

**Athletics or Academics?**  
**An Analysis of Student-Athlete Collegiate Priorities**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the academic and athletic priorities of collegiate student-athletes, using Duke University as a case study. Analyses of information collected through online surveys (N= 151) and in-person interviews (N=8) suggest that both non-revenue athletes and revenue athletes value their academics more than athletics. However, comparisons of the two groups indicate that non-revenue athletes value their academics slightly more than do revenue athletes. Revenue athletes struggle with short-term academic goals, such as studying outside of class and turning academic coursework in before the deadline. These findings suggest the need for more effective support policies to help revenue athletes devote more time to their academic courses.

In 2014, collegiate sports programs in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) generated roughly \$305 million in revenue, making it the second most lucrative college conference in the United States (Forbes, 2015). About eight million individuals attend these ACC football and basketball home games each year, with millions more watching the games on television (NCAA, 2014; NCAA, 2015). Clearly, collegiate athletics are an essential aspect of American culture; with over 460,000 student-athletes in the NCAA, these individuals are an important part of higher education (NCAA, 2015; Upthegrove et al., 1999). However, some critics suggest that this emphasis our society places on athletic performance causes student-athletes to undervalue their academics (Aries et al., 2004; Upthegrove et al., 1999; Van Rheenen & Atwood, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to examine the various priorities of collegiate student-athletes, specifically comparing how individuals value academics and athletics. This thesis will separately analyze the reported priorities of the two major groups of student-athletes: revenue athletes and non-revenue athletes at a single university. For the purposes of this study, the revenue sports considered will be men's basketball and football, and non-revenue sports will include all remaining programs. I hypothesize that non-revenue athletes will place a higher value on their academics than their athletics, whereas revenue athletes will give more precedence to their athletics over academics (note that throughout the thesis, I use the terms "priority" and "value" interchangeably). Individuals in this study will be male student-athletes at Duke University, an elite academic institution with NCAA Division I athletics.

This study will contribute to existing literature by analyzing the differences in priorities of student-athletes from revenue and non-revenue sports. Previous studies have focused on differences in academic performance of revenue and non-revenue athletes, rather than differences in their academic and athletic priorities (Ting, 2009; Jolly, 2008; Simons, et al, 1999; Adler & Adler, 1985). Additionally, among the few studies that have conducted research on student-athletes at elite universities, most have centered on Division III schools with less demanding sports programs (Aries & Richards, 1999; Aries et al., 2004). To supplement this prior research, this project will examine student-athletes at both an academically and athletically challenging university.

Given the varying time requirements, athletic pressures, and level of sport visibility for each type of athlete, it is reasonable to expect that revenue and non-revenue athletes have differing priorities. Such disparities create distinct athletic and academic challenges for the student-athletes, which may lead to dissimilar levels of academic motivation. If in fact these academic motivation levels differ, then specific and separate academic support policies will be necessary for these athletes. Most college athletes will not go on to play professionally after college, so it is important to recognize if many student-athletes have insufficient levels of academic motivation. All in all, student-athletes not only represent their universities through their athletic talents, but also through their academic performance and success in future careers; therefore, adequate policies must be in place to help these individuals succeed, both on and off of the playing field.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **The Academic Gap Between Athletes and Non-Athletes**

The contrast between the academic performances of student-athletes and non-athletes is reason for concern. Academic challenges certainly do not exist for all student-athletes, but evidence suggests significant disparities, on average, among the academic achievement levels for athletes and non-athletes. Studies indicate that male collegiate athletes, particularly those who were recruited for their sport, have college GPAs that are on average 0.20 lower than the GPAs of male non-athletes (Rampell, 2010; Upthegrove et al., 1999). Student-athletes may also take classes from “softer” majors, such as physical education or general studies, in comparison with non-athletes (Funk, 1991; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). In 2014, the average graduation rates for male Division I basketball players and football players were respectively 31.5 percentage points and 20 percentage points lower than the graduation rates of non-athletes (Sexton & Southall, 2014; Sexton et al., 2014).

However, on the other hand, the combined graduation rate for student-athletes across all sports is often higher than that of the rest of the student body. In 2014, the average graduation rate for all student-athletes at Division I schools combined was 66%, which was similar to the rate for all non-athletes (Hosick, 2014). The inclusion of other sports (besides football and basketball) thus increases the average graduation rate for athletes, suggesting that lower academic performance may only be associated with certain sports.

Still, the lower educational achievements for some student-athletes, particularly revenue athletes, may be a result of universities overlooking these

athletes' academic developments and instead focusing on their athletic achievements (Funk, 1991; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). This focus is likely misguided given that an overwhelming majority of student-athletes will not play their sport professionally and thus cannot rely on their sport to be a future career. In fact, in 2014, the NFL drafted only 1.6% of all collegiate varsity football players (NCAA Research, 2015). Similarly, in 2013, the NBA drafted only 1.2% of all men's varsity basketball players (NCAA Research, 2015). Similar low probabilities of competing professionally exist across all collegiate sports teams (NCAA Research, 2015). At Duke specifically, 12 out of 663 athletes were drafted into professional leagues concluding the 2013-2014 school year (Duke University, 2014; Duke University, 2014). Only two of the drafted athletes were men's basketball players, and only one was a football player.

### **Conflicting Identities: Student vs. Athlete**

Existing literature on the priorities of student-athletes in college focuses on two major, conflicting identities—the student and the athlete. Roughly 460,000 student-athletes compete in varsity athletics in the United States each year, belonging to 23 different sports (NCAA, 2015). These student-athletes are different from the rest of the student population in that they must balance the rigorous demands of athletic participation in addition to the equally strenuous demands of their studies (NCAA, 2015; Jolly, 2008; Ting, 2009). Student-athletes often spend upwards of 25 hours per week on athletics-related activities while in-season; this includes practices, weight training, competitions, team meetings, film review, etc. (Johnson et al., 2013; Upthegrove et al., 1999; Simons et al., 1999; Jolly, 2008).



Athletic competitions often cause student-athletes to be absent from class, and the strenuous nature of athletic training can impact student-athletes' ability to stay focused in the classes they can attend. All of this only adds to their cumulative emotional stress of pressure from parents, coaches, and teammates (Ting, 2009; Simons et al. 1999; Jolly, 2008).

As a result of the greater time demands and emotional pressures that student-athletes experience in college compared to non-athletes, some scholars believe that athletes primarily focus on athletics rather than academics, which in turn undermines the value of their educational degrees (Funk, 1991; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). The apparent academic performance division between athletes and non-athletes, as denoted by athlete GPAs, majors, and class schedules, could suggest the lack of priority given to their education while in college (Funk, 1991; Adler & Adler, 1985). Additionally, athletic experiences could cause student-athletes to become increasingly uninvolved with academics throughout their college career, as their lives become progressively more focused around the playing field or court (Adler & Adler, 1985; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003).

