Where to Play?: How Student-Athletes Perceive the College Choice Process

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WHERE TO PLAY?:
HOW STUDENT-ATHLETES PERCEIVE THE COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
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in
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by

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Vince Lombardi once said, “I firmly believe that at any man’s finest hour, his greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear, is the moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle – victorious.” Victory is the word I would use on this journey of self-fulfillment to my excellence of becoming who I am today – Doctor Smith. I could not have fulfilled this journey alone; therefore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following individuals for being a part of this journey…

God – thank You for allowing me to complete this journey, for without you guiding me every step of the way, I would have failed. You carried me to this moment in time and for that I “thank you.”

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the perceptions of thirteen, female student-athletes who chose to participate in intercollegiate athletics, specifically basketball. Each of the participants was enrolled at a Division I institution in the same athletic conference. Both institutions are nationally ranked institutions in their primary (revenue generating) sport (NCAA, 2004). All of the participants were offered full athletic scholarships to other institutions, yet they made their college choice decision based on multiple factors.

The data revealed that although student-athletes undergo a similar process as non-athletes, their experience in many ways was different due to the additional factors they have to consider. As indicated by the findings of this study, the process to choose a college was a challenge for student-athletes as they considered the opinions of others, the prestige of the coach and the collegiate athletic program and their commitment to academic performance. Overall, participants were satisfied with their college choice process and felt they identified the institution that fit their personal and academic goals.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Some individuals may claim that “one size fits all”, yet, the reality is – one size does not always fit well – particularly as it pertains to college choice. For example, what factors influence the college choice process across various sub-groups? Even more so, do these factors differ for student-athletes? Although there are significant amounts of research focusing on the decision-making process of students relative to which college to attend (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Hoy, 1967; McDonough, 1997; Paulsen, 1990), there is limited literature on the college choice process of student-athletes (Letawsky, Schneider, Pederson, & Palmer, 2003).

Many research studies have examined students’ college choice process (Bers & Smith, 1987; Hearn, 1984; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); yet there is a lack of studies that specifically identified student-athletes in their participant group. The few studies that have focused on student-athletes have found that the college choice process is more involved for student-athletes as they are also considering the reputation of athletic programs, resources of the institution and ability to compete immediately upon entrance onto the university campus (Letawsky et al., 2003). Likewise, Adler and Adler (1991) assert that when student-athletes are considering a college, they are not just investigating the institution for its academics; they are also considering the athletic environment of the institution, such as the college coach’s reputation. In addition, Mathes and Gurney (1985) reported that student-athletes found the campus environment to be an important factor in the college choice process. Therefore, this study attempted to provide insight into the college choice process of student-athletes, specifically, the factors that influenced their college choice decision.
Statement of the Problem

The college choice process for a recruited student-athlete may be different than that of a non-athlete (Hu & Hossler, 2000). The coach, the reputation of the coach, the potential opportunity to play, and the academic program are factors student-athletes consider while making a decision on which college to attend (Letawsky et al., 2003). The traditional motivations for selecting a college, such as family influence and finance-related factors (Hu & Hossler, 2000) or availability of desired major (Sevier, 1993) may not apply to student-athletes since they are often recruited for their athletic talent rather than their possible academic contributions (Mathes & Gurney, 1985).

In order to study the phenomenon of the college choice process for student-athletes, previous studies on college choice for non-student-athletes were examined (see e.g. Bers & Smith, 1987; Hearn, 1984; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Hoy, 1967; Johnson, Stewart, & Eberly, 1991; Martin & Dixon, 1991; McDonough, 1997; Paulsen, 1990). The aforementioned studies were specific in their examination of the college choice process as it relates to typical high school graduates that were not student-athletes. Yet, one could argue that student-athletes are far from typical, especially those making a decision of which college to attend (Letawsky et al., 2003). Unfortunately, very few studies have considered the perspective of the student-athlete when examining the college choice process.

By focusing on the college choice process of non-student-athletes, it was clear that there is a lack of research directly related to the factors student-athletes may consider during their recruitment process relative to which college to attend. Additionally, the aspirations student-athletes have to play intercollegiate sports and their perceptions of how to make a college choice
decision has been neglected in existing research. Some studies provided information on the
college choice process of student-athletes, but the research was either conducted several years
ago or included student-athletes at lower division levels within the NCAA structure (Letawsky et
al., 2003). Moreover, even fewer studies have examined the college choice process of female
student-athletes.

Wesley and Southerland (1994) noted that extensive research has been conducted on how
and why students choose to attend a particular college or university. Conversely, limited
research is available on the college choice factors of student-athletes (Letawsky et al., 2003).
Since prospective intercollegiate athletes not only choose a university, but also a team and a
coach, their college selection process may be much more involved than a non-athletes’ college
choice process (Letawsky et al., 2003). Mathes and Gurney (1985) found that the college coach
and campus environment were most important in the student-athlete’s decision making process.
Similarly, the coach and the reputation of the coach were most often mentioned by athletes
(Adler & Adler, 1991) as important factors in the college choice process. Additionally, the
opportunity to play early in their careers (Konnert & Giese, 1987), receiving an athletic
scholarship, and the academic reputation of the institution (Reynaud, 1998) were the most
important factors student-athletes considered during their college choice process.

Student-athletes are often characterized as individuals who experience more pressure on
deciding what college to attend than non-athletes (Bergandi & Wittig, 1984). Factors such as the
opportunity to play sports on national television and the prestige that comes from playing on
such a large stage may influence the process of choosing a college and ultimately effect the way
student-athletes perceive the college choice and recruiting process. Adler and Adler (1991)
found that the coach and subsequently the coach’s reputation were influential to the final
decision of which college to attend by the student-athlete. Other studies revealed that receiving an athletic scholarship, the academic reputation of the institution (Reynaud, 1998), and the opportunity to play (Konnert & Giese, 1987) were also influential in the college choice process for student-athletes. Yet these factors may be different now given the increased prestige of intercollegiate athletics (Letawsky et al., 2003) at large institutions. Furthermore, the increase in national attention on collegiate athletics could identify different influential factors in the college choice process of student-athletes, particularly female student-athletes.

The increased exposure of women in sports through such avenues as the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), Olympic level competition, and other sports that have gained popularity across the nation may provide a greater level of interest for women who participate in sports. The increased number of post-collegiate athletic options for a female student-athlete has made the choice process more intense for these students. Although the factors that influence their decision may vary; female student-athletes who chose a college may have made their decision based on factors quite different from male student-athletes. Therefore, the goal of this study was to contribute to the literature on the college choice decision-making process, specifically for female student-athletes who attended nationally ranked, Division I institutions.

**Research Questions**

In order to examine the college choice process and factors related to the decision making process of female student-athletes, this study explored a central question: How do student-athletes perceive their college choice process? Secondary questions included:

1. How do external factors influence student-athletes’ decision about where to attend college?
2. How do student characteristics influence student-athletes’ college choice decision?

Significance of Study

Chapman (1981) posited that there has been substantial research of factors affecting students’ level of educational aspirations and their decisions to attend or not attend college. Yet the research presented by Chapman (1981) does not include factors that may be relevant only to student-athletes. High school student-athletes involved in the college choice process are not only considering the established factors related to making a decision (e.g., location, campus life, academic reputation), but they are also navigating the rules and regulations of being recruited into a collegiate athletic program in order to contribute to the legacy of their chosen institution. The lack of research devoted specifically to student-athletes comes at a time when the support of collegiate athletics is at an all-time high. For example, CBS Sports signed a 1.7 billion dollar contract to broadcast the NCAA Final Four Men’s Division I Basketball tournament from 1995-2002 (Sperber, 1999).

Considering the prestige that athletics brings to the institution, student-athletes may have considered external factors and the future gain that college athletics has to offer while involved in the college choice process. The exposure and recognition of their abilities before large crowds at their chosen institution may lead to a professional career and financial stability for the player and their family. Likewise, a winning season regardless of the sport means greater revenue and national exposure for the institution and the athletic program. It is possible that the college choice process for student-athletes is different today than it was for those making a college decision 10-15 years ago. The financial gain and national exposure for a college or university having a program that was able to not only play in that tournament, but possibly win the national
championship would be immeasurable. The increased pressure by colleges and universities on their athletic departments to capture the national spotlight in some cases has been detrimental to some high school athletes deciding where they would attend college (Sperber, 1999).

By studying the college choice process of today’s student-athlete, the research related to college choice may be enhanced and contribute to filling a void in the literature. Letawsky et al. (2003) suggests that research on the college choice process was either conducted several years ago or included student-athletes at a lower division level of the NCAA’s structure. For example, Canale, Dunlap, Brit and Donahue (1996) researched the factors related to the college choice of student-athletes, yet their study did not specifically identify the factors related to the final decision-making process of which college to attend. It is possible that student-athletes utilize academics as a probable factor in their college choice decision, but the aspiration to potentially play sports enhances their decision further (Konnert & Giese, 1987). By identifying which factors are strongly considered by student-athletes in their final decision-making process, a more comprehensive recruiting and college admissions process could be developed to assist future student-athletes making a college decision. The results of this study may be significant for many groups of educational and athletic administrators who are central to the college choice process of student-athletes.

University administrators may be able to understand how to recruit student-athletes and what factors are important in their final decision-making process. Besides the possible success the institution will gain from knowing how to recruit student-athletes effectively, they may also be in a better position to support student-athletes who are comparing one institution to another. Additionally, parents of student-athletes may find this research helpful by gaining a better understanding of what factors are important to their son or daughter and what can be done to
support the student-athlete while making the college choice decision. The research could also assist athletic administrators in their attempts to understand the perceptions of student-athletes in their college choice process, but most importantly, this study will attempt to inform future student-athletes on how they can make informed decisions in their college choice.

**Overview of Methodology**

For the purpose of this study, two public institutions were chosen as sites to conduct this research project. At the time of data collection, each site had an NCAA Division I sanctioned athletic department which supported three of the four “major” sports, including baseball, basketball, and volleyball. Participants chosen were female students-athletes who shared the following attributes: a) were in compliance with NCAA eligibility requirements (partial or full qualifier); b) were 18-20 years of age; c) had no more than 2 years of college experience; and d) had been offered more than one athletic scholarship prior to making their final college choice decision. The participants in this study identified basketball as the sport for which they received their athletic scholarship.

In order to gain insight into the participant’s attitudes and feelings about their college choice process, the study used qualitative data collection. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed as indicated by techniques outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994).

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms and concepts were used throughout the study:

*College Choice* is defined as the process a student encounters while determining which college to attend (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

*Full Scholarship Athlete* is defined as a student-athlete who receives full financial aid, such as tuition, books, fees and room and board.
Partial Scholarship Athlete is defined as a student-athlete who receives partial financial aid, such as tuition, books, and fees only or room and board only. (Some parts of financial aid are excluded).

Intercollegiate is defined as participating in athletics between different colleges (Webster’s Dictionary, 1991).

NCAA Eligibility Requirement is defined as the requirements student-athletes need to meet academically in order to compete at the Division I, II, III levels (www.ncaa.org, 2004).

NCAA is the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

NCAA Division I Level refers to an institution that sponsors at least seven sports for men and seven for women (or six for men and eight for women) with two team sports for each gender. The institution must meet minimum financial aid awards for their athletics program. (There are maximum financial aid awards for each sport that a Division I school cannot exceed) (www.ncaa.org, 2004).

Partial Qualifier is defined as a student-athlete who has not successfully met all academic requirements. The student-athlete is entitled to practice with the team at its home facility, receive a scholarship, and only have three remaining seasons of competition. The student-athlete is able to appeal to play for their fourth season if graduation occurs within the four years.

Full Qualifier is defined as a student-athlete who has successfully met all academic requirements sanctioned by the NCAA rules and regulations.

Postsecondary College, Collegiate, and Higher Education are terms used interchangeably to refer to schooling after high school graduation.
Recruiting is defined as the process coaches undergo while in quest of an athlete for their specific sport program.

Student-athlete is a student at a college or university who participates in competitive, organized sports sanctioned by the NCAA.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

A delimitation is defined as the ability to narrow the scope of a research study (Creswell, 2003). This study was delimited to women student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate basketball on an athletic scholarship at two 4-year public Division I institutions. The female student-athletes were 18-20 years of age and had no more than 2 years of college experience. The institutions participating in the study were delimited to the participation in a prominent conference of the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association).

Creswell (2003) defines a limitation as the potential weakness of a study. Therefore, some of the limitations of this study included the small sample size and lack of generalizability of the findings. However, it is anticipated that the findings would provide insight on understanding how student-athletes perceived their college choice process, particularly female student-athletes.

**Conclusion**

New students entering college are subject to many factors related to their college choice process. Internal and external influences add to the already difficult decision of whether to attend college or not; and which college to attend, if the decision is made to continue education beyond high school. For student-athletes, the process is even more involved as they are also considering the reputation of athletic programs, resources of the institution and ability to compete on the collegiate level immediately (Letawsky et al., 2003). Hence, this study will
attempt to identify not only the perceptions of female student-athletes involved in their own college choice process, but also the factors that influenced their decision of which college to attend.

Organization of Study

This chapter provided the purpose and significance of this study. Chapter 2 will present literature related to the college choice process of student-athletes and documented research that also examines the process. Additionally, Chapter 2 will present literature related to the various models of college choice and how they differ in relationship to the specific purpose of this study. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approach used in this study including site selection, participant selection, and data analysis procedures. In Chapter 4, a participant profile and common themes that emerged during data analysis are presented. A discussion of the findings and the implications of this study are explored in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions student-athletes have about their college choice process. In doing so, this study will examine external factors and student characteristics that may influence student-athletes’ college choice decision. There are several literature sources that suggest which factors prospective students in general, and student-athletes more specifically consider when making the decision on which college to attend, for example (Hood, 1968; Hoy, 1967; Paulsen, 1990b; Zemsky & Oedel, 1983). However, it appears that researchers cannot agree on which factors are most important. Moreover, Slabik (1995) suggested that research excludes direct input from the actual “decision maker,” the student-athletes, to assist in the formulation of specific choice related factors.

In order to understand the college choice process of student-athletes, it is important to explore the historical evolution of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its relationship to the development of collegiate athletics. By examining the historical evolution of the NCAA, a foundation may be established that will place in proper context the immense pressure that high school student-athletes experience when making a college choice decision. In addition, this chapter will provide an overview of relevant college choice models and literature related to those models. Finally, chapter two concludes with the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual framework will serve as a guide to examine and explore the recognized factors of the college choice process and the probable factors related to student-athletes that may make the process more complex and involved.
An Overview of NCAA History

A discussion of college student-athletes would not be complete without a brief examination explaining the role of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). From its roots, the NCAA has overseen the governance, policy-setting and management of college athletics (NCAA, 2004). The NCAA acts as both a governing and enforcement organization that sets policies by which high school student-athletes aspiring to attend college should follow during the recruitment phase of their college choice decision-making process. In addition, the NCAA provides policies that collegiate athletic programs should follow in the recruitment of high school student-athletes. The NCAA has always played a primary role in supporting and protecting student-athletes even when protection was not recognized as a necessity. The establishment of the NCAA can be traced to one of the most recognizable college sports - football. It is through football that the NCAA as an organization became a necessity, to protect and provide authority for one of the most influential sports on the college campus.

Football: A Catalyst for Change

Initially, athletics on most college campuses was a recreational endeavor that gave students an opportunity to relax and engage in activities other than schoolwork (Hawes, 1999). Over time, the development of leagues and scheduled competitions between college campuses elevated football from being recreational to a source of campus pride and debate. A rowing regatta in 1852 pitted Harvard against Yale and is recognized as the first intercollegiate sporting activity (Hawes, 1999; Scott, 1951). Although this crew race was historic, it was not a monumental moment in the formation of the NCAA. Subsequently, other sports, such as tennis and baseball, were played between opposing college teams. However, it was not until an 1869 football game, between Rutgers University and Princeton University that the debates surrounding
college athletics began. The Rutgers-Princeton game brought to surface the controversies regarding the necessity of football, the injuries related to the game, and the dispute over its worth on the college campus. Even though football, as an activity, was injury-prone and violent, it also provided revenue for the colleges that participated (Hawes, 1999). Although controversial, other colleges and universities wanted some of the ‘football money’.

The Ivy League, a group of prestigious and respected universities in the northeastern United States consisting of Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale (Encarta, 2004), eagerly adopted football at an unprecedented rate as administrators saw how a winning football team increased alumni support and donations (Hawes, 1999). For state institutions, a winning football team resulted in “increased appropriations from the state legislature” (Eitzen & Sage, 1978, p. 52). Chu, Seagrave, and Becker (1985) reported that colleges and universities discovered that football increased the prestige of the institution. A winning football team meant increased alumni donations, more support for the institution from the surrounding community and increased enrollment. Therefore, the football team was able to raise money from alumni, and eventually the sport was categorized as a “major” endeavor because it had produced a substantial amount of revenue. Sports that produced less revenue were considered “minor”. Initially in the Ivy League, football was considered a “club sport” meaning that although there was a recognized team representing Harvard, Yale or Brown, the university for the most part did not sanction its actions or regulate its affairs. Yet, as more colleges and universities began participating in the game of football, the necessity for the colleges to intervene became greater (Davenport, 1985).

Although state colleges and universities received more state appropriations (NCAA, 2004), the prestige and publicity brought corruption as colleges and universities exploited to their
advantage the very few rules devoted to football and college athletics (Hawes, 1999). For example, schools recruited less than academically qualified players to only enroll during football season. Even though they had no aspirations to attend college, professional players were recruited to play on the college team during their off season. Moreover, many players were not even students at the college, but were allowed to play football (Hawes, 1999).

While seeking to promote and develop football at the collegiate level, colleges and universities were not ready for the organization of football. Fights resulting in deaths amongst fans and street brawls were common after many games and the game itself was dangerous as the rules regulating fair competition with minimal injury were non-existent (Hawes, 1999). According to Hawes (1999), from 1869 to 1905, 18 deaths and 149 serious injuries were attributed to football. Even with the serious outcomes from football, both in the stands and on the field, there was no organized body to regulate the game specifically or college athletics in general.

_The Development of the NCAA_

The NCAA would not be in existence, as we know it today, if it were not for the sport of football. After years of injuries, corrupt athletic administration and feuding fans, the decision was made to regulate the management of the game. On October 5, 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt met with representatives of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton universities to discuss the future of the game (Hawes, 1999). The result of the meeting was the eventual formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS). The IAAUS primarily served as a regulatory body for football, but in time, evolved into a committee focused on all college athletics.
Between 1905 and 1910, the IAAUS continued to formulate its purpose and administration. In scholarly papers, wrote Hawes (1999), “Its object shall be the regulation and supervision of college athletic activities… [this] may be maintained on an ethical plane in keeping with the dignity and high purpose of education” (cited in NCAA, 2004, p. 3). The primary issues of the IAAUS mirror what are the primary concerns of collegiate athletics today - eligibility of athletes, adherence to academic standards, following a code of ethics, maintaining proper residency requirements, and other secondary issues related to the primary concerns (Hawes, 1999). In 1910, members of the IAAUS voted to rename the organization the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to reflect its true role in collegiate athletics. Although football played a major role in the formation of the NCAA, its purpose was founded on the principles set forth by higher education and the basic relationship between the college and the community.

*Athletics and Higher Education*

During the early formation of colleges and universities, there was never a plan to include athletics (recreation or club sports) in the curriculum (Davenport, 1985). Higher education was intended to act as an “untouchable” entity that only supported the ideals of scholarly pursuits and complex thinking (Davenport, 1985). Yet the role of intercollegiate athletics in higher education through the popularity of football became a very important entity in the academic functionality of many colleges and universities (Davenport, 1985). The paradox of college sports is connected to the public’s expectation that institutions of higher education should espouse the values of scholarship, leadership, honesty, financial integrity, ethics, and all other positive qualities (Davenport, 1985). However, even with the heavy emphasis on academics, times eventually began to change and students began to participate in recreational activities (Hawes, 1999).
As Wilson and Brondfield wrote, “There came new freedoms, new searchings for emotional and physical outlets; and sports seemed to provide the one big national denominator” as college sports blossomed during the “golden age” of higher education (cited in Hoy, 1967, p. 109). In the 1920’s, institutions of higher education finally recognized intercollegiate athletics as part of the academic mission by placing athletic programs in physical education departments (Davenport, 1985). The coaches were elected to be faculty members with appointments to teach in the physical education department. Furthermore, the importance of physical education was recognized by faculty and administration. In addition, almost all institutions of higher education in the 1920’s had a requirement of physical education courses, which assisted in establishing the importance of athletics in developing the whole student (Davenport, 1985). Due to the inclusion of athletics as part of the educational mission, intercollegiate sports received institutional funds that allowed sports to continue to grow while enhancing the development of higher education.

Amateurism and the NCAA

The violence of football may have been the catalyst to establish the NCAA, but problems related to amateurism and eligibility rules received much more attention (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). The NCAA contends in its Principles of Amateurism that an amateur player is one who engages in sports for the physical, mental or social benefits he derives there from, and to whom the sport is an avocation (NCAA, 2005). Any college athlete who takes pay for participation in athletics does not meet this definition of amateurism. The NCAA’s Principles of Amateurism was not immediately set in place in 1906 when the NCAA was established. Violations ranged from recruiting professional players to “fixing” the outcome of certain games to gain national attention (Sperber, 1999). Although the NCAA established policies for conduct and sportsmanship in college athletic programs, policies regarding the recruitment of prospective
student-athletes were non-existent. As the NCAA continued to reform the issues surrounding amateurism, the governing board would develop and enhance the meaning of amateurism until it was utilized by the institutions accordingly.

Even though a basic philosophy of sports is fair and equal competition for all, the issue of amateur recruiting and college athletics was far from fair and equal. To combat the unfair recruiting practices of many college programs, a set of guidelines was needed to protect the amateurism of college athletics and equalize the recruiting process of high school athletes (NCAA, 2005). The guidelines would frame recruiting rules that would assure equal access to prospective collegiate student-athletes, while giving institutions the opportunity to develop their product - which was college athletics (NCAA, 2005). Although the aspect of fair recruiting and protection of amateurism was the primary reason for monitoring the activity of recruiting, the implications of a successful athletic program were immense to a college or university. For example, the impact one “outstanding” college recruit has on the financial bottom line of an athletic program and institution is staggering (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). The ideal of a fair and balanced recruiting process was of utmost concern to the NCAA during the early years of this newly developed industry – college athletics (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).

In an attempt to control and maintain its position on amateurism, the NCAA developed bylaws specifically for recruiting. For example, Article VI suggested that each member institution was to enforce measures to prevent violations of amateur principles (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Violations are held to a single definition - “the offering of inducements to players to enter colleges or universities because of their athletic abilities or supporting or maintaining players while students on account of their athletic abilities, either by athletic organization, individual alumni, or otherwise, directly or indirectly” (NCAA, cited in Sack &
Staurowsky, 1998, p. 33). Essentially, institutions were not allowed to offer scholarships or financial assistance based solely on athletic ability; the student-athlete was required to also meet the academic standards of the institution. With absolute conviction regarding amateurism, the NCAA firmly stood its ground that athletes should be selected within the institution rather than recruited externally with offers of “money, financial concession, or emoluments” (cited in Sack & Staurowsky, 1998, p. 36). Another bylaw, Article VII, required college recruits to respond to a questionnaire regarding any inducements, scholarships, or completion of academic work by another student or tutor (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Because the governing board was attempting to maintain the autonomy of the institution, the questionnaires were returned to the respective institution, not the NCAA (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).

The principles established for amateurism became known as the “Sanity Code”, which gained its adoption as Article III of the NCAA Constitution in 1948 (NCAA, 2004). The code also established a Constitutional Compliance Committee to make rulings whether or not institutions violated any regulations in their administration of NCAA rules and regulations. The penalty for negative rulings was expulsion of the institution by the Committee acting on behalf of the NCAA. Institutions cited for major violations or failing to comply with established rules, faced termination of their membership in the NCAA. The rulings were to be deemed final and authoritative, subject only to reversal by vote of the Association in an assembled convention (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).

Unfortunately, some institutions still violated the newly established regulations. Subsequently, the NCAA adopted terminology to identify the status of institutions not adhering to the rules and regulations. For example, an institution could be deemed “out of compliance” or “not in compliance”. An institution not in compliance could be penalized until there was
substantial evidence that the program had fixed its errors (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). The Compliance Committee swiftly demonstrated its power and sanctioned several institutions for violations of the Sanity Code and required immediate changes in order to continue their recruiting processes (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). However, some southern institutions wanted to be released from the NCAA. These programs did not want to change their recruiting practices and awarding of scholarships to academically less than qualified but uniquely gifted student-athletes. For example, Coach Paul “Bear” Bryant at the University of Alabama, one of college footballs’ most well known figures, was notorious for his disregard for recruiting policies and regulations (Sperber, 1999). At the time that the NCAA and the Compliance Committee evaluated and voted for a separation of southern institutions, it was determined that not enough of the members supported the change of the rules to be successful.

The adoption of the Sanity Code in 1948 had been an accommodation to interests that supported the subsidization of college athletes. However, the 1950 vote of no-confidence for the code paved the way for student-athletes to participate in professional sports without any guidance or control (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Eventually the Sanity Code was dropped completely. Yet, the principles governing financial aid, according to Sack and Staurowsky (1998), gave individual institutions the freedom to set their own financial aid policies for athletes. The ability to dictate the amount of funds that an athlete would receive, contradicted the “amateurism” status the NCAA was trying to maintain. With institutions providing financial aid for the students’ athletic ability, the institutions were headed in the direction of making the NCAA a professional association. There were other institutions that wanted to continue the status of “amateurism” for an athlete. In understanding the importance of maintaining “amateurism” in athletics, the NCAA (2004) characterized the levels of competition to three
different member institution levels, Division I, II, and III. These varying levels of competition for prospective college athletes to consider when choosing a college to attend further complicates the decision making process.

Division I

The Division I member institution is required to sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven sports for women (or 6 for men and 8 for women) with at least two team sports for each gender. Within the Division I membership, institutions that field football teams are classified as Division I-A or I-AA (NCAA, 2004). The Division I institutions must meet minimum standards for financial aid awards and must not exceed maximum financial aid awards for each sport. Division I-A teams are also required to meet minimum attendance requirements such as 17,000 spectators are needed in football attendance per home game or an average of 20,000 spectators at all football games in the last four years. Division I-A teams are also required to be in a member conference in which at least six conference members sponsor football or more than half of schools offering football meet attendance criterion established by the NCAA (NCAA, 2004). In contrast, Division I-AA schools do not have to meet the same minimum attendance requirements as Division I-A in order to maintain their membership in the NCAA. Although no specific numbers are given, institutions that have higher attendance at athletic events usually result in more institutional support of the athletic program at I-AA programs (NCAA, 2004).

Division II

Division II member institutions are required to sponsor at least four sports for men and four sports for women, with two team sports for each gender. In addition, each gender must be represented during each playing season. The game competition and participant minimums are
similar to Division I member institutions except 50% of their games can be played against
Division II, I-A, or I-AA. There are not any attendance or arena requirements for team sports.
Division II institutions recruit local talent based on their limited financial aid offers. Many
Division II student-athletes pay for school through a combination of scholarships, grants, student
loans, and employment earnings (NCAA, 2004). The NCAA (2004) also suggests that Division
II athletic programs are financed in the institution’s budget similar to other academic programs
on campus.

Division III, Independent and 2-Year Institutions

The final classification for NCAA programs includes Division III, Independent and 2-
year institutions. In their own right, each type of program is different, yet they are involved in
some way with the NCAA.

Division III. Division III member institutions are required to sponsor five sports for men
and five sports for women, with two team sports for each gender, and each gender represented
each playing season. There are minimum game competitions and participant requirements for
each sport. Division III athletics features student-athletes who do not receive any financial aid
related to their athletic ability and the athletic department is funded just like any other program
on campus; therefore, they are able to provide more sports than Division II or I institutions.
Division III member institutions purportedly concentrate on the impact of athletics on the
participant rather than the spectators (NCAA, 2004).

Independent Institutions. Independent institutions represent those athletic programs that
operate in many ways similar to other divisions within the NCAA but are not members of the
NCAA (NCAA, 2004). Primarily, these institutions, usually small, choose not to join an athletic
conference for a variety of reasons. Travel distance for conference competitions, non-
sponsorship of certain sports, or small athletic programs are some of the reasons given (NCAA, 2004). An independent institution is also usually a private school with a greater institutional focus on academics rather than athletics.

