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College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A Case Study to Examine the Impact on Football Student-Athletes when their Program is
Eliminated

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Transformational Leadership

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Concordia University–Portland

2020

Abstract

School administrators have limited data-based evidence available when considered to eliminate an extracurricular program. Literature shows a significant academic and non-academic benefit for students participating in extracurricular programs, including sports and football. A gap exists in available literature regarding the impact of eliminating an extracurricular program, such as community-college football, from the student's perspective. This create a problem for school administrators seeking to lead their school systems through these potential changes. This qualitative case study interviewed and conducted a focus group with six student-athletes who had recently had their community college football program eliminated. Results of the data analysis indicated the following impact on student-athletes:

1. Loss of opportunities to pursue dreams and goals.
2. Significant decrease in academic outcomes and results.
3. Forced life changes.
4. Emotionally challenging experiences.
5. Negative impacts to health and well-being.

Results also indicated a disproportional impact to those student-athletes with limited financial resources and support network. Future research should examine different populations to better understand variances in impact, as well as increase depth of data available.

Keywords: student-athlete, football program elimination, extracurriculars, community-college football, school administrators

Dedication

Looking back at all that has transpired in my life since I started this adventure highlights how remarkable the journey has been. The required commitment of time, energy, and personal growth was not something I could have done alone. I dedicate this to my amazing wife Stephanie. I am grateful to have someone who has grown with me and is as committed to my success and happiness as I am to hers. I can't believe I found you. You are truly exceptional. To my not so little anymore boys Kyle and Levi, I adore and cherish you. You bring purpose to my life and push me to be great. I want nothing more than to see you chase after excellence and pursue your own dreams with reckless abandon. To answer your constant question, yes, Daddy is finally done with his homework. For now. Love you infinity times infinity.

Acknowledgements

Without Dr. James Therrell's constant support, this wouldn't have been possible. Every email, text, and phone call were both needed and appreciated. There were times when I didn't think I would finish, but you always knew exactly how to best guide me. When moments of clarity finally occurred, it was almost always because of one of our conversations. Nothing brought me more comfort than seeing the phrase "Onward!" at the end of an email. Thank you.

I also need to thank my committee members. Your feedback and direction have been invaluable. The depth of your perspectives and insights maximized what this study could be. Thank you, Dr. Billingsley and Dr. Easley, your contributions have made me a better scholar and researcher!

I would like to also thank my network of family, friends, mentors, and peers. Along this lengthy journey you have provided support and encouragement. Lastly, to football players and coaches, keep chasing your dreams and pursuing excellence. It matters.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Extracurricular activities, including sports, are widely known to benefit students in a variety of ways. These benefits have been shown to impact students in high school and college. Football is well known as a platform for students to learn life skills and develop in ways not possible in the classroom. For the purpose of anonymity all names have been changed including the community college district that this study includes. Southwest County Community College District (SWCCCD), and subsequently other community colleges in the southwest, decided to eliminate football at their community colleges after the 2018 season. Most studies appear to show positive benefits to the student-athlete who participates in football (Camire, 2013). These benefits have been found in the classroom (Filsinger, 2012) and beyond the classroom (Skaza, 2014). This study seeks to understand the impact on those SWCCCD student-athletes who were participating in community college football, but who have had that opportunity eliminated by their college district.

Background, Context, History

This study revolves around the elimination of a college sport, specifically community college football. Eliminating a student's opportunity to participate in an extracurricular activity occurs in a wide variety of institutional settings. In recent years, with budget cuts occurring and schools working to be in line with new regulations, there has been evidence of extracurricular programs being eliminated (Suggs, 2003; VanRheenen, 2011). Studies have shown that participating in extracurricular activities positively impacts students both academically (Filsinger, 2012) and non-academically (Skaza, 2013). For some students, participation in sports appears to be a vital part of their collegiate experience. Eliminating a sport, such as football, may impact student-athletes in unanticipated ways.

