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LATINO COLLEGE STUDENT ATHLETES AS NEPANTLERAS: FOSTERING  
ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND ATHLETIC IDENTITY  
AT TWO NCAA DIVISION II INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation Presented

by

Carlos E. Vega

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## ABSTRACT

Collegiate athletic programs at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II institutions in the United States serve a two-fold purpose. They offer aspiring student athletes access to college and opportunities to play competitive college sports. Consequently, student athletes at Division II institutions experience personal and institutional pressures to compete for championships while achieving academic success. Increasing demands on today's college student athletes' athletic participation and performance has a multitude of consequences that could influence their academic performance and success in college. Simultaneously, these institutions and athletic programs are also witnessing another phenomenon – a transformation in their student population. Latino college student athlete matriculation continues to increase every year, mirroring their non-student athlete counterparts in higher education. Their increased enrollment on these college campuses necessitates higher education researchers to better understand this understudied population. In furthering that endeavor, this inquiry sought to illuminate an overarching research question: how does a Latino college athlete's racial identity influence their academic success and athletic performance?

Guided by Gloria Anzaldúa's Theory of Borderlands (*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 2012), this two-part qualitative study invited seven Latino college student athletes' to examine their racial-ethnic identity, their academic success, and their athletic participation in Division II competitive sports. Through 12 semi-structured open-ended interviews, the researcher examined the intersections between Latino student athletes' motivation to do well in their respective sport and their motivation to perform well academically. Among the major findings of this study, participants strongly identified themselves as *Nepantleras* – border crossers who possessed an intrinsic ability to seamlessly cross the world of academics and the world of athletics. Their movement across these dual world realities, in addition to balancing the expectations of their Latino *familias y culturas*, resulted in the participants rejecting the idea of one or the other (student or athlete) and claiming a singular identity: *Soy Estudiante Deportista*.

Understanding and engaging with Latino college student athletes' academic and athletic experiences at Division II institutions is vital for college faculty, athletic directors, coaches, student affairs professionals, and institutional administrators invested in their success. This study offers these institutional agents recommendations to best support their student athletes.

*Keywords:* Latino Student Athletes, *Nepantla*, Student Athletes, Division II, NCAA, Academic Success

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For Latino American students in the United States, enrolling at colleges and universities has become more common, and the number of Latino<sup>1</sup> American students continues to increase every year. The term Latino describes people whose ancestral origins come from a Spanish speaking country in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, and consists of people from multiple countries, cultures, and customs. (Torres & Delgado-Romero, 2007). Latino students drop out of high school at higher rates than any other demographic in the US (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2017b), yet they are enrolling at colleges faster than any other demographic, besides Asian Americans (NCES, 2017d). Latinos also have the lowest attainment of bachelor degrees out of any demographic. Similarly, this phenomenon of an increase in Latino students is mirrored in collegiate athletics with an increase of Latino student athletes over the last 10 years, as shown by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (“Sport Sponsorship, Participation and Demographics Search”, 2017).

Historically, college athletics have had a significant presence in American higher education. In 2016-17, there were 2832 four-year public and private institutions of higher education (Digest of Education Statistics, 2018). Of those 2832 institutions, nearly 1100 institutions reported to have athletic programs sponsored by the NCAA (NCAA, 2018f). Within the NCAA, colleges and universities compete to be classified within three divisions – Division I, Division II, and Division III.

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<sup>1</sup> The research uses the term Latino to represent both genders instead of using Latino/a/x

The role Division II institutions play in providing educational access is lacking awareness in higher education research. Division II institutions provide “thousands of student-athletes the opportunity to compete at a high level of scholarship athletics while excelling in the classroom and fully engaging in the broader campus experience” (NCAA website, n.d.). The NCAA notes that students attending Division II institutions are seen as being holistic in their academic and athletic development, i.e., they are fully involved in the undergraduate collegiate experience, as well as full participants in competitive athletic competitions. Division II athletics programs also have a commitment to “establishing an inclusive culture in which persons of all backgrounds are respected and given the opportunity to provide input and to participate” (“Division II philosophy statement”, n.d). The number of Latino student athletes at the Division II level has increased substantially since the 1999-2000 school year, and continues to grow. In the 1999-2000 school year, 1867 (4.19%) student athletes who self-identified as Latino participated in Division II athletics. A decade later, by 2010-2011, that number increased to 3428 (5.62%), and more recently, during the 2016-2017 school year, 4713 (6.67%) Latino student athletes were enrolled at Division II institutions (“Sport Sponsorship, Participation and Demographics Search”, 2017).

Division II institutions espouse a “Life in the Balance” philosophy that believes in a “balanced approach that integrates athletics into the college experience and allows students to focus on their academic pursuits and participate in other campus and community activities” (“Division II philosophy statement”, n.d.) through participation in four aspects of campus life. These include academics, athletics, community engagement, and post-graduation success. This claim would insinuate that Division II is a very

balanced approach to a well-rounded, co-curricular education. This claim would also lead the public to believe that student athletes at Division II have enough time in their schedules to balance campus and community activities, with their academic and athletic commitments. Simons, Van Rheenen, and Covington (1999a) posit that participating in intercollegiate athletics requires a substantial commitment of time and energy, typically ranging between 20 - 30 hours per week (p. 158). This leaves less time for a student athlete to dedicate to their academics. Studies have shown that student athletes often favor athletics over academics and are conflicted between the demands of combining academics and athletics (Adler & Adler, 1991; Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999b).

Student athletes can also feel the pressure to perform athletically, as their athleticism is one of the main factors as to why they were recruited for their sport at their college or university. In addition to the athletic pressure, a student athletes' academics adds to the time commitment, pressures to perform well in the classroom, and the demands of a student athletes' everyday life. In order for a student athlete to remain eligible for athletic competition, every NCAA Division has a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) that a student athlete has to achieve and maintain. Having a GPA requirement adds additional pressure on students to do well in the classroom, especially if this mark is beyond their academic abilities, and is not easily attainable by the student.

A student athlete's motivation to perform well in athletic competition is often a reason they are recruited, because of their proven desire to succeed. At the same time, these student athletes seem to lack motivation to succeed in the classroom, putting them at a motivational contradiction (Simons et al., 1999a). Because of the discrepancy of

motivation in athletic competition and academic success by a student athlete in the classroom, this study will closely examine how a student's athletic participation and performance influences their academic success, while also taking the student athlete's Latino identity into consideration. This study focused on student athletes at the Division II level because of the commitment that NCAA Division II programs make to promote a balance of a high level of athletic competition with academic rigor and success. Because there is little research on Latino student athletes, this study examined this specific demographic. For the purpose of this study, athletic participation refers to student athletes being on the roster of an NCAA varsity sport. Their athletic performance refers to how a student athlete excels in athletic related tasks. Academic success refers to how a student athlete excels in academic related tasks.

### **Problem Statement**

Student athletes at Division II institutions experience personal and institutional pressures to compete for championships while achieving academic success. Increasing demands on today's college student athletes' athletic participation and performance has a multitude of consequences that could influence their academic performance and success in college. Simultaneously, these institutions and athletic programs are also witnessing another phenomenon – a transformation in their student population. Latino college student athlete matriculation continues to increase every year, mirroring their non-student athlete counterparts in higher education. Their increased enrollment on these college campuses necessitates higher education researchers to better understand this understudied population.

## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research study was to examine how NCAA Division II Latino student athletes' racial identity influences their athletic participation, performance, and academic success. Using semi-structured, open-ended interviews, this study illuminated participants' lived experiences in college. Findings from this research study are intended to aid university administrators, coaches, athletic administration, counseling staff, and student affairs professionals about their roles in fostering academic success and athletic identity among Latino college student athletes.

The study examined the resources and support services that Latino student athletes need in order to perform well on the playing field and in the classroom. Furthermore, this investigation helps fill the gap in higher education literature, specifically in the realm of Division II athletics and Latino Student athletes. Little is known about this population of student athletes, and “despite the growing body of research, Latino/a/x student-athletes are noticeably absent in the literature” (Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018). This research is important because it will help future prospective Latino students make informed decisions about attending an institution of higher education as a collegiate athlete, and highlights the benefits that come with being a collegiate student athlete.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Gloria Anzaldúa's (2012) *Borderlands/La Frontera*, has served as an influential literary work to understand cultural complexities along the US and Mexican Borders. To Anzaldúa (2012), the U.S.-Mexican border is “the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country - a border culture” (p. 3). Although metaphorical borders, Anzaldúa

offers a new way of viewing the border, which is “captured by her analysis of the ‘new mestiza,’ ‘mestiza consciousness,’ and ‘nepantla’ [the in-between space].” (Naples, 2010, p. 507).

The creation of the Mestiza people was articulated by Anzaldúa as people with mixed Indian and Spanish blood, a race that had never existed before (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 5). Mestiza people found it difficult fitting in with either identities, but over time learned to navigate between two different cultures through their mestiza consciousness, or internal identity creation. This allowed them to establish new identities through the deconstruction and reconstruction of their new selves, into a new self or identity (Anzaldúa, 2012; Keating, 2006).

Similar to Mestiza people, the interweaving and balance of different aspects of their lives are mirrored by the lives of student athletes through the phenomena of Nepantla, the Nahuatl word meaning “inbetween space” (Keating, 2006, p. 8). “Nepantla is where pursuit for liberation begins and where a person is exposed to numerous versions of identity, constructed realities and the juxtapositions of these” (Murphy, 2016, p. 3). This allows for the person to navigate within their identities with ease. According to Keating (2006), “Nepantleras are threshold people: they move within and among multiple, often conflicting, worlds and refuse to align themselves exclusively with any single individual, group, or belief system” (p. 6). Latino student athletes navigate this experience in similar fashion when going in between their student athlete and Latino identities as border crossers who possessed an intrinsic ability to seamlessly cross the world of academics and the world of athletics.

The similarities of discovery and navigating seamlessly between different worlds between Mestizos and that of Latino student athletes informs the research through the use of the Borderlands/La Frontera as a theoretical framework for this study, with a focus on Nepantla, or navigating in between different worlds. “Nepantleras use their movements among divergent worlds to develop innovative, potentially transformative perspectives. They respect the differences within and among the diverse groups and, simultaneously, posit commonalities (Keating, 2006, p. 6). As Latino student athletes are on their journey of identity formation, through movement across these dual world realities, in addition to balancing the expectations of their Latino familias y culturas<sup>2</sup>.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does a student athlete participant’s racial identity (Latino) influence their athletic performance and academic success?
2. How does a student athlete’s motivation to do well in their respective sport translate into their motivation to perform well academically?

### **Latino/a/x**

There are multiple ways in which Latino’s identify their different gender identities. In 2014, the term Latinx began appearing on the internet and social media, as a way to promote inclusivity in language (Salinas & Lozano, 2017; Padillo, 2016). It has not been discovered as to when the use of Latinx emerged, but “appears to have been born out of the LGBTQIA community in the U.S. as a way to resist the gender binary”

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<sup>2</sup> familias and cultures



(Salinas & Lozano, 2017, p. 3). This term has entered the Latino lexicon in order to provide a more inclusive approach in encouraging gender binary.

The researcher wanted to acknowledge the use of this term, as well as support for the LGBTQIA community. Because the researcher discovered the use of this term late into the research process, the researcher will use “Latino” despite its masculine connotations. The term will be used to discuss Latin American people of all ages and genders. This term will be used throughout this research paper, with hopes that the readers can forgive the un-inclusivity of the use of the term Latino.

### **Definitions**

- **Academic Success Rate (ASR)** - Graduation metric developed by the NCAA that is mandatory and calculated for Division II institutions. It takes transfer students, mid-year enrollees, and non-scholarship first-year athletes into consideration. This metric removes student-athletes who leave the institution but were still eligible to compete. The ASR records graduation status six years after initial college enrollment (NCAA Research Staff, 2018).
- **Athletic Scholarship (Athletics Aid)** - Athletics aid is financial aid awarded by the institution’s athletics department or institutional financial aid that requires the recipient to participate in intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2019a).
- **Academic Status (Eligibility)** - To be eligible to represent an institution in intercollegiate athletics competition, a student-athlete shall be enrolled in at least a minimum full-time program of studies, be in good academic standing and maintain progress toward a baccalaureate or equivalent degree (NCAA, 2019a).

- **Academic Success** - How students excel in academic related tasks, students who have higher than average Grade Point Averages (GPA), and remain academically eligible.
- **Amateurism** - Considered to be about doing things for the love of them, doing them without reward or material gain or doing them unprofessionally (Allison, 2001). In terms of collegiate athletics, amateurism refers to a student athlete who does not get money to play their sport nor participates in athletic competition with other professional athletes (NCAA, 2019b).
- **Athletic Participation** - A student athlete who participates in NCAA competition and is on an official roster of an NCAA varsity sport.
- **Athletic Performance** - Athletic performance refers to how a student athlete excels in competition in their sports and athletic-related tasks. Wins and losses are used as a measure of whether a sports team is successful.
- **Attainment** - Achieving an educational goal such as a certificate or degree.
- **Familismo** - The idea of putting priorities of the family and cultural group ahead of one's own priorities (Marín & Marín, 1991).
- **College Athletics (Athletics, College sports, Collegiate sports)** – Amateur athletics/sports in which teams are not paid to play their sport at a college or university, and is made up of student athletes. Student athletes from colleges and universities compete against each other, while being governed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

- **College Choice** - An institution of higher education, college or university where a student decides to enroll. College choice takes the college decision making process and all of its factors into consideration.
- **National Collegiate Athletic Association** - The largest governing body of collegiate athletics in the US and recently, parts of Canada. It is made up of three different divisions. These include Division I, Division II, and Division III.
- **Partial Athletic Scholarship** - An athletic scholarship that covers only some of the full cost of college, which leaves student-athletes to finance the rest of institutional costs from other sources. Partial athletic scholarships are often added to academic or need-based financial aid.
- **Persistence** - The act of continuing towards an educational goal (e.g., earning a bachelor's degree) ("Post-secondary Retention and Persistence," n.d.).
- **Professional Athlete** - A professional athlete is one who receives any kind of payment, directly or indirectly, for athletics participation except as permitted by the governing legislation of the Association (NCAA, 2019a).
- **Red Shirt** - When a student athlete or coach decide to sit a player out for an academic year to further develop their athletic talents for a variety of reasons. These may include that the athlete is not athletically ready to participate, there are older and more experienced players in that same position as the student athlete, injuries, or giving the student an extra year to get acclimated to balancing academics and athletics.

- **Reflexivity** - An attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process (Malterud, 2009, p.484).
- **Student-Athlete** - A participant in a collegiate sports program of the institution that he or she is enrolled.

### **Limitations**

This study focuses on the lived experiences of seven Division II Latino student athletes at two private institutions in the northeast region of the US. Four limitations were identified during the conceptualization and after the completion of the study. These limited are discussed below.

The lived experiences of these student athlete participants do not represent the experiences of all Division II student athletes in the US. However, examining their experiences can inform higher education administrators and athletic departments to assess the support services and recruitment strategies they provide to not only enroll this population of student athletes, but also to assist with retention and graduation efforts for this specific college demographic.

All of the participants in this study attended private colleges in the northeastern region of the US. This study does not account for experiences of student athletes at institutions outside of the Northeast, or attending public Division II institutions. This is a limitation for this study because location was found to be a choice for attending an institution of higher education for some of the student athletes interviewed in this study.

The participants in this study all self-identified as cis-male, and therefore the experiences of athletes of other genders was not captured by this study. The experiences

of female, trans, gender-fluid athletes may be different from those of cis-male student athletes.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the three sports most popular among the Latino community are soccer, boxing, and baseball. To keep consistent and the ease to recruit athletes from a single sport, the researcher decided to only interview student athletes who played soccer. The experiences of Latino college athletes who play other sports were not documented in this study.

### **Summary**

Student athletes have unique opportunities to play organized sports at the collegiate level, but their heavy involvement and time spent on athletics could affect their academic success in the classroom. This study was designed to specifically understand what resources Latino student athletes need not only to be competitive athletically, but also to be in an environment that supports their learning and promotes academic success. Because motivational influence is often consistent in the way a person approaches tasks, consistently good or bad performance on the athletic fields are likely to mirror good or bad performance in the classroom. Providing support and resources and for student athletes to at minimum be competitive on the playing fields and to see success in the classroom, could allow for an overall better college experience for student athletes.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The review of the literature provides insight on three important characteristics that are embedded in the life of a Latino student athlete, and could influence their athletic participation, performance, and academic success. Because there are multiple characteristics that make up the life of a Latino student athlete, the review of the literature will be looking at the following three characteristics of Latino student athletes' lives and experiences. First, the researcher will look at the student's Latino identity, along with a look at the lives of Latino college students. Second, the literature will review recruitment factors, NCAA Divisions, and personnel that influenced Latino student athletes to select, enroll, and persist at their institution of higher education. The third characteristic of a Latino student athlete's life that will be explored are the influences of athletic and academic success on the lives of Latino student athletes. Understanding the role that each of these characteristics plays in the life of Latino student athletes will be important when attempting to discover the influence of athletic participation and performance on their academic success.

### **Latino College Students in Higher Education**

Latinos are enrolling at institutions of higher education at a very rapid pace. According to studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Latino students drop out of high school at higher rates than any other demographic in the US (NCES, 2017b), yet they are enrolling at colleges faster than any other demographic (NCES, 2017d), and have the lowest attainment of bachelor degrees out of any demographic (NCES, 2017c). Given their lower educational attainment levels, Latino college students are more likely than any other demographic to be the first in their family

to attend a college or university (Gándera & Contreras, 2009; Hurtado, Sáenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008; Reyes & Nora, 2012). For those Latino students that enroll at a four year institution, their persistence, or act of earning a degree, has improved over time. For a three year period of 2011-2014, the six year persistence rates of Latino students was 79%, compared to the 82% persistence rate of white students and 86% persistence rate of Asian students (NCES, 2017a).

Latino college students have a lot of factors that play into their identity as a college-going student. Family is a big influencer on the institution of higher education that a Latino student chooses, and in developing their identities as Latino college students. Latino college students will often describe their families as their largest influence on their identity development and growth in college (Gándera, 1995; Ortiz & Santos, 2009; Torres & Hernández, 2007). Latino college students express that their families play a pivotal role, as a source of support in their education, through encouragement and guidance (Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vázquez, 2013, p. 17). Through advice, or consejos, a Latino student's college choice is influenced in part on what is best for the family as a whole.

Although Latino families tend to not have experience in attending college or limited English proficiency, they are often very supportive of their student's decision to pursue their enrollment at colleges and universities (Perez & McDonough, 2008). In addition to this idea, Laden (2001) adds that parents openly encourage their child's college aspirations after being provided more information on how the college-going process works, as well as the benefits that attending college provides their child. This is important to take into consideration when engaging a prospective Latino student in their

recruitment process. Getting the family involved and informing them of the way the college-going process works can help develop trust with the family, and can lead them to encourage their child to attend a college or university.