Two-Year Institutions. Junior and community colleges are considered two-year institutions that to a lesser degree are regulated through a system similar to the NCAA. The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) acts as the policy-making and enforcement body for two-year institutions that have athletic programs. Although not considered a major factor in “big-time” college athletics, two-year institutions have long been a “hiding place” for academically unprepared star athletes (Sperber, 1990). Many Division I-A, I-AA, and Division II schools have admitted to “storing” star athletes at two-year institutions in order for them to gain the necessary academic credits to transfer to the larger four-year schools as opposed to being recruited and passing the already established requirements for admittance, such as ACT or SAT scores and/or high school GPA (Sperber, 1990).

The Recruiting Process

The NCAA has implemented guidelines for college athletic participation and inclusion. The most important section in these guidelines concerns recruiting and violations of the recruiting process (McQuilken, 1996). McQuilken (1996) notes “the recruiting process officially starts in a student-athlete’s life and details a complex set of rules and regulations, covering topics from phone calls to insurance policies” (p. 62). Because of the complexities of the recruiting process, one could assume that the process is a mystery to the student-athletes as well. When addressing the recruiting issues for high school student-athletes who are entering college, there are new terms and processes they are faced with that are crucial to their successful transition from high school to college.
Each of the specific steps in the recruiting process for high school student-athletes transitioning into college have their own unique set of rules, timelines and definitions (McQuilken, 1996). For coaches, scouts, recruiters and athletic administrators, the process of recruiting a high school athlete may be quite ordinary, yet it is completely new and overwhelming for students undergoing the process for the first time (McQuilken, 1996). Likewise, the student-athlete entering college must understand new terminology such as Letter of Intent, a college visit, contact periods, types of contacts and the possibility of offers and inducements.

**National Letter of Intent Program**

The *National Letter of Intent Program* was designed to formalize the agreement between a student-athlete and the college of choice (McQuilken, 1996). In the past, the wording of the scholarship agreement between the student-athlete and the institution was very loose. The creation of the National Letter of Intent Program in 1964 by the NCAA added structure to a process with many errors and holes (McQuilken, 1996).

Due to the vagueness of the scholarship agreement, colleges would sometimes renege on their offers to the student-athlete or continue to recruit other student-athletes who had already committed to another program (McQuilken, 1996). The Collegiate Commissioner’s Association, an association that enforces eligibility requirements among colleges (NCAA, 2004), developed a solution to improve the letter of intent. The association devised the program, became an official organization in 1964, and began to monitor the letter of intent for Division I, Division II, and independent schools.

When a letter of intent is signed by a student-athlete, the young man or woman is committing to attend that school for one full year, and in reverse, the school is committing to the
student for at least the same amount of time. The agreement between the two parties is renewed annually. If for some reason the student does not meet the minimum academic requirements of the institution, then the agreement can be revoked. Furthermore, a student-athlete without a valid letter of intent may sign with another institution and begin the application process again. McQuilken (1996) adds that if a student-athlete signs a letter of intent and is admitted into an institution, but decides not to attend (regardless of their reason), the student-athlete is restricted from participation in athletic competition for a full year. For example, if a student-athlete signs a letter of intent for one institution in February but then decides to attend another school (different than the one for which the letter of intent was signed), then that student-athlete cannot play for the new institution for an entire year unless the student-athlete attends an institution with a lower NCAA affiliation ranking.

Although there are many reasons why student-athletes may change their decision (including family emergency, lack of funds, etc.), the spirit of the regulation is to discourage rival institutions from “stealing” student-athletes from one program in order to enhance their own. A school may grant the student-athlete a release from their letter of intent, but in most cases the reason must be compelling enough for the institution to risk the possibility of a good athlete playing for another program.

College Visits

Campus visits for many high school student-athletes is the best way to grasp the magnitude of the commitment they are planning to make when attending a college or university (McQuilken, 1996). An “official” visit means that the college has contacted the recruit and has invited the prospect to visit the campus (McQuilken, 1996). In the case of an official visit, the school pays for the recruits’ transportation, room and board to visit within a time frame of forty-
eight hours. The official visit is limited to one visit per school, and the recruit can visit a maximum of five colleges under the official visit definition (McQuilken, 1996). McQuilken (1996) defines an *unofficial visit* as the prospective student-athlete paying their own expenses to visit a school. A student-athlete is allowed as many unofficial visits as desired, but the college cannot pay any expenses related to it.

*Summer Camps and All-Star Games*

There have been an increase in the number of summer camps and corporate sponsored all-star games for high school student-athletes to demonstrate their skills (McQuilken, 1996). These types of games are utilized to evaluate the talent of future prospects. Colleges are only allowed to attend events during certain times of the year; therefore, a student-athlete would need to know and understand if the events they are participating in are sanctioned by the NCAA so neither they nor the institution are considered in violation (McQuilken, 1996).

*Contacts*

The NCAA allocates certain times recruiters can visit or make contacts with the prospective student-athletes. The NCAA defines contact as:

Any face to face encounter between a prospect or the prospect’s legal guardian and an institutional staff member or athletics representative during which any dialogue occurs in excess of an exchange of a greeting. And such face to face encounter that is pre-arranged or that takes place on the grounds or at the organized competition or practice involving the prospect or the prospect’s all-star team shall be considered a contact regarding of the conversation that takes place (NCAA, cited in McQuilken, 1996, p. 65-66).

The NCAA also defines contact periods, evaluation periods, quiet periods, and dead periods for college prospects and recruiters that are correlated to the various competition calendars of each individual sport (McQuilken, 1996). Additionally, these aforementioned types of periods were and are utilized to control the pressures placed on student-athletes during the recruiting process,
but McQuilken (1996) adds that these periods also give all colleges the opportunity to recruit the prospective athlete.

According to the NCAA (2004), a **contact period** is an authorized time for an athletic department staff member to make in-person, off-campus recruiting contacts and evaluations. The **evaluation period** is authorized time when staff members of an athletic department can get involved in off-campus activities to assess the athletic ability and academic qualifications of the prospective student-athlete (NCAA, 2004). However, during the evaluation period, in-person, off-campus recruiting contacts with a prospect is not permitted. Additionally, the NCAA defines two recruiting times when no recruiting can take place: quiet period and dead period.

The **quiet period**, according to the NCAA (2004), refers to a two to four week period when all recruiting inquiries by the college or university must temporarily stop. The recruit may initiate contact on their own with the collegiate athletic program, but the institution is not allowed to initiate the contact with the individual.

Finally, the **dead period** is when an athletic department staff member is barred from making any contact with prospective student-athletes. This includes: in-person recruiting contact, conducting talent evaluations on-or-off-campus, and official or unofficial visits. The dead period essentially prohibits all contact by the institution with the high school student-athlete including alumni and athletic boosters. In 1987, the NCAA barred all contact by alumni and boosters of athletic programs with high school prospects (Bailey & Littleton, 1991; McQuilken, 1996) during the recruiting process’ dead period.

**Telephone Calls**

Contacting a prospect by phone has some of the strictest enforcements associated with its regulation (McQuilken, 1996). The NCAA added restrictions to phone calls to prospects after
stories of unfair usage began to surface (McQuilken, 1996). In some cases, prospects were called by professional players during the halftime of televised football games (such as the Superbowl) (McQuilken, 1996). In other instances, well-known college coaches (football and basketball) would call at half-time of their games in order to create more excitement and pressure on the recruit as the prospect began to picture him or herself in that locker room at half-time (McQuilken, 1996).

The current legislation as it pertains to phone calls restricts who can call the prospective student-athlete, and the time of day, number of phone calls, and the general content of the conversation (McQuilken, 1996). Even though there are stipulations as to when a recruiter can contact prospects, McQuilken (1996) suggests that the recruiter obtain clearance from their compliance office to call prospective student-athletes on the institution’s behalf.

Offers and Inducements

The NCAA prohibits any authorized offerings of gifts to prospects (McQuilken, 1996). This rule dates back to the days when the distinction between a professional and an amateur was clear cut: professionals were paid but amateurs received no more than tuition, room, board, and books (McQuilken, 1996). There are advocates that support inducements for student-athletes, but the movement has only resulted in miniscule compensation beyond tuition, room, board, and books (McQuilken, 1996). The NCAA prohibits the following inducements: employment for relatives, gifts of clothing, cash, merchandise, loans, and free or reduced housing off campus (McQuilken, 1996). Additionally, the NCAA does not allow scholarship student-athletes to be employed during the academic year (fall and spring semesters) (McQuilken, 1996).

The recruiting process for prospective student-athletes is complex and complicated. There is a great burden placed the student-athletes as they attempt to understand the rules and
regulations of the process. Not understanding the recruiting process as proposed in this research, may adversely affect how the student-athlete chooses a college. For female student-athletes, the recruiting process can even be more difficult as they may be faced with less access to institutions that sponsor their sport (i.e., softball, volleyball, lacrosse, etc.), fewer scholarships and collegiate programs that have smaller budgets to recruit female student-athletes (Sperber, 1990).

Women in College Athletics

As the NCAA expanded its role and regulations with increasing emphasis on males, women were not considered to be of similar importance. Football, basketball and baseball had always been considered the primary concern for the NCAA and since they were played only by men, then consequently the organization only focused on men (NCAA, 2004). Yet the number of women in intercollegiate athletics grew over time and their supporters started to raise questions as to why the NCAA did not include women sports and more importantly who was protecting women athletes in colleges and universities. The adoption of Title IX in 1972, part of the Higher Education Act, prohibiting sex discrimination in education, changed the emphasis placed on women’s sports by colleges and universities (NCAA, 2004). Women were now at the forefront of a decade of change (NCAA, 2004). Both colleges and high schools began to add women’s sports in their athletic programs because of Title IX and became the catalyst for change in the future of college athletics.

While the NCAA continued to research the possibility of adding women’s sports to the association, a new group was formed to regulate women’s athletics. In 1971, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was established as an alternative to the NCAA. By acting as a counter organization to the NCAA, the AIAW identified as their focus the entire development of the woman athlete and not just her athletic performance. The AIAW served as a
springboard for more rapid change within the administration of collegiate sports. The AIAW was developed for women and by women. Initially the AIAW began as an educational association with close relations to physical education; it also sought to avoid the problems men’s athletics were encountering. According to the NCAA (2004), the AIAW permitted women to transfer and play immediately at their chosen institution, but they prohibited athletic scholarships and off-campus recruiting.

Although Title IX was officially enacted in 1972, Congress installed a six year time period for secondary and post secondary schools to comply with the new regulations. It was not until 1978 that the true understanding of the ruling became a perceived threat to college and university athletic programs that were not in compliance. Between 1972 and 1978, the AIAW flourished and added member institutions at a staggering rate. The NCAA initially viewed the AIAW as insignificant and focused its efforts on lobbying Congress to repeal Title IX because of the damaging impact that it could have on college athletics (NCAA, 2004). At the same time, the AIAW worked with colleges and universities to develop programs and processes specifically for women athletes. During the 1980’s, most athletic programs hired or designated new personnel for women athletes, including: assistant and associate athletic directors, recruiting staffs, and even trainers. Title IX at least at the outset was working even though the NCAA was not happy about its outcomes.

The rules and regulations of the AIAW, especially those regarding financial aid, transfer and recruiting – were far different from the NCAA (NCAA, 2004). As the AIAW began to increase its member institutions, and increase budgets, it began offering athletic scholarships (NCAA, 2004). It was not until the AIAW established their first national championship for women’s sports that the NCAA took notice of the AIAW’s power. Although colleges and
universities had dual-membership in both the NCAA and the AIAW, there had only been one source of money to split when it came to national championships and television contracts. The AIAW had become legitimate as they created a national championship and signed a television contract with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Due to this success, the NCAA began to strongly consider adding women’s championships (NCAA, 2004). The idea that the NCAA would host national championships led to questions of which championship would be recognized as official and more importantly, which organization would govern women’s athletics.

At the AIAW’s January 1980 convention, the members requested a 5-year moratorium on discussion of who would govern women’s athletics. They also asked the NCAA and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) to also refrain from complicating the discussion during that 5-year time period (NCAA, 2004). Unfortunately, at the 1980 annual convention of the NCAA, members from Division II and Division III institutions voted to hold women’s championships in five sports – basketball, field hockey, swimming, tennis, and volleyball (NCAA, 2004). This adoption led to the beginning of the NCAA representing women’s athletics. Subsequently, the NCAA then began to consider plans on how to totally govern women’s athletics.

The NCAA began to publicize a full “governance plan” which would expand the NCAA Governing Council to include four members, designate committees to coordinate women’s championships in all sports and provide equal governance of women’s athletic events. The discussion to take over women’s sports by the NCAA was heavily contested and debated strongly as the sides were formed along those that supported the AIAW and those that supported the NCAA. The 1981 NCAA national convention was historic as the “full governance plan” initially passed with Divisions II and III but not with Division I (NCAA, 2004). However, a vote
was called again with the Division I representatives and it passed. The NCAA had unified men’s and women’s sports. With the acceptance of the NCAA proposal, the AIAW experienced a decline in participation and consequently ceased to exist while the NCAA enhanced its association by adding women’s athletics.

Title IX Impact

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was created to prohibit sex discrimination in education programs that receive Federal financial assistance (Department of Education, 2005). Nearly every educational institution is a recipient of federal funds and thus, is required to comply with Title IX. Title IX is enforced by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education. OCR has authority to develop policy on the regulations it enforces. In the 1970’s and 1980’s, the NCAA actively sought a conservative application of how the Title IX law should apply to college athletics, whereas presently, the NCAA policy supports Title IX (NCAA, 2004) by ensuring that college athletics is in compliance with the Title IX amendment.

In 1974, the NCAA sought to amend Title IX in order to support intercollegiate sports for men. However, the proposal failed and interested parties, such as the president of the NCAA proclaimed that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare’s (HEW) perceptions of Title IX as expressed could seriously damage the major men’s intercollegiate athletic programs (NCAA, 2004). Through intense lobbying, the NCAA sought to limit the impact of Title IX. The NCAA attempted to sue HEW, suggesting that the HEW was reaching beyond its boundaries in its attempt to implement Title IX legislation in athletics (NCAA, 2004). The NCAA was found by the courts to have insufficient legal standing, thus ending that body’s attempt to maintain its pre-eminent status in college athletics (NCAA, 2004).
In 1978, a private institution supported by the NCAA, made claims that their institution did not comply with Title IX because the school did not receive federal funding (NCAA, 2004). With assistance from the United States Supreme Court, Title IX made a potentially huge impact on intercollegiate sports because the High Court ruled that provisions of Title IX did apply to private institutions albeit only the departments that were receiving federal funding. This ruling narrowed the interpretation and placed a limitation on intercollegiate athletics. However, in 1988, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Restoration Act, requiring that all institutions that receive federal funds directly or indirectly had to abide by the Title IX amendment (NCAA, 2004). For women in sports, Title IX was an advantage that allowed for greater access to all of the benefits collegiate athletics could offer. Yet, it would take years for the development of recruiting women in athletics to become a commonplace occurrence on most college campuses (Salter, 1996).

For athletic programs, OCR developed an Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Interpretation that was issued December 11, 1979 (cited in NCAA, 2005). The 1979 Policy Interpretation remains a current policy. The Title IX statute does not reference athletic programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, athletics program requirements are specifically addressed in the Title IX regulations as such:

No person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, be treated differently from another person or otherwise be discriminated against in any interscholastic, intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics offered by a recipient, and no recipient shall provide any such athletics separately on such basis (cited in Department of Education, 2005).

Also, the athletics scholarships, according to the Title IX regulations are addressed as this:

A recipient [institution] that awards athletic scholarships or grants-in-aid, must provide reasonable opportunities for such awards for members of each sex in proportion to the number of students of each sex participating in interscholastic or intercollegiate athletics (cited in Department of Education, 2005).
Title IX, in the view of many, enhances athletic programs and gives individuals the opportunity to receive scholarships for their athletic endeavors. Without the assistance of Title IX, women’s athletics possibly could still be suffering today.

Colleges and universities wishing to remain compliant with the NCAA were forced to add athletic teams and programs for women (NCAA, 2004). Their recruiting methods to get “decent” athletes were less than organized and very informal (Salter, 1996). Coaches recruited the female athletes through the high school coach who then convinced the student-athletes’ parents that this college was a good decision (Salter, 1996). Salter (1996) continues to suggest that essentially, much of the college choice process was taken away from the female student-athletes as they were coerced into a college by outside individuals. Though the inclusion of women student-athletes was established with Title IX enactment, since that time they have experienced a college choice process different from those that are not athletes (Letawsky et al., 2003).

Evolution of Women’s Athletics

The expansion of women in collegiate athletics has risen significantly as women’s basketball has gained in popularity and acceptance (Suggs, 1999). The formation of the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), increased television markets for women’s basketball and nationally televised Division I participation has given the female collegiate game more exposure than before. The WNBA has provided a post-collegiate option for female basketball players which has placed a greater emphasis on the performance of prospective WNBA stars while in college. Additionally, television ratings for the Women’s Basketball Final Four tournament coverage has increased and provided more viewers to the sport due in large part to the role of individuals involved – both players and coaches (Farrow, 2005). Furthermore, the
yearly success of college programs such as the University of Tennessee, Duke University, the University of Connecticut and others has led to greater emphasis on the importance of women’s basketball. For example, women’s basketball at the University of Tennessee ranks first in overall attendance with well over 200,000 spectators every season and hosts almost as many spectators as that university’s men’s basketball team every season. As the interest grows in women’s basketball, undoubtedly the recruiting process for women student-athletes will change ultimately affecting the process by which high school women student-athletes decide on which college to attend.

As explained above, the emphasis placed on women’s collegiate athletics specifically basketball has increased tremendously. Likewise, the emphasis on recruiting the best talent for collegiate programs has become a concern for elite and not-so elite level programs alike. Yet, it is only recently that women’s basketball has become significant in collegiate sports. Thus, the recruiting process and factors related to the college-choice process for women has not been explored. While this study aims to provide insight on the factors related to college choice for student-athletes, specifically women student-athletes, it is prudent to discuss research related to the college choice process and models used to explain college choice.

**College Choice Models**

Research related to student college choice has been examined by diverse methods, assumptions, and varied theoretical perspectives (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Subsequently different methods, models and processes exist to ultimately explain the factors related to and steps taken by students deciding on which college to attend. Ranero (1999) suggests that the college choice process refers to the factors that influence an individual’s decision as to what college to apply to and eventually attend. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper
(1999) suggest four forms of theoretically based approaches or models for examining the
college-choice process: 1) economic models; 2) status-attainment models; 3) information-
processing models, and 4) combined models.

Economic models of college choice focus on the assumptions students make regarding
the cost benefits of college and the social and educational outcome related to the investment in
college by the individual (Bishop, 1977; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Paulsen,
2001). Status-attainment models examine which variables and factors are more interactive in the
final college choice decision (Boyle, 1996; Hearn, 1984; Hossler, Vesper, & Braxton, 1999;
Stage & Hossler, 1989). Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) posit that information-processing
models incorporate the information gathering process as the main component of the college
choice decision.

Another model that has been used to describe the college choice process is the combined
model. Generally, combined models use the characteristics of the economic, status attainment,
and information-gathering models of college choice to describe the college choice process
(Clark, 1993; Coleman, 1987; Huber, 1984; McDonough, 1997; Stinchcombe, 1990). There are
four theoretical college choice models that are generally classified beneath the combination
umbrella category that are widely used to study college choice. These models are a combination
of ideas from the theoretical perspectives of economics and sociology based on theories set forth
by Jackson (1982); Hanson and Litten (1982); Hossler and Gallagher (1987); and Chapman

The Jackson Model

The Jackson model (1982), a combined model for college choice, has three stages: 1)
preference; 2) exclusion; and 3) evaluation (see Figure 1). In the preference stage,
Jackson (1982) groups factors that focus on the related nature of the primary factors related to college choice.

**Preference stage.** In the preference stage, the academic achievements of students demonstrate the strongest correlation with students’ educational aspirations (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Thus, as students excel academically, they will visualize an institution that best suits their level of academic accomplishment. Additionally, other factors such as the students’ aspirations, social context (i.e., surroundings, peers, background) and family background are essential factors in the preference stage. The socioeconomic status (SES) and level of parental education are major factors related to family background and relate significantly to the student developing a list of potential colleges.

**Exclusion stage.** The exclusion stage utilizes economic theory to exclude choices of the student’s decision as to what college to attend. Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) suggest that exclusion factors students might consider would be location, cost, or academic quality of the institution.

**Evaluation stage.** Once the student reaches a decision, the third stage of Jackson’s model is reached, the evaluation stage. During this stage the student evaluates the remaining colleges to
make the final decision of what institution to attend. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) contend that although the model is suggested to be grounded in theory, Jackson fails to disclose how the initial institutional sets are formed.

Jackson’s Model of College Choice (1982), though theoretically sound, does not explore the additional factors related to the student-athlete. For example, although in the preference stage, Jackson includes *academic achievement* as a factor related to preference, it could be argued that the students’ *athletic* performance should be considered as well. Jackson’s model places primary emphasis on factors external to the student, such as family background and social context, with only slight regard for the students’ personal attributes other than academics.

*The Hanson and Litten Model*

Another combined college choice model was provided by Hanson and Litten (1982). The Hanson and Litten (1982) model advances the Jackson model in one significant way; it is the recognition that the college choice process is a continuing one.

![Figure 2 - The Hanson and Litten Model (Hanson & Litten, 1982)]
The process occurs in five steps: 1) having college aspirations; 2) beginning the search process; 3) gathering information; 4) sending applications; and 5) enrolling at the college (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Furthermore, these five steps are divided into three stages: 1) the decision to participate in postsecondary education; 2) the investigation of the colleges and the development of the colleges in the consideration set; and 3) the process of applying and enrolling. Hanson and Litten (1982) identified a wide array of variables that affect the college choice process in their model: 1) background characteristics; 2) personal characteristics; 3) high school characteristics; 4) and college characteristics (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999).

According to Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999), the goal of the Hanson and Litten (1982) model is to present in context the external and internal variables specifically related to the choice process. For example, college choice will be dependent upon the variables related to the process at the time that they occur. Likewise, the background characteristics are the student’s parental income, their education, race, and gender. When taken together, internal influences include the personal characteristics of the student, such as: academic ability, class ranking, and self-image. External characteristics central to the final choice include: high school attributes related to the student’s social experience, their curriculum, and programs they were involved with. Additionally, the college characteristics considered external include: financial considerations of the college, the programs offered at the college, and the response received from student questionnaires. Hanson and Litten (1982) proposed that separately the aforementioned factors mean little unless depicted in combination and sequence of each other. Most of these stages influence the decision of the student to enroll in postsecondary education.

In reference to student-athletes, the Hanson and Litten model (1982) demonstrates only one aspect of the college choice process. The model does not depict any institutional
expectations of the student during their recruiting process. The specific process a student-athlete explores while engaging in a college choice process may include some variables that are not relative to the experiences of non student-athletes. For example, a highly recruited student-athlete may interact with the athletic department at a prospective school more frequently than any other recruiting office at a given institution. The Hanson and Litten model (1982) does not demonstrate how the athletic department of the institution interacts with the athlete. Although largely comprehensive, this model does not address the college choice process relative to student-athletes.

The Hossler and Gallagher Model

The Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of student college choice was developed in an attempt to deconstruct the explanation of the college choice to its barest form. As the model is sociological in nature, it is suggested to provide a simple approach to a complex topic (Figure 3). The Hossler and Gallagher model explains the college choice process in three stages, focused primarily on the decisions and thought processes of the student: 1) predisposition; 2) search; and 3) choice.

![Figure 3 - The Hossler and Gallagher Model](Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

The predisposition stage is a point where the student makes a decision to attend college rather than taking alternative paths to gain status, such as work or military service (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). The predisposition stage is similar to educational aspirations of other models, yet the emphasis is placed on the decision to go to college rather than the intent to go to college. The predisposition stage is presented by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) to include
background factors such as family influences, the SES of student and involvement of the students’ social network and other external characteristics that would assist in the decision making process.

In the search stage, the student is exploring many options, yet is unaware of the college choices available (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper, 1999). This is a period where the student is seeking information about college opportunities available to them. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) assume that the student is searching for institutional characteristics important to each individual student as well as identifying institutions that portray favorable attributes (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), this stage is considered the most important stage of the college choice process. During the search stage, students are expected to consider many college options and develop a list of colleges that suit their specific needs (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). This list is dynamic and ever-changing as students rank the options available to them from each institution.

The final stage of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model is choice, where students go about the task of making tangible steps towards attendance in college (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). In this stage, students complete applications, schedule visits and perform the necessary steps in order to solidify their final decision from the list of schools previously selected (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

In analyzing this model, as it relates to student-athletes, the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model appears too simple for use in the context of this study. This model’s lack of overall exploration of the institutional characteristics was similar to the shortcomings of the Hanson and Litten (1982) model. Both models appear to present college choice decision making as a process that lives independently of the collegiate characteristics that may influence the final
decision. For a student-athlete considering a college or university, the institutional characteristics are central to the final decision as the student-athlete may consider other variables in their selection of which college to attend. Therefore, the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model is too limiting to support the college choice process of student-athletes.

The Chapman Model of College Choice

The Chapman (1984) model of College Choice (Figure 4) suggests that the student’s college choice is influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with a series of external influences (Chapman, 1981). The student characteristics as a broad term include: the socioeconomic status (SES), aptitude, level of educational aspirations, and the high school performance related to Chapman’s model (1984).

![Figure 4 - Chapman’s College Choice Model (Chapman, 1984)](image)

**Student Characteristics**

*Socioeconomic status.* Students from families of varying levels of socioeconomic status (SES) explore higher education at different times in their lives and internalize the selection process differently (Cross, 1971; Tillery & Kildegaard, 1973; Trent & Medskar, 1969). For
example, students with a high SES are more likely to attend a 4-year institution because they are more likely to have been exposed to college as an option earlier in their lives rather than later (Tillery, 1973). Conversely, a student from a low-SES family may only consider collegiate options later in their high school experiences and may not be fully prepared to begin a college search since many others in the surrounding community may not have college experience or aspirations. In many cases, a student of low SES will not be aware of the options available or the relative costs involved.

The impact of a low-SES is important when students consider the costs of college. As family income has as much to do with institutional cost and financial aid, the lack of monetary contribution from the family limits the realistic options of attending college (Chapman, 1981). Therefore, SES sets a precedence that influences attitudes and behaviors of students seeking a college to attend.

*Aptitude.* The student’s high school achievement and performance on college aptitude tests correlate with college admission influences (Chapman, 1981). Nolfi (1979) suggests that students enroll in institutions with other students of the same aptitude. Work by Nolfi (1979) indicates that “the attractiveness of educational alternatives first increases with the average quality of other students enrolled in them, peaks at a point where average ability of the student in question, and then falls with further increases in average quality” (cited in Chapman, 1981, p. 493).

*Level of educational aspirations/expectations.* Although educational aspirations and expectations are different, they both influence student’s college choice (Chapman, 1981). Chapman (1981) defines expectations as what a person perceives he or she will be doing or have completed by a certain time. This type of determination involves reality and judgment of the
student’s future. Aspirations are wishes or desires expressing an individual’s hopes about the future (Brookover, Erickson, & Joiner; Erikson, & Joiner, 1967).

High school performance. According to Chapman (1981), “High school is one of the more explicit bases of which colleges accept or reject students” (p. 494). As colleges recruit students, they promote and advertise for certain students with class rank and a high school GPA to attend their institution (Chapman, 1981). In turn, prospective students utilize this information in judging whether the college would be interested in them (Nolfi, Fuller, Corazzini, Epstein, Freeman, Manski, Nelson and Wise, 1978). High school performance may also trigger other responses to the student that helps shape their college choice. For example, if the student excels in academics, they may be encouraged by others to pursue college. Moreover, the student with higher academic ability may be more apt to receive college advising by a counselor and information related to scholarship attainment (Chapman & Gill, 1980).

Factors such as influences from family and friends, the cost of college attendance, academic program availability, and recruiting strategies of the college and high school administrators are considered external to the college choice process in the Chapman (1984) model of college choice. These factors become significant when they are combined with the student characteristics.

External Influences

The external influences of a college going student are significant as the student will attempt to shape their decision based on personal biases and feelings (Chapman, 1981). The external influences can include family, friends, college characteristics, costs, location and other factors which will be interpreted differently by each student experiencing the college-choice process.
**Significant persons.** Chapman (1981) suggests the influence of the groups operate in three ways: 1) their comments regarding college shapes the expectations as to what college is like; 2) they may offer direct advice as to where the student should attend college; and 3) in regards to friends, where a friend decides to go to college may influence the student’s college choice.