Context is important in order to situate the reader to the specifics of the people and places where the study occurs. This study takes place in community colleges in the southwest, including the Southwest County Community Colleges (SWCCCD) football programs. SWCCCD is a district of over 10 community colleges in Southwest County. SWCCCD is a network of these 10 community colleges, connected with the local 4-year schools in the area, for students to be able to attend and transfer with ease throughout the network. SWCCCD is the affordable college option for Southwest County, a county with a large urban population. According to the most current district data, in 2017 SWCCCD had just over 100,000 students, with 33.9% taking classes online and the rest attending class at their physical campuses. Of the students attending SWCCCD, 29.3% attend full time, and 55% of the students are female. Student-athletes playing football at SWCCCD are almost exclusively male and are required to attend classes full-time during their season (NJCAA, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Educators and administrators should know how participation in football and other extracurricular activities can impact students since significant evidence is available regarding both the positive academic and non-academic benefits (Camire, 2013). However, SWCCCD, as well as other institutions with sports programs, don't have an evidence-based understanding of the impact on student-athletes when they eliminate their football programs. Evidence is also insufficient in; understanding where student-athletes go without such programs in place, how the students' academic experience is impacted, how they are adjusting both physically and mentally, how their relationships have been affected, and if their pursuits have been derailed or altered.

Purpose and Significance of the Proposed Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how eliminating community colleges football programs have impacted student-athletes. The significance is how this further understanding would benefit educators and student-athletes. Educators can benefit through the increase in the availability of data about how student-athletes may be impacted when a program is eliminated. Evidence may include the specific impacts when a program is eliminated directly from those who participate, the student-athletes. Student-athletes could benefit the most because educators may be more aware of how football impacts student outcomes, and thus be able to develop a more effective approach to how schools use and implement football participation. Additionally, educators may know better how to help students who experience an elimination of their football program. Students at SWCCCD had their football program eliminated; if SWCCCD educators had this research available to them, they may have provided a better experience and transition for these students by being more aware of what the impact might be on their student-athletes. Additionally, if SWCCCD had a more thorough understanding of the impact on student-athletes, they may have made different decisions when deciding whether to eliminate or keep their football programs.

Research Question

A research question has been created to address the problem and purpose of this study, and to guide the research:

How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?

Definition of Terms

Student-athlete – a student enrolled in educational courses that is also participating in sports

Football program – a football athletic program. Refers to the entirety of the program including: coaching staff, medical staff, support staff, and student-athletes

Extracurriculars – programs that exist outside of the typical educational day and are designed to enrich the educational experiences of students. Consists of sport teams, fine arts, clubs.

Academic impact- areas within academics that are impacted through participation in extracurriculars.

Non-academic impact- areas outside of academics that are impacted through participation in extracurriculars.

Conceptual - Theoretical Framework

Conceptual-theoretical frameworks (CTF) serve to understand how the study fits into available theory (Creswell, 2018). A CTF is an argument, rooted in theory, of why a study and topic matter, and provides validation of the study proposed (Ravitch, & Riggan, 2017). Osanloo (2014) compared a CTF to a blueprint for a home which serves as the rationale while providing structure and support for the study. The most crucial aspect of the CTF is that it creates the lens or perspective from which the dissertation is told (Osanloo, 2014). The parts of the CTF detailed below include: transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), how transformative learning theory impacted this study, the Kubler-Ross model (1969), stages of the Kubler-Ross model, and the Kubler-Ross change curve. The CTF is then evaluated in chapters 4 and 5, confirming its accuracy and prevision, or lack thereof.

Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning helps with understanding the impact of participation in extracurriculars such as football. This study explores how community college student-athletes have been impacted by the elimination of their football program. It is relevant to this study to understand how participation in football may create transformative learning experiences for student-athletes. Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory (TLT)

provides reasoning that through meaningful experiences, learning occurs that can create or alter perspectives or worldviews, as well as redefine meaning schemes (Hodge, 2014). Participating in football can be an influential learning experience and thus create transformative change in its participants (Camire, 2013; Segal, 2012; Filsinger, 2012; Rainer, 2009).