While attending college, a sense of belonging is important for Latino college students to remain engaged and ultimately enrolled at their institutions (Allison, 1999). According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), participating in social organizations, community service, religious organizations, student government, class participation, attending tutoring, and sports teams were high indicators of a high sense of belonging for Latino students. Because dropout rates are so high for Latino students, there has to be a concerted effort by institutions of higher education and their faculty and staff to help retain this population of students. According to Pertuz (2018), “Latinx/a/o students need supportive Latinx/a/o staff and faculty who can provide them with mentorship and role modeling as they navigate their college experiences” (p. 72). The difficult part in finding mentorship and role models from Latino faculty and staff is the small percentage of Latino faculty and staff that exist on college campuses. The underrepresentation of Latino faculty consists of only 5% of total faculty in higher education in the US. (McFarland et al., 2018).

Studies on Latino student success (Baca, 2007; Fiebig, Braid, Ross, Tom, & Prinzo, 2010; Gonzales & Morrison, 2016; Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Sanchez, Usinger, Thornton, 2015) provide insight into factors that allow students to achieve academic success in college. Among these factors are personal motivation, families and extended families (Fiebig, 2010), faculty interest in the student, attending a four-year college directly out of college, college readiness and preparedness (Sanchez et al., 2015), and



financial aid (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016). According to Murphy & Murphy (2018), “Academic success can be defined in several ways. Colleges typically define success by graduation rates, cumulative student GPA, number of students who enroll in graduate studies, ethnic diversity among students and faculty, and faculty accomplishments” (p. 4). For those Latino students that prioritize or have the desire to be academically successful in college, it is important for college personnel to be aware of these personal motivators in order to provide support services for this population of students.

Academic preparation can often hurt a Latino student in persisting at their college or university. According to Linares (2008), “Academic preparation is a personal protective factor also critical to student success in college, as it provides the necessary background upon which advanced knowledge is built” (p. 16). In terms of Latino students, first and second-generation Latino students who drop out of college lack the academic foundation that a student needs to do well in their collegiate coursework. This is mainly in part to the lack of resources at their middle schools and high schools (Ballesteros, 1986). When selecting which classes to take, minority students are discouraged from taking college preparatory courses by their guidance counselors because they feel that the student cannot handle, or contribute to class discussion in a college preparatory program (Linares, 2008). College faculty and staff, as well as academic advisors, should monitor this population of students when they enroll at their colleges or universities, to provide support services for students to do well in their coursework, or to help students catch up where they may lack in their academic abilities.

## **Student Athletes**

Student athletes are a unique population of college students. On top of their commitment to athletics, the college student athlete faces the same challenges experienced as non-student athletes, which include social adjustment, career exploration, intellectual growth (Watt & Moore, 2001, p. 7). They live distinct lives from their collegiate peers and not only is their college experience different, but so is the way they select their college or university. According to Watt and Moore (2001), “Playing an intercollegiate sport, however, adds an unexpectedly complex layer to the life of the student athlete.” Unlike non-student athletes, student athletes have athletic activities on a daily basis which include, daily practice while in season, getting treated for injuries, home and away contests, and studying film and plays on their opponents (p. 7).

Student athletes often have a different path in selecting their institution of higher education than the average student. Because student athletes not only choose a university, but also a team and coach, their college selection process is much different than that of a non-student athlete (Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003). Letawsky et al. (2003) note that the most important deciding factors for prospective student athletes, as opposed to non-student athletes, are degree-program options, head coach, academic support services, type of community in which the campus is located, and the school’s sports traditions. Similarly, Mathes and Gurney (1985) focused on reasons why a prospective student athlete chose to attend an institution of higher education. They categorized these factors into campus, athletics, coach, friends, and academics.

Student athletes devote a lot of time to both their sport and their academics. In order to remain eligible in Division II, students have to maintain a GPA of 2.2 or better in

their core classes (NCAA, 2018b). Student athletes are required to devote upwards of 25 hours per week when their sport is in season, miss numerous classes for university sanctioned athletic competitions, and deal with fatigue and injuries as a result of their athletic participation (Simons et al., 1999). The time commitment and stress that balancing academics and athletics has could cause distress for student athletes, and has been known to be the reason for dropouts from both sport and school (Perrelli, 2004). According to Adler and Adler (1985), despite high expectations when first entering college, student athletes are overwhelmed by the extraordinary demands of their multiple roles as a student and as an athlete.

Student athletes also experience unique problems in the classroom just by being a student athlete. According to Adler and Adler (1987), “When athletes did attend class, they often encountered another set of difficulties or disillusionments. In the classroom athletes thought that many professors labeled them as jocks” (p. 448). This label could affect student athlete morale and cause the athlete to perform poorly in the classroom. Student-athletes who internalize negative stereotypes and perceived academic failure can develop low motivation, avoid activities where they feel failure, and focus on activities where they experience success (Simons et al., 1999). Weiss and Robinson (2013) add to this idea when stating that “problems inherent in the role of the student–athlete include negative perceptions that some administrators, faculty, and students hold towards them concerning their academic competency” (p. 88). Student-athletes are viewed among the privileged when assuming their athletic identity, but may experience feelings of anxiety when placed in an environment where they are stigmatized for their athleticism, fearing that their only value to the school/classroom is physical in nature (Cheville, 2001). Being

viewed this way can interrupt the effort put in by student athletes to perform well in the classroom.

The way student athletes are treated can also seem like it is benefiting them while it could actually be hurting them. According to Adler and Adler (1987), student athletes encountered different expectations and treatment than the general student body. Whether they were given greater tolerance (extra tutoring sessions, relaxed deadlines, relaxed academic standards) or less tolerance (“Those guys think they’re entitled to special treatment because they’re athletes, and I’m going to show them they’re wrong” (p. 448)), they were treated as less than full adults. Special treatment could leave student athletes unprepared to deal with problems and in finding solutions to these problems, when the special treating no longer occurs.

### **Latino Athletes**

Similar to national trends in Latino enrollment, Division II shows an increase in Latino students over the last 10 years (NCAA, 2017). As of 2017, Latino student athletes now compete in higher numbers than ever before (NCAA, 2017). Although the Latino student athlete population is growing, this population still accounts for a relatively low number of overall student athletes. Cameron (2012) acknowledges this lack of Latino student athletes and gives four reasons as to why there is a low number of Latino student athletes in the NCAA. These reasons include “kinks in the educational pipeline that divert Latinos from transitioning from high school to college, restrictive academic eligibility rules, cultural and familial expectations about going to work, and the absence of sports participation from Latinos’ group success” (pp. 236-242).

Collegiate sports have been seen as a way to help pay for college and make it a reality for student athletes. According to Osanloo, Parra, and Pedraza (2018), “Family economics often create a cost-prohibitive environment for Latino/a families to provide the opportunity of youth sports and higher education after graduation” (p. 65). Youth sports are often what helps develop the athlete’s athletic skills, which lead them to recruitment at the collegiate level. Not participating in youth sports can often hinder an athlete’s athletic development.

In collegiate athletics there is little incentive for Latinos to play collegiate sports if their goal is to play professionally. Colleges are seen as recruiting grounds for recruiting professional football and basketball players, which are sports with very little Latino representation. Colleges are not pipelines for professional boxing and soccer, which are sports most associated with Latino athletes. Baseball is another sport that Latinos are heavily playing, but has a very robust minor league system that does not require an athlete to enroll in colleges in order to attend (Ruffins, 2010). According to Ruffins (2010), collegiate sports, and athletic scholarships in particular, have served as portals to higher education for generations of African-Americans who may have not otherwise attended college, but is not the case for Latinos (Ruffins, 2010).

Background characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, major, and sport did not significantly influence student athlete interactions with faculty, participation in academic-related activities, or involvement in student groups and organizations. However, these characteristics do appear to influence interaction with students other than teammates, with women doing more so than men (Gayles & Hu, 2009). These interactions with students on campus are a daily part of a student athlete’s day to day

routine. Not having a relationship with peers from the student body could hinder them in the classroom, or in their involvement in extracurricular activities where non-student athletes participate heavily.

### **College Choice for Student athletes.**

While scholarships can be attractive to student athletes, there are other factors to take into consideration when students consider an institution of higher education. The factors that students take into consideration are known as college choice. Bergerson (2009) describes college choice as a “complex construct that incorporates students’ college aspirations, their expectations of those aspirations becoming a reality, the beginning of their plans, and the steps taken to actualize those aspirations” (p. 47). Family background, the context in which students grow up, major, prestige, and parent influence, academic ability, schooling experiences, family structure, and information about postsecondary options can all play a big role in where a student chooses to study (Bergerson, 2009).

Studies show that family background characteristics are very important when it comes to a student’s decision to select their college or university. The education a parent holds, as well as their income, make up some of the family characteristics that play a role in college choice (Bouse & Hossler, 1991; Conley, 2001; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001). When a parent has experienced a higher salary or has seen the opportunities that education has provided for them, they put more importance in the college selection process for their child. Hossler and Stage (1992) acknowledge this when stating that the level of parental education has a strong positive influence on a

child's decision to attend an institution of higher education, more than income or the student's academic achievements.

### **Coach's Influence**

Coaches play a big role on how a student athlete is recruited to an institution. Coaches have to make sure that prospective student athletes are able to be academically accepted into their institution and to build relationships with prospective student athletes and their families. According to Schneider and Messenger (2012):

Recruiting is one of the greatest challenges a college coach has, and the ability to understand what the student-athlete is looking for in their choice of a school will go a long way to the level of success that a coach and his program have in attracting these recruits. (p. 806)

Coaches have many tasks as a part of their job, according to Gorney and Ness (2000), "These include public relations, recruiting, running practices, planning and implementing game strategies, teaching values, and fund-raising" (p. 49). On top of taking care of their student athletes and running practices, coaches also spend time recruiting and developing relationships with student athletes. Although time consuming, this is an important aspect of their job, as they are the ones who can influence student athletes to attend their institution. According to Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, and Ferris (2014):

Recruits looking for athletic programs that will provide them with a positive and nurturing environment because that is what they experienced at home may seek out teams whose coaches convey the characteristics of agreeableness, empathy, and warmth. If those characteristics are very important to recruits, but not evident to them during their interactions with a coaching staff, then the recruits may look

for teams whose coaches can better fill the void of the home environment they are leaving behind, regardless of other factors (e.g., availability of desired college major, opportunity to play as a freshman, offer of a scholarship). (p. 1268)

According to Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, and Palmer (2003), “Since intercollegiate athletes not only choose a university, but also a team and coach, their college selection process may be much different than non-athletes” (p. 605). A coach is going to be someone that a student athlete will potentially be spending their four years of college with.

Coaches play a big role in why a student athlete chooses to enroll at a college or university. Several studies (Croft, 2008; Gabert, Hale, & Montvalo, 1999; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003; Magnusen et al., 2014; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Pauline, 2010) have shown that a coach, especially the head coach, is one of the most influential and identified factors that weigh in on a prospective student athletes’ college choice decision. Research shows that coaches and their assistants also play a critical role in the recruitment of student athletes, even before the collegiate admission process starts (Adler & Adler, 1985; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). They are in essence an extension of the admission office staff, and may help be the deciding factor for student athletes to enroll at their college or university. Student athletes form a strong emotional connection to their coaches. This connection with coaches is supported by strict structures of meetings, athletic training, practice, study hall, and volunteer activities (Howard-Hamilton, 2001).

Coaches also have strong motivations and incentives to win. Motivation to win could cause them to put pressure on their student athletes to perform well athletically, as well as pressure to remain eligible in the classroom. Farmer and Pecorino (2010) state



that “talented coaches and players are both in limited supply. Coaching talent is auctioned, with the most talented coach going to the team that pays the highest salary” (p. 842). Coaching salaries range from school to school. Schools with higher budgets are able to afford more experienced coaches and are able to keep them around by offering additional monetary incentives if they show a sign of improvement and winning. While an athletics department may genuinely care about academic success and the healthy development of student-athletes, players often receive contradictory messages from coaches who are expected to win, advance to bowl games and the NCAA basketball tournament, and fill stadiums with excited fans who buy tickets and make donations (Comeaux et al., 2011; Gayles, 2014; Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Institutions with more resources will buy the most talented coaches expecting them to win them more games. Farmer et al. (2010) supports this claim when saying that “players and coaches are modeled as scarce talent in a very particular sense. Teams recognize that when they hire a talented player or coach, they are denying his services to their rival” (p. 843). Their success is often determined by how they perform in competition. According to Coakley (1994), “The profession of coaching, unlike the teaching of physical education, is directly related to competition and competitive success. When coaches are judged by their team's results, then they are credited for wins and are blamed for losses” (p. 48).

### **Athletic Scholarships**

Athletic scholarships are awarded solely on the basis of athletic performance, and do not consider academic ability. Athletic scholarships are also limited to a one year basis (Nestel, 1992, p. 1407). Receiving athletic scholarships has different impacts on student

athletes, both positive and negative. Nestel (1992) states that year by year scholarship “transforms the athletic scholarship into a series of short-term contracts. These contracts provide an opportunity for coaches and other members of the university to exert pressure on student-athletes to improve their athletic performance by threatening nonrenewal of scholarship benefits” (p. 1419). This phenomena can affect student athlete performance by knowing their time is limited, and if they do not perform well athletically, their scholarship could be taken away. This treats the awarding of a scholarship to reflect a business model instead of a traditional high school to college enrollment pipeline.

Medic, Mack, Wilson, and Starks (2007) claim that “being motivated by extrinsic factors and internal feelings of pressure such as guilt and anxiety was associated with the receipt of a full athletic scholarship” (p. 303). This could cause students to spend most of their time focusing on performing well in their sport over performing well in the classroom. Failure to perform in the classroom would take away a student’s opportunity to participate in athletic competition. Adler and Adler (2004) agree with the previous statement when talking about student athlete’s “frequent academic failures (or at best mediocre grades) led athletes to distance themselves from self-involvement in the academic role. It was better not to try than to try and fail” (p. 449).

Students also have to maintain a certain grade point average in order to remain eligible for competition. “Division II student-athletes must earn a 1.8 GPA after 24 semesters or 36 quarter hours, a 1.9 GPA after 48 semesters or 72 quarter hours and a 2.0 GPA after both 72 semesters or 108 quarter hours and 96 semesters or 144 quarter hours” (NCAA, 2016b). If students do not maintain their grades, then they are forbidden to participate in practices and competition. Student athletes who perform poorly in the

classroom may place their academic eligibility in jeopardy (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001), also affecting the rest of the student athlete's team if the ineligible student athlete is someone who is participating a lot in athletic competitions. These factors create added pressure and stress on a student athletes. Because prospective student athletes are awarded athletic scholarships on the basis of their athletic achievement, student athletes tend to enter college with a high level of athletic ability. This in no way is a measure of their academic abilities or success in the classroom (Simons, Covington, & Van Rhee, 1999a).

Gaston-Gayles (2004) notes that "few studies have explored academic and athletic motivation as noncognitive variables and their usefulness in predicting academic performance for student athletes" (p. 76). Gaston-Gayles (2004) focused on studying a student athlete's motivation, and the factors that influence the athlete's performance in their sport through surveys of student athletes at the Division I level. The need for the literature on what influencers impact a student athlete's academic performance at the Division II informs this study.

Receiving an athletic scholarship is an important deciding factor in why a student athlete decides to attend an institution of higher education. According to Reynaud (1998) receiving an athletic scholarship is known to be the most important decision factor in a prospective student athlete's choice of schools. At this point of a student athlete's life, they have likely spent a lot of time and resources in practicing their sports. Because of the effort spent in athletic participation, parents and prospective student athletes are looking for a return on their investment. It is likely that a majority of the student athlete's life has been spent on their sport. There is an allure to having been awarded an athletic

scholarship. Parents and student athletes can use this as a bragging mechanism to show that their investment in that sport has paid off. There are times when being awarded a lesser athletic scholarship at an institution can draw a student athlete there, even if an academic merit award is higher and total cost at another institution is lower than the athletic award. The athletic awards that are offered are based off of athletic ability, therefore making these rarer in how they are offered. Similar to this idea, Gabert et al. (1999) mention that the athletic scholarship is not only important, but plays a big role in the recruitment process when saying:

The fact that student-athletes who self-identified as athletic scholarship recipients are influenced in a greater way by the athletic factors than were the non-scholarship recipients is predictable. It is reasonable to assume that athletic scholarship recipients have a greater stake in the recruitment and college choice process than those student-athletes who do not receive a grant-in-aid and should be influenced in a greater way by the athletic factors. (p. 28)

An athletic scholarship is awarded on a one year basis. In order to continue receiving their athletic scholarship, a student athlete has to maintain certain criteria at their college or university. According to Nestel (1992), in order for a student athlete to receive full benefits over the term of the scholarship, the recipients must maintain academic eligibility and must not “fraudulently misrepresent any information on an application, letter of intent or financial aid agreement” (p. 1413). Breaking university policies by engaging in misconduct, triggering disciplinary action, and being a full participant in athletic practices are also a requirement to maintain an athletic scholarship. If a student athlete fails to meet any of these requirements, their athletic scholarship is

void, and the college or university can cancel the student athlete's scholarship (Nestel, 1992, p. 1413).

While scholarships can be attractive to student athletes, there are several other factors to take into consideration when a student considers an institution of higher education. Location, major, prestige, and parent influence can all play a big factor into where a student chooses to study. Because Division II institutions are not considered top institutions in their rankings, a student athlete may be less likely to attend a Division II institution based off of reputation alone. It is hard to pinpoint if this is the case or not, as there is limited information about why students choose Division II. This opportunity has the ability to attract students, and take them away from choosing the Division II option.

An important factor to consider is that regardless of the institution, a student athlete has to be recruited by that institution, most likely by a coach of the specific sport. There are walk-on and tryout opportunities at every level, but the majority of student athletes who are recruited have made contact and have been recruited by a coach.

### **Familismo**

Family plays a big factor in the life of a Latino college student in deciding whether they will be attending college. Familismo, or the idea of putting priorities of the family and cultural group ahead of one's own, plays a major role in the college selection process of Latino students. It is considered to be one of the most notable and important values among Latinos (Marín & Marín, 1991). According to Martinez (2013), "Latina/o families have been considered to be more collectivist in nature, in that they place greater value on being members of a community and family" (p. 22). This collectivist mentality can hinder a student from choosing to go away for college.

Familismo insinuates an expectation to be loyal to one's family, which impacts how Latino students support their family financially, how family decisions are made, and how they help out around the house (Marin & Marin, 1991; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Latino students often feel the pressures of income and economic problems at home, and often decide that they cannot afford to go away for college and be far from home (Abraham, Lujan, López, & Walker, 2002; Cameron & Heckman, 1999). Even if the family comes to a conclusion that leaving home is the best option for the student, there may be familial compromises that come along with that major life decision. According to Nuñez (2005), students are often renegotiating back and forth with their parents to not only find time to visit their family and take care of some of their familial responsibilities, but also trading some of that time to spend on their college campuses and integrating into their campus' community. According to Sáenz and Ponjuan (2009), "The notion of familismo among Latino families should not be seen as a negative force working to perpetuate gaps in educational attainment between males and females" (p. 63). According to Salerno and Fink (1992), students who did well in school had the support of their family and at least one of their parents. Parents motivated and encouraged their children to remain in school, in order to have a better future. Latino students also have an awareness of the sacrifices their parents are making for them to go to college, and feel like they should pay them back in some form or another (Nuñez, 2005, p. 97). According to Fann, Jarsky, and McDonough (2009), even though Latino families have high hopes and dreams for their children to attend colleges or universities, they face many obstacles in making those dreams a reality. Many of the parents of Latino students lack language

and communication skills, which may be little to non-existent, as well as make it difficult to communicate with guidance counselors and school personnel about their child's future.

