

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

Jonene L. Cook
Nicole D. Jones

The Graduate School
Morehead State University
February 12, 2016

FACILITATING BETTER LEARNING FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES:
A COMPETENCY-BASED NEEDS ASSESSMENT
IN AN ACADEMIC SERVICES UNIT

Abstract of capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
At Morehead State University

By

Jonene L. Cook

Stillwater, Oklahoma

Nicole D. Jones

Stillwater, Oklahoma

Committee Chair: Dr. John H. Curry, Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

February 12, 2016

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FACILITATING BETTER LEARNING FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES:
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Learning specialists conducted a needs assessment of an established academic training experience for Division I, scholarship collegiate football players and facilitators who work with them. Staff who work with the program identified competencies needed for academic success, then student-athletes and facilitators were given the opportunity to identify needed competencies for educational success, as well as modifications and needed additions to make the established learning training and support program more meaningful and beneficial for the stakeholders directly impacted by and involved in the program. Responses were compared and gaps identified; responses that indicated valuable aspects, modifications, and changes were collected and recommendations were presented in the Needs Assessment Report.

KEYWORDS: student-athlete, academics, needs, assessment, Division I athletes

Candidate Signature

Date

Candidate Signature

Date

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By

Jonene L. Cook
Nicole D. Jones

Approved by

Marilyn Middlebrook
Committee Member Date

Daryl R. Privott
Committee Member Date

John H. Curry
Committee Chair Date

Christopher T. Miller
Department Chair Date

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Nicole D. Jones

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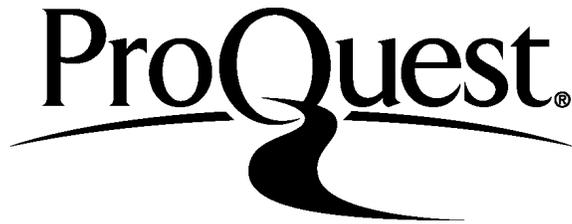
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DEDICATION

JONENE COOK

It is with great love and appreciation that I dedicate this capstone to my husband for his support, patience, and guidance through my graduate program. Thank you for sharing your experiences and sharing in this experience; I appreciate you, and I didn't say it enough. And to my children, thank you for putting up with the lights on until all hours and for stepping up to the challenges presented to you during this experience. To my parents, John Bode and Chelsea and Carol Cook, and the rest of my family, thank you for your reassurance and love. Mom, I wish you'd been here to see this.

Nikki, my friend, my co-worker, and my co-author, who continued to push me and talk me down during crazy periods of coursework and change. I cannot express what persevering through this experience with you has meant, and what this experience would have lacked had you not been part of it.

And finally, to my friends who listened to my ramblings, yet continued to ask questions and offer words of support. Thank you all.

DEDICATION

NICOLE JONES

I would like to dedicate this capstone project to my mom and brother whose love has been unconditional and support unwavering. There are not enough words in my vocabulary or space in this dedication to adequately express my feelings, so I will just simply say THANK YOU and I love you both.

This is also dedicated to my friends. They have been there as my cheerleader when I needed one and to pick me up when I wasn't sure I could go any further. A special "shout out" goes to my best friend, Sally, who helped me believe in my ability to do this!

To Jonene, my co-author and partner in this project – we started this adventure as co-workers who were setting out to achieve a goal. Today, here we are, friends who have walked together on this journey and I could not imagine it any other way! Thank you for always being there with words of wisdom, a listening ear, and such a genuine heart. The friendship we have built is something I treasure!

Finally, in loving memory, I dedicate this to my step-dad who supported my education without hesitation. I wish he could have been here to see this – I am sure he will be smiling from above on graduation day!

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

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We would further like to thank Morehead State University College of Education doctoral program administration and faculty for building a quality, student-centric program, built on purposeful coursework and encouragement to pursue our interests.

We would like to thank our cohort - The Breakfast Club - for their support, camaraderie, motivation, and friendship; you have been an invaluable part of our success, and we wouldn't have wanted to make this journey without you.

We thank our co-workers for putting up with us on the tough days, encouraging us, checking in on us, celebrating with us through the milestones, and making sure we were taking care of ourselves.

Finally, we thank the student-athletes and facilitators, who were the inspiration for this project, for their cooperation, communication, and support throughout our program.

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Executive Summary

Fundamentally unfounded. Those two words hold extreme significance to individuals who work in academic services units. In September 2013, a five part series appearing in *Sports Illustrated* magazine alleged academic misconduct, among a variety of other allegations. For those who dedicate their careers to working with collegiate student-athletes, this type of article leaves lasting repercussions far beyond what the public perceives.

What is the core of the capstone?

Division I college athletics are under intense scrutiny; a litany of rules violations accusations abound (Dixon, Turner, Pastore, & Mahony, 2003; Dohrmann & Evans, 2013; Keeling, McGoldrick, & Sadhu, 2013). At the fore of many lists are alleged improprieties in the *student* part of the student-athlete. Whether investigations into these allegations reveal actual improprieties or are deemed unfounded accusations, they still affect the programs involved. These programs are impacted by the questions posed by outside observers which may not be answerable due to privacy issues. The programs are further impacted by commentary from part-time employees regarding them being unsure of their role in providing help, such as what is too much. Staff, too are impacted and may feel pressured to make overt adjustments to avoid any perceptions of inappropriate or questionable actions, such as wording and rewording of emails, as well as secondary readers of emails prior to clicking send. Many of the comments within the allegations and from outside perspectives relating to these allegations stem from the underpreparedness of many high-profile student-

athletes (Cagwin, 2006; Lawry, 2005; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Parsons, 2013). How different universities respond to problems is based on their resources and perceived needs. Some universities sweep reported problems under a rug, only to have them re-emerge worse than thought (Barrett, 2014; Williams & Costello, 2014; Adelson, 2014). Other universities muddle through, with academics at odds with coaches, neither completely convinced of their responsibilities under National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) compliance regulations (Stripling, 2014).

The academic and other allegations purported in *Sports Illustrated* were determined to be false in October 2014; however, academic services units should choose to utilize the events as a way to reflect, analyze, and improve their current processes. The goal of this capstone project was to examine the current state of the football student-athlete training and the academic facilitator training program from the perspective of those directly involved as football student-athletes and those serving as facilitators to provide insight into the future direction of training for both groups, individually and collectively.

The training program for football student-athletes and the training program for facilitators at the academic center have been developed and modified since their inception. The programs have seen successes and struggles, but the trainings have worked well to provide support to student-athletes and facilitators. Given allegations such as those in the *Sports Illustrated* article (Dohrmann & Evans, 2013), the learning specialists in academic services have engaged the program's core training, seeking ways to make the training more engaging, more developed, and more thorough while

working within the time constraints of the training session compared to years past when training had been more of a dispensation of information. The continual evaluation led to the addition of scenario-based training videos for the student-athletes and the facilitators, which grew out of research on how to better engage learners and improve information retention.

With the development of the football student-athlete training, bringing in freshmen to acclimate them to collegiate expectations, the learning specialists considered what was needed by those football student-athletes to help them be successful. New scholarship student-athletes in the football program engage in training in the summer following their senior year of high school and into the fall and spring semesters. Student-athletes train in areas of time management, organization, study skills, how to balance the demands of their sport with their academics, tips for success, effective written/verbal communication, and overall adjustment to college life. In order to better understand the continued application of the techniques learned in training, more evaluation of the program was needed.

The facilitator training program consists of a day-long orientation beginning with new facilitators in the morning, with returning facilitators joining mid-day. In the morning session, new facilitators are introduced to staff and oriented with academic services operations and services. During this time, facilitators are also given their academic services handbook and various documents and resources they will use throughout the course of their meetings with the student-athletes. The handbook is discussed, with the understood expectation that facilitators will read it in its entirety

prior to starting the semester, and each document used during meetings is addressed as to the expectation of its use and its importance to the meeting. After this portion of the training, returning facilitators join the group to foster time of communication to share experiences and build a sense of camaraderie among facilitators.

With both groups in attendance, a representative of the compliance office presents a variety of situations and explains the potential for violations, the consequences for the violations, and their impacts on the department and university. The representative also provides information as to the importance of communication, as well as where to go to ask questions if the facilitator is concerned with a potential situation. Immediately following this presentation, the learning specialists address Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) concerns.

The training concludes with activities designed to illustrate potential situations that may exist in meetings, such as behavior changes in student-athletes, academic integrity issues, and communication among facilitators. Additionally, exercises are engaged in which facilitators make connections between the goals of facilitating and the sports with which the facilitators may work, making an analogical connection that they may then use in their one-on-one meetings.

There has been continuing evaluation of the program by learning specialists Jonene Cook and Nicole Jones, who lead the training, and questions as to what is needed so facilitators, both new and returning, could work more diligently and consistently with their student-athletes, while continuing to uphold the high standards and integrity expected by the academic services staff.

The perceived needs were where the prompting for this study began. Rather than basing any changes for student-athlete and facilitator training on the perceived needs of the learning specialists alone, the learning specialist evaluation team, comprised of those conducting the competency-based needs assessment, sought to identify the needs of the student-athletes and the facilitators as seen through their eyes. This competency-based needs assessment identified the perceived needs of current student-athletes and the perceived needs of current facilitators to identify gaps in the existing program. Identifying these gaps allowed the learning specialists to better train each party to succeed in their respective roles.

Rather than implementing new tactics in hopes they make a positive change, the evaluation team took the investigation to those immediately involved. What did current student-athletes in the football program believe they needed to help them fulfill their roles as students more effectively and engage with their facilitators in a more collaborative, rather than simply instructional, way? And what did the current facilitators believe they needed to more effectively do their jobs as facilitators?

Who is the capstone meant to impact?

Student-athletes frequently have their motivations, educational abilities, and educational participation questioned even without allegations; questioning comes in many forms and may come from anyone from community members to fans to instructors, as well as from the NCAA. Fans and community members or students who already dislike institutional support of athletics begin to question the integrity of the institution, the student-athletes, and subsequently question the integrity of those

who work with the student-athletes in academic capacities. Those against university sports programs, or against student-athletes, gain momentum in their fight against both institution and players (Dowling, 2001; Lawry, 2005).

For the purposes of this competency-based needs assessment, the following terms are understood:

Scholarship student-athlete – An individual who has achieved the status, earned the opportunity, and accepted the role of both a student at a university as well as an athlete engaged in an officially-sponsored sport. A student-athlete is expected to fulfill both the role of student and the role of athlete equally under competing pressure for time and energy, which often leads to role conflict. The student-athlete's educational track is impacted and regulated by NCAA guidelines with regard to his eligibility based on adherence to university and NCAA rules such as appropriate behaviors, grade minimums, progress toward degree, and others.

Facilitator – An individual interviewed by learning specialists within the academic center and hired by academic services to work in the academic center with incoming freshmen and transfer student-athletes. The facilitator must be at least a master's degree-seeking student in good standing with his or her program or a professional in the community with at least a bachelor's degree. As such, most facilitators elect to continue working in academic services for two to four years as graduate assistants during the duration of their masters and/or doctoral program. Community members include former corporate managers and retired school teachers; the current retention rate of community members working in academic services ranges from five to

thirteen years. Facilitators are charged with teaching and promoting organizational and appropriate study techniques and habits for student-athletes. Facilitators' roles extend to personal development of student-athletes in communication with instructors and community members, as well as often functioning as a sounding board for common collegiate student struggles such as homesickness and boy-/girlfriend issues.

Student-athletes

In some cases, the role as student in student-athlete can be challenging to develop, especially for underprepared learners. For the more prepared students, balancing the demands of school and sport becomes the challenge. They may possess the needed knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful as students, but they have not had to perform academically under the pressures and expectations of Division I college athletics. For the underprepared learner, the lacking knowledge and skills are more visible. Not only are they lacking some of the necessary skills needed for engaging in learning, but they also do not completely understand and embrace their role of college student. Helping students in the transition and preparing them for the role of college student is a necessity for their success. Once they feel more comfortable in that role, they are able to construct knowledge about what it takes to be successful college students, improve some of their skills, and develop the attitude of a successful student, with the end-goal of the learners becoming more engaged in their academics.

In identifying with the role of successful college student, it is important for the student-athlete to define and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes

associated with being a successful student-athlete. A variety of factors contribute to developing the successful student role. A successful student needs to be able to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem solving skills in their classes in order to make well-thought out decisions and learn to consider different perspectives and approaches to solving various challenges. Critical thinking is needed both academically and socially. Often students do not think things through or simply look to others to solve their problems. A successful student has the ability to look at the situation, analyze the factors contributing to the problem, and develop a plan of action for resolving the issue.

Successful students need to be able to use their time efficiently and effectively. They:

- use strategies like creating a semester calendar or constructing daily and/or weekly to-do lists for keeping themselves on track.
- are organized, keep up with due dates, and are able to plan upcoming assignments and projects around practice, training, meetings, and competition.

Successful students need to be self-motivated and self-directed when it comes to their learning. They:

- should not rely on someone else to motivate them to complete assignments or fully participate and engage in their classes or coursework.

- understand why they are in college and what it takes to be academically successful.
- monitor their own academic behavior and keep themselves focused on matters of learning.

As successful students, the individuals are self-disciplined and accept personal responsibility for their own learning, keeping themselves on track for adequate preparation for tests and papers. They:

- are able to keep up with their assignments, set aside appropriate amounts of time for their studies, and acknowledge their own responsibility, or lack thereof.
- do not place blame on others, such as tutors or facilitators, for their lack of success in the classroom.

Although training procedures are in place, for underprepared learners or those who lack the necessary college readiness skills, the barriers to engagement can still seem significant. For these student-athletes, the services provided by academic services are a necessary part of their development as college students. As such, the learning specialists responsible for revising and conducting the training program and academic services are constantly looking at ways to improve how student-athletes are trained for their role as college students. As a result, the facilitator program is designed to focus on freshmen and transfer student-athletes. By reaching out to these populations who are new on campus, facilitators can help the student-athletes

transition to the particulars of collegiate life at their new university. The facilitator program is also utilized for continued assistance to returning student-athletes in some cases for sustained academic structure, needed additional development, or at the student-athlete's request.

Facilitators

Facilitators must be prepared for many possibilities. They must help their assigned student-athletes find “the proper balance between intercollegiate athletics participation and the goals of higher education” (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009, p. 315). The student-athlete's time is limited; in addition to class and homework, student-athletes must devote time to their sport including practice, watching film, strength and conditioning, treatment for injuries, travel, and competition (Hollis, 2001/2002; Parsons, 2013). The facilitator must fit into that schedule and must meet each student-athlete at his level and help him move forward.

The facilitator should have, and continue to build, good communication skills and trustworthiness. The facilitator should also be supportive, flexible, enthusiastic, and empathetic. The facilitator should understand there is a symbiotic relationship between the student-athlete and his or her environment and provide a structured environment with expectations and shared successes (Corella, 2010). The facilitator may function as a mentor, an organizer, a trainer, a life coach, an educator, a friend, and a tutor. Through the multiple roles and diversity of student-athletes, facilitating “is seen as a holistic process that necessarily involves all aspects of a person's identity and life circumstances” (Martens & Lee, 1998, p. 127).

As a mentor, the facilitator can show the student-athlete campus resources or show the student-athlete how to find those resources; the facilitator can help the student-athlete better manage the pressures of his new roles and learn techniques to prepare for different types of tests and classes (Avalos-Louie, 2010). The mentor role requires the facilitator to have a broad general academic knowledge base. The facilitator in a mentoring role can teach the student-athlete approaches for studying more effectively and methods that will improve his or her preparation for different types of evaluations (Jordan & Denson, 1990). Throughout the course of their meetings, the facilitator as mentor seeks to enhance the student-athlete's critical thinking skills rather than merely providing answers (Nwaokoro, 2010). To enhance these thinking skills, the facilitator must see where each of the student-athletes assigned to him or her can enjoy successes. Even small successes can be built upon and can teach that student-athlete how to foster successes and utilize the student-athlete's individual assets (Grogan, 2011). The mentoring facilitator must be able to meet the student-athlete where he or she is academically and help the student-athlete grow from there.

As an organizer, the facilitator works with student-athletes who may have weak organizational skills or not completely understand what will be expected of them in a university setting. The role then becomes one where the student-athletes can more effectively manage all their activities and coursework in the limited time available, and the facilitator can emphasize managing where activities and assignments can fit into a student-athlete's day. The organizer facilitator can help the

student-athlete learn to maintain his or her schedule so fewer assignments are overlooked (Avalos-Louie, 2010; Dewart & Rowan, 2007; Hendry, 2009; Jordan & Denson, 1990; & Steele, 1996). The organizer facilitator uses meeting times to emphasize manageable to-do lists for activities and assignments pertinent to the courses and the student-athlete's study habits while noting time that must be spent in classes, with tutors, in practices, in travel, and in the student-athlete's sport (Jordan & Denson, 1990). These organizational skills are meant to help student-athletes designate study time and use their limited time effectively. Managing time, learning and implementing study or other academic skills helps student-athletes allot and commit to specific sections of time in their days for the student part of their lives; this helps foster a recognition of the duality they must maintain which is essential to student-athlete success (Lanning, 1982; Mazerolle, Pitney, Casa, & Pagnotta, 2011). Developing strong organizational skills is an especially important lesson for transitioning freshmen and transferring student-athletes who may not be accustomed to the stringent requirements and/or way a four-year university operates courses.

