

## **Impact of Demographic Variables on African-American Student Athletes' Academic Performance**

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Since the passage of Proposition 48 (NCAA, 1984), African-American student-athletes entering National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) major colleges and universities have met new challenges in their future as student-athletes. This major change altered the landscape of the future of college athletics particularly for students of color. Proposition 48 mandates minimum scores from the ACT (17), SAT (700), and a 2.0 high school grade point average (GPA). The scores are used as predictors to increase graduation rates for NCAA student-athletes. Needless to say, the new ruling was met with controversy from the African-American community with assertions that the policy was biased to a select certain group of athletes. Before the enactment of Proposition 48, many historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were operating with an open

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admissions enrollment policy. Since 1994, they have utilized an admission criterion for incoming students similar to other NCAA schools.

Research conducted by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (2001) acknowledged,

Athletes are often admitted to institutions where they do not have a reasonable chance to graduate. They are athlete-students, brought into the collegiate mix more as performers than aspiring undergraduates. Their ambiguous academic credentials lead to chronic classroom failures or chronic cover-ups of their academic deficiencies. As soon as they arrive on campus, they are immersed in the demands of their sports. (p. 16)

Two former HBCU presidents argued that historically Black schools would be disproportionately harmed in recruiting qualified student-athletes with the implementation of these standards (Covell & Barr, 2001). Early studies of high school sports provide a focus on the need for high school athletes to meet academic standards in order to participate in college sports. Thus, increased academic outcomes were an indirect effect of high school sports (Lapchick, 1995). In contrast, the NCAA believes that by putting a criterion on student-athletes, it will improve the graduation success rate and it will allow colleges and universities to be more selective of the students they admit through their doors on athletic scholarships.

There are other factors that affect the academic achievement of student-athletes at the college level. For example, the demographic variables of gender, family structure, and socioeconomic status have a significant impact on the academic performance of African-American student athletes. These variables have accounted for some successes and failures of student-athletes. NCAA (2005) reports indicate that female student-athletes have a higher graduation rate than their male counterparts. Socioeconomic Status (SES) has been perceived by both genders as a major concern in pursuing funding for entering college without scholarships. Research has shown that family structure influences the educational success of children.

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### **Assumptions**

While this study is quantitative, the researchers want to offer some assumptions related to student athletes based on experiences of working with and teaching students enrolled at a HBCU in a metropolitan city in Texas. Every student can learn, including athletes. Athletes have proven this assertion with their efforts, work habits, dedication and practice schedules.

Research by Cox (2007) indicates that athletes are high achievers. As former student-athletes and current teachers and coaches, the researchers have had experiences in making quick decisions during intense games within minutes of the closing of the game. Decisions must be made quickly in game situations. Athletes such as point guards in basketball, quarterbacks in football, and setters in volleyball are highly skilled and knowledgeable and leaders in their respected sports. Their decisions make a great impact on the outcomes of an athletic contest (Cox, 2007). For example, student athletes must make quick and timely decisions on the court in a

matter of seconds. Off the court, these same student-athletes live their dreams of becoming successful college graduates. These students can use these same skills and abilities to aid them in the academic arena.

Athletics can be important from a schooling perspective as well as an access perspective. Success in sports is often their ticket to earn the right to attend many of the NCAA Division I colleges and universities. If this opportunity is not afforded to them, many student-athletes will need to find other avenues to pay for their collegiate experience.

For these students, their academic pursuit is warded off by negatives such as being under-prepared for college and not ready for the rigor of college academics. There is some truth in the commercial aired during the NCAA tournament 2012 with the comment, "There are about 400,000 student-athletes and only 10% will ever suit up in a professional uniform." If only 10% ever reach the professional level, some college-level stakeholders have surmised *What happens to the other 90%?*

Although not all athletes will ascend to the professional level, the researchers of this study assert they can make a difference in the lives of many people who they will encounter through professional careers in health, physical education, and coaching. These careers are predicated by the need for acceptance to colleges and universities, necessary funding, and successful matriculation and graduation. College attendance is critical for many student athletes, therefore the NCAA rules impact these athletes' futures in a number of ways.