The foundation and of TLT is that a person needs to experience a disorienting dilemma. This dilemma can present itself in various natural environments (Mezirow, 1991). However, teachers often attempt to create a transformative learning environment in the classroom to challenge students' worldviews and encourage critical thinking (Cranton, 2006). Students participating in extracurriculars may also encounter dilemmas from learning experiences that occur outside the classroom. The dilemma forces individuals to reflect upon their current meaning schemes and assumptions (Mezirow, 1991), recognize a desire for growth, critically think through new meaning schemes and worldviews, and acquiring knowledge. The final phase of TLT is testing out the new perspective before fully integrating and accepting it. This process repeats itself throughout our lives. Furthermore, TLT may often occurs without the individual's awareness (Mezirow, 1991).

TLT impact on this study. TLT guided the literature review and research approach of this study. To understand the impact of the elimination of football for student-athletes, it makes sense to first know how those student-athletes may have been impacted by their participation. Adopting a social constructivism framework indicates that individuals learn and grow through the various experiences of themselves and others (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, a learning theory seemed appropriate to best understand how participation in football impacted student athletes. Several theories were considered, such as Astin's (1985) theory of involvement that concludes that students learn by being involved. Additionally, Knowles (1984) theory of andragogy and

Kolb (1984) theory of experiential learning were explored as potential options for this study. Ultimately, TLT (Mezirow, 1991) was chosen as the best fit because of its inclusion of principles from other learning theories (Astin, 1985; Kolb, 1984; Knowles, 1984), being rooted in social constructivism (Creswell, 2018), and the transformative change that can often occur to those participating in extracurriculars such as football (Camire 2013; Redalen, 2017).

Studies show that participation in football and other extracurriculars can have positive academic outcomes (Filsinger, 2012) as well as positive non-academic outcomes (Belton, 2017). These outcomes are rooted in TLT, as football can be a learning experience that can alter perspectives and meaning schemes (Camire, 2013; Mezirow, 1991). It isn't well understood what impact eliminating a football program has on its participants, and if whether that experience adjusts previously expected outcomes or alters the perspectives and meaning schemes for those college student-athletes impacted. A visual interpretation of the impact TLT has on student-athletes is represented below (Figure 1).