As a trainer, the facilitator guides student-athletes to improve academically through emphasizing internal skills and beliefs. Just like a personal trainer instills beliefs in physical abilities and training, the facilitator works to bolster established efforts and develop motivational methods to strengthen the student-athlete's beliefs that he or she can succeed. By building on small successes the student-athlete enjoys, the facilitator can help build the student-athlete's confidence in him- or herself. Emphasizing these skills provides opportunities for engaging in activities beyond the

academic skills training. For example, at the beginning of the semester facilitators may have student-athletes list what they value about having the opportunity to be both a student and an athlete at a Division I institution (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006). Activities like this allow the student-athletes to reflect on what is important to them. The process of physically writing values down gets them asking questions about what type of students they want to be and what barriers and challenges they may experience as they work toward their goals. This allows them to engage in a meaningful activity as opposed to just being lectured to about using their time wisely and the importance of setting goals. Writing helps them to be an active participant in creating their own academic vision for themselves which could help to increase their overall engagement in academics and confidence in their abilities to be good *students*.

As a life coach, the facilitator's role is to help the student-athlete identify short-term and long-term goals establishing a concrete objective to work toward. By meeting regularly, the facilitator and the student-athlete can identify successes toward those goals or make adjustments to their plans to get the student-athlete moving toward those goals (Avalos-Louie, 2010). The life coach facilitator is a guide to helping the student-athlete establish his own methods of organization and goal-setting, with the student-athlete functioning independently as the goal (Bryzzheva, 2006). The life coach facilitator can contribute to the individual progress of the student-athlete with discussion of healthy food choices, social development, etiquette and proper communication, and how to find help as needed. The life coach facilitator

has a diversified role, well beyond merely setting goals. Life coach facilitators help their student-athletes prioritize needs and learn how to maintain decorum in difficult situations on and off their sport grounds (Olson, 2013). The life coach facilitator knows that as the student-athletes gain the needed skills to succeed academically, they grow more readily both in subsequent academic situations, as well as in their sport, making success cyclical (Grogan, 2011; Hester, 1990).

As an educator, the facilitator has the potential to make a significant contribution to the content the student-athlete engages in academically by helping him or her find ways to overcome barriers to learning. The educator facilitator can challenge the student-athlete's belief that he is not good at certain activities. Where some student-athletes may come into the academic setting believing they are not good at a specific task, working with a dedicated educator facilitator, they may find solutions or different ways of looking at work to help the student overcome this perceived barrier. Helping the student-athlete demonstrate he or she is able to overcome obstacles in the classroom, the educator facilitator can then help the student-athlete engage the content differently and enjoy further success.

The facilitator may at times function as a friend, helping with the student-athlete's personal life concerns and providing support in areas outside of academics (Corella, 2010). The friend facilitator can aid in the transition to college's unique social norms. By doing this, the friend facilitator relates to the individual quirks of each student-athlete in a safe, comfortable setting (Bryzzheva, 2006; Corella, 2010). Often, the friend facilitator has a general knowledge of the happenings within the

student-athlete's sport and is able to engage in dialogue about that aspect of the student-athlete's life (Hester, 1990). Beyond that, the friend facilitator has a general understanding of the student-athlete's family structure and events that may affect the student-athlete. The student-athletes may share worries that they would not discuss with teammates or coaches; situations regarding a family member's health, team issues, or even the progress or end of personal relationships with significant others are all topics the friend facilitator and student-athlete may discuss (Jordan & Denson, 1990). The friend facilitator builds the relationship through comfort, discussion, and a reciprocal approach of sharing (Avalos-Louie, 2010).

As a tutor, the facilitator explains concepts from courses between or in lieu of formal tutoring sessions. The facilitating sessions may, at times, resemble more of a review or study session. The tutor facilitator understands what is needed to succeed academically and can teach the student-athlete to make connections between the experiences the student-athlete has had and the topic being studied. The facilitator must model and reinforce the need for student-athletes to be thorough when it comes to preparation, note-taking, and building study tools for the course. The facilitator must also demonstrate professionalism; this soft skill is one that student-athletes will use societally, academically, and personally (Bruhn, Zajac, Al-Kazemi, & Prescott, 2002).

How was the capstone project implemented?

The capstone project was a needs assessment, specifically a competency-based needs assessment. Focus groups, including informal interviews, discussion, and

observations, were conducted during Summer and Fall 2015 semesters. Academic services units are charged with preparing Division I freshman and transfer student-athletes for balancing their roles as college students with the demands of their athletic commitments. The unit is housed in the home location of the Athletic Department. While academic services is located in the arena, it is important to note the unit is administratively housed under the Academic Affairs department of the university. The study was conducted under the approval of the director of the academic services unit.

Focus group responses and identified needs were collected in tandem, with both members of the evaluation team contributing to the coding of information, identification of themes, editing, finalization of those items, and the presentation of the competency-based needs assessment findings to the director of the academic services unit. Interviews occurred in groups. The interviews were conducted with all football scholarship student-athletes represented by each academic grouping (seniors, juniors, sophomores, freshmen). In the event a student-athlete was not able to meet with his academic year group, the process was not repeated. Due to the close knit nature of athletic teams, especially at the collegiate level, those not involved in the initial interview group would have been influenced by what they heard from teammates, thereby potentially modifying their responses, giving time to gather information from others who are not part of the identified population, and tainting the pool.

Senior scholarship student-athletes entered the academic center to find poster boards pinned to the wall and sticky notes and pens on their tables. Each poster board had designated questions based on the competencies the learning specialists had established as indicators for more successful student-athletes and better facilitating experiences; these included questions regarding what their expectations were for help from facilitators, what their experiences held, what problems or positive aspects of the student-athlete/facilitator partnership they had experienced, and what skills they believed were necessary for collegiate success. (See Appendix A for list of questions.)

The evaluation team gave a brief welcome, thanked the student-athletes for their attendance and participation, and explained that they would be asked a series of questions regarding their facilitating experience. Student-athletes were instructed to be reflective, respectful, and thoughtful but prompt in their answers to adhere to the one-hour parameters of the focus group. The evaluation team noted they would collect the sticky notes following each question, where the notes would be placed on the corresponding poster board at the front of the room. As the first evaluation team member continued through the questions, the second evaluation team member established follow up questions based on the responses. Once the last question had been addressed and sticky notes placed, attention was directed to the front of the room where the evaluation team asked a series of explicatory follow up questions to help further clarify or expand on the student-athletes' responses on the sticky notes.

Questions were developed based on the goals established by academic services under the guidance of the director of the unit and sought the student-athletes' perspectives on facilitating, success in college, and expectation, to identify parallels between the student-athlete and staff responses, confirm identified needs from both student-athletes and/or staff, and identify gaps between the identified needs for success as perceived by the staff and the identified needs for success as perceived by the student-athletes. The interview session began to conclude with the hypothetical opportunity to go back and give advice to their freshmen selves. The evaluation team thanked the participants and solicited any final thoughts from that session's participants.

The process was repeated with junior scholarship student-athletes, from the perspective of their years of experience as college students and scholarship athletes. Again the process was repeated with sophomores, and then, following the start of the semester, freshmen. Freshmen interviews were postponed until after six-week grades had posted. This was determined to be more effective to give freshmen a chance to experience some of the facilitating experience, coursework, and college life during their sport season. Finally, the process was repeated with the facilitators, gathering their perspective of the needs for them to aid in the student development of the student-athletes with whom they work. Due to the number of new facilitators, the focus group session with facilitators was held following six-week grades. This allowed the new facilitators to experience several weeks of working with their student-athletes in order to gain perspective and be able to actively engage in the

focus group. As was the procedure with the student-athlete focus groups, if a facilitator could not participate in the established date for the focus group, the focus group was not repeated due to potential for outside discussion and advanced access to questions, leading to a tainted pool.

All football scholarship student-athletes and facilitators who attended the focus groups and participated signed release forms at the beginning of their respective sessions indicating their willingness to participate in the needs assessment. The understanding was established that the needs assessment would include: informal discussions/interviews, observations, coded notes, follow up questions, and because privacy and confidentiality are essential aspects of needs assessments and working with student-athletes, any names or identifiers would be removed for student-athletes or facilitators to protect anonymity.

Why were this capstone and related strategies selected?

According to recent figures, “[a]t least 60 percent of 2012 U.S. college-bound high school graduates are at risk when it comes to success in college” (McGlynn, 2013, p. 34). There are a variety of possibilities to explain these disturbing results including lack of academic preparation, inadequate time management and study skills, lack of understanding of the role of a college student, and, for some, lack of engagement (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Hollis, 2001; Reid & Moore, 2008).

Every university has its own unique methods for working with student-athletes and training those who will work with them, but the world of Division I athletics and the student-athletes’ stories and struggles are not unusual. The dreams of

making it to the next level are common, as are the compounding frustrations both on and off the field, court, or mat. It is the goal of the academic services staff, and particularly the learning specialists, to educate the student-athletes and the facilitators as to what is expected of them, as well as what they may expect of one another.

Based on the multiple roles student-athletes and facilitators are expected to fulfill, it would be easy for learning specialists to make assumptions and predictions about the perceived needs and implement changes as a result. A competency-based needs assessment identifies the competencies expected of the student-athletes then the facilitators. Establishing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that are desired for each group, the evaluation team can then evaluate the needs the group stakeholders put forth (Sleezer, Russ-Eft, & Gupta, 2014).

By beginning with the perceived needs for success in the collegiate setting, as identified by the academic services staff, then focusing in on the needs identified by the student-athletes and facilitators, it is their perception that is explored in-depth. This allows the evaluation team to compare the answers, then identify parallels in beliefs and gaps in training and develop supplemental activities that benefit stakeholders directly and responsively, so they are more likely to further engage their efforts to make the programs better.

The purpose of the capstone project was not to assume, based on experience, what will or will not work with student-athletes. For the learning specialists, the most beneficial path appeared to be to start at the beginning. While the past training had worked, it was agreed by both that a new approach may be in order. To assess the

needs of the student-athletes, hearing their voice was where it began. What did they feel they needed to be more prepared as college students? What were the differences between the needs of the more confident students, versus those who lack the basic skills needed to successfully navigate the academic rigors of college coursework? How could they become more engaged in the process of their own academic careers? What were their concerns with regard to their role as college students? They are confident in their abilities on the field, but what about in the classroom? What could be done to build their confidence as learners?

The evaluation team ascertained there were possible discrepancies among the trainings, the practices, and the needs of the student-athletes and facilitators. Initially, the indication was to implement changes based on the perceptions of the learning specialists. However, after consideration, the evaluation team identified the desire to document the needs of the student-athletes and the needs of the facilitators as each group recognized them, rather than only addressing perceived needs the learning specialists believed to be factors.

The learning specialists determined conducting a needs assessment for the capstone project would be the most effective approach for documenting the needs of the student-athletes and the needs of the facilitators. The evaluation team then set out to identify what type of assessment would most appropriately address the questions identified and achieve the ultimate goals of the project, which were to continue to improve the student-athlete and facilitator training programs. This process was in alignment with research that indicates one should define the needs first and then

select the method for assessment (Watkins & Altschuld, 2014). As such, starting at the beginning and using the competency based needs assessment as an information-gathering tool was the most appropriate way to address those needs (Hammond, 2001).

The decision to implement a competency-based needs assessment was reached after reviewing several needs assessment options as a methodology for the project including goals-free approach, consumer-oriented approach, and the competency-based approach. Goals-free was immediately ruled out because both members of the evaluation team are full-time staff members of academic services, thus they already know the goals and objectives of the organization. Next, a strategic needs assessment approach was considered. This type of assessment “focuses on learning and performance gaps within the context of an organization’s business strategy” (Sleezer, Russ-Eft, & Gupta, 2014, p. 29). It was determined this type of assessment was not appropriate because the gaps in training for both the student-athlete and facilitators had not yet been documented. Although the learning specialists had identified perceived gaps, an important part of the proposed project was to document the identified needs of both groups, not the assumed needs.

As such, after the questions were identified, and the evaluation team considered various approaches to needs assessments, it was determined a competency-based needs assessment approach was most appropriate. A competency-based needs assessment “contains three processes with specific output items signifying each stage of competency identification, gap identification and training

curriculum preparation” (Sarkar, 2013, p. 255). This type of needs assessment focuses on “the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, motivations and beliefs that people must have to be successful in a job” (Sleezer, Russ-Eft, & Gupta, 2014, p. 29). This allows the learning specialists to focus not only on the knowledge and skills needed for student success and facilitator success, but also to be able to identify certain motivations and beliefs that are important factors in both student and facilitator success. It is the latter that may be not as easily identifiable, but is a current perceived gap as seen by the learning specialists. By establishing the competencies for student-athletes and facilitators, conducting the assessment, and identifying gaps, the goal was to develop a stronger and even more effective training curriculum for both groups.

The first step in a successful needs assessment “is clearly identifying what you want from the needs assessment project and then asking the questions that will provide this information” (Hammond, 2001, p. 189). In order to effectively gather data, the research team had to know what they were looking for which ultimately guided the research. For this project, the needs assessment came down to two questions:

1. What do incoming freshmen scholarship football players need to know to be better prepared for collegiate academic work?
2. What can be done to better prepare facilitators to guide incoming freshmen scholarship student-athletes for the rigors of collegiate academic work?

In most competency-based needs assessments, between seven and nine competencies are identified (Sarkar, 2013). For the purposes of this project, seven competencies were established for each group of stakeholders; these competencies were based on directives from the academic services unit and a pilot study conducted in academic services. Stakeholders included current student-athletes at different points in their careers, current facilitators, academic services staff, faculty members, and others who are engaged in the active academic success of student-athletes. For the purposes of this study, the perceived needs of the student-athletes, the perceptions of the expected role of the facilitator, and the directives of the academic services unit guided this competency-based needs assessment and the guiding responses. The seven competencies were based on who this program seeks to support. Figure 1 (p. 35-37) identifies the seven competencies that were identified by the pilot study and the associated expectations for them.

Competency:	The student-athlete should:	The facilitator should:
1.	Be able to apply critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills to both academic and personal situations.	(mentor) Ask questions to guide each student-athlete through his thought process of decision-making.
2.	Be able to demonstrate effective time management, organization, and study skills. Given the time constraints between class, tutoring,	(organizer) Be able to lead the student-athlete through syllabus reading, putting syllabus information on a semester-long calendar, and use that

	<p>academic requirements, practice, training, and competition, the student-athlete must be able to develop strategies (like calendars and to-do lists) for managing their time, organizing their assignments and other commitments, and prepare in advance for upcoming projects and assignments.</p>	<p>information to create weekly to do lists; Help student-athletes use folders or binders to organize each course; Teach multiple test-preparation techniques such as outlines, note cards, etc., as appropriate for courses.</p>
3.	<p>Be able to self-motivate and self-regulate in academic situations especially when motivation, self-direction, and academic confidence may be low.</p>	<p>(trainer) Draw parallels to the student-athlete’s sport to create effective analogies for motivation; Work with their student-athletes’ abilities to increase self-direction ease and confidence.</p>
4.	<p>Be able to demonstrate self-discipline, self-control, and personal responsibility in academic situations, Student-athlete must accept responsibility that their academic success is contingent upon their personal effort and in the end their work is their responsibility.</p>	<p>(life coach) Progressively place duties of organization and decision-making in the hands of the student-athlete; Continue to ask questions to guide each student-athlete in his thought processes.</p>
5.	<p>Be able to demonstrate ability to identify and overcome barriers in learning situations. Be able to identify areas the student-athlete struggles with academically and be able to seek out assistance in those areas.</p>	<p>(educator) Help the student-athlete identify areas he or she may struggle in, finding methods that makes sense for each issue and each individual student-athlete.</p>
6.	<p>Be able to effectively balance academics, sport, and social</p>	<p>(friend) Engage in meaningful conversation with the student-</p>

	life. Student-athlete must recognize stressors and develop strategies for stress management, including taking time to develop personal connections and interests outside their sport.	athletes; Detect changes in behavior through knowing each student-athlete; Help the student-athlete explore techniques for managing stress, expectations from family & friends back home; Help student-athletes plan ahead for travel, identifying blocks of time and how to best use that time.
7.	Be able to use effective oral and written communication skills in the academic setting. Must develop soft skills to communicate with instructors and others at the university both in oral and written form.	(tutor) Guide student-athletes through email communication; Rehearse how the student-athlete approaches instructors (soft skills); Emphasize basic grammar/sentence structure guidance in posts/homework.

Figure 1: Identified successful student and facilitator competencies as noted by the academic services staff.

The purpose of the competency-based needs assessment, therefore, was to identify the needs of the student-athletes and the needs of the facilitators in their pairings; what do each of these groups need to be successful? What do they need to be successful as a team? Are these competencies still the perceived needs of student-athletes and facilitators? What new competencies would be exposed through the needs assessment? How do the student-athletes and facilitators view these needs being met?

Identifying the competencies needed in both areas is much like writing a job description (Sarkar, 2013). What skills do student-athletes need to be successful academically in college? In what areas do they need to be competent? Likewise,

what makes a good facilitator? What qualities are academic services units looking for when hiring someone for that position? By using a competency-based approach, the research team was identifying the qualities student-athletes and facilitators feel are necessary to fulfill their respective roles. Once established, the current gaps in training with input from both student-athletes and facilitators were identified. Upon completion of the assessment, the research team was able to construct a more accurate picture of how to approach the future training modifications.