The literature also shows that familismo can serve as a strong social network and form of social capital that can facilitate lifelong educational success (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). McMillan and Reed (1994) expand on the notion of social network when finding that support may also come from other members of a student's family, including aunts, uncles, siblings, or grandparents. They found that forming a bond with non-parent family members still allowed them to get the verbal support and encouragement to attend and do well in college.

Because of the impact that family plays on the college selection process, academic faculty, staff, and athletic coaches need to take Latino families in consideration and include them in the conversation about the support services and care their child will receive in the institution's college environment.

### **La Frontera: Nepantla & Nepantleras**

Gloria Anzaldúa's (2012) book *Borderlands/La Frontera* touches on navigating multiple identities of Latino culture and offers theories to promote social change. She refers to the Borderlands or fronteras, as the U.S.-Mexican Border, and "the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country - a border culture" (p. 3). Through fronteras, Anzaldúa (2012) was specifically referring to Chicanos navigating between their Mexican and American identities, and having a hard time distinguishing themselves from their American counterparts.

Latino student athletes are constantly navigating multiple worlds, but do not quite align themselves with any single individual, group, or belief system. As noted in previous

sections, family is very important to Latino student athletes. These student athletes have to be able to navigate between familial pressures, their academic experience, and their student athlete experience. This interweaving and balance of different aspects of their lives is mirrored by the phenomena of *Nepantla*, which is the Nahuatl word meaning “inbetween space” (Keating, 2006, p. 8). According to Keating (2006), “*Nepantleras* are threshold people: they move within and among multiple, often conflicting, worlds and refuse to align themselves exclusively with any single individual, group, or belief system” (p. 6). Latino student athletes experience this similar experience in trying to navigate their student athlete and Latino identities, without dedicating themselves to one specific group.

In the case of the Latino student athlete traveler, or *Nepantlera*, these travelers are navigating between their athletic/American identity and their Latino identity. Because of the phenomena of going in between worlds, student athletes navigate these identities and may prioritize one over the other. Keating (2006) describes the phenomena of navigating different identities when saying that “*Nepantleras* use their movements among divergent worlds to develop innovative, potentially transformative perspectives. They respect the differences within and among the diverse groups and, simultaneously, posit commonalities (p. 6). It is not always easy for the Latino student athlete to see the similarities and differences that come with their different identities, but only after accepting that there is a difference between them, can similarities in their identities be seen as well.

Identity navigation can also come with hardship. At times it can cause the traveler to feel lonely, or not accepted or excluded by their different identities. While the outsider



might praise the traveler for navigating through multiple identities, the outsider may not realize the difficulty and pain that the traveler goes through. Keating (2006) mentions this difficult journey when saying:

Although it might be tempting to celebrate nepantleras for their ability to move among so many divergent worlds, it's important to recognize the painful dimensions of this world-traveling. Their inability or refusal to remain within a single group or worldview makes them vulnerable to rejection, ostracism, and other forms of isolation. (p. 8)

For student athletes navigating their different identities, athletic participation can become a priority for a student athlete (Meyer, 1990; Parham, 1993), forcing them to reject their academics and potentially damage relationships with academic faculty and staff.

Because of the student athlete's ability to navigate these identities, they may be often confused in which culture they are living in. "Living between cultures results in 'seeing' double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent" (Keating, 2006, p. 8). Once the transparency sets in, and different parts of a Latino student athlete's culture come into fruition, and becomes their own identity, not one that they were encultured to see. "Removed from that culture's center you glimpse the sea in which you've been immersed but to which you were oblivious, no longer seeing the world the way you were enculturated to see it" (Keating, 2006, p. 8). Through this process, identity development can begin for the student athlete.

## **Confianza**

Although family, coach, and finances all play important roles in the decision making process of the student athlete, relationship building, trust, and how a student relates to other students is a key value in Latino culture (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Relationship building and trust have been identified as important in engaging Latino students and their families in U.S. education. This form of trust and relationship building is known and translated as *confianza*, or the capacity to relate to another individual with confidence, in a trusting way (Nuñez et al., 2013). Because a lot of importance is put on the coach's ability to recruit a student athlete and develop trust (Croft, 2008; Gabert, et al., 1999; Gabert, et al., 1999; Letawsky et al., 2003; Magnusen et al., 2014; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Pauline, 2010), the coach became a very important factor for a Latino student athlete to not only choose their institution, but to commit to play for this person for the next four years of their college experience.

Within the student athlete community, student athletes interact with faculty, staff, and coaches on a daily basis. Even in the recruiting process, relationships were built with coaches, faculty, and staff at the institutions where prospective student athletes ultimately enrolled in. Even though *confianza* is a key value for Latinos, levels of personal trust are lower among Latinos than they are among the general public (Taylor, Lopez, Martínez, & Velasco, 2012). This makes it crucial for college administrators to be intentional about working with this population of students, and developing trust with not only the student athlete, but their families as well. Reassurance about support systems, safety, and educational success will help put families at ease, as educational prosperity is valued in Latino culture (Nuñez, 2005).

## **Faculty and Staff**

A large portion of a student athlete's collegiate experience is spent in the classroom. In order to stay eligible for athletic competition, student athletes attend classes and maintain a certain grade point average. Depending on the size of the classes or institutions, student athletes can develop relationships with their professors and faculty members at their colleges or universities. Even though coaches and athletes may have a belief that the role of the student athlete is more important than that of their academic assimilation on campus, several students admire and hold their faculty members in the highest regard. This admiration and respect can later lead to faculty cultivating essential relationships with their students (Adler & Adler, 1991; Eitzen, 1999; Light, 2001).

By developing a faculty and student relationship, this allows student athletes to excel in the classroom and receive outside help from their faculty and staff. Harrison, Comeaux, and Plecha (2006) found cultivating a relationship with faculty members played a positive role in student-athletes' commitment to academic pursuits. Even though family influences how students develop the belief of the importance of performing well in their academics, it does not compare to the great importance of the expectations and encouragement from professors on their academic success (Alva & Padilla, 1995). These professors and university faculty serve as "intellectual coaches" (Harrison et al., 2006, p. 277) for their student athletes. A lot like their athletic coaches, university faculty become a big influencer on a student athlete's academic success through the bond and relationships they develop over time.

## **NCAA Divisional Differences**

Within the NCAA, there are three divisions in which colleges and universities can participate in athletic competition. In the first two divisions (Division I and Division II) of collegiate athletics, individual institutions are permitted to issue scholarships based off of a student athlete's athletic abilities. When student athletes receive an athletic scholarship, they are being rewarded strictly for their athletic achievements. Participation member institutions in Division III are not permitted to issue athletic scholarship, but can still recruit students to play organized sports at their institutions.

There are around 350 NCAA Division I institutions that host over 6000 athletic teams, and allow more than 170,000 student athletes to participate in collegiate athletics. Division I is seen as the most competitive and top level of NCAA division. Athletically, they are the institutions that are drawing the best athletic talent and include the most well-known colleges and universities. Division I institutions have to have at least seven sports for men and seven for women, or six for men and eight for women. Two of these sports have to be team sports for each gender. Each playing season (Fall, Winter, and Spring) has to be represented by each gender as well (NCAA, 2019c). Division I is able to award the most athletic scholarships out of the two divisions, and must meet the minimum financial aid awards for their athletic programs, and cannot exceed the maximum awards allowed per sport (NCAA, 2019c). More funding is allocated to athletics at Division I institutions and some of their athletic programs bring in revenue for colleges and universities. Most Division I institutions devote more money and resources to support their athletics programs, and can do so because of the large media contracts that Division I conferences can attract, mainly because of the popularity of Division I football and

basketball (NCAA, 2018b). Their facilities are often top of the line, and can seat more fans in their arenas, fields, and stadiums. Division I institutions also pull in big contract deals with sponsors like Nike, Coca-Cola, and TV networks. These contracts can range in the multiple million dollar range. Fans are purchasing their merchandise, which also increases the institution's revenue. Some major football programs alone will bring in enough money to run all of their college's athletic teams. Because of the heavy demands of the athletic schedule, Division I athletes have very little time to participate in other campus events, study abroad, and community service activities. Potuto and O'Hanlon's (2006) study, "Seventy percent of the respondents state that there are educational opportunities (internships, research projects, study abroad, etc.) that they cannot do because of their athletics participation," while, "two-thirds of those surveyed say that they wished they had more time to pursue educational opportunities available at their universities." However, most of the student athletes surveyed still felt as though having their experiences in collegiate athletics, which non student-athletes did not have, were a fair trade-off over educational opportunities. In a study of 246 first-year student athletes from Division I, Division II, and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), Gabert, Hale, and Montalvo (1999) indicated that Division I student-athletes are influenced more by athletic environmental factors than social and academic college factors. These athletic environmental factors included the student athlete's head coach, opportunity to play as a first year student athlete, athletic facilities, athletic traditions, and athletic facilities at the institution they attended. However, student athletes at Division II and NAIA institutions, placed more importance on the non-athletic college environment factors (Gabert et al., 1999, p. 28).

Division II institutions consist of around 300 member institutions, ranging from all sizes. Enrollments at Division II institutions can range from over 25,000 to less than 2,500. Of those 300 member institutions, 87% of them have less than 8,000 students. The NCAA claims that Division II allows student athletes the opportunity to compete at a high level of athletic competition, while also excelling in the classroom, and fully engaging in a broader campus experience (NCAA, 2018b). Division II has a “partial-scholarship” model for financial aid, where student-athletes’ college experiences are funded through a mix of athletics scholarships, academic aid, need-based grants and/or employment earnings (NCAA, 2018b). Division II is based on regional competition model, which helps reduce time missed for class, and cuts travel expenses due to traveling shorter distances, often through bus or vans (NCAA, 2018b).

Division III athletics is the division of colleges and universities that focuses the most on academics. There are no athletic scholarships awarded at this division, and 80% of these institutions are private colleges and universities. Division III colleges contains the largest number of colleges and universities out of any NCAA division. Division III colleges have a median enrollment of 2750, ranging from enrollment as little as 418 to populations as large as 38,000 (“2017-18 Division III Facts and Figures”, 2017). Because no athletic scholarships are offered at this level, students’ athletic ability should have no bearing on whether they are admitted into an institution. Division III also contains very prestigious liberal arts institutions, as well as academically and nationally ranked institutions.

Because Division I brings in the best athletic talent, and has institutions with great academics, and Division III has a very strong academic focus, Division II does not have

much of its own identity. For the student who is looking for the best competition or to go to a larger or ranked institution, they have the option to go Division I, if recruited. If a student athlete is not awarded athletic scholarship, they can still be recruited to the team as a walk-on or offered an opportunity to try out for the team. This opportunity has the ability to attract students, and take them away from choosing the division II option. If a student is looking for a smaller, but academically talented school, they have more Division III options to choose from. However, according to Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006), on average, student athletes in all three NCAA divisions were similar with non-student athletes in positive academic involvement, which include challenging themselves in the classroom, interacting with their professors, and participating in an education setting. Academics are held to a high importance between the three divisions, which can imply that there is more of a difference in athletic competition than in the academics at different divisional institutions.

An important factor to consider is that regardless of the institution, a student athlete has to be recruited by that institution, most likely by a coach of the specific sport. There are walk-on and tryout opportunities at every level, but the majority of students recruited have made contact and have been recruited by a coach or college/university.

## **Division II**

According to an annual report produced by the NCAA, Division II provides “thousands of student-athletes the opportunity to compete at a high level of scholarship athletics while excelling in the classroom and fully engaging in the broader campus experience” (NCAA, 2018d). The NCAA claims that students attending Division II institutions are seen as being wholly involved in the campus experience, as well as full

participants in competitive athletic competition. This gives the impression that there is balance between academics and athletics for the lives of student athletes at the division II level. With this claim by the NCAA, student athletes should have the time in their schedule to do well in their classes, get enough athletic training to compete at a high level, and have a well-balanced student experience.

At the Division II level, athletic scholarships are awarded based on athletic talent. The one condition to award athletic scholarships to student athletes is that the student be admissible to the institution, and pass the NCAA eligibility requirements. These eligibility requirements state that the student to have a minimum of a 2.2 grade point average (GPA) and an 800 combined SAT of Verbal and Math and a 70 ACT sum total. As of the 2017-2018 school year, there is now a sliding scale implemented by the NCAA for test score requirements. As a student's GPA rises above a 2.2, the minimum SAT score requirement drops. A student with a 3.3 or above only needs to have a minimum combined score of 400 on the SAT and 37 combined sum on the ACT. These required minimum scores are not high enough for admission at most academically rigorous institutions, and if not for the student's athletic ability, the student would likely be denied from that institution (NCAA, 2019d).

In regards to a balance of academics and athletics at the Division II level, student athletes are supported by faculty and staff at their institutions. According to Feezell (2013), "Division II faculty are quite different from their Division I and III colleagues who express negative feelings toward athletics around the academic-athletic tension, that is, that athletics seems to distract and remain disconnected from the primary academic enterprise" (p. 83). Not having tension between students and professors could take the



pressure off student athletes in the classroom, and allow them to focus on their studies without any pressure. On the other hand, in a study on faculty attitudes toward male Division II athletes by Baucom and Lantz (2001), their findings suggested that faculty do have prejudices over student athlete admission processes and how they perform in the classroom, but still held mostly “positive attitudes towards this group” (p. 273). Another point of interest should be that “faculty prejudices toward male student-athletes may be rather robust and may not be associated with only ‘big time’ athletic programs” (p. 273). This suggests that this is a problem student athletes face across the three divisions. Division II and III are not considered “big time” athletic programs.

Overall, there are 309 NCAA Division II institutions in the US. In terms of academic accolades, the U.S. News and World Report releases a ranking of the top colleges in the US every year. In its annual rankings for 2018, only one Division II college or university, from all geographical regions, was in the top 50 institutions ranked in the US, and only two Division II institutions were ranked in the top 100. Even though the U.S. News and World Report is not the only measurement of great academic institutions of higher education, this statistic suggests that Division II affiliated colleges are not academically rigorous.

Only 55 Division II colleges and universities are located in the Northeast region of the US consisting of 18 public and 37 private institutions. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, this region is composed of nine states which include Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Of these nine states, Rhode Island and Maine do not have any Division II institutions.

Because Division II institutions in the northeast tend to be smaller, private, and less selective (U.S. News and World Report, 2017), student athletes are not being retained at institutions, which hurts institutions' enrollments, budgets, and prestige. According to Smith, Pender, and Howell (2013), "less selective institutions typically have smaller budgets and spending per student" which "translates into less academic support and less spending on non-academics that students enjoy (e.g., sports, gyms, food, etc.), which has been shown to reduce graduation rates" (p. 248). Graduation rates and retention rates are very important to colleges and are included in the statistics posted by the U.S. News and World report every year. The U.S. News and World report published the top academic institutions in the nation by ranking them in order from best to worst.

In Division II, financial aid in the form of grants are based on a partial-scholarship model. Student-athletes in Division II will receive a portion of athletics-based aid, but a small number of students get full scholarships. Division II also has a large number of student-athletes who participate in collegiate athletics without receiving any athletics-based financial aid, but will receive financial aid packages based off of "merit", or their academic achievements in the classroom (NCAA, 2018b).

### **Academic Success**

Academic success refers to how students excel in academic related tasks. Just like a student athlete practices their sport and spends countless hours improving their athletic abilities, student athletes must be willing to put time into studying, doing coursework, attending class, and achieving good grades. Simons et al.'s (1999) study on academic motivation for student athletes suggests that in order to have a positive athletic performance, a student athlete must put in practice time, show determination, and focus

on their end goals. The authors' suggest that this same determination and focus can be transferred into academic success, with the proper time dedication. This academic success not only reflects the "student" in student athlete, but obtaining good grades is a requirement for student athletes to be able to participate in athletic competition (p. 151).

Student athletes are often told by coaches and college administrators that they are students first and athletes second. This saying sums up what is believed to be the priority of a student athlete. However, in a national study done by Potuto and O'Hanlon (2006) on student athlete experiences in college, over half of the student athletes surveyed had reported not spending as much time on their academics as they should have and 80% cited being too busy with athletic participation as the main reason for not dedicating their time to their academics. Student athletes are dedicating more time to perform well athletically, and push their academics to the side. Spending a lot of time on athletics could impact an athlete in multiple ways which include: grade point average; choice of major; socialization with academic faculty, and in life outside of their sport (Bowen & Lenin, 1991; Schneider, Ross, & Fisher, 2010; Scott, Paskus, Miranda, Metr, & McArdle, 2008; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). On the contrary, being involved in school organized extracurricular activities have been seen as a factor that positively influences the academic success of Latino students (Reese, 2002; Simpkins 2011). Student athletes are the one that need to work on their time management skills, or seek help from college resources on how to do so.

Scott et al. (2008) revealed that academic performance was poorer for athletes in their season of competition, which proved the common misconception of student athletes having better grades during their respective season, as opposed to their off-season. This

idea is reinforced by data presented by Paskus (2008) which showed that increased athletic activity corresponded with less academic time for student athletes. With so much time tied into the athletic component, less time is left for a student athlete to devote to their academics, and could cause them to be academically ineligible for athletic competition. According to Maloney and McCormick (1993), for any academic term, academic performance is poorer as time away from academic tasks increases. This would imply that student athletes are neglecting their studies so that they could devote more time to performing well athletically.

Athletes in the classroom also face different challenges than regular students. In Simmons' (2007) study on student athletes, 33% of student athletes reported negative perceptions from their faculty, and 60% reported the same negative treatment from other students. Most participants stated that faculty members had made negative comments about athletes in class, most commonly hearing that student athletes were "expecting special treatment, not academically qualified, and only interested in sports" (p. 251). According to the authors, these complaints mirrored the dumb jock stereotype, "low intelligence, little academic motivation and receipt of undeserved benefits and privilege" (p. 251).

Self-motivation and hard work are often seen as factors that help student athletes' success not only on the playing fields, but also in the classroom. Studies have shown (Jodry, Robles-Pifia, & Nichter, 2005; Me Millan & Reed, 1994) that Latino students owe their success to internal traits like determination, positive self-esteem, motivation, and resiliency. Because of their determination and willingness to succeed, Latino student

athletes will push themselves harder to achieve positive outcomes on the playing field and in the classroom.

In terms of academic preparedness, the literature suggests that student athletes enter college less prepared than their peers, particularly those who were highly committed to their sport (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). This puts students at an academic disadvantage. Instead of progressing in their coursework, some students have to get extra academic support just to get to the same academic level as their peers. This means an enhanced effort on the part of the student athlete to play catch up to reach the academic level of their peers and keep up with their schoolwork, on top of their already time-consuming athletic schedule.