**College characteristics.** In Chapman’s model (1981), the relatively fixed college characteristics are cost, location, programs available and campus environment. With the exception of location, these characteristics fall in the realm of the institution to effect and modify over time, but they are factors that are relatively stable in the college choice process (Chapman, 1981).

**Cost.** Cost is probably the most important factor in the student’s college choice process rather than which college to attend (Tillery & Kildegaard, 1973). In the Chapman model (1981), there appears to be a lack of a relationship between family income and cost of college (Mundy, 1976) while sorting colleges on the basis of family income. However, other research suggests that cost does make a difference in the college choice process. For example, Davis and VanDusen (1975) found that cost was one of the primary reasons why students did not select a college they were considering. Though there is conflicting research about the influence of cost, Chapman (1981) suggests that 1) cost be considered in the larger model of college choice and 2) cost cannot be considered separate from financial aid influences.

**Location.** Over 50% of entering freshmen attend colleges within 50-miles of their home; and 92% attend colleges within five hundred miles of their home (Ihlaneledt, 1980). High ability students with no financial need may consider a wide range of colleges in various locations across the country, whereas low ability students who need financial aid may consider institutions closer
to their permanent homes (Chapman, 1981). Students with many colleges in their community are more than likely to live away from home than students in a rural area that do not have a college in their community (Chapman, 1981).

**Availability of program.** Students select colleges they believe can provide the necessary courses needed for graduation or to secure a job (Chapman, 1981). Chapman and Johnson (1979) and Davis and VanDusen (1975) suggest that the courses that are available and the benefits they can gain from the courses are characteristics that students look for when choosing a college.

**College efforts to communicate with students.** Up to this point, the Chapman model (1984) explored the characteristics related to students and their college choice process without considering the aspects relative to the college selecting the student. Included in the selection process as Chapman (1981) details is the idea that the university must be a factor in the college choice process as it is indicated in the model. Specifically, the college’s efforts to communicate with the student includes all activities related to the marketing of the student. The performance of the communication process by the college to attract the student, as Chapman (1980) indicates, acts as an external factor with little or no measures of effectiveness. Additionally, the research related to the effectiveness of college marketing techniques is still unsubstantiated in truly uncovering the overall worth in attracting the student to the institution.

It is from the perspective that there is a presumption of collegiate experiences that Chapman (1981) attempts to connect the personal characteristics of the student and the external factors related to making a college choice decision that assist in solidifying the final choice. In doing so, Chapman (1981) presents an additional stage or factor called *general expectations of college life* as a prominent aspect of his model of college choice.
General expectations of college life. In an attempt to capture all of the other aspects related to the college choice process, Chapman (1981) included an additional stage that relates to the presumptions or preconceived notions students consider when choosing a college. Whether the expectations or presumptions are based on experiences of family members, friends, classmates or popular culture, Chapman (1981) considers those expectations as an important factor in the college choice process. High school seniors considering college are visualizing a version of their college life that is far from reality and less than satisfying once they are actually in college (Stern, 1970). The disparity between the imagined college experience and the real college experience was identified by Stern (1970) as the “freshman myth.” While some authors have speculated on the beginning of the unrealistic expectations of students, the research is unclear as the source (Chapman & Baranowski, 1977; Stern, 1970; Tillery, 1973).

Aspiring college students making a college choice decision are most likely to seek out necessary information to make a rational decision regarding their college choice and ultimately narrow down their selection of college attendance. Likewise, the student is also more likely to compare their own academic performance against the criteria for admissions to the college to determine whether or not a particular institution would even consider the student as a viable candidate for admission (Chapman, 1981). The type of “dual-selection” whereas the student selects the college and at the same time, the student assumes the level of interest the college would have in the student is central to understanding the primary relationship that exists between the student and the college choice process framed in the Chapman (1984) model. Additionally, Chapman (1984) suggests that the expectations of how life will be once the student is enrolled in college is directly rooted in the intermingling of the external factors and student characteristics related to the college choice process.
In analyzing the Chapman (1984) model as it relates to student-athletes, there is an appearance that the model best fits the college choice process of a student-athlete. Chapman’s (1984) model utilizes external factors that student-athletes may consider related to an institution and the student characteristics that the institution may seek in a student-athlete. Although this model attempts to relate to the college choice process of a student-athlete, it eliminates a significant portion of the college choice process for a student-athlete – the considerations of the athletic department. For example, if the athletic department does not indicate an interest in the student-athlete, there is a possibility that the student-athlete may not experience the college choice process; therefore, if there is not a consideration by the athletic department, the college choice process of the student-athlete may be similar to a non-athlete.

**Research Studies on College Choice**

The approach students use to choose an institution has been described by many researchers as a three-stage process (Letwasky et al. 2003, McDonough, 1991, Mathes & Gurney, 1985). The process begins with a broad overview of postsecondary education opportunities available to the prospective student, followed by a search for information about possible institutions to form a choice set, and then a final choice phase when the student narrows the choice set down to a single institution (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Making a college choice decision may seem easy and predictable; but for many students, the choice is idiosyncratic and unpredictable (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Unpredictable may be the word one can use for student-athletes considering college attendance. Even more so, as a student-athlete undergoes the college choice process, their decision may occur early in their senior year or later, after high school graduation. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) suggest that among students who attend college, some cannot remember when they did not think of attending college, while
others decided as late as a week before the beginning of the academic year to attend college. For the student-athlete who always planned to attend college, their most important decision is which college to attend or what athletic department is offering the best athletic opportunity. Just as important as the college or university offering an opportunity to play, the student-athlete must also consider the factors related to college choice that all college-bound students consider. Even in the context of college selection, the student-athlete does not escape the necessity to contemplate the factors of a particular college that force them to make comparisons from one college to the next.

Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) suggest there are several studies that examine the different aspects of student college choice. Various institutional characteristics consistently have been found to be influential during this process, such as cost, distance from home, availability of financial aid (especially grants), and selectivity. Also, student characteristics considered, such as gender, race–ethnicity, parents’ education, income, parental preferences, religion, and academic ability (Paulsen, 1990), in a student’s college choice. Even more so, institutional studies have attempted to research the determining factors that affect the decision to attend a postsecondary education institution (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989).

Also, additional studies (Ekstrom, 1985; Gilmour, Dolich, & Spiro, 1978; Jackson, 1978; Tillery, 1973) have examined the postsecondary educational aspirations of high school seniors, the relationship between postsecondary education and high school counselors, and the impact of financial aid on postsecondary education decisions regarding what institution to choose.

Several studies have explored student college choice and have typically used quantitative methods to model how students select an institution to attend (Chapman, 1983; Hamrick & Hossler, 1996; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Litten, 1991; Litten, 1982; Paulsen,
1990; Welki & Navratil, 1987). Other scholars have focused upon particular variables including, but not limited to academic ability, family income, institutional rankings, financial aid and scholarships, and other variables that are common to most students entering college (e.g. Flint, 1992; Hossler et al., 1991; Hossler & Foley, 1995; Leppel, 1993; McPherson & Schapiro, 1994; Moore et al., 1991; Muffo, 1987; Wanat & Bowles, 1992; Weiler, 1994,). Although the previously mentioned studies were primarily quantitative in nature, the qualitative studies related to college choice are limited (Bers & Galowich, 2002; McDonough, 1991, 1994; McDonough, McClafferty, Fann, 2002) and are not specific to student-athletes.

As McDonough (1997) suggests, the college choice process can be lengthy, extending back to the earliest impression of aspirations about post secondary educational opportunities available to students. Hamrick and Hossler (1996) suggest that the overall research literature on student college choice often links aspirations to attend college with an interest in status attainment. The aspirations to attend college, as presented by Hamrick and Hossler (1996), can also be linked to the contributing factors which either assist or hamper students in the college choice decision making process. It may be impossible to identify all of the factors directly or indirectly related to the college choice process of any student. Yet in the college choice models discussed earlier in this chapter, the most common factors related to college choice include external and internal background characteristics such as: socioeconomic status, family, academic needs, academic ability, religion, peers and high school counselors, extracurricular activities, college access, and college characteristics. By examining each of the background factors related to college choice, a true understanding of the models developed to explain college choice can become more meaningful.
**Background Characteristics**

Students beginning their postsecondary education have, at least theoretically, an almost overwhelming range of options. They can choose a baccalaureate program at a 4-year college or university, a certificate or an associate’s degree program at a 2-year college, or a vocational program at a 2-year or less-than-2-year institution. They can attend a local institution, living at home or on their own; choose an in-state institution away from home; or move to a completely different part of the country. Depending on where students choose to enroll and live for college, the decision weighs heavily on characteristics they may need to consider in the different colleges of their interest.

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) conclude that background characteristics such as the students’ educational aspirations and their willingness to attain a college education influence students desire to attend college. Likewise, the student may choose to attain a college education with the intention of improving their post-collegiate lifestyle in contrast to the lifestyle of their parents. The choice a student makes regarding which college to attend is heavily affected by family, school, and societal expectations about appropriate alternatives (McDonough, 1997). Subsequently, the background characteristics of the student becomes an important factor to consider when discussing the college choice process.

**Socioeconomic Status.** The socioeconomic status of the student’s parents may influence the students’ choice to participate in making decisions of a college career. According to McDonough, Antonio and Trent (1997), the socioeconomic status is comprised of variables that include the parents’ highest educational level, occupational, and income levels. In previous studies on college choice, the findings indicate a positive correlation as the parental income levels increase, the likelihood of their children attending college increases (Hossler, Braxton, &
Coopersmith, 1989; Jackson, 1982; Mortenson, 1989; Rouse, 1994). For low-income students, obtaining the financial aid they needed was especially likely to be a very important consideration (45 percent reported that it was very important, versus 20 percent of other students) (Choy & Premo, 1996). Furthermore, other studies confirm that students from low-income families are less likely than other students to participate in postsecondary education (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Perna, 2000). Yet, Freeman (2005) indicates that students who have low SES still want to attend college and they also receive the support to attend college from their parents. Freeman (2005) continued to say that in order to build on the desires of the parents with low SES, it is crucial that students be provided with appropriate information early on so that they do not lose the desire to continue their education. Not only is the SES of the student and the family important in the college choice process, but the family understanding of the benefits of college becomes a key factor in the college choice process (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999).

*Family.* Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) identified parental encouragement as an interactive approach for the student and parent to share their views about their hopes and dreams for a future in college. However, parental support is usually identified as the financial or monetary support parents can provide (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). As parental encouragement is an extension of the dreams of the student, the college attendance of the parent becomes relative to the chances of the child attending college as well (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Additionally, siblings of the college-bound student or other family members increases the chances that the student will attend (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Tillery (1973) reported that the more contact prospective students had with other individuals who attended college they would be more than likely to attend or consider attending college.
Freeman (1998) found that when the parents of African-American college-bound students were not able to assist in the decision-making process of college attendance, others in the community and extended family offered a comparable level of assistance during the decision process. “Education is the traditional opportunity through which black families find their place in life. And having found it, they replicate their experience again and again through their children” (Billingsley, 1992, p. 172). Additionally, Freeman (1998) found that the family variable of college choice was prevalent in the college choice process to African-Americans, especially those who were not as financially prepared to pursue college. Finally, the way in which African American families value education has everything to do with the way they influence their children’s college choice process (Freeman, 2005).

**Academic needs.** The academic needs of students influence high school achievement and performance on the aptitude tests associated with college entrance examinations (Chapman, 1981). Since both, achievement and performance, are used widely by colleges in describing their range of competitive applicants and, eventually as a basis for screening applicants, students often self-select the colleges to which they apply to reflect what they believe the college will consider. In addition, students tend to select institutions with enrolled students of similar aptitude as themselves (Nolfi, 1979).

According to the NCAA (2005), student-athletes are provided with the academic requirements necessary for them to be eligible for acceptance or enrollment at a 4-year institution. Therefore, upon successfully acquiring the necessary academic requirements, student-athletes have the opportunity to consider a college that normally would not consider them for college enrollment.
Academic ability. The academic ability of the student is a primary factor in their college choice process as they have been conditioned to value academics and excel in this area (Hossler et al., 1989). Students who prove to be better in the classroom are more inclined to receive encouragement from those close to them and are also encouraged to aspire towards a college career (McDonough, 1997; Weiss, 1990).

Religion. Maguire and Lay (1981) suggest that involvement in a church is a probable factor in the college choice decision making of students in the selection of which college to attend. The involvement in church and church related activities have been shown to increase the likelihood of students attending college after high school (Maguire & Lay, 1981; Tierney, 1984).

Peers and high school counselors. McDonough (1997) asserted that students who had few friends with college aspirations had less expectation to attend college themselves. Additionally, students who considered themselves to be “loners” or had few friends did not exhibit the same college-going attributes as others who were socially connected (McDonough, 1997). An earlier study conducted by Tillery (1973) found that the more contact students had with other students who wanted to attend college the greater the influence each student had on the other to attend college.

High school counselors were not the primary source of college decision-making information, but they did influence the college choice process if the student had limited adult influence in their lives (Freeman, 1997). McDonough (1997) found that high school counselors were crucial in developing the necessary skills and resources so that students could make an informed college choice decision.

Extracurricular activities. Several studies (Hossler & Stage, 1992; Stage & Hossler, 1989) posit that high school students who are involved in clubs (i.e. beta, yearbook, drama,
etc...), organizations (student council, choir, band, etc...) and organized athletic teams are more likely to have aspirations to attend college. Although their aspirations may not be fulfilled at the desired level, they will possibly attempt to participate in some sort of organization at their chosen college.

**Institutional-specific characteristics.** The specific characteristics of an individual institution are important when students are making the decision to apply and attend a postsecondary institution (Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Dahl, 1982; Litten, Sullivan, & Brodigan, 1983; Stewart et al., 1991). Characteristics such as special academic programs, financial aid availability, tuition costs, general academic reputation/general quality, location (distance from home), size of community/school, and social atmosphere have all been found to be significant in the final decision making process (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). Findings reported in a study by Chapman (1981), indicated that the institution’s academic reputation, size, type (public/private), and location, were the most influential factors in the college choice process. Likewise, Absher and Crawford (1996) found that in their study of community colleges that most significant factors of the college choice process was: 1) the quality of education; 2) the type of academic programs; 3) the community in which the college is located; 4) the qualifications of faculty; and 5) the overall reputation of school. Chapman and Jackson (1987) concluded that institutional quality was the single most important factor in the college choice process. Additionally, the institutional characteristics that were most compelling across a broad cross-section of college seeking students seemed to support previous results.

For example, a study using the 1989–90 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:90) data found that the following were very important considerations for students in selecting an institution: the institution offered the course of study they wanted (73 percent); they
could live at home (51 percent); they were able to go to school while working (51 percent); the institution had a good reputation (50 percent); and the institution was located close to home (43 percent) (Choy & Premo, 1995). Except for the institution’s reputation, older students (24 years or older) were more likely than younger students to consider each of these factors important.

The student college choice process is a complex phenomenon that has not yet been sufficiently researched using theoretical models and questions (Barnes-Teamer, 2003). Furthermore, the unique factors related to the student-athletes’ college choice process have gone largely overlooked in terms of in-depth research studies. The small number of studies that do exist attempted to quantitatively demonstrate the college choice process of student-athletes without exploring the individual choice process of student-athletes. Moreover, the few studies of the college choice process of student-athletes have primarily utilized econometric models and results suggest only the broadest correlation between sports and admissions (Toma & Cross, 1996). However, many of these research studies were beneficial in shaping this qualitative study.

Research Studies on College Choice and Student-Athletes

Limited studies (Letawsky et al., 2003; Mathes & Gurney; 1985; Toma & Cross, 1998; Slabik, 1995), have investigated the factors that influence the decisions of student-athletes to attend college. These factors include the degree program offered by institutions, the head coach, the academic support services, the type of community where the institution is located, the institution’s sports traditions, and the difference in scholarship availability. In understanding the factors that influence student-athletes to select a college, research has found that academics and athletics are the primary factors in the college choice process of student-athletes.
Academics. Letawsky et al. (2003) found that the degree options offered to student-athletes by the university was the most important factor in the college choice process. An earlier study found that academics was considered the most important factor compared to the athletic environment of the institution (Mathes & Gurney, 1998). Freeman (2005)

Athletics. Many factors can be related to the athletic aspect of the college choice process for student-athletes. Specifically, Mathes and Gurney (1985) found the presence and influence of the coach was a major influence for male athletes entering college. However, the impact of the coach, in some cases did not outweigh the influence of academics (Mathes & Gurney, 1985). This factor was primarily dependent upon the type of institution – if the institution was highly recognized for academics rather than athletics.

Letawsky et al (2003) found that student-athletes viewed their relationship with the athletic department relative to whether or not the student-athlete liked or disliked the institution. In essence, a university could appear to provide the best atmosphere for students. Yet, the institution still could not be considered by the student-athlete in the college choice selection if the athletic department appeared to be non-caring or non-responsive (Letawsky et al., 2003). In addition to the athletic department, Gabert, Hale, and Montalvo (1999) found that the head coach was identified as the most influential factor at Division I institutions. The institution’s sports tradition was another factor student-athletes considered while undergoing the college choice process (Slabik, 1995). Additionally, Letawsky et al (2003) found that the purposeful and deliberate attempts by the university to recruit a student-athlete were significant in the final decision to attend a particular institution. However, not all findings coincide with those reported within the college choice literature for non-student-athletes. For example, high school students often report that friends have a significant influence on their college choice process (Mathes &
Gurney, 1985), but teammates, as an influence, was reported as one of the lowest factors pertaining to the college choice process of student-athletes (Letawsky et al., 2003).

*Other factors.* Factors associated with “Big-Time College Sports”, for example, television exposure, perceived future professional opportunities, and the opportunity to play were considered low-ranked factors in the college choice process of student-athletes (Letawsky et al., 2003). Although the factors of participating in collegiate athletics at a prestigious institution were considered to be a deficit in the college choice process, Mathes and Gurney (1985) suggested that scholarships were a factor considered by prospective collegiate student-athletes. In agreement, Freeman (2005) reported that African-American student-athletes choosing to participate in higher education is basically for financial resources, such as, how will school get paid -- scholarships through athletics or academics. Slabik (1995) reported that the factors associated with the college choice process of student-athletes were personal-base, school-base, and ethnic-gender ratios. The personal-base factors were related to family, friends, and outside support while undergoing the college choice process. School-base factors, include factors that the institution is able to offer the student-athlete, such as academics, program options, and graduation rate. Finally, the ethnic-gender ratio examined factors that did not correlate to the college choice process of student-athletes, such as the ethnicity of the institution or the male-female ratio of the college.

As the literature suggests, the depth and breadth of research related to college choice is extensive as it is detailed. The approach by previous research on college choice has isolated a particular factor or set of factors that will ultimately provide a rational explanation of why the student made the choice he/she made and what variables assisted in making the final decision. Likewise, the focus of this research is to examine the variables that could possibly be most
influential to the final college of choice. In order to present the basis for this research, the next section will outline and explain the conceptual framework for this study.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 5) was primarily influenced by Chapman’s (1984) Model of College Choice and Jackson’s (1982) College Choice Model. Each model was significant in providing insight into the individual factors related to college choice, yet neither were adequate enough to specifically explore issues related to the college choice of student-athletes. Moreover, these models were unidirectional in nature. Chapman’s (1984) model of college choice influenced the conceptual framework by emphasizing the institutional factors related to the college choice process. Whereas, Jackson’s (1982) model of college choice introduced the significance of external characteristics related to the college choice process. The development of the conceptual framework (Figure 5) consisted of three intersecting circles or spheres that represent the factors student-athletes may consider when selecting a college to attend.

Sphere A represents the student considerations that are unique to the individual student-athlete making the college choice decision. The factors related to the student considerations (A) are individual in nature and vary from student-to-student, yet may prove to be important to the overall development of the college choice process for student-athletes. The external considerations, sphere B, represent the factors related to the student-athlete’s college choice process that may influence the student in their decision making process, but the students themselves have little or no control on how those factors impact the process. Finally, sphere C, athletic department considerations, represents additional factors related specifically to student-athletes.
The athletic department considerations, sphere C, represents the primary addition to the conceptual framework. The selection of the student-athlete and the level of interest the athletic department exhibits in the prospective student-athlete may prove to be influential to the college choice process. While Jackson (1982) did include the external considerations of the institution, the particular interest of the athletic department and related factors, such as the athletic ability of the student-athlete, the need for a student-athlete with a particular skill, etc., may represent a critical external factor that differs from the experiences of non-student-athletes making a college-choice decision. When taken individually, each of the spheres represents a specific aspect that may prove to be crucial to the understanding of the college choice process of student-athletes.

Figure 5 - Student-Athletes College Choice Process
Sphere A - Student Considerations

For the student-athlete experiencing the college choice process, their personal traits and attributes are considered when attempting to identify an institution to attend. Insomuch as the individual factors related to the student characteristics could be collectively relevant, it is when considered individually that they may prove to be influential to the student-athletes’ college choice process.

Socioeconomic status. The socioeconomic status (SES) of the student-athlete can be conceptualized as a catalyst that influences other attitudes and behaviors related to the college choice process. SES is more appropriately tied to the parent’s influence in the college-choice process as the parents are the primary income earners in the household (Chapman, 1981). It is possible that the income level of the student-athlete may influence the types of colleges the student will consider, regardless of athletic aptitude. For student-athletes, the consideration of athletic scholarships as the primary method to pay for college may be a factor in which college a student will attend.

Scholastic aptitude. Scholastic aptitude in high school is most often “showcased” to college admissions boards by way of college standardized tests such as the ACT or SAT (Chapman, 1981). The weight placed on such tests allows students to self-select or deselect from certain institutions based on their individual test scores (Chapman, 1981). Student-athletes must consider their own academic aptitude in the choice process as they will more than likely be required to meet the entrance minimums of the institution of their choice.

High school GPA. An additional primary criterion (other than ACT/SAT scores) considered by college admissions boards is the high school grade point average of the student, which is also an indicator of scholastic aptitude (Chapman, 1981). For a student-athlete, the high
school GPA, similar to the ACT/SAT score, can be linked directly to their ability to participate in collegiate athletics at an institution of their choosing.

*Educational aspirations/expectations.* The educational expectations and aspirations of a student-athlete may be an important factor in the overall college choice process. The expectations of the student refer to what they perceive will happen while in the institutional environment whereas aspirations refer to the individual’s desires and wishes for the future (Chapman, 1981).

*High school athletic success.* Student-athletes who have the athletic ability and experience moderate to high levels of success may incorrectly assume that they will be a top recruit based on their self-evaluation and aspirations to participate in collegiate athletics even though they may not possess the academic ability to be successful in college (Peltier & Laden, 1999). Although the certification process for student-athletes is much more regulated than in the past, the thought that a student-athlete can be solely an athlete and not a student is still a perception shared by many high school students wishing to attend college (Sperber, 1999).

*Athletic aspirations/expectations.* Considering that student-athletes are the focus of this study, it is important to include their athletic aspirations and expectations while making a college choice decision. Whether the desire to play collegiate athletics is related to influences from parents, friends, classmates or the media, most high school student-athletes would like to be involved in college athletics (Toma & Cross, 1998). Many student-athletes look at the success of a collegiate athletic team (such as winning a national championship or sending players to the professional level) as a catalyst to try and achieve the same level of success (Toma & Cross, 1998). Hence, teams that are nationally ranked could be more appealing to prospective college students as they consider which college to attend.
Sphere B - External Considerations

The external considerations of the student-athlete are specific influences on the college choice decision making process in which the student has no control. These individual factors could contribute as influential controls in the way a student-athlete determines if indeed they are making the best decision of which college to attend.

Required ACT/SAT score. As mentioned in the Student Considerations sphere, the ACT/SAT score of the student is just as important as the minimum ACT/SAT score accepted by the institution (Chapman, 1981). The college choice consideration set may be limited for student-athletes who do not meet the minimum ACT/SAT requirements. Therefore, a prospective student-athlete seeking to attend a college without the necessary ACT/SAT requirements may not receive the attention they need in order to be recognized for collegiate athletics at their prospective college consideration.

Significant persons. When selecting a college, Chapman (1981) suggests that students are strongly persuaded by the comments and advice of their friends and family. Toma and Cross (1998) found that student-athletes making a college choice decision were more likely to participate in collegiate athletics if there were significant persons close to the student-athlete who participated in collegiate athletics themselves. In addition, Chapman (1984) asserted that high school personnel such as the coach, guidance counselor and athletic director could influence the college choice process (Chapman, 1984).

College characteristics. Location, cost, campus environment, and the availability of desired programs are included in the conceptual framework as fixed college characteristics (Chapman, 1981). Student-athletes may view these characteristics in order to make a decision about the institution they would like to attend.
Location. The location of the institution is a factor that student-athletes may consider. For example, if a student lived in a rural area, they may be less likely to attend an institution in an urban area or large city (Chapman, 1981).

Cost/financial aid. The cost element of the college choice decision is relative to the ability for the student-athlete to receive a scholarship to cover their cost of attendance. As Chapman (1981) discussed, the cost of attendance may in fact not be as significant (considering financial aid such as a scholarship or grants), if in fact the family background of the student does not readily appreciate the gain from attending college. Specifically, the student-athlete may view an athletic scholarship as the only way to attend college and discount other sources of financial aid at comparable institutions if the institution is unwilling to offer a scholarship.

Campus environment. Although overall student-athletes may be more socially involved on campus with other athletes or other school sponsored teams, they still may be more likely to isolate themselves from the rest of the college campus. Therefore, when considering the college outside of athletics, the prospective student-athlete may seek to choose a prospective college based on the environment of the school, such as, a central location, urban versus rural, city versus rural, etc… The popularity of an institution’s environment based on the involvement of collegiate athletics may influence the prospective student-athlete to choose the institution.

Availability of desired academic program. Chapman (1981) confirms the notion that academic study availability is a significant factor in the choice process. However, Chapman (1981) also indicates that the choice of major is directly related to the career aspirations or long-range goals of the student.

College communication with student-athletes. Chapman (1981) included in his study of college choice the influence of institutions attempts to interact with students (whether by mail,
person or electronic communication). Although the NCAA has restrictions on the amount of contact the athletic department has with the potential student-athlete, those same restrictions do not apply to the normal process of recruiting that occurs through the office of admissions or other recruiting departments.

**Athletic scholarship availability.** Schneider (2001) reported that most athletic scholarships do not cover the entire cost of college for many student-athletes. If not, then many student-athletes considering college may question how they will afford the remaining balance of funds needed to attend college. The availability of an athletic scholarship may influence student-athletes decision relative to which institution they enroll.

**College coach.** The coach and the reputation of the coach are factors student-athletes consider in making a decision about which college to attend (Letawsky et al., 2003).

**Sphere C – Athletic Department Considerations**

Within this conceptual framework an aspect is included which is not found in other models of college choice. There is a distinct college choice process that exists from the perspective of the athletic department as the student-athlete is evaluated for their athletic ability versus the needs of the athletic program. The institution’s interest in the student-athlete is an important aspect of the choice process as the student-athlete may not be able to consider an institution that does not have interest in the student.

**Athletic ability.** The athletic ability of the student-athlete weighs heavily on their opportunities to participate in athletics. Without the desired athletic skills, the student-athlete may not be included as a possible candidate for recruiting and may not fulfill a need that the athletic department has for the student-athlete making their college choice.
Needs. An athletic department may evaluate offers to individual student-athletes based on need and available vacancies on the team (Toma & Cross, 1998). Some institutions may recruit to fill vacant positions as needed (e.g., due to attrition, graduation or non-eligibility), while other institutions may recruit individuals for the future in order to prepare for later vacancies.

Recruiting process. Since the recruiting process is mandated strictly through the NCAA, there is little room for interpretation related to recruiting potential collegiate student-athletes. Yet the timing of the recruiting, style of recruiting and personnel involved in recruiting may indicate the amount of interest the athletic department has in the recruit. Overall, the recruiting process takes place throughout a student-athletes high school career, particularly if there are early indications that the student will be valuable to a collegiate team. However, colleges start the official recruiting process at the end of the student-athlete’s junior year of high school.

Contact. The institution is allowed to have a certain amount of contact with the prospective student-athlete during the recruiting process. This form of contact is what possibly keeps the student-athlete interested in the institution. The contact occurs frequently, especially if the prospective student-athlete is considered to be a highly recruited athlete.