When was the capstone implemented?

The competency-based needs assessment began with interviewing current groups of senior, junior, and sophomore scholarship football players in Summer 2015 and freshmen scholarship football players following the sixth week of classes in Fall 2015 in person at the academic center. Interviews with current facilitators were conducted at the six-week mark in the semester at the academic center. This allowed the evaluation team the opportunity to construct the needs assessment report most effectively and provide recommendations based on that report to the director of the academic services unit.

The training for freshmen and transfer football student-athletes begins the summer before their freshmen year when they arrive on campus for the Summer Bridge program. The Summer Bridge program sets the tone for their academic experience and helps to start the process of learning to balance their roles as both student and athlete. The training consists of both individual and group meetings.

In meetings throughout the summer, training focuses on time management, organization, and study skills needed to become successful students at the university level. Topics also extend to navigating the world of being a student-athlete, including public perception, personal behavior, class behavior, expectations of conduct, and appropriate representation of the university and team. Student-athletes are also familiarized with the university's course management system and email; in this they learn the importance of checking emails frequently, with the ability to install their campus email on their phones. Additionally, student-athletes set up individual folders for each of their classes in the campus data storage to promote organization.

Conducting the competency based needs assessment during the summer session was determined to be the most feasible time to engage the older student-athletes. During summer, players have more time in their daily schedules to attend additional meetings. Although there are some time constraints during the summer months, the learning specialists do not deal with the same time constraints they would in the fall. It is also a time when it was easier to get the players together, by classification, in a group setting. During the fall semester this could have been challenging due to football season being underway when they are having to balance both the roles of student and athlete and divide time between classes, study sessions, practice, training, and competitions. However, during the summer months, sessions could be easily scheduled during the week. Conducting the interviews by class, starting with the senior group in the summer and ending with freshmen group after the six-week mark of the Fall 2015 semester gave the learning specialists time to

evaluate and reflect after each session and prepare for the subsequent focus group sessions.

Prior to each fall semester, facilitators come together for training from the learning specialists for how to best engage student-athletes, no matter the level of preparation the student-athletes they are assigned may have. Recommendations are made for facilitators to aid student-athletes in making calendars and to-do lists, creating meaningful analogies, and ways for the facilitators to communicate with student-athletes most effectively, and resources are shared that will help the facilitators fulfill these recommendations, such as academic term calendars, meeting contracts, weekly to-do list forms, and facilitator report forms. Many of the recommendations stem from scenario-based videos learning specialists have developed to aid in training and discussion through their Morehead State University coursework. New facilitators are able to see depictions of actual situations unfold and consider their potential actions and responses; returning facilitators are able to share their experiences in how they may address the situations presented looking at the situation from a different, more experienced perspective. The training for facilitators is structured, but informal, and allows both new and returning facilitators to ask questions of the trainers and engage with the provided training materials and group activities in preparation for making contact with and subsequently meeting their student-athletes during the first week of school.

During the fall training, new facilitators meet in the morning to engage in questions and are later joined by the returning facilitators in the afternoon to work as

a team to refocus efforts toward the new semester. By meeting with the new facilitators first, learning specialists are able to introduce compliance issues and the structure of the provided binder of training materials – information to which returning facilitators have become accustomed. Having returning facilitators join shortly before lunch provides a depth of experience to discussions regarding how and to what extent calendars, to do lists, and other information included in the binder will be used. After lunch, having both new and experienced facilitators allows for engaging discussion and activities to reaffirm their procedures and introduce new regulations that may have been implemented.

By doing this in the fall prior to the semester beginning, the learning specialists have a full day with the facilitators. The training is still fresh when the facilitators meet the student-athletes with whom they will work for the semester, year, or longer. Facilitators are thinking toward how they will best help the student-athletes, what the student-athletes will need, and how prepared the student-athletes will be for college work. By conducting the interviews and discussions during the training, especially at this time in their training, new facilitators would have been inundated with hypothetical situations generating thoughts of what they *may* need to ensure they are able to meet the student-athletes where they are and what the facilitators would need to best fulfill their roles, but without any practical application experience. Based on that, facilitator interviews were scheduled for the week after the first grade check, just after Week 6 of the Fall 2015 semester to allow time for

personal experience with the facilitator program and working with the student-athletes.

Impact of the capstone

College athletics have taken several hits off the field of play in recent years with regard to academic practices. In 2014, allegations against the University of North Carolina included “paper classes” (Barrett, 2014; Seidl, 2014) where student-athletes were rewarded with above-average grades for substandard work. Prior to that, in 2013, *Sports Illustrated* launched a five-part series, one of which covered allegations of academic improprieties, against Oklahoma State University. Allegations ranged from tutors writing papers for student-athletes, to instructors granting passing grades for no work, to student-athletes being provided with exam answers prior to tests (Dohrmann & Evans, 2013). With allegations covered by national news media outlets, college academic units and the practices of those units everywhere are called into question (Dixon, Turner, Pastore, & Mahony, 2003).

In light of the scrutiny of academic programs nationally, academic services units have to see such investigation as a time of reflection and identification of potential areas for improvement. As such, the impact of this capstone was to go to the student-athletes and facilitators to see if the perceived needs of the learning specialists aligned with the needs identified by the current scholarship football players and facilitators. Conducting a competency-based needs assessment allowed the learning specialists to use current identified competencies as a base to start a conversation first with the student-athletes about what skills and abilities they believe

are needed for them to develop in their role as students. By having the student-athletes confirm current competencies and identify any new ones, the students have a greater voice in what is needed in training programs to prepare them as students and for success academically, which addresses many national concerns as mentioned. Additionally, the needs assessment identified what is currently working in the student training, pointed to any gaps in the training process or curriculum, and provided direction for implementing new strategies and topics for training in the future.

The needs of the student-athletes, as identified by the student-athletes will directly impact the training of the facilitators. Based on the needs identified by the student-athletes, the facilitator training can be modified, with practices added to inform the facilitator as to the identified needs of the student-athletes. The results of the competency-based needs assessment further impacts the training of the facilitators. Based on the needs the facilitators identified, established practices can be reinforced, training modified where needed, and new training or activities recommended for identified areas.

With the competency-based needs assessment, the learning specialists sought to listen to the voices of those directly involved in and impacted by the student-athlete/facilitator pairings. This ensures that, in subsequent years, the program continues to move in a direction that will foster the development of student-athletes, preparing them for academic challenges throughout college and beyond, and building independence. By meeting their immediate needs as new student-athletes and building competencies, they will build for success beyond their college careers. By

addressing the competencies prescribed and the needs perceived, the gaps between the two were identified more easily. Once the gaps were visible, recommendations for continuing to improve the program could be detailed and identified to be implemented (McCawley, 2009).

Limitations of the study

There are several considerations to be made in the conduct and replication of this competency-based needs assessment. First, the needs of the student-athletes were based on self-reports. Senior, junior and sophomore football players were interviewed prior to the beginning of the Fall 2015 semester. These upperclassmen experiences lent reflection and content to the needs perceived by more experienced students. Should the competency-based needs assessment be replicated, these perceived needs may fluctuate for different years. As such, in interviews with senior, junior, and sophomore players, maturation could be an issue. As indicated, with each year in college, student-athletes' perceptions of what is needed to be a successful college student and their expectations of interactions with facilitators can change. With the freshmen population, their perceptions may be distorted by their lack of familiarity with the collegiate setting. However, their responses included valuable insights as to where they were lacking and what they believed they needed to be successful in their first year in a four-year institution. To that end, freshmen were interviewed just after six-week grades were posted; this ensured they had engaged in the facilitation processes and been allowed adequate time to receive instructor feedback. As an incoming freshman, one might have certain concerns that by his senior year do not

seem as much of an issue. By including all scholarship football players, at various stages in their academic careers, the researchers were striving for a picture of the student-athlete's experience in its entirety.

By classification, student-athletes who have reached the Division I level of athletics are competitive and want to contribute the proper response to the given situations they face; facilitators can be the same. Since the interviews were being conducted by learning specialists who work with the football players and the facilitators within the scope of their jobs, a potential threat to validity could be the Hawthorne Effect (Fernald, Coombs, DeAlleaume, West, & Parnes, 2012). Given the existing working relationship, players might have been inclined to give responses during the interview they thought the interviewers wanted to hear. Facilitators could have altered their behavior according to what they believed was the “right” answer for the given situation, thus affecting the study. To address this, the interviewers dedicated time before beginning group interviews to establish the goals of the inquiry. It was explained that participants would not be judged for their responses nor would their identities be recorded in notes or included in the final report. Instead, themes were established to guide the inquiry, and results of player and facilitator responses were presented in general group terms, not specific to individual players or facilitators. They were encouraged to give honest, respectful, and beneficial feedback in an attempt to improve the program for current and future players and facilitators and assured them their voice was a needed and valuable component in the evaluation process. For the facilitators, their honest and anticipated efforts were already

expected, due to the nature of their jobs; to help the program, themselves, and the student-athletes, their honest responses were needed.

The sample size for the scholarship football student-athletes is a consideration that would affect replication. For this competency-based needs assessment, those interviewed and observed were a captured audience sample; they were the entirety of the scholarship student-athletes on the 2015-2016 football squad. Scholarship athletes were chosen based on the requirements for their attendance and participation in the facilitator program for the duration of their first academic year (August-May) at the university.

Similarly, the sample size for facilitators is also a consideration in replicating the competency-based needs assessment. The facilitator sample was also a captured audience, as all facilitators employed during the 2015-2016 academic year were solicited for interview. Despite facilitators being assigned to certain sports, there is overlap and every facilitator must be prepared and available to work with any student-athlete population. Based on this, all focus group and discussion data were collected following posting of the six-week grades during the Fall 2015 semester; this allowed new facilitators to experience the process of meetings and interaction with student-athletes over the first six weeks of a new semester. Returning facilitators' responses may have been based on models of the facilitator program that have changed due to current constraints of the program; however, their feedback regarding their successes and setbacks as facilitators was valuable in contrast to the new facilitators' inexperience. As the facilitators mature throughout their time at academic

services, their perceptions of the needs of the student-athletes change; this evolution impacts their responses and, again, were the competency-based needs assessment to be replicated, these perceived needs could be different across the years.

Researcher bias is possible due to the researchers' immediate involvement in the training of football players and facilitators, debriefing of football players and facilitators on a regular basis, and their roles as facilitators. The collection and interpretation of data from student-athletes and facilitators was within the scope of the learning specialists' job descriptions. Both members of the evaluation team serve in the role of facilitator, and as proponents of the facilitator program, as such, the information collected may potentially have been interpreted with bias and the researchers not recognize it. The evaluation team sought to limit this bias by establishing the themes and coding student-athletes' and facilitators' responses within those themes.

The exploration of this unique singularity does not diminish its impact on the future development of the facilitator program, as there are commonalities across all semesters and among numerous student-athletes who are and will be positively impacted by the reflection, observation, and evaluation sought in this study.

Delineation of work

Jonene Cook and Nicole Jones elected to complete this competency-based needs assessment in academic services as an evaluation team, much like the teams with whom they work in academic services on a daily basis and like the team they

function as in their daily responsibilities in the academic center. Figure 2 (p. 48) illustrates the delineation of tasks for the needs assessment.

Task:	Evaluation Team:
Student-Athlete Interviews	Cook & Jones (Jones took lead in student-athlete interviews)
Facilitator Interviews	Cook & Jones (Cook took lead in facilitator interviews)
Analysis of Student-Athlete Data	Jones
Analysis of Facilitator Data	Cook
Write-up of Student-Athlete Findings	Jones
Write-up of Facilitator Findings	Cook
Cohesion Process	Cook (Cook engaged the process of making the final report sound of one voice; final edits went through both parties)

Figure 2: Delineation of tasks

In the event either learning specialist was unable to continue with the capstone project, a contingency plan was established. Should Cook have been unable to continue, Jones would have completed the project as a student-athlete competency-based needs assessment. In this scenario, the student-athlete needs assessment would have attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What do scholarship football players, based on their expectations as incoming freshmen or experiences as upperclassmen, perceive as competencies needed to be successful college students?
2. What are their expectations of their academic facilitators?
3. What areas of academic training do they feel are addressed well? What areas could be improved? What areas are not covered at all, but they wish were?
4. How could the working relationship between the scholarship football players and facilitators be improved?
5. Where are the gaps in what academic services does currently with regard to academic training of scholarship football players versus what the revealed needs are? Where are the gaps in facilitating the working relationship between players and facilitators?

For Cook, should Jones have been unable to continue, the project would have become a facilitator competency-based needs assessment and would have focused on the following questions:

1. What do facilitators, based on their expectations as incoming facilitators or experiences as returning facilitators, perceive as competencies needed to be a successful facilitator?
2. What are their expectations of the scholarship football players with whom they are assigned to work?

3. What areas in their facilitator training do they feel are addressed well? What areas could be improved? What areas are not covered at all, but they wish were?
4. How could the working relationship between the facilitators and football players be improved?
5. Where are the gaps in what academic services currently does with regard to facilitator training versus what the revealed needs are? Where are the gaps in facilitating the working relationship between facilitators and their assigned scholarship football players?

Since each member of the evaluation team was taking a lead role in their respective interviews, they would have been able to simply focus on their area should one party no longer continue the process.

Reflections

The focus of the needs assessment was to collect honest and thoughtful feedback from current senior, junior, sophomore, and freshmen scholarship football players along with current academic facilitators employed by academic services. The focus groups gave each individual an opportunity to have a voice in improving the efficacy of the student-athlete and facilitator programs and shaping the direction they will take for subsequent semesters.

While valuable insight was gained from both student-athletes and facilitators, the intent of the project was confirmed when a senior student-athlete randomly spoke to one of the researchers the day after the focus group he attended. The researcher

thanked the student for his participation in the focus group and the student responded by thanking the researcher for asking their opinion and giving them a chance to give feedback from their perspective. The student-athlete indicated he wished that other departments would do the same and that it was satisfying to know they had a voice in shaping future improvements to the academic training program.

The research indicated a number of facets of training for both student-athletes and facilitators that are successful; for those, the academic services staff intend to continue promoting and training student-athletes and facilitators to understand the expectations of each of their roles more clearly, enter into the relationship with a strong foundation of resources, and continue to build for academic success.

Responses that affected other aspects of the student-athlete experience were indications that these groups of student-athletes valued the opportunity to engage in discussion about aspects of their collegiate experiences to potentially affect change. Those comments, ranging from class checking to writing center observations, were distributed to supervisors in the respective areas. Since those areas are all directly peripheral to the student-athlete experience and academic services, it is necessary to maintain open communication with those respective areas to the success of the program.

With the thoughtful, critical, reflective, constructive commentary from both student-athletes and facilitators, as well as the clear recommendations, academic services identified a number of changes and additions to the current program for training student-athletes and facilitators who work with them. Refinement of the

training programs for student-athletes and facilitators will be an ongoing evolution; through the eyes of the stakeholders in this process, researchers were able to narrow the wide array of potential inputs that *may* have impact, to a handful of changes that *will* have a meaningful impact, as indicated by competencies established not only by the academic services staff, but also as identified by the student-athletes and facilitators -- those directly impacted by and responsible for the quality of the academic training and education on which academic services prides itself.

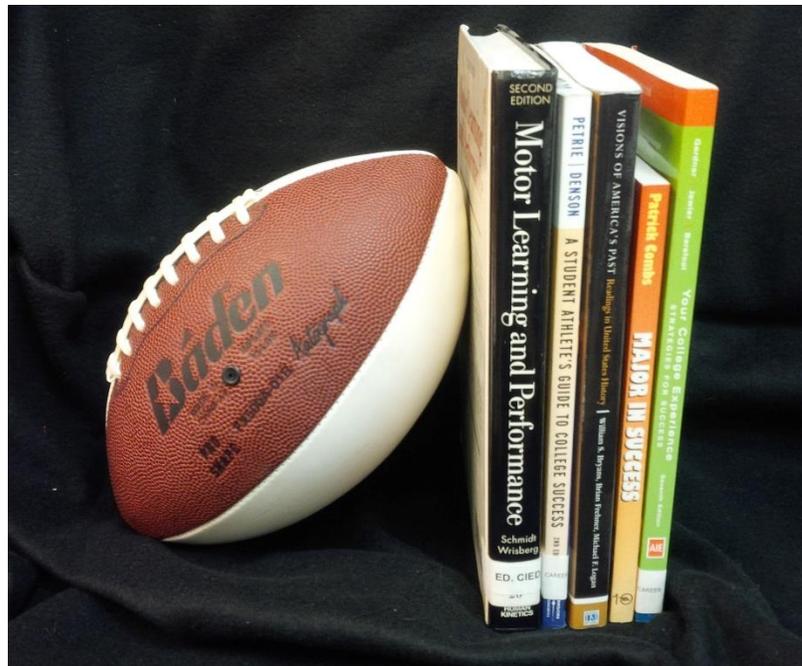
Academic services should continue to seek what is next for engaging student-athletes at their level and building successful collegiate learners. Discussion between the academic services staff and the facilitators should continue as a research area as changes are made to the program. Learning specialists should continue asking questions of the established group of stakeholders -- incoming freshmen scholarship football players, those who will conclude their first year of college, and facilitators -- to identify further reflections. This continued evaluation with the established groups will help identify implementations and changes to the training programs that are or are not effective. Additionally, expanding the research pool to other scholarship student-athlete populations to examine the perceived needs of other student-athlete populations is a needed next step to identify potential variations in the perceived needs of players of different sports' scholarship athletes.