The academic success of Division II athletic programs are measured by the institution's Academic Success Rate (ASR). The ASR is a graduation metric developed by the NCAA that is calculated and mandatory for Division II institutions. It takes transfer students, mid-year enrollees, and non-scholarship first-year athletes into consideration. This metric removes student-athletes who leave the institution but were still eligible to compete. The ASR also records graduation status six years after initial college enrollment. ASR's for Latino college athletes increased by 16% between 2006 and 2018. Since 1998, Latino students in Division II have had better ASRs than the Federal Graduation Rates for non-student athlete Latinos. In 2018, the Federal Graduate Rate was 46% compared to the 52% ASR of Latino Student Athletes. This suggests that Latino student athletes are graduating at higher rates than non-student athlete Latinos (NCAA Research Staff, 2018).

## **Athletic Performance**

Athletic performance refers to how a student athlete excels in competition in their sports. Wins and losses are used as a measure of whether a sports team is successful. Institutions are looking to recruit student athletes who will help them compete for championships and win athletic competitions. According to Letawsky et al. (2003), “In order to ensure the cycle of successful seasons, it is imperative that the athletic department recruits the most athletically talented and academically eligible potential student-athletes possible” (p. 605). Having an academically talented student athlete helps in terms of the student remaining eligible for athletic competition.

The human body is also feeling pressure and stress from athletic competition and practices. According to Simons et al. (1999a), athletic participation puts a heavy toll on the body. Fatigue is also likely to set in from multiple hours spent on training and competing in athletic events. With a fatigued or injured body, students may have a harder time concentrating on their studies, and could be a reason for student athletes to miss their classes (p. 58).

Studies have shown that the high level demands of college athletics force student athletes to prioritize athletics over their academics (Meyer, 1990; Parham, 1993). However, when compared to student athletes who entered college with similar background characteristics, student athletes do not differ from their peers in academic performance while in college (Aries et al., 2004; Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Stuart, 1985).

On the other hand, in a longitudinal study conducted by DeMeulenaere (2010) of four student athletes and how their student involvement in athletics impacted academic

performance, findings show that structured sports actually helped students have a positive academic experience. DeMeulenaere (2010) explored six ways that sports served to promote student success. These included “structuring schedules, creating incentives, building confidence, developing positive adult and peer role models, and getting students to develop future aspirations” (p. 130).

### **Summary**

The review of the literature contains an extensive review of the existing literature on the three important characteristics that are embedded in the life of a Latino student athlete, and how these inform their athletic participation, performance, and academic success. In connection to this study, it is vital to comprehend all of the influencers of a student athlete’s athletic participation and performance and those affecting their academic success. For this reason, the review of the literature explored three characteristics embedded in the life of a Latino student athlete, which included student athlete’s Latino identity, collegiate athletics and the role that Division II plays on the athletic and academic lives of Latino student athletes, and the recruitment factors and personnel that led Latino student athletes to select, enroll, and persist at their institution of higher education.

### **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN**

This chapter describes the methodology used to investigate how Latino student athletes' athletic participation and performance influences their academic success at NCAA Division II colleges in the Northeastern region of the US. The researcher took the student athlete's Latino identity into consideration, and how different aspects of that identity influences their academic success. Constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006) was carried out to formulate a substantive theory of Latino student athletes' athletic participation and performance within the context of NCAA Division II institutions. Two semi-structured, open ended interviews were conducted with seven Latino Student athletes at two different Division II institutions in the Northeastern region of the US. Qualitative interviewing provides an "open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 28-29). According to the developers of the original Grounded Theory method, Glaser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory is founded from a context-based and process-oriented explanation of social phenomenon, illustrated through representative examples of data, and is useful as a methodology when examining understudied social phenomenon. The lack of exploration of social phenomena among research of Latino student athletes is what allows Grounded Theory to be useful for this study.

The two interviews conducted focused on different aspects of the life of a student athlete. The first interviews, conducted in the Fall 2018 semester, focused on only the student athlete's athletic participation, performance and academic success. The second interview was conducted in the Spring 2019 semester and focused on the student athlete's



racial/ethnic (Latino) and student athlete identity, and their influences on their athletic participation, performance and academic success. After conducting the interviews, the interviews were transcribed and data was coded from the transcriptions. The researcher then examined the data, formulated themes, and formulated a Grounded Theory from the data. The research participants' implicit meanings and experiential views were taken into consideration, and were used to construct a reality of their experiences as Charmaz (2006) described in her methods of constructing grounded theory (p. 10).

### **Qualitative Methodology**

Grounded Theory is a qualitative methodology which consists of “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). When seen from a constructivist lens, Constructivist Grounded Theory “places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (Charmaz, 1990, 1995b, 2000, 2001; Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996). This allows the researcher to share their own lived experiences and views with the participants in order to “clarify and problematize their assumptions and make those assumptions clear to others” (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 212).

Qualitative research is not set up to generalize the population from the sample that the researcher was working with; instead it was used for the purpose of developing critical, analytical, in-depth insights. The researcher does not focus on participant size, as much as the importance that is placed on the rich, thick, descriptive qualitative data that

came out of the one-on-one interviews, from the lived experiences of the Latino student athlete participants.

### **Research Sites**

The research sites of the study were at two private, liberal arts institution in the Northeastern region of the US. These institutions were NCAA Division II institutions. The first institution, Southern New England University, is a residential campus with around 1700 undergraduate students, which host most of their athletic facilities on their main campus. This institution places a heavy focus on their academics, and nationally competes with a top 10 ASR for over a decade. Their sports teams, however, are constantly losing athletic competitions, and rarely see post-season games and matches. There are 21 varsity sports at this institution, 14 of which do not offer athletic scholarships to their student athletes. Men's and Women's basketball are the only two sports that offer full athletic scholarships. Of the 1700 students, 24% of them are varsity student athletes. The second institution, Northern City University, is about 50% residential, and has around 2200 undergraduate students. They have 18 Division II varsity sports at their institution, and are very successful in their athletic competitions, with frequent visits to the NCAA tournament in multiple sports.

### **Research Participants**

All of the participants in this study were fully enrolled and in good academic standing at private, liberal arts colleges in the Northeastern region of the US. One of the participants dropped out of his institution and was unable to interview because he did not return for his spring semester. The participants were intentionally selected using purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) suggests that a smaller number of participants be

selected based off specific criteria or perspectives that they may have, and selecting information-rich cases. “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 169). The researcher intentionally picked student athletes who are enrolled in an undergraduate degree program, self-identified as Latino, are on an official NCAA roster of their institution’s athletic department, as well as participated at the NCAA Division II level. The participants were all at least 18 years old.

**Risks.** The risks in this study were minimal. The researcher provided assurance that he would protect the information collected from the participants during this study. Consent forms indicated that the researcher will not collect any information that will identify the participants to further protect their confidentiality and avoid any potential risk for an accidental breach of confidentiality.

**Benefits.** There were no direct benefits for the participants taking part in this study. The participants were informed that the research will help contribute to the body of knowledge of Latino student athletes, and could help colleges and universities start the conversation about support services for this specific population of students.

### **Research Procedures**

The first stage in collecting data, coding, and data analysis was to find access to Latino student athletes at Division II, Northeastern colleges. Two coaches at northeastern colleges were excellent resources for discovering which participants matched the criteria (Appendix A) for the study. To maintain confidentiality, the participants remained anonymous by having the researcher remove any identifiers from the interview transcripts and having the participants assign pseudonyms to themselves. In one case, a

participant used his own name, so the researcher replaced it with a random pseudonym. The researcher first reached out to three coaches at northeastern colleges (Appendix B) to ask permission to come to one of their practices, and speak to interested prospective student athletes about participating in this study. Only two of the three coaches responded to the researcher's initial e-mails. Personal recruitment knowledge by the research was used to recruit student athletes at one of the three colleges to participate in this study. These coaches had the best knowledge of which of their student athletes actively participate in their sport, and are enrolled full time at their institution. The researcher attended a practice, and obtained contact information through a sign-up sheet (Appendix E), and contacted the student athletes by email (Appendix D) to schedule the interviews. Seven student athletes demonstrated interest in participating. Once interview times and location were determined, the researcher sent the student athletes a confirmation email (Appendix E). Locations on the student athlete's campus were neutral and convenient to the participants. Before the first set of interviews were conducted, a consent form (Appendix J) was handed out to the participants, followed by a questionnaire (Appendix G) focusing on the participant's racial/ethnic identity, student information (major, year graduated from high school, age, and current college GPA), student status (full time/part time, first to attend college) and financial information (Pell-grant eligibility, employment information).

The researcher conducted all of the first set of semi-structured, open-ended interviews in person, at a predetermined location on the campus of the research participants' college. Because of distance, and scheduling conflicts, one of the seven second interviews were conducted through skype. The interviews were all audio

recorded, with permission of the participants, and then later transcribed. One of the seven participants did not return to their college for the spring semester. Following the transcription process, codes and themes were formulated from what the student athletes' described as their experiences on how their athletic participation and performance affected their academic success, while taking their Latino identities into consideration. Confidentiality was verbally guaranteed. The participants also provided written consent.

### **Data Collection**

This study used a variety of approaches in formulating different themes and extracting codes from the data. Data collection for this study includes open-ended semi-structured interviews and transcriptions.

**Interviews.** Two semi-structured open-ended interview were conducted with each of the seven participants. The first interviews, conducted in the Fall 2018 semester focused only on the student athlete's athletic participation, performance and academic success. They consisted of open-ended questions based around three different characteristics of the life of a student athlete (Appendix H). The characteristics that the questions were based on were athletic participation and scholarship, athletic performance, and academic success. The second interview was conducted in the Spring 2019 semester and focused on the student athlete's racial/ethnic (Latino) and student athlete identities, and their influence on their athletic participation, performance and academic success. These interviews also consisted of open-ended questions based around three different characteristics of the life of a student athlete (Appendix I), which included student athlete identity, racial/ethnic identity, and intersectionality.

Interviews conducted by the researcher on the campus of the seven participants were navigated by a semi-structured interview approach, where predetermined questions on three main topics were asked, but were not limited to only those specific questions. This approach allowed the researcher to expand on matters discussed in the interviews, and touch on what was especially meaningful to each individual.

### **Reflexivity**

The researcher focused on reflexivity in his research, which constructed an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. According to Malterud (2001), “A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (p. 484). Part of why the researcher decided to use Constructive Grounded Theory was because the analysis in this research was created from shared experiences and relationships with participants, which allows the researcher to share their own lived experiences and views with the participants in order to clarify and problematize their assumptions and make those assumptions clear to others. It was important to the researcher to showcase his positionality. The researcher’s reflexivity brought in his own experiences as a participant in Division II athletics, and as a Latino student. This is a population that the researcher wanted to focus his research on and his previous experience was brought into his pre-study beliefs. According to Malterud (2001):

Reflexivity starts by identifying preconceptions brought into the project by the researcher, representing previous personal and professional experiences, pre study beliefs about how things are and what is to be investigated, motivation and

qualifications for exploration of the field, and perspectives and theoretical foundations related to education and interests (p. 484).

Similarly, through reflexivity the researcher was able to bring in his own experiences, motivation, and knowledge, which helped guide his study when talking to Latino student athletes.

While the parents of the researcher attended college in their home country of Peru, they did not attend an American college or university. During their arrival to the US, his parents worked at fast food restaurants, hotels, and thrift shops. They were not able to initially practice their pharmacy professions because their education was not recognized in the US. Like a lot of the participants interviewed, their parents moved to the US for a better future, and many are the first to attend college in the US.

The researcher's involvement in Division II at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke as a basketball manager is what opened his eyes up to the heavy time demands and schedules of a student athlete. Between going to classes, a double major in computer science and Spanish, attending every practice, and traveling to every home and away contest, it was very difficult to find time for homework and keeping with the academics. The expectations and structure from coaches and athletic staff is what motivated the researcher to go from being a poor student in high school, to doing well in class, and ultimately influenced him to pursue a doctorate in higher education. Similar to his experiences, the participants in this study referenced coaches as an important reason as to why they attended class and tried to do well in school. After reviewing the interview transcriptions, along with parts of the literature review, the researcher was able to identify

that being involved in collegiate athletics helped get him through college, and had a positive influence on his overall college experience.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the interview process, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed to make meaning of what the participants discussed. The transcriptions of the interviews were used as data, and were analyzed using coding procedures described by Charmaz (2006) for Constructivist Grounded Theory. Initial coding was first used throughout all of the interviews. Through initial coding Charmaz (2006) suggested for ideas to be grouped together to study fragments of data, words, lines, segments, and incidents – closely for their analytic import. The researcher grouped these fragments to begin to formulate ideas of potential themes. The researcher then used focused coding on the initial codes to test the data against extensive data. This process involved a “focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). These more significant codes were then used to formulate themes about the lived experiences of Latino student athletes.

The process of inductive analysis was also used by the researcher to develop themes by studying the recordings and transcriptions. The research mirrored the steps of inductive analysis described by Bhattacharya (2017) which looks “at all the raw data, groups it into small analytical units of meaning for further analysis (usually called codes), cluster similar analytical units and label them as categories (usually called themes)” (p. 150). The process included the researcher going back and forth between stages of coding



and re-reading of the data. Phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that stood out to the researcher were grouped together and labeled into three categories.

**Transcriptions.** All 12 of the interviews were recorded using the voice memos application on the researcher's password protected iPhone X. All seven of the first set of interview audio recordings were then uploaded onto a software based transcription website called Trint at <http://www.trint.com>. Once uploaded, the transcription software transcribed the audio files into text. Following the transcription process, the researcher went back and listened to the audio and read the corresponding text at the same time, and made corrections to the wording and phrases that were not properly transcribed. The second set of interviews were outsourced to a transcription service, and were delivered to the researcher by e-mail.

**Coding.** Once the transcriptions were completed, they were used as data for this study. According to Charmaz (2006), "Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you *define* what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (p. 46). The data was first interpreted, and corresponding interview comments were identified, classified, and labeled to formulate codes in a process called initial coding, using a computer software called NVivo. The 11 transcribed interviews were reviewed on multiple occasions and codes were constantly modified. This process was followed by a second cycle of coding called focused coding, where the codes were combined into groups to reflect the lived experiences of student athletes' athletic participation and scholarship, athletic performance, and academic success. Charmaz (2006) describes the process of focused coding as "using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through

large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (p. 57).

Through focused coding, themes were formulated from the data analysis. This process of initial and focused coding reflect steps set out by Charmaz (2006) and is consistent with Grounded Theory coding.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This study investigated the collegiate experiences of seven NCAA student athletes at institutions of higher education in the northeastern region of the US. The purpose of this research study was to examine how NCAA Division II Latino student athletes' racial identity influences their athletic participation, performance, and academic success. Two core questions guided this study in which the Latino student athletes' athletic and racial identities were central. These include:

1. How does a student athlete participant's racial identity (Latino) influence their athletic performance and academic success?
2. How does a student athlete's motivation to do well in their respective sport translate into their motivation to perform well academically?

The qualitative data was extracted and generated from the seven participants' lived experiences from two separate one on one interviews. A pre-questionnaire form was used to collect students' demographic information. Table 1 includes the participants' pseudonyms, age, gender, and racial/ethnic identities. Table 2 reflects the participant's scholarship and income information. Table 3 provides the participant's academic identifiers such as major, year in college, and name of institution.

All seven participants identified as cis-male and all self-identified and equated their racial/ethnic identity as from their parents' countries of origins/nationalities. They all considered themselves Latino. The participants all came from high schools in the US, but their hometowns varied in population and size.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Racial/Ethnic Identity</b>
Nathaniel	21	M	Mexican
Jake	19	M	Salvadorian/Other: Brazilian
Roger	20	M	Multiracial
Cristiano	19	M	Colombian/Ecuadorian
Stephen	21	M	Ecuadorian
James	19	M	Colombian
Nicolas	18	M	Cuban

The participants reported varying socio-economic backgrounds, with five of the participants qualifying and receiving federal Pell grants. None of the participants from Southern New England University were awarded athletic scholarships, while all of the participants at Northern City University were granted athletic scholarships. Some of the participants also had jobs outside of their academic and athletic commitments.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Pell</b>	<b>First Generation</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Scholarship</b>
Nathaniel	Yes	Yes	No	Academic
Jake	Yes	No	Yes	Academic
Roger	No	No	No	Academic
Cristiano	Yes	Yes	No	Athletic
Stephen	No	Yes	Yes	Athletic
James	Yes	No	Yes	Athletic
Nicolas	Yes	Yes	No	Athletic

While academic achievement varied among the participants, all but two (one student did not report) reported Grade Point Averages over 3.0. All four collegiate academic classes (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) were represented among the participants.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Institution</b>
Nathaniel	Business Administration	Senior	Southern New England University
Jake	Accounting/Economics	Sophomore	Southern New England University
Roger	Economics	Sophomore	Southern New England University
Cristiano	Comm. Arts	Freshman	Northern City University
Stephen	Criminal Justice	Junior	Northern City University
James	Psychology	First-Year	Northern City University
Nicolas	Business Management	First-Year	Northern City University

### **Vignettes: A Profile of the Participants**

This section of the chapter provides vignettes to introduce each of the seven participants and their stories. Employing vignettes enabled the researcher to explore participant's lived experiences, beliefs, and how they made meaning of their academic and athletic experiences (Barter & Renold, 1999). These vignettes offer a glimpse into the personal lives, collegiate experiences, and Latino identity of Nathaniel, Jake, Roger, Cristiano Ronaldo, Stephen, James Rodriguez, and Nicolas. After the vignettes, the chapter presents the four key themes, which emerged from the rich, thick descriptive data that the participants shared in their one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

#### ***Vignette 1: Nathaniel***

Nathaniel was the oldest of all the participants and a senior at Southern New England University. Nathaniel was 21 years old and identified as Mexican American. Nathaniel is the older of two siblings, and grew up in Mexico City. He immigrated to the US when he was 10 years old, and has lived with his brother and mother since, while his

father has continued to work in Mexico City. Nathaniel qualified to receive federal Pell grants, and noted that his financial aid package played a huge role in attending his college of choice. One of his unique characteristics in comparison to the other participants was becoming a US citizen during college. He described with pride his achievement of going through the naturalization process of “becoming” a U.S. citizen, and made it known that part of his identity now included “being” an American.

Nathaniel was in his senior season on the men’s soccer team at Southern New England University and was majoring in business, with a double minor in economics and psychology. He did not hesitate to share how he struggled academically during his time at his university. He was forced to go back home after his first year in college, and did not return for his sophomore year due to family issues. He attended a community college back home, and found that he missed his soccer experience and residential campus experience. On a trip over winter break, he came to visit former teammates, with the intention to talk to admissions about re-enrolling at Southern New England University for his junior year.