Financial ability. The financial ability of the institution weighs heavily on the interest they may have in a student-athlete to participate in collegiate athletics. Financial ability of the institution is considered as the ability to offer a prospective student-athlete a scholarship whether the scholarship is a full or partial scholarship offer. Some institutions may not have the ability to offer a prospective student-athlete a scholarship – full or partial – initially, but they still may want the athlete to attend their institution. Whether the scholarship offered is full or partial, the
financial aid ability the institution is able to offer a student-athlete will determine the quality of
the athlete recruited.

Sphere Intersections – 1, 2 and 3

The intersection of each of the spheres of consideration (1, 2, and 3) represents the
incomplete overlap of the factors without evidence that there is a complete compatibility of each
sphere of consideration. One could argue that the factors overlap, yet they only represent an
incomplete snapshot of the college choice process for student-athletes. For example, the external
considerations overlap with the athletic department’s considerations and not the student’s
considerations would discount the importance of the student-athlete’s individual characteristics.
Each of the intersections (1, 2, and 3) do not represent any influence of the missing sphere and
therefore may suggest that the missing sphere is not relevant to the college choice process. Yet it
is the contention of the researcher that the integration of all three spheres of consideration (D)
represents the college choice process of student-athletes.

Intersection D – College Choice Process

The convergence of all three spheres, sphere D, represents the possible college choice
process of student-athletes who are considering opportunities beyond high school. For the
purpose of this study, the development of a model of college choice for student-athletes will take
into account all of the factors and relative subcategories as the smaller pieces of a larger puzzle.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

Student-athletes deciding on a college to attend have many factors to consider, which may include coaches, playing time, and most importantly their own academic programs at the prospective institution (Letawsky, Schneider, Pederson, & Palmer, 2003). Are these the only factors student-athletes should consider? To what extent do these factors influence the college choice process for student-athletes? These questions cannot be easily answered because there is little research on student-athletes’ college choice process. Thus, the goal of this study was to explore the college choice process of female student-athletes.

In this chapter, the methodology used to explore the research questions is discussed. Primarily, this chapter discusses the qualitative research method, the phenomenological approach, the research questions, the role of the researcher, and the choice of data collection methods. Finally, this chapter addresses the data analysis methods, trustworthiness, and the delimitations and limitations related to this study.

Research Questions

In order to gain insight into the reasons why student-athletes, specifically female student-athletes, decided on the chosen college of enrollment, I used several research questions to explore their college choice process. The primary research question for this study was: How do student-athletes perceive their college choice process? Secondary questions were:

1. How do external factors influence student-athletes’ decision about where to attend college?

2. How do personal characteristics influence student-athletes college choice decision?
Rationale for Using a Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research has been described as naturalistic, interactive, humanistic, emergent, and interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Moreover, Miles and Huberman (1994) explains that qualitative data collection is more descriptive and richer than quantitative data collection. The characteristics (naturalistic, interactive & humanistic, emergent, interpretive) described by Marshall and Rossman (1999) for qualitative research can be applied to this study.

Naturalistic

There is a “naturalist” emphasis on qualitative research (Wolcott, 1982), which is defined as the actual setting as to where data is directly collected (Bogdan & Bilkan, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the “researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local actors “from the inside” through a process of deep attentiveness of emphatic understanding and of suspending or “bracketing” preconceptions about the topics under discussion” (p.6). Creswell (2003) suggests that this form of research allows the researcher to develop some level of understanding about the participant(s) or setting where their experiences evolved. The “naturalistic” aspect as described by Marshall and Rossman (1999) are reached in this study because of the attempt to discuss the college choice process with the participants at their chosen college.

Interactive and Humanistic

Creswell (2003) defines interactive and humanistic aspects of qualitative data collection as the involvement of the researcher with the participants of the study so that rapport and credibility can be built. However, the researcher does not interact unnecessarily with the participants (Creswell, 2003). In addition, qualitative researchers utilize open-ended interviews, observations, and e-mails as the actual method of data collection to assist in maintaining rapport
and credibility. The individual, face-to-face interviews between the researcher and the student-athletes regarding their college-choice process satisfies the humanistic and interaction qualifications (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

**Emergent**

Qualitative research is emergent rather than prefigured (Creswell, 2003). However, because emergence is the foundation of theory building, a researcher cannot arrive to a study with preconceived concepts, a design, nor a theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In qualitative research, the research questions may change and be refined as the researcher learns what to ask and how to ask certain questions of the participants (Creswell, 2003). Since there is little data to support the process student-athletes undergo in making a college choice, the data collection process will allow some flexibility to meet the criteria of a qualitative study.

**Interpretive**

Qualitative research can be interpretive, meaning the researcher is interpreting the data being collected (Creswell, 2003). Wolcott (1994) notes that by “developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making interpretations of conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating lessons learned and offering questions to be asked” (cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 182). Additionally, the interpretive form of qualitative research presents data from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2003).

In using interpretive research for this qualitative study, the researcher will demonstrate how data was interpreted when the findings are discussed. By combining the naturalistic, interactive, humanistic, emergent, and interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) aspects of
qualitative research within this study, the focus became clear as to the importance of this type of research methodology to the data being collected. As student-athletes are considering a college, they are not just investigating the institution for its academic reputation; they are also considering the athletic environment of the institution, such as the college coach’s reputation (Letawsky et al., 2003). By using qualitative research, my intent was to present the perspective of student-athletes by gaining insight into their perceptions pertaining to their college-choice process.

In previous studies related to the college choice process of student-athletes, quantitative approaches were used (e.g. Letawsky et al., (2003); Espinoza, Bradshaw, Hausman (2000). Although those studies were informative, they did not truly uncover the experiences of student-athletes in a “first-person account” of their college-choice process. In attempting to answer the research questions, the use of qualitative data provided more opportunity to hear the participants’ voices. Secondly, participants’ settings (such as family background and home environment), lifestyle, outside influences, friends and family are not fully known when using the quantitative data collection method, whereas it can be displayed qualitatively (Creswell, 2003). Each of the above mentioned factors are important as it relates to this study in identifying the college-choice process for student-athletes. The use of qualitative data collection was important to this study because it allowed the participants’ “voices” to come through and in relationship to their attitudes and opinions regarding their college choice process. Since qualitative data presents more than just raw numbers, as in a quantitative study, it was a better choice for data collection in a study such as this one (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
Rationale for Using Phenomenological Study

Gay and Airasian (2000) explained that there are seven methodological approaches to qualitative research; specifically case study, ethnography, ethnology, ethnomethodology, grounded theory, phenomenology and symbolic interaction. Even though the different methodologies related to qualitative research are similar, the selection of an appropriate style for a research study is an important decision for any researcher (Creswell, 2003). For the purpose of this investigation, the phenomenological approach was used to explore the college choice process of student-athletes. The development of phenomenology as a methodology was based on thorough investigation of its purpose and usage within qualitative data collection.

The intent of phenomenology is to “understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (Bogdan & Bilkan, 2003, p. 23). Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggested phenomenological study has its roots in the origination and exposition of lived experiences of participants. However, since all qualitative research is intended to reveal meaning of events that have happened to individuals, the development of the personal reflections of the researcher on the topic are included in the final outcome of analysis (Laverty, 2003).

Additionally, Creswell (2003) defined phenomenology as a method in which “the researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants” (p. 1). Likewise, in understanding the “lived experiences”, indicates phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying small numbers of subjects through extensive and prolonged interactions in order to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, cited in Creswell, 2003). Nieswiadody (cited in Creswell, 2003) indicated that in utilizing phenomenology, the researcher “brackets” his or her own experiences in order to establish an understanding of the participants in the study.
“A phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experiences of the phenomena under study” (Glesne, 1999, p. 7). The usefulness of phenomenology comes from the ability of the researcher to interact more with the participant and internalize the results from the interview, specifically the unimportant events of ordinary life (Laverty, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In essence, “the researcher will “re-examine” these taken for granted experiences and perhaps uncover new and/or forgotten meaning” (Laverty, 2003, p.4). Likewise, my intent was to examine the feelings and overall perceptions student-athletes have about the recruiting phenomenon they experienced while deciding on which college to attend.

The Role of the Researcher

The primary role of a researcher is complex. The researcher must work at identifying a meaningful topic, formulating appropriate research questions, and developing a comprehensive research plan (Creswell, 2003). Even more so, qualitative researchers look for involvement of their participants in data collection and seek to build rapport and credibility with the individuals in the study (Creswell, 1994). As a researcher, I reflected on personal feelings I possessed about this study and how my feelings could influence the study. It is my hope that I performed this research inquiry with minimal bias.

Having a professional and personal involvement in athletics stimulated my research interest in student-athletes; therefore, I needed to consistently monitor my behavior and how it affected participants. Maintaining an appropriate level of self-awareness helped me to present a professional image as a researcher. In the role of researcher, it was my responsibility to gain entry into the research site, secure access to participants, and take steps to ensure participant confidentiality.
As the researcher I was responsible for deciding what to observe, explore, and analyze during data collection and analysis. In this position, I needed to continuously challenge myself to put my own ideas and assumptions aside while I allowed the true experiences and perspectives of the student-athletes to emerge. To manage this, it was important for me to inform the reader of my assumptions, my unique contributions, and how subjectivity would be managed.

**Researcher’s Assumptions**

“It is virtually impossible to obtain totally unbiased and perfectly valid data in a qualitative research study” (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 225); therefore, by stating my biases and expectations for the outcomes of this research project, I hoped to increase my awareness about what I expected to find.

My expectations may be the result of my prolonged exposure to the literature associated with this study and my own personal experiences as a student-athlete. My primary assumption regarding this research project was that student-athletes encounter a different college choice process than non-athletes. Moreover, research indicated (Letawsky et al., 2003) that factors related to the college choice selection of student-athletes varies from students who are non-athletes. My second assumption was that as student-athletes undergo the recruiting process to pursue their athletic endeavors, their college choice decision changes as they interact with the institutional environment and speak with other students, administrators, and faculty at the institution. Therefore, the more institutions the student-athlete comes in contact with, the more difficult the college choice process may become.

Due to the recruiting process student-athletes undergo as they participate in high school athletics, I anticipated the college choice process began for college-bound student-athletes much sooner than a non-athlete because of the national prestige of the athletic environment. I also
believed that the factors for choosing a college may be based on additional athletic factors that student-athletes may take into consideration. I aimed to keep my biases in perspective in order to allow the participant’s perceptions to be depicted with accuracy. In order to control my biases from the participant’s perceptions, I kept a reflexive journal to reflect on my feelings and perceptions in an attempt to focus on the participant’s feelings.

Unique Contributions

This research was inspired by my desire to incorporate my passion for athletics, my experiences as a former student-athlete, and my professional experiences as a basketball coach at a community college. Having had the experience of being a student-athlete who had to make my own college choice, I am in a unique position to understand the perceptions of student-athletes’ college choice process. To review the experiences that led me to the proposed research topic, I will begin with my undergraduate experience and conclude with how these experiences informed this study.

My college choice process began when I was a freshman in high school. I received recruiting letters from different colleges and universities. The opportunity to attend a major university was exciting and at the same time overwhelming. I was thrilled that someone other than my family and friends were impressed with my athletic talents. I had the opportunity of a lifetime – to receive an education and play my favorite sport. Throughout my years in high school, I did not give serious thought about the college I would attend, but I knew I was going to college. I also knew that I had to be academically ready in order to play collegiate basketball.

During my senior year in high school, more and more recruiting letters arrived, inviting me to visit their campus and speak with individuals at the institution. I wanted to make a decision early in the year so that I could enjoy my last year of high school. Although at the time
I was not quite sure of what factors I should consider in the college choice process, I narrowed my decision to two institutions. Each of my final two choices had excellent academic programs and an excellent women’s basketball program. Attending either of those institutions would fulfill my goals of receiving a top-level education while playing basketball at a reputable university. My lack of knowledge regarding the recruiting process and how to make a good college choice turned out to be a weakness for me.

The institution I wanted to attend did not offer me a full scholarship immediately as I entered college but they did offer the opportunity to walk-on with the possibility of receiving the full scholarship my second semester of college. Although tempting, I decided to consider other options. My second college choice offered me a full scholarship and gave me some time to make a final decision. Unfortunately, I did not make a decision quick enough.

I “waited” on my first college choice for any change in their offer, but the change never occurred. My second college choice signed other players while I was waiting and ultimately they did not offer me a scholarship either. Because of my lack of knowledge about the recruiting process, I did not sign a scholarship offer with either institution.

As my senior year was ending, I was limited to which college I could attend. I eventually made a decision to sign with an institution that I had not considered previously. The university I chose was a 4-year institution, but the basketball team was not a prestigious program. Although I did not have the outcome that I had hoped, now looking back on my personal experiences, I realized that I was not prepared to make such a decision or manage the process. I did not have the high school personnel (coaches and counselors) to assist me in my decision-making process. My parents were involved to a lesser extent in my college choice process, but they did not fully understand what I should be considering and what questions I should ask. In beginning the
process, I considered factors that were central to the decision, such as prestige of the institution, the level of basketball competition, and my family, yet I was not able to truly integrate my personal decisions into the process because I just did not know how. Relative to my experiences, one can assume that there are other high school student-athletes that have similar experiences.

Just as my final decision was made for me because I had no options – I had no where else to go, so I chose an institution that was my last resort. Likewise, I speculate there are others who must navigate the college choice process without the proper information regarding the process and also end up with no options. As any college-bound student is choosing a college, the student-athlete may have other factors to consider that may or may not be discussed on the high school level. The aspirations to attend a certain institution may not materialize to be the student-athletes’ college choice based on the needs and wants of the prospective institution.

As a former head coach at a community college, I recruited student-athletes. In some cases, I witnessed student-athletes who, like me, waited too late in the recruiting process and had to settle for any institution that would allow them to play. Many of these student-athletes were exposed quickly to the recruiting process at a Division I or nationally ranked institution and did not have the information necessary to consider all of their options that they too often “fell out” of consideration with their “dream schools.” My contact with these same students often occurs after they have spent months trying to figure out the recruiting process. Subsequently, these students are now willing to play anywhere that offers a scholarship and the opportunity to play their sport.

My unique perspective gives me the opportunity to proceed as a researcher in an area that has received little attention – student-athletes’ college choice process. My personal and professional experiences as a former student-athlete and a current head coach challenge me as a
researcher, doctoral student, and an individual as I attempt to recognize and minimize my biases for this study. Examining unusual or contradictory results for explanations; ignoring such “outliers” may represent a bias in the researcher’s perspective toward the more “conventional” data collected (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Therefore, to minimize my bias for this study, I made a concerted effort to obtain the participants trust and comfort, thus providing more detailed, honest information. I also used verbatim accounts of the interview by collecting and recording data with a tape recorder and writing detailed field notes.

**Ethical Considerations**

As the researcher anticipates data collection, they must respect the participants and the sites of the research. The development of ethical considerations for the study must be central in all actions regarding the research design, data collection, data analysis and final reporting (Creswell, 2003). There are many ethical issues that arise during this stage of research; therefore, the principles of the researcher are on display as the study represents the positive and negative, right or wrong aspects of the researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

In any study, the researcher must develop a set of ethical guidelines based on personal intuition and adherence to policies set forth by the sponsoring organization such as a foundation or university (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Rossman and Rallis (2003) and Bogdan and Bilk (2003) present four major perspectives to consider when developing ethical guidelines for the research study. These four perspectives are: ethic of consequences, ethic of rights and responsibilities, ethic of social justice, and ethic of care.

The **ethic of consequences** asks the researcher to consider how this study affects the participant during and after the study has been completed (Bogdan & Bilk, 2003; Rossman &
The ethic of consequences relate to this study in a manner that gave the participants the opportunity to contribute to this study with a full understanding that their information will possibly assist future research and prospective student-athletes.

The **ethic of rights and responsibilities** considers that the researcher must at all times remember that the individual is a human being and they should be treated with the same rights that the researcher would ask for themselves (Bogdan & Bilkan, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In relating ethic of rights and responsibilities to this study, the participants were given the right to refuse to be involved and the right to stop participation at any time.

The **ethic of social justice** indicates to the researcher to consider the voice that has not been heard, to consider all sides of the story and explore all available viewpoints related to the issue being analyzed (Bogdan & Bilkan, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Comparatively, for this study, the participants’ experiences and feelings were portrayed through their words. The researcher presented all information provided by the participants in a confidential and respectful manner.

The **ethic of care** admonishes the researcher to not remove themselves from the idea that we as human beings share some level of care for our fellow human beings (Bogdan and Bilkan, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Therefore, the researcher disguised information that may possibly lead to recognition of the participants and institutions in the study. To be specific, the investigator could not allow harm to fall upon the participants so that a level of researcher objectivity could be maintained. These four ethical considerations create an overarching level of responsibility for the researcher to the subjects.

Along with the ethical considerations of participants, there were two additional issues of **informed consent** and **the protection of subjects from harm** that this study addressed (Bogdan &
Bilkan, 2003). The study design and purpose were explained in writing and verbally to the participants regarding the procedures for all phases of the study including the collection before the interview began. Participants were asked to sign a consent form before the interview began indicating that they understood the purpose of the study and any risks associated with their participation. To preserve privacy and confidentiality of subjects, a pseudonym was assigned to each of the study participants as well as the institution that they currently attend. Next, I ensured that all audiotapes of interviews, transcripts, and signed release forms were kept in separate locations to protect participants’ identities.

Pilot Study

During the Spring of 2005, a pilot study was conducted to identify if there was a need to explore the college choice decision making process of student-athletes. Gay and Airasian (2000) suggest that the pilot study is an effective way to identify any weaknesses in the research and how to effectively strengthen them prior to beginning a full study. The subjects in the pilot study were informed that their voluntary participation in the research could result in the decision to further investigate the college choice process for student-athletes. Participants were asked questions relative to the main research question which was: How do student-athletes perceive their college choice process? Secondary questions included:

1. How do external factors influence student-athletes’ decision about where to go to college?
2. How do student characteristics influence student-athletes college choice decision?

Pilot Study Participants and Site

Four student-athletes representing various collegiate sports were interviewed in order to identify unique experiences while deciding on which college to attend. The four participants
were all student-athletes at an urban, Research Intensive (Carnegie, 2005) institution in the Southern part of the United States. The pilot study institution, Hunter University, had an average undergraduate enrollment of 13,000 students and participated in athletics on the highest level of collegiate sports or Division I (NCAA, 2005). Data was analyzed to capture the essence of participant responses (Creswell, 2003).

Pilot Study Results

Three themes resulted from the pilot study which aided in the development of the current research. The three central themes related to the athletic aspirations of study participants, their academic preparation and the athletic administrators. Student-athletes in the pilot study who underwent the college choice process understood the need for academic preparation in high school in order to participate in college athletics. Even though a prospective student-athlete may participate in the college choice process, they may not understand it completely without prior knowledge of the process itself. Although, student-athletes in the pilot study felt they participated in a ‘true’ college choice process, they also realized that there was a lot they did not know until they enrolled at Hunter University.

The participant’s athletic aspirations were important in understanding how athletic participation influenced the need to follow the academic requirements that would eventually influence their pursuance of college. Likewise, in the pilot study, the student-athletes allowed their athletic aspirations to be an incentive for them to investigate the necessary requirements for academic eligibility in collegiate sports.

Finally, data found that athletic administrators (high school and college) influenced the college choice process of participants by providing support, information, and resources in order to assist them in making a decision. Additionally, the athletic administrators were vital to
student-athletes as they explained the intricacies of the recruiting process. Particularly, college athletic administrators, provided detailed information that assisted student-athletes in their college choice process. The pilot study explored the college choice process of student-athletes and ultimately informed this proposed study.

Site and Sample Selection

The success of any research project is related to the strength of the data collection procedures and all factors related to that activity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Accordingly, the selection of both the site and the participants for this study is an important factor in regards to the strength of the data collected. In this section, I discussed site selection and the process for choosing participants for this study.

Site Selection

The selection of the sites for this study provided an opportunity to explore the research questions in different settings (Glesne, 1999). Two sites were selected for this study to gain a broad overview of the college choice process of student-athletes at different institutions.

To preserve the identity of the two sites for this study, the athletic conference to which they belong will be called the “All-Pro Conference” (APC). Both institutions were classified as Research Extensive (Carnegie, 2005) universities; they were also nationally ranked institutions in their primary (revenue generating) sport, according to the NCAA (2004). As noted in chapter two, the ranking of institutions in relationship to the number of sports offered, student enrollment and revenue generated from each athletic program assists in the segmentation of the NCAA’s athletic conferences (NCAA, 2005). Division I (DI) is the highest level of conference ranking and institutions who meet certain criteria, such as a minimum student enrollment, participation in football, and attendance records at football games are members (NCAA, 2005). The APC is a DI
conference in the NCAA and has consistently ranked high in strength of recruiting class and outcome in the Women’s Final Four Basketball tournament.

The All-Pro Conference has a 70+ year history of athletic achievement and academic excellence. Overall, the APC finished in the top two in 10 of its 20 sponsored sports for men and women and in the top five in 15 of the 20 sports for men and women in 2005 (NCAA, 2005). Seven women's basketball teams of APC were invited to the NCAA Tournament with two teams advancing to the Finals. Student-athletes, both male and female, excelled in the classroom with 1,954 earning recognition on the APC Academic Honor Roll. Therefore, based on the success of the student-athletes, academically and athletically, who participate in the All-Pro Conference, the two institutions would be excellent institutions to explore the college choice process of student-athletes.

*Site Profile: South Ball University (SBU).* SBU is a 140+ year old institution with undergraduate degree programs and extensive graduate research opportunities designed to attract and educate highly qualified students. SBU is the flagship institution of the state and one of only 25 universities nationwide to hold both land-grant and sea-grant status. Land-grant is defined as a college or university that has been designated by the state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 (NASULGC, 2005). Sea grant is defined as a college or university that conducts scientific research, education, and extension projects to enhance the practical use and conservation of coastal, marine and Great Lakes resources (NSGO, 2005).

SBU is a large institution with over 27,000 undergraduates and at least 5,000 graduate students attending each semester. There are more female (54%) than male (46%) students at SBU, with 23% of the student population identifying themselves as an ethnic minority. Given
the size and age of the institution, support for SBU’s athletic programs is deeply rooted in all parts of the state in which SBU is located.

The SBU athletic department offers 10 different women sports. There are seven team sports - basketball, soccer, softball, swimming/diving, track and field, cross country, and volleyball – and three individual sports - golf, gymnastics, and tennis. At SBU, women’s basketball is considered to be the major female sport due to the revenue generated from the team. There are 8 different men sports at SBU of which six are team sports – baseball, basketball, football, swimming/diving, track and field, and cross country – and two are individual sports – golf and tennis.

Site Profile: Justice University (JU). Similarly, JU offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional education. Undergraduate students are admitted competitively, and each first-year class includes the best-prepared students from the state and around the world. JU has a total campus enrollment that consists of approximately 25,000 students, which is a blend of undergraduate and post-baccalaureate students comprised of 52% women and 48% men.

JU’s athletic department offers 11 different women sports. There are nine team sports - basketball, softball, cross country, rowing, swimming/diving, track and field, volleyball, soccer, and cheerleading – and two are individual sports - golf and tennis. At JU, women’s basketball is considered to be the major sport due to the revenue generated from the team. There are 8 different men sports at JU comprised of six team sports – baseball, basketball, football, swimming/diving, track and field, and cross country – and two individual sports – golf and tennis.
Gaining Access

Permission to conduct research is necessary for any investigative methods or procedures requiring interaction with human subjects (Creswell, 2003). Accordingly, applications were filed with each of the selected sites’ Institutional Review Board office in order to contact students on their campus. An application for permission to include human subjects in the research was also filed with the University of New Orleans for the research to be considered protected by the Institutional Review Board. Once approval was obtained from all Institutional Review Boards, I began the process of contacting a gatekeeper.

According to Bogdan and Bilkan (2003) the “first problem to face in fieldwork is gaining permission to conduct your study” (p.75). Even though the difficulty is gaining access to the site, qualitative researchers must negotiate a relationship to gain entry in order to conduct the research (Creswell, 1994). Bogdan and Bilkan (2003) identified the term “gatekeeper” as an individual who provides access to the population of possible participants involved in the study. This individual, the gatekeeper, provides support and verification for the researcher to enter the site and contact participants (Creswell, 2003).

The gatekeeper for this study was the women’s basketball operations administrator at each site. The respective gatekeeper at each site had contact with the potential participants and was also the individual most knowledgeable of the student-athletes schedule and availability. Although conventional wisdom suggests that the head coach or an assistant coach would be a logical gatekeeper, the influence of possible coercion from either individual could have unduly influenced the willingness of the prospective participants to participate in this study. Therefore, a formal letter (Appendix A) was sent to the gatekeeper explaining the study. Additionally, I sought from the gatekeeper an opportunity to meet with the potential participants during their
workout session or team meeting so that I could recruit them as participants. Finally, I informed
the gatekeeper that I needed a quiet room so that I would be able to interview the potential
participants without any disturbances.

Selection of Participants

The primary goal in selecting participants for a research study is to identify individuals
that can contribute their unique “voice” to the research in order to add new knowledge (Creswell,
2003). Therefore, in order to enhance this study in conventional methods of qualitative
investigation, I selected my subjects based on developing a homogenous group. To enhance the
homogenous group, I enlisted the purposeful sampling method to identify who would be
included (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Purposeful sampling is defined in a qualitative study as identifying typical cases or in this
case participants that share some similarity in background and experiences (Lincoln & Guba,
1985). Within a homogeneous group, the goal is to select subjects that share some aspects in
order to visualize and identify their similarities even though they are different (Glesne, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the college choice process of female
student-athletes attending a 4-year Division I institution. Participants for this study met the
following criteria: a) be in compliance with NCAA eligibility requirements (partial or full
qualifier); b) be 18-20 years of age female student-athlete; c) will have no more than two years
of college experience; and d) have been offered more than one athletic scholarship prior to
making their final college choice.

Contacting Participants

I contacted the gatekeeper via e-mail (Appendix B) requesting a date and time to meet
with the potential participants (such as a practice session or team meeting) to solicit participation
in the study. The e-mail explained to the gatekeeper what would be discussed with potential participants after the practice session or team meeting. I also informed the gatekeeper that I would be given the potential participants a participation questionnaire (Appendix C) to obtain preliminary data and contact information for the potential participants. I also asked the gatekeeper to provide a room (such as a classroom or unused conference room) for the interviews. Since the gatekeeper is an administrator working closely with the women I planned to interview for the study, he/she was able to identify two days, such as a Thursday or Friday, that would be most effective in attempting to schedule the participants for a 60-minute interview.

At the practice session or team meeting, I explained briefly to the potential participants the purpose of the study, the importance of the data to the overall research project, answered any questions they had and explained the participation questionnaire (Appendix C). The participation questionnaire (Appendix C) served two purposes: 1) to efficiently collect information that was requested of all participants and 2) to assist in “jogging” the memory of the participants for the interview when related questions were asked. Also, the participation questionnaire (Appendix C) allowed the participants to provide information related to where they attended high school, high school GPA and ACT/SAT scores, athletic honors and accomplishments while in high school. Most importantly, participants were asked to identify two choices of dates and times to conduct the interview. Since the gatekeeper had provided me with the dates and times that would possibly work with the schedules of the participants, this information was printed on the participation questionnaire (Appendix C) for selection by the participants.

The intent was to ask potential participants to commit as soon as possible to an interview date and time in order to maximize my contact with them at the team meeting. Additionally,
participants were asked to provide contact information (email and phone number) so that I could remind them of our appointment prior to the interviews. I shared my contact information with the participants in case they had questions related to the study or needed to reschedule their interview time and/or date.

Once the participation questionnaire (Appendix C) was returned and eligibility of participants had been confirmed by the co-investigator, the participants were sent an e-mail (Appendix D) to thank them for their willingness to participate in the study and to confirm their interview date, time and location. Each participant was also sent a consent form (Appendix E) via e-mail for their review. The consent form (Appendix E) outlined the purpose of the study again, explained any risks associated with participation in the study and emphasized the voluntary and confidential nature of the research. The participants was also informed that prior to the interview that I would review the consent form and request their signature.

Four days after e-mailing the thank you letter (Appendix D), the participants was contacted via phone (Appendix F) to confirm receipt of the e-mail and to answer any questions about the study. They were also reminded that the consent form would be reviewed and signed prior to the start of the interview. Participants were called two days prior to the interview (Appendix G) to remind them of the interview.