Education is an evolution for the learner and the teacher; although the training programs for student-athletes and facilitators at academic services are quality programs, changes and modifications will be made and more will be considered.

Meeting allegations head on, academic services staff are able to be reflective of current practices from a new point of view and build on the established practices. Continual evaluation of methods, foci, needs, and implementation will take place to continue to improve the quality programs that are already in place.

Capstone Project

**FACILITATING BETTER LEARNING FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES:
COMPETENCY-BASED NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT**



Prepared by:

Jonene L. Cook & Nicole D. Jones

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Needs Assessment Report

<p>Background</p>	<p>The researchers in academic services set out to identify ways to improve their academic training for student-athletes and for their academic facilitator training programs. While both were considered successful, the unit was aware of the importance of continued evaluation in an effort to provide the best programming and training for both the student-athletes who accessed the services provided by academic services and the facilitators employed by academic services. Originally, many suggestions were made and ideas were brainstormed on how to improve the program. However, after much reflection, it was determined the assessment needed to begin with asking the student-athletes and the facilitators about academic and facilitator training directly in order to evaluate the future directions and recommendations for the program.</p>
<p>Purpose</p>	<p>The purpose of the needs assessment was to identify what areas of academic training for student-athletes and facilitators training were working well, and which areas could be improved. Information received would be used to guide recommendations for change to the director of academic services.</p>
<p>Research Methods</p>	<p>Data collection for the needs assessment was conducted through focus groups. Student-athletes were divided into four focus groups of participants: Seniors, juniors, sophomores, and freshmen. The focus groups were held at the academic center. Due to time constraints, each focus group session was limited to approximately one hour. A single focus group was held for the academic facilitators. In each group, participants were asked a series of questions and individual responses were recorded onto sticky notes. After each question, anonymous responses were gathered and reviewed. Once all questions had been asked and answered, follow up questions were posed to the group as a whole and discussed. It is important to note in each session, participants were encouraged to be open with their responses and to answer</p>

<p>Research Methods (continued)</p>	<p>expediently. Researchers conducting the focus groups wanted honest and thoughtful responses without concern for grammar and punctuation.</p> <p>Student-athletes focus groups were held on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seniors July 20, 2015 • Juniors July 21, 2015 • Sophomores July 23, 2015 • Freshmen* October 19, 2015 <p>*Note: the freshmen focus group was not held until after the six-week mark in the semester. This date was decided in an effort to give the freshmen football players time to participate in the facilitating program and become acclimated to the expectations and demands of balancing their academic work with their sport before their focus group.</p> <p>The facilitator focus group was held on October 18, 2015*</p> <p>*Note: the facilitator focus group was not held until after the six-week mark in the semester. This date was decided in an effort to give new facilitators time to function in their role as facilitators and the ability to actively participate and provide feedback in the facilitator focus group.</p>
<p>Data Summary</p>	<p>The focus groups consisted of scripted questions followed by additional researcher questions asked to clarify responses and to request suggestions for achieving those suggestions. The following information was collected from each scripted question and the follow up questions:</p> <p>Student-Athlete Question 1: What were your expectations of your facilitator before arriving on campus? What did you think they would do?</p>

<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Almost half of current seniors indicated they did not know or have any expectations for a facilitator. While a handful of the seniors indicated they thought their facilitator would be someone who would do their work for them, more juniors and sophomores acknowledged that they expected their facilitator would help them. This help, they believed, would come in the form of organization, guidance, reminders, and explanations. One student-athlete noted, “my expectations were simple. I expected them to work with us if needed, and have scheduled appointments if necessary” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015).</p> <p>Facilitator Question 1: What were your expectations of your student-athletes before arriving on campus? What did you think they would do?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Facilitators noted a number of illusions regarding student-athletes’ preparedness and willingness to work with someone academically. They anticipated student-athletes being appreciative of the help provided, but conceded they also anticipated encountering challenges from the bigheaded Star Athlete attitude. Facilitators noted they did not expect how underprepared and low achieving some of the student-athletes they were paired with were. Facilitators further noted they expected student-athletes would do some of their academic maintenance on their own, such as managing their time, doing their homework, and checking their email. They also noted they did not anticipate they would enjoy the student-athletes as much as they do or that they would encounter the good students amongst their student-athletes.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-athletes’ responses identified a shift in awareness about the facilitator program and what they anticipated from that facilitator from the seniors to the sophomores. As awareness of the facilitator’s role grew a culture shift grew, also.
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitators' responses revealed basic stereotypes many academic people hold when addressing student-athletes. Although they did encounter the academic deficiencies they anticipated, their responses also revealed that when given the opportunity to engage on a personal level with student-athletes, the facilitators found they enjoyed working with the student-athlete population more than they anticipated they would. <p>Student-Athlete Question 2: What was your experience like with your facilitator? Was it helpful?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>The majority of student-athletes noted their facilitator experience was helpful. They noted help with time management, reminders, and organization. They also noted the facilitator experience helped them feel connections with school and a person in their new environment. One respondent noted this experience helped him keep his mind on school while managing football as well. While there are numerous ways this helps build responsibility, of note was the preference for texting.</p> <p>Some student-athletes indicated their facilitator experience was limited in some sense. One student-athlete said he disliked the facilitator process, but it was helpful. Another said he liked the facilitator relationship, but did not need the help the facilitator afforded; yet another indicated <i>he</i> did not need the facilitator assistance, but recognized it could be helpful or "useful for others who had never experienced this type of academic difficulty" (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015). Other student-athletes felt their experience was limited because of number of student-athletes each facilitator was attempting to help. One respondent indicated more facilitators were needed "so they aren't helping everyone at one time" (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015).</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>Some respondents indicated facilitating was not helpful. Student-athletes felt facilitating was not needed or that the facilitator was bossy or unpleasant. Student-athletes also noted a lack of time and/or resources; they indicated transportation was not always available when the student-athlete was supposed to be at the academic center for meetings.</p> <p>Facilitator Question 2: What has your experience been like with your student-athlete? Has it been helpful to them?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>There were a number of positive responses to the facilitators' experiences with their student-athletes. Facilitators noted the beneficial aspects of preparation for coursework, indicating the student-athletes had positive experiences going over their syllabi, developing their note-taking abilities, and improving their test-taking skills through their facilitator's guidance. As a team, facilitators and their student-athletes had spent time breaking down assignments to make sure each student-athlete understood each instructor's expectations; this allowed individual student-athletes to experience growth and improvement potential beyond what they initially believed possible.</p> <p>Facilitators indicated student-athletes have become more comfortable, trusting, and motivated through meetings. This has allowed student-athletes to have an environment in which they can brainstorm without fear, while at the same time, have a relationship with an authority-type figure who will hold them accountable. Facilitators described this role as almost a parent-like one, where they apply tough love and guidance to help their student-athletes develop confidence and know-how to appropriately and effectively talk to instructors in person and via email, develop and practice soft skills, and live up to someone's expectations outside of their sport. The fact that facilitators did not fall under the purview of coaches was a helpful aspect of the structure of the academic services.</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>Each of the experiences noted indicated a positive movement for student-athletes' transition to college.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academically, there are indicated advantages of the student-athlete/facilitator pairing recognized by the student-athletes. Student-athletes' responses indicate the need for a transitional period for many students into the collegiate academic setting. Because of the perceived and real deficits some student-athletes come to college with, they need to feel a connection to their new surroundings if there is any hope of success. By establishing positive academic patterns and responsibilities, the student-athlete pairing can begin to repair academic deficits and build academic responsibility. • Student-athletes' responses indicate the majority find the facilitator relationship beneficial to their academics. One of the most important aspects of the facilitator/student-athlete pairing, though, is the relationship that develops. Even for those for whom facilitating was perceived as not beneficial, there was a realization that it helps many student-athletes adapt and adjust to collegiate academic expectations. • Responses did point to an issue: the ratio of facilitators to student-athletes. With a number of respondents indicating their experience was not positive due to the small number of facilitators and the fact that their time is divided, this was also a concern noted by the learning specialists. <p>Student-Athlete Question 3: What could have made your facilitating experience better?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Responses in this category were similar in nature among all groups when it came to the importance of establishing a relationship and opportunities for social interaction in an</p>
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Data Summary (continued)	<p>effort to create a stronger bond early on, need for more flexible times, and lowering the student-facilitator ratio.</p> <p>In terms of the student-facilitator relationship, all groups emphasized the need for a more personal working relationship with their facilitator. One junior noted the importance of seeing personal investment from the facilitator. As he indicated, the student wanted to know “they got your back” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 21, 2015) academically speaking. Responses also indicated a desire for the facilitator to know their student-athlete on a more personal level when it came to their personalities, academic skills and abilities, and their majors. Some student-athletes suggested this process start with the learning specialists during the Summer Bridge program. Their ideas included giving personality assessments to match with potential facilitators and having personal meetings with each incoming freshmen to discuss their concerns and their perceived need areas of improvement during the summer before the semester begins. The senior group further suggested that similar meetings occur each semester giving the student-athlete and Learning Specialist and opportunity to evaluate their academic performance and progress for that semester and set their academic goals for the upcoming semester. One senior likened it to their meetings with their football position coaches at the end of the fall and spring semesters. He compared it to “grading out” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 20, 2015) each semester academically like they would athletically. It was something the senior group seemed to relate to.</p> <p>Other suggestions included matching student-athletes with facilitators who had similar majors. One indicated they were a business major and would have found it much more beneficial to have been paired with someone who was a business major who would have been more familiar with the courses the student-athlete would be taking and the faculty members they would be working with.</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>Student-athletes also indicated a desire to get to know their facilitators before their first working meeting and suggested a proposed change for the facilitating experience in the form of a student-facilitator mixer before the semester begins. Suggestions included an ice cream social, ice-breaker activities, and scavenger hunts on campus.</p> <p>Facilitator Question 3: What can make/could have made your facilitating experience better?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Facilitators noted the benefit of meeting the student-athletes with whom they may work before school starts. A large group mixer was mentioned as an option. This would allow facilitators and student-athletes to meet on neutral terms and in a non-academic setting.</p> <p>Facilitators were specific that an example of how a meeting would look would have been beneficial to their facilitating experience. Once meetings began, facilitators suggested it would have been helpful to meet with new student-athletes in private rooms. They felt these meetings would have been more focused. Specifically, facilitators felt meeting in a more private setting would promote talking during meetings and allow student-athletes to speak on a more personal level, being able to ask more questions without embarrassment. Privacy would also encourage student-athletes to be mindful of attention to the meeting.</p> <p>Through this privacy, student-athletes would learn to respect the meeting, especially if the student-athletes were to better know what the facilitator's role is meant to be. Facilitators noted having the student-athletes be better prepared in knowing what role the facilitator was going to play would have decreased some of the issues, but also noted they would have benefitted from recommendations on how to deal with difficult students.</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>As the semester progressed, facilitators noted it would have benefitted their facilitating to have had more interactions with other facilitators, and to continue those meetings throughout the semester.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is need to refocus efforts on establishing the student-facilitator relationship early on. This relationship sets the tone for the eventual success of the student-facilitator pairing. It is also apparent this relationship needs to be evaluated throughout the semester by the supervising learning specialist in an effort to make sure the partnership is having the desired results for the student academically and personally with regard to their adjustment to the rigors of college. <p>Student-Athlete Question 4: What skills did you think were necessary to be a good a college student before you arrived on campus?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>The majority of responses included time management, organization, self-discipline, study skills with specific emphasis on note-taking skills and effective communication skills. Student-athletes also indicated a strong work ethic, dedication, and a positive attitude were important attributes needed to be successful at the collegiate level.</p> <p>In addition to the majority of responses provided by all groups, which are discussed above, several notable responses were recorded. One of the sophomores thought he would need to “be teachable” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 23, 2015). This was a very insightful response and one that stood out among the rest indicating a level of self-awareness, not exhibited by most. Likewise, one junior indicated he thought he would need to be able to “seek help when needed” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 21, 2015).</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>Student-athletes also voiced awareness that coming in they knew they needed to accept a certain level of personal responsibility. They acknowledged their parents would no longer be there to make sure certain things were done and that it was up to them to do things on their own.</p> <p>Facilitator Question 4: What skills did you think were necessary to be a good college student before you arrived on campus?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Facilitators reflected on their beliefs of what it was going to take to be a good college student, during which they noted a variety of needed skills. With regard to classes, they identified completing assigned readings, attending and participating in class, good study and writing skills, a foundation of academic preparation, and curiosity and a willingness to learn.</p> <p>In preparation for success, they also noted the advantage of organization and having a planner to organize their coursework and aid in time management. They believed this would also help prioritize school.</p> <p>Outside of these more tangible needs, the facilitators noted their beliefs that social skills and soft skills, as well as desire, curiosity, openness, and learning to operate without parents would help make them good college students.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-athletes had awareness of the need for time management, organization, and study skills, which are the current emphasis areas, addressed in academic facilitating. There was also emphasis placed on self-discipline, personal responsibility, and communication/soft skills that are areas of training that could be further developed. • Facilitators noted their beliefs and struggles with being a good student and noted they shared their
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>struggles in adjusting those beliefs to the actuality of the demands of collegiate life. They also acknowledged there was benefit to be had in that struggle.</p> <p>Student-Athlete Question 5: Once you arrived, did those needed skills change?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Student-athlete responses varied on this question. Many indicated while the skills they thought they needed did not necessarily change, there was a realization they needed <i>more</i> of the same thing. They indicated needing better time management and organizational skills, along with better study skills including note taking, textbook reading strategies, and “how to study the right way” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015). Others acknowledged it became more evident they needed to apply themselves more and be more proactive when it came to managing their time and preparation for assignments, papers, and exams. Several indicated they needed to “refocus” and tended to slack without supervision or reminders from their facilitators.</p> <p>Two notable points included needing to learn how to better communicate with professors and realizing they “needed to apply different effort for different classes” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015).</p> <p>One student-athlete did indicate his perceived needed skills were still valid, but once he got into his coursework, those “were building blocks” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015) that he would further develop.</p> <p>Facilitator Question 5: Have those needed skills changed?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Facilitators noted the emphasis on time management, making a commitment to learning, and the importance of study skills, especially, as continuing to be important</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>skills. They added finding balance and the importance of self-care as part of becoming a successful college student.</p> <p>With regard to their student-athletes, they added the importance of buy-in and making the facilitator's efforts personal. To get student-athletes to perform to their abilities, the skills facilitators perceived as being important grew to reflect the personal investment they felt is required: finding out what is going on with them, showing that the facilitator cares about them, and being a cheerleader for them academically. Through this, facilitators felt they had gotten better performance from their student-athletes, noting the student-athletes often work harder for their facilitator than they would for themselves.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-athletes were aware of the continued need in the areas of time management, organization, and study skills. Emerging skills needed included effective professor communication, how to refocus themselves when they go off track, and increasing academic self-motivation. • Many facilitators, at a minimum, are engaged in master's level coursework. They have had time to reflect on their beliefs versus the reality of college navigation. With this knowledge and willingness to invest in their student-athletes, the facilitator's guidance can help freshmen student-athletes more quickly adapt to realities of collegiate life, rather than grow frustrated and fall behind in their attempts to find balance between their academic needs and their sport demands. <p>Student-Athlete Question 6: Did you feel prepared as a freshman?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Some student-athletes indicated they felt completely prepared as freshmen. However, the majority responded</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>as to feeling prepared, but with some reservation. The sources of reservation varied. Some indicated they felt prepared due to the help of their facilitator while others listed struggling with figuring out online classes, difficulty maintaining their class/practice schedule, feelings of being alone/homesick, or struggling with one specific area such as time management but overall having a feeling of being prepared. One comment that stood out suggested the student felt prepared for their freshman year, but not after.</p> <p>Those who indicated no cited reasons such as not being held accountable for their academic success prior to college, not putting in time for academics during high school, and not having any study skills before starting college.</p> <p>Facilitator Question 6: Did you think your student-athletes would be prepared coming in as freshmen?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>The most poignant response was no, “because most college freshmen aren’t prepared in general” (facilitator, personal communication, October 18, 2015). When asked to elaborate, the group agreed that <i>most</i> college freshmen need to work to develop their skills set, build on existing knowledge, and learn to plan and evaluate their actions.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One take-away from this question is that overall, the student-athletes feel prepared for their freshman year, but the majority may have one or more specific areas in which they do not feel prepared. It would be important for facilitators to help them identify these areas early on and focus on those their freshman year. • This question also brought up an area not well covered during the Summer Bridge program: online course preparation. For the majority of freshmen, online courses are something they are not familiar with but
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>potentially encounter their freshmen year as many student-athletes are enrolled in at least one online course each semester due to the flexibility it allows in their schedules. This is often an area of concern for many freshmen. They are unsure of how to approach or keep up with online courses.</p> <p>Student-Athlete Question 7: What would have made you feel more prepared to start college?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>While some indicated there was not anything that would have made them feel more prepared, others offered a variety of suggestions. Some of the suggestions included knowing more about campus and where buildings were located, having a better mindset from the beginning, having better writing skills, knowing in-class versus online class expectations including attendance/participation, advice on not dropping classes from older players, and better writing skills. The sophomore group were adamant in telling freshmen they <i>have</i> to do their homework, they need to learn to manage their time, and to answer texts and calls from their academic people. They felt these were important steps in their developing success that freshmen would feel more prepared if they adopted these earlier in their college career.</p> <p>Interestingly, the majority of freshmen indicated better preparation in high school would have made a difference. Specifically, several student-athletes noted they wished they had taken AP classes, taken classes for college credit while still in high school, and/or had more ACT/SAT preparation.</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>Facilitator Question 7: What would have made them feel more prepared to start college?</p> <p><u>Facilitator Responses</u></p> <p>Facilitators reported that some sort of prep course would have helped them feel more prepared to start college. Some noted concurrent enrollment as a version of a prep course, while others described more of a program like the academic services established Summer Bridge. Within the Summer Bridge program, they specifically noted how to find key points while reading, how to take good notes in class, and test-taking skills. At the root of this preparation was having to be more accountable in high school.</p> <p>Facilitators felt there needed to be a more realistic perspective of balance for new students to feel prepared, but especially for student-athletes. For student-athletes to feel more prepared, facilitators also noted the importance of mentoring and student-athletes realizing even non-athletes struggle in their coursework, to make sure they know they are normal in comparison to others.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With both groups indicating better high school preparation and accountability, it is surmised this will continue to be an important adjustment to help new student-athletes overcome. <p>Student-Athlete Question 8: What areas of academic training do you feel are addressed well by academic services?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>While many of the student-athletes reported being pleased with the training provided by academic services staff, they continued to note the necessity for time management, organization, and effective communication skills training.</p> <p>They indicated strengths of the training included putting emphasis on being responsible for one’s own academic</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>work, being prepared for class and completing course on time, if not ahead of schedule. One freshmen specifically mentioned facilitator reminders and assignment tracking as being “Helpful in keeping me responsible” (student-athlete, personal communication, October 19, 2015) while a one junior described their facilitator as someone who “helps keep me accountable” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 21, 2015).</p> <p>It was also noted by the juniors that facilitators were helpful in guiding students through the process of adjusting to the demands of their academic work and their sport requirement “as well as being a guide for things you may not understand” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 21, 2015). Their facilitators were described as helping them to stay organized, keeping up with due dates for assignments, and planning/managing their time. As one student-athlete put it, “I would be ineligible without” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015) the guidance of the staff.</p> <p>Facilitator Question 8: What areas of facilitator and academic training do you feel are addressed well by academic services?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Facilitators felt training provided a good overview of the academic services writing center and what it had to offer student-athletes. Other resources provided in the academic center were noted as being explained well and provided, including additional resources for note-taking and calendars.</p> <p>They also noted the importance of communication being well-addressed. This communication is emphasized between the facilitator and student-athlete, the facilitator and the learning specialists, and the facilitator and the sport counselors.</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The learning specialists have established a thorough training program for the incoming student-athletes, as well as the facilitators. It is important to continue to evaluate the programs and adapt to the changing climate of academic services and needs of the student-athletes. <p>Student-Athlete Question 9: What areas could be improved?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>The suggestions for areas of improvement mostly were voiced from the sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The freshmen had limited responses for this question. The upperclassmen offered several suggestions.</p> <p>It was noted there was a need for more individualized sessions and not approaching it the same for all freshmen across the board. They acknowledged an understanding of the needs of different students and that the sessions and level of involvement be determined based on the student and not just the fact they were freshmen. As one sophomore stated, “Try not to downplay our intelligence or our will to actually want to work hard just because we are Freshmen” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 23, 2015). The juniors specifically indicated a need for facilitators to talk with them more about personal issues and understanding more about their lives than just academics as a way to better relate to them and what they were experiencing as student-athletes.</p> <p>The groups also suggested making it more about the person, creating more trust and trying to get to know the student-athletes more by having more one-on-one sessions as opposed to group sessions. It was also noted they would like to have more flexibility and freedom with their sessions, indicating that better times (less evenings) and giving students more space, “if we deserve it” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015), to get things done would be beneficial.</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>Additionally, it was again mentioned that there was a need to decrease the student-facilitator ratio. In doing so, they suggested it would create time within their sessions to focus more on improving their study skills including test preparation and working on other academic skills they needed to develop.</p> <p>Facilitator Question 9: What areas could be improved?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Facilitators noted not knowing what to do when their student-athlete is caught up with work and felt that could be part of the training. When prompted, facilitators desired more information as to how they could help student-athletes who were more academically prepared or whose classes had “off weeks” where there were no pressing academic activities.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given both student and facilitator responses, it is clear there is need for continued emphasis on individualized sessions and continuing to meet the students where they are, and not using a “one size fits all” facilitating method. It is also critical that the student-facilitator relationship be given time to develop as trust and personal connection are key factors in establishing a successful facilitating relationship. <p>Student-Athlete Question 10: What areas that weren’t covered, but you wish were?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Student-athletes indicated they wished several academic areas would have been covered, or covered better. Academic areas they would have liked to see addressed included: campus navigation, learning styles, typing, and how to handle academic meetings they might</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>have on campus like conduct meetings or meetings with professors. Areas they wish would have been better addressed were: what to expect (advice from upperclassmen and former players) and “Telling us how classes really are and how hard” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015), note taking, and study skills. They also indicated they would have liked to have had their facilitator be more familiar with their major. These responses were specifically generated from students in majors outside of Education and Arts & Sciences, such as business and engineering.</p> <p>They also voiced a need for greater attention to areas of life skills and personal support. Areas noted included dealing with depression, finding resources (not necessarily school-related), and generating ideas for life after football.</p> <p>Facilitator Question 10: What are areas that weren’t covered, but you wish were?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>Facilitators noted the limitations of time in training session, and commended most of the preparation and information provided. However, they noted desiring additional information and guidance in how to work with difficult student-athletes and what to do with them placing blame on the facilitator for failings.</p> <p>Facilitators also requested training covering how to communicate with tutors who work with their student-athletes. Along those lines, if tutoring provided within the academic center is not available or the student-athlete requests additional help, facilitators noted needing help guiding the student-athlete to finding and securing outside resources for help.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the implementation of a revised 8-week Summer Bridge for Summer 2014, and that program being further developed and refined for Summer 2015, responses indicated this was a positive move as student-athletes in the sophomore
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>and freshmen groups focused more on personal and practical needs, such as depression resources, campus navigation help, and items specific to football that are outside the purview of academic services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juniors and seniors were more likely to indicate the need for learning and study skills, indicating a positive effect in implementation of potential resources and abilities development during the established Summer Bridge program. <p>Student-Athlete Question 11: What could be done to improve the working relationship between facilitators and student-athletes?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>While a majority of students indicated a good relationship with their facilitator, some did offer suggestions for improvement. Flexible times and one-on-one sessions were again listed as potential avenues for creating a better working relationship. Additionally, they wanted their facilitator to know them on a more personal level (both academically and personally) and make decisions regarding their sessions accordingly. It was noted that they wanted their facilitators to have a better understanding of who they were as individuals (knowing their learning styles and academic backgrounds) because as one junior indicated, “everyone has a different story” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 21, 2015). Several also voiced the desire to create a bond with their facilitator like other students had with theirs.</p> <p>However, they also admitted there was only so much a facilitator could do and that they were also responsible for the success of the relationship, as indicated in the following response: “The facilitators are here to help; its</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>[sic] really based on how the student-athlete responds and their attitude toward working” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015).</p> <p>Facilitator Question 11: What could be done to improve the working relationship between facilitators and student-athletes?</p> <p><u>Responses</u></p> <p>From the start of the facilitator/student-athlete relationship, facilitators were adamant that clear boundaries and expectations were one of the most important ways to establish and improve how they function together. Facilitators also noted it would be helpful to better understand the roles and expectations in the roles of not only them as facilitator, but the roles of those with whom they and their student-athletes will interact in the academic center; specifically, the facilitators noted the importance of better understanding the roles of the learning specialists, sport counselors, and tutors in relation to interactions with the student-athletes.</p> <p>Once the relationship is established, the facilitators noted the importance of growing trust through shared events. Suggestions raised included mixers and supporting student-athletes at their sporting events. Facilitators felt these actions would build the trust sought, and it would further build a relationship that would allow the student-athlete to feel comfortable in voicing concerns to their facilitator. They acknowledged, however, that improving the working relationship between facilitators and student-athletes was highly dependent on the facilitator and the student-athlete; this illustrates the awareness facilitators hold that they each function differently, and each student-athlete is a unique individual.</p> <p>Finally, facilitators noted shifts in terminology that would potentially improve the relationship between them and the student-athletes. A shift in terminology, would play to the perception of <i>why</i> the student-athlete is meeting with a facilitator. When discussing facilitating, the suggestion</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>arose to explain the student-athletes “GET this service,” not that they “will have a facilitator” or “have to meet with a facilitator” (facilitator, personal communication, October 18, 2015). This simple shift emphasizes the positive aspects of receiving a benefit, as opposed to having yet another thing they <i>have</i> to do.</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sanctity of the relationships built during the time facilitators spend with student-athletes must be protected. Facilitators and student-athletes have limited time resources; the importance of creating opportunities for efficiently establishing connections and protecting those relationships should be a primary concern. <hr/> <p>At the conclusion of each student-athlete focus group, the student-athletes were asked to think back to their freshmen year and offer a piece of advice to their freshmen self. The advice was practical and sound. “Study,” was a common refrain, as was “Go to class” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015). They found value in coming to the academic center, so long as they did not “come up playing games” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015) and used the resources at their disposal to help them prepare. Effective use of time was reflected in several comments, but summed up by one as “procrastination is death” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015). Their maturity was illustrated through one of their concluding thoughts on the need for the student-athlete to take initiative: “at the end of the day it’s on you” (student-athlete, personal communication, July 2015).</p> <p>The requests student-athletes made included an opportunity to get to know their facilitators more before having to have formal academic meetings and having to share information about their academic history and abilities. They also suggested having some facilitators on staff who were more closely aligned with their specific majors (business majors with business graduate students, engineering students with engineering graduate students</p>
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<p>Data Summary (continued)</p>	<p>or someone in the field, etc.). Lastly, a number of students suggested having more individualized meetings at the end of each semester to review their semester and set goals for the upcoming semester, much like meetings conducted with coaches at the end of the season or spring camp where they are “graded out”.</p> <hr/> <p>At the conclusion of their focus group, facilitators were asked to think back to their first meeting and discuss what they would share with new facilitators or do differently with a new group of student-athletes. They noted the importance of establishing clearer expectations with their student-athletes to set a tone of structure and effective use of time during their meetings. They also indicated they would make more use of tips they may have felt were irrelevant and placed more emphasis on setting clear, realistic goals with their student-athletes. Finally, putting all of that into action, they would implement practice as part of the facilitator role and sessions, helping student-athletes engage more deeply in their coursework.</p> <p>The requests facilitators made included best practices sharing through established meetings among the facilitators and learning specialists throughout the semester. This would serve as continuing education for facilitators where they could communicate regarding shared struggles and challenges they were facing, providing a safe sounding board and peer group to help offer suggestions, which would help build more cohesive relationships among facilitators and between the facilitators and learning specialists.</p>
<p>Recommendations for Training and Programming</p>	<p>The following recommendations for training and programming for student-athletes and facilitators are provided based on data collected from the student-athlete and facilitator focus groups.</p> <p><u>For student-athlete training</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the director, sport counselors, and coaching staff to emphasize the role of learning specialists when speaking with recruits during