Nathaniel explained that he found both his academic and athletic experiences to be challenging. His struggles in his collegiate experience were in both academics and athletics. He was able to overcome these challenges through hard work and desire to play the sport that he loved. During his second semester, he was ineligible to participate in sports due to his lack of academic progress. The embarrassment and desire to re-participate in collegiate athletics were two critical reasons that led him to change his academic approach in a positive manner. He recalled:

I had a poor performance in my fall semester, my freshman year. So I wasn't eligible to play in the spring season, or participate in team practices for the first three or four weeks until I get my grades up. And it hasn't been a problem ever since... That experience was what shaped me to think about academics the way I do now but, 100 percent, it was more of embarrassment. You know that we have twenty five plus guys on one team and they're all held to the same standard. So if you don't do it, it's not like 10 or 15 other guys are illegible [*sic*]. It's just one or two maybe if that. And I was one of them. So it was more what I thought about myself or felt about myself more than anything else. And ever since then, held myself to an even higher standard because, clearly my freshman year wasn't good enough, so that's helped me, actually that semester helped me a lot in terms of realizing what I had to do and how I had to do.

This ethos of hard work and dedication allowed Nathaniel to overcome a variety of challenges, re-enroll back into college for his junior year, and to be on track to graduate in the spring of 2019.

Nathaniel has developed into a team leader who motivates his team to give their all and mentors the younger players on the team, like he once was mentored as an underclassmen. He mentioned on multiple occasions how many people helped and contributed to his journey from matriculation to graduation, and how he is forever grateful. Throughout his interview, he spoke with positivity, even as he described his struggles. He was proud of the strides that he made to motivate himself to get himself through his academic challenges and on-field injuries. He had the longest interview out of

the seven participants where he focused heavily on the importance of his Latino identity and how proud he was to be Latino.

During his first interview he spoke of eventually pursuing higher education, and going into coaching as a profession. He was not quite ready to give up on the sport he loved. By the spring semester, he was further removed from his last season in collegiate athletics, and realized that he would not be pursuing an athletic career any further. By the end of his second interview, Nathaniel was excited to announce that he was offered a job with his father in Mexico City, pending graduation. He was excited about this next challenge, and nervous to move back to the place where he had grown up, after so many years.

### ***Vignette 2: Jake***

Jake is a 19 year old sophomore at Southern New England University. He self-identified as Salvadorian as well as Brazilian on his pre-questionnaire. Jake grew up in a single parent household with his brother and mother. Jake's mother played an enormous role in not only raising him and his brother, but also in his pursuit of becoming a collegiate athlete. His mother played an active role in contacting coaches and expanding Jake's view on potential colleges to attend. Jake mentioned how important his family is to him, especially how his mother mentioned that his little brother idolizes him. Because of what his brother means to him, Jake wants to make him proud by being successful in life. Geographic location of the institution did not seem to make any difference as to where Jake sought to attend college. When given the choice, Jake could not choose between sports or academics as the more important aspect of his college selection process.



Jake is a sophomore on the men's soccer team who is an economics and accounting double major. Jake had been able to keep up with his grades. He had moments where he has been unmotivated to do school work or has done just enough schoolwork to get by. During the beginning of college, he was dating his girlfriend from his hometown, who passed away in the summer before his sophomore year. Jake took the death of his girlfriend extremely hard, and there were times where he could not concentrate on school work. This lack of concentration also affected his participation and performance in his athletics. He found that his institution was very supportive of him through those hard times, and his professors and coaches were understanding of needing to excuse himself from class or practice. This took a toll on his grades, which he was eventually able to pull back up.

For Jake, finances were the most important reason for attending his institution of higher education. Throughout the interviews, affordability and not graduating from college with a lot of debt was of major importance for him. Jake qualified for a federal Pell grant along with a merit scholarship award. During his college selection process, it came down to the last month before he was able to make a decision on where to attend. Jake's decision to attend his institution ended up being most influenced by his financial aid package.

As far as his Latino identity, Jake spent the least time out of the participants who participated in the second interview, talking about what his Latino identity meant to him and the importance that it has on his life. When asked about the influence of his Latino identity influence on his academic performance, Jake said:

Honestly, in my experience, it hasn't really affected me that much. You know, [where he grew up] the Latino influence there is pretty vast. It's not like I was outcast by anyone. And even coming down here, you know, there's a slightly smaller Latino population, as far as the guys I'm around all the time, half of them are Latino. So it's not really something that has held me back... Once again, I feel like I'm an everyday student and an everyday athlete among the population.

Even though he felt pride in being Latino, he did not feel like that identity influenced him positively or negative in the classroom or on the sports field.

During Jake's interviews, he constantly brought up the importance of receiving a quality financial aid package along with his personal life struggles. He knows that the process to recovery is long, but is willing to work hard at it. He was also very clear on how his athletic career will end when his four years of collegiate are over. He is looking forward to joining the workforce after he graduates from his institution.

### ***Vignette 3: Roger***

Roger is a 20 year old sophomore at Southern New England University who identified as multiracial on his pre-questionnaire. Roger sat out his first year for an injury that happened during preseason. He was academically a sophomore in the classroom, but a "redshirt freshman" on the athletic field. He was equally as focused on his academics as his athletics.

Roger was very confident in his responses and was very unworried about his grades being academically ineligible to play his sport. At times he seemed distracted, or as if his mind was somewhere else. He was also the only respondent who did not remember to give himself a pseudonym, and used his actual name in the interview. The

researcher elected to pick a random name for the participant, in order to conceal his identity.

During the second interview, Roger talked about his complicated Latino identity. He identifies as French Venezuelan, but felt it elaborate as to why he chose this phrasing. He felt it was important to talk about how his grandparents met in Paris, followed by a move to Quito, Ecuador. Roger's grandparents eventually settled in Venezuela and had their three kids [Roger's parents]. Roger's father grew up speaking French and comes from a French family, therefore showing importance for his French identity.

Unlike the other participants, Roger was the only person to say that family was not an influencer on choosing his institution. Both of his parents attended college, but none of them had a background in athletics. Even though they placed a lot of importance in academics, they allowed Roger to choose his institution based off of his needs. Roger was also unique in the fact that location was the prime factor for choosing to attend his institution.

Finances were not an issue to Roger. He was not eligible for a federal Pell grant and said that his financial aid package had no influence on selecting his institution. Roger discussed being financial well off, and attending private schools growing up. He remembers very vividly how the recession in 2008 hurt his family financially and he was forced to go to public school. Roger mentions this when saying:

It was in 08, that they [Roger's parents] weren't making that much money at that time. They really got hit by that 08 [2008 Recession], so they had to move me from my private school to a public school, which was great. That's where I found my closest friends which I still talk to from back home, from 7th and 8th grade.

And they told me, this is for you to understand the other perspective of school, see what they have and what you had before. And it truly showed the differences between schools, like even the environment of talking to someone, the way they felt about school, the places they were in, it was much different in one spot than the other. But it really helped understand those 2 different values at school between 2 different groups of people.

Public school is also where Roger said he learned Spanish. The students in his middle school were mostly children of immigrants and many were in the English as Second Language (ESL) track. In exchange for helping them out with their English, they helped Roger with his Spanish. After the recession got better, Roger's family rebounded and became well off again. Roger mentions that most of the students in his private high school were fourth generation Latino, and mostly did not speak Spanish.

Roger's coach played a major role in his recruitment process, and he had a great relationship with his coach. He mentioned that this was the first White coach that he had ever been coached by. All of his previous coaches identified as Latino. Roger recalled that his Latino coaches were very strict and focused mainly on the sporting aspect, and rarely got to know their athletes on a personal level. He said that his college coach had a strong and positive connection with his players. He compared him to a second father, with how he routinely checks in on his players, makes sure they are taking care of themselves in and outside of the classroom, and even on how he continues to keep in touch with his former players. Roger mentions that this feeling of being like a second father is very welcomed and appreciated by his own parents.

Following the interview, Roger revealed that he was going to transfer out of his institution to be closer to family. He said that both of his grandparents moved back to his parent's house and that he wanted to be around to help take care of his grandparents. He plans to stop playing his sport, and focus on his academics at a large, public university near his hometown.

***Vignette 4: Cristiano Ronaldo***

Cristiano Ronaldo was a 19 year old first-year who identified as Colombian and Ecuadorian. He attended Northern City University and was very upbeat and positive about his collegiate experience. He told me from the beginning of his first interview that he wanted to be a professional athlete. Cristiano was one of two participants who selected a professional athlete's name as his own. He was very intentional in saying that everything came second to soccer. He was maintaining his grades and did just enough in the classroom to be eligible to play.

As far as his athletic experience, he was proud of his fitness and that he was able to participate athletically as a first-year on his team. If it were up to him, he would be training three times a day and spending less time in the classroom. He works on his fitness and skills outside of mandated team practices and games, which leaves for less time for him to work on his academics. His road to becoming a professional athlete seemed to be his biggest motivation to play collegiate athletics, and it drove him to make decisions based around his athletic demands. Cristiano mentions his professional soccer desires, and the importance that becoming a professional athlete means to him when saying:

You've got to take your chances. Sometimes it's even about luck. So let's say you played a really good that game and they offer you a contract right there... And it's worth leaving school behind. You have to do it. Well I feel like I have to do it, because that's my dream!

This determination and professional desire seemed to be his biggest influencer on his collegiate experience, and he was very passionate about becoming a professional athlete.

Finances were really important in his decision to select his institution, next to playing his sport. Cristiano was eligible to receive a federal Pell grant and was also the first in his family to attend college. Cristiano said that it was a family sacrifice to send him to college, and that he could have gone to college for next to nothing had he stayed in his home state. Even though college would have been cheaper instate, the institution he chose offered him the best financial aid package, along with the opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics.

Cristiano was only able to participate in the first interview. He did not return to his institution for the following spring semester. He ended up dropping out of his institution to pursue a professional soccer career. The researcher tried to reach out to talk about his reasons for dropping out and not continuing his collegiate career, but was unsuccessful in reaching him.

#### ***Vignette 5: Stephen***

Stephen was a 21 year junior who identified as Ecuadorian. He was one of two local students at Northern City University. Staying close to his family was very important to him. That was the deciding factor on attending his institution. As the first in his family to attend college, he found that education was of utmost importance. His family had told

him that he did not want to do manual labor like his father, and that getting a college degree is a steppingstone to a better future. Not only does he want a better future for himself, but he wants to be able to provide and help out his family as well. He talks about the importance of obtaining a college degree when saying:

Attending college to me and my family means getting a degree. In order to work hard... Not work outside, like my dad works in landscaping. My dad says it's hard all the time. He comes back exhausted and all that. My family always tells me like, oh you don't want to be doing that. You want to be like, having a good job with good pay... I want to take care of my family after, because they took care of me when I was small. So I want to take care of them and re-pay them back.

His coach had some influence on his college choice, along with his financial aid package, but those did not compare to the importance of being close to his family.

Stephen probably talked about the admission process the most, and how his institution was very helpful in the recruitment process. His institution was able to explain finances and support services to his mother, who spoke little English. Education was a recurring topic in his interview, and how important it was to him and his family. He is looking to be a police officer after graduating and feels like his education is preparing him well to take that next step.

Stephen prided himself on his work ethic, and on the importance of winning competitions. He mentioned that the more you win, the more you get to play your sport. Winning allowed him and his teammates to advance further in postseason play, which extended his season. He was very close to his teammates and said that his team is like a small family to him. To Stephen, his performance and outcomes on the field did not

impact his academic performance. He said that once you are off the field, academics are a major focus for him. This includes attending classes and trips to the library to get his school work done.

As an upperclassman, Stephen took mentoring and being a team leader very seriously. He mentioned that this is an important role to undertake, in order to mentor the younger players, and be serious all of the time to “help keep them in check” and out of trouble. He acknowledged the influence that upperclassman had on him, and how they made him realize that once you are a senior, your collegiate experience comes to an end, and because most college athletes do not end up playing professional sports, college will be the highest level of competition that they will play.

While education was important to Stephen, his passion for his sport allowed him to do well in both. He had a starting spot on his athletic team, which he was very proud of. He could not separate his student identity for his athlete identity, and kept stating the importance of balancing both, obtaining his degree, and being a student athlete. The supportive environment, from professors to coaches, and attending a smaller institution played a big role in his student athlete success.

***Vignette 6: James Rodriguez***

James Rodriguez was a 19 year first-year who identified as Colombian, and the first to get back to me from Northern City University about conducting his second interview. He was the second of the four students whose family lived locally. He was the only commuter student out of the seven participants and lived at home with his parents. James was the second of two participants who selected a professional athlete’s name as his own. He was often in a very upbeat and happy mood, and even admitted that he loved



joking around. James was born in the US, but moved back to Colombia at a young age when his grandmother got sick. He later moved back to the US around the time he turned 12. He loved his experience in Colombia and recommends that kind of upbringing for anyone. He was very intentional in demystifying the stereotype of Colombia being dangerous, and mentioned that it was a very safe and happy environment for kids to grow up in.

James has a lifelong dream and goal of becoming a professional athlete. He believes that playing at the collegiate level, along with his determination will help make that dream a reality. Even though James had a huge passion and desire to be a professional soccer player, he did mention becoming a police officer if his professional career did not work out. He chose psychology as a major, because he feels like it would be the best major that will allow him to be a successful cop. He also took AP psychology in high school and immediately made him fall in love with the subject. He self-reported having a GPA of 3.0. Education was really important to his family and they stressed the importance of education constantly. His sister ended up going to and graduating from a four year institution and putting a lot of importance and time into her education. His parents used to put this education pressure on him until they realized what his true goals in life were. They also realized he was taking care of getting good grades and playing his sport.

I mean, Hispanic household, man, they expect you to get A's, B's, and nothing less than that. And even when you get a B it's tough. My parents have understood that I barely have time, I barely put in the time for school because I can't do it more. But I put more time in what I believe is more important to me, which is

soccer. So they do understand. They caught on to it very quickly. They don't bother me. They're not on my butt about school. That's more about for my sister, my sister was more about school. They were always on her.

James attributed his love for his sport to his Latino culture and family influence. He said that he immediately makes a connection to other Latino student athletes when seeing them on the playing field or in the classroom. When asked about seeing other Latinos on the playing field James said that:

Oh, they are my boys. There's a connection. To be honest with you, I try to be very friendly to everybody. But there's this thing about Hispanics, they are open to everything, they are open to a friendship, they are open to a handshake, they are open to a smile. They're not self-center type of person that wants to stay to themselves, and stay there, and not open up to anybody. Latinos are known for being very open and really happy people. So that's why when I see my Latino boys, when they play on the field, when I see just people having fun in general when they are playing on the field, I feel identified. I call them my friends, in a sense, they are all my boys. When it comes to soccer, they are all my friends.

This response aligned well with his jovial nature, as well as his love and pride for the Latino culture.

***Vignette 7: Nicolas***

Nicolas was an 18 year old first-year at Northern City University, and identified as Cuban. He was the youngest out of all the participants in the study and had the shortest first interview out of all the participants. He immigrated with his family to the US at a

young age, and has lived in the US ever since. The researcher was unable to reach Nicolas for a second interview.

Nicolas was a first generation college student and stressed the importance of receiving an athletic scholarship to attend college, because his parents were not financially well off. Nicolas qualified to receive a federal Pell grant, and his scholarship allowed for him not to work while attending college. Nicolas was happy that he could take that financial burden off of his family, and it played a big role in deciding to attend his institution. He saw athletics as a way to help pay for college and help out his family. He recalled this when saying he wanted to be a student athlete “around like the beginning of high school, like I realized that I... this can be like a future for me and it could be a stepping stone for my college career and like a way to pay for college.”

Nicolas pointed out the importance of his parents in his journey to become a student athlete. They were very involved in the process, and made sure he stayed on top of his academics and his athletics. When asked what attending college meant for he and his family, Nicolas answered by saying, “It means a future, you know, an education is very important in Latino families... Because with education comes success and with success comes a good career.” Nicolas talked about the influence that Latino family has on education, without being asked about his Latino identity in his first interview. He was one of the few to have done this in his first interview.

Nicolas is majoring in business, and hopes to start his own business one day. While soccer is a passion of his, he stressed more on the importance of academics. Even though he is a first-year, he has been able to keep his academics and athletics separate from one another. He is proud to call himself a student-athlete, and he knows that more of

being asked of you as student athlete, as opposed to regular students. Nicolas also stressed the importance of time management, and looks to be the best student athlete he can be. Being a student athlete is something that Nicolas does not take for granted.

### **Humanizing the Participants**

The seven participants of this study, Nathaniel, Jake, Roger, Cristiano Ronaldo, Stephen, James Rodriguez, and Nicolas, while abstract and anonymized for this study, are very real people. They experienced successes and setbacks as they attempted to undergo the adventures that attending college brought into their lives as college student athletes. By sharing their vignettes, the researcher intended to humanize the participants and their experiences. In summary, vignettes allowed and provided the researcher an opportunity to offer a concise perspective of how the participants viewed their academic success and athletic identity as Latino college student athletes.

### **Thematic-Formulation: Navigating Latino Student-Athlete Identities**

While the earlier section provided vignettes of the seven participants of the study, in this section key emergent themes are shared. These themes were formulated from open-ended, semi-structured interviews that were conducted to examine how Latino student athletes' racial identity influences their athletic participation, performance, and academic success. Students were asked questions formulated by the researcher that dealt with a student athlete's racial/ethnic (Latino) and athletic identities, and how these identities influence their athletic participation, performance and academic success. Interviews revealed that participants were proud of being student athletes and of their Latino heritage. Student athletes navigated seamlessly between their Latino and student athlete identities in a constant state of *Nepantla*. Family was very important to all of the

student athletes, and played a major role in the college selection process, encouragement to succeed academically, and financial awareness. Interviews uncovered the important role athletics played in enhancing the participants' work ethic and instilled an ethos of hard work, which in turn motivated them to put in more than 100% effort into all aspects of their lives.

Overall, four major themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) la vida Nepantlera of the student athlete<sup>3</sup>; (2) uniqueness in student athlete identity; (3) el orgullo de la familia<sup>4</sup>; and (4) giving more than 100%. These themes provided a richer understanding about the influence a student athlete's Latino identity has on their athletic participation and academic performance.

*La Vida Nepantlera of the student athlete.* Latino student athletes have multiple identities that they navigate on a daily basis. Navigating between the participant's Latino and student athlete identities is something that the participants do naturally, sometimes without realizing they are doing it. Similar to the state of Nepantla, the student athlete participants are in a constant state of in-betweenness throughout their different identities. Because collegiate athletics is Americanized and a foreign concept to Latinos and Latino culture, the participants are living between their American and Latino identities. Sport and academics are kept separate in Latin American countries, as the US is the only country to have a large level of organized collegiate sport. On top of their American and Latino identities, the participants are navigating through the realm of collegiate athletics, which also include their student and athlete identities.

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<sup>3</sup> The Nepantlera life of a student athlete

<sup>4</sup> The pride of the family

The participants live their lives as students, athletes, and Latinos simultaneously. During their time at their institutions, they were constantly going in between these different identities. Jake recalled his experience in navigating academics with athletics when saying:

I mean, for me, again, it depends how well I'm doing in one or the other. It depends on performance in one. Sometimes, I will be doing great in the classroom, but poorly on the field and vice versa. And there are times when, you know, if you are doing great in the classroom but poorly on the field, it kinda sticks with you for a little bit and kinda frustrates you... So you really need to balance the two and kinda learn that whichever you are focusing on at the time, takes priority over the other.