At the beginning of the interview, each participant was asked to review the consent form (Appendix E) and sign in the presence of the co-investigator for verification. At the beginning of the taped portion of the interview, verbal verification was recorded from the participant that they had read the consent form and were participating in the study voluntarily without pressure. The consent forms were stored in a locked file cabinet in a secure location separate from the location of the raw data collected from this study. The consent forms and transcribed data were never
stored together through the duration of the data collection, data analysis and data reporting processes.

**Rationale for Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable, and has the ability to be explicit in meaning and content (Patton, 1990). In a more general definition, qualitative interviews allowed the researcher to obtain information from the participants through a face-to-face, one-on-one “conversation” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The conversation is the vital part to the interview as the researcher should interact with the participant in order to generate the responses that are central to the study design (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In qualitative interviewing, the researcher is able to interpret the data being presented by the participant and react immediately to statements, feelings, and answers in the same way two acquaintances would react in a non-research related conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

**Interview Guide**

The interview guide was intended to act as a map for the qualitative researcher and for the use of interviews to inform the study as to what topics are important aspects of the discussion (Creswell, 2003). Using an interview guide, according to Patton (1990), provides a systematic way of gathering information and “provides a framework with which the interviewer would develop questions, sequence those questions, and make decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth” (p. 201). For this study, an interview guide was created (Appendix H) to gain insight from participants about the college choice process. The interview questions focused on asking the participants to reflect upon their recruiting experiences during high school.
Other areas that were explored included internal and external influences associated with the college choice process, such as student characteristics, significant persons who influenced their college choice decision, fixed college characteristics, the colleges’ efforts to communicate, and factors regarding their athletic relationship with the institution (e.g., scholarship offer, playing time, etc.)

**Interviews**

Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggested that the purpose of an interview is “to understand the perspective of the participants, probe and clarify data, deepen understanding, generate rich and descriptive data, gather insight into the participant’s thinking and learn more about the context of the participants’ surroundings” (p.180). In maintaining the major points of the purpose of an interview, I explained the process for conducting the interviews for this research study:

1. **Consent** – Prior to the start of the interview, the researcher reviewed the consent form and asked if there were any questions. Subsequently, participants were asked to read and sign the consent form. Each participant was provided a copy of the consent form for their records.

2. **Introduction** – The tape recorder started and I introduced myself and provided an overview of the study. I asked each participant if there were additional questions and began the interview.

3. **Interview Questions** – The interview guide was used to explore and discuss questions related to the study. The questions were presented in order and follow-up or “probing” questions were used to explore significant themes or clarify responses.
provided. Participants were asked open-ended questions, so that the researcher could collect necessary information to analyze data.

4. **Closing** – When an ending point was determined or the duration was nearing 60 minutes, the interview came to a close. At this point, I engaged in “member-checking” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to clarify issues related to statements made by the participant. Member checking is an opportunity to reflect on unclear thoughts for the researcher. After clarifying the participants’ responses, I reminded the participant of the confidential nature of the interviews and the study itself. A final clarification of the study commenced and any final questions were answered and the tape recorder was stopped.

*Field Notes*

Creswell (2003) defined field notes as the observer’s record of what he or she sees, hears, experiences, and thinks about during an interview session; therefore, field notes were used to add a level of depth to the settings of the actual interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Field notes were used as an additional data collection source which provided more detailed insight relative to the interview setting. In addition, I recorded the strengths and weaknesses of my interviews, thoughts, and any other notes after each interview session that may facilitate a more accurate analysis of the data (Bogdan & Bilkan, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994) as well as enhance subsequent interviews.

*Transcribing*

The tapes were transcribed verbatim and field notes were documented at the conclusion of each interview as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). In addition, I used an experienced transcriptionist to transcribe verbatim the interview tapes in order to analyze the data (Gay &
Airasian, 2000). Once the tapes were returned to me from the transcriptionist, I read the transcriptions while listening to the tape recording in order to ensure that all words spoken by the participant were included. I also entered appropriate field notes and other observations that occurred during the interview into the appropriate place on the transcript.

**Data Analysis**

Understanding participants’ perspectives and answering research questions are the goals of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the strength of qualitative data analysis is the power to immediately be involved in data analysis while the study is taking place. The intent is to make decisions early regarding the depth of the study rather than later. Described below are the steps that were employed to analyze data for this study.

**Coding**

Coding is the process of organizing the transcribed information into “chunks” before bringing meaning to these “chunks” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, cited in Creswell, 2003). This procedure involves taking text, data or pictures, segmenting sentences or paragraphs or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (Creswell, 2003). In order to maintain consistency to my research methodology, both interviews and field notes were coded to gain insight into data collected (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

**Analyzing Data Through the Matrix Approach**

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that data matrices act as an organizational tool for the researcher to view the data as a whole versus viewing data in disjointed pieces. The matrix consisted of the coded information and the data chunks classified by the pseudonym of the
participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The intent in using matrices was to find themes across the participants and within the interviews. Creswell (2003) suggested that two or more participants may give the same answer to a question, but the information may not be revealed until the matrix draws the connection. The coded data for this study was placed into matrices to consolidate and examine the data as a collective unit to inform the research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

There are several types of matrices for studies identified by Miles and Huberman (1994), such as time-ordered, conceptually-ordered, and narrative-ordered (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The primary matrix for data analysis in this study was the conceptually-ordered matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This type of matrix served as a major identifier for arranging the data that was collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For concepts and themes that were not evident during the coding process, the conceptually-ordered matrix assisted in identifying those themes. For example, the researcher was able to look at all transcribed information and search for themes that were not obvious, but most importantly identify different information given by the participants.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research depends on various methods for gathering data. Hence, the use of multiple data collection methods, such as interviewing, observing, and a reflexive journal, contributes to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the researcher must demonstrate an atmosphere of trustworthiness so that the reader can determine if the information presented is accurate and worth reading. Further, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit there are four criteria for evaluating trustworthiness of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.
Credibility

Credibility, or the value of truth, requires the researcher to present information that is accurate and represents the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest using field notes, such as the use of a reflexive journal, in order to portray the participant’s mood, tone, and attitude. In addition, the reflexive journal portrayed my perceptions of the participant’s comments. This data may demonstrate some form of subjectivity in this process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, maintaining a reflexive journal allowed me to assess transcribed words of the interview to the setting and descriptions of the participant’s actions.

Transferability

This second criterion of trustworthiness, transferability, refers to the ability for the information presented to “fit” depending on the situation and its context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability assists the reader in making the connection with the data and the findings relative to their own settings. Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that the reader should make their own transferability decisions; however, I believe that the researcher has some responsibility in ensuring the reader can make the connection. In utilizing transferability for this study, the researcher used a “thick rich description” of the data so the reader would be able to relate the findings to other settings (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Dependability

Dependability is the third concept in trustworthiness. The purpose of dependability is to ensure that the study can “stand alone” over a period of time and provide input for future studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This concept makes assumptions that data is true to all aspects of
the study, including the research questions. Additionally, collected and analyzed data should be in alignment with each other in order to support dependability.

To ensure and maintain dependability, I used a peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a recent doctoral graduate, who is familiar with the topic and qualitative data analysis. The dependability concept will ensure the interpretations are based on the perspectives of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Confirmability**

Miles and Huberman (1994) identify confirmability as a level of “objectivity”. The level of confirmability for the study depends on “the subjects and the conditions of the inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994) instead of the biases of the researcher. To ensure confirmability, I used the notes from the reflexive journal that depicted my biases. This provided an adequate record of how any subjective biases were identified in the process of the study and how future research can minimize similar influences.

**Delimitations**

This was a qualitative research study which only included interviews of female student-athletes 18-20 years of age with no more than 2 years of college experience. Additionally, this study only investigated females who participated in collegiate basketball on an athletic scholarship at two 4-year public Division I institutions. This study did not explore other sports (such as individual sports) or older students. Moreover, this study did not explore high school students involved in the college choice process. Finally, the institutions participating in the study were delimited to participation in a prominent conference of the NCAA.
**Limitations**

When considering implications for additional studies or using the findings in practice, there were several limitations of this study that should be considered. The small sample size of this study decreased the generalizability of the findings. This study was not generalizable to all areas of athletics or other institutional types. Additionally, the use of the findings for application to males or another athletic conference may not yield similar findings. However, the findings contributed to the growing research on how student-athletes perceive their college choice process, specifically female student-athletes.

Finally, participation for the study was voluntary and did use a self-selection process; therefore, giving me limited control of how many students participated in the study. The students who self-selected to participate or not to participate might have also introduced bias to the sample due to their personal feelings and dedication to their chosen institution. However, data that was utilized from those students who elected to participate contributes to enhancing our understanding of the college choice process for female student-athletes.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors related to the college choice process and perceptions of student-athletes when deciding which college to attend. Participants of this study were allowed to reflect upon their decision making process and external factors related to why and how they chose their eventual college of enrollment.

The primary research question developed for this study was: How do student-athletes perceive their college choice process? Secondary questions included:

1. How do external factors influence student-athletes’ decision about where to go to college?
2. How do student characteristics influence student-athletes’ college choice decision?

This chapter is organized into two sections. The first section provides pertinent details of the study participants. Additionally, this section will summarize the differences of each of the participants’ background as it related to their collegiate aspirations. The second section will present major themes that emerged from data analysis and reduction. It is within the second section that a true portrait of female student-athletes’ perceptions of the college choice process is illuminated. The distinct considerations related to the process that are central to any student choosing a college becomes more critical when the student is also considering the opportunity to play collegiate athletics.

Participants

Data were gathered from 13, female student-athletes during the Fall of 2005. All of the participants were enrolled at a Division I institution (NCAA, 2005) and received a full scholarship for their participation in women’s basketball. In this study, the selected sites will be
referred to as South Ball University (SBU) and Justice University (JU) to ensure anonymity of institutions and participants.

SBU is a 140+ year old institution with undergraduate degree programs and extensive graduate research opportunities designed to attract and educate highly qualified students. SBU is a large institution with over 27,000 undergraduates and at least 5,000 graduate students attending each semester. The SBU athletic department offers 10 women’s sports. There are seven team sports - basketball, soccer, softball, swimming/diving, track and field, cross country, and volleyball – and three individual sports - golf, gymnastics, and tennis. At SBU, women’s basketball is considered to be the major female sport due to the revenue generated from the team.

Similarly, JU offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional education. JU has a total campus enrollment that consists of approximately 25,000 students. JU’s athletic department offers 11 different women’s sports. There are nine team sports - basketball, softball, cross country, rowing, swimming/diving, track and field, volleyball, soccer, and cheerleading – and two individual sports - golf and tennis. At JU, women’s basketball is considered to be the major female sport due to the revenue generated from the team.

All study participants graduated from a public or private high school within the United States where they participated in basketball on a school-sponsored competitive level. All participants met NCAA eligibility requirements, were at least 18 years old and no older than 20 and had no more than two years of college experience. Moreover, the participants in this study had been offered athletic scholarships from more than one institution. Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of each study participant at SBU and JU, respectively. These tables delineate relevant information regarding academic preparation, family background and corresponding pseudonym. A profile of each participant can be found following each table.
Mary is a 19-year old African-American female who attended a private high school in an urban area of Louisiana. Mary graduated from high school with a 3.3 grade point average (GPA). She received an 18 on the ACT college assessment test. Mary narrowed her scholarship offers to three in order to attend college. Mary chose to attend SBU after having a difficult college choice process. She was unfamiliar with the athletic recruiting process so she did not feel completely comfortable with selecting a college.

Margaret is a 18-year old African-American female who attended a public, urban high school in Georgia. Margaret graduated from her high school with a 3.9 GPA. Margaret took the ACT and SAT and received a 22 and 1080, respectively. Margaret narrowed her multiple scholarship offers to three 4-year institutions. She wanted to experience being away from home, so she decided to attend SBU. Margaret’s academic performance was strong enough to garner an academic scholarship, but her athletic skills were strong enough to be recruited for an athletic scholarship also.
Shannon is an 18-year old African-American female who attended a public, rural high school in Texas with a 5.0 GPA. Shannon received a 17 on the ACT. She narrowed her many scholarship offers to four institutions. Although Shannon felt she could have scored higher on the college entrance exams, she scored the minimum required for SBU and was satisfied with the outcome.

Lisa is a 20-year old African-American female who attended a public urban high school in Georgia with a 3.0 GPA. Lisa received an 860 on the SAT. She considered five institutions after receiving multiple scholarship offers. Although Lisa had the opportunity to play collegiate softball, she chose to attend SBU on a basketball scholarship. Lisa took the SAT several times until the very last moment of eligibility before she was able to successfully obtain the minimum score and receive a scholarship offer from SBU.

Desiree is a 19-year old African-American female who attended a public urban high school in Florida, but transferred to a private high school within the state for her senior year. She graduated with a 2.7 GPA. On her ACT college assessment test, Desiree scored a 17. Desiree narrowed her scholarship offers to three institutions. Desiree changed high schools twice, so her academic performance was not as strong as she would have hoped.

June is an 18-year old African-American female who attended a public rural high school in Florida with a 2.7 GPA. June earned a 900 on her SAT test. She narrowed her scholarship offers to seven and decided to attend SBU to continue her athletic career, but she did not have a long recruiting process period.

Keisha is a 19-year old African-American female who attended and graduated from a semi-private, urban high school in Louisiana with a 2.9 GPA. She earned an 18 on the ACT and
received 10 scholarship offers, all of which she gave serious consideration. Keisha wanted to attend a college where she would get along with the team and create a sense of family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Home State</th>
<th>SAT/ACT Score</th>
<th>Scholarships Considered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>ACT – 20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>ACT – 24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanita</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>SAT – 820</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanna</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>ACT – 24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>SAT – 830</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ashley is a 19-year old African-American female who attended a public, urban high school in West Virginia. She graduated from high school with a 3.2 GPA and scored a 20 on the ACT college assessment examination. Ashley received eight scholarship offers, all of which she decided to consider. Subsequently, she decided to attend JU based on how she felt about the college. She indicated that she made a great connection with the coach through phone conversations and visits.

Jordan is a 19-year old African-American female who graduated from a public, urban high school in Illinois with a 3.7 GPA. She scored a 24 on the ACT. Jordan’s college choice process began early in her career as she began to receive national recognition for her talents. In choosing JU, Jordan, with the support of her family, wanted to attend a college that was known for winning; therefore, she eliminated many colleges right from the beginning. After narrowing
her decision to the colleges she was interested in, Jordan considered five scholarship offers to attend college. Subsequently, she considered scholarship offers from all five institutions.

Whitney is an 18-year old African-American female who attended and graduated from a public, urban high school in Arizona with a 3.3 GPA. She received a score of 24 on the ACT exam. When Whitney was being recruited for college, she narrowed her scholarship offers to five. She initially had difficulty considering JU for college since it was so far away from her home.

Lanita is a 19-year old African-American female who attended and graduated from a public, urban high school in California with a 3.0 GPA. She received a score of an 820 on the SAT college entrance exam. Lanita suggested that she had narrowed her college offers to five institutions while she was attempting to make a decision and subsequently she received scholarship offers from all five institutions. Her decision to choose JU early on in her college choice process did not give her an opportunity to experience the recruiting process fully.

Shanna is an 18-year old African-American female who attended and graduated from a public, rural high school in Tennessee with a 3.8 GPA. Shanna received a score of 24 on the ACT exam. Before making a decision on her chosen college, Shanna narrowed her decision to five scholarship offers. She decided to attend JU since she was familiar with their athletic program, but most importantly, the recognition she would receive by attending JU.

Patty is an 18 year old Caucasian female who attended and graduated from a public, urban high school in Georgia with a 3.6 GPA. She earned a score of 830 on her SAT college entrance examination. While Patty considered five scholarship offers, her decision to choose JU was finalized before the official recruiting process began in her junior year. She performed well in school and did not have difficulty qualifying academically to attend JU.
Understanding the College Choice Process for Student-Athletes

Student-athletes are often characterized as individuals who experience more pressure on making a decision as to what college to attend than non-athletes. As the goal of this study was to identify the perceptions of student-athletes when they were involved in the college choice process, the results of this study illuminate not only their perceptions but also the significant factors related to the choice. Each of the participants identified several experiences that were most important in their college choice process. These experiences along with the related factors identified through the conceptual framework for this study collectively provided insight into the findings relative to the college choice process of female student-athletes.

Mathes and Gurney (1985) observed that student-athletes choosing a college to attend considered many factors when making their final decision. The “factors” Mathes and Gurney (1985) found include institutional aspects such as the degree program, academic support services and coaches as central in the decision making process for student-athletes. Additionally, the influence of external individuals, such as family, friends and high school personnel are also included as factors that relate to the decision making process when student-athletes are choosing a college to attend. Likewise, participants in this study identified many of the same factors as central in their college choice process and important in their decision making. Since the goal of this study was to identify the perception of the college choice process of student-athletes, the factors related to the process were discussed as participants recalled their experiences choosing a college.

Generally, participants were satisfied with their college choice process and felt they were able to identify which university would fit their personal and academic goals fully. Although the data will show that external forces such as immediate family members, high school
academic/athletic staff and collegiate athletic staff play a profound role in the final outcome of the college selected; participants felt confident that their decision was completely their own. Furthermore, the general consensus of the participants indicates they entered the college choice process not knowing fully how they would or should choose an institution to attend.

Major Themes: The Perception of the College Choice Process for Student-Athletes

This chapter examined the results of data collected from participants who had recently engaged in the college choice process. Thus, the perceptions of the participants act as a progressive journey from highly recruited high school student-athletes to incoming first-year college student-athletes. The experiences of the participants assisted in presenting which factors were influential in their college choice process. Through shared perceptions of the participants’ college choice process, themes that best represent their entire process were developed.

Throughout data collection and analysis, six prominent themes emerged related to the perception of the college choice process of student-athletes. These themes were: 1) the college choice process for student-athletes begins before they enter high school, 2) student-athletes are motivated to achieve academic requirements in order to play their sport in college, 3) student-athletes consider more than just athletic success when choosing a college, 4) high school administrators are critical in the college choice process, 5) the success of the collegiate coach/athletic program is important to the student-athlete, and 6) student-athletes value communication from everyone during the college choice process.

Within the context of responses to interview questions and discussion, a general understanding of the college choice process for these participants began to take shape. Although they considered themselves students first, they also appeared to understand that their athletic abilities represented the primary source of interest for colleges and universities. Furthermore, it
was their athletic abilities that transformed the process of just choosing a college to being recruited as a player for the teams’ roster. As indicted in chapter 2, the prestige of winning programs and subsequent national attention of a college or university adds to the pressure for institutions to recruit the best athletes. The participants’ introduction to the college choice process began, for some, at a very early age. In explaining the major themes related to this study, the sections that follow will attempt to illuminate the shared experiences of the participants from their first introduction to the college choice process to their final decision of where to play.

*The College Choice Process for Student-Athletes Begins Before they Enter High School*

It is likely that a student will unknowingly begin the college choice process when they first think about attending college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1985). Similarly, the 13 participants of this study started their college choice process when they began thinking about playing basketball in college. Although the participants were not aware at the time, their college choice process started at an early age when they began to develop thoughts on which level they could excel playing their sport. Even before entering high school, many participants were exposed to collegiate athletics through their playground involvement with basketball. For Ashley (JU), the decision to attend college was tied to her love of the sport from a very early age:

> When I was about five, I thought about playing basketball in college because I started playing the sport with my brother and his friends. As I played with him and the other guys I actually started liking the game and I started playing with the older guys more often. They were expressing how they wanted to go and play at different colleges and how they saw this team and that team on TV and I was like “well I can do that too!” They wanted to play in the NBA after college, so I began to want to play in college too. I
was like I am going to go play in college with the guys, but because I loved the game at such an early age; I just wanted to keep playing. I knew all this before I knew they had college teams for girls and there was a professional league for women.

Lanita (JU) had a similar experience as she was exposed to the game of basketball playing with boys much older than her:

I played with high school players when I was in the sixth grade – I was one of the top sixth graders in my school. I was like, okay, I am ready for college, but I hated school so much, I did not want to do anything else but play basketball. I didn’t want to do homework or nothing.

Four other participants thought about playing basketball in college when they were students in middle and junior high school. Two participants, Whitney (JU) and Margaret (SBU) considered college basketball after success in eighth grade. Whitney explained that she was excited about the success at an early age and wanted more in college:

…when I got my first letter in junior high school is when I knew I had a chance to play college basketball. I saw how much people really wanted to get a letter and I had one and I was like, well, I can do this where more people can watch me.

Margaret also looked at the attention from basketball as a reason to attempt collegiate sports:

Receiving the attention that I received while playing basketball gave me an insight as to how popular women’s basketball had become. It was an easy decision for me to want to keep playing and I knew that, really, if I wanted to get good at it, I had to play to get into college. Now I’m like, basketball has been in my life for, like, over 10 years.

While all of the participants admitted to considering the option to play college basketball early in their childhood, there were a few participants that still did not seriously consider playing in
college until later in their high school years. Desiree (SBU), June (SBU), Lisa (SBU), and Patty (JU) all suggested they did not consider playing college basketball until they had completed their first year in high school. Desiree’s aspirations came later in high school because she did not start playing basketball until her eighth grade year. Whereas, June did not consider collegiate athletics early on in her childhood because she felt that she was not good enough to be a top recruit. Although she received awards and recognition for her playing, there was a level of self-doubt that caused June to dismiss college as an option:

I just didn’t think I was good enough. I didn’t really want to dream too big because my freshman year was tough. It was new stuff all the time. In my sophomore year, I began believing I could play college basketball on the Division I level because of the attention I was receiving from college coaches. I always had the love for the game, but I did not know I could play at that level until I started receiving interest from those coaches.

Lisa, Keisha (SBU), and Patty considered participating in collegiate basketball in their ninth grade year, Lisa explained: “…during AAU, I considered playing basketball in college more since I was receiving more attention from colleges at this level [AAU].” Surprisingly, Mary (SBU) was the participant that waited the longest to consider collegiate basketball. She considered playing collegiate basketball in her eleventh grade year of high school:

Okay, in my freshmen year, I just played basketball to play. I don’t want to say the attention influenced me, but everybody knew me when I played basketball. I really didn’t have any colleges truly pursuing me at that time. I really didn’t care about too much at this time in my life and then in my sophomore year, a former teammate was captain and things began to change at my high school, for example, I began to play more and playing basketball truly began to matter. At the same time, my grades were
beginning to suffer and I was about to get kicked out of school, which meant I could not play basketball anymore, so I realized I needed to get my act together.

Even as the participants were beginning to realize that they were being evaluated, their complete understanding of the college choice process had not yet been formulated. Through the participants early years, their “worth” to a college or university was based solely on their playing ability. It was not until later that the participants were asked to make decisions related to an academic major in college. Yet for the next few years, the attention that the participants received would increase in intensity.

_Coping with the Increased Attention_

All of the participants expressed their awareness that they were being recruited to attend a college or university to bring their athletic skills to a basketball team. The smallest level of athletic success for some of the participants placed them on a recruiting radar screen as they began playing basketball competitively from an early age. For many of the participants, the recruiting process started very early and therefore placed some pressure on their remaining years in school. For example, Lanita and Whitney received their first recruiting letter when they were only in 6th grade. Lanita barely knew what a recruiting letter was, but was receiving interest from colleges before she entered junior high school:

_Actually, I did not know we [6th graders] were allowed to receive recruiting letters; I had not even entered high school, so receiving a recruiting letter at such an early time in my career was exciting._

Whitney had to discuss her recruiting letter with other family members to understand what it meant:
I asked my family like why was I getting mail? They knew what it was, but I knew I just liked playing ball, so for me I couldn’t even think about college. I didn’t even consider or you know really understand that college was a thing to do. All I knew was I liked basketball and I wanted to keep playing all the time, I was a kid, you know.

The recruiting letter for participants represented validation that they were seriously being considered as a potential student-athlete at a college or university. The recruiting letter also served as a reminder to participants that they, too, had a role to play in deciding on a college to attend. Ashley accepted the increased attention she was receiving and tried to focus on her goals:

It was just exciting for me to get all those letters. I mean one minute I was just a kid playing ball and the next I’ve got all this mail and stuff. It really hit me when I got letters in like 9th grade and I was just looking at all those pictures in the books and I was like man, I could really go to school there. Reality kinda set-in when I was like thinking that I had to focus on playing ball if I really wanted to get there. I was excited. I came to the conclusion that I have a future in basketball at any school that may be interested in me. The letter kinda proved to me that someone realized what I could do at their school.

Recruiting letters varied from questionnaires to actual written communication from colleges who were interested in the participants. The receipt of the first such letter or questionnaire was an exciting time for all of the participants. Jordan (JU) received her first recruiting letter from a college she was really interested in early in her athletic career. Unfortunately for her, it was for another sport she was playing:

The first recruiting letter I received was in the 7th grade. I was in love with [school name]. Every team I played on in camps, the team’s name was [school name] and when
they came to play in my hometown, I went to see them play basketball. I just wanted a letter from them so bad. In my sophomore year, I finally got a letter from them. I came in the house waving it around. At that time, the schools had these questionnaires that came with the letter. I opened the envelope up and it [the recruiting letter] was for volleyball. I really didn’t get a letter [recruiting] from [school name] until my junior year of high school.

As the initial excitement of receiving recruiting letters began to fade, many of the participants recounted how the process became less and less important when the frequency of the letters began to increase. By their own admission, each of the thirteen participants in this study estimated that they received at least 300 pieces of mail before deciding on a college to attend. A few of the participants estimated that they received more than 2000 different recruiting letters, questionnaires or other pieces of mail during the recruiting process. Jordan, one of the most heavily recruited participants estimated she received more than 3000 pieces:

On the first day the colleges were allowed to send letters, it was Monday (Labor Day weekend), so the post office was closed that Monday. On Tuesday, my dad went to get the mail. When he returned, I had 87 FedEx pieces of mail in one day. The next day, I received 57 letters and the mail continued on and on.

The excitement created by the recruiting letters also affected parents of participants as it was clear that the potential to attend college was becoming more and more of a reality. Many of the participants explained how their parents were just as, if not more excited then they were for the increasing possibility that their daughter could attend college with a scholarship. For example, Margaret’s mother became very involved in the recruiting process as the recruiting letters came more frequently:
When I received my recruiting letters, my mom was more excited than me, since she was more into the process [recruiting] than me. I really didn’t pay too much attention to the letters because I was just in the 9th grade enjoying playing basketball – I didn’t think too much about it because I knew it could change at any time. Don’t get me wrong, I thought about college, but as far as what college I wanted to go to it didn’t cross my mind… I was under the impression that my 9th grade year was not as important as the next three years would be, so I tried not to get too emotional.

The recruiting letter itself was a source of pride and confusion for some participants as they began to realize how important their athletic performance would be to their entrance into college. The opportunity to go to college as a student-athlete was becoming an opportunity that many participants were becoming acutely aware of and fortunately were able to understand as they continued on in their high school years.

Making Sense of the Recruiting Process

According to the participants of this study, they were some of the most heavily recruited student-athletes in their sport. All of the participants garnered some or all of the highest individual honors bestowed to high school players such as All American, District Most Valuable Player, State Most Valuable Player and McDonald’s All American. Additionally, the ability to understand the complexities of the recruiting process as they were trying to choose a college became a challenge for many of the participants. To varying degrees, the participants learned of the recruiting process in their athletic preparation more so than in their academic preparation. Patty learned of the recruiting policies related to the NCAA well before she considered a college to attend:
I knew the rules and regulations of the NCAA recruiting process very well. This topic has to be spoken about at every camp or tournament you attend. The information they gave you was a review of the rules – expectations of what you can and cannot do.

Likewise, Ashley commented on the amount of time reserved for NCAA recruitment sessions while she was involved in athletic camps:

I received the rules and regulations during an AAU tournament, especially if the [athletic organization] is certified through the NCAA where coaches get to watch you play. At the tournament, you have to have an NCAA talk at some point in time during the NCAA sanctioned tournament. After so many tournaments, you get pretty familiar with it.

