

# The Effect of Sport Participation on Academic Integration of International Student-Athletes

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# International Students

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- Language and educational differences pose significant barriers to academic integration (Andrade, 2005)
- Social challenges include loss of social support, cultural differences & study time (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007)
- International student transition is aided by trained staff, social interaction opportunities & faculty relationships (Rai, 2002)

# American Student-Athletes

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- Athletic demands lead to academic difficulties
  - Clustering
  - Academic fraud
  - Poor graduation rates
- Athletic participation prevents student-athletes from spending time with non student-athletes (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2006)
  - In-class participation
  - Extra-curricular activities

# International Student-Athletes

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- Comprise of 3% of male and 3.2% of female teams (NCAA, 2009)
- Several logistical hurdles to enrollment (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000)
- Adjustment is dependent on several factors (Bale, 1991; Popp, Hums, & Greenwell, 2009)
  - Sport structure
  - Relationships with coaches and teammates
  - Weather conditions
  - Training methods
  - Academic and athletic motivation

# Academic Integration

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- Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984)
  - The quality and quantity of mental and physical energy spent on academic activities directly impacts the likelihood of graduation
  - Academic absorption
  - Extracurricular participation
  - Faculty interaction

# Purpose Statement

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- Determine how sport participation affects the academic integration of international student-athletes at the University of the Pacific

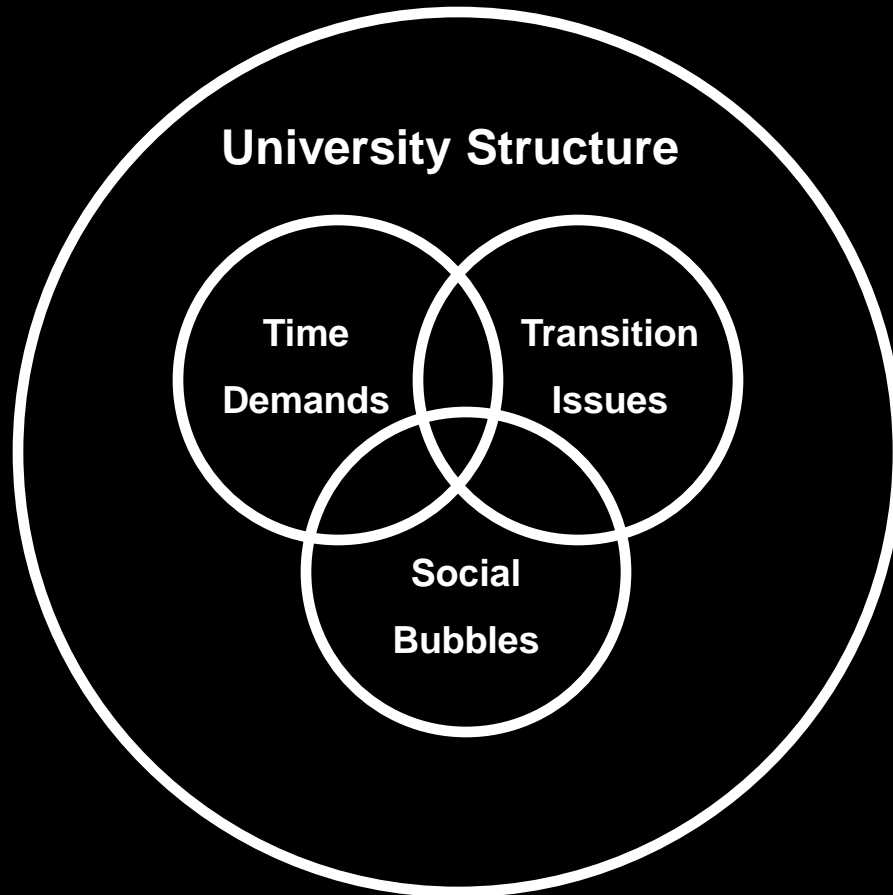
# Method

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- Case study of one NCAA Division I Athletic Program
- Semi-structured interviews
  - 12 international athletes
    - 8 sports, 9 countries represented
  - 4 head coaches
  - Director of international programs
- Analyzed qualitatively using “theorizing” (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984)
  - International faculty member included to reduce bias

# Results & Discussion

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# Transition Issues

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- Transition ranged from “hard” to “shocked”
  - Language barrier