Throughout their college experiences, these student athletes are trying to navigate which of their identities requires their attention the most. They are navigating between what is required from their academics, participation in college athletics, as well as cultural obligations and pressures. Being away from family is hard on Latino student athletes and can add pressure to their lives, in balancing communication on top of their academics and athletic responsibilities. Jake alluded to this when saying, "Sometimes it can be just mentally exhausting being away from family and everybody, you know, in which you're comfortable with."

Student athletes have learned to prioritize at which points in their collegiate experience their identities require their attention. Because of the importance that student athletes give to their athletic performance, the participants acknowledge their academics, but are not fully committed to them. The student athlete participants are therefore living

in coexistence with their academics. They know grades are important, and that they have to maintain a certain GPA in order to participate in collegiate athletics, but their grades are not their top priority. Participating in their sport serves as a motivation to do well in the classroom, while prioritizing their athletics. A major influence of when participants put importance in their grades are due to familial pressures and seeing education as a key to get ahead in life. Academics were more important to the families of the participants, than to the participants themselves. James agreed to this statement when saying that:

To be honest with you, man, when it comes to school, I do well, I perform. I do it, because I do it for my parents, I do it for people that just look up to me, that tell me to do the right thing. It's not my favorite thing to do but I do it.

Due to family pressures on the participants, there is an importance in doing well in their academics that some of the participants only saw as important in order to continue playing the sport that they love.

Athletics was of high importance among all of the participants. Within their academic importance, several of the participants expressed their aspirations of becoming a professional athlete. Every single participant started playing their sport at a young age, and their athletic identity has become part of their everyday lives. For those who aspired to be professional athletes, they made it very clear that academics came second to them. When asked about his future plans, James said that he wanted:

To become a pro. Simply like that. That's pretty much my main goal. That's been my goal since... I'm not going to say ever since I started playing the sport, but I'm going to say probably my freshman year of high school, that I realized that I was

like, good enough. And if I continue working hard enough, I could actually make it. So that's pretty much my goal right now.

Even though academics became secondary for these students, they were able to maintain their grades in order to be eligible for athletic competition. Even when having aspirations to be a professional athlete, some of the participants mentioned pursuing a professional career as a backup plan if athletics did not work out for them. Stephen alluded to this when saying:

I mean, if soccer takes me nowhere then I just have a job, that's what I was saying about the options. And if soccer does takes me somewhere, then I'll also have a major, a degree to go to, just in case it backfires.

Degree completion was important to these student athletes, especially knowing that professional sports was not an easy thing to achieve. James agreed with this when saying:

So say my plan A is to become professional in soccer. Say that doesn't work, I still got my degree. I still got my academics. And that's going to take me somewhere else... And I'm still gonna make a living. I'm still going to be somebody in life.

The reality of becoming a professional athlete held a lot of importance to some of the student athlete participants. The two participants who had aspirations of becoming professional athletes picked their pseudonyms based off of the names of professional athletes. The reality of pursuing a career to become a professional soccer athlete influenced Cristiano in his decision to drop out of his institution. During his interview, Cristiano mentioned the possibility of leaving college to pursue athletics when saying:



I feel like no matter how much I earn in a job. I will never be sufficed with myself if I don't sign that pro contract. That's just me. Some people are here more just to study, and they lucked out because they got a soccer scholarship. But I see it as, you know, I got a soccer scholarship. Let me do what I have to do. Even If it means leaving school behind.

The dream of becoming a professional athlete outweighed his interest to stay enrolled at his institution. Cristiano he knew what his passion was from the beginning, and took a chance on collegiate athletics.

There is a large time commitment that goes into both academics and athletics for a student athlete. Student athletes are required to maintain certain grades in order to participate in athletic competition. This means that student athletes need to attend classes, on top of going to practices, and athletic competitions. All of the participants talked about the time commitment involved in collegiate athletics. The participants all had to make sacrifices in order to make time for both academics and athletics. Nathaniel echoed this sentiment when saying:

Whether it's on the field or off the field and academically, I require myself to do my readings. I require myself to stay on top of my studying. I require myself to...

If I don't understand something, you seek for help. I just know what I have to do. I know it has to be done. So that's the way I approach it every day.

Sacrificing sleep in order to find time to get their schoolwork or attend early morning practices was brought up by several of the participants. James recalls having this experience when saying:

I don't even know how I do it, but I do it. It happens, sometimes it happen naturally, other times it just happens over a night when you drink 3 cups of coffee to make it through the night and you don't sleep at all. Sometimes you have some free time and you just start doing homework that's not due for another 2 weeks. So you just find little spots, little openings in time when you just start doing your homework, start doing your work, and you continue to do regular things for your school.

Because of the added time commitment of balancing athletics with academics, the student athlete participants are at an academic disadvantage, compared to their student peers.

They have become resilient in learning how to manage their time in order to perform well in the classroom, on top of their participation in athletics.

Between athletic and academic commitments, these student athletes have become well aware of the hard work and effort that goes into the life of a student athlete. There is a sense of pride that student athletes carry, knowing what they go through on a daily basis, and what it took to get them to where they are. When asked what being a student athlete means to him, Nathaniel reflected on what his sport has taught him, and of the pride he has for himself by saying:

Ever since I was young. Soccer taught me everything I know. Growing up, the discipline, the hard work, the sacrifices, having to go on a tournament, and not being able to go out with your friends on the weekends when you are 15, 16, when that's all you want to do. Your food habits, you know, your drinking habits, everything, it just shapes you to be a more discipline person, which is again, what being a student athlete. I can think of pride in my head, I'm just proud.

Collegiate athletics are also seasonal. This allows the student athlete a buffer to regulate their grades, when their athletic participation demands are not as great. It allows for them to step out of their athletic mindset and navigate towards their student athlete identity.

Multiple participants acknowledged this change of athletic to academic mindset.

Nathaniel agreed with this change when saying:

And it hindered me [athletic participation], it hurt me sometimes, but that's what I loved, that's what I did, so, in the spring was when I saved myself all the time. In the fall it's always been, it's always been super difficult. I'd practice for 8 hours a day, then go to school. Sometimes I didn't have time to do homework, sometimes I had to stay up late and wake up earlier. So, like I said, it wasn't easy. It still isn't easy.

The participants are putting more importance on their sport during their athletic seasons.

This is the period of time where they are traveling for competitions and practicing six days a week, on top of attending classes and doing homework. Roger admitted to putting more importance in his athletics when saying:

Well, during season I, I'm not very concentrated all the time in my academics. It's more the sport because I mean... we're in season and I need to stay focused a lot during game, like during season so I can really focus in on playing. But... Off the season it's always both. It's always the training aspect and then studying all the time.

Even though there is more focus on the academics, there is still an athletic component that these student athletes are keeping up with. This identity never truly goes away. The off season is a great time for student athletes to focus on bringing their grades up, but

they still need to keep them high enough to participate during their regular athletic seasons.

**Uniqueness of student athlete identity.** The student athlete participants were proud of being student athletes and identified very strongly with this identity. These students are actively engaged in maximizing their collegiate experiences. Their unique positionalities as students and athletes necessitated that they acquired and developed skills and strategies to juggle multiple roles and balance their commitments to their academics and sports. Most students are not afforded the opportunity to be a student athlete in college, making this a unique experience for a select few. The average student does not understand the time commitment and dedication that goes into being a student athlete. Jake alluded to this dedication when saying:

A lot of people that don't play sports in college don't understand the burden that you carry with you being an athlete too. It's not just, you know, winning the games or wearing the school logo, it's also the amount of time you have to put into academics and athletics. So, it carries a great deal of respect to be a student athlete.

Many participants acknowledged that not everyone gets to be a student athlete, and how lucky they were to be among the few chosen to participate in collegiate athletics. James recalled:

You feel privileged in a sense. I've heard that only 1% of high schoolers make it to college. 1% of high school athletes make it to college athletics and then 1% of college athletes make it to professional. So in a sense, you are privileged, you

made it this far. But that doesn't mean that you should stop, that means that you should continue working and take care of this opportunity that you've been given. There was a lot of importance on their athletic identity because they carry it with them throughout their college experience. Nathaniel spoke of the importance of being a student athlete when saying it was "very important to me. It's like you said before, it's a big part of who I am. It's something I carry with great honor. It is a privilege, something I worked very very hard for. So, I'm very proud of it." Their lives as student athletes are very much intertwined between their student and athlete identities, and they could not have one without the other.

To be an athlete in college means that you have to maintain a certain GPA in order to participate in your sport. This served as a motivation for the participants to maintain their grades above the required minimums, in order to be eligible to compete athletically. When asked how important achieving a high level of academic performance was, Cristiano responded by saying:

It's really important. Um, if you don't have good grades you can't play the sport. Simple as that. But make sure that grades are on point. So like, you can succeed on both and you don't get kicked out. Simple as that. That's how I see it. You're getting practically paid in a way. But, obviously scholarship wise... To study and play. So... It doesn't get better than that honestly.

While maintaining importance in his grades, Cristiano still managed to mention that athletics were also important. This sentiment was reflected by others as well. James alluded to this as well when saying "mainly I do it [go to class] because I have to keep up my grades or else I'm not going to play what I love. And I gotta do what I love, so, the

main purpose of me going to school was soccer.” The participants acknowledge that they are CHOOSING to be athletes, while they HAVE to be students. This shows a connection between the two and how sport and academics have a symbiotic relationship, for better or for worse.

It was evident through their interviews that the participants in this study all identified strongly with their student athlete identity. When asked what being a Latino student athlete meant to them, all of the participants<sup>5</sup> mentioned either not thinking about the combination of these identities, or that they are just student athletes. Nathaniel reflected on this when saying, “Latino, for me it’s, I don’t think about it as much, I don’t think about it every day. I’m doing it now because you are asking the questions, but I don’t wake up and I’m like, I’m a Latino, you know?” The participants in this study all acknowledged their Latino identities, but it did not seem to define them. When asked about combining his Latino and student athlete identities, Stephen said:

I mean, once again for me, just because I’m Latino I don’t feel I should put that whole brand on myself. I feel like I’m a regular student like everybody else. And everybody else is trying to reach their goal in life and be successful. And like I said, if you can go for it, you go for it. There’s people that don’t want to do it and that’s on them.

Jake had a similar experience when asked how his Latino identity affected him in the classroom or on the playing field, he responded by repeating twice that he does not feel like his Latino identity influenced his classroom or athletic experiences. He elaborated by

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<sup>5</sup> Five participants had their interviews about Latino identity

saying, “Once again, I feel like I’m an everyday student and an everyday athlete among the population.” Nathaniel confirmed this thought when asked if he considers himself an athlete or a Latino student athlete identity when he said:

No, Just a student athlete. I guess for me personally I wouldn’t... I wouldn’t see it as, oh, I’m a Latino student athlete because then you’re paving the way for someone to say, oh, that’s kind of an excuse if you do bad or do better and... no. I try to stay level with everyone. I don’t want an advantage or a disadvantage... No, no, I don’t do that, you know, I’m a student athlete, and that’s what it is, you know?

Nathaniel’s connection to his student athlete identity is very strong; however, he did not want that to change the way others looked at him, or to be treated differently. The student athletes as a whole did not give much thought about these interweaving identities. James had a similar experience with his Latino and student athlete identities when saying, “I feel like they [Latino and student athlete identities] cross without even thinking about it.” They all seemed to have a good sense of who they were, and a huge part of that self-identification was their student athlete identity.

Several factors influence a student athlete’s identity and college choice selection. Of the seven participants, the most important aspects of deciding their institution were family influence, coach, finances, and location. The student athlete’s identities were heavily influenced by the student’s recruitment process. For the participants, the recruitment always started with the coach, and a strong relationship was formed and developed with their coaches, starting at the recruitment stage. Their coach became a person the participants could confide in and trust. Most of the student athletes talked

about the importance of the influence that their time spent with their coaches had on selecting their institution. Roger spoke of his relationship with his coach when saying:

Coach really likes to take it personal with us. He likes to have that connection with us, which is great. I love that about coach. But sometimes, when he knows a little too much, he's exactly like your dad. He's like, why aren't you going to this class, or this thing? He has that feeling of... but it's cool, my parents like that about it.

The participant's coach is someone who they will spend the most time with, outside of their peers, during their collegiate experience. Developing trust and a bond with this person will be very important to student athletes as they navigate their student athlete experience.

Sports and academics have been a large part of the lives of these student athletes. Despite wanting a professional sporting career for some of the participants, they recognize the meaning and importance of obtaining a college degree. Academics holds an importance in their lives, as does their athletic identity. Their sport will always be a part of their lives in some capacity. Even though it may not be at the level it was in college, Stephen accounts for sport always being in his future when saying, "Of course, soccer will always be in my life. Anywhere I am I'll play for fun or whatever it is. Maybe my kids, help them out, you never know. Soccer is going to be in my life though." Nicolas confirms this idea when saying:

Success like it helps you succeed and it helps you get a future. Like if you're a good athlete then you'll always have that, like background as an athlete and to



help you be healthy in the future and also good success in your academics. Or lead to a good career. That's very important.

These recollections show the influence that sport has had on these student athletes, while taking both their academic and athletic identities into account, creating an appropriate balance of both student and athlete identities.

**El orgullo de la familia.** Yosso (2005) using critical race theory conceptualized the community cultural wealth model, which posits that students of color bring various forms of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts that enable them to be successful in college. Kanagala, Rendón, and Nora (2016), while providing empirical evidence that 47 Latin@ college students attending a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), leveraged the various forms of capital that comprised the community cultural wealth model also expanded to create the Ventajas y Conocimientos framework for Latin@ student success. In addition to the six forms of capital that Yosso's community cultural wealth model conceptualized, which include aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant, the Ventajas y Conocimientos framework uncovered four more forms of capital, namely, ganas/perseverance, ethnic consciousness, spirituality/faith, and pluriversal cultural wealth.

Both the community cultural wealth model and the Ventajas y Conocimientos framework implore researchers who study first-generation, limited income students from underserved and underrepresented backgrounds to recast deficit narratives with asset-based theoretical frameworks. To that end, this study's participants mentioned and confirmed the various forms of capital that they leveraged to navigate the world of academics and the world of athletics. The most salient form of capital that student

athletes relied upon in this study was their familial capital (Yosso, 2005). Participants shared how important family was to them in their lives. Families played a role and helped influence the participant's decisions to attend college, as well as to ultimately choose to enroll at an institution to continue the family's educational desires for their children. This was true for Stephen, and he acknowledges it when saying:

The first who told me to come to college would be my parents. They only went to high school, and they never went to college. So me coming to college was a big step in our family and they just want me to have a professional lifestyle, to get good money and not be working outside or something like that.

The family influence to attend college was always present, and parents felt their sacrifices were worth it so their children could succeed in college. Nathaniel recalls support from both parents on both athletic and educational pursuits when saying, "My father influenced me because he wanted me to play college soccer, and my mother influenced me because she said that the biggest price, the biggest reward I can give them is graduating college." When reflecting on his college choice and parental influence, Nicolas said:

I say that it had to do a lot with my parents. Yeah... They were very involved in the process. They always pushed me to stay on top of my studies but as well my sports and staying fit, and making sure I was doing the right things. And staying away from the wrong people, to try to make my goals and try to do everything possible.

The encouragement and influence of family was very important to the participants. The topic of family came up throughout all of the interviews, and portrayed the importance that family had on the lives of these student athletes.

The participants brought up family sacrifices and immigrating to the US to provide a better future for their children. These sacrifices allowed families to be able to put their child in a better position to improve their academic futures. When talking about the sacrifices that Latino families make, James said:

Sometimes it does when I start slacking at school, start telling myself your parents came to this country for you, so you can have a better education, so you can have a good future, but after that it doesn't cross my mind anymore. That's pretty much it. I feel like every other Hispanic/Latino that goes through the same thing. Any Latino my age, or student athlete my age. They tell themselves they have to do it because their parents came to this country for the same reason, to have a good future.

Roger had a similar experience when talking about family, "Well, being Latino gives me that pride to strive harder obviously because my father came here. He found an opportunity, so he wanted me to be an American because he knew the opportunity that having been here would give me." Even though Nicolas did not participate in the second interview dealing with Latino identities, he felt important to mention what it meant for him and his family to attend college when saying:

Oh, it means a future, you know, an education is very important in Latino families. They always strive for their children, so they don't want them to have their background of working class and having to struggle working late shifts and

stuff. They want you to have an education. Because [with] education comes success and with success comes a good career.

This attitude allowed families to do anything at all costs to help their children succeed. They took pride in giving their child the opportunity for a better future. In turn, the participants mentioned repaying their families for their sacrifices. This notion of giving back prompted Stephen to say that he wanted to:

Help the family out with any type of thing that they need. Like I tell my parents, I know you helped me out when I was small, and when I'm bigger and get a successful job, I'm going to help you guys out. It only gives back, feeds back to everything.

This sense of family responsibility and giving back then comes back full circle, after the student athlete achieves their goal of becoming a successful professional.

Families sacrifice their career aspirations and own academic interests in order to provide a better life for their children. The only thing they ask for in return is for their children to be successful. Once their child accomplishes this goal, their parents can be more at ease that their sacrifices have paid off. James acknowledges this sentiment when asked what earning a college degree means to his family:

It means a lot to them because it's pretty much saying that they've accomplished it. They made it. It's a feeling now that they can go home and relax and sit down and say that they've raised their child correctly, they completed their mission.

For many of the participants, they were the first in their family to go to college. Their families were very proud of the participants and were excited to talk about the

accomplishments of their children. This brings massive pride and happiness to the families of the participants. Stephen alluded to family pride when saying:

I mean, right now, my family could not be any happier because every time my dad and my mom, like, we have family reunions, my family is always grateful about me. They go, oh, keep doing the great work, keep doing what you have to do. They are glad that I'm going to school and doing soccer at the same time.

This family sacrifice was recognized by the participants. Their families were proud of them, and the participants were at peace knowing that their family's sacrifices were not in vain.

For one of the participants, familismo, or the concept of putting family before oneself, took over. Family had a large influence on his life, and he decided to leave his institution, and his collegiate soccer career in order to be closer to his family. Although he will continue to be a student and pursue a career in business, his sporting career is over. The student athletes understood the sacrifices that being a college athlete had on their families and their academics. The pressure of navigating all of these was too much for some of the participants, while others stuck with it.