Three participants had family members who were knowledgeable of recruitment regulations and assisted in understanding the policies. Jordan explained:

I talked to my brother because he went through the same thing I was going through and since I was there with his recruiting experience, I experienced the whole thing too. My dad is an AAU coach, so I received information from him. I also used study books and asked a lot of questions. I also had a list of criteria that I kinda used to make sure that I was, really, looking at stuff that was important to me. I wanted to be able to play in front of a large crowd…you know somewhere where women’s basketball mattered. I wanted to make sure my parents could come to the games. I, of course, wanted to be happy at the school. Like, I didn’t want to be there and not be happy away from practice, games and school. I guess, also, that I wanted to be happy if for some reason I got hurt and couldn’t play basketball. I wanted to make sure the school had my major and if I went to graduate school, I could continue my education.
Jordan also commented that her father met with college recruiters as part of his AAU coaching duties and became a knowledgeable source of information while she was considering colleges to attend. Margaret and Shannon had parents that were very involved in the recruitment process and assisted in helping them understand what was allowed and not allowed by recruiting colleges. Margaret’s mother was very involved in the process:

I knew what I could do as far as right and wrong. My mom informed me of most of the information, but she did not go into details. She just would let me know what I could and could not do during the recruiting process. She would always be on the school internet searching for information on different schools and changes in the rules of the NCAA. Shannon (SBU) explained that her mother experienced the same process with two other family members and was able to assist as well:

My mother had gone through the recruiting process with two of my family members before it was my turn – my sister and my cousin, who both attended 4-year colleges on athletic scholarships. Really the whole family had gone through the process, so it made my understanding of the eligibility rules much easier. To have someone experienced in the recruiting process makes it easier for the next person.

For four of the participants, they relied on their high school and other personnel to inform them of the recruiting rules and regulations. For example, Lisa identified her high school coach as a resource for understanding the process:

I was not aware of the rules or the eligibility requirements of the NCAA. My high school coach informed me of what I needed to know regarding the rules and eligibility requirements. I only received the important information from him, such as what I could and could not do and my academic requirements in order to participate on that level.
Shanna (JU) also had a similar experience with her high school coach:

I was somewhat familiar with it [rules and regulations] because I would attend the seminars at different functions. I knew we could not take money and things like that, but my high school coach informed me of the rules, regulations and eligibility rules.

Overall the participants felt prepared to navigate the details related to the NCAA and what could and could not be allowed during the recruiting process. Letters, phone calls and other contacts introduced the college and/or university to the student.

It was not until the participants began to consider how each college or university differed that they began to make comparisons and ultimately choose a college. Likewise, in formulating opinions about each of the colleges and universities, they also began to realize some of the academic requirements they had to satisfy to continue in the recruiting process and ultimately continue in their own college choice process.

_Student-Athletes are Motivated to Achieve Academic Requirements to Play_

The study participants viewed the opportunity to play at their chosen university as a motivator to maintain or raise their level of academic performance for entrance to that institution. Essentially, they perceived their athletic aspirations as an incentive to perform much better in the classroom than they had before being involved in the college choice process. For example, all of the participants concentrated on maintaining an adequate high school GPA and obtaining the necessary college entrance exam scores to be eligible for athletic recruiting. Participants began to realize that their athletic aspirations would depend heavily on college entrance examinations and high school GPA’s. Although the participants were making their final selections of which schools they would strongly consider, they also had to pay attention to the requirements for entry into their chosen institution.
Both SBU and JU considered the college entrance exam scores (either ACT or SAT) and the high school GPA as evidence that the applicant was prepared to attempt academic work on a collegiate level. Several of the participants admitted that they were just interested in getting the minimum score on their college entrance exam and/or maintaining the minimum high school GPA to be eligible. Mary revealed that she did take the ACT twice, but stopped after receiving the minimum score she needed:

I think it was at the end of my junior year when I took the ACT and since I was not involved in the recruiting process until late, I had a limited amount of time. When I took the college assessment test, I took the ACT twice – I made an 18 the first time and a 17 the second time. When I got my scores, I was happy because I was eligible to attend a big-time college. All I needed was a score of 17, so I didn’t really care after that. The score didn’t mean anything to me once I got the score I needed. I didn’t want to take the test again because I made what I needed to make to get into SBU. All the stuff the other student-athletes were going through about taking the ACT again and stuff….I wasn’t for that. Man, taking the test three and four times…I wasn’t gonna do that. Why would you keep taking the test just to get a higher score when you going somewhere on a basketball scholarship? I was happy with what I got.

Shanna viewed the process of taking the college entrance exam as a very necessary but overemphasized step in the recruiting process:

I just wanted to get the score I needed in order to be eligible because I did not want to be like other people trying to take the test two or three times. I knew if I got the score I needed on the ACT that I could get a scholarship to play basketball at a good school. It didn’t really matter how high I got on the ACT because I was still going there and I was
still going to get an education from there. The ACT was just like a part of the process. I was going to be playing basketball anyway. I just wanted to work on getting the score I needed and move on.

Unlike Mary or Shanna, Lisa had to take her college entrance exam several times in order to get the minimum score needed for eligibility:

I took the SAT in my junior year of high school. I think I scored a 430 or 560 on the test my first time, something like that. I just knew that with that score, I needed to take it again. I took the SAT test three or four times. I didn’t feel too good about my initial score, but I had to keep taking the test until I scored what I needed so that I was eligible to go to school. I think taking the test so many times had become a stressful issue for me, but I was determined. I felt that if I didn’t do what I needed on the tests, I would not be able to attend the college I wanted to. I attempted to forget about all of the stress that was placed on me having to make the right score and commit to do whatever it was I needed to do to get here to SBU, so I took practice tests and classes and tutors just so I could get the scores I needed to get in.

Keisha related how her score improved as she continued to take the ACT exam:

I first took the ACT in my 10th grade year of high school. Oh my God, my first score was an 11 and I knew that was not going to cut it. I took the test again and I received a 15. I took the ACT test four times after I made the 15. I didn’t have time to feel anything about my score, I just kept taking the test until my score got higher.

Although the ACT/SAT score and the high school GPA were considered important entry criteria by both universities, course preparation of incoming students was important in the admission process. All of the participants indicated that they did take college prepatory courses while in
high school, yet a few of the participants admitted that they were under-prepared for what they first experienced when entering college. Mary was one participant who felt under-prepared for college work:

The high school I attended thought what we were taking were college prep courses, but none of the courses I took in high school were relevant to college, except for my vocabulary usage – my word usage was outstanding. But I don’t think that I really was ready for college work when I first started.

Whitney felt comfortable with her preparation for college and also was confident in her abilities:

My high school was great. I don’t know how other high schools are, but mine was called a prep school, so I guess that was their main focus – to see that you graduate – not just graduate, but to make sure you had the correct courses you needed for college. I know a lot of people who not until their senior of high school who found out that they were missing some needed courses in order to get into the college they wanted to get in to. I did not have that problem, so maybe if I wanted to go to Harvard or something like that, I would have needed to take something else.

Lisa indicated that her high school counselors were involved in the courses she took and whether or not it would prepare her for college:

…the courses I was taking during the time of my 9th grade year through my 12th grade year were considered college prep courses. My teachers and counselors kind of guided me in that direction. They were very serious about me taking college courses because they sorta told me that I just couldn’t major in basketball. I thought that was kinda funny, but they were real serious about me getting ready for college.
Shanna also considered her high school counselor as an influence for her taking college prep courses:

Yes, I knew about the courses I needed to take through high school in order to be eligible for athletics. The athletes who my high school thought had the opportunity to go somewhere like college, they would inform them of the necessary courses they needed in order to be academically eligible. Each student-athlete was assigned to different counselors. My counselor, for example, I had to go to his office and he would tell me about the Clearinghouse. He would make sure we all got that sort of information if we wanted to play in college.

Keisha admitted that she would have been more serious about academics earlier in high school if she knew how they were connected, but she did “get serious” about her academic performance eventually:

I ended up having to take the SAT when I found out I got the 16 on the ACT, which was not high enough for me to be eligible. I had to take the SAT because I didn’t know what my final grades were going to be at the time of my recruiting process. I was so stressed about trying to get the right grades. I wish I would have known what I needed earlier, I would not have played around like I did – C’s could have been A’s. All I knew was I needed to get high enough to get into SBU, that’s where I wanted to play.

Shannon also wanted to maintain her high school GPA because of the implications on a collegiate athletic career:

I didn’t want to make anything lower than a “B” when I was in high school. I knew that my academics would enhance my chances of pursuing my athletic career, but I also knew
I wanted to major in Physical Therapy; therefore, I needed to maintain a certain GPA to enroll in any school.

Lanita forced herself to at least be a decent student in order to showcase her athletic ability to colleges and universities:

JU had the best academic schools. Although I didn’t like school when I was in high school, I knew I would need to excel in the classroom at my chosen college. The women’s program at JU has a 100% graduation rate and I wanted to be somebody. Also, back home, there were a lot of people who did not believe in me; they said I would end up ineligible and get kicked off of the team, so I needed to prove them wrong. I was like if I can’t pass my classes then it won’t really matter what I can do on the court, they won’t even look at me.

June changed her attitude about academic performance and its relationship to playing basketball when she realized that being successful in both would be necessary to enter college.

You know I just thought that you played ball and then the classes would just be gimmees. They would just help you get through, but I was wrong. Academics played probably about 10% in my college choice decision because I was young and focused on my athletic endeavors. I was not focused on what was important during my recruiting process, which has changed tremendously now; if I had to rate myself now, I would say academics is about 65% and athletics is 35%.

Patty paid special attention to her academic preparation regardless of her athletic opportunities in college:

I had a goal to make all A’s while I was in high school and I think I did a pretty good job
in doing that. I kinda knew that I needed to focus on grades while I played ball but not let one take over the other.

Not all of the participants felt strongly about maintaining academic minimums to enter college. Even though they were forced to do so, their motivation was not specifically on their academic achievement. Three of the participants did not challenge themselves to over-achieve in their academics in order to maintain the minimum requirements. Lisa was just doing the bare minimum in school:

I just wanted to do enough to just get by. I mean, at my school, you really didn’t have to do anything. The people at the high school didn’t really push you to excel any more than what you wanted to do, so if they did not expect me to reach higher for my goals, I didn’t. I did the bare minimum.

Desiree had a similar situation in high school “…all I wanted to do was get by – do enough just so I can pass.” Lanita admitted that her focus was not at all on academics, “I did absolutely nothing in high school for studies. Everything was about basketball…”

With the exception of a few participants, the motivation to enter college was primarily motivated by the necessity to achieve the required scores on the college entrance exams and maintain an average high school GPA. Although the college or university recruiting the participants recognized their athletic talents, it was the evidence of academic performance and preparation for college that would ultimately allow the student-athletes to enroll in the university. As the focus for the participants shifted to maintaining their academic performance in school, they began to formulate opinions about the academic opportunities at the college and universities they were considering.
Student-Athletes Consider More than Just Athletic Success when Choosing a College

All of the participants viewed their recruiting process as a challenge when taking into account the added responsibilities of succeeding as a student, achieving in basketball and enjoying their high school experience similar as other non-student-athletes. However, the non-student-athletes at the participants’ high school did not have to make early decisions about their college choice while still attempting to exist as a high school student. The recruiting letters from various athletic programs became increasingly more specific as the participants progressed through high school and garnered more athletic honors. Moreover, the decision making process on how to narrow down the choices was approached from many different angles.

Each of the participants explained how they considered more than just the athletic prestige of the institution when making their college choice decision. Most of the participants considered factors, such as the major courses of study the college or university had to offer, its campus environment and location, as well as the opportunities to enter a career after college. The participants used their own unique criteria to delineate those schools that would be considered a part of their choice set versus those that would not. Jordan discussed her timeline of narrowing down the schools she was interested in:

The offers became rather scary because I was going into my senior year still receiving an enormous amount of offers – offers that did not diminish. In my junior year going into my senior year, I narrowed it [my choices] down to twenty schools and the list was cut off at that point. In my senior year is when I started receiving phone calls, so during my games, I had college coaches of schools I was not interested in attending my games, which was frustrating.
Jordan also indicated that she did have to inform the schools that had “fallen off” her list of
consideration that she just was not interested. Although Jordan, a nationally recruited high
school student-athlete had offers from dozens of schools in the country, she eventually identified
five schools she considered attending. Her process for narrowing down her choices to five was
the end-result of what aspects of each school Jordan held important in her college choice
process:

[College/University] was a hometown school and I wanted to get out of my hometown.
It’s nice to be home, but I think that being away from home causes more growing up –
away from your parents. [State] was too far away and I wanted my parents to see me play
and trying to get a plane ticket to [state] was super expensive. My top three schools were
[college/university 1], [college/university 2] and JU. I did not choose [college/university
2] based on a family decision – the program was not on top of anything, they had a new
coach and my parents just didn’t feel comfortable with the program. My final two
choices – [college/university 1] and JU – I don’t know why, but I closed my eyes and I
felt better with JU. I was close with the team and the coaches were nice. To make sure of
my decision, I made some dots on a paper one day in school that identified a certain
school where the other set of dots represented another school, I closed my eyes again and
I selected JU – JU won again.

Jordan went on to say:

…out of the five schools I selected I don’t think I could have made a bad or wrong
choice. All of them matched my list of criteria. I knew they had the major that I wanted
to do at the time. I also knew they had a graduate program so if I wanted to stay I could
continue my schooling.
Although Jordan’s experience may be similar to other participants in this study, her situation was unique because of her nationally ranked status as a high school student-athlete. However, many of the participants indicated that during the decision making process they focused more on the name recognition of the institution or national status. For example, Ashley narrowed the eight scholarship offers she was considering to the three highest ranked athletic programs:

[College/University 1] and JU were my top choices. JU was my dream school growing up. They were the most televised team in women’s athletics and basketball was all I watched. They really caught my eye when the program was televised on cable and at the time I knew I wanted to go to JU. [college/university 2] was close to home, but they were not televised as much as my other choices. [college/university 3] came into the picture during my junior year of high school. The coach and her staff were wonderful. I tried to keep my options open because [college/university 3] had a wonderful school and awesome academic programs; and since I wanted to be in the medical arena, [college/university 3] was high on my list.

Similar to Ashley and Jordan, Shanna received multiple scholarship offers, but she narrowed her consideration set to five institutions:

I did not choose [University 1] because they really don’t have a tradition in winning. They are not really known for that particular entity. [University 2], by best friend went there and I wanted to go somewhere where I needed to meet new people. I didn’t want to have a package deal [since they were interested in my best friend, they would take me too]. [University 3] and [chosen college] were my top two [schools]. [University 5] seemed kind of shady to me and my parents; that’s why I didn’t choose them. [University 3] – I loved the coaches and players…I did not go there [University 3]
because they were having a re-building year. I knew I could play there, but I did not want to go through the idea of being in a new situation for years and years.

Margaret agreed with Shanna:

I would say at least thirty schools attempted to recruit me, but out of those 30, I only considered three schools after I narrowed my choices. I considered [University 1] because of the coaching staff [the old staff not the new staff] which I am glad I did not go there. I considered [University 2] because it was closer to home and I knew a lot of the players that was there. Of course [chosen college] because they were an up and coming school in women’s basketball.

Choosing a Major/Choosing a College

Even though two of the 13 participants did not consider a major in college as a determining factor in their college choice, four participants looked specifically at the majors offered by their potential colleges as reasons to attend. Ashley viewed the opportunity to choose a major she was interested in as a primary factor in her final decision:

Academics played a lot in my college choice decision – [college name] didn’t have a physical therapy program, but their exercise science major is the top in the nation. Well, then there is medical school, I was looking at [college name] training room department, in which I got to talk to our trainer and other individuals regarding the program. My cousin got her master’s from here in something, but she was also in exercise science and she would talk about how much dedication individuals have here about teaching this subject and going through this particular major. So, I was like – cool – the school is solid, basketball is solid; therefore, this was a pretty good choice.
Shannon was in agreement, as she indicated that her academic aspirations affected her college choice decision. She said, “if SBU did not have the major I was considering, I would not have chosen that college.” Similarly, Shanna also considered the college major as a primary reason to not include a school in her choice set. She was strongly opposed to attending any institution that did not meet her academic requirements:

My academic decision was probably one of my top priorities as far as choosing a college because I wanted to be a pediatrician, so I needed to go somewhere that had a good medical program. Don’t get me wrong, I was not sure that JU was the right school for my major, but JU was chosen because of other reasons because another school’s pre-med program is better than JU.

Margaret equated the level of academic success with the athletic success at the institution:

I wanted to go to a college where my academics as well as my athletics would be enhanced. You know, one school may have great academics, but not a great athletic program, I wanted it all. I was like, if they are really good in their basketball program, then they can’t be all that bad with the teaching and the other classroom stuff. I felt like I was a good enough player that I should play at a good school and the education would be good too. If you look at some schools that are not the best in athletics, sometimes they don’t really have good academic programs because they might be a small school or something.

Wanting to prosper in academics and athletics was a common theme among all participants who were considering their college choice. However, not all participants indicated that they chose the college based solely on the academic reputation of the institution. Five of the participants,
suggested that their personal academic goals were not very important in their college choice decision. Mary viewed the opportunity to play basketball as a chance to move on:

I just wanted to get out of high school. My freshmen year was bad – I wanted to leave [high school name]…I didn’t really care where I went at that time. To be honest, I got serious about academics in high school when I was about to get put out of school and kicked off the basketball team, but I really got serious about academics when I entered college.

June viewed the majors offered by institutions as a low priority in her decision making process:

I really didn’t have any academic aspirations. I know I didn’t want to flunk out of high school. I just wanted to pass class – if I got a ‘C’, I was excited. In choosing SBU, academics played probably about 10% in my college choice decision. As I look at it now, that is rather low, but I was young and naïve, but now that I am here, I would say that academics is important to me…like basketball is 35% important and academics is 65%.

The opportunity to attend a school that offered a desired major and had a quality academic program was in high demand for the participants as they evaluated their choices of academic programs and majors at their prospective institutions. Similarly, the participants also felt strongly about the location of the college campus and the environment they would ultimately enter upon enrollment. Many of the participants admitted that they were not immediately aware of the importance of the campus environment and location early in their college choice process but became acutely aware of its importance after they began visiting campuses.
Environment and Location

The location of the institution was an important factor as many of the participants realized that they would be spending a large amount of time on campus involved in athletic commitments and other collegiate responsibilities. Jordan was the most vocal about the location and more importantly, environment of the campus:

Location played a big part. In the beginning when I would go to camp in high school, it was not like I would get homesick or anything. I am not a home body person… I mean I miss my parents and all when we are apart and I am cool if I was going to camp for a couple of weeks, but this decision was not the same. It was like, if I am going to be here for at least four years, then I should like where I will be spending so much time.

Shanna also began to realize the importance of the location of the college as she was going through the decision making process:

At first I really did not care how far away I went to college, but when I started thinking about the city, I began to consider if I would want to go home, I would not have to fly or drive ten hours away from home to attend school; therefore, towards the end, I began thinking that living closer to home may be better than traveling for long hours.

Other participants recognized the importance of the environment and location, but didn’t realize how important it was until after they started college. Likewise, their attitude towards the location of the university changed during their final decision making process, Keisha recalled her initial thoughts about the location of the university:

I guess I just went where I wanted to go. I didn’t think about the location of any of my college choices because I figured I was going to have fun wherever I went because I am a fun person, so it [the location] did not matter. Now I think about it, maybe I should have
considered somewhere else that was a little bigger. The town that is. Once you are on campus, it’s huge…but that’s it.

Lanita also had strong feelings about JU when she was considering attending there:

I did not want to leave home because [state name] is way on the other side. When I took the visit to JU, all I could think about is – this place is boring, there is nothing to do, but then I began to think if I did go away from home I would stay out of trouble. Don’t get me wrong, I like the school, but this town, I truly had to get used to the area. My decision to choose JU had nothing to do with the environment because I would have not chosen here. To me, the environment of JU is a difficult challenge if you are not used to it.

Patty was happy about the location of JU as she had concerns of travel costs to go home when she was able:

JU was a perfect location because it’s not too close and not too far away. I can go home if I need to on my own and that’s good. I just wanted to be somewhere where I could not feel like I never left home but then at the same time I wanted to be close enough to get home. I guess it [the school] is was not too far away nor was it too close. I am able to go home when I need to without having to purchase tickets all the time. That was real important to me.

Mary knew that being close to home was important to her as she was able to continue to still feel like she was at home when she wanted to have the comforts of her home environment:

I didn’t want to go far away…so after I committed to SBU, the location did not matter. Now, as I think about this, I get the best of both worlds – I get home-cooked meals brought to me and I also get to visit home quite often.
Mary also said that she did not think she would have made it at a school that was far away from her hometown – “You never know what it is like to be away from home until you have done so.” Margaret considered the climate of the college she was going to attend as part of her reasons for deciding which institution to attend:

I hate cold weather and man when they would be like – “you have to bring extra big coats and long underwear during the winter” I was like, what? No. Let me stay my behind in the south. I don’t like cold weather, so going to a school up north would really make me think harder about attending that school. I mean they would have had to really be offering some really, really good reasons to go there if it was in the cold. Also, the school I wanted to attend had to be close to my family.

Although many of the participants did indicate the location of the institution was a big factor in their college choice, there were three participants that did not consider the location as a major factor. The location was not as important for those three participants as much as the environment of the campus itself. Ashley considered the campus environment and what it would “feel” like being there:

Location had nothing to do with my decision to choose JU. I am not a home bodied person and I don’t get home sick, but I can say, the only thing I did not want was to go to the west coast because if something was to happen at home – whew, the price of a last minute ticket is costly, so that played a factor in my college choice process. I really wanted to go somewhere that felt comfortable being on campus and talking to people just, you know, hanging out and stuff. I didn’t want to be somewhere where you had to act a certain way or dress a certain way or whatever. I knew going in that everybody would be looking at me like a dumb jock, so I didn’t want to be, you know, not
considered normal or whatever. If I had to really think about the location of JU, and the

campus life is similar to my hometown.

Shannon also looked at the location as not an important factor in her college choice decision, but
she did say “I love [state name], so attending SBU was a good idea. My family and I are always
here in [state name] and my parents are from here, so I was familiar with [state name] and
going away from home was good for me. I really liked the way the campus just kinda felt like
everyone was normal.” June knew that location would not play a huge role in her college choice
decision:

I have traveled so much in my lifetime that I knew I could handle being away from home.

Plus, my family could not always travel to see me play and I always played well with
them not there, so I knew I would be okay if I would go away to school. I just wanted to
go somewhere that was comfortable and I felt like I could be another student away from
basketball. On the court, I wanted to be known as a player but like in class and stuff, I
just wanted to be a student.

Although Whitney considered the location of JU as a negative, she decided to attend there
because of the added benefit she felt it would give her:

JU is so far away from [hometown], but I thought that if I really wanted to grow and
mature, attending JU was an incentive to separate away from my family, have an
opportunity to participate at a great school, and mature while being on my own.

Whether the participants’ chosen college was close to home or far away, they did consider the
location as part of the criteria related to their college choice decision. The campus environment
also appeared to influence the decision making process even though for some of the participants
they would make the best of any campus situation as long as they were able to play basketball and pursue their academic major.

**Post-Collegiate Opportunities**

As indicated earlier, the participants did consider the opportunity to pursue their academic major as one of the criteria for choosing a college. The participants also appeared to consider the opportunities after college as important to their final college decision. Lisa was excited about the opportunity to participate in the strong academic tradition at SBU and what it would mean to her when she graduated:

They presented me with the fact that I would graduate and receive a degree. They assured me that I would graduate on time if I were to do what I needed in the classroom, so that made me feel great because I would be the first one in my family to graduate from college; and being able to graduate was a huge incentive to consider SBU. I really wanted to be a good student and a good basketball player.

Margaret considered her participation in athletics as a way to possibly graduate on time or even earlier:

…graduating early was a huge selling point for me. For example, we are in school constantly and that is so that we can graduate on time… I really did not like the idea initially, but than I realized that being an athlete I would have a better opportunity to take more courses because I would not be involved with athletics, such as traveling, practice, and public engagements. Also, I felt I had a better opportunity to get ahead in my courses and pick up my grades so that I am able to complete my aspirations of graduating from college, especially within four years.
In anticipation of student-athletes like Margaret, the NCAA now allows student-athletes an opportunity to receive an additional year of athletic eligibility if they graduate within four years of initial enrollment. Whitney understood the importance of the new NCAA regulations and how it is viewed by JU as it relates to graduation:

[Coach name] always speaks about graduation; don’t get me wrong, she is definitely serious about basketball, but she is really serious about graduations. That was one of the things I liked about JU. Graduating from JU would be an awesome incentive on my resume’ and to possibly receive another athletic year of eligibility – I am excited.

Shannon understood that she would have the resources to be successful and the college would make the commitment to her achievement:

They [coaches] informed me they would introduce me to the necessary people to get me where I needed to be academically, such as the advisor, the department head of my major, and the tutors. They [coaches] give us summer jobs pertaining to our major in order for us to be able to experience what our major would entail. They [coaches] informed me that if I did not graduate, it would be my own fault because everything is basically presented and done for us to graduate; therefore, if it [the assistance] does not help us, it is our own fault.

The commitment to academics for the participants seemed to only solidify their reasons for attending either SBU or JU. Additionally, they viewed the opportunity to play their sport and receive an education as central in their decision making process. Although the participants did identify non-athletic factors important in their college choice process, it is still important to note that the athletic reputation of the school played a role in the final decision process. Moreover,
the participants indicated that they attempted to consider the athletic program as part of the reason to attend their chosen college and not the only reason to attend.

During the college choice process, the participants developed an appreciation of the opportunity to receive a degree and career opportunities. Whether or not the academic opportunities, major, and/or athletic program were important in the college choice process, data from this study suggests that the participants also considered other factors such as the coach’s reputation, the environment and location of each institution being considered.

*High School Administrators are Critical in the College Choice Process*

Data showed that high school administrators influenced the college choice process of participants by providing support, information, and resources in order to assist them in making a college choice decision. Additionally, the high school guidance counselors assisted by helping the students understand the intricacies of the recruiting process. These administrators allowed for a easier connection to be made between the college recruiting staff and the student-athlete. For example, the high school administrators introduced the student-athlete to the “idea” of being a college student while the college recruiting staff discussed information regarding academic assistance, graduation statistics, and campus life. This information, according to the participants, was essential in helping them make their final college choice decision. Eleven of the thirteen participants related their appreciation of their high school administrators as a primary resource for their successful college choice.

Although the participants were beginning to understand the criteria necessary to play college basketball, they all identified the high school coaches and guidance counselors as major influences in their selection process. Three of the participants indicated that their high school counselors were more involved in their recruiting process than any of the other administrators at
their high school and in some cases even the coach. June spoke of her guidance counselor similar to another parent or even an “agent” in regards to her recruiting process:

My guidance counselor would give me my mail from the different colleges who were recruiting me. She handled all of my paperwork with the clearinghouse information. She would make sure I had all of my academic information taken care of so that I would be academically eligible. It’s like I had another parent, you know, someone who was really looking out for me and what I was going to do when I left the high school. I mean it was really like she looked at me as her own kid and wanted me to not get played over by the schools that were out there. I really thanked her for that and told her that she was so important to me.

Whitney had a similar experience with her counselors and thought that her “counselors were extremely involved with sending out transcripts and informing [college] coaches of my academic progress.” Although Jordan, a top, nationally ranked high school prospect, narrowed her college choices down to five, the involvement of the counselor was essential as she was being recruited from more colleges than all of the other participants:

You know my high school guidance counselor did a great job of keeping me informed of what I needed academically, she mailed out my information to the schools I was interested in, and she would also find out what other resources I would need to be eligible. It was such a circus, everything was just happening so fast that I am so glad she was involved in my decision because she kept me on track and didn’t let me get overwhelmed. She was really involved in my recruiting process because she would mail the transcripts to the different schools who were interested in me. With that information, she would also receive all of my information from the different schools, but most
importantly, she researched what sort of academics I would need in order to be eligible athletically.

Some participants such as June, felt that her high school guidance counselor was much more of a resource than her own basketball coach:

My guidance counselor was a huge help in my recruiting process. She would give me all of my mail; the most important thing was the Clearinghouse information, she received all of that information and explained to me what I needed to have academically in order to be eligible. On the other hand, my high school coach was at a distant; not like other coaches. He wanted my college choice to be my decision; he didn’t want me to blame him if my decision was based on the information he gave me.