In contrast, other studies suggest that student-athletes do, in fact, greatly appreciate their academics, and they do not allow athletics to take precedence in their collegiate life (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Paule & Gilson, 2010; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Clark, 2013; Umbach, 2006). Athletic motivation, in terms of pursuing a professional career after college, might not take away from a student's academic success (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Clark, 2013). Advantageous characteristics derived from sports include the athlete's ability to stay focused, demonstrate self-discipline,

and maintain hard work; these qualities can be beneficial in the classroom setting (Simons et al., 1999; Upthegrove et al., 1999). Also, student-athletes may interact more frequently with professors than non-athletes do, showing that intercollegiate athletics can serve as a mode for the individual to develop and excel (Umbach, 2006; Clark, 2013). Many student-athletes from Division I universities believe that a college education is important for their future success, and that sports only help them attain this college education by functioning as a voluntary avenue for leisure, thus alleviating other stressors (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003).

### **Current Academic Policies for Collegiate Student-Athletes**

Current specific academic support policies for student-athletes vary by institution, with the exception of NCAA policies that each university must follow (Thamel, 2006; Lopiano, 2008). According to NCAA regulations, Division I student-athletes must have at least 40% of their degree completed by the end of their second year, 60% by the end of their third year, and 80% completed by the end of their fourth year (NCAA Remaining Eligible, 2013; Duke University, 2015).

Furthermore, the NCAA limits the total number of mandatory hours a student-athlete can spend on their athletics per week. While in-season (during the competition period), athletes cannot be required to spend more than 20 hours on their sport per week (Duke Compliance, 2015). While in the off-season, athletes cannot be required to spend more than eight hours. Activities that count towards these hours include practice, weights/ conditioning, meetings, film review, and competition (Duke Compliance, 2015). A caveat to this rule is that time spent over

the maximum number of hours is considered “optional” for the student-athletes, where “optional” means that they cannot be required to stay, but most often do. Thus, student-athletes can spend upwards of 25 hours per week on athletics-related activities while in-season (Johnson et al., 2013; Upthegrove et al., 1999; Simons et al., 1999; Jolly, 2008).

Some universities have very distinct programs for athletes, whereas other institutions, like Duke, incorporate many of the same academic services provided to the general student body (Thamel, 2006; Duke Athletics, 2005). The Duke Athletics Administration believes student-athletes should strive to be integrated with rest of the students (Duke Athletics, 2005). Hence, student-athletes are encouraged to use many of the same services as non-athletes, including the writing studio, pre-major advising studio, foreign language support, etc. (Duke Athletics, 2005). However, multiple systems of support exist that are specifically for student-athletes at Duke University, such as free tutoring, additional academic counseling, priority scheduling, and workshops for personal development and/or leadership (Duke Athletics, 2005; Featherston, 2014).

At Duke, academic support is similar for revenue and non-revenue athletes. However, individual coaches may enforce additional academic requirements to ensure that their athletes maintain their academic course load, and thus these policies may vary by team. Many teams, including the basketball and football teams, strongly encourage their student-athletes to have a tutor for every class (Featherstone, 2014). Students struggling with their courses, regardless of team, often have mandatory study hall hours in order to strengthen their academics.

Furthermore, some freshmen student-athletes have academic mentors to help them adjust to their large time demands. Mentors suggest various techniques for time management, study methods, and overall learning strategies (Duke Sports Information, 2011).

### **Differences Between Revenue and Non-Revenue Athletes**

In 2012, a third-string quarterback for Ohio State tweeted, “Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain’t come to play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS” (ESPN, 2012; capitalization original). Although this individual likely is not representative of all revenue athletes at large, research suggests differences in the academic values of revenue and non-revenue athletes. The differing demands, goals, and pressures of non-revenue and revenue athletes create two distinct sets of academic and athletic priorities within a single university. According to several studies, revenue athletes are less involved in academics, and thus less academically motivated, than are non-revenue athletes (Simons et al., 1999; Adler & Adler, 1991; Upthegrove et al., 1999). Additionally, non-revenue athletes may more easily transfer beneficial qualities attained from athletics to their academics (i.e., self-discipline and focus), as demonstrated through levels of reported time management skills and differences in time spent on athletics versus academics (Simons et al., 1999; Upthegrove et al., 1999).

Differences in pressures between revenue and non-revenue athletes could potentially explain these distinctions in priorities, specifically the degree to which various athletes value academics (Upthegrove et al., 1999; Simons et al., 1999; Adler & Adler, 1991; Van Rheezen & Atwood 2014). Although all student-athletes face

both academic and athletic pressures, research suggests that revenue athletes have amplified pressures, which may further impact their academic motivation (Adler & Adler, 1991; Upthegrove et al., 1999; Wolniak et al., 2001). The high visibility of revenue sports, combined with these sports' ability to produce a substantial profit for the university, drives coaches and recruiters to have higher expectations of athletic success for revenue athletes (Upthegrove et al., 1999; Wolniak et al., 2001). Revenue athletes may feel more exploited for their athletic abilities than do non-revenue athletes, which could thus impact their level of academic focus (Ting, 2009; Aries et al., 2004; Van Rheenen & Atwood, 2014; Wolniak et al., 2001; Cross, 1973). Some revenue athletes have indicated that they feel they are university employees without proper compensation. Although many Division I athletic programs earn millions of dollars in profit each year from revenue sports teams, the NCAA prohibits salaries to student-athletes for their athletic achievements (NCAA Amateurism, 2015; Van Rheenen & Atwood, 2014; Cross, 1973). Such an emphasis on profit for the university could undermine the responsibility collegiate athletes feel to perform well in the classroom (Aries et al., 2004; Ting, 2009; Cross, 1973).

However, football and basketball players are surprisingly not the most likely collegiate athletes to play professionally. Even though baseball is traditionally a non-revenue sport in college, about 8.6% of all collegiate baseball players go on to play professionally in the MLB (NCAA Research, 2015). Similarly, roughly 6.8% of men's ice hockey players in college will go on to play professionally in the NHL (NCAA Research, 2015). This is in contrast with the 1.6% of collegiate football players and 1.2% of collegiate basketball players that will play professionally (NCAA

Research, 2015). Thus, playing at the professional level should likely not be an additional pressure for revenue athletes, considering these low percentages. Yet, many revenue athletes still attest to feeling this pressure.

### **Importance of Athletic and Academic Motivation**

The evaluation of the athletic and academic priorities of student-athletes can help portray the academic gap between athletes and non-athletes in college. The priorities of collegiate student-athletes are measured in this study as individual levels of academic and athletic motivation. Academic motivation (i.e., the desire to learn new material, attend classes, and do coursework) is particularly important because it is one of the primary factors behind academic achievement for students (Simons et al., 1999; Ting, 2009; Aries et al., 2004). Many scholars believe that the motivation to succeed in academics is more determinant of an individual's overall academic success in college than is his or her preexisting academic level upon entrance to college, as determined by SAT/ACT scores and high school GPAs (Simons et al., 1999; Ting, 2009; Aries et al., 2004).

Learning more about the priorities of student-athletes can help us better understand the strength of their academic motivation, thereby allowing us to provide appropriate academic support. Too often, research studies consider athletes as a single category rather than examining variation among groups of athletes. Identifying the differing pressures on revenue and non-revenue athletes will illustrate the academic and athletic priorities for these two groups, and will further show how their need for support may differ.