Recommendations for Training and Programming (continued)	<p>their campus visits. Then, by getting to know student-athletes during the Summer Bridge program, the learning specialists will have an opportunity to explain the facilitator role/process before the students begin their fall semester. We also recommend developing the partnership or cohort idea and guidelines for the student/facilitator relationship for student-athletes during the Summer Bridge program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to emphasize time management, organization, and study skills in the Summer Bridge program. Increase efforts in the areas of self-discipline, personal responsibility, and communication/soft skills. By further emphasizing the later areas, students will gain a greater sense of independence and develop a skill set needed to navigate collegiate life successfully. This could include individual activities and bringing in older players who can offer personal insight into their experiences and how they developed their skills since arriving on campus.• That soft skills training, including how to communicate effectively with professors, be added to the Summer Bridge program.• To look at incorporating a unit into the Summer Bridge program focused on how to refocus if the student finds himself getting off track, the importance of reaching out and asking for help, and strategies for getting back on track.• That a unit on online courses be created for the Summer Bridge program beginning Summer 2016. The unit should include navigating D2L, course requirements, response expectations, and how to plan out or approach the daily/weekly work, and communication.• Activities, such as campus-specific scavenger hunts, could prove useful in acclimating new
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<p>Recommendations for Training and Programming (continued)</p>	<p>student-athletes to the campus layout and resource location. These could be implemented as part of the Summer Bridge program.</p> <p><u>For facilitator training</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare them for the potential academic deficiencies some student-athletes struggle with when enter college. Emphasize the relationship aspect of the facilitator/student-athlete pairing to expedite the personal investment and engagement desired by both the student-athlete and the facilitator. • Facilitators should communicate the importance of their role to new facilitators and work to build positive relationships with their student-athletes. Additionally, facilitator’s training should include the importance of the development of soft skills and the importance of scaffolding instruction to help student-athletes build confidence and independence in the collegiate setting. • When facilitators begin meeting with student-athletes, they should consider the appeal to find more private rooms or areas in which to meet for facilitating. • Engage facilitators in reminiscing about their initial collegiate experiences and their expectation and beliefs, along with the struggles they encountered in reconciling those expectations and struggles to lead them to where they are. • That facilitators work with students their first semester to identify areas where they feel less prepared and establish plans for working on improving the student’s confidence in those areas. • For student-athletes to be given more of a voice in guiding the sessions and that they are provided with an opportunity to discuss what issues they
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Recommendations for Training and Programming (continued)	<p>feel need to be addressed within the facilitating session. This can be done early in the semester as a foundation for goals to set and achieve throughout their first year and beyond.</p> <p><u>In general</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To address ratio of facilitators to student-athletes concerns, it is recommended the learning specialists/ academic services staff increase efforts to add facilitating staff. Additional facilitating staff would allow facilitators and student-athletes to meet individually with less interruptions and distractions. Furthermore, it is recommended facilitators and learning specialists establish more specific individual meeting times in the form of scheduled “appointments” in an effort to address student-athlete, facilitator, and learning specialists concerns. Currently, students have scheduled times to meet with their assigned facilitator or learning specialist, but often those times overlap with open sessions causing some student-athletes to become frustrated when there are others in the room requesting help during their specified times. Academic services also needs to put more emphasis on the “appointment” concept. By creating an environment where student-athletes see the separation between their facilitator time and their session time, it would appear to lend itself to a more positive facilitating experience.• The creation of a facilitator/student-athlete mixer just before semester begins. Both facilitators and student-athletes would be able to introduce themselves and have an opportunity to get to know one another before meeting and focusing on academics. This meeting would be mutually beneficial to both groups.• The learning specialists conduct conferences with incoming freshmen during Summer Bridge to assess the individual student-athlete’s concerns
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Recommendations for Training and Programming (continued)	<p>and perceived needs with regard to building academic skills. It is further recommended, that similar conferences occur at the end of each subsequent semester to evaluate student progress and set goals for the upcoming semester.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That learning specialists extend their facilitator recruitment outside of the college where most of the current facilitators are enrolled in graduate programs. Specifically, reach out to contacts in the other colleges to try and grow the facilitating staff to include other academic areas.• It is important to, again, emphasize the personal relationship that is the foundation of the facilitator/student-athlete relationship.• Continued evaluation of strategies used in working with student-athletes on time management and organization. It is also recommended that learning specialists continue to develop new methods for helping guide students through the transition from high school to college and to encourage self-efficacy when it comes to their academic work.• Learning specialists should continue promoting the academic services writing center and what it offers. Furthermore, learning specialists should work with writing center director to establish a guide to services to further promote student-athlete use.• Learning specialists should create opportunities for open channels of communication between facilitators, between facilitators and tutors, and between facilitators and learning specialists.• The learning specialists should continue to work with others in the academic center to establish a repository of resources for academic assistance and note-taking/study skills to build upon the existing resources. Learning specialists should
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Recommendations for Training and Programming (continued)	<p>work to make those resources fully accessible to facilitators who experience physical challenges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning specialists should establish a start-to-finish guide for meetings to illustrate introductory and subsequent meetings procedures. Establishing this guide will help illustrate a more tangible procedure for how to establish the expectations for student-athletes that will carry throughout the semester. This guide will also depict scenarios where the student-athlete may not need as much guidance from the facilitator and what those meetings may look like. The guide should illustrate beginning, middle, concluding events, as well as report filing expectations.• Monthly check-ins - Establishing monthly check-ins between facilitators or between facilitators and learning specialists would allow for continuing discussion and problem-solving on a more consistent and group-based basis. While several facilitators check in consistently with their respective learning specialist, providing a more scheduled event would give a sense of formality and bring together all the facilitators and learning specialists to address concerns in a shared environment.• Continued development of the Summer Bridge program for incoming freshmen is strongly supported. Learning specialists should continue to implement study techniques, soft skills, and social activities within the program, as well as continue to bring in veteran student-athletes to speak. Learning specialists should consider implementation of a cohort structure with incoming groups to further foster a team mentality in their academics.• Learning specialists should work to develop and provide additional resources and support to facilitators for challenging student-athlete
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	<p>personalities. This should be in conjunction with the sport counselors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The academic services staff should continue to build a list of tutoring resources available across campus and instruct facilitators in ways to guide student-athletes to those resources. • The academic services staff should work to arrange more opportunities for one-on-one meetings between the facilitator and student-athlete. This may be through additional hiring, training practices, room designation specific to facilitating, or other resource allocation.
<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>To evaluate future effectiveness of the academic training and facilitating programs after the recommendations are approved and implemented, the following will be evaluations will occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After implementing making improvements and changes to the Summer Bridge program, a focus group will be held to interview 2016 participants during Summer 2017 after they have completed a full academic year. They will be asked similar questions to the original focus group and their answers will be compared to the previous groups to evaluate the impact of the improvements and changes suggested. • Additionally, the previous participants of the original group (now sophomores, juniors, and seniors) will participate in a follow-up focus group to get feedback regarding the changes/improvements to the program. • Evaluation will continue to be an ongoing process, once the follow-up has occurred. Future directions also include conducting additional focus groups with other student-athlete groups to gain other perspectives and potentially guide future changes to the student-athlete and facilitator programs.