As the recruiting process for high school student-athletes choosing a college involves both academic success and athletic ability, the relationship amongst the student-athlete, high school counselor and coach seems to be critical. The partnerships formed on the students’ behalf between the counselor and the coach seemed to allow for a consistent information flow between the student-athlete and the college recruiting the student-athlete. Furthermore, Ashley elaborated on how other individuals at her high school assisted her:

I think they all [coach, guidance counselor, athletic director, principal, vice principal, and the secretary] assisted me in my recruiting process. I think the school secretary was like my personal secretary. I grew up and played with her [child] until I was four, so I knew her pretty well. She handled all of my letters that came through the school. If people called, she made sure I would call them back. She would set everything up. She would keep checking on things for me with the guidance counselor to make sure she had everything. I transferred high schools, so like before I transferred, these people [high
school administrators] were working on things for me. My principal and vice principal would conversate with the coaches about me at the games. I think everybody had a hand in the situation. At some point in time, teachers got involved because college coaches wanted me to talk to them… the teachers also kept me on track.

Lisa received assistance from administrators and coaches from two different high schools:

I attended two different high school, so my first high school was kind of different than the second high school I attended; whereas at the first high school, my coach was very involved in my recruiting process, he was the one who got college coaches interested in me – he would call different schools, so that they could attend my games. He also would write them and inform them of my skills and abilities. On the other hand, at the second high school, my guidance counselor would inform me of the courses I needed to take. The new coach I got was similar to the old one, but he also got me involved in AAU. I guess you can say that at the second school, I was able to receive more information because I had more individuals involved.

Similarly, the high school coach played an important role in the selection process. Even though the coach would primarily share information related to athletic ability, they also acted as an advocate for the student-athlete as they spent the most time with them in on and off court situations. Shanna was very impressed with the level of involvement her high school coach played in her college choice process:

My high school coach was so awesome and involved. He really made the process very easy to understand, I guess ‘cause he had done it with so many other people before me. He was also my AAU coach, so he would let me know if college coaches were going to
be there. He got me exposed to different schools during the recruiting process. He and the JU coach are pretty close friends and they spoke a lot during my recruiting process. Along with the high school basketball coaches, several participants indicated that their high school athletic directors were also instrumental in making the recruiting process easier to understand. Lanita explained her involvement with her athletic director as positive and helpful:

Our athletic director basically did everything for me during my recruiting process. If the recruiting college coaches would call the office, they would transfer them straight to her. She just would talk to the coaches and if they should ask for anything, she was the one who would transfer them to the coaches at the high school. She would also let them know where I stood with my academics and everything and the academic progress.

Likewise, Margaret noted:

…our athletic director was involved when colleges wanted to attend my high school games. He would inform me that the coaches would be attending my basketball game, but he would also remind me of what I could and could not do.

Although the majority of the participants had some assistance of administrators at their high school during their recruiting process, only one participant did not have any assistance from her high school administrators at all. Lisa indicated:

…didn’t have anyone involved in my recruiting process from high school. [Why?] I don’t know. I can only speculate that they [administrators] did not know the information or they did not want to get involved in the process. Who knows.”

As shown through the data collected, the involvement of high school personnel appeared to be important as the participants were making their college choice decisions. Whether or not high school personnel specifically assisted in making the decision, they did provide support with the
added amount of responsibilities the student-athlete has in order to be recruited. The high school administrators seemed to be a good “diffuser” of some of the perceived glamour of the success of the collegiate athletic program. Although high school personnel did provide some structure and organization for the recruiting process, participants still viewed the success of the collegiate athletic program as a primary factor in their decision making process.

*The Success of the Collegiate Coach/Athletic Program is Important to Student-Athletes*

Adler and Adler (1991) found that the coach’s reputation was a significant factor in the student-athletes’ college choice decision. Likewise, the participants in this study also valued the reputation of the coach and by extension the athletic program as a primary factor in their college choice decision. Moreover, the participants coupled their respect for the coach with the success of the athletic program and the opportunities available at the institution. The athletic programs from highly ranked institutions usually receive the most attention from aspiring student-athletes based on their national recognition (Adler & Adler, 1991). Likewise, ten of the thirteen participants viewed the success of the athletic program just as important as the level of academic excellence the institution presented in their recruiting communications with the student-athlete.

For the participants, being honored and possibly even being put on a “superstar” pedestal was pretty ordinary as they garnered many state, regional and national awards while in high school. Yet, no matter the level of success they obtained and accolades collected, they were still in awe of the accomplishments of their respective colleges’ athletic programs and the coaches that led those programs. Patty was very forthcoming in her admission that the coaches were very important in her decision to attend JU:

There was like this, you know, strange feeling when you hear that [coach name] saw you play and wants to meet you. I mean [coach name] wants to meet you! Then you know
about their program and what they have done in the past. I mean the coach and the program was so important to me. These were the individuals I was going to be around most of the time while I am here and you don’t want to be around individuals who are not right for you or where you don’t fit in.

Jordan, who admittedly could have played at any institution that recruited her, used the reputation of the coach and the athletic program as part of her decision making process:

All the things [coach, program] influenced me… I mean I want to be the best in my sport, so why go to just any institution? I chose a school that had the best – a coach, good players, and an excellent program… I had people telling me not to choose a college just because of basketball, but I felt that I would be spending about seventy-five percent of my time doing this, so I chose the best college to do just that… This college can do so much for me even after my four years of basketball. I can go to graduate school anywhere if I take care of my business at JU. I mean, [coach name] can pick up a phone and just make a call and you get doors opened for you, so she can assist me with a lot of things even after I graduate.

Lanita also identified that her coach was a huge factor in her final decision based solely on who the coach is and the respect she garners in the NCAA:

I know that after basketball I would still have a career because she [coach name] knows so many people that I will succeed after I finish playing. I don’t know if I would play in the WNBA or maybe overseas, but if I stay with it, then I know coach [coach name] would help me because she just, you know, has this reputation of helping her players even after they are not in school anymore.
Even with the reputation of the athletic program and the strength of the coach’s reputation as influential factors for the participants, the interaction they had with others in the athletic department were important in the process as well. Although Desiree did not visit SBU prior to making her final decision, she realized that the coaches there were most influential in her choice:

I can talk about the coaches on that part because I never took a visit to SBU. They [the coaches] were just ‘dead’ real about everything they said about the school. There was not any phoniness in any stuff they said during the recruiting process. They didn’t make any promises about playing time like other schools. I needed to make sure that the colleges were not telling me things just to get me to their school.

Two participants identified the combination of the coach’s reputation and the tradition of the program that the coach built as important factors in the decision to attend. Whitney made sure that the coach and her eventual teammates would be beneficial to her while in college:

JU is like no other school, they have a great program and a wonderful team. I wanted to grow with a group of people [teammates] who share this opportunity with an excellent coach. I knew that I was going to be a better person just being around them because they really believed what the coach was trying to do. I liked that and wanted to be a part of that program.

Shanna was interested in attending an institution that was successful:

I was used to winning and I wanted to continue the tradition. Don’t get me wrong, I like the tradition of JU and having the opportunity to be around a great coach was great in itself, but I didn’t want to just be there and be losing all the time. I was like, I need to go somewhere that really wants to do good and not just throw a team on the court. So, yeah,
that had a lot to do with it, but the coach was someone who looked like she didn’t mess around and didn’t like to lose.

While the interaction with head coaches and assistant coaches seemed to be an influential factor in some of the participants’ college choice decision, additional involvement with future team members also proved to be important. Mary indicated that the chemistry of the team was top on her list of reasons why she chose SBU:

I liked the program they had and all the coaches, but it was when I hung out with the team that it really started to sink in. If the team was not cool, I could not attend the institution… the team are the people you will be around most of the time – I have to live with them and play with them, so that was the reason for my decision to choose SBU.

Ashley also saw her future teammates at JU as important in her feeling comfortable if she chose to attend there:

I could truly see how the team got along with each other. Sometimes you can kinda tell if they are like not clicking together or something, but when I saw them, they were like together, you know. They were even really happy to be with the coaches there and how hard they made them work. The love the coaches had for their players in spite of how hard they have to be on the court. The coaches are serious about their job, yet love and respect their players all at the same time and I truly appreciated that. The team, really, recognized that and I was like, this is cool.

Some of the participants, such as Jordan, knew that they should look beyond athletic success when choosing a college but were not able to because of the winning tradition of the institution:

I enjoyed all the things about JU… I mean I wanted to the best in my sport, but I also wanted to be the best that I could be and that’s why I just didn’t want to choose just any
institution; I wanted an institution where I was receiving the best every day from my coaches and my teammates. I was always told not to choose a college just because of basketball, but I felt like this is what I am going to be doing approximately 75% of my time. I knew school would be there obviously, which I am very serious about, but basketball is what I want to do. I want to be a part of basketball for life and I know that I will receive that through my experiences here with JU and the connections that [coach’s name] has through this basketball arena.

Lanita also looked at the success factor as a benefit for her in the future:

[Coach’s name] is the biggest name in women’s basketball and I talked to her former players. By her having that big name and having the opportunity to play for JU, she can just “hey, can you give one of my players a job?” easily; so you basically don’t have anything to worry about regarding your future – you can play at a great school, graduate, and receive a job after graduation. Come on…

Whitney viewed her admiration for JU from an outsider as a privilege to have an opportunity to play there and receive an education at the same time:

Well, first of all tradition. No school could compare to women’s basketball here – it’s bigger than men’s basketball. I don’t think its like that at any other place. Women’s basketball get so much attention here compared to any other place I visited. The team – I think when I came on my visit, I really had a great time with the team here more than any other team at other schools – that was a big part for me.

The strength of most Division I athletic recruiting can be attributed to the reputation of the head coach (Adler & Adler, 1991). As one of the of the most recognizable faces within their sport as they are interviewed before and after games, the coach represents the athletic program and the
institution on a national stage (Letawsky et al, 2003). The coach and by extension her/his athletic program represents the university by way of recruiting and introducing opportunities to potential student-athletes. The participants recognized that the coach and the athletic program were important in their decision making. Similarly, participants in this study also valued the opinions, thoughts and discussions they held with other significant individuals with whom they discussed their college choice process.

*Student-Athletes Value Communication from Everyone during the College Choice Process*

Communication between the collegiate athletic staff and the student-athlete is commonplace in the recruiting process. Communication allows the student-athlete to build a relationship with the college personnel and discuss their aspirations both on and off the court with the recruiters that are presenting the opportunities available. Yet, for the participants in this study, the data suggests that they valued the relationships they formed with everyone who had a vested interest in their success. It seems that participants not only made a decision regarding the institution but also the individuals with whom they interacted. All of the participants indicated that their communication with the coaches of their chosen college was important but they also valued the opinions of others when trying to make a final college choice decision.

*Communication with Family and Friends*

All of the participants indicated that they relied on family and friends to provide support and guidance while they were making a college choice decision. These individuals were labeled “significant persons” and their involvement in the participants’ college choice process ranged from not very involved to extremely involved. The influence of the significant persons in the participants’ decision seemed important in the final decision. Ashley relied on experiences of other family members in her college choice process:
The recruiting process made me see that there are a lot of basketball fanatics in my family and a lot of athletes who lived their dreams through my process. There are a lot of family members who did not get to play collegiate sports because they started late in pursuing their opportunity. I am the kind of person that sets goals and sees the track I need to follow and I do it. When my cousin went to college, I was like, it’s possible for me too. When my brother went to college, I was like – this is a definite opportunity for me…

Margaret expressed how her parents were actually the big role in her college choice decision:

My grandmother was the most influential person in my college choice decision because she wanted me to attend a college where she was able to drive and see me play and that was an important factor to consider in itself. Actually, my family played a big role because most of my family live in [hometown], so they didn’t really get to see me play in high school…when it came for me to choose a college, I considered them in my decision so that they were able to attend my games. My mom influenced my decision also because she was so into the recruiting process that I wanted to make her happy.

The influence of family on the college choice process was first and foremost in the minds of the participants as they developed their personal list of which factors were most important in the selection process. Many of the participants, such as Jordan, included her family in her decisions:

We are a really tight-knit family – we share and talk about anything before we make any big moves. I honor their opinions – almost too much sometimes, but I feel that they know what’s best for me – so I will go with what they believe. We talked about every detail in the process and maybe over thought everything, but I think it was worth it because I am very happy with my decision. I think they would’ve told me if I was going
to be making a bad choice. Like I said before, I wanted to make sure they could see me play, so I really considered that when I decided.

Shannon implied that her parents and her sister were influential in her college choice decision:

My parents do so much for us and they would do anything for us; if they wanted me to go to college, I would go. They could have convinced me to attend any college – if they were those kinds of parents. I saw the success my sister had in college and how proud my parents were of her so I considered that too. I wanted them to be proud of me too, so I was seeking their approval not only in attending college but where to go and play.

Desiree, Shanna, Patty, Keisha, and Whitney all felt that one or both of their parents influenced their college choice decision. Patty stated that her mom was influential in her college choice decision because she wanted to accomplish something her mother was unable to complete:

I wanted to be able to work hard for her. She really did keep me going when I was stressed during the whole recruiting process. I know she didn’t finish college so I guess she was living through me or something, but I knew I didn’t want to disappoint her at all.

Shanna was primarily influenced by her grandmother and mother’s guidance:

I wanted my grandmother to see me play in college. She attended every one of my high school games, so I wanted her to be able to see me play without having to drive three hours or more from her home. You would like to think they [parents] know enough to make sure you are making the right decision.

Keisha and Whitney suggested that their family influenced their college choice decision. In fact, Whitney said her dad knew everything about her chosen college:
He knew everything about the coaches, the players, and the program. He truly wanted me to attend JU and I was convinced even more so when my dad’s opinions were validated.

Keisha indicated that her family was influential in her college choice decision because her family went on the recruiting trips with her as they were involved completely in the process with her. The involvement of family and friends in the college choice process for all the participants seemed to indicate a strong relationship to the college choice process and the final decision made by the participants.

Likewise, the participants were pleased with the advice and involvement that their family, friends and other significant individuals had in the final decision as to which college to attend. Additionally, the involvement of family and friends in the college choice process also assisted in how the participants viewed other factors related to their final decision. For example, Mary discussed how her friends helped her view her prospective colleges apart from just basketball and academic success:

One of my friends were so supportive, she suggested that I take into consideration the amount of playing time I would receive from the school. Another friend suggested that as long as I was happy with my decision, she was happy for me and would support my decision, but they also told me to consider what it would be like to be there on weekends and outside of playing season. I hadn’t really thought about being there as just a student like everybody else.

Although many of the participants identified the importance of their family in the process, Lisa felt that no one influenced her decisions:
No one influenced me to attend SBU. In fact, I felt as though I was suckered into this decision by the coach. I believe I was told certain things in order to get me here, such as playing opportunities, but I also felt like I was with a family with the players on the visit.

*Communication with Assistant Coaches and Former Players*

Some participants also identified that others such as assistant college coaches and student-athletes at the recruiting schools were major influences in their final decision. As was the case for Desiree who indicated that the coaches at SBU were important in the process for her:

I felt very comfortable when I would talk to them because they knew what it meant to be a winner, to be successful. To have a coach who has been around so long and have participated in college basketball, be young, and have the same ethnic background as me, this was awesome.

The primary individuals responsible for recruiting in most programs are the assistant coaches. They spend the largest amount of time calling students at home and explaining particulars of the college or university to the recruits. Similarly, many of the participants began their recruiting process by interacting with assistant coaches, trainers and other athletic personnel who had a primary role in the recruiting process. Jordan spoke highly of her interactions with the assistant coaches at JU:

I just think that [assistant coach name] and I hit it off from the get go. She was kind of in charge of recruiting and [head coach name] and I have always had a very special relationship. She [assistant coach name] wanted to make it known that because JU was one of my five schools and I had a close relationship with the head coach at JU, so she wanted me to know that I could have a good relationship with the head coach here.

Mary’s experience was similar as she interacted with assistant coaches at SBU most of the time:
The third assistant was the one who called me the most. She would always talk to me when I went to the games; the other assistant coaches were familiar with me because they recruited former high school friends of mine. Another reason I chose SBU was because the coaches were laid back – something I was used to.

Likewise, Shannon identified that her connection with the assistant coaches was similar to dealing with her family when making decisions:

I had the most contact with [assistant coach name]. I didn’t feel like she wanted me to try and impress her and that you know, if I told her – “I’m going to another school” or something that she would have understood. I guess it was like talking to a sister or somebody in my family even though she was trying to recruit me to come here. I have to admit – trying to understand her sometimes was kind of hard because she is similar to my mom. I think because we played the same position, we can relate to each other better on the court than off. I had a good connection with the other assistants too who I spoke to on the phone a lot.

Margaret formed a connection with not only the assistant coaches but an academic advisor at SBU and that relationship proved to be important in her final college choice decision:

The academic advisor was truly helpful. He seemed more into his job than the other academic advisor. He knew what we needed and cared about us outside of athletics. I knew I would be okay with him here with academics and athletics. The strength coach was an influence because she was motivated to work with me before I was even enrolled. When I talked with her, she made me comfortable in the decision of choosing SBU because she gave me an insight as to what I was going to be doing and how much she would be a part of my journey. In all actuality, I can truly say all of the administrators at
SBU played a role in my decision because they all seemed as though they liked what they were doing, which made me feel comfortable.

June also felt that the coaches at SBU were influential in her decision:

Everybody seemed like they were good people. They had a nice little program – they were beginning to get recognition for the excellent job they had accomplished in the past years. It was not far away from home. I liked the head coach a lot – she was old and sweet; she did not take too much stuff, but her pleasantries were needed and wanted. I also had a huge opportunity to take the team to the Final Four and win.

Lanita expressed that meeting former players at JU was also influential:

Meeting [former player’s names] and getting an insight as to what they thought of [JU coach name]. I felt at this point they had nothing to lose so I wanted to know it all. They could have told me all the really good and great stuff, but they told me, you know, other stuff about the coach. Mood, what kind of drills we would do if we lost, when was a bad time to tell her bad news, stuff like that. I though that was really cool because they could have been just real fake and only told me the good stuff.

The participants valued the opportunity they had to share their college choice process with those that they felt were important in their lives. The involvement of family and friends assisting them in making a decision was central to the process in which they made their decisions. However, participants also shared that there were individuals at the colleges and universities that they wish there had been more communication with.

Opportunity to Communicate with More People

As much as the participants valued their interactions with family, friends, assistant coaches and others, they also wished they could have spoken with more individuals to assist in
helping to make a decision. Specifically, participants also wished they could have talked with individuals who were not on staff within the athletic department. For example, Lanita and Whitney both wanted to speak with academic counselors:

   I wanted to talk with someone with a different perspective, so that I was able to find out how they [coaches] truly felt about me coming to JU. Also, I wish I would have met with someone in the academic office in order to assure me of my academic endeavors. I was receiving the assurance from the coaches, but a reassurance from the individuals I would probably be dealing with quite often, since my academics were not where they needed to be.

Whitney also echoed the same sentiments:

   I wish I would have met with the academic counselor. I am not sure if it was necessary, but I think it would have been good for her to get involved, so that she can let the athletes know what is expected of us. I think it just would have been nice to hear from someone else other than the coaches.

Participants also placed great value on the attitudes and impressions of former and/or current players as a way to better understand the environment at the college or university. The ability to communicate with those individuals also proved to be important. June was happy with her choice but also wished she had been exposed to differing opinions:

   I wish I would have had a lot more contact with other individuals in the athletic department, such as the academic counselor and the players. Not that I really expected them to, you know, give you the real scoop but I could have gotten a feel better for the place. Also, I wish I was able to visit the college more often, so that I was able to see how the team and the staff interact in a normal situation – not a planned visit.
Although Ashley had a greater connection with JU through a family member, she still wanted to meet others at the university.

I wish I could have talked with the academic advisor more, but I also had the opportunity to interact with the players when I would go and visit my cousin. I had the opportunity to talk with a lot of players on-line during my recruiting process; they would tell me all about practices and the coaches. I would only make an attempt to talk to individuals when I needed to, such as my secretary.

Lanita wished she could have had more contrasting opinions about JU as well:

I would like to have talked with someone with a difference of opinion in order to find out how they really felt about me coming here. Also, I would like to have talked to [head coach name] more instead of when she would usually call me, which was not too often.

Shanna admitted that she knew a lot of the recruiting process was “for show” and wished there was more contact with individuals who would have been honest regardless whether or not it was positive or negative:

I wish I would have had more contact with the players – past and present. I would like to have found out what it really was like to be a part of this organization. I know coaches tell you all the good things and they choose their favorite athletes who will talk positively about their program, but I know that things are not always wonderful…talking to other players could possibly give me a different insight.

As it relates to the college choice process, the participants were positive that the discussions they engaged in with as many people as possible assisted them in making the best college choice. Although they were involved with the coaches at the recruiting institutions, they also wanted to hear the opinions from others with more realistic views of the program.
Conclusion

This chapter examined the themes that emerged during the data collection process. Voices of the participants’ college choice process helped identify what their experiences were when attempting to select a college and what aspects of the process seemed to be most significant in making the final choice. Though all of the participants described a positive experience in their college choice process, the data suggests that the involvement of individuals such as family members, friends and others contributed to how the student-athlete perceived the college choice experience.

The major themes developed also identified the immediate pressure that student-athletes are under to consider colleges from the first sign of their athletic ability. This coupled with the ability to maintain academic requirements to become eligible for collegiate athletics may impact greatly how student-athletes evaluate the institutions recruiting them. It also appears that although student-athletes are considering the academic programs and environment of prospective colleges they are at the same time drawn to the success of the collegiate coach and the athletic program. In Chapter 5, the themes will be discussed as related to the research. Additionally, Chapter 5 will explore implications for practice and future research as a result of this study on the college choice process of female student-athletes.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The study explored the perceptions of female student-athletes relative to their college choice process. Thirteen current, female college student-athletes shared perceptions of their process in deciding on which college to attend and participate in intercollegiate athletics. Even though the participants received several offers to play college sports at other institutions, this study investigated their decision to enroll and eventually play at the college of their choice.

The remainder of this chapter will provide an overview of the study and discuss the major themes that emerged during data analysis. Implications for policy, practice, and future research will conclude the chapter.

Overview of Study

There are several factors that influence high school students in deciding on which college to attend. During the college choice process, high school students making a decision about college consider factors, such as location of campus, academic reputation of the college, financial aid considerations, career options upon graduation, campus life, and other factors (Chapman, 1984; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1991). However, for high school students who have aspirations of playing collegiate athletics, they must consider factors that their non-athlete peers do not consider, such as the opportunity to play, reputation and rank of the athletic program, scholarship opportunities, the coach, and even the possibility of playing professionally (Hu & Hossler, 2000; Konnert & Giese, 1987; Letawsky et al., 2003; Slabik, 1995). Like other high school students, student-athletes making a college choice decision are in some cases subject to family influences, academic ability, and other external factors (Letawsky et al., 2003). Each of these factors may not be readily evident in the
college choice decisions of student-athletes, yet, data from this study indicated that the factors do have an impact on the overall process in some way.

To investigate the perceptions of female student-athletes regarding their college choice process, the following primary research question was used as a guide: How do student-athletes perceive their college choice process? Secondary questions included:

1. How do external factors influence student-athletes’ decision about where to attend college?

2. How do student characteristics influence student-athletes’ college choice decision?

To address the perceptions of female student-athletes and their college choice process, thirteen current female student-athletes were interviewed for this study. Each of the participants was enrolled at a Division I institution in the same athletic conference. Both institutions, Justice University (JU) and South Ball University (SBU) were classified as Research Extensive (Carnegie, 2005) universities and are nationally ranked institutions in their primary (revenue generating) sport (NCAA, 2004). All of the participants were offered full athletic scholarships to other institutions, yet they made their college choice decision based on multiple factors.

Discussion of Findings

The data revealed that although student-athletes undergo a similar process as non-athletes, their experience in many ways was different due to the additional factors they have to consider. As a result of the participants responses to open-ended interview questions intended to illicit honest answers regarding their college-choice decisions, six themes emerged: 1) the college choice process for student-athletes begins before they enter high school, 2) student-athletes are motivated to achieve academic requirements in order to play their sport in college, 3) student-athletes consider more than just athletic success when choosing a college, 4) high school
administrators are critical in the college choice process, 5) the success of the collegiate coach/athletic program is important to the student-athlete, and 6) student-athletes value communication from everyone during the college choice process.

College Choice Process for Student-Athletes Begins Before They Enter High School

Women’s sports are experiencing a growth in popularity. For example, television contracts for collegiate teams, star power of female players (i.e., Cheryl Swoops, Lisa Leslie, and Diana Taurasi), and the lure of the WNBA have provided opportunities for women to receive some of the attention that male athletes have enjoyed since the formation of the NCAA (NCAA, 2005). Consequently, the positive revenue and attention generated by women’s basketball has precipitated collegiate recruiting at the earliest sign that a young girl shows talent for competing in collegiate athletics. For several of the participants, their recruiting process began even before they entered high school.

Each of the participants had contact with college recruiters well before they had an opportunity to consider college as simply a student; let alone a student-athlete. The attention by colleges occurred at a very early age – in some cases as early as the 6th grade – and was based on their athletic performance without much regard to their success as a student. Mathes and Gurney (1985) confirmed that student-athletes are recruited for their athletic talents rather than their academic ability; therefore, the attention received by the participants supports the primary interest of the recruiting colleges on athletic ability.

Participants in this study were unaware that they would be evaluated so early by prospective colleges. The ability to be recognized at such a young age encouraged some thoughts of playing basketball in college. For example, when Lanita expressed that she did not know she could receive letters from colleges as a 6th grader, she was excited at the prospect of
being recruited. Moreover, individuals who received collegiate information indicated that it provided them with the opportunity to consider the implications of playing basketball and being a college student even if they did not know what that quite meant yet.

The mailings and letters participants received confirmed the idea that the college choice process starts much earlier for student-athletes. Perhaps, participants were entering the search stage (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) of the college choice process before they were aware. Konnert and Giese (1987) found that the opportunity to play intercollegiate athletics influenced the student-athletes’ decision to attend college. The findings from this study support Konnert and Giese (1987), as data analysis revealed that the primary reason participants chose JU and SBU was to play collegiate sports. As the participants’ exposure to attending college to play basketball happened so early in their playing career, it is feasible that they were motivated to do what was necessary to be eligible to participate.

*Student-Athletes are Motivated to Achieve Academic Requirements to Play*

The unfortunate perception of highly recruited student-athletes is that there is more attention placed on athletic competition rather than the academic performance (Mathes & Gurney, 1985). However, findings of this study indicated that several participants included academic outcomes as part of their search criteria and subsequently were motivated to achieve academic success in high school.

Student-athletes in this study allowed their athletic aspirations to serve as a catalyst to investigate the necessary requirements for academic eligibility to enter college. For example, all of the participants concentrated on maintaining an adequate high school GPA and obtaining the required ACT or SAT score in order to be admitted to their chosen institution. Furthermore, as Chapman (1981) indicated, as a student’s high school achievement and performance on the
college aptitude tests correlate with college admissions influences, the more the student considers the institution. Hence, it could be concluded that student-athletes may perceive a relationship between academic performance and athletic aspirations. Without the appropriate academic performance, prospective student-athletes would not be able to pursue their athletic aspirations to participate in collegiate athletics (NCAA, 2005).

The student-athlete who wishes to participate in collegiate athletics could possibly face their biggest challenge in their entire college choice process – the preparation of academics (Letawsky et al., 2003). The academic preparation is the first factor a student-athlete may need to contemplate when considering participation in collegiate athletics. This preparation begins in the student-athletes' freshmen year of high school and continues throughout their senior year. All of the participants knew how important their academic performance in high school related to their college choice process. In essence, without the minimum scores on the entrance examination and grade point average (GPA) necessary to be admitted to their chosen institution, it is probable that prospective collegiate athletes would have to consider different institutional types, such as a Division II, an NAIA, and/or a junior college institution. Subsequently, even though some of the participants struggled to meet the necessary requirements they were willing to do what was necessary to meet minimum admission criteria. For example, several participants took the ACT and/or SAT several times until they received the minimum score for eligibility. Taking the entrance exam several times can be related to non-athletes, i.e., honor or national merit scholars desire to attend a particular institution that promotes the class rank and GPA of incoming freshmen at their institution (Chapman, 1981).
Student-Athletes Desire Communication with Others During the College Choice Process

The communication between the athletic department and the student-athlete seemed to be a significant factor during the college choice process. Likewise, the desire to communicate with other significant persons, such as the college academic advisors, former student-athletes and staff personnel at the institution outside of athletics, seemed important as well. Communication allowed the student-athlete to build a relationship with college personnel and ultimately create a connection to the institution. The majority of participants had a desire to meet with individuals outside of the athletic department so that they could see what academic programs and support the institution provided. Similar to Chapman and Johnson (1979) and Davis and VanDusen (1975) who indicated that the availability and benefits of effective communication by the institution is an important factor when choosing a college. Although literature suggest student-athletes are recruited for their athletic abilities rather than their academic performance (Mathes & Gurney, 1985), the participants wanted access to more individuals outside of athletics so they could ensure they were making the best college choice decision.