## **Significance of This Study**

The athletic and academic pressures for non-revenue athletes and revenue athletes are too dissimilar for the values of these athletes to be evaluated together. Of the studies that do separate these types of athletes in their findings, most analyze academic motivation through academic performance results such as GPA, and very few evaluate academic motivation through student-athletes' own perceptions of the importance of athletics and academics in their lives (Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Simons, et al, 1999). Therefore, to add to this relatively small pool of literature, this study will specifically compare and contrast the self-reported priorities between non-revenue and revenue athletes at Duke University, in order to understand the varying academic approaches of athletes.

Secondly, this study is unique in that it focuses on the differences between types of athletes at Duke, an elite academic university. A few researchers have evaluated student-athletes at top academic universities, but the institutions in their reports were Division III athletic programs (Aries & Richards, 1999; Aries et al., 2004). Division III sports programs likely do not have the same athletic pressures or athlete expectations as Division I programs, given the lack of athletic scholarships at Division III schools, as well as the lack of national spotlight on their sports programs (O'Shaughnessy, 2009; Aries & Richards, 1999). Assessing the values of athletes at a top-tier academic institution, particularly one with an extremely competitive Division I athletics program, will contribute to previous studies and help illustrate any potential issues of misplaced academic and athletic priorities.

I hypothesize the study will show that non-revenue athletes value academics over athletics, whereas revenue athletes value athletics over academics. Additionally, I predict that non-revenue athletes will value academics more highly than that of revenue athletes. My findings will likely suggest the necessity of different academic support policies for non-revenue and revenue athletes; this thesis will later detail my proposed initiatives for Duke University.

### **HYPOTHESIS & OBSERVABLE IMPLICATIONS**

1. Non-revenue athletes value academics more than revenue athletes do at Duke University.

To support this hypothesis, non-revenue athletes would visit the writing studio, meet with professors or TAs outside of class, and meet with tutors and study groups more frequently than revenue athletes do. The majority of non-revenue athletes would spend more time on their academics than would revenue athletes, and a larger proportion of non-revenue athletes would consider their favorite aspect of Duke to be academics-related. In the interviews, non-revenue athletes would mention or reference academics more times on average than revenue athletes, particularly in the questions regarding the student-athlete's most influential person, their most memorable experience, and what they believe will have the most impact on their future. Additionally, non-revenue athletes would provide more convincing arguments for the hypothetical situations in favor of their academics over athletics, whereas revenue athletes would provide stronger arguments in favor of their athletics over academics.



2. Non-revenue athletes value their academics more than athletics at Duke University.

If this hypothesis is true, one might observe how non-revenue athletes spend most of their time on academics, or how they consider their favorite aspect of Duke to be the institution's academic challenge. Other observable implications include most non-revenue athletes claiming they would have attended Duke even if they could not play their sport, and the majority stating they would not transfer from Duke if their team was cut. In the interviews, individuals would emphasize their academics more than their athletics. Their Duke education would be believed to have the most lasting impact on their future. They would provide an argument against skipping a class for an athletic practice, and they would provide an argument in favor of skipping a practice if a major class grade depended on it. Lastly, they would more frequently choose a role model/influential person that had a positive influence on their academic performance at Duke.

3. Revenue athletes value their athletics more than academics at Duke University.

The observable implications for this hypothesis include revenue athletes considering their favorite aspect of Duke to be athletics and revenue athletes spending most of their time on their sport. Other supporting information would be the majority of revenue athletes believing they would not have attended Duke without their sport, and how they would consider transferring from Duke now if they suddenly could not play their sport. The revenue athletes would convey their priority for athletics over academics in the interview, as well. They would

not choose to skip a practice for a major class assignment, and they would elect to skip a class for an important practice. Also, they would choose a role model that influenced their athletic performance, rather than academic performance. Lastly, they would believe that athletics, or some extent of athletics, would leave the most impact on their future.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study evaluated the priorities of student-athletes of non-revenue sports and revenue sports at Duke University, in order to understand their varying academic approaches. The research design included a survey and interviews. The survey attempted to rank the student-athlete's preferences for athletics and academics by asking questions about their habits, whereas the interviews provided more insight on the reasoning behind the student-athletes' priorities. Duke University was the focus of this study because of the institution's rare combination of elite academics and Division I athletics. Duke University's demanding academic curriculum, coupled with the intense intercollegiate competitions of the ACC Conference, made this the ideal institution for observing student-athlete motivations and challenges.

The questions in the survey focused specifically on basic demographic information, athlete preferences, time usage, involvement in academics, and importance of athletics to the individual. Basic demographic information was necessary to set the background of the survey. It was important to ask about athlete preferences because preferences ultimately frame priorities. Additionally, given that

individual time usage is a direct application of priorities, it was essential to collect this data in order to show how athletes actually prioritize the time in the day. I researched different athletes' involvement in academics in order to understand the importance of athletics to student-athletes, which is necessary for comparison purposes between revenue and non-revenue athletes.

In the interview, student-athletes specifically compared their athletics and academics through hypothetical and broad questions about their time at Duke University. The interview questions attempted to get the student-athletes to vocalize their prioritization of academics or athletics. Many of the questions were general so as to provide the opportunity for student-athletes to explain and justify their athletic and academic preferences. These responses were relevant to the entire thesis project, as all three hypotheses were integrated to the interviews.

The combination of the online survey and the in-person interviews was the most appropriate methodology for conducting this study. No viable data source existed that could serve as the base for this study, so collecting new data was necessary. The survey was the best method of showing a student-athlete's definitive rankings of priorities, as well as providing quantifiable measurements for a student-athlete's time use and frequency of particular activities. One-on-one interviews supplemented the survey data by providing a more complete view into the mindset of student-athletes.

Although many sports do contribute a profit to Duke University (after factoring in alumni contributions), revenue sports for the purpose of this study were the men's basketball team and football team. The revenue generated from these

sports has been substantially higher than any other Duke athletic program. For example, for the 2013-2014 school year, the men's basketball team and football contributed roughly \$27 million and \$25 million in revenue, respectively, whereas the total revenue of all other sports combined was only about \$8 million (Duke University, 2014). Therefore, non-revenue sports in this study referred to the remaining nine male sports programs at Duke University. Though female athletes were not included in the full study, they were included in the pilot survey phase.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through an online survey distributed to roughly 120 male varsity revenue athletes and 250 male varsity non-revenue athletes. Only male student-athletes received this survey via the athletic listserv; female athletes were excluded from both the survey and the interview because no female revenue sport exists. The interview sub-sample consisted of eight volunteer student-athletes—four revenue athletes and four non-revenue athletes. Both the survey and the interviews included individuals from each grade level. All men's teams were represented in the survey, and the interview had non-revenue responses from four different teams.

#### *Online Surveys*

The survey was accessible on a computer and smartphone. Leslie Barnes, Duke Athletics Assistant Director of Student-Athlete Development, granted permission for the use of the athletic listserv for data collection. The study aimed for a balance across the two groups, but more responses were from non-revenue athletes given their larger number. The survey received 47 revenue responses

(estimated response rate of 39%) and 104 non-revenue responses (estimated response rate of 42%).