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## Review of Related Research

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### Predictor and Success Variables

A considerable number of research investigations have been conducted on the demographics of student athletes. Tracy and Sedlacek (1984), Seller (1992), NCAA (2005), Lapchick (1995), and Synder (1996) have conducted research to establish significant predictor variables. Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1985) examined the academic preparations and achievements of African-American student athletes and found they often come to college unprepared for their academic challenges and opportunities. It was concluded that marginal test scores, low grade point averages, and lack of academic focus were some of the indicators responsible for student failures.

In an earlier study, Shapiro (1984) examined the success rate of student athletes using factors other than the traditional measures of academic requirements such as college entrance exam scores (SAT/ACT), high school grade-point averages (GPAs), and class rankings. In this 25-year study of research on Michigan State University athletes who attended the institution from fall 1950 to fall 1974, Shapiro found that participation in intercollegiate athletics positively influences educational attainment. The attrition rate was higher and the graduation rate was lower for African-American students and football players did not perform as well

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as other athletes in the study. Tracy and Sedlacek's (1984) study revealed much-needed knowledge and significant information with regard to selected predictors of academic performance of student athletes who found that the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCG) was a good predictor of African-American athletes' college persistence. The NCG measures leadership, confidence, and family support and is a good predictor of students' GPA when coupled with the SAT or used alone (Tracy & Sedlacek, 1984).

As a rule, when the NCAA posts graduation rate for each academic year, there is an increase in the number of student athletes who are graduating, making good grades, and progressing academically. Nevertheless, the NCAA (2005) indicates that student athletes graduate from college at a higher graduation rate "than do students from the general population of many American universities." NCAA (2005) research indicates that both African-American male (42%) and female (47%) student athletes are graduating at a lower rate than other ethnicities classified in Division I NCAA athletic programs.

The NCAA research from 2005 indicates that student athletes graduation rates are higher than the general student population at most colleges and universities. This success was accomplished because of the NCAA criterion for student athletes entering college with minimum SAT/ACT test scores, higher grade point averages (GPAs), and selected core courses. Otherwise many HBCUs have open admission policies for their entering freshmen classes.

The NCAA has implemented a plan which works constantly to make improvements so student athletes will have successful academic encounters. The NCAA Committee on Academic Performance (CAP) instituted academic performance measures to monitor all college and university athletic programs using the benchmark 925 to assess the growth and successful academic achievements of each member institution. Failure to meet these standards may result in a letter of reprimand and loss of scholarships for institutions that do not measure up to expectations (NCAA, 2005). Certainly, there is room for improvement and all college and university academic support staff, coaches, administrators, and student athletes must play a positive role in the quest for higher academic standards.

Additionally, student athletes who are recruited by NCAA Division I programs have criteria they must meet before admission: (a) SAT Scores of 820 or higher or ACT Scores of 17 or higher and (b) completion of 16 core courses in high school with a 2.5 grade point average. Also, each student must be cleared by the NCAA clearing house.

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### **African-American and Minority Student Athlete Factors**

Sellers (1992) opined that African-American student athletes were often recruited from many of the larger American cities to play their respective sports namely, basketball and football, on the collegiate level. These athletes pursue or are clustered in majors in the social sciences and general studies; are usually recruited on athletic scholarships; and are often the first in their families to attend a college

or university. However, demographic data are counter-stereotypical in some aspects due to previous claims and research dealing with the plight of the African-American student athlete (Coakley, 2004).

Some pertinent studies by Nettles, Thoeny, and Grossman (1986) employed over 4,000 surveys at 30 colleges among students and faculty and concluded that college grade point averages were significantly lower for ethnic minorities. These findings, in part, may be explained inasmuch as racial minorities were very likely to attend public inner-city high schools that were generally associated with a lower quality education. Thus, ethnic minorities might perform poorer in college than do their White counterparts as a result of having received inadequate preparation at underperforming schools that offer a watered-down curriculum.