How TLT Impacts Student-Athletes in Extracurriculars

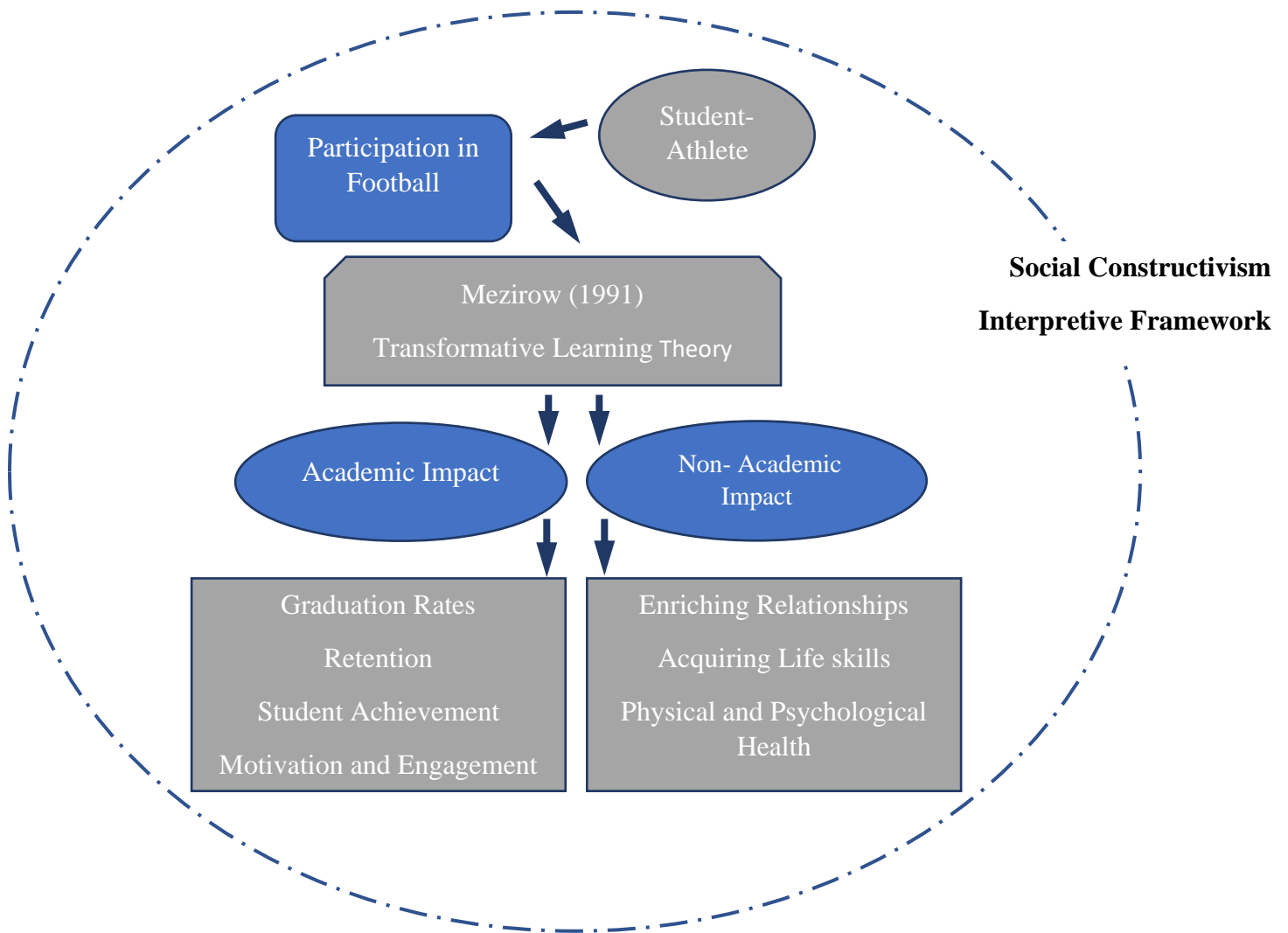


Figure 1: When a student-athlete participates in football, they may be impacted both academically and non-academically.

Kubler-Ross Model

The Kubler-Ross (1969) model (KRM) adds to the conceptual-theoretical framework for this study. When a student-athlete participates in football, they may experience TLT (Mezirow, 1991), which can lead to positive academic and non-academic outcomes (Belton, 2017; Filsinger, 2012). When that program is eliminated the student-athlete may experience change

through the KRM. Specific areas of impact identified through TLT from participating in football may be impacted from the program being eliminated as the student-athlete moved through the various stages of KRM. This study seeks to understand that impact and change. A visual interpretation of KRM on student-athletes is depicted below (Figure 2).