**Giving more than 100%.** All of the student athlete participants mentioned the amount of hard work that goes into balancing college athletics and their academics. When it came to sport, multiple participants mentioned putting their utmost energy towards performing well, or giving more than 100%. This concept of giving more than 100% was used on multiple occasions, and is an Americanized concept. In Latino culture this phrasing does not exist, or is not used. The athletes in this study attribute giving their 110% to 120% to their athletic upbringing. This includes hard work and dedication to

their sport. When asked about meeting his coach's expectations Stephen mentioned that, "I always try my best to do everything... I'm telling you, I always like go in a hundred and twenty percent all the time and everything." This also translated into putting extra hard work into their academics as well. Roger's experience in playing soccer with American student athletes, and how they give their 120% is mentioned when he said:

I always thought that Latinos had a competitive edge in soccer, and we always thought that back home. But our coaches always told us that Americans put 120%, they would run forever and ever and he wasn't wrong, the competitiveness here in the North is more physical, like running all day, running the entire 90 minutes. Back home it's more skillful, you take your time, and find a way in. But it's good to have that Latino back scene, seen the different styles, and how it helps me on the field sometimes, how to read.

As a Latino, student athletes feel like they have to work hard in both the classroom and on the playing field; however, they do not feel that their Latino identity hinders them in achieving success. To them, hard work will help you reach your goals. Stephen mirrors this thought when saying:

Being a Latino student athlete, I feel like we, us as Latinos have it a little bit harder. But I feel like if you go and do what you gotta do and reach your goal like being good in soccer, don't worry about anything else... Once you come into the field and then trying to switch gears and go to school, getting your mind in school and getting good grades and then going to work, I feel like you can do it if you really put your mind. Set your mind to everything. Being Latino doesn't really

matter at that point because you either go through with the goal or you don't want to reach it.

Being a student athlete takes a lot of hard work and dedication on both academics and athletics. Student athletes have to be able to maintain their grades, on top of participating in practices and athletic competitions. Because the student athlete participants know the amount of work they put in, they take a lot of pride in this student athlete identity. As the senior-most participant, Nathaniel reflected on his four years of participating in college athletics, when saying:

I've been just reflecting on how all the work that you put in, all the work, all the favors, all the mistakes, all the good things I've done, I can say now that being a student athlete is the hardest thing I've done. It's testing me academically, it's testing me athletically because handling both it's never been easy. But it just means having pride for who you are, for what you want, going after it and getting it.

Being a student athlete takes a lot of hard work and dedication. It was not easy for the participants to balance everything, and still be a successful student athlete. The participants attribute their hard work and pride as a motivator to succeed.

Ultimately, the student athletes put in hard work in order to succeed in the classroom and on the playing field. They made sure that no matter the challenges, their sport needed to be enjoyable to keep participating in it. Roger reflected on his time as a student athlete said:

So on the field it is the 110% that coach wants from you. At the end is for the enjoyment for yourself. At least from that Latino aspect, that's how it's always

been for our coaches. Work hard, but always enjoy, like, always have that feeling of fun to the sport.

Making sure that the athletic aspect was enjoyable was an important factor that made both academics and athletes manageable. Nicolas agreed when saying, “I always said it, when it stopped being enjoyable, I was going to stop. Because, you’re not doing it for... I’m doing it for the pleasure.” The student athlete participants had enjoyable experiences in their sport, which translated into their hard work on the playing field and in the classroom.

### **Summary**

This study offered the participants an opportunity to reflect on their Latino identities as they navigate their collegiate experience as student athletes. Chapter 4 presented the data gathered from conducting two one-on-one, semi-structured open-ended interviews with seven Latino student athletes from two Division II institutions. Four themes emerged from the data, that included La Vida Nepantlera of the student athlete, uniqueness of student athlete identity, el orgullo de la familia, and giving more than 100%. These themes came together to form a singular identity for the student athletes seeing themselves as Soy Estudiante Deportista<sup>6</sup>.

The participants showed pride in being among the select few recruited to be student athletes at their institutions. They exuded pride in their Latino cultures and identities, and informed the researcher on the influence that aspects of their Latino identity had on their college selection process. The participants reflected on how they

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<sup>6</sup> I am a student athlete



navigated their multiple identities, and often without giving much thought when going in-between their student, athlete, and Latino identities. The student athletes navigated seamlessly between their Latino and student athlete identities in a constant state of Nepantla, or in navigating in-between their multiple identities.

The uniqueness of the participants' student athlete identity was demonstrated throughout all of the interviews. The student athletes interviewed for this study knew that their experiences were different compared to those of regular students at their institutions. In addition to their responsibilities as students, the participants had to attend athletic practice, sport competitions, and team-related events. These demands on their time left them with less time to focus on their academic responsibilities. The participants showed dedication and persistence in navigating their multiple identities, even when it meant sacrificing sleep, or prioritizing one academic or athletic task over the other. Many of the participants made the choice to be athletes, while being a student was due to necessity in order to be able to participate in athletic competition, which often became their priority.

All participants mentioned the importance of the role that family had on their lives. This became evident not only in their college choice process but also in the family encouragement of the student to succeed in life after college. Participants shared stories of their families making sacrifices in order to create opportunities for them and their siblings to attend college. For many of the participants in the study, this involved their parents' immigration to the US seeking a better future for their children. A combination of athletic and merit scholarships offered by these institutions made college a reality for the student athletes, reducing the financial burden and stress for their families. To the participants, the drive and motivation to be academically and athletically successful was a

way to demonstrate their gratitude and a way to repay their parents for their sacrifices. Parents took immense pride in talking about all of the accomplishments of their child in the classroom and on the playing field.

Finally, the interviews revealed that participating in collegiate athletics taught and instilled an ethos of hard work, and that they put more than a 100% of their energy into everything they did. Because of the influence that the participant's coaches had on the lives of these student athletes, they were introduced to a new culture of expectations, which required them to give more than 100%. Regardless of their Latino or student athlete identities, the participants felt that hard work was not determined by race or identity, but by their internal motivations to succeed, which they attributed to their athletic roots. All participants stressed the importance of time commitment and dedication to both academics and athletics to be successful college student athletes, and how it was not easy to balance the different aspects of their lives as student athletes.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Seven NCAA student athletes at two northeastern Division II institutions were the focus of this study. The purpose of the research study was to examine how NCAA Division II Latino student athlete's racial identity influences their athletic participation, performance, and academic success. Using semi-structured, open-ended interviews, this study illuminated the participants' lived experiences in college. Guided by an in-depth review of literature that demonstrated a gap, this research study and its findings add to the scholarship about the lived experiences of Latino college students, especially college student athletes. It is imperative that institutions and institutional agents recognize their roles in how best to serve Latino college student athletes to ensure that they enroll, persist and graduate from college, while having successful collegiate athletic careers. Findings from this research study are intended to aid university administrators, coaches, athletic administration, counseling staff, and student affairs professionals about their roles in fostering academic success and athletic identity among Latino college student athletes. Additionally, findings will further the discussion about high-impact practices that are relevant to this student demographic in American higher education.

To better understand the influence that a student athlete's Latino identity has on their athletic participation, performance, and academic success, this study examined the following questions:

1. How does a student athlete participant's racial identity (Latino) influence their athletic performance and academic success?
2. How does a student athlete's motivation to do well in their respective sport translate into their motivation to perform well academically?

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate the lived experiences of seven student athletes at two northeastern Division II institutions. Four themes were formulated from the student's interviews and lived experiences. These themes included la vida Nepantlera of the student athlete, uniqueness of student athlete identity, el orgullo de la familia, and giving more than 100%. Through their lived experiences as students, college athletes, and Latinos, and through interweaving their multiple identities, the participants' identities, supported by the central themes that emerged from this study, converge to create a singular identity that captures the essence of their lived experiences.

### **Navigating Multiple Identities: *Soy Estudiante Deportista***

Throughout their journeys as student athletes, the participants lived their lives as Latino student athletes by navigating “in-betweenness” across multiple identities. The student athletes navigated across three separate planes, and each identity had their own influencers that played a very important role for them to be successful. Figure 1 represents the influencers on the multiple identities that Latino student athletes navigate on a daily basis. All of these influencers make up the lives of the Latino student athletes, and through their navigation participants can be any or all of these identities at the same time.

Latino identity was a strong influencer on the participants in not only selecting their institution but also in pursuing higher education. Families oftentimes made sacrifices in order to give their child an opportunity for a better future. Families showed immense pride when talking about their children, and pride in how their children are succeeding in their academic careers. The participants' student identity played a role in their collegiate experience, through the amount of time spent in the classroom and doing

homework, as well as in their preparation for the workforce. As part of their student identity, the importance of grades played a critical role on the participants because without maintaining a certain grade point average, student athletes were ineligible for athletic competition. The students' athlete identity played a pivotal role in the lives of the participants, oftentimes because they prioritized athletics over academics. Furthermore, athletics influenced college choice among student athletes through the offering of athletic scholarships, recruiting influence exerted by coaches, and the promise and aspirations of making it as professional athletes. Even though importance in education varied throughout the three identities of the student athletes, education was a common link between the three identities. Orgullo<sup>7</sup> was also seen as an influencer of the three identities, in showing pride in the participants' Latino identities, achieving good grades, getting to play at the next (athletic) level, and pride in being a student athlete.

### **Latino**

The participant's Latino identity had multiple influencers that played an important role in the lives of the Latino student athletes. While this identity was very present in their lives, the participants did not let it define them. Instead, they incorporated it into their student athlete identities. The influencers that played a major role in the lives of the participants included parents y familia<sup>8</sup>, aspirations and sacrifices, family financial help, familismo, ethnic consciousness, orgullo, and education.

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<sup>7</sup> Pride

<sup>8</sup> Family

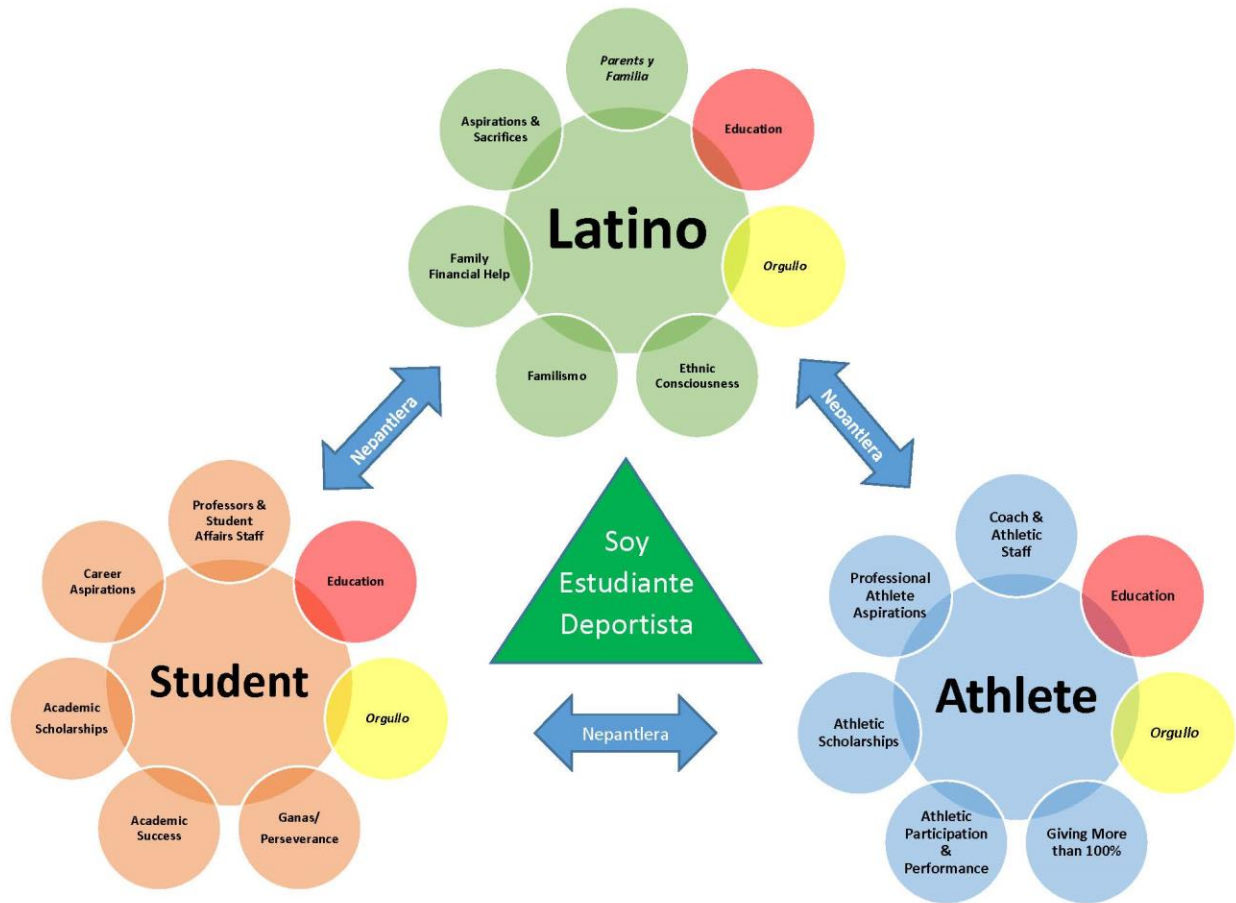


Figure 1: Navigating Multiple Identities: Soy Estudiante Deportista

Parents placed a great deal of importance in their children's education. It was mentioned on multiple occasions that parents of the participants came to this country so that their children could have the opportunity to study in the American educational system. In their opinions, this opportunity allowed their children access to better jobs and to secure a better future. The student athlete participants were well aware of the sacrifices made by their parents, and wanted to give back to their family once they felt like they have achieved their career goals. Families were invested in the student's future by showing pride and support for the student's educational career. This was very important to the families, and in return was all that they asked for from their children – to be successful so that their sacrifices were not in vain.

Because sport was an avenue for their children to attend college, as well as help with the burden of college costs, parents gave their blessing to their children to attend college, despite the distance of where the institution was located. College became affordable due to athletic and academic scholarships, which influenced the college choice process of the student athlete participants.

At times, the participants put the importance of their families over themselves, as described by the concept of familismo. They wanted to contribute to their overall family well-being, and often sacrificed their own wants and desires in order to put their family members first. In the case of one of the student athletes, familismo did take precedence, and he ended up dropping out of college to be closer to home and help his parents look after his grandparents.

Ethnic consciousness was portrayed in the way the student athletes were committed to their families. They wanted to give back to them, because of a sense of

responsibility they felt they had towards contributing to their families. The participants' families also felt orgullo when talking about the accomplishments of their family member attending college, and felt like success for that family member was success for the whole family. The participants mentioned that their collegiate success also contributes to the Latino community as a whole, and that they felt as though they serve as positive role models for other Latinos.

The student athletes recognized the importance that education had for their families, as well as the Latino community. To their families, education was a way of getting ahead in life. They often mentioned the pride they had in being Latino, and how their family encouraged and fostered this pride that resonated from their Latino identities.

### **Student**

The student identity was very present in the life of the Latino student athlete participants. Being a student and doing well in the classroom is a prerequisite to be able to participate in athletic competition at the collegiate level. There were several influencers on the success of the participants as students. The influencers on the participant's student identity that were noticeably present included ganas<sup>9</sup> and perseverance, academic success, academic scholarships, career aspirations, professors and student affairs staff, education, and orgullo.

The student athlete participants mentioned having spent a lot of time in the classroom and doing school work outside of class. Because of the participant's ganas and perseverance that were influenced by both their Latino upbringing and in giving more

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<sup>9</sup> desires, urges



than 100% from their athletic backgrounds, the participants were able to carry their positive attitudes and hard work into their academics.

Education became a focal point for all of the student athlete participants. Some may have put less importance into academics than others, but the necessity to do well in the classroom was always present. This came at a cost to some participants, as they would have rather been practicing in their sport, or working on their fitness, in order to better themselves as athletes. Regardless of their preference to compete in athletics, the student athlete participants knew they had to perform well in the classroom in order to participate in their sport. Balancing their time became a necessity for the participants because of the heavy time requirements of attending class, doing school work, going to practices, participating in athletic competition, and the travel time needed to get to and from these competitions.

Finances to attend college were a concern for some of the student athlete participants. Because not every participant was awarded an athletic scholarship, some of the student athletes depended on academic scholarships to help their education be affordable. Even for the participants who received athletic scholarships, money was an important factor for attending college. The importance of money also influenced the participants' desires to make money and obtain a job after graduating from college. To the participants, education served as a means to get a job and be successful after college. For those aspiring to be professional athletes, they still mentioned how having a college degree was a good backup to have, in case they did not make it as a professional athlete.

Because the participants spent a lot of time in the classroom, they developed a strong relationship with their professors. They found that most of the professors they had

interactions with were supportive of their participation in athletics, but also held them to the same standards as any other students. This was important for the student athletes, as they did not seem to want special treatment, and were also students on top of being athletes. They also mentioned having a positive experience with institutional staff who helped make their collegiate experience a more positive one.

A lot like their Latino identities, education was important to the participants from their student identity as well. Education was the root of being a student, and importance in their academics meant being able to play their sport, and a pathway to a successful career after college. Orgullo came out in the participants' desire to be successful, and they were proud of their academic progression. In order for them to be successful, the participants mentioned the hard work that it took for them to be successful students, and how this experience will shape them to be future working professionals.

### **Athlete**

The athlete identity was very prominent for all of the student participants. They all selected to attend their institution because they had the opportunity to play collegiate athletics. Participation in collegiate athletics was a huge time commitment for the student athlete participants, in time spent attending practices and athletic competitions. The student athlete participants learned that it took patience, dedication, and hard work in order to be a successful student athlete. The participants repeated the importance of their work ethic, and of all of the demands put on them to be successful student athletes. The influencers that played an important role on the participant's athlete identities included giving more than 100%, athletic participation and performance, athletic scholarships, professional athlete aspirations, coach and athletic staff, education, and orgullo.

The concept of giving more than 100% served as a guideline for the student athlete participants to work hard at improving themselves in their sport, and was instilled into their work ethic by their coaches. The hard work put in by the student athlete participants translated into all aspect of their lives, including the playing fields and in the classroom.

Athletics had been a part of the participants' lives since a very young age. Their athlete identity is something that the participants have identified with for most of their lives. As mentioned in Chapter 4, it is important to note that the participants choose to be athletes, while their academic participation was due to necessity in order to participate in athletic competition. The desire to participate in athletics often became a priority for the student athlete participants, especially during the semesters in which they had athletic competitions.

Another layer and unique aspect of the recruiting process includes athletic scholarships. Some of the student athlete participants were awarded athletic scholarships to attend their institution, based off of their athletic talents. These scholarships made it so that attending their institutions would become affordable, as well as played a role in why they selected to attend their institutions. Because of being awarded athletic scholarships, the participants often felt like they needed to perform well athletically, in order to maintain their scholarships and a positive image as an athlete, which often made them prioritize their athletics.

The participants were well aware that only a few student athletes get the opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics, and even a smaller amount get the chance to go and play their sport professionally. Some of the participants had aspirations

to become professional athletes, which caused them to prioritize athletics over their academics. One of the participants chose to follow his dreams of becoming a professional athlete and dropped out after one semester at their institution.

While there were different factors for the participants to choose their institution, the ability to play their sport was something they all had in common. Coaches were also a major influence in the selection process for the student athlete participants. The coaching staff at the participants' institutions made them feel comfortable, and were able to develop a strong bond during their recruitment process. This bond allowed student athletes to trust their coaches, and commit to leaving home to attend college and participate in their sport at the collegiate level.