Often, minorities (including African-American student athletes) overload classrooms and are offered fewer college preparation materials by their high school counselors. Moreover, Cross and Slator (1995) found that 12% of students enrolled in the nations' top schools for African Americans graduated with honors, while 37% of Caucasians in similar situations graduate with honors. The information in Cross and Slator's study is of special significance, because many student athletes who participate in sports at Division I colleges and universities are minorities, particularly African Americans who are overrepresented among college athletes, especially in football and in men's basketball. Nettles, Theony, and Gosman (1986) found that minority students' college GPAs were associated with students' perceptions of suspicions about racial discrimination at the university and that individual GPAs were related to students' ethnicity.

African-American student athletes come from a variety of home settings: the basic two-parent families, single-parent families, some are raised by grandparents, while others are raised by different family members. College athletics have opened doors for many of these young men and women. Basketball has been their ticket to other opportunities and not just the professional ranks. Many of these athletes have moved on to other careers as a result of achieving in the classrooms academically while on athletic scholarships.

Although preparation issues pose challenges for some of these athletes, other societal and cultural challenges exist. Brooks and Althouse (2000) conducted extensive research on the historical accounts of racism in college athletics. Steele (1997) indicated that African-American student athletes experience various forms of discrimination throughout their careers. However, similar research studies by Brooks and Althouse (2000), Eitzen (1993), Miller (1995), and Wiggins (1997 & 2000) supported these findings with historical accounts of racism which had occurred involving African-American student athletes. Steele (1997) revealed that African-American male athletes' experience involving racial issues had been explored qualitatively with regards to specific episodes which had occurred throughout their athletic careers.

In examination of challenges and other issues, one salient question has emerged regarding why some student athletes perform poorly and others perform well in

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some college and university programs. Lapchick (1995) indicated that when African-American student athletes made official recruiting visits to HBCUs, they felt socially accepted by individual they met on their visits and were greeted warmly and treated well. Whereas, when they made official recruiting visits to predominantly White universities, they felt insecure as a result of stereotypes attached to athletes.

Furthermore, Sellers' (1992) study produced significant information on the quality and nature of formal and informal interaction between student athletes, coaches, and faculty members at the various institutions. His study reveals that coaches and faculty members who are exposed to the culture of the African-American student population began to engage in positive dialogues because of these students' desires to attain success in the classroom and in their respective sports. Sellers (1992) indicated that motivation to earn a degree is very important to all college students and there is no difference between the aspirations of the African-American student athletes and those of White student athletes in their desire to become academically successful on the collegiate level.

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### Impact of Family Structure, Socioeconomic Status, and Gender Variables

The purpose of this study was to predict the relationship between the independent variable (the demographic variables) which consist of family structure, socioeconomic status, and gender toward athletics and the dependent variable (academic performance) as measured by the Cognitive Grade Point Averages (CGPA) of student athletes in selected NCAA Division I basketball programs from universities in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Demographic research characteristics often include such measures as race and family background; however, the NCAA organization has conducted extensive studies on improving academic performance of student athletes at all levels of the NCAA.

*Family Structure.* Family structure plays a great role in the life of student athletes, but it does not define their career aspirations. Family structure is another demographic variable that significantly impacts the academic preparation of minority students. For example, Black children are significantly less likely than other children to be living with two married parents. According to Wilson and Wilson (1992), when parents have high educational expectations and are involved in their child's education, the child has a tendency to become a high achiever. The demographics of the African-American family structure in Wilson and Wilson's study were quite diverse. Participants came from various social class settings within the African-American culture. The research on family structure was found to be significant. Athletes who come from two-parent homes and those who come from single-parent homes have the same or equal chance of becoming successful in the classroom. If parents share knowledge and give their children early exposure to extra curricula activities, travel and reading this can enhance their self-esteem for success later in life.