Appendix

Student-Athlete Focus Group Questions

- Question 1: What were your expectations of your facilitator before arriving on campus? What did you think they would do?
- Question 2: What was your experience like with your facilitator? Was it helpful?
- Question 3: What could have made your facilitating experience better?
- Question 4: What skills did you think were necessary to be a good a college student before you arrived on campus?
- Question 5: Once you arrived, did those needed skills change?
- Question 6: Did you feel prepared as a freshman?
- Question 7: What would have made you feel more prepared to start college?
- Question 8: What areas of academic training do you feel are addressed well by academic services?
- Question 9: What areas could be improved?
- Question 10: What areas that weren't covered, but you wish were?
- Question 11: What could be done to improve the working relationship between facilitators and student-athletes?

Facilitator Focus Group Questions

Question 1: What were your expectations of your student-athletes before arriving on campus? What did you think they would do?

Question 2: What has your experience been like with your student-athlete? Has it been helpful to them?

Question 3: What can make/could have made your facilitating experience better?

Question 4: What skills did you think were necessary to be a good college student before you arrived on campus?

Question 5: Have those needed skills changed?

Question 6: Did you think your student-athletes would be prepared coming in as freshmen?

Question 7: What would have made them feel more prepared to start college?

Question 8: What areas of facilitator and academic training do you feel are addressed well by academic services?

Question 9: What areas could be improved?

Question 10: What are areas that weren't covered, but you wish were?

Question 11: What could be done to improve the working relationship between facilitators and student-athletes?

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Appendix A

Student-Athlete Focus Group Questions

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Appendix B

Student-athletes and facilitators were advised they were free to not respond to any questions they felt uncomfortable answering. They were instructed to answer with their initial thoughts in an expedient manner.

Responses that contained identifiers or were tangential were omitted from reporting are indicated by an asterisk inside brackets [*].

Responses that fell outside the purview of the academic services unit, but were relevant to leadership with which we are affiliated, were passed along to individuals in those organizations and are indicated by the at sign (@).

Responses that contained suggestions or commentary that informed decisions to modify or add to the student-athlete and/or facilitator trainings are indicated by a carat (^).

Student-Athlete Responses

Question 1: What were your expectations of your facilitator before arriving on campus? What did you think they would do?

Seniors

- “I was not fully aware of the role of a facilitator before I came here. But once I got here I expected my facilitator to help me be organized.”
- “I figured they would make an agenda for me and just remind me of things to do”
- “I thought that they would actually do a lot of our homework”
- “I thought they would be somewhat like a tutor”
- “I thought they will help with homework”
- “I thought that they were going to help with my school work”
- “I didn’t hear of one”
- “I didn’t know about a facilitator before I got here”
- “I had no clue what my facilitator was going to be like. [*]”
- “I really believe I didn’t know about having one, I kind of thought that we can ask anybody for help”
- “I didn’t know anything about a facilitator”
- “Didn’t really know anything about a facilitator”
- “No expectations didn’t hear about it”

Juniors

- “To help me with my work when needed”

- “My expectations were simple. I expected them to work with us if needed, and have scheduled appointments if necessary.”
- “That she was going to be very helpful and make sure I do my work”
- “That I would have someone guide me with my work, not help but just be there with hard work”
- “Make everything clear and understandable when I first got here”
- “To help me in areas I need help in and help me get use to college”
- “Someone to keep us on task/keep track of assignments and grades”
- “To help me organize and help me with my homework”
- “I thought they would guide me through my homework, and remind me of assignments”
- “I didn’t know what one was”
- “I honestly didn’t know what they were”
- “I did not know what a facilitator was before my arrival”
- “Didn’t even know what it was”
- “Had no idea what to expect. Just expected guidance”

Sophomores

- “Being there for me when I needed assistance and helping me with my work.”
- “My expectations were to receive aid and tutoring. I thought they would revolve around my expectations”
- “I thought they would meet with us & oversee our schedule/help us with H.W.”
- “They would help me complete assignments and stay on track”
- “I thought they would help me be organized and help with homework”
- “Exactly what happened. Keep me on track”
- “I thought they would just keep me in check [*]”
- “I thought they would guide me through organization for my work.”
- “I expected my facilitator to make sure I was doing my work”
- “I thought that they would be here if I needed them.”
- “That they would be very hard to deal with.”
- “[*]”
- “They would be on us 24/7 even on the little things”
- “[*]”
- “I had no expectations”
- “I did not know what exactly to expect”
- “Didn’t have any expectations”
- “[*]”

Freshmen

- “[*]”

- “My expectation was that we were going to be bombarded with a lot of rules and forced to do our work. I thought they would get to know us and try to understand our weaknesses.”
- “Be helpful, whenever we needed it and also to keep us ahead of class.”
- “I expected that they would help me maintain my homework schedule to keep me on track and help me whenever I needed help.”
- “[*]”
- “Help us with our work.”
- “I thought my facilitator was going to be bossy and a butt. It thought they were going to be controlling.”
- “I expected them to help me with my school work. That I knew what had to be done that week, and if I had questions they would help.”
- “I thought my facilitator was going to be annoying and always telling me what to do.”
- “I didn’t have any expectations, I just knew they would help me [*]”
- “Honestly I didn’t know we was going to have a facilitator so I didn’t know what to expect, but when I found I thought they would do all our work.”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “What would you *like* to have known or been told?”

“That we would have one”

“Who picks”

“Who we would meet with”

“That we would get one”

“Who they would be”

“And it would be nice to have met them before the semester” (^)

“What they can do”

Researcher: “How can facilitators help with homework?”

“Get facilitators from different content areas” (^)

Researcher: “How could the facilitator be helpful?”

“Let us know when assignments are due”

“Cooperation”

“Organizing”

“Personal stuff”

Question 2: What was your experience like with your facilitator? Was it helpful?

Seniors

- “I had a great relationship with my facilitator very helpful”

- “It was helpful, it consistently kept my mind of school b/c I had to report to somebody, yes we got along”
- “I had a great facilitator she was very helpful I really connected with her and she helped me with my syllabus”
- “We built a very strong relationship. [*].”
- “IDK the name but she was straight”
- “I had a great experience with my facilitator. She helped me become a better student.”
- “It was helpful they helped me to understand the organization to college.”
- “My experience was unpleasant because I did not have the transportation to be at the AC as often as they wanted and I could take care of my business.”
- “[*]. It could have been done over txt. It could have been done by a calendar or planner, It was of no use.”
- “I felt like she was bossy every second it seemed like she was watching me”
- “Helpful when the room wasn’t crowded. Connected with them good though when we met”
- “It helped but could’ve been better”
- “Healthy. She was nice and helped remember assignments, but I didn’t need her”

Juniors

- “It was very helpful especially because I had the best grades I’ve had my freshmen year”
- “Good, she was helpful. She helped me organize [*]”
- “My experience was very good. I had no idea what I was getting into when I first arrived. They helped me understand and grasp everything.”
- “Mine was very good. She held me accountable.”
- “Awesome. Having someone there for you when you need help outside of football was very helpful”
- “It was helpful, especially my first year because she reminded me of every assignment.
- “Yes it was very helpful because she help me stay on task and help me keep up with my work”
- “Great. She was always on me to be at the ac to get my work done and to make sure we were done for the week.”
- “It was helpful because it kept me in check with all of my classes and staying on top of everything.”
- “She was a cool person and she was helpful b/c she understood my learning style.”
- “My experience was very helpful. My first arrival I was not very responsible w/ that being said, I believe my facilitator was helpful.”
- “I didn’t like it. I felt like I didn’t need it”

- “Not for me, just because I am used to workload. But it was useful for the others who had never experienced this type of academic difficulty.”
- “It’s a good experience they help me but I wish that there could be appointments so they aren’t helping everyone at one time.”

Sophomores

- “Initially, very bad. However, that facilitator has since been gone. [*] are awesome”
- “Although I disliked my facilitator, she/he was very helpful and helped me stay on top of my work”
- “It was time consuming wasn’t really helpful I got everything done without them.”
- “Yes she taught me the right way to do things”
- “My experience with my facilitator was great. Very helpful always reminded me of things like test.”
- “Yes it was very helpful. My facilitator was great.”
- “Yes, very. Texted me when every assignment was due.”
- “It was very helpful. They kept me on top of my work so I wouldn’t forget.”
- “Yes, my facilitator helped me keep up with due dates.”
- “My experience was helpful. Helped me understand things that I didn’t know at first.”
- “My facilitator was the best! She made sure that we met and recorded my schedule each week.”
- “Yes, she reminded me of my assignments and didn’t make me meet when I didn’t need to”
- “Yes, VERY helpful. Helped me adjust to college life, told me where my classes were.”
- “I felt like my facilitator was more than helpful. She was like a big sister”
- “She helped me stay focused and organized. Yes she was helpful.”
- “[*] was the best facilitator. She helped out a lot. She was very helpful”
- “It was very helpful b/c I was able to stay/focus on my task with the busy schedules we have as an athlete”
- “She was helpful in many ways such as [*] making sure I was prepared”

Freshmen

- “Amazing”
- “It’s been the most helpful”
- “[*] always on my back and it helps me get my work done.”
- “It has been fun and very helpful”
- “It has been helpful. It has been a good experience”
- “Extremely helpful”
- “Yes, very helpful...they make us do our work when we don’t wanna”
- “My experience has been great [*]”

- “My experience has been great and she has been really helpful”
- “Good and yes”
- “It’s been great and very helpful.”
- “My experience has been great. [*]. She is awesome. It has been very helpful.”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “Could have been better how?”

“Lenient/flexible on times”

“Better ratio of facilitators to student-athletes” (^)

Researcher: “How did your facilitator help you build responsibility?”

“Texting”

Researcher: “Why is learning style important?”

“To help us as individuals with learning. I might need to hear my facilitator explain, but he (gestures to teammate) might need to talk to work through it.”

Researcher: “Ok, moving to question 3, what would have made the relationship better?”

“Know the student-athletes more”

“Understand our personalities” (^)

“HS background to tell what kind of student we are”

Question 3: What could have made your facilitating experience better?

Seniors

- “[*]”
- “Nothing, everything was great”
- “Personally I thought it was fine. It was a little loud at times but other than that it was great.”
- “If I didn’t have meetings. Maybe 1 meeting after syllabus day to put all important dates in my phone but otherwise...no”
- “Having a way of identifying students that do not have to spend as much time with the facilitators.” (^)
- “What would have made my experience better if she didn’t have so many people she worked with” (^)
- “If we had better times to work together. The times were inconvenient”
- “1 on 1 sessions. Better times to come in and work” (^)
- “If I could have been more flexible with my meeting times.”
- “I think if the meetings were more flexible. No set times”
- “Less people at one time, to crowded at times, needed more help” (^)

- “Less of them after I proved myself. Most the time my work was already done when I checked in”
- “If it was 1 on 1 I would have been more focused” (^)
- “I believe just knowing about them and how they work” (^)

Juniors

- “[*].”
- “Honestly, nothing. The facilitators were great at keeping everyone on task”
- “It was pretty much everything I needed and coulda asked for”
- “I believe my facilitator did her job well. She made me stay on top of my academics.”
- “More space, to let me figure out what I needed to do by myself”
- “[*].”
- “More flexibility with schedule”
- “I think overall it was a good experience but what could of made it better was working a quiet areas more” (^)
- “Having appointments and being aware of what your grade is either weekly or every two weeks”
- “Being able to meet w/ her during the day instead of at night”
- “More reminders of due dates.”
- “Maybe having a better relationship with the facilitator would have improved the desire to get work done.” (^)
- “Them understanding us more, and what we do day to day in the fall”
- “Just getting to know us better with who we are. What we like. How we operated.” (^)
- “Myself being more involved”

Sophomores

- “Really haven’t thought of anything to make it better was helpful.”
- “Nothing I loved it.”
- “Nothing, it was great.”
- “I don’t think anything would have my facilitating a better experience she helped out a lot”
- “There weren’t many things to make it better. [*].”
- “It was fine.”
- “Nothing. Everything was helpful”
- “I feel like everything they did was helpful they made sure we was there”
- “Not a whole lot. My facilitator was great.”
- “I have nothing to say besides I am thankful for all the help that was given to me!”
- “My first facilitator was very standoffish. It has been great so far.”
- “If she would have been able to help me more on homework.”

- “Better times to come meet but it was good.”
- “Don’t meet if we don’t have to”
- “If it wasn’t mandatory.”
- “I would have liked a more social facilitator”
- “I could have paid more attention”
- “Starting off with a better mindset”

Freshmen

- “Great”
- “Nothing, because I love it already”
- “I don’t think anything can make it better”
- “[*]”
- “Nothing”
- “Everything was good”
- “I think my facilitating experience is perfect but if I could change anything for the better it would be earlier in the day meetings since mine are at night.”
- “Nothing”
- “It has been pretty great”
- “Nothing”
- “Nothing”
- “I don’t think anything could make it better honestly. Maybe if she brought candy, but she isn’t allowed to so it’s ok.”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “What would continue to be beneficial?”

“Program focus; people in my major” (^)

“Flexibility in meeting times”

Researcher: “How were reminders done?”

“Text/phone call”

Researcher: “Why is getting to know guys important?”

“Conversation means investment” (^)

“Relationships”

“You know they got your back”

Researcher: “What would have helped the facilitator/student-athlete relationship get off to a better start?”

“Ease our way in”

“For the facilitator to learn that student” (^)

“Establish individual preferences with guys in the summer” (^)

Question 4: What skills did you think were necessary to be a good a college student before you arrived on campus?

Seniors

- “I believe having great social skills would be clutch”
- “SWAG”
- “Skills necessary was my work ethic I liked getting my stuff done on time”
- “Hard work, being on time, & being respectful were the skills I thought necessary”
- “Patience, good attitude”
- “Organization, work ethic, responsible”
- “Organization, Time Management, Good study habits”
- “Good study habits”
- “How to study the right way and take good notes”
- “Good study skills”
- “I thought you had to have good study habits and be discipline when it comes to going to class and going to be on time”
- “Before I got here I thought I needed time management skills and study skills.”
- “Time management, responsible”
- “Organized, go to class, staying on top of my work”

Juniors

- “Time management is the most important skill to learn before arriving, the second most is probably seeking help”
- “Honestly just going to class”
- “Organization and focus”
- “Studying and doing all work”
- “To be punctual and to listen & study and turning things in on time.”
- “Great time management skills also being organized”
- “Studying and being on time”
- “Having good study skills & time management”
- “Just have great time management and be ahead of work”
- “Being organized, being on top of my homework and school. Making my time more flexible.”
- “Having good study skills, time management & being organized”
- “Responsibility, and maturity”
- “I believe it would take a lot of discipline and patience. Also, dedication.”
- “I never really thought about it. Coming in you only think about football”

Sophomores

- “To be teachable, open ears, mostly to have communication/focus”
- “Being able to work alone and communication skills.”

- “Professional communication, counting money”
- “People skills, drive, discipline”
- “Ability to manage my time. Be independent”
- “Having good study habits and being responsible for myself”
- “I needed better study habits”
- “Taking good notes, study, stay organized”
- “Study hard, pay attention, be a good student”
- “No procrastination, priorities, comprehension on reading”
- “To be responsible, productive and very positive”
- “To be successful, I knew I had to be responsible and a good time-manager”
- “Time management, self-discipline, focus, intellect”
- “Just having a good work ethic, time management, and staying focus.”
- “Time-management”
- “Focus, Preparation, Time-management, Stay ahead”
- “Being able to manage football and classes. Staying focused on my classes”
- “Discipline, time management”

Freshmen

- “Time management”
- “Studious, patient, and compliant”
- “Being able to listen and do better”
- “Be prepared, do work on time, better time management”
- “Be very studious and disciplined”
- “I thought you had to be able to read a lot of stuff and memorize it, but [*] taught me how to skim and it’s helpful.”
- “Main one is manage time”
- “Having good studies habit, I thought that would be the key”
- “That you had to study a lot.”
- “Being proactive, so you can get your work done.”
- “Study habits and time management”
- “Study habits, being able (good) to do things on your own, being able to do your work without your parents on you.

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “How have you learned work ethic that we could use with freshmen?”
 “Bring older guys to talk to freshmen” (^)

Question 5: Once you arrived, did those needed skills change?