Even though they prioritized their athletics, they knew that they needed to maintain good grades in order to participate in their sport, which demonstrated how academics will always play a role in the lives of student athletes and that education is an important influencer on the participants' athlete identity. Along with their educational importance, pride in being a student athlete was evident in the lives of all the participants. They took pride in their work ethic, along with being among the select few to be recruited to play a collegiate sport.

### **Summary**

In analyzing the data, it was evident that the student participants navigated through three separate planes. Each of their identities, Latino, student, and athlete, had several influencers that played a very important role in their success in navigating their lives as student athletes.

While it is evident that the participants cannot have one identity without the other, and their multiple identities could be seen as three separate entities, it was evident that the participants thought of their identities as a singular identity. The students were able to exist and navigate in what Gloria Anzaldúa called the nepantlera, or the navigator of the “in-between” spaces. In the case of these Latino student athlete participants, they are navigating throughout their identities as nepantleras, which is being conceptualized as their singular identity, Soy Estudiante Deportista.

### **Implications for Research**

Seven Latino college student athletes at two Division II institutions participated in this study and described their ability to seamlessly navigate their student, athlete, and Latino identities and exist in a state of “in-betweenness” as border crossers: Nepantleras. It is imperative that institutions and institutional agents recognize their roles in how best to serve Latino college student athletes to ensure that they enroll, persist and graduate from college while having successful collegiate athletic careers. Several implications for research are identified as a consequence of this research study. These implications are enumerated below.

The past couple of decades have witnessed a significant increase in the Latino population. Latinos are now considered among the two fastest growing racial or ethnic groups in the US. In 2016, Latinos accounted for 18% (56 million) of the overall U.S. population (Flores, 2017). Colleges and universities have also witnessed this shift in their college student demographic, especially at Hispanic Serving Institutions. Much of the recent research focused on Latino college students is centered around their experiences attending these institutions where their enrollment is equal or greater than 25% of the

total student enrollment. While limited research has been conducted on Latino community college athletes, little to no research exists on Latino college student athletes at four year institutions. This study alleviates and addresses that concern.

Similarly, past research focused on experiences of Latino students at Tier 1 research institutions, which are predominantly/historically white institutions. Many of these institutions play at the Division I level, and have the biggest student enrollment compared to Division II and III institutions. They also manage the largest athletics budgets and award the most number of athletic scholarships. With these immense financial resources at their disposal, Division I institutions have always generated research interest in their college student athletes. Similarly, with 450 member institutions, Division I is the largest NCAA division and receives significant attention. With the least number of member institutions and limited financial resources, Division II is often overlooked and understudied. By conceptualizing this study that examined the experiences of seven Latino college student athletes at two Division II institutions, research findings may offer new research questions that may be investigated.

Future research on the influence of athletic participation and performance on the academic success of Latino student athletes should expand to include all three NCAA Divisions (I, II, and III). Institutions of higher education of all sizes and divisions would benefit from this research to compare and contrast the needs of their students with institutions that are similar to themselves. It is easier to compare an institution that has similar characteristics than to compare institutions that vary in size and division.

Participants in this study were at different stages in their athletic and academic careers. The older participants in this study seemed to have had more time to figure out

their challenges and how to overcome them, while these challenges were new to the first year college student athletes. To gain an understanding of the same level of experience, participation, and academic maturity, future researchers should interview student athletes who are in the same grade level, or have an equal representation of student athletes in the same academic and athletic year.

Having a representative sample from only one gender may have influenced the researcher's understanding of the overall experience of student athletes. For example, female athletes use athletic opportunity as a means to an end, i.e., college education, and are more dedicated to their academics (Adler & Adler, 1991; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Simons et al., 1999). There was also differences in gender perspective in which females felt less pressure from their coaches to prioritize their athletics (Adler & Adler, 1985). It is also important to note that experiences of trans-identified athletes may also significantly differ as colleges and athletic divisions grapple with issues of their inclusion and participation.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings in this study suggest that Latino student athletes navigate their multiple identities on a daily basis. There are heavy demands on all of the different tasks that are asked of a student athlete, with less time to dedicate to all three aspects of their Latino student athlete identities. The understanding of these demands is important for institutions of higher education to take into account when recruiting prospective student athletes, and ultimately enrolling them in their institutions.

Multiple influencers go into the composition of the three identities of Latino student athletes. Navigating these identities and their influencers is not easy, and is

important for collegiate faculty and staff to be aware of this difficult balancing act that Latino student athletes go through, and assist them in their navigation of their collegiate experiences. Affordable financial assistance, coaches who mentor and develop a student athlete's academic and athletic skills, and staff who can provide comfort and reassurance to the Latino families of the prospective student athlete that their son or daughter will be taken care of will be needed in order to help Latino student athletes feel comfortable in selecting their institution.

Because student athletes were found to have put more importance into their athletics over academics while in season, it is recommended for institutions of higher education to review their policies about permissible hours of combined athletics with academics during a student athlete's season of competition. If a student athlete spends 40 hours a week dedicated to academics and 40 hours into athletics, student athletes are spending the equivalent of two full-time jobs on their academic and athletic responsibilities. This would take a total toll on a student athlete's physical and mental health. Recommendations on lessening the academic or athletic load in a student athlete's semester would help bring balance to their schedules.

Even though student athletes were unmotivated at times and struggled in the classroom, findings show that their motivation to be able to participate in their sport, or their confidence gained from playing a sport, translated into motivation and confidence to do well in the classroom. Knowing that positive motivation is a positive influencer on Latino student athletes allows college administrators to help motivate and support students to perform well in the classroom before they struggle, and before becoming academically ineligible to participate in their sport.



## Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to examine how NCAA Division II Latino student athletes' racial identity influences their athletic participation, performance, and academic success. Three different identities and their various influencers converge to form a singular identity known as *Soy Estudiante Deportista*. These three identities were discovered to be interchangeable when Latino student athletes navigate their collegiate experience.

Education and orgullo were the common links between the different identities. Even though athletics seemed to be the identity most prioritized, a Latino student athlete cannot have one identity without the others. The student athlete participants chose to be athletes, while their academic participation was due to necessity in order to be eligible to participate in athletic competition. Without their Latino family influence, the student athlete participants would not have enrolled at their institution to play their sport, and would have stayed closer to home. Latino identity does indeed influence athletic participation, performance and academic success, through the many aspects that make up the lives of Latino student athletes.

The second research question examined the student athlete's motivation to do well in their sport, and how that translated into academic success. The results of this study showed that a student athletes' athletic performance influence their academic success through the hard work and motivation that they get from their athletic upbringing. The notion of putting in more than 100% translated into all aspects of their lives, including academics and athletics. The participants' self-confidence and motivation to do well in their sport translated into the participants doing well in the classroom. Skills that

the participants developed through athletics, including hard work and dedication translated into their academic success.

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## **APPENDIX A: Recruiter Criteria Sheet**

### Information for Potential Interview Participants:

- Name
- Latino/a Student
- 18-29 years of age
- Year in School: 1, 2, 3, 4, or >4
- Attends an NCAA Division II Institution of Higher Education in a Northeastern State
- Plays an NCAA Division II Varsity Sport
- Time allotted for Interviews: 60-120 minutes
- Dates of Interviews: (will be provided at time of request)

## **APPENDIX B: Script for contacting coaches by email**

Hello [Coach's Name],

My name is Carlos Vega and I am a doctoral student from the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont. I am conducting research on the experiences of Latino student athletes at NCAA Division II Institutions. I will specifically be looking at the participants' racial/ethnic (Latino) and student athlete identities and its influence on their athletic participation, performance, and academic success.

This study will consist of two semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Latino Student athletes. I welcome students of all age groups, majors, academic levels (First-Year-Seniors). The First interview will be conducted in the months of October and November, followed by a second in January through March.

I am personally contacting you for your assistance in recommending student athletes for this study because of your previous experience in working with student athletes. Because you work directly with student athletes, I was wondering if you would allow me to speak about my study after one of your practices, to see if any of your student athletes are interested in helping out with this study.

If you would like to talk to your team about this study in advance of a visit, please see the student criteria sheet attached.

If you would like to assist with my research or have any questions about the study, please feel free to email me at [cevega@uvm.edu](mailto:cevega@uvm.edu) or by phone at (919) 619-6970.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Carlos Vega, M.S.Ed  
Student, Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership  
College of Education and Social Services  
The University of Vermont

## **APPENDIX C: Verbal Script for talking to student athletes about study**

Hello!

Thank you [university contact name] and to you all for welcoming me to your practice session! My name is Carlos Vega and I am a doctoral student from the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont. I am conducting research on the experiences of Latino student athletes at NCAA Division II Institutions. I will specifically be looking at the student athlete participants' racial/ethnic identity (Latino) and its influence on their athletic participation, performance, and academic success.

The overarching aim of the study is to examine Latino college students' athletic participation and performance and the influence that it has on their academic success at a Division II institution of higher education, and how a student athlete's motivation to do well in their respective sport translates into their motivation to perform well academically.

If you agree to participate, you will take part in two interviews over the course of this Fall semester and your upcoming Spring semester. These interviews will take place on your campus at a time that is convenient for you. If we can't decide on an interview time that works for both of us on campus, we can choose to conduct the interviews by skype, or by phone.

Your participation is voluntary and deciding to participate will not affect your relationship with the University of Vermont, [college/university of student athlete], or [university contact name].

If you are interested in assisting with my study, I will pass around a sign-up sheet. I will try to answer any questions you may have about the student.

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Carlos Vega, M.S.Ed  
Student, Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership  
College of Education and Social Services  
The University of Vermont

## **APPENDIX D: Script for contacting students by email**

Hello [Student Name],

My name is Carlos Vega and I am a doctoral student from the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont. I received your e-mail from [university contact name]. I am in the process of conducting research on Latino student athletes at in Division II and their college experiences, specifically at your racial/ethnic (Latino) and student athlete identities and the influence that it has on your athletic participation, performance, and academic success.

I am contacting you because you shared that were interested in participating in my study. Your participation is voluntary and deciding to participate will not affect your relationship with the University of Vermont, [college/university of student athlete], or [university contact name].

If you agree to participate, you will take part in two interviews over the course of this Fall semester and your upcoming Spring semester. These interviews will take place on campus at a time that is convenient for you. If we can't decide on an interview time that works for both of us on campus, we can choose to conduct the interviews by skype, or by phone.

If you are interested, simply reply to this email.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to email me at [cevega@uvm.edu](mailto:cevega@uvm.edu) or by phone at (919) 619-6970.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Carlos Vega, M.S.Ed  
Student, Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership  
College of Education and Social Services  
The University of Vermont





## **APPENDIX F: Email script for Confirmation Individual Interviews**

Hello [Student Name],

This email is to confirm your participation for your interview. The interview will take place at [location] on [date] at [time].

Please reply to this email to confirm.

Thank you again for participating in this study. We look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Carlos Vega, M.S.Ed  
Student, Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership  
College of Education and Social Services  
The University of Vermont

## APPENDIX G: Student Pre-Questionnaire

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

High School Attended: \_\_\_\_\_ Year Graduated: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name) (City, State, Zip)

Major: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Current GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Background Data

1. Gender:

Male  Female  Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. How do you refer to your racial/ethnic identity?

Colombian  Guatemalan  Salvadoran  
 Cuban  Peruvian  Spanish (from Spain)  
 Dominican  Puerto Rican  Multiracial  
 Ecuadorian  Mexican  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Country where you were born

United States  
 Other, please indicate \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you a transfer student? If yes, where did you go to college before [name of current institution]?

Yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_  
 No

5. What is your current student status at [name of institution]?

Part-time student, how many credits have you completed? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Full-time student, how many credits have you completed? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Did you **receive** a Pell Grant as part of your financial aid award?

Yes  
 No

7. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend college?

Yes  
 No

8. Are you working while enrolled at [name of institution]?  Yes  No

9. If **yes**, describe your work schedule: (Check all that apply.)

Full-time  Part-time  
 On campus  On campus  
 Off campus  Off campus

## **APPENDIX H: Interview Protocol 1**

### **The University of Vermont**

#### **Latino College Students' Athletic Participation, Performance, and Academic Success at a Division II Institution**

##### **Individual One-on-One Student Athlete Interview Protocol**

### **INTERVIEW I**

This interview will focus on your athletic participation, performance and academic success.

#### **Introduction**

1. Please tell me a little about yourself. [Your name, academic classification, college major]
2. Did you start college at [name of institution] or did you transfer?
3. Where did you grow up? Are you the first in the family to go to college? What does attending college mean for you and your family?

#### **Athletic Participation and Scholarship**

4. Describe your athletic involvement in high school and how long have you played your sport?
5. When did you realize you wanted to be a college athlete? Who or what helped you pursue your goals to become a college athlete?
6. How long have you been a student athlete at [name of institution]?
7. Can you share your primary reason(s) for choosing to attend [name of institution]? [Probe for additional reasons that a student chose their institution. e.g. coach, scholarship, location, major. Why were these reasons important?]
8. Please describe your college admissions/selection process. What were so important considerations while deciding, which college to attend?
9. How important was receiving an athletic scholarship to you to (a) attend [name of institution] and (b) play [name of sport]?

#### **Athletic Performance**

10. What are your expectations of yourself as an athlete?
11. Please share how important achieving a high level of performance in your sport is to you.
12. What experiences have hindered your experience to perform as an athlete?
13. Can you describe how winning or losing in athletic competition affects your collegiate experience?
14. Can you share how you meet the expectations of your coaches?

#### **Academic Success**

15. What are your expectations of yourself as a student?

16. Please share any challenges you have experienced to meet your academic goals.
17. Please share how important achieving a high level of performance in your academics is to you.
18. Can you describe how your academic performance (good or bad grades) affects your collegiate experience? [Probe for importance,
19. Can you share how you meet the expectations of your faculty/course work?
20. What does success mean to you academically and athletically? [Probe for academic success and athletic excellence]

## **APPENDIX I: Interview Protocol 2**

### **The University of Vermont**

#### **Latino College Students' Athletic Participation, Performance, and Academic Success at a Division II Institution**

#### **Individual One-on-One Student Athlete Interview Protocol**

#### **INTERVIEW II**

This interview will focus on your racial/ethnic (Latino) and student athlete identities as well as their influence on your athletic participation, performance, and academic success.

#### **Introduction**

1. Who or what influenced you to attend college?
2. Who or what influenced to play collegiate sports?

#### **Student Athlete Identity**

3. What does being a “student athlete” mean to you? [Probe for importance, value, prestige, opportunity]
4. In what ways does your student athlete identity impact (helped or hindered) your academic performance? [Probe for challenges in the classroom and on the field/court, in college admissions process]
5. How important is it to you that you are a college student athlete? Why? [Why not?]
6. Do your coaches, faculty, and family nurture your student athlete identity? How? [Probe for ways in which they can, if they aren't supportive of the student's athletic identity, probe for institutional support]

#### **Racial/Ethnic Identity**

7. How do you self-identify racially/ethnically? What does being Latino/a mean for you?
8. In what ways does your racial identity impact (helped or hindered) your academic performance?[Probe for challenges in the classroom and on the field/court, in college admissions process]
9. How important is your racial/ethnic identity as a college student athlete? Why? [Why not?]
10. Do your coaches, faculty, and family nurture your racial/ethnic identity? How? [Probe for ways in which they can, if they aren't supportive of the student's racial/ethnic identity, probe for institutional support]

#### **Intersectionality**

11. What does being a Latino student athlete mean for you? [Probe for intersectionality, which identity is more salient and why?]

12. How does your racial/ethnic identity and your student athlete identity influence your experience in the classroom? [Probe for community and familial expectations]
13. How does your racial/ethnic identity and your student athlete identity influence your experience on the court/field? [Probe for community and familial expectations]
14. What is the meaning of earning a college degree for you? For your family? For the Latino community? [Probe for ethnic consciousness in contributing back to the community]
15. Can you share how you balance your athletic and academic commitments? [Probe for time commitment, tension between athletic demands and academic interests, for example, are you here because of the athletic program/scholarship or are you here because of the academics]
16. How important is it to you to have a sense of community? [Probe for community among athletes or community of color or both]
17. What are your career aspirations after graduating from college? [Probe for pro-athletic aspirations, if students indicate that they athletically focused instead of academic]

## **APPENDIX J: Research Information Sheet/Consent Form**

Title of Study: Latino College Students' Athletic Participation, Performance, and Academic Success at a Division II Institution

Principal Investigator (PI): Carlos E. Vega, MS.Ed.

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Vijay Kanagala

Funder: N/A

### **Introduction**

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a varsity athlete at a Division II institution in the Northeastern region of the United States, and identify as Latino. This study is being conducted by Carlos Vega at the University of Vermont.

### **Purpose**

This research study is being conducted to examine how student athletes' athletic participation and performance influences their academic success as well as how their racial identity (Latino) influences their athletic participation, performance, and academic success while competing at a division II institution in the US Northeast. Findings from this research study are intended to aid university administrators, coaches, athletic administration, counseling staff, and student affairs professionals about their roles in fostering academic success and athletic identity among Latino college student athletes.

### **Study Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in two in-person one on one interview, each lasting up to two hours, with an option to interview via skype or phone, if you are unavailable.
- Complete a short questionnaire about your background (example: age, family, income, national origin, gender)
- Verify the raw, verbatim transcript of your interview after both interviews with an option to add, modify or delete your responses to questions from interview.

Total estimated time to participate in this study is four hours.

Examples of some of the interview questions include:

- How important is achieving a high level of performance in your sport to you?
- How do you gauge if your team is successful?
- Does winning/losing in athletic competition affect how you go about living your daily life?

### **Benefits**

As a participant in this research study, there will not be a direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

### **Risks**

We will do our best to protect the information we collect from you during this study.

We will not collect any information that will identify you to further protect your confidentiality and avoid any potential risk for an accidental breach of confidentiality.



**Costs**

There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

**Compensation**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality**

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be stored with a code name or number so that we are able to match you to your answers.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, you will be assigned a pseudonym (a made up name) to protect your identity and to anonymize your responses. No information that might reveal your identity will be used. Only the researchers of this project will be able to use the information gathered. The data from the audio recordings will be coded so that no personal identifying information is available. The digital files will be stored in a password-protected computer and destroyed once they are transcribed.

The printed transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet and only the researcher will have access to the key. All records of this study will be retained for a period of five years after data collection and then permanently deleted. They will be stored securely and the same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data. You, as well as the University of Vermont Institutional Review Board and regulatory authorities, will be granted direct access to your original research records for verification of research procedures and/or data.

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study

are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

### **Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. If a participant decides to withdraw from the study, the data will not be used in the study and will be destroyed.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Carlos Vega at the following phone number 802-654-2912. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact the Director of the Research Protections Office at (802) 656-5040.

### **Participation**

Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to participate without penalty or discrimination at any time.

### **Statement of Consent**

You have been given and have read or have had read to you a summary of this research study. Should you have any further questions about the research, you may contact the persons conducting the study at the addresses and telephone numbers given below. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice.