In efforts to encourage participation, each participant that completed the survey was eligible to win an iPod from a raffle. The optional raffle was in accordance with NCAA regulations concerning appropriate compensation for athletes. If the athlete wished to participate, then he entered his email address on a separate Qualtrics survey. The potential for anonymity helped solicit honest feedback. The window for survey participation was from April 23, 2015 to May 2, 2015 and September 7, 2015 to September 15, 2015. The survey was re-administered in the fall to maximize sample size, as well as to potentially survey athletes who could not participate in the spring. The sample was one of convenience, and was not a representative sample of all student-athletes at Duke University.

As mentioned previously, the survey questions centered on basic demographic information, athletes' preferences, time use, involvement in the academic community, and importance of the sport (see Appendix 1). The opening questions focused on basic demographic information, including the participant's gender (to ensure that the athlete qualified for the study), sport they played, and year in school (e.g. freshman, sophomore, etc.).

In the survey, student-athletes ranked in order the importance of the following eight priorities: performing well at championship game/match/meet; being a supportive teammate; attending all practices for your sport; being a good representative of your team to recruits; receiving ACC Academic Honor Roll this

semester (3.0 GPA or higher); turning in academic coursework by the deadline; attending all classes; and attaining a Duke degree. A score of 1 was the most important aspect and a score of 8 was the least important aspect. The priorities were presented randomly, with four priorities related to athletics and four related to academics. The top priority and the bottom priority for each group was noted and comparisons were made between the percentages of respondents for each.

Next, individuals indicated their favorite aspect of Duke University, choosing one out of the five options: the academic challenge of Duke; athletics; social culture; student involvement opportunities (clubs, student government, community service, etc.); and Greek life. The proportion of non-revenue and revenue athletes for each option was compared. Then, student-athletes said whether they plan on competing professionally after college.

Another question queried time use by athletes, asking each to record the estimated amount of time per week, in hours, that he spends on the following five activities: his sport (practice, games/meets/matches, etc.); studying (not in class); extracurricular activities (clubs, student government, community service, etc.); and leisure. The average time usage between the two types of athletes was compared.

The following group of questions related to the academic involvement of student-athletes. Students recorded how many times in the past two weeks they did the following: visited the writing studio; met with professors or TAs outside of class; met with a study group (including group project meetings); met with a tutor; or attended a lecture or workshop not required for a class. Additionally, they tallied the

number of study groups and tutors they had for this semester. The average frequency of each for both groups was compared.

The next four questions all pertained to the importance of the sport to the athlete. Student-athletes ranked the influence that athletics had on their college decision on a scale of 1-10. A score of 1 indicated that athletics had no impact on their decision to attend Duke, and a score of 10 indicated that athletics was the primary reason behind their decision. Comparisons were considered between the two groups. Next, student-athletes determined if they would have attended Duke originally had they not been able to play their sport. Individuals then specified if they would consider transferring to another school if their sports program was suddenly cut. The students had three options: stay at Duke without playing your sport; transfer to another college and play your sport; or, unsure. Finally, the survey concluded by asking if the students plan to play throughout their entire Duke experience. For the three previous questions, the proportions of revenue and non-revenue athletes for each answer choice were compared.

To test the feasibility of the survey portion of my study, I conducted a pilot survey on 10 female swimmers at Duke University. No major logistical complications with the survey administration emerged. The participants completed the survey on Qualtrics, which was accessible on both computers and smartphones, and provided feedback. On average, it took between three to five minutes to complete the 14-question survey, which suggested that the length would not dissuade any individuals from partaking in the study. In attempts to make the survey as clear as possible, I modified the wording of several answer choices. For

example, I changed “maintaining your sport’s practice schedule” to “attending all practices for your sport.”

### *Interviews*

The interviews were conducted in-person. The window for participation for the interviews was from September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015 to September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015. The athletes volunteered for the interviews and they received no additional compensation. Eight student-athletes each answered six questions, and the interviews lasted between 6-9 minutes. All of the interviews were audio-recorded on an iPhone, and each conversation was transcribed. The names and other identifying information of the student-athletes were not reported.

To begin the interview, the student-athlete said what year he was in school; this question provided the only background information on the interviewee that was reported in my findings. Next, the participant described any difficulties that he may have encountered in balancing his academics and athletics. The purpose of this question was to delve deeper into the academic approach taken by student-athletes. This question provided the opportunity for a participant to elaborate on his time management skills. The student-athlete was free to discuss how he prioritized his time, how he managed to satisfy both his academic classes and his sport, and/or how a time management problem led to an academic or athletic revelation.

The subsequent two interview questions were hypothetical situations designed to reveal the student-athlete’s immediate priorities towards athletics and academics. A student was asked whether he would skip a class to mentally or physically prepare for a strenuous practice that evening, in which his performance



would determine whether he made the next travel squad. Then, I asked the opposite of this: whether he would be willing to skip a practice in order to complete an academic assignment worth 30% of his grade. For both of these questions, the thought processes behind the student-athlete's decisions helped to reveal his preferences.

Then, the participant stated his most influential person or role model at Duke, along with an explanation. Whether the student-athlete believed the role model affected his athletic or academic performance helped reveal the student-athlete's priorities. Finally, both parts of the final question required the student-athlete to consider the future. The student-athlete was asked what he would remember the most from his time at Duke, as well as what would leave the most impact on his future. Comparisons were made between the two groups as to how much the individual favored academics over athletics and vice versa.

### **Data Analysis**

The first set of analyses involved comparison of averages on survey questions from non-revenue and revenue athletes. I evaluated hypotheses regarding differences between non-revenue and revenue athletes through tests for differences in independent means and in proportions. A p-value of 10% was used to decide whether the observed difference was significant.

For each survey question, an average was calculated to represent the non-revenue or revenue group, based on all the responses from that particular group. No responses were excluded from the averages. From there, two-sided t-tests were used to determine the significance of differences between the two groups regarding:

hours spent on athletics/academics per week; frequency of activities (study groups, writing studio, etc.); number of tutors and study groups; and average influence rating of athletics on college decision. Two-sided z-tests were used to evaluate the significance of difference in proportions between non-revenue and revenue athletes. These tests evaluated differences regarding: the percentage for each top priority and lowest priority; the proportions for each favorite aspect of Duke; the proportion willing to attend Duke originally without their sport; the proportion wanting to stay at Duke now without their sport; the proportion planning to play professionally; and the proportion planning to play throughout their Duke career.

The interview analysis consisted of thematic coding on transcripts of the audio recordings. For each response, I took note of the frequency of allusions to athletics and academics, as well as the order mentioned. More importantly, however, was the substance of the responses and the vigor with which a student-athlete conveyed a particular message. Anonymous, direct quotes from the interviews supplemented my findings.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Sample**

The survey on Duke student-athletes generated 175 partial and complete responses. Of these responses, 151 survey responses (143 completed surveys and 8 partial surveys) were eligible for use in this project. Those excluded only had answers for the beginning demographic questions and left all other questions blank.

The findings in this report included 47 revenue responses (31%) and 104 non-revenue responses (69%).

The most represented team was football, with 44 respondents that accounted for 94% of all revenue responses. Fewer basketball players took the survey given their small team size. The most represented non-revenue team was Track & Field, accounting for 22% of all non-revenue responses (23 responses). Distribution across the classes was fairly equal. The most represented class was freshmen with 35% of respondents. See Table 1 for the representations of athletic teams in the survey, types of athletes, and class distribution.