# Language Quote

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- *The hardest part is obviously the language first. You can't, umm, communicate and be yourself because you're not yourself. You can't express yourself. That's probably the hardest part because you're basically mute for the first couple months. (Female Volleyball Player A)*

# Transition Issues

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- Transition ranged from “hard” to “shocked”
  - Language barrier
  - Sport experience/style
  - Maturity

# Maturity Quote

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- *I was quite shocked that they were checking me if I am studying or not. I was like 20, and they are like, “Oh you have to go to study hall. You have to give me proof you went there.” I was like, “I am 20. You don’t have to check me if I am studying or not. I am old enough to be like independent.” (Female Volleyball Player B)*

# Transition Issues

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- Transition ranged from “hard” to “shocked”
  - Language barrier
  - Sport experience/style
  - Maturity
  - Athletic/Academic balance
- Lengthened time needed to become academically integrated

# Time Demands of Athletics

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- Often reported 20+ hours/week in sport
- Fatigue
- Missing class--travel
- All combined to limit
  - Time for study

# Fatigue Quote

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- *A lot of times I have got back to campus like Sunday at night and it's hard to study after the road when you're away and then you even have to pull an all-nighter to do all your studies and that affects your entire week because you start the next week very tired and ugh, I feel like that's where I have the hardest time, like the most pressure. (Male Tennis Player)*

# Time Demands of Athletics

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- Often reported 20+ hours/week in sport
- Fatigue
- Missing class--travel
- All combined to limit
  - Social network
  - Time for study
  - Extracurricular involvement

# Extracurricular Limitations Quote

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- *I was going to try and go to the BSU [Black Student Union], but that didn't work out. When we're not practicing, or when we're not conditioning, we're often having meetings with each other, having team dinners and things like that. So you don't have a lot of time.  
(Female Field Hockey Player)*

# Time Demands of Athletics

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- Often reported 20+ hours/week in sport
- Fatigue
- Missing class--travel
- All combined to limit
  - Social network
  - Time for study
  - Extracurricular involvement
- Academic integration was inhibited

# Social Bubbles

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- Enjoyed social lives, but existed in two bubbles
- Athlete bubble
  - Primarily teammates
  - Other athletes through shared facilities

# Athletic Bubble Quote

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- *I got to meet all the athletes in the little athletic community. You kind of get to know everybody. I made some really good friends and had wonderful teammates.  
(Female Field Hockey Player)*

# Social Bubbles

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- Enjoyed social lives, but existed in two bubbles
- Athlete bubble
  - Primarily teammates
  - Other athletes through shared facilities
- International Student Bubble
  - Facilitated through international programs office & network
  - Bonded around outsider, cultured status
- Both eased the social transition

# Easing the Social Transition Quote

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- *I would say that international athletes help each other out a lot. For example, my teammate from Serbia always calls me if he has a problem. I would say international athletes have a different kind of relationship than just student-athletes. (Male Volleyball Player)*

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- International Student Bubble
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  - Bonded around outsider, cultured status
- Both eased the social transition
- Limited interaction with entire student body

# American University Structure

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- University structure aided the integration of international student athletes
  - Small school, small class size
  - Professor/student interaction

# Small College Quote

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- *The class sizes are so small that [professors] actually get to know you. Not like big schools where 1,000 people enter the class and you have no interaction with the professor. (Male tennis player)*

# American University Structure

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- University structure aided the integration of international student athletes
  - Small college, small class size
  - Professor/student interaction
  - International student population
  - International studies program

# International Students Quote

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- *We have a lot of foreign athletes at this school. Whether it's water polo, or swimming, or tennis, you know even men's volleyball's got a couple. They won't fear they will be the only ones. A lot of them say they don't want to be the only European or international athlete here, and there's a collection of them. [The director of International Programs] does a good job getting them all together, and there's a lot of international flavor on campus.*  
(Women's volleyball coach)

# American University Structure

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- University structure aided the integration of international student athletes
  - Small school, small class size
  - Professor/student interaction
  - International student population
  - International studies program
- Structure helped athletes overcome the integration barriers posed by other factors

# Conclusion

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- International student-athletes appeared to be academically integrated
  - Great grades, honors students
  - Fight the same barriers as other international students
- Sport hindered integration
- School structure helped integration
  - Offered the trained staff, social interaction opportunities & faculty relationships recommended by Rai (2002)