Taylor, Chatters and Jackson (1993) and Greene (1995) have conducted studies which purport that the African-American family structure, involving relatives and non-relatives, was characterized by both groups' commitments to become

successful in their educational achievements. According to Wilson and Wilson (1992), when parents themselves have achieved academic success or have high educational backgrounds and are involved in their adolescent's education, the child has a tendency to become a high achiever. This may occur as a result of the family support and positive belief that adolescents have about parental guidance. The demographics of the African-American family structure in the Wilsons' study were fairly diverse, in that students come from various social class settings within the African-American culture.

Additionally, those who viewed their fathers as role models had lower school dropout rates. Zimmerman, Salem, and Maton (1995) emphasized certain aspects of culture, especially how African Americans tended to act in response to prejudice and discrimination from conservative American culture and institutions.

**Socioeconomic Status.** Socioeconomic status can play a very valuable role in the growth of student athletes' academic performance and athletic endeavors. The socioeconomic statuses of student athletes are reflected by their families' income situation. The achievement gap in education has been affected by certain levels of socioeconomic status. Orr's (2003) research debated the concept of wealth, using personal assets minus debt, and its impact on African-American student achievement. Orr concluded that "wealth has a positive effect on student achievement even after family's socioeconomic status is held constant. Wealth also explains a portion of Black-White differences in achievement" (p. 295). A great number of African-American student athletes indeed come from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds. However, other African-American student athletes have attained high socioeconomic levels in recent decades.

**Gender.** Title IX opened the doors for new women's sports teams. Over 30 years ago, fewer than 30,000 female athletes competed at the collegiate level. In 2003, there were approximately 150,000 collegiate female student athletes (NCAA, 2003). As Title IX celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, women now account for 41 percent of all intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2003).

High school female student athletes reported more positive attitudes in their interactions with their teachers than did male students (Baker, 1987; Bernard, Keefauver, Elsworth, & Naylor, 1981) and expressed greater concern with pleasing their teachers (Miller, Greene, Montalvo, Ravindran, & Nicholls, 1996).

In a 1997 study, Wiggins indicated that "Only one (1) out of 37,500 males and one (1) out of 12,625,000 females will ever put on a professional uniform" (p. 171). Those female athletes who do obtain a career in professional athletics will average only five years of professional playing time (Miracle, Jr., & Rees, 1994). Simons and Rheenen's (2000) study indicated that both academic and athletic factors were examined among 200 students from the University of Michigan. The researchers found in their study "that athletes were on a higher standard or received special treatments and showed a significant decrease in their GPAs over the course of their collegiate experiences" (p. 167).

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### **Theoretical Framework**

Ogbu (1978) opined that, "The theories of oppositional culture originated in the work of Anthropology" (p. 170). His research has subsequently been called, "the blocked opportunity framework and the caste theory on individual deficit." Ogbu sought to explain the academic performances of racial and ethnic minorities with reference to broader societal structures and historical improvements. After 28 years of research, Ogbu concluded that the differences in academic performance were caused by the treatment of minority groups in society at large and in school, as well as by the perceptions of the minorities and their responses to school due to such treatment. In the early 1980s, the focus of his research shifted toward explaining differences in school performance among minority groups themselves (Ogbu, 1987).

Oppositional identity plays a major role in the attitudes of the community, parents, and students toward school because, "they see the school as a White institution." The requirements for school success, which involve mastering the school curriculum, learning to speak and write Standard English and exhibiting "good" school behaviors, are interpreted as White society's requirements designed to deprive minorities of their identities. For example, teaching Standard English at school may be interpreted as a mechanism of language assimilation (Steele, 1992).