### **Survey Findings**

The results revealed a difference between the academic and athletic values of revenue and non-revenue athletes at Duke, but the difference was not as large as expected. Although non-revenue athletes appeared to value their academics slightly more than did revenue athletes, both groups ultimately seemed to prioritize their academics over athletics. Reference Table 2 for a comparison across non-revenue and revenue groups, as well as within groups, for the following three hypotheses.

#### *Hypothesis 1: Non-Revenue vs. Revenue*

Throughout the survey results, non-revenue athletes placed a slightly higher emphasis on their academics than did revenue athletes, but both valued their athletics fairly equally. To begin, when asked to rank eight academic and athletic priorities, 79% of non-revenue athletes and 74% of revenue athletes had two or more academic priorities in their top four places. This small difference suggests both groups of athletes place academic priorities before athletic priorities.

Most individuals from both the revenue group and non-revenue group considered “Attaining a Duke degree” as their number one priority, which suggests the groups are similar in their long-term academic priorities (see Figure 1). Surprisingly, more revenue athletes (62%) chose “Attaining a Duke degree” as their number one priority than did non-revenue athletes (57%), which was contrary to the hypothesis that non-revenue athletes valued academics more than revenue athletes (although this difference was not statistically significant). For both groups, the next most popular choice for the top priority was “Performing well at your championship game/match/ meet.” These percentages were also similar, as roughly 20% of non-revenue athletes and 21% of non-revenue athletes placed this as their top priority. However, a majority of individuals from both groups felt that getting a Duke education was more important.

Overall, the lowest priorities for revenue and non-revenue athletes suggested that surveyed non-revenues value their academics slightly more than revenues, as in accordance with the first hypothesis (see Figure 2). Although the difference was statistically insignificant, almost 30% of non-revenue athletes felt that “Being a good representative of your team to recruits” was the least of their concern, compared with 21% of revenue athletes that considered this athletic priority to be their lowest priority. Similarly, 26% of revenue athletes felt that “Turning academic coursework in before the deadline” was their bottom priority, while only 10% of non-revenues felt this way; this large difference (although not quite statistically significant) shows that non-revenues value this priority more highly than revenue athletes do.

However, contrary to this hypothesis, about 22% of non-revenues and 19% of

revenues felt that “Attending all classes” was their lowest priority. I anticipated a larger difference in the opposite direction for this priority, as it was expected that non-revenue athletes would more highly value attending classes than would revenue athletes. However, the observed difference was statistically insignificant.

The most striking piece of survey evidence in favor of this hypothesis was the difference between the number of hours spent studying outside of class for revenue athletes and non-revenue athletes. Non-revenue athletes spent an average of 13.68 hours per week studying (not including class time), whereas revenue athletes spent a mere 7.82 hours studying (statistically significant difference at the 1% level). Meanwhile, revenue athletes played their sport more on average (24.07 hours) than non-revenues did (21.41 hours). These results support the hypothesis that non-revenues value their academics more than revenues.

Slightly more non-revenue athletes (18%) chose “academic challenge” as their favorite aspect of Duke than did revenue athletes (11%), thus also contributing to the idea that non-revenues prefer their academics more. But, the difference was not statistically significant ( $p$ -value= 0.851). Furthermore, a majority from both groups preferred “athletics” as their favorite aspect, with slightly more revenue athletes (72%) choosing it than non-revenue athletes (63%). Although I expected the results to be more in favor of the “academic challenge” for non-revenues and for more distinct differences to exist between the groups, these results still align with the notion that non-revenues value academics more highly than revenues, and revenues value athletics more highly than non-revenues.

Additionally, non-revenues visited the writing studio more than their revenue counterparts, though neither utilized this resource very often. Non-revenues visited 0.02 times in the last two weeks, while revenues visited 0 times in the last two weeks (statistically significant). Non-revenue athletes met with study groups an average of 1.3 times in the past two weeks, whereas revenue athletes met an average of 1.1 times (statistically insignificant).

However, several pieces of evidence suggested the opposite of the hypothesis, that revenue athletes prioritized academic aspects more than non-revenue athletes did. First of all, revenue athletes had more tutors than revenue athletes this semester, and also met with these tutors more frequently. Surveyed revenue athletes met with a tutor 1.61 times in the past two weeks, while surveyed non-revenue athletes met with a tutor 0.56 times. Revenue athletes had an average of 0.93 tutors this semester whereas non-revenues had an average of 0.5 tutors (statistically significant at 1% level). Additionally, surveyed revenue athletes also were in more study groups this semester (1.07 groups) than non-revenue athletes (0.77 groups), and met with professors more frequently (1 time) in the past two weeks than did non-revenue athletes (0.8 times). Therefore, these results were contrary to previous expectations; I had anticipated revenue athletes to meet with a tutor and professors less often, and have fewer tutors and study groups this semester than non-revenue athletes.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the survey results suggested that non-revenue athletes also highly value their athletics, almost more than revenue athletes do. Playing a sport at Duke appeared to influence non-revenue athletes' decisions to

attend Duke more than it did for revenue athletes (7.26 and 7.12, respectively, on a ten-point scale). Furthermore, more surveyed non-revenues (67.7%) than revenues (57.1%) would have wanted to attend Duke without their sport. Also, more revenue athletes (52.4%) than non-revenue athletes (49.5%) said they would have wanted to remain at Duke even if they could no longer play their sport.

However, both groups appear to value their athletic experiences. A large majority of both revenue and non-revenue athletes plan to continue their sport throughout their time at Duke (96% for non-revenue and 98% for revenue). In fact, many do not want their sports careers to end at the collegiate level, as shockingly high percentages of both groups intend on playing professionally after college (29% of non-revenue athletes and 50% of revenue athletes).

#### *Hypothesis 2: Non-Revenue Athletes Value Academics*

In general, the survey results supported the second hypothesis, which stated that non-revenue athletes value their academics more than they value their athletics. Firstly, 79% of non-revenue athletes placed two or more academic preferences within their top four places when ranking their academic and athletic priorities, whereas only 21% placed two or more athletic preferences in their top four places (significant at 1% level). Additionally, almost 62% of all revenue athletes chose “Attaining a Duke degree” as their top priority, whereas only 21% chose “Performing well at your championship game/match/meet” as their top priority.

Furthermore, non-revenues indicated that in a typical week, they spend an average of 13.68 hours on studying outside of class and 21.41 hours on their athletics. After adding 10 hours of class time (assuming most take four classes and

regularly attend these classes each week), non-revenues spend roughly 23.68 hours per week on their academics, plus any time spent with professors, tutors, or in study groups. Although not quite statistically significant, non-revenues still may spend more cumulative time on academics than athletics.

Other evidence supports the second hypothesis. A majority of non-revenues (68%) believed that they would have wanted to attend Duke originally even if they couldn't play their sport. Finally, over 70% of non-revenues did not plan on playing professionally after college, suggesting that their future endeavors do not depend on their athletics but rather their academics.