Seniors

- “No”
- “Nope”
- “Not really”

- “Nope you still need SWAG on and off the field”
- “No they didn’t they said they same, [*]”
- “Skills did not change just had to adjust”
- “Those skills held true. Time management became more stressed.”
- “Nothing didn’t, the hardest part was just maintaining those skills”
- “Yes, you need organization”
- “Yes, I didn’t know how to study the right way”
- “Once I arrived I realized I needed to be able to feel out each different professor and each class requires different effort” (^)
- “Yes, I had to learn how to actually talk to my prof” (^)
- “Not really. If anything checking my e-mail”
- “I realize I needed better time management skills”

Juniors

- “Not at all they were building blocks”
- “[*]”
- “No they didn’t, those same skills helped me get better grades once I applied”
- “Yes because I stopped applying myself”
- “Not really just making things actually happen”
- “No, I just realized how much of those skills I needed.”
- “I never had the best time management skills. After arriving my skills got better.”
- “Yes they change I learned how to use these skills better”
- “I did when I first got here but as I been here I should have been more flexible with my time”
- “Yes, football changed them all. I didn’t have great time-management”
- “The skills I expected were right. I just needed to take a little more action.”
- “No just needed to be more driven at times in school”

Sophomores

- “My skills that I thought I needed did work”
- “I feel as if they improved as the semesters and classes went by”
- “Yes it made me a better student, facilitator have your back”
- “The only skills that was needed to change a little was time management”
- “I became better organized but my study skills are still poor”
- “My skills were already there. I brought them with me to college.”
- “No”
- “No they did not”
- “No, maybe just independability”
- “No I still had to adapt to them when I got to college”
- “No they did not change”
- “No”
- “No they didn’t. I also developed other skills.”

- “No, everything stayed consistent”
- “Definitely no procrastination, organization”
- “No”
- “No they did not.”

Freshmen

- “No”
- “Nope”
- “No they haven’t”
- “Yes, I needed time management all the time”
- “The skills have changed. I don’t need what I thought I needed.”
- “Yes I can manage my time better”
- “No, but I do need focus”
- “They have gotten better”
- “No”
- “No, but you don’t have to study like I thought”
- “Yes, I am more proactive than what I was in high school.”
- “Some of my skills have changed. I think my studying skills have gotten better, and I have learned to do things on my own”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “Skills as developing or building? What skills?”

“Routine”

“How to study”

“Turning work in on time”

“Time management in general”

Researcher: “What can we work on to help with study skills?”

“Maybe set early due dates, before professor’s due date”

Question 6: Did you feel prepared as a freshman?

Seniors

- “YES!”
- “Yes I felt prepared and ahead of the regular students”
- “I was prepared when I stepped on campus”
- “Yes, because that’s when I really studied”
- “Yes I did, I felt like I took some pretty difficult classes in H.S. and made good grades”
- “Yes, private school”
- “Yes, I thought I had it all figured out”
- “After the summer semester yes I did. I feel I learned the skills I needed”

- “I feel like was prepared. But there were areas I needed to work on like time management”
- “Overall I did the biggest thing for me was being alone for the most part”
- “I felt well prepared. The only thing that was stressful was maintaining practice & class”
- “Yes except for the online classes” (^)
- “I didn’t feel prepared because I thought it would be a work load”
- “No I needed to learn how to study”

Juniors

- “I believe I was prepared.”
- “I did. I feel like I came in good”
- “Yes I had a good year academically”
- “Yes, I feel like I was a good enough student”
- “I was prepared when I got here as a freshman”
- “Yes I felt prepared as a freshmen because of my work ethic in high school”
- “Once I first got here I didn’t because I did not know what to look forward to. But after getting a facilitator I was prepared”
- “I do believe I was prepared because of the responsibility my facilitator held me to.”
- “Once I met with my facilitator a couple times I felt like I was on top of my work”
- “No I didn’t b/c I didn’t care for academics, so I never put time into it”
- “I did not feel prepared coming into my freshmen year”
- “Yes I had 0 study skills before I got here”
- “No, because my school district accepted any and all late work. We weren’t held accountable” (^)
- “The work was easy my freshman year but the years after I wasn’t prepared”
- “I felt prepared while working with the facilitators. Without them I would’ve been lost”

Sophomores

- “No I did not”
- “I didn’t feel prepared coming from high school” (^)
- “Honestly I didn’t. But learning and going with the college flow I began to get myself more together.”
- “No I wasn’t ready”
- “I feeled more developed than ever after couple months”
- “Yes I was prepared”
- “Yes, felt prepared, but not 100%”
- “Yes”
- “Absolutely”
- “Yes, I feel prepared from high school.”

- “Yes I felt prepared”
- “Yes”
- “Yes”
- “Yes I did feel prepared, come get work done and get everything done.”
- “Yes”
- “Yes”
- “I felt prepared as a incoming freshman”
- “Very prepared”

Freshmen

- “I felt confident coming in.”
- “Yes”
- “Yes I did”
- “Yes”
- “Yes”
- “No not really”
- “Yes I felt very prepared”
- “Yes I felt prepared, there was somethings I needed but still thought I was ready.”
- “No”
- “Yes”
- “No I didn’t”
- “[school name omitted*] did a great job @ preparing”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: Researcher: “What should we tell freshmen to expect?”

“They have to do homework”

“Answer texts and calls from [the academics staff]”

“Manage your time”

Question 7: What would have made you feel more prepared to start college?

Seniors

- “More personal, more specific to individuals”
- “Make us have huge study groups with food and drinks”
- “Sitting down and talking to teammates who have been through it, hearing from their point of view” (^)
- “Tell me that it isn’t ok to drop classes”
- “Comfortable shoes for my walks to class”
- “I felt like they prepared us well. Emphasizing the importance of attendance could’ve helped”
- “[*]”

- “More study sessions, good note taking tips”
- “More introduction to the subject matter”
- “Nothing. Only thing different was the work load”
- “There is not anything that comes to mind”
- “I feel like everything was done to have me prepared”
- “Nothing YOU could have done”
- “I believe being on a strict schedule hurt me”

Juniors

- “Ya’ll did a good job showing me how to be good at school”
- “Actually caring about academics”
- “Help me with my time management skills”
- “Help with my time management”
- “If I could have visited the academic center on my visits and payed more attention to the school buildings” (@)
- “Honestly, nothing. I was ready. For others, probably learning where the help centers are located and where to get tutors”
- “I would have felt more prepared to start college if I would have had looked at some notes from high school classes”
- “Getting taught how college would be or told how they would be”
- “Understanding the difference between high school and college”
- “Practicing skills in high school that would prepare me for college”
- “I would’ve felt more prepared if I had more writing assignments in high school”
- “My high school teacher actually forcing”
- “I think if I would have prepared in high school for college I would have felt more prepared”
- “If I would started being organized during high school [*]”

Sophomores

- “Being contacted early. Creating a connection before coming.”
- “[*]”
- “Having a good mindset”
- “Being aware of all the papers”
- “If I had my writing skills down for my major so my facilitators got me on point for it”
- “Not taking easy classes in my senior year”
- “Taking classes in high school to start getting my mindset right”
- “Managing my time better”
- “Learning more in high school. Coming into college I didn’t know if I knew enough”
- “More college credits”
- “Taking college classes in H.S.”

- “If I would have had someone tell me what to expect”
- “Have better study habits”
- “Understanding how important studying & homework is”
- “Start it from high school and know what to expect”
- “Nothing, I was always prepared”
- “I already was prepared”
- “I was already prepared”

Freshmen

- “Nothing”
- “Take a college prep class”
- “More AP classes in high school”
- “If I would’ve gotten a higher SAT score or more AP classes.”
- “What would have made me feel more prepared would have been a better ACT score.”
- “More AP classes in HS.”
- “Better study habits”
- “More AP classes”
- “More AP classes”
- “If I had managed my time better”
- “Duel credit classes”
- “I felt like I was prepared”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “What elements of time management?”

“Contracts”

“Weekly meetings”

“Assignments due when”

“To do lists”

“Planned day-by-day”

“Whole week planned out”

Question 8: What areas of academic training do you feel are addressed well by academic services?

Seniors

- “You guys are really addressing our academics which is main priorities”
- “Tutor times”
- “The way we learn”
- “Forcing us to check in and show grades b/c there are no secrets, forces us to stay on top of it”
- “Helping us plan our weeks, time management”
- “Reminding us what we need to do”

- “Organization, being on top of us with assignments & work”
- “[*] Also, keeping us updated with due dates.”
- “Checking up on people often”
- “Making sure we are on top of our work”
- “The scheduling with everything & keeping us on time”
- “Did a good job with us managing our time”
- “Nothing”
- “Umm...everything good”

Juniors

- “The versatility of the staff. [*]”
- “Helpful at keeping me responsible”
- “I believe they are good with keeping you up to date with your work as well as being a guide for things you may not understand.”
- “They helped a lot with organization.”
- “Planning, and being organized. Also, time management”
- “The ability to help students with staying on track and time management”
- “Being on top of the kids and finishing their work and being here when needed”
- “Time management, correct document styles, and being a good student”
- “The academic training I feel was addressed well was helping me by calling and making sure that I’m doing what I’m supposed to.”
- “I think keeping us on point. Making us come in every week so many days/hours”
- “I believe that they are all addressed well [*]”
- “I feel like it is very organized”
- “The ability to keep us up to date with what is coming up on our work”
- “Staying on top of work”

Sophomores

- “Staying w/rules/not cheating. Being sociable/helpful”
- “My facilitator [*] was awesome”
- “Writing a weekly schedule, & working with you on each class.”
- “Facilitation”
- “Being prepared and getting yourself to that point.”
- “Give us a schedule and a plan.”
- “They make sure we are prepared to come in and ...everything is based on academics.
- “Managing all our assignments and making sure we complete”
- “I like the fact that they remind me of things that I have due. Always pushing me to due my best.”
- “Keeping us on track”
- “They make sure we are well organized”

- “Being on time, staying focused, be prepared”
- “Organization is addressed”
- “Staying on top of all assignments”
- “Keeping students organized”
- “Everything felt well addressed. You guys are the best”
- “All areas were addressed”
- “All areas were addressed well”
- “All areas were addressed”

Freshmen

- “You guys keep us in line”
- “Stay on top of stuff”
- “Study, be prepared, being on time, being responsible”
- “[*]”
- “I feel they do well with communicating and mostly everything I love the academic center”
- “Help students understand everything”
- “[*]”
- “Make us get the work done early”
- “Time management and getting ahead”
- “Keeping us on track & focused”
- “Start assignments early, help us not procrastinate.”
- “[*] keep us on a good track and organized”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “Time management and organization used how?”

“Talk to and relate to me”

Question 9: What areas could be improved?

Seniors

- “Getting to know us on a personal level. A safe place away from the field” (^)
- “More individual time with facilitator” (^)
- “Focus more on the guys that need help” (^)
- “More 1 on 1 tutoring especially in math, I’m not a fan of group tutoring for math” (@)
- “More personal keep the ratio down” (^)
- “Flexible hours, teach better study habits then let people work on their own. Get them to be independent [*]” (^)
- “The times that are required to meet, Although work is completed”
- “Allow us to come in when we want to, or change our times”
- “Hours in which things start”
- “Hours for sessions”

- “Not turn us ‘in’ for being late”
- “Getting turned in for being late”
- “[*]”

Juniors

- “Just the trust”
- “Getting to know the students more” (^)
- “I honestly do not know I believe my facilitator did her job well. Always felt prepared.”
- “Using time more efficiently.”
- “Teaching effective study habits”
- “Have a visual of where classes are and what the building looks like” (^)
- “Life skills teaching us to be more independent” (^)
- “I think that each sport can have their own rooms so we can stay focus”
- “The time we have to meet with them several times out the week.”
- “The timing of appointments, work around days off, try to get things done earlier in the day”
- “Probably amounts of facilitators, because there are at least 3 people seeking attention at one time” (^)
- “More flexible with time changes”
- “Some areas that can be improved are not having so many people in at the same time.” (^)
- “The schedule times that we have”

Sophomores

- “Having more facilitators.”
- “[*]”
- “[*]”
- “I feel like what could be better is communicating when we are going through things just let us have our space a min.”
- “Giving us more freedom if we deserve it. Also giving us more freedom to be ourselves” (^)
- “Determine the students who need less help” (^)
- “Try not to downplay our intelligence or our will to actually want to work hard just because we are freshmen.” (^)
- “I really can’t think of anything”
- “They are all fairly well”
- “I think yall do a fine job”
- “I don’t think anything can be improved”
- “None at all.”
- “I don’t think any areas could be improved”
- “I feel like academic services is perfect honestly”
- “Nothing should be”

- “I have no complaints. You guys are awesome”
- “[*]”

Freshmen

- “Nothing”
- “Nothing”
- “If yall had more people”
- “[*]”
- “There’s nothing that could be improved. They are all great”
- “[*]”
- “Flexibility on being late”
- “[*]”
- “Everything is done well”
- “Nothing”
- “Nothing”
- “I think it was all great”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “How do you see us transitioning guys to be more independent?”

“Depends on the guy” (^)

“Use the different levels of learners” (^)

“More one-on-one help” (^)

Question 10: What areas that weren’t covered, but you wish were?

Seniors

- “Help generate ideas for life after football.” (^)
- “The online work in classes” (^)
- “Ways to keep up with your school work”
- “I wish I knew how to study better”
- “Learning how to take notes”
- “Note taking was never covered”
- “I believe note taking because I suck at notes”
- “Note taking, writing papers, typing”
- “Study skills/note taking”
- “I can not think of anything off the top of my head”
- “Nothing really”
- “[*]”
- “Nothing I can think of.”
- “[*]”

Juniors

- “Life skills & stressing how important going to class is.”

- “I wish we covered more life skills”
- “[*]”
- “I haven’t seen someone in my major that works here”
- “[*], more life skills training (doctors appointments, eating right)”
- “What I needed to expect.”
- “More explainable”
- “I think the facilitators should learn about where the students struggle w/different learning styles”
- “I think you guys should try to learn our learning styles more”
- “Note taking, a lot of people try to take good notes but don’t know how”
- “Most if not all areas are covered. I believe they are doing everything they should be.”
- “I think all was covered because yall did a good job”
- “I feel like all areas are covered”
- “I think most things are covered”

Sophomores

- “Telling us how classes really are and how hard.”
- “[*]” (@)
- “Social”
- “Better writing center tutoring”(@)
- “Help for higher level majors” (^)
- “I feel like everything was covered by them”
- “I think everything was covered fairly”
- “None”
- “None”
- “I feel like all areas were covered”
- “Nothing. Everything really was right in my opinion”
- “Really they were all pretty much covered”
- “None I feel pretty good with the way things were.”
- “They were all covered”
- “None”
- “None at all”
- “It was all covered”
- “How to navigate around campus”

Freshmen

- “Nothing”
- “Wish we would have talked about class checkers” (@)
- “They were all covered well”
- “Having to come up every day as a freshman, class checkers”(@)
- “Class checkers” (@)
- “Class checkers”(@)

- “Class checkers”(@)
- “Class checkers”(@)
- “Everything I needed to know was covered”
- “Conduct meetings”
- “Class checkers”(@)
- “Everything was covered”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “What life skills?”

“Finding resources, things we need” (^)

“The social aspect, just being around people”

Question 11: What could be done to improve the working relationship between facilitators and student-athletes?

Seniors

- “Activities outside of the academic services would have greatly increased relationships.” (^)
- “Activities outside academic services” (^)
- “Creating a bond”
- “I’ve always had good relationships with my facilitators. I can’t think of anyway to improve”
- “[*]”
- “Let us pick our facilitator”
- “[*]”
- “Have more flexibility in the schedules”
- “Don’t turn us in, if we talk about us missing ahead of time and you still turn us in- not ok, Don’t check on us so much”
- “I personally feel that they’re isn’t anything else to be done.”
- “I think just more 1 on 1 time. It’s easier to concentrate when they’re aren’t other people needing help too” (^)
- “Making time for each of your students, most time there are a lot of people in there at once” (^)
- “Not have to many people in the academic services at one time” (^)

Juniors

- “Learn the background of student-athletes. Everybody comes from different places w/ different stories” (^)
- “To get to know the student more on a personal level” (^)
- “Talk and get a better understanding”
- “Personality tests to match up people accordingly”

- “Adapt to our learning styles better” (^)
- “They can learn our learning styles because everyone is different” (^)
- “Asking questions.”
- “Being aware when asked a question.”
- “More flexible in time changes”
- “Working with time during the day. Earlier times so we don’t have to come back up here after practice.”
- “Them being able to fit our schedules better, and more one on one time”
- “Add more facilitators”
- “Add more facilitators, so that students can not just sit idly, and can get to work faster”

Sophomores

- “Communicating better times”
- “To address everything as grown ups. I mean its fun to laugh and build a bond, but sometimes I see other athletes take advantage of it.”
- “The facilitators are here to help its really based on how the student-athlete responds and their attitudes toward working.”
- “For the facilitators to be more open-minded”
- “If it wasn’t mandatory”
- “More social & flexible facilitators like [*]”
- “Having a legit relationship”
- “I feel as if we could be more interactive with them so they could get to know us better not just as a student but as a person” (^)
- “Cookouts – outside of the academic services bonding”
- “I think its fine”
- “Im not sure”
- “Nothing”
- “Relationships were great”
- “[*] was the best facilitator. She helped out a lot”
- “I think the relationship with my facilitator was good.”
- “I love the relationship I have with my facilitator”

Freshmen

- “[*]”
- “Nothing”
- “[*]”
- “[*]”
- “[*]”
- “What you can improve is the number of facilitators to help the athletes”
- “IDK”
- “[*]”
- “[*]”

- “[*]”
- “Nothing yall are the facilitating pros”

Focus Group follow up questions - Conclusion

Researcher: “If you could go back in time and talk to your former self, what would you tell him?”