KRM for Football-Student Athletes When Program Is Eliminated

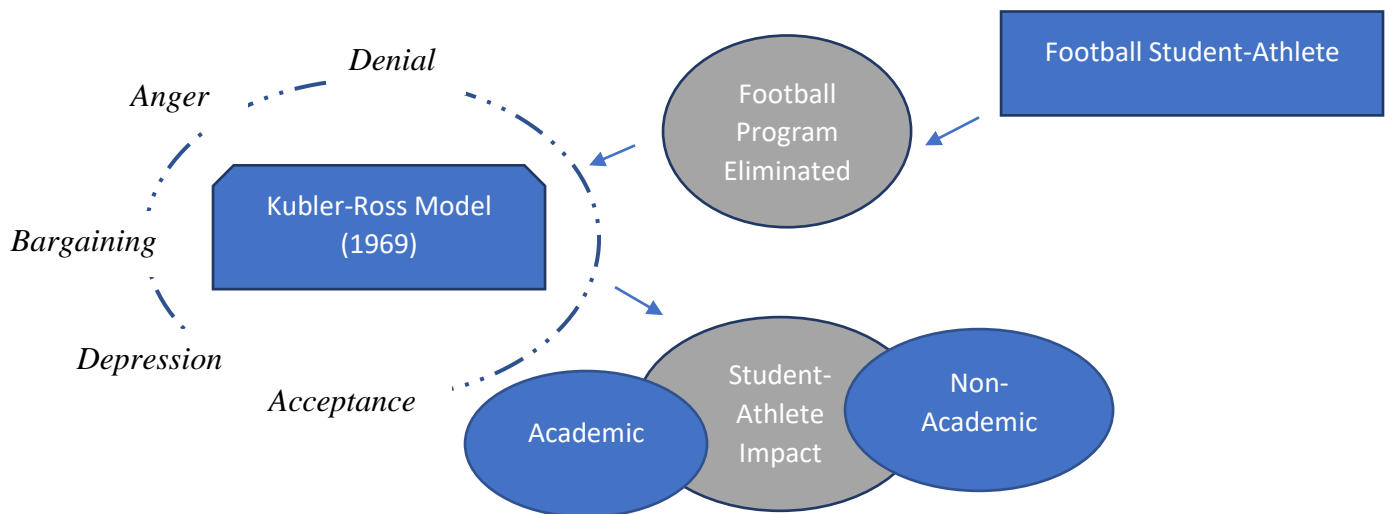


Figure 2: This visual shows the relationships for this conceptual-theoretical framework. When a football student-athlete's program is eliminated, they may go through the KRM which may have an impact on the student-athlete.

Stages of the KRM. The KRM provides five stages of grief that individuals must address as they encounter change (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Those five stages are; denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969). The five stages of grief are often viewed to not occur in a linear progression, but in a progression or means that can differ with the individual (Kearney, 2003).

Denial. Denial in KRM refers to the individual's denial or refusal to accept the change (Kubler-Ross, 1969). In this study this would refer to the student-athlete's denial of the

elimination of their football program. Kubler-Ross (1969) considered denial to be a beneficial reaction, as it gave the individual time to adjust to the new reality and adopt additional adjustment methods.

Anger. In the anger stage an individual can direct their feelings of anger, frustration, resentment in all directions (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Often this anger can be projected at individuals or groups who have had little or no impact on the change (Kearney, 2003). For student-athletes in this stage after the elimination of their football program, anger and their lashing out could have an impact on relationships with family and friends, their psychological health, and their motivation and engagement levels.

Bargaining. The bargaining stage can be described as where the individual attempts to avoid the change by trading something to prevent the change from occurring (Kearney, 2003). Kubler-Ross (1969) stated that this stage is limited in its helpfulness to the individual as it prevents acceptance of change for hope that it can be avoided. For student-athletes this stage could look like efforts to save their football programs and find ways to appeal to those implementing the change.

Depression. Depression in the individual indicates that the anger has been replaced with an understanding of the loss or change can't be prevented (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Often this stage is accompanied by sadness and other feelings such as a lack of motivation. The individual's energy can be lowest during this stage. For student-athletes this stage could have an impact both academically and non-academically.

Acceptance. While not necessarily a happy stage, acceptance can see an individual's energy and motivation levels rise as they begin to accept the change and realize they must continue (Kubler-Ross, 1969). This stage can include solutions or options individuals may find

to dealing with the change. For student-athletes this could include transferring schools, dropping their sport altogether, or other options they discover.