However, non-revenue athletes placed a greater emphasis on athletics than anticipated. An overwhelming majority of non-revenues considered "athletics" to be their favorite aspect of Duke, rather than "academic challenge." After excluding the individuals who selected favorite aspects of Duke other than academics and athletics, 22.4% of the remaining 85 non-revenues chose "academic challenge" while 77.6% chose "athletics" (a statistically significant difference at  $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, playing a sport at Duke appeared to be an important factor in the average non-revenue's decision to attend Duke University; the average rating of this influence was 7.26 out of 10 (where a 10 meant playing a sport had total influence over his collegiate decision).

### *Hypothesis 3: Revenue Athletes Value Athletics*

The results were mixed regarding whether revenue athletes value athletics more than academics. First of all, contrary to the third hypothesis, 74% of revenue athletes put two or more academic preferences in the top four places of their



ranking of eight academic and athletic priorities. To break this down further, 28% of revenue athletes had at least three academic priorities in the top four places, and 6.4% had all four academic priorities before the four athletic priorities.

Also against the third hypothesis was the majority of surveyed revenue athletes (57%) that indicated they would have attended Duke even if they could not have played their sport. Furthermore, after excluding the four individuals that chose the “unsure” option, a majority of revenue athletes (58%) would also stay at Duke today, rather than transfer to another school, if they suddenly could no longer play their sport. Similar to the non-revenues in this case, it is notable that a majority of revenue athletes recognize the value of staying at Duke University even without athletics.

However, some evidence still existed for the hypothesis that revenue athletes value their athletics more than academics. The most significant result in favor of this notion was the large difference between the groups in the average time spent studying outside of class (7.82 hours) and average time spent on athletics in a given week (24.07 hours). Even after adding 10 hours for class (again assuming the average revenue athlete takes, and regularly attends, four classes per semester), the surveyed revenue athletes still spent more time on their athletics than academics; the difference between the two was significant at the 1% level. Furthermore, surveyed revenue athletes’ indicated that their decision to attend Duke was largely determined by their ability to play their sport in college. Revenues gave an average rating of 7.12 out of a possible 10 in regards to the influence of their sport on their college decision (significant at 1% level).

Additionally, more surveyed revenue athletes chose “athletics” (72%) than “academic challenge” (11%) as their favorite aspect of Duke, which adds to the original hypothesis that revenues value athletics more. Also, an astonishing 50% of revenue athletes plan on playing professionally after college. This means that half of surveyed revenue athletes may rely on their athletics, not academics, for their immediate future endeavors.

### **Interview Findings**

Through the process of thematic coding, several major themes emerged. In comparison with revenue athletes, non-revenue athletes referenced their academics more frequently throughout the interview questions while revenue athletes stressed the importance of their athletics more frequently. However, athletes from both groups emphasized the lasting importance of academics on their future careers, and the overall responses appeared to be more focused on academics than athletics.

#### *Hypothesis 1: Non-Revenue vs. Revenue*

Similar to the survey results, interviewed non-revenue athletes appeared to slightly value their academics more than did revenue athletes, although the difference was minimal. Of the interview findings that supported this difference, the most prominent was in regards to the question of whether student-athletes would consider missing a practice for an important class assignment. None of the revenue athletes would miss the practice, whereas almost all (three out of four) of the non-revenue athletes would miss the practice to complete the assignment. Additionally, when asked whether they would be willing to miss a class for an important practice,

more non-revenue athletes expressed reluctance with skipping this class than did revenue athletes. Furthermore, all interviewed non-revenue athletes believed their academics would most impact their future, whereas revenue athletes were relatively split between academics and athletics having the most impact.

However, similarities between the two groups also existed. Most notable were the shared difficulties in balancing athletics and academics at Duke. Both groups emphasized the problem of time management. Time conflicts included the challenge of arranging classes around practices, the necessity of advanced weekly planning, and the struggle of finding adequate time for homework in the day. Several athletes—both revenue and non-revenue—specifically mentioned the direct tradeoff between sleeping and completing homework. Neither group mentioned the tradeoff between attending practice and completing homework, which suggested that practice was more important than sleep. However, inherent in the responses from both revenue and non-revenue athletes was the desire to do both school and athletics, without one or the other suffering.

#### *Hypothesis 2: Non-Revenues Value Academics*

The interview results further supported the survey findings in its agreement with the hypothesis that non-revenue athletes value their academics more than athletics. For starters, although all of the non-revenue athletes were willing to skip a class for an important practice, three-fourths expressed reluctance with skipping the class. One individual indicated that he would first attempt to rearrange his practice schedule before opting to skip the class; he explained that he “prioritize[s] school, so that’s why [he’d] be less inclined to skip the class.” Additionally, most of

the non-revenue athletes were willing to skip a practice for an important class assignment, if necessary.

Moreover, for the question regarding what would have the most impact on the student's future, all non-revenue athletes gave responses that were related to academics. These responses were split between career connections, lessons learned from being a student-athlete, and overall academics at Duke. Values learned from being a student-athlete included organization, work ethic, time management, and being able to complete goals. One interviewee bluntly stated that his "performance in school is what impacts [his] future the most," and felt that his performance in his sport would not have as much of an impact.

An underlying sense of academic priority and the dependence on efficient time management existed throughout the non-revenue responses. All respondents expressed a desire to complete their academic assignments, yet also maintain their sports. Most expressed the need to effectively balance the two, but ultimately, as one respondent stated, "I definitely have [athletic] goals... [but] they're not as big as my academic goals."

### *Hypothesis 3: Revenue Athletes Value Athletics*

Again similar to the survey results, the interviews provided relatively mixed results for the hypothesis that revenue athletes favor athletics over academics. However, interviewed revenues conveyed their prioritization of academics to a greater extent than what came across in the survey results.

To begin, revenue athletes were split on whether they would skip class for an important practice. Two individuals were adamant that missing class would be

detrimental to their success. Even if the football coaches did not check for class attendance, these two strongly emphasized that they would still not skip class, even if they were “downright exhausted.” However, the other two revenue athletes would consider skipping class. One elaborated, saying that skipping class depends on “how seriously they take their sport.... and how seriously they want to be on the travel team and play.”

In accordance with the hypothesis and with survey data, revenue athletes appeared to prioritize their short-term athletic goals over short-term academic goals. None of the revenue athletes would skip practice for a class assignment. In fact, two of the athletes laughed at the idea of skipping practice, saying that they “don’t see skipping practice as even an option.”

However, several interview findings also supported the survey results that revenue athletes cared about their long-term academic goals. When asked what would have the most impact on their future, two revenue athletes conveyed the importance of their academics. One explained, “You can only play a sport for so long,” while the other said that “we know that football doesn’t last forever.” These individuals elaborated further, saying “a lot of [the players] came here, not only for the football but also for our futures,” and “we know that with a Duke degree, we are going to be set.”

## **DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION**

This thesis focused on the academic and athletic priorities of collegiate student-athletes at Duke University, specifically looking at the differences between

revenue athletes and non-revenue athletes. The purpose of this study was to reveal any concerning levels of academic priorities amongst the athletes. Student-athletes should recognize the value of their Duke education given the small percentage of individuals that go on to play professionally, as very few can rely on their athletics for their future endeavors.