Indeed, race does matter in the United States, as indicated by West (2001), because it centers on the family structure with regard to educational attainments of equal opportunities and employment status. This statement implies that the normal family structure has impacted the foundation of educational encounters and family perceptions, especially for African-American families. Ogbu's framework can help explain experiences faced by the athletes in this study.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of selected demographic variables on the academic performance of NCAA Division I basketball players. A major focus of this study was to ascertain relevant data relative to basketball players' views such as their family structure, socioeconomic status, and gender. The guiding research question and hypothesis of this study follows:

- Is there a significant relationship between the demographic variables gender, family structure, and socioeconomic status on the academic performance of basketball players at selected NCAA Division I universities in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas?
- Hypothesis: There is no significant linear relationship among gender, family structure, socioeconomic status, and the academic performance of basketball players at selected NCAA Division I universities in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

Therefore, based upon the changes implemented in NCAA rules, in account-



ability measures and the increase of student-athletes attending college each year, particularly at HBCUs, there exists a need, to study the relationship between the educational attainment levels of student-athletes and the related demographic variables. The research design is depicted graphically in Figure 1.

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### **Instrumentation**

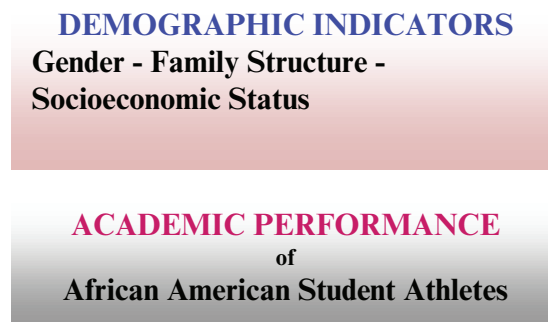
The instruments used in this investigation were the Morris Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Student Athletes' Motivation toward Sports and Questionnaire, and a demographic survey. The Morris Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale consists of 10 items, each of which is rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). Scores on this test reflect perceptions of global self-esteem, which may predict behavior across a wide range of situations (O'Brien, 1985). The scale generally has high reliability, with test-retest correlations typically in the range of .82 to .88 and a Cronbach's Alpha for various samples in the range of a very positive reliability index. Socioeconomic status (SES) has demonstrated good reliability and validity across several diverse samples (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) was used to measure levels of motivations of student-athletes. This self-esteem measure was designed to assess individuals' overall feelings of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965).

Gaston-Gayles (2004) developed an instrument, the Student Athletes' Motivation toward Sports and Academics Questionnaire (SAMSAQ). The SAMSAQ was developed to measure academic and athletic motivation of student-athletes. The survey instrument was consistent in measuring each construct with a Cronbach's Alpha value of .84 (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Demographic information was also collected as a part of the research investigation. Demographic question assessed family structure socioeconomic status and gender.

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**Figure 1**

Research Design: The Academic Performance of Student Athlete Variables



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### Data Analysis

Table 1 presents data relative to the gender of the sample population of student basketball athletes. Table 1 indicates that there were 98 (47.6%) male basketball players who participated in the study. By contrast there were 108 (52.4%) female basketball players who participated in this empirical study.

A standard multiple regression analysis was performed with academic performance as the dependent variable and gender, family structure, and socioeconomic status as the independent variables (See Table 2). Calculations from these variables resulted in a multiple correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of .33. The predictor variables (family structure, socioeconomic status and gender,) accounted for an adjusted 10% of the variance in academic performance. A significant linear relationship was found among NCAA Division I basketball players' gender, family structure, socioeconomic status, and their academic performance, ( $F = 8.219$ ,  $df = 3, 202$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Specifically, gender and socioeconomic status were found to have significant linear relationships with the academic performance of basketball players with  $t$ -values of 3.830 and 3.336, respectively. Thus, hypothesis 1 ( $H_{O1}$ ) was rejected. Table 2 results showed a significant correlation to gender (.000) and socioeconomic status (.001) which indicated that these indicator outcomes were very positive. Female student athletes are achieving at greater numbers than the males student athletes on college campuses with graduation rates at 47% for African Americans compared to 72% for White female student athletes. The same differences can be

**Table 1**  
Frequency Distribution of Student Basketball Athletes by Gender

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Male	98	47.6
Female	108	52.4
Total	206	100.0

**Table 2**  
Gender, Family Structure, and Socioeconomic Status on Academic Performance

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	2.622	.104			
Gender	.245	.064	.255	3.830	.000***
Family	.109	.070	.114	1.556	.121
SES	.007	.023	.244	3.336	.001***

Legend:  $R = .330$ ;  $r^2 = .109$ ;  $r^2$  Adjusted = .096;  $F = 8.219$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $df = 3/202$ ;

$B$  = Slope of Multiple Regression Coefficient; ( $F = 8.219$ ,  $df 3, 202$ ,  $p < .001$ );

\*Significant at the .05 level

shared for African-American males graduating from college at 42% compared to White student athletes at 57%. This research results shared by the NCAA (2000) have changed only slightly since this study.