The opportunity to communicate with other individuals outside of the athletic department allowed the student-athlete to understand their sense of belonging to the institution beyond being “just a student-athlete.” For example, Margaret felt very comfortable about the opportunities presented to her when she spoke to academic advisors who assisted her in understanding the complexities of the institution. Although some participants suggested that they did not know where they would have had the opportunity to pursue other activities outside of athletics, having the opportunity to learn of the availability of activities and academic support services would have been interesting to know.
High School Administrators are Critical in the College Choice Process

Through the participants’ stories it was discerned that high school administrators were critical in the college choice process. The high school personnel involved in the college choice process of the participants provided support, information, and resources in order to assist them in making a college choice decision. Moreover, the guidance counselors, coaches and others at the high school assisted by helping the students understand the intricacies of the recruiting process. High school guidance counselors provided the necessary academic structure that participants indicated was crucial in their selection process which was also found to be the case in an earlier study conducted by McDonough (1997). The high school guidance counselors for participants in this study reviewed transcripts, assisted with ACT/SAT preparation and provided assistance in selecting the necessary courses for college admission. June spoke of her guidance counselor as another parent and credited her with assisting in keeping all the details organized related to college admissions and academic eligibility. Freeman (1997) agreed that the guidance counselor often influenced the college choice process particularly if none of the family members had little knowledge of the process. Although the participants had a parental figure at home who may not have had experience with the college choice process, the guidance counselor more than likely assisted athletes and non-athletes alike in making their college decision. The guidance counselor also buffered the level of excitement created by the athletic departments recruiting the student-athletes and the importance of being a student and an athlete.

Likewise, the high school coaches and athletic directors contributed to the college choice decision of the participants. For example, the high school coaches served not only as advocates for students, but also assisted to some extent in helping students make informed decisions regarding the available opportunities to participate in collegiate athletics.
The Success of the Collegiate Coach/Athletic Program is Important to the Student-Athlete

The most significant factor in the college choice decision for participants in this study is probably the most obvious theme - the opportunity for an aspiring student-athlete to play for a major college basketball program and an equally popular coach. As indicated by Mathes and Gurney (1985), the presence and influence of the coach was a major influence for athletes entering college. Even as they identified the location of the institution, academic major, and ability to please their family as critical to them in their college choice process; the success of the coach and the athletic program created excitement for study participants. Also, student-athletes viewed their relationship with the athletic department, coaching staff and teammates, as an indication of whether they would like to attend the institution (Letawsky et al., 2003)

Student-Athletes Value Communication from Everyone During the College Choice Process

The involvement of family, friends, academic advisors and others also proved to be significant in the decision that student-athletes made in their college choice process. For many of the participants, the involvement of significant persons was almost as important in the college choice process as choosing the school itself. Researchers have utilized parental encouragement as an interactive approach for a student and parent to share their views about their hopes and dreams for a future in college (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). For example, Jordan placed a great deal of emphasis on her involvement with her family in all of the big decisions in her life and valued their opinion. Consequently, for other participants, the involvement and opinions of their parents was a fulfillment of dreams by both the students and their parents to participate in a college choice process.
Similarly, the communication participants had with friends and academic advisors also appeared to be significant as the student-athletes sought opinions from others to confirm their college choice decision. Tillery (1973) supports this finding in that the more contact students had with other students who wanted to attend college the greater the influence each student had on the other to attend college. Although the primary external influences involved in the choice process were collegiate coaches and high school administrators, the opinions of those outside of the athletic arena proved to be vital to the participants as well.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings from this study have relevance to the college choice process of student-athletes, particularly those that are heavily recruited for their athletic abilities and receive multiple scholarship offers. Insomuch as student-athletes may consider their collegiate opportunities as a true measure of their athletic skill, there is the possibility of making an ill-advised decision relative to which college to attend. Moreover, others involved in the recruiting process of student-athletes may glean useful information from the findings. Hence, this study has implications for the following groups: 1. student-athletes, 2. high school counselors, 3. collegiate athletic departments.

**Implications for Student-Athletes**

The student-athlete at the center of the college choice decision may have the most to gain and lose from development of policies and practices devoted to their decision making process. Chapman (1981) identified that although external influences play a significant role in the college choice process, it is the student themselves that must have all the information to be able to make informed choices regarding their college choice. Likewise, the findings of this study illustrated
that the student-athlete must be able to consider all of the factors related to their choice of college before making a decision.

Programs could be developed that expose student-athletes to the process of college recruiting (on the highest level) and explain the terminology involved in the specific process of recruiting and preparing to enter college. An orientation program designed to introduce student-athletes to the specific process involved in recruiting would dispel some of the anxieties that may exist when student-athletes encounter this process for the first time. It was evident through the participants stories that they had to negotiate the process of understanding the requirements for athletic participation and the aspects of entering the college with little or no prior knowledge of its inner workings. An orientation program could be offered by high school athletic departments in collaboration with the governing body for collegiate athletics as a way to inform prospective student-athletes of the necessary requirements. Perhaps, the governing body for collegiate athletics could develop a handbook that could serve as a guide for high school athletic departments to facilitate a successful orientation.

As participants spoke of the influence of the college coaches and their staff on their decisions, it may be prudent to provide guidelines for student-athletes to evaluate the athletic staff and its commitment to the student if they were to select the institution. Although all of the participants made positive connections with coaches and assistant coaches who recruited them to attend, the trust established by the participants was not based on anything more than their own “gut feelings” about the coach as an individual and reputation. A policy could be implemented by high school athletic administrators in collaboration with the NCAA that requires institutions to complete a profile that includes all of the pertinent information relative to the needs of the student-athlete. Not only would such a profile include graduation rates, course information and
programming, it would also include information pertinent to the athletic program including a sample practice schedule, key personnel needs for their team and survey responses regarding the coaching staff from former and current players at the recruiting institution. The intent would be to provide objective information for the student-athlete that is not based on personal relationship-building between the coach and the player. Several of the participants mentioned that they attended tournaments or summer camps that discussed NCAA recruiting guidelines. Therefore, the NCAA could design a seminar or at a minimum provide handouts on what factors prospective student-athletes may want to consider in making their college choice decision.

Additional programs could be developed that encourage student-athletes to consider taking the college entrance exams earlier in high school to alleviate some of their anxiety in obtaining the minimum score. In this study, some of the participants took their first college entrance exam late in their high school career, whereas others had already taken the test three or more times. Although, the exam can be taken at any time during high school, the opportunity to prepare and reduce test anxiety may be lessened if the test is taken for the first time early in their high school years (NCAA, 2006). Moreover, student-athletes could benefit from practicing the college entrance exams prior to actually taking the “real” test.

Implications for High School Counselors

To enhance the college choice process of student-athletes warrants an understanding of the implications of what high school administrators can do to benefit the student-athletes’ college choice decision. The college choice process for student-athletes begins when they start thinking about playing collegiate athletics. High school counselors should understand what is needed for the student-athlete to excel academically at the collegiate level. High school counselors could have eligibility seminars and classes for freshmen high school student-athletes who have
aspirations to participate in collegiate sports. This process would continue throughout high school, so the student-athlete would have the knowledge of what is necessary to be eligible to play collegiate sports.

Likewise, high school counselors assigned to student-athletes could be released to attend seminars sponsored by the NCAA related to athletic eligibility and recruiting regulations for incoming students. Additionally, high school counselors could also promote early completion of college entrance exams prior to the student-athlete’s junior year. This type of encouragement could give the counselor the opportunity to work with the student-athlete who may be struggling with taking college entrance exams. Additionally, the assistance from the high school counselors could give the student-athlete an incentive to excel earlier in high school before they are contemplating the college choice process.

Implications for College Athletic Departments

As indicated by the findings of this study, student-athletes formed relationships with coaches which ultimately led to their successful enrollment at their chosen institution. The influence of the collegiate athletic department was significant in the college choice decision. Moreover, with the athletic department acting as an additional external influence, the college choice decision is dependent upon the recruiting methods and style of the individual collegiate program. According to the themes discussed in this study, athletic success and academic preparation are important to the student-athlete. Likewise, the ability for collegiate athletic departments to identify how they can satisfy those two desires in their recruiting methods may be central to the outcome of the student’s college choice decision. Athletic administrators and coaches who understand the perceptions and the process that student-athletes have regarding the
recruiting process could develop marketing material that addresses the needs of the prospective student-athlete.

Coaches and other athletic staff could also include more information regarding services and options available to all students at their particular campus. Many of the participants did not learn of services or programs available to them while investigating colleges and universities which, for some, was rather troubling. Other than the athletic department and the academic center, most of the participants did not receive any information regarding other programs on campus. In most cases, the prospective student-athlete only had contact with the athletic department; therefore, it may be beneficial that the marketing department for athletics include additional services and activities offered on campus and options available for the student-athlete.

During the initial recruiting process, the recruiting staff may need to take into consideration the lack of understanding a prospective student-athlete may have related to the eligibility rules and NCAA regulations. The opportunity to evaluate the recruiting process by student-athletes could become a source of valuable information for future improvement in the recruiting process for different colleges. Data collected for this study was gathered from responses female student-athletes had regarding their college choice process. Likewise, coaches and assistant coaches, as well as the athletic department administrators can evaluate and refine their recruiting process to meet the needs of the student-athletes they are targeting. For example, current student-athletes could discuss with their current coaches what aspects of the recruiting process they liked or disliked. Additionally, athletic administrators could develop an evaluation form or a suggestion box for freshmen student-athletes who have chosen their institution in order to express what they liked or did not like about the recruiting process. The ability for the
participants of this study to remain anonymous was important as they discussed their dislikes and likes of the recruiting process related to their college choice.

**Future Research**

The development of findings related to the college choice process of student-athletes presented specific factors that are considered during the evaluation of colleges and universities to attend. Yet this study could be enhanced by further research in the college choice process of student-athletes.

*College choice process of female student-athletes.* This research study only included two institutions so further inquiry across a larger sample of institutions would provide additional insight as to whether these themes are common across female basketball players at other Division I institutions. Additionally, examining how women who participate in other collegiate sports perceive their college choice process would contribute to the literature. Moreover, quantitative research of female student-athletes’ college choice process across all institutional types and sports could be useful in generating a model of college choice process for female student-athletes.

*College choice process of male student-athletes.* Although this research was specifically focused on female student-athletes who were recruited to play basketball, additional studies could examine the college choice decision process for males across all sports. It is possible that the influence of significant individuals involved in the recruiting process could be more or less impactful when focusing primarily on a male population. Additionally, as the revenue generated from men’s sports is greater at most Division I institutions, one could assume that the recruiting process could be far more stressful for male student-athletes.
**Participation in other revenue and non-revenue sports.** Future research could analyze the college choice process of student-athletes who are being recruited to play other revenue and non-revenue generating sports. For example, the experiences of a student-athlete being recruited to play football at a large, Division I institution, may differ from a student being recruited to play golf at that same institution. There could be some linkages between the amount of recruiting that occurs based on the value (i.e., revenue generated) that the institution places on the sport in consideration of the financial impact it has on the budget. The impact of non-revenue generating sports may be such that the pressure placed on coaches and assistant coaches to field a winning team may be non-existent and therefore the decisions a student-athletes has to make are far less stressful during the college choice process.

**Persistence of student-athletes.** It could be beneficial to investigate the factors that cause student-athletes to persist at their chosen college. As many of the participants in this study eventually made qualitative decisions about their chosen college, the impact of that choice on their long term success or failures (e.g., choice of major, career planning, student-involvement on campus) could challenge high school student-athletes to consider other factors as well.

**Decision to attend non-Division I institutions.** Investigating the college choice process for student-athletes who have opportunities to play at Division II, III or NAIA institutions may uncover additional factors related to the choice process not inherent to choosing between two or more Division I institutions. Although a student-athlete may have the skills to compete at a large, Division I school, they may also appreciate the subtle (or drastic) differences that a smaller institution may provide. Additionally, it could be beneficial to identify those student-athletes who chose a lower division institution when they had scholarship offers to attend a Division I institution as well.
Conclusion

This study investigated the perceptions of female student-athletes related to the college choice process and identified which factors were significant in their final decision. As indicated by the findings of this study, the process to choose a college was a challenge for student-athletes as they considered the opinions of others, the prestige of the coach and the collegiate athletic program and their commitment to academic performance. Additionally, student-athletes were aware of their responsibilities for both academic success and their role in the recruiting process. Taken together, these factors allowed student-athletes to clearly understand, if not immediately, the importance of the college choice process and their involvement in the final decision.

The discovery that student-athletes were recruited prior to entering high school, some as early as 6th grade, and were almost immediately challenged to start considering a college presents troubling data for the future of collegiate athletics. Insomuch as student-athletes will continue to be recruited to participate in Division I athletics, it is evident that future research in this area is warranted and necessary.
REFERENCES


Ann Arbor, Michigan: Project CHOICE, School of Education, University of Michigan.


Konnert, W., & Giese, R. (1987, Fall). College choice factors of male athletes at private NCAA division III institutions. College and University. 63, 33-44.


*College Student Journal.* 37, 4, pp. 604-610.


APPENDICES
Appendix A:

Formal Letter to Gatekeeper

[DATE]

Mr. John Player
Women’s Basketball Administrative Coordinator
Justice University
Sampler Drive
Any City, Any State 00000

Dear John:

My name is Arrianna N. Smith and I am conducting a doctoral dissertation on how student-athlete’s perceive their college choice process. There is very little research on the decision process of student-athletes and the college they choose to attend. I have chosen this topic in order to investigate influential factors student-athletes consider when choosing a college. As a PhD candidate at the University of New Orleans and a former student-athlete, my area of research is higher education, with a focus on the perception of student-athletes’ college choice process.

This study will benefit prospective student-athletes who will undergo the process of choosing a college when they are presented with two or more athletic scholarship offers. Additionally, this study may benefit athletic administrators as they enhance their understanding of how student-athletes make their college choice decision.

I would like to visit your campus during a scheduled team practice session or a team meeting to propose my study and to ask for volunteers. My intent will be to explain the study as I have done here, answer questions and enlist willing participants for a 60 minute one-on-one interview.

Additionally, if you can also provide two dates in <<month>>, in your opinion, that would be most convenient to meet with selected participants. With your assistance, I intend to interview the participants in an unused classroom or conference room that you may have available.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss my research interests and the scope of the study with you. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (504) 280-3213 or my major professor, Dr. Barbara J. Johnson at (504) 280-6448.

Sincerely,

Arrianna N. Smith
Doctoral Candidate, University of New Orleans
Appendix B:

Availability of Women’s Basketball Team Email

Dear <<Gatekeeper>>,

Thank you again for your continued support of this study. Your involvement in this study will assist in understanding the college choice process of student-athletes. The purpose for this email is to request a time and date in which I can meet with your women’s basketball team to solicit volunteers for the study I contacted you about previously.

I will only need 20 minutes to speak with the women to discuss the following:

1. Research Subject
2. Purpose of Study
3. Process of Data Collection
4. Any Associated Risks
5. Questions & Answers

Once completed, I will ask for volunteers and then request they complete a participation questionnaire. It is also my intention, if possible to interview participants in an unused office or conference room at your athletic field-house. This may make them feel more comfortable in their surroundings and easier to find than an off campus location.

If you have any questions, please contact me at any of the methods listed below:

Researcher: Arrianna N. Smith
Home Phone: (504) 280-3213
Email: ansmith@uno.edu

You may also contact my major professor, Dr. Barbara J. Johnson at (504) 280-6448 or bijohnso@uno.edu if there are questions.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Sincerely,

Arrianna N. Smith
Doctoral Candidate, University of New Orleans
Appendix C:

Participation Questionnaire Cover Letter

The purpose of this study is to learn what attitudes and perceptions student-athletes have regarding their college choice process. I hope to learn what factors influenced student-athletes to choose their current college.

Procedures for this Research
The selected participants will be audiotaped to express their feelings pertaining to their college choice process experience. Each interview will last no longer than 60 minutes.

Potential Risks or Discomforts
This project will not pose any risk to you. There may be some potential loss of personal time being given up in order to participate in this study. There is also the possibility that participants may become fatigued during the interview. Participants will be allowed to take breaks if needed and will be offered an opportunity to debrief issues brought up over the course of interviewing. All aspects of participation are voluntary and the participant may choose to conclude the interview at any time.

Potential Benefits to You or Others
Participants may benefit from the opportunity to express and discuss how their college choice process is viewed. Additionally, their participation will benefit future prospective student-athletes who will undergo the process of choosing a college when they are presented with two or more scholarship offers. Even more so, your participation will benefit athletic administrators in understanding how prospective student-athletes make the college choice decision. It is my aspiration to present this study to high school and postsecondary administrators, NCAA conference representatives, and other student-athletes.

Protection of Confidentiality
The participant’s name, current institution, and any other identifying information will be kept confidential at all times. The participants will be identified with pseudonyms in this project.

Financial Compensation
You will not be paid for your participation.

Thank You.
Arrianna N. Smith, Doctoral Candidate, University of New Orleans

Are you interested in serving as a participant for this research study? (Please Check One)

☐ Yes  ☐ No

If YES, please continue to complete this form.
If NO, thank you for your time and consideration.
### Appendix C2:

**Participation Questionnaire**

**Personal Information**

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**Parent’s Highest Level of Education**

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<th>Some College</th>
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<th>Bachelor’s Degree</th>
<th>Graduate Degree</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Father</td>
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<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
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</table>

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<th>Occupation of Father:</th>
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**High School Academic Information**

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
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</table>

**High School Athletic Honors**

Please list all athletic honors you received in your senior year:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
College Recruiting Process

Please list the colleges who recruited you during your senior year:

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

How many schools made scholarship offers to you prior to making your decision to attend your chosen institution?

☐ 1  ☐ 2  ☐ 3  ☐ 4  If more than 4, how many? ______

Are you a <<STATE OF SITE>> resident?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

Are you on full or partial athletic scholarship?  ☐ Partial  ☐ Full

Interview Selection

Please select a first and second choice date and time to conduct your interview regarding your college choice process. The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. You will receive an email to confirm the date, time and location of the selected interview session.

The dates for interviews will be <<DATE>> and <<DATE>>. Please indicate first choice and second choice below:

<table>
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<th>First choice Date</th>
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<th>Second choice Date</th>
<th>Second Choice Time</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>☐ After 4 p.m.</td>
<td>☐ After 4 p.m.</td>
<td>☐ After 4 p.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If you select “After 4 p.m.”, you will be contacted to arrange an exact time and location

Contact Information

Name ____________________________________________

Address ______________________________________________________________________________

City __________________________ State________ Zip Code ___________

Home Phone # ___________________________  E-mail _________________________________

Cell # _____________________________  Work # _______________________________________

Thank You.
Appendix D:

Formal Thank You Email for Participants

Dear <<Participant Name>>,

Thank you again for your continued support of this study. Your involvement in this study will assist in understanding the college choice process of student-athletes. The purpose for this email is to confirm our scheduled interview according to the information listed below.

Interview Date: <<Date of Interview>>
Location: <<Location of interview>>
Time: <<Time of Interview, starting and ending>>

At least two days prior to the interview, I will send an email as well as a reminder call to confirm our scheduled interview. Also, you will find a consent form outlining the purpose of the study. We will review and sign the consent form prior to the start of the interview.

If you have any questions, please contact me at any of the methods listed below:

Researcher: Arrianna Smith
Home Phone: (504) 280-3213
Email: ansmith@uno.edu

You may also contact my major professor, Dr. Barbara J. Johnson at (504) 280-6448 or bjjohnso@uno.edu if there are questions.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Sincerely,
Arrianna N. Smith,
Doctoral Candidate, University of New Orleans
Appendix E:

Consent Form

1. Title of Research Study
   Where to play?: How do student-athletes perceive their college choice process?

2. Project Director
   Arrianna N. Smith, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. (504) 280-3213. E-Mail – ansmith@uno.edu

   This research project is in partial fulfillment of course requirements, and under the supervision of Dr. Barbara J. Johnson, professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. Office (504) 280-6661. E-mail – bjjohnso@uno.edu.

3. Purpose of this Research
   The purpose of this study is to learn what attitudes and perceptions student-athletes have regarding their college choice process. I hope to learn what factors influenced student-athletes to choose their current college.

4. Procedures for this Research
   The Project Director will interview 12-16 female student-athletes at a 4-year Division I public institutions in the Southeastern region of the United States. Each participant will complete the interview alone and the interview should last about 1 hour. Participants will be audiotaped in order to collect verbatim their experiences regarding their college choice process.

5. Potential Risks or Discomforts
   There may be some potential loss of personal time being given up in order to participate in this study. There is also the possibility that participants may become fatigued during the interview. Participants will be allowed to take breaks if needed and will be offered an opportunity to debrief issues brought up over the course of interviewing. All aspects of participation are voluntary and the participant may choose to conclude the interview at any time. Participants who would like to discuss these or other potential discomforts may contact the Project Director listed in #2 of this form.

6. Potential Benefits to You or Others
   Participants may benefit from the opportunity to express and discuss how their college choice process is viewed. Additionally, their participation will benefit future prospective student-athletes who will undergo the process of choosing a college when they are presented with two or more scholarship offers. Even more so, your participation will benefit athletic administrators understanding how prospective student-athletes make the college choice decision. It is my aspiration to present this study to high school and
postsecondary administrators, NCAA conference representatives, and other student-athletes.

7. **Alternative Procedures**
   Participation for this research project is entirely voluntary. Each participant may withdraw his/her consent and terminate participation at any time without consequences.

8. **Protection of Confidentiality**
   Your name, current institution, and any other identifying information will be kept confidential at all times. You will be identified with pseudonyms in this project. The interview tapes will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist or by the Project Director. The signed consent forms, audiotapes, interview transcripts, and any other materials related to this project will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner by the Project Director. The data collected of this research study will be destroyed in three years.

9. **Financial Compensation**
   You will not be paid for your participation.

10. **Your Rights as a Participants**
    If you have questions about my rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, Dr. Anthony Kontos at the University of New Orleans at 504-280-6420.

11. **Signatures and Consent to Participate**
    Federal and University of New Orleans guidelines require that we obtain signed consent for the conduct of social research and for participation in research projects, which involve human subjects. After this study’s purpose, procedures, potential risks/discomforts, and benefits have been explained to you, please indicate your consent by reading and signing the statement below.

    I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks, and I have given my permission to participate in this study.

    __________________________________________________________________________
    Signature of Participant                                                   Name of Participant (print)   Date

    __________________________________________________________________________
    Signature of Project Director                                              Name of Project Director (print)   Date

    Arrianna N. Smith
Appendix F:

Confirmation Telephone Script for Participants

Hello Participant:
This is Arrianna Smith, the Project Director for the proposed research study you agreed to participate in.

Four days ago, I sent you an e-mail thanking you for agreeing to participate in the study. I was calling to confirm your receipt of the e-mail and to answer any questions you might have. Do you have any questions at this time?

At this time I would like to remind you of the date, time and location of our interview. *(Date, Time, and Location)*. We will also review and sign the consent form prior to beginning the interview. I will call you again two days before the interview.

Looking forward to talking with you. Thank you.
Appendix G:
Reminder Telephone Script for Participants

Hello Participant:
This is Arrianna Smith, the Project Director for the proposed research study you agreed to participate in.

I am calling to remind you of the time, date, and location of our interview. *(Time, Date, and Location)*. Do you have any questions as we get closer to the interview?

**YES**

Questions?

**NO**

Looking forward to talking with you. Thank you.
Appendix H:

Interview Guide

Student Characteristics

High School Athletic Honors / Performance

1. When did you begin considering playing your sport in college?
2. What other sports or activities did you participate in during high school?
3. What athletic honors did you receive in high school?
4. When did you receive your first recruiting letter?
   a. How did you feel?
   b. How many recruiting letters did you receive?
   c. What did you do with the letters you received?
   d. How many colleges recruited you in your junior year until you graduated?
   e. How many colleges did you seriously consider? Why?
5. Were you familiar with the recruiting process / eligibility rules and regulations of the NCAA?
   a. How?
   b. What about your parent(s)?
   c. How did they learn?

High School Academics / Aptitude / Levels of Aspirations

6. When did you first take the ACT / SAT?
   a. What was your score?
   b. How many times did you take the test?
   c. How did you feel about your score(s)?
7. What courses did you take in high school?
   a. Were they considered college prep courses?
   b. Were you familiar with the courses needed to take in order to be eligible athletically?
8. What administrators at your high school were involved in your recruiting process?

Levels of Educational Aspirations

9. What were your academic aspirations during high school?
10. How much did your academic aspirations play on your college choice decision?

Family – Athletics

11. Did anyone in your immediate family play sports in college? Who?
    a. What impact did this have on your aspirations to participate in athletics on the college level?
12. What role did your family play in your choice of college?

External Influences

13. What significant persons influenced your college choice decision? (friends, parents, high school personnel)
   a. How and why do you feel they influenced your college choice decision?
14. What influence did financial aid have on your college choice?
15. What influence did the location of the institution play on your college choice decision?
16. What programs were available that influenced you to choose your college?
17. What recruiting material did you receive from the colleges?
   a. How often?
   b. How did you feel about receiving material like this?
18. How often did you visit your college choice before you made the decision?
   a. What did you accomplish / do on your college visit?
19. What did you have to do for admission to the college?
   a. Did you receive assistance from the athletic department pertaining to admission into the college? Explain.
20. When did you receive your scholarship offer?
21. How long did it take for you to respond to the (Letter of Intent) offer? Why?
22. Did you doubt your decision after committing to the institution?
23. What factors assisted you in your college choice decision? Explain.

Administrators

24. What role did individuals at the institution you considered attending play in your college choice decision?
25. Can you describe the recruiting technique of your chosen college?
26. Was the coach a major factor in your college choice decision? How?
27. What academic opportunities did the athletic department present to you?
   a. How did you feel about it?
28. Who did you have the most contact with during your recruiting experience?
29. Do you wish you could have had contact with more individuals during your recruiting process? Why or Why not?

Follow-up

30. Are you satisfied with your college choice decision? Explain.
31. What, if anything, would you change about your college choice process?
32. Do you have any advice to high school athletes about the college choice process?
Form Number: 05JUN05

(please refer to this number in all future correspondence concerning this protocol)

Principal Investigator: Barbara Johnson Arrianna Smith

Title: Assistant Professor Graduate Student

Department: ELCF

College: Education

Project Title: Where to play?: How student-athletes perceive the college choice process

Dates of Proposed Project Period From 6/15/05 to 6/15/06

Approval Status:

☐ Full Board Review  ☑ Approved Date: 6-2-05

☐ Expedite

☐ Exempt

☐ Project requires review more than annually. Review every ________ months.

*approval is for 1 year from approval date only and may be renewed yearly.

1st continuation Signature of IRB Chair Date:

2nd continuation Signature of IRB Chair Date:

3rd continuation Signature of IRB Chair Date:

4th continuation Signature of IRB Chair Date:

Committee Signatures:

Laura Scaramella, Ph.D. (Chair)

Pamela Jenkins, Ph.D.

Anthony Kontos, Ph.D. (Associate chair)

Richard B. Speaker, Ph.D.

Gary Talarcek, Ph.D.

Kari Walsh

Kathleen Whalen, LSW

L. Allen Witt, Ph.D.

Version 2.1 6/2/2005
VITA

Arrianna N. Smith received her Bachelor of General Studies with a concentration in Physical Education from Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. As a former head women’s basketball coach, she has an interest in research related to collegiate student-athletes. She served on the Athletics Committee at Delgado Community College, as well as an academic advisor for the student-athletes. Being involved in athletics allowed her to join organizations to enhance her knowledge of athletics, such as the Women’s Basketball Coaches Association, the National Junior College Athletic Association, and the National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrator.

Arrianna earned a Master of Education degree from the University of New Orleans in Human Performance and Health Promotion. She is currently an Assistant Professor in the Health and Physical Education Department at Nicholls State University. She also serves on several committees that advise the direction of service delivery and overall enhancement of the athletic department for Nicholls State University. As a doctoral student she has maintained a full-time job while a single parent to her daughter.