- “Study”
- “Go to class”
- “Don’t drop classes”
- “Only take twelve hours during season”
- “Don’t take music class online”
- “Go thank your high school English teacher”
- “Take school seriously”
- “Do as much of your work ahead of time as you can”
- “Get sleep”

Researcher: “What makes a good facilitator?” (^)

- “A facilitator should have a broad knowledge base”
- “Cares”
- “Gives us space to work”
- “Lets us be ourselves”
- “Understands us”
- “Is patient”
- “Has a good relationship with us”
- “Helps us get started, then checks on us, but not over our shoulder”
- “Lets us earn trust”
- “Understands what kind of person I am”
- “Gives one-on-one attention”
- “Is relaxed and I can talk about personal stuff”
- “Is flexible”

Researcher: “Student-Athletes should know...” (^)

- “Get to know [the academic center staff] and come to the academic center”
- “Procrastination is death”
- “Preparing is KEY”
- “Don’t take classes before 9am”
- “Study”
- “Having a laptop is helpful”
- “Don’t come up playing games, you’ll hurt yourself”
- “Put your phone up” (^)
- “Yeah, and facilitators need to put their phone away, too”

“Maybe like a reward system. Fifteen minutes of work earns a phone break”

“They need to take initiative”

“At the end of the day it’s on you [as the student-athlete]”

Facilitator Responses

Question 1: What were your expectations of your student-athletes before arriving on campus? What did you think they would do?

- “I thought they might be more “big headed” about their status being star athletes. Maybe didn’t know some would be as good of students as they are and visa versa :)”
- “I was expecting some resistance in interacting w/me -- that they would feel as though it was forced upon them. Academically, I expected a spectrum - but that many would be on the lower edge.”
- “I thought they wouldn’t always want to be there but that they’d be appreciative. I thought they’d be more willing to want to do school work. I didn’t expect them to be as underprepared/low achieving as some of them are.”
- “I anticipated that my student athletes would be shy at first, but hoping we would be able to connect and for them to feel more comfortable. Being freshmen I thought they would be really nervous the first week.”
- “I had a feeling there would be a few who saw our meetings as unnecessary, mostly b/c they never had needed or had someone help w/ the things we would as a facilitator. I was more nervous that I wouldn’t be able to answer their questions.”
- “I thought my students would fight me on getting homework done. That they wouldn’t be motivated to do well.”
- “I didn’t expect I would enjoy their company as much as I do.” (^)
- “I thought the students would want to be here, that they are students who are struggling academically. I thought they would be open to discussion and bring questions they had. I thought they would ask for or want help with organization and study tips or that they would want help studying for exams.”
- “I thought they’d be like slightly more mature versions of junior high students.”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “Unprepared how?”

“The time it would take”

“To do homework”

“To be able to do things on their own like write emails” (^)

“Managing their own time”

“Navigating the online classroom” (^)

Question 2: What has your experience been like with your student-athlete? Has it been helpful to them?

- “I am curious how helpful it is. I wonder what skills are transferring.”
- “I think some have benefitted more than others. Some are invested, others are not. Some use the personal relationship of a facilitator, some do not. Some use the academic support, some do not.”
- “I think for most of my athletes the process has been very helpful. Each week they are ready and express disappointment when not doing well. Many have stated they like our meeting and it helps them organize their weeks.”
- “They have definitely gotten more comfortable and trusting. They are not afraid to ask for help. They have actually told me that meeting with me is very helpful and it helps [the student-athlete] get motivated for the week and knows exactly what to expect.” (^)
- “For most of my students it has been very helpful. They’ve gotten good at going through the syllabi and preparing for their classes. I’ve also seen improvements in note-taking and quiz grades. They really seem to want to be here. For others, they either don’t need or don’t want help.”
- “I find that overall, the majority might not need me, but they like having someone to hold them accountable. At the very least, they can bounce ideas off me & many like the safety of knowing I don’t respond to their coaches. Overall, helpful.”
- “Overall experience has been positive (there are a few who don’t necessarily use the time for more than “reorganization). With that said, I think it’s especially beneficial for their transition to college but I don’t know if they always see it as beneficial. Hard to say.”
- “I have had numerous wonderful experiences. I have watched lots of kids mature & try harder in school & in life. It doesn’t always happen fast (might take a few years). I think I have had a part in helping w/ life skills as much as school.” (^)

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “What life skills?”

“Soft skills”

“Emails”

“Guidances to talk to instructors”

“Learning to break down assignments”

“Being able to have growth and improvement”

“It’s like we have almost a parental role-ish; it’s in between a parent and a friend; there’s a lot of tough love”

Question 3: What can make/could have made your facilitating experience better?

- “Training on how to handle difficult students. Having a general meeting with both facilitators and athletes to explain the program, what it is for, how we are here to help, and the rules and expectations. They could also just be for the athletes alone since facilitators already have this meeting, though it would be a good chance to meet before school starts.” (^)
- “In the beginning [the student-athletes] were confused about my role and why they had to meet with me. I think it would be helpful for them to be told what our purpose is before meeting with us initially because they were very confused @ the first meeting.” (^)
- “I feel my experience has been great. I sometimes wish the students had as much “want” for themselves as I do for them. And there is the unfortunate times where students blame you for things instead of taking responsibility for their own actions.” (^)
- “It could have been helpful to see an example for the types of things facilitators in the past have done during their meetings. I know they’re individualized mtgs but a few specific ideas might help.” (^)
- “Meeting in a quiet, more private area. Would reduce pressure to answer other students’ questions. Also, might reduce the student from getting distracted/feeling rushed.” (^)
- “[*]”
- “Having more interactions w/ other facilitators - at the very least for best practice sharing.” (^)
- “Having a better idea of what the meetings consisted of. Also having space that’s less distracting to them.” (^)

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “What would more private or quiet meeting areas give?”

“More personal communication”

“Respect meetings”

“Limit others talking during meeting”

“Make meetings more personal - they may ask more questions without embarrassment” (^)

“Limit flirting”

Researcher: “What suggestions do you have for where or how to create a more private area?”

“Maybe not everyone, but especially with the newbies in private rooms”

“Switch rooms so they aren’t in the same room with their friends or where they normally go”

“Maybe a facilitator-specific area or zone/station”

Question 4: What skills did you think were necessary to be a good college student before you arrived on campus?

- “Attending and participating in class, reading before class, trying to study prior to the night before an exam. But mainly attending class and doing your homework, just like it was in high school.”
- “Organization, time management, prioritizing school.”
- “Be organized and be prepared to study a lot more than I did in high school. I was going to have to learn how to manage my time between schoolwork and a social life without my parents there.”
- “Book smarts :), organization, time management.”
- “Always going to class. Do homework on time. I really didn’t think about study skills, etc. (Based off of what I did in high school, but college definitely requires more effort!)”
- “The skills I thought were necessary were: good writing skills, study skills, time-management, social skills, desire to learn.”
- “Time management, openness & willingness to learn, critical reading, organization.”
- “Intellectual curiosity and the ability to keep a planner.”

Question 5: Have those needed skills changed?

- “No. same skills needed.”
- “No; still need/use them today in grad school.”
- “Yes, but not necessarily until I had the first couple test grades that weren’t as high as I’d hoped.”
- “Time management because more important, but overall not really.”
- “Yes - while org., time management, etc. helped make my life easier, I didn’t anticipate balance or self-care as being necessary or even skills.”
- “Time management, commitment, study skills - didn’t all change but more were added!”
- “Yes, those skills have changed. There are skills I thought I would need and did, but there’s a lot about college I didn’t know about and wasn’t prepared for.”
- “I don’t think so.”

Focus Group follow up questions (4 & 5)

Researcher: “What of these have you shared with your student-athletes?”

“Maintaining a good social life”

“The importance of soft skills” (^)

“How to manage without parents around” (^)

“That I wasn’t prepared for these changes at their age” (^)

Researcher: “Did sharing benefit your student-athlete or your relationship?”

“It gained buy-in”

“Made it more personal” (^)

“It let them talk more about what’s going on with them”

“It gave me currency. It showed I could relate and was willing to share struggles”

“Trust”

“I think when we are a cheerleader for them academically it comes out in their performance”

“Yes. Sometimes it seems they’ll do more for their facilitator than they would do for themselves”

Question 6: Did you think your student-athletes would be prepared coming in as freshmen?

- “No. I’ve seen the level of preparedness of high school students.”
- “I thought some would be prepared, but then others I thought wouldn’t be. Just like with non-athlete students it all depends on their priorities and the skills they are coming in with. Some only care about their sport. Others their education, and some both.” (^)
- “Not really. I don’t know if I thought much about it when I first started. Now I know some will be some won’t be.”
- “Some, but I wasn’t expecting all. They have a diff. skill set coming in that as a non-athlete, I didn’t have to have.”
- “No I did not. I felt they would only be thinking about sports and not the academic side.”
- “No, because most college freshman aren’t prepared in general. I was really impressed w/ a few of them though!”
- “I didn’t expect them to be prepared...”
- “I thought they would have some ideas about what to expect, but regardless of how prepared you might think you are, there are always surprises and unexpected things come up.”

Question 7: What would have made them feel more prepared to start college?

- “[*] Really - a “prep course” to give them some insight.” (^)
- “A realistic perspective of the time commitments they are expected to have with balancing sports & academics.”
- “Having workshops before classes started to get to know other students, their facilitator, expectations, and talk to other students about college life & classes, how to do well in those classes so they aren’t going in ‘blind’ so they feel more comfortable and ready. Maybe even creating study groups before classes start to they know who to talk to if they need help. Or maybe an older athlete serving as a mentor.” (^)

- “A list of ‘successful college’ tips maybe... things such as what they might need for materials but also less obvious tips about reviewing material more than right before a test, etc.”
- “I think if high school teachers or counselors talked to them more about what to expect it would help. Also, students who take concurrent enrollment in high school are introduced to college life slowly & minimally @ first.”
- “Academically, a warning that even non-athletes don’t always do well - many of my students compare themselves to their peers w/o realizing that their achieving a x%, is FAB b/c of their schedule & person B doesn’t have everything else.”
- “- having to be more accountable in HS - some of them: having parents that could help prepare them better - a specific orientation designed for their future college schedule.”
- “Agenda skills, prior knowledge of traditional academic basics, writing skills.”

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “What do you think would be important to discuss in those first few meetings or events?”

“Test taking skills and preparation”

“Letting them know they are normal in comparison to others. ‘Normal’ students struggle and get help. It gives them reassurance.” (^)

“How to identify key points while reading”

“How to take notes in class”

Question 8: What areas of facilitator and academic training do you feel are addressed well by academic services?

- “Academic services is a place students come to for help. They know it is a valuable resource by and large.”
- “I like that all of the staff are approachable for both facilitators & athletes & there are numerous resources available to help w/ facilitating (weekly checklists, campus maps, cornell notes, etc.)”
- “Preparing athletes for the following week and providing tutors for those who are struggling. If we have questions or concerns, y’all are very good at answering those & helping us. Y’all are also great at stepping in and talking to the athletes to see how they are doing.”
- “Student-facilitator ration. facilitator/supervisor open ended questions answered. (feeling comfortable asking for help.) The annual orientation. Organization for the students.”
- “I think the knowledge of services available is great & the NCAA & Big 12 bylaws that govern what we do is very well covered.”
- “For facilitators it is very helpful to have multiple resources and open communication with the learning specialists. The training was also helpful and

we were prepared with how to address certain situations and if we don't know the answer, who to contact.”

- “[*]. For facilitators, the training day is really helpful. Lays out expectations, guidelines, etc.”
- “Writing center is one of the best resources I have to offer my students. In training, the importance of comm. not only w/ the SC [sport counselor] but also with the LS [learning specialist] has made my role easier.” (@)

Question 9: What areas could be improved?

- “[*]”
- “It might help keep us on track if we talked w/ facilitator coordinators more frequently or if coordinators also met w/ each student at some point to check in. I sometimes feel like I'm not helping the students very much (or they need our mtngs less as the semester goes on).” (^)
- “[*] checking in with tutors to make sure they are meeting with athletes since the athletes don't always want to honestly tell us. Preparing us for difficult students and how to handle certain situations such as them wanting to leave after 15 minutes.” (^)
- “In facilitator training, a ‘what to do when your students are on top of it all’. Perhaps a monthly meeting w/ facilitators to ‘best practice’ share.” (^)
- “Maybe continuing education as specific issues come up. I wish there was a fool proof way to make sure assignments weren't missed but we are only human. I wish we had more weight or control getting kids to class or to do work.”
- “I think the knowledge of what meetings look like and ideas on dealing with difficult kids could be improved. Also how to use the reports system.” (^)(@)
- “[*] Post a list of tutoring times and campus resources in the academic services.” (@)
- “I think it would be helpful to have a monthly meeting or something and maybe hear how everyone is doing and what issues people have dealt with. This could better prepare if we ever face that same problem.” (^)

Focus Group follow up questions

Researcher: “What *do* you do when your student-athletes are caught up? If you had to figure out a way to keep them, how would you do it?”

“There is always reading to do”

“Student-athletes should come prepared to work”

“But you risk losing the student-athlete even coming in if s/he feels forced”

Question 10: What are areas that weren't covered, but you wish were?

- “More detail in what facilitator can assist students with in regards to papers, research, & homework.” (^)

- “Maybe how to deal w/ the kids if they were ever to ‘come at you w/ blame’; maybe working w/ kids w/ learning disabilities; [*] I think the training is great.” (^)
- “Maybe more explanation of what topics we can and can’t discuss with them. More specific details. Also what the expectations are for the athletes, such as how many hours of study hall they have to have each week.” (^) (@)
- “What to do when they ‘have it all figured out’. Outside resources on campus (such as the math & sci lab in the lib., etc.).” (^) (@)
- “How to work with more difficult students; how to [teach students to] communicate with tutors/professors since we can’t directly talk to them. How to make the session last the full time when they don’t bring anything with them (maybe some organizational or study exercises we could do or go over?).” (^)
- “The main thing that I’ve spent outside time on to prepare for mtgs - examples of how to take notes or study skills for some students. I’ve looked some up but it would be interesting to here [sic] from past students what worked well for them (especially w/ Bio & chem classes).” (^)
- “I don’t know.”

Question 11: What could be done to improve the working relationship between facilitators and student-athletes?

- “Students need to feel comfortable voicing their needs to facilitators.”
- “Not allowing them to use cell phones during facilitation meetings. Having a ‘get to know you’ meeting before school starts in addition to the initial meeting that’s already set up. Having a meeting to explain why they have a facilitator and how we are here to help them.” (^)
- “Explaining to student athletes what our mtgs are in place for. I think it would be good for them to know who we are as a resource to them before our 1st meeting -> setting more clear expectations (tutors v. facilitators, etc.).” (^)
- “For the facilitator & the student-athletes to know what is expected of them by the other party. Removes any confusion and it is all on the table from the beginning.” (^)
- “I think by setting clear boundaries & expectations can help foster a working relationship.”
- “[*]”
- “Frame the service of a facilitator not as a chore, i.e. ‘you have to meet w/ your facilitator,’ but rather as, ‘b/c you’re a stu-ath, you get this service...’. Explain the differences between our role & those of a SC [sport counselor] or LS [learning specialist].” (^)
- “I think that depends on the personality of the student & the facilitator. I think sometimes when we have events such as the etiquette dinner or ‘outside’ events it helps grow trust b/w the two which helps the relationship.” (^)

Focus Group follow up questions - Conclusion

Researcher: “If you could go back to your first meeting, what would you share, do differently, or what up your sleeve?”

“I would definitely set clearer expectations”

“I would want more tips for what to do”

“Setting goals”

“Putting ideas into practice. Like making them explain concepts and making sessions more interactive” (^)

Researcher: “So if you could add one more thing to be covered in the facilitator training...”

“It would be nice to have practice as part of the facilitator role in the training sessions” (^)

“Continuing education for facilitators, like shared struggles and challenges” (^)

“Something like a best practices sharing” (^)

“That it’s important to have a good relationship between the facilitators and a way to build those” (^)

VITA

JONENE L. COOK

EDUCATION

May, 1997	Bachelor of Science Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
May, 2011	Master of Science Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
Pending	Doctor of Education Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

June 2013-Present	Learning Specialist Academic Services for Student-Athletes Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
2007-2015	Adjunct Professor Northern Oklahoma College - Stillwater Stillwater, Oklahoma
2011-2013	Graduate Assistant Social Foundations of Education & Educational Technology Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
2002-2004	Director/Coordinator/Teacher The Learning Center – Enrichment Program Stillwater, Oklahoma

PUBLICATIONS

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VITA

NICOLE D. JONES

EDUCATION

December, 2004	Bachelor of Science Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
May, 2008	Master of Science Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
Pending	Doctor of Education Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

2016-Present	Manager, Student Academic Development, Football Academic Services for Student-Athletes Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
2005-2016	Learning Specialist Academic Services for Student-Athletes Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
2001-2005	Sr. Office Assistant Academic Services for Student-Athletes Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma
2000-2001	Office Assistant College of Education Student-Services Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma

PUBLICATIONS

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