KRM Change Curve. The KRM change curve is a popular visual that depicts the energy level of an individual or group while progressing through change with the KRM. For this study, the KRM change curve (Figure 3) helps with understanding how student-athletes may be adjusting to the change, and visually seeing what the impact of the different stages could be.

KRM Change Curve

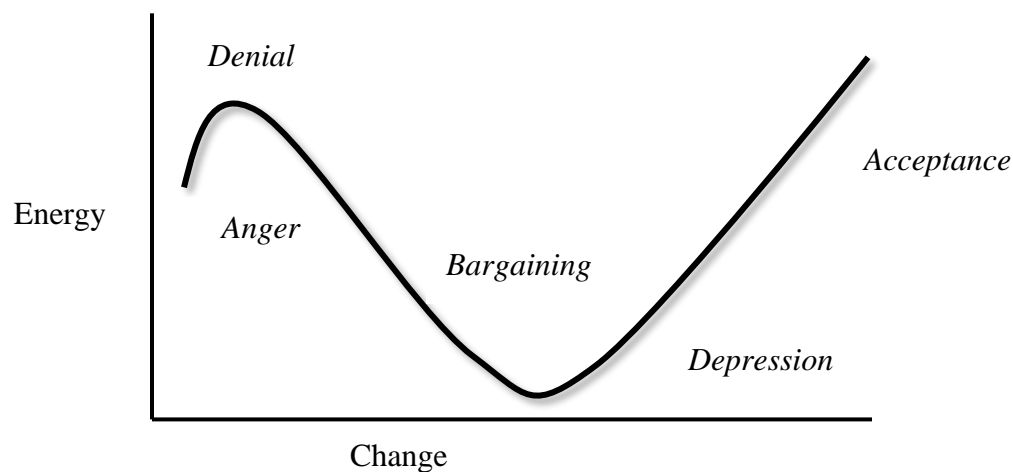


Figure 3: This visual provides a representation of the energy and impact that a KRM may have on student-athletes as they adjust to the change of their program being eliminated.

Summary of Conceptual-Theoretical Framework

The purpose of a CTF is to provide both validation for a study and create the lens through which the problem is examined (Ravitch, & Riggan, 2017). This study seeks to address the lack of significant evidence for educators and administrators about what impact occurs for student-athletes when a football program is eliminated. This study takes an approach of social constructivism acknowledging that different realities are determined from different lived

experiences (Creswell, 2018). TLT guides the literature review for this study with an understanding that people learn through experiences. TLT indicates that it is important to first understand how student-athletes may have been impacted from their participation in football, leading a more thorough understanding of areas that may be impacted by the loss of that program (Mezirow, 1991). KRM provides evidence backed theory that change impacts individuals and their energy. Therefore, KRM provides the foundation that guides the research approach, development of interview questions, and data analysis by attempting to understand how the sudden loss and change of the football program being eliminated has impacted student-athletes in areas first identified through the TLT approach.

Assumptions

Listed below are assumptions regarding education leaders and football programs in general:

1. I assumed that education leaders primary concern is for the overall educational experience of all students when making institutional decisions.
2. I assumed that most football programs and coaches are committed to providing student-athletes with further opportunities for learning within the educational experience.
3. I assumed SWCCCD eliminating their football programs was done with the intent that it was the best interest of the institution and its students.
4. I assumed that those choosing to participate in SWCCCD football programs had a generally positive or beneficial experience.
5. I assumed that those choosing to participate in SWCCCD football programs wanted to have the option to continue participation.

Delimitations

Delimitations are aspects of a study that can define and limit the boundaries and scope (Simon, 2011). Study participants will be delimited to student-athletes who participated in community college football programs that were eliminated in the previous academic year in the same geographic region as the researcher, and had eligibility remaining. This delimitation affords the option of either web-based or in-person focus groups and interviews.