Some 20% of student athletes in this report indicated that their parents' annual income was less than \$20,000 and 27% were \$50,000 and above. Fifty-two percent came from one-parent families and 48% came from two-parent families. Also, the parent's educational levels for the student athletes' mothers with a college education were 31% and fathers with a college education 20%. Whereas, 80% were on full scholarships and 20% were on partial or no athletic scholarships. Therefore, the conclusion was that there is a significant linear relationship among family structure, socioeconomic status, and gender on the academic performance of basketball players at selected NCAA Division I universities in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

## **Discussion**

A notable finding of the present study was the significant influence of selected demographic variables on the academic performance of college basketball players. The variables of family structure, socioeconomic status, and gender were found to have a linear relationship with the academic performance of basketball players on college campuses. Particularly, the variables gender and socioeconomic status were positively related to the academic performance among basketball players. The findings regarding gender parallel those of NCAA (2002) and Synder (1996). Data from the aforementioned researchers revealed that gender and the academic performance of athletes were highly correlated. This research indicated that female student athletes had a higher correlation than their male counterparts. Many female student athletes come to college with a focus to graduate, because there are not many opportunities to obtain a professional contract. Therefore, many female student-athletes view college athletics as an avenue to meet their educational attainments by playing sports. They came prepared from high school to meet the task. Their ACT and SAT Scores were higher, their grade point average (GPA) were higher and their graduation success rate were higher, according to the NCAA Graduation Report (2000). This research revealed that African-American females are more studious, focused, and poised to make a difference in their future, as a result of obtaining a full scholarship. They arrived with a mission to graduate from college, and basketball is just the vehicle to defer the cost of receiving this awesome task. Whereas, their male counterparts have dreams and aspirations of playing professional sports (i.e., basketball and football).

Further analyses of the gender revealed that male basketball players, especially African Americans, seem to perform lower academically when compared with their female counterparts. A reasonable explanation for the prevailing finding might be that a large number of African-American male athletes focus more on their athletic performance and playing on the professional level rather than on academics.

Research on the demographic variables (Indicators) of African-American student

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athletes related to gender, family structure, and socioeconomic status revealed that female student athletes are progressing and working harder to meet the rigor of both their academic performance and athletic responsibilities. Research has always favored results toward female student athletes who strived for greater measured of attainment academically. Research by Synder (1996) and later Parmer (1994) both contend that African-American student athletes have false fantasies: false athletic dreams and overwhelming ambitions about using basketball as a springboard to becoming rich and famous. Yet, history has shown that through their resilience, African-American athletes can make the adjustment to become successful in any endeavor they undertake in life, "not just in the sport of basketball."

Furthermore, the demographic variable of family structure had a significant linear relationship with academic performance along with gender and socioeconomic status. However, independently family structure did not contribute significantly to the academic performance of basketball players on college campuses. This finding was not consistent with those of West (2001), Taylor, Chatters, and Jackson (1993), Wilson and Wilson (1992), and Greene (1995). All of the above researchers found a correlation between family structure and academic achievement among athletes. A subjective explanation for the present finding might be that athletes, specifically basketball players, seem to have a tendency to place value on academics, if their parents come from a highly educational background.

Finally, the data were treated through the application of standard multiple regression procedure. Based on the findings derived from the results of this empirical study, the following conclusions were reached: Any attempt to predict the academic performance of basketball players should take into consideration the demographic variables of family structure. This variable accounted for 10% of the variance in the academic performance of student athletes. Therefore, it was found in this research that family structure did not play a major role in the academic success of student-athletes, male or female, Black or White. However, this disproves a growing concept that 68% of absent fathers in the home does not hinder an African-American male from being a success story (Kunjufu, 2011).