Similar to some previous studies that concentrated on the perceptions of student-athletes (Gaston-Gayles, 2005; Simons, et al, 1999), rather than on achievement levels, this project utilized surveys and interviews to gain insight into the mindset of collegiate student-athletes. Unlike previous studies, this thesis focused on a unique student-athlete population, given the high academic demands and NCAA Division I status of Duke University. However, these results can serve as background information for additional, future studies concerning the academic and athletic priorities of student-athletes at highly academic institutions.

To briefly summarize the findings, non-revenue and revenue athletes at Duke appeared to strongly value both their academics and athletics. Both the survey and the interview responses revealed an underlying responsibility of student-athletes to succeed at both. That being said, the study appears to support my first hypothesis that non-revenue athletes value their academics more than revenue athletes, although only a small difference seems to exist between these two groups at Duke University. Furthermore, both groups at Duke University seemed to value their academics more than their athletics.

### *Groups More Similar Than Anticipated*

The survey and interview results provided partial support for the first hypothesis, which presumed that non-revenue athletes value their academics more than revenue athletes do at Duke University. This study suggested that non-revenues may value their daily performances in class, i.e. short-term academic goals, more than do revenues. Non-revenues devoted more time to their academic courses, and saw the importance of “Turning academic coursework in before the deadline,” unlike their revenue counterparts. From the interviews, none of the revenue athletes were willing to miss the practice for an important class, whereas most of the non-revenue athletes were. Additionally, several revenue athletes insinuated that getting adequate rest was more important than completing myriad homework assignments because this rest affected their performance in practice the next morning.

Furthermore, the academic factors that revenue athletes seemingly prioritized more than non-revenues, e.g. tutor usage, “attending all classes,” and visiting with professors or teaching assistants, could be attributed to requirements of their sport. Many football and basketball players are required to have a tutor for each of their classes; football, as discovered in interviews, checks players’ attendance in classes; and, the increased number of competitions for revenue athletes may cause them to meet more frequently with professors.

However, other results equated the academic and athletic preferences of revenue athletes with that of non-revenue athletes, suggesting that a large difference may not exist after all. A smaller difference may exist because non-

revenue athletes did not significantly value their athletics less than revenue athletes. For example, the percentage of those who valued “academic challenge” versus those who valued “athletics” as their favorite aspect of Duke were similar across revenue and non-revenue groups. Additionally, in their decision to attend Duke, non-revenue athletes more heavily considered their desire to play a sport in college than did revenue athletes.

All in all, the differences between the academic priorities of revenue and non-revenue athletes could be due to their emphasis on different aspects of their academics. Revenue athletes may more easily prioritize long-term academic goals, like “Attaining a Duke degree,” yet lose sight of the short-term goals, e.g. studying for class. However, that being said, the significance of a majority of both groups choosing “Attaining a Duke degree” over all other athletic priorities cannot be understated. It illustrated that Duke athletes understand the significance of their education; whether they utilize this education to the fullest, or whether they prioritize their academics in the daily activities are separate questions entirely.

#### *Non-Revenues Still Value Athletics*

In accordance with the second hypothesis, evident throughout the survey and interview results was the importance of academics to non-revenue athletes. Non-revenue athletes valued academic priorities over athletic priorities, presumably spent more cumulative time on their academics than athletics, and were willing to miss practice for an important class assignment. Interviewed non-revenue athletes also strongly conveyed the importance of Duke academics for their future endeavors. Thus, in addition to overarching theoretical academic priorities, non-



revenue athletes were willing to put in the time necessary to attain short-term academic goals. It was apparent that non-revenue athletes were not willing to compromise the success of their academics for the success of their athletics.

However, debatably more interesting was the level of importance that non-revenue athletes still gave to their athletics. It begs the question: why do non-revenue athletes devote so much time to athletics, although they know they will never receive the same public recognition as revenue athletes? After discussing further with non-revenues in the interviews, the answer appears to be painstakingly simple. Non-revenue athletes play because it is a part of their identity. As one respondent said, “developing [one]self intellectually and developing [one]self athletically are two very meaningful parts.” Most are grateful for the lessons they learned from being a student-athlete, as athletics have established a foundational work ethic that translates into other aspects of their lives.

#### *Revenues Prioritize Long-Term Academic Goals*

The survey results and interview results were relatively split for the hypothesis that revenue athletes value their athletics over academics. However, particularly strong evidence existed for revenue athlete’s prioritization of long-term academic goals, which in turn suggested that revenue athletes at Duke may, in fact, value their academics more than they value their athletics. Revenue athletes placed an importance on “Attaining a Duke degree” and “Receiving ACC Academic Honor Roll this semester (3.0 GPA or higher).” Additionally, the high percentage of surveyed revenue athletes that would have attended Duke without their sport (57%), along with those that would not leave Duke if they could no longer play their

sport (52%), suggested revenues value their Duke education. Further testament to this was a revenue athlete's comment: "As football players, we know that football doesn't last forever," and "we know that with a duke degree, after our football careers, we are going to be set."

However, an apparent lack of priority on short-term academic goals existed for revenue athletes. With an average of only 7.82 hours of outside studying per week, revenue athletes spent over three times more time on their athletics than academics in a given week. Can students truly excel in the classroom when less than two hours of preparation is devoted to each class<sup>1</sup> per week? Given that studying often directly translates to academic success, revenue athletes likely are not maximizing their full academic potential. Thus, an obvious disconnect exists between revenue athletes' conception of long-term academic goals and the daily academic duties that are necessary to fulfill these goals.

### *Policy Recommendations*

Revenue athletes should have required study hours per week because increased study hours will help revenue athletes with their short-term academic goals. Less than eight hours per week on outside academics, as indicated from the survey results, simply cannot be enough time needed to excel in classes at such an elite institution as Duke University. If individuals are performing very poorly in their classes, student-athletes are often required to log a certain number of hours in their academic center. Rather than wait until the situation is dire, I recommend that all revenue athletes be required to spend 10-15 hours in study hall per week. Given

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<sup>1</sup> Assumes the average revenue athlete takes four classes per semester.

that their non-revenue counterparts are able to study this much, revenue athletes can devote this much time to their studies. These enforcements can come from academic advisors or the coaching staff.

Furthermore, NCAA rules should be more closely monitored amongst all sports teams at Duke University. According to NCAA bylaws, student-athletes can only be required to practice a maximum of 20 hours per week in-season, and even less in off-season. Both the non-revenue and the revenue groups practiced more than this, as the survey results showed non-revenue athletes practiced an average of 21.41 hours and revenue athletes an average of 24.07 hours. This regulation is meant to limit the demands of athletics on collegiate student-athletes, and they should be more adequately enforced so as to foster higher academic prioritization. Ways to manage this include repeated student-athlete surveys, signed testaments to 20 hours of training, and more frequent visits from NCAA compliance officers to athletic teams to educate athletes and coaches of these regulations.

Lastly, a policy that establishes mandatory workshops for time management skills should be incorporated for all athletes at Duke University, especially during freshmen year. As was repeatedly mentioned throughout the interviews, time management is a key component to success at Duke University. Most athletes indicated that they struggled throughout their beginning semesters at Duke because establishing a routine is difficult, although it “gets easier” once a routine is established. Mandatory workshops that foster these skills would be beneficial for the success of these athletes in the classroom.