Limitations

The specificity of this study, involving community college football student-athletes, may limit the generalizability of the findings. As a qualitative study focusing on the perspective of the student-athlete, implications may be limited on their impact to different populations or groups. The sample size, 9-10 participants, while small is designed to encompass multiple perspective and participant experiences which may offer more generalizability of results.

Summary

The chapter serves as an introduction to the research problem, the context and background of the problem, why this is significant, the development of the research questions and study design, and the limitations of this study. Football programs at community colleges serve many students nationwide, and an entire district deciding to eliminate their program is a major event. TLT offers insight into how participation in football could impact student-athletes and guides the literature review and research approach by understanding where to look for potential impact after their program has been eliminated. KRM suggests what student-athletes might be going through as they deal with the change of their program being eliminated and its corresponding impact, and how this process could be affecting impacted areas.

Understanding how the decision to eliminated football programs impacts the student-athletes involved can provide valuable and data rich evidence to education leaders as they navigate similar circumstances. This study is relevant because as education institutions change, students are impacted. While this study is limited to student-athletes participating in football, understanding their perspective could provide insight into how other students may be impacted through similar changes. Understanding the student experience is necessary and vital for educational leaders.

This next chapter examines the current literature regarding academic and non-academic impact from participation in extracurriculars, impact of football on student-athletes, and the limited data available on when an extracurricular program is eliminated. This literature led to the design and creation of my research question and research design.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Organization

The literature review examines the impact that occurs for students participating in extracurriculars, including a student-athlete's participation in football. This review examines the impact in and out of the classroom, identifying the role participation in extracurriculars plays into the student experience. A conceptual-theoretical framework is identified and explored, followed by a comprehensive review of available literature. Available data from common points such as academic impact, non-academic impact, and specific programs that experienced elimination are reviewed. A review of the methodological issues is then conducted, concluding with a synthesis of research findings, a critique of previous research, and chapter summary.

Review of Research and Methodological Literature

The purpose of this section is to review the literature regarding the impact of extracurriculars. A significant amount of literature was available, so the initial step was ensuring that research findings were directly relevant to this study. This review organizes the literature first by areas of academic impact, then by impact in areas other than academics. This separation is done by logically grouping them together based on similar areas of impact. Each sub-section that follows reviews relevant connections and claims in relation to my research question. Sub-sections were grouped together based on connections with other studies or significant results of a study.

Academic Impact of Participation in Extracurriculars

Participation in sports and other extracurriculars appears to create positive academic and non-academic impact (Filsinger, 2012). Student-athletes are more likely to have higher grade point averages, lower dropout rates, better attendance records, and less likely to encounter

negative discipline than non-student-athletes (NFHS, 2019). Further data show that students experience transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) and see an increase in student engagement (Gayles, 2009), as well as intrinsic motivation (Swanson, 2016). Benefits from participation in extracurriculars carries over into non-academic areas, where student's see an increase in their life skills development (Forneris, 2015), health and well-being (Belton, 2017), as well as in their relationships and social experiences (Skaza, 2014). The following sub-sections are grouped into two categories academic impact and non-academic impact. Areas of academic impact include: student academic achievement, graduation rates, student retention, and student motivation and engagement. Non-academic areas of impact include: student-athlete relationships, development of life skills, physical, psychological, and mental health.

GPA: athlete vs the non-athlete. A student's grade point average (GPA) is reflective of their overall academic achievement in school. Participation in sports appears to impact student GPA (Filsinger, 2012). One study took a random sample of 300 students from five different high schools that participated in varsity athletics, then recorded GPA data of athletes and non-athletes alike (Filsinger, 2012). This study stressed the importance of the findings in relation to budget reductions at schools, and in understanding the impact of athletics in the high school academic environment (Filsinger, 2012). This study about the GPA of varsity high school athletes found that athletes earned significantly higher GPA's than non-athletes (Filsinger, 2012).