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### **Conclusions and Implications for Research and Practice**

Based on the findings derived from the results of this investigation the following outcomes were found: A relationship existed between basketball players' gender, family structure, socioeconomic status, and academic performance. The variables gender and socioeconomic status were positively related to the academic performance of basketball players on participating campuses in this study. Gender and socioeconomic status were positively related to the academic performance of basketball players. Research supports that female student-athletes performed better in the classroom setting and their overall graduation rate was higher than their male counterparts.

SAT scores also play a significant role in determining if a male or female student-athlete excelled in their pursuit of a higher education. Although, family structure

did not play a powerful role in the final results, “it was an important predictor for many students in this study.” African-American student athletes have faced some insurmountable odds in life; but, as educators and former student athletes, the writers still have faith that student athletes will prevail in all of their future endeavors, both academically and athletically.

The academic performance of African-American student athletes has drawn some negative criticism in recent years. If more stringent measures were implemented in 2011, there would be some major universities not allowed to participate in the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament in 2012 (NCAA, 2011). There were several HBCUs that were not allowed to participate in the NCAA 2011 post season NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament because they failed to meet the requirements for Academic Progress Rate for two consecutive years with a score of 925. Starting in 2014, additional measures will be implemented to improve the overall graduation rates for all 340 NCAA Division I institutions. The new policies will have a core requirement of 930 toward graduation success rate for a six (6) year period in all athletics departments. These calculations are based on 50% graduation rate of all NCAA student athletes. Men’s basketball and football recorded the lowest APR scores for their respected sports in 2011.

At its April 26, 2012, meeting the NCAA Division I Board of Directors accepted a recommendation to allow low resource institutions more flexibility in the transition to higher Academic Progress Rate standards. The recommendations requested the Committee on Academic Performance to permit limited resource institutions more time to make meaningful changes for teams that need additional help in the classroom, while still holding institutions accountable for progressing toward a 930 APR. All limited resource institutions that wish to use the longer transition timeline or the improvement filter must have in place a meaningful APR improvement plan. The NCAA will evaluate for:

- The implementation of previous APR improvement plans, if required.
- The identification of the issues on that campus most critical to academic success, supported by data.
- The development of meaningful initiatives that address those issues.
- The inclusion of representatives from across campus in developing and evaluating the plan.
- Chancellor/president approval.
- The team’s projected single year APR targets included in the plan elevate the team out of the penalty structure by the end of the transition period.

These practices will allow the institutions that have recorded low APR scores in that past the opportunity to improve over time with continued monitoring of an academic enhancement plan.

### **Implications for Practice**

There are some true measures that must be implemented by universities and the NCAA to strengthen successful completions of the degree requirements for student-athletes. Once a student has completed their collegiate eligibility, the main focus should be to make certain that these students are given every opportunity to meet the goal of their degree completion requirements. The NCAA has parameters in place to help with these requirements. It is important that the Academic Enhancements Program, athletic administrators, and coaches seek and find avenues to help their athletes meet their graduation expectations.

Improvement in Academic Enhancement programs at HBCUs will require securing new funding to increase the number of personnel to make this a reality. There are many HBCUs which do not have adequate staff support to meet the needs and expectations of their student athletes, due to lack of sufficient funding. The NCAA minimum requirements for participation by sports teams are fifteen (15). It would be wise to have staff in place that can do a sufficient job to enhance the graduation rates of all student athletes involved in all collegiate sports on every campus.

