

***How pervasive is academic clustering? An analysis of academic majors of SEC and PAC-10 football players***

Kadie Otto, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Western Carolina University

In 2009, Fountain and Finley published an article in the *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics* analyzing the academic majors of upperclassmen football players in the ACC. Stemming from Fountain and Finley's (2009) work, this study aims to extend the existing research concerning whether academic clustering pervades other BCS member conferences. As noted by Fountain and Finley (2009), Case, Greer and Brown (1987) defined clustering as occurring when 25% or more of an athletic team shares a single academic major.

Data collection consisted of gathering the 2009-10 electronic football media guides from each team's website. The subjects used for this analysis were upperclassmen (junior and senior) football players. Data was collected on each football program in the SEC ( $n=11$ ; note: Alabama was excluded from this study because they did not report the majors of the football players in their media guide) and the PAC – 10 ( $n=10$ ). Quantitative analyses were run on each football program ( $n=21$ ), including the overall percentage of football players housed in particular majors. Further, the researchers reported the percentage of Caucasians v. minority football players housed in various majors.

Results revealed that clustering exists (to varying degrees) in a majority of SEC and PAC-10 football programs. Furthermore, minorities were found to be 'clustered' at higher rates than their Caucasian counterparts.

The findings of this study are critically important for students (who are also athletes), coaches, athletic directors, university presidents, the NCAA and higher education as a whole. When a student signs an "Athletic Financial Aid Contract" with a university, the university is awarding the student and athletic grant-in-aid to "enable the student to further his/her education". It is imperative that future researchers seek to discover why clustering exists in these programs. Are these athletes "choosing" to major in a particular academic discipline or are they being coerced and/or forced to major in a specific academic discipline?