### *Limitations*

Given the relatively mixed results of this research, this study does not provide sufficient evidence to prove or disprove any of the hypotheses. Additional research and future studies are necessary to establish more conclusive theories. Also, the limited number of interviews may have provided an unrepresentative sample of both revenue and non-revenue athletes. However, a majority of this study's claims rested on the results from the extensive survey, and the information from the interviews were simply supplemental.

Another limitation is the lack of information on the academic performance divide between non-revenue and revenue athletes at Duke University. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the differences in motivation and priorities between these two groups, rather than the differences in achievement levels. Future studies on the differences between the performance levels could be beneficial to this discussion.

### *Closing Remarks*

This study shed further light on the interesting dynamic between the role of a student and the role of an athlete for collegiate student-athletes at Duke University. The results provided an insight into the unique Duke student-athlete population; the intensified academic demands were not lost on these student-athletes, and the dual relationship of their passions was evident throughout the results. The study also provides insights on academic support practices that can benefit student athletes at Duke. Overall, this study suggested that although non-revenue athletes may value

academics slightly more than their revenue counterparts, both types of athletes ultimately value their academics more than their athletics.

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## APPENDIX I: SURVEY QUESTIONS

\*Before survey on Qualtrics, participants must consent to participate (See Appendix II).

### Basic Demographic Information:

1. Are you a male varsity athlete at Duke University? (Y/N)
2. Which varsity sports team are you on? (Choose one from the pull-down menu)
  - Baseball
  - Golf
  - Track & Field and Cross Country (combined)
  - Wrestling
  - Basketball
  - Fencing
  - Football
  - Lacrosse
  - Soccer
  - Swimming and Diving (combined)
  - Tennis
3. What year are you in school? (Choose one of the following)
  - Freshman
  - Sophomore
  - Junior
  - Senior
  - Fifth-year Senior

### Priorities of Athletes:

4. Rank the importance of the following in your life (1= most important; 8= least important):
  - \_\_\_ Performing well at championship game/match/meet
  - \_\_\_ Being a supportive teammate
  - \_\_\_ Attending all practices for your sport
  - \_\_\_ Being a good representative of your team for recruits
  - \_\_\_ Receiving ACC Academic Honor Roll this semester (3.0 GPA or higher)
  - \_\_\_ Turning in academic coursework by the deadline
  - \_\_\_ Attending all classes
  - \_\_\_ Attaining a Duke degree
5. What is your favorite aspect of Duke University? (Choose one)
  - \_\_\_ Athletics
  - \_\_\_ Academic challenge of Duke University

- Diverse culture
- Greek life
- Student Involvement Opportunities (clubs, committees, student government, community service, etc.)

6. Do you plan on playing your sport professionally after college? (Y/N)

**Time Use of Athletes:**

7. List the hours per week spent on the following activities:
- Your sport (practice, games/meets/matches, etc.)
  - Other sports
  - Studying (not in class)
  - Extracurricular activities (clubs, committees, student government, community service, etc.)
  - Leisure

**Involvement in the Academic Community:**

8. How many times in the past two weeks have you done the following?
- Visited the writing studio
  - Met with professors or TAs outside of class
  - Met with a study group (includes group project meetings)
  - Met with a tutor
9. How many study groups have you been in this semester?
10. How many academic tutors do you have?

**Importance of the Sport to the Athlete:**

11. On a scale of 1-10, how much did playing a sport influence your decision to attend Duke? (1= did not affect my decision at all; 10= it was the sole reason I came to Duke)
12. Would you have wanted to attend Duke if you couldn't play your sport? (Y/N)
13. Right now, if you were told that you could remain at Duke but not play your sport, or transfer to another college and play your sport, what would you do? (Choose one of the following)
- Stay at Duke without playing your sport
  - Transfer to another college and play your sport
  - Not sure
14. Do you plan on participating in your sport throughout your entire time at Duke? (Y/N)

If you wish to provide your email address in order to enter the raffle, please click (LINK).

\*Note that your email address will be stored separate from your responses so that your responses will be completely anonymous. No email addresses will be reported in this study.

If you prefer not to enter the raffle, thank you very much for your time!

Please provide your email address here: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What year are you at Duke?
2. Can you describe any difficulties that you have encountered in balancing both your athletics and academics in college?
3. Consider this hypothetical situation. You just heard that your coach is going to select individuals for the travel team based on performances at tonight's practice. Would you consider skipping class so that you can rest and/or mentally prepare before practice?
4. Consider another hypothetical situation. Your teacher just assigned a huge paper due the next day that is 30% of your grade. But, you have mandatory practice that evening. Would you consider skipping practice? Or would you ask the professor for an extension?
5. Who has been the most influential person/ role model for you at Duke (professor, coach, etc.)? Why?
6. When you look back on your college experience, what are you going to remember the most? What do you think will leave the most impact on your future?

### **APPENDIX III: CONSENT FORM FOR SURVEY**

Hello,

My name is Alexa Mendes, and I am an undergraduate student here at Duke University. I am asking you to participate in a research study on the athletic and academic involvement of student-athletes. I hope that this study will provide insight to the priorities of student-athletes, so as to help administrators create more effective academic support policies for student-athletes on college campuses.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. This survey has 14 questions and should take between 5-10 minutes of your time. Survey questions pertain to your priorities, your time usage, your involvement in the academic community, and the importance of your sport to you. Some basic demographic information will be collected as well.

In order to protect your identity should you choose to enter the raffle, your email addresses will be stored in a separate spreadsheet with no other identifying information.

Additionally, the survey will ask you what year you are in school and what sport you play. In order to protect your identity when I report my findings, all of the data will be aggregated into two categories: revenue athletes and non-revenue athletes. These two large categories will significantly minimize the chances of the identification of any individual participant from the findings.

Your participation in this study is completely optional. If you decide to participate, at the end of the survey you will have the option to enter your email address. You are not required to enter your email address. Entering your email address upon completion of the survey will enter you into a raffle for an iPod.

If you have any questions about my study, please contact me at [ajm70@duke.edu](mailto:ajm70@duke.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Human Subjects Committee at [ors-info@duke.edu](mailto:ors-info@duke.edu).

If you would like to participate in this study by completing the survey, please click below to continue.

#### **APPENDIX IV: ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT FOR INTERVIEWS**

My name is Alexa Mendes, and I am an undergraduate student here at Duke University. I am asking you to participate in a research study on the athletic and academic involvement of student-athletes. I hope that this study will provide insight to the priorities of student-athletes, so as to help administrators create more effective academic support policies for student-athletes on college campuses.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you questions regarding your daily athletic and academic activities, and your everyday preferences. This interview will take about 15 minutes.

Your name and all of your responses will be kept anonymous in my research study. I will ask you what year you are in school and what sport you play. In order to protect your identity when I report my findings, all of the data will be aggregated into two categories: revenue athletes and non-revenue athletes. These two large categories will significantly minimize the chances of the identification of any individual participant from the findings.

Your participation in this study is completely optional. You may skip any questions that you prefer not to answer, and you can also end the interview at any point.

If you have any questions about my study, here is a sheet with my contact information. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Human Subjects Committee at [ors-info@duke.edu](mailto:ors-info@duke.edu).

Do you have any questions before we begin?