If a student's desires are to achieve an education, there must be parameters in place to assist him or her with these opportunities. The universities should have academic advising centers in place and tutors to assist with certain coursework. There are some HBCUs that are not adequately funded and are thus understaffed to help many of their student athletes to become successful achievers in the classroom, and this is also true in some major college and university programs. When a student athlete fails to receive his/her degree after four years, who is at fault, especially if the athlete played competitively for each of his or her four seasons? Lack of education can be a hindrance to these students' futures after college. We all know that every student athlete will not become a professional athlete after they finish their sport eligibility. Therefore, it is imperative that the NCAA hold these colleges and universities accountable for the graduation success of each and every student athlete who enters an agreement to pursue athletic endeavors. Every student can learn and every student deserves a chance to meet their stated obligations academically as well as those achieved athletically.

The success and failure of any student athlete starts with their mental focus and previous high school preparation. Fleming (1984) explained that scholarly development is more positive for African Americans in HBCUs. These students experienced more contact with faculty, practice greater fulfillment with their academic lives, and exhibit higher career aspirations. Davis' (1995) research on African-American males in higher education opined that many American universities and educational institutions respond differently to African-American males, due to their higher visibility, negative perceptions of them, and perceived lack of academic ability. This type of mentality has opened the door for more dialogue related to the discussions of academics and African-American college student athletes' vision for success. Fleming's (1984) work indicates that African-American males do a better job in the

classrooms of HBCUs, and African-American males and females at predominately White institutions (PWIs) do not differ in terms of their pre-college demographic characteristics (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

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### **Implications for Research**

To extend and build on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following:

- A follow-up study should be conducted with African-American student athletes attending PWIs in various geographical locations.
- A study should be conducted to compare and contrast the influence of demographic factors on the academic performance of student athletes in other sports besides basketball at NCAA Division I colleges and universities.
- Additional studies need to be conducted to examine the influence of cultural factors on the academic performance of student athletes at NCAA Division I colleges and universities.
- However, research reveals that less than 40% of male student athletes graduate from college. Additional research should be conducted with athletes who graduate from college while on a full athletic scholarship.

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### **Conclusions**

It is the sincere hope of the researchers that the readers will have a better understanding of the successful academic encounters of African-American student athletes. In some instances, they have been told they would never amount to anything significant in their lives, but many are beating the odds by using sports as a springboard to meet their academic objectives and graduate from college. It is difficult to navigate the rigors of academics and athletics when there is so much pressure to win and stay academically eligible as a student athlete. Some will fail to meet the demands placed on them by their respective universities.

If a student enters college with a positive frame of mind and a strong support system from family, coaches, and faculty, it has been proven that success will be the ultimate outcome. Researchers have indicated that the HBCU experience drives more African-American students into graduate and professional degree programs (e.g., Allen, 1988, 1992; Brown & Davis, 2001; Kunjufu, 1986). These achievements could be a direct result of a nurturing and caring atmosphere exhibited by professors, academic support staff, and positive self-esteem student experience at certain universities. In this study, the student athletes did not show any negative signs of low self-esteem or the lack of motivation to succeed in the academic arena. This was in direct opposition of research done by Sellers (1992) and Lapchick (1995).

Kunjufu (1987) maintains that there is a 53% dropout rate for African-American students. This leads to unfavorable consequences of tracking these males from special education to the American prison system. Sports have been a way out for

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many of these student athletes. As coaches and teachers, the researchers are aware of what structure can do for young male and female student athletes. The role of the coach starts early for student athletes beginning with T-Ball, Pop Warner, AAU, and junior high school and high school sports. Coaches often become role models and father figures for athletes. The respect and growth begins early and is a growth process for many student athletes which benefits them as youth, adolescents, young adults, and college students.

The life stories of many African-American student athletes are being told by others who do not know their full story. There are negative perceptions placed on African-American males, which track them from third grade to the completion of high school. The researchers for this article are former student athletes and graduates of HBCUs. We therefore have the realization that the impact of this study is significant. In the case of the lead researcher, his career aspiration was to become a teacher and coach. He was afforded the opportunity to become a head coach or an assistant coach with an NCAA institution for over 20 years. Education was the passport for greater achievements in this arena. As teachers and coaches, these researchers' goals were to impact the students through guidance and positively directing the futures of student athletes. It is a privilege to become a difference-maker in the lives of students as teachers and coaches.

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