In the above-mentioned study, GPA was examined based on gender as well as athlete vs. non-athlete status (Filsinger, 2012). Male athletes had a cumulative GPA of 2.97 while male non-athletes had a cumulative GPA of 2.83. These results continued into comparing female student's GPA's. Female athletes had a 3.38 GPA, while female non-athlete's cumulative GPA was a 3.15. While female non-athletes scored higher than male athletes, overall athletes had a

higher cumulative GPA than non-athletes by gender. In calls for future research, Filsinger (2012) noted how her study only compared varsity athletes, and a more developed understanding could be gained through evaluating student-athletes of all grades and program level.

Perceived improvements by student-athletes. Student-athletes viewed extracurricular impact as an improvement to their college experience. In one study, student-athletes who participated in football were observed and interviewed (Camire, 2013). This study attempted to better understand the impact football was having on its participants (Camire, 2013). In Quebec, Football is a sport that has seen a rise in popularity with more high schools offering the sport and more boys participating. One of the significant aspects of Camire's (2013) study showed that most participants weren't involved in any other sport or extracurricular prior to participating in football. The study found the students themselves expressed an improvement in their grades from participating in football (Camire, 2013). Student's made statements such as "because of football, I really work hard at school, I try to be better because I want to be on the team next year" (p.45) and "If it wasn't for football I wouldn't be here right now. I'm here because of football. I don't have super good grades, but I work hard because I want to stay here" (p.45). The study found that while coaches pushed student-athletes to perform better in school, students identified results to additional areas as well, with one student saying football taught them "to give it my all at everything I do" (Camire, 2013, p. 43).

This concept of student-athletes perceiving improvements due to extracurriculars is found in other studies. One study showed that varsity high school student-athletes had a higher cumulative GPA than non-athletes, and some indicated their sports as the cause (Filsinger, 2012). Another study showed that student-athletes participating in high school football in Quebec, Canada perceived an improvement and motivation due to their involvement in football (Camire,

2013). This study also pointed to life skills development, relationships with peers and coaches, and a connection to their school as reasons for improvement in the student-athlete's academic achievement (Camire, 2013).

Extracurriculars impact on standardized testing. It is generally agreed upon that most measures of academic achievement include some combination of datasets, centered around testing results and student GPA. Most states require most students to undergo standardized testing as part of their evaluation of school systems. Additionally, most colleges use ACT or SAT test scores to aid them in their admissions or acceptance process. The available data suggest that a correlation exists between participation in extracurriculars and higher student test scores.

One study sought to determine what impact extracurriculars had on standardized testing results (Wilcock, 2012). This study took place in a rural 7-12 school with an enrollment of 750 students (Wilcock, 2012). In addition to analyzing extracurricular participation to test scores, connection was also drawn to attendance and discipline contacts. Furthermore, gender and reduced lunch status data was compared to test scores to see if additional predictors were available. A significant difference was found in language arts and math standardized test scores between extracurricular participants and non-participants at the high school level (Wilcock, 2012). This study didn't separate athletics from other extracurriculars and showed a positive correlation between participating in multiple extracurriculars and academic achievement. Extracurricular participation led to an increase in attendance and a decrease in school discipline encounters (Wilcock, 2012). Participation in extracurriculars, high attendance, and low discipline encounters were found to be an indicator for success on math and language arts standardized testing (Wilcock, 2012). This study also determined that gender and reduced lunch status were not indicators in testing performance. As with Filsinger's (2012) study, Wilcock (2012) sought to

provide a more thorough understanding of the importance of extracurriculars in the educational experience. He sought this data so that educational leaders could be more informed in their budget decisions and have evidence to support their decision making.

Challenges in college athletics. Collegiate sports are often sorted into two categories, revenue generating and non-revenue generating. By general rule, revenue generating sports are typically male football and basketball (Brecht, 2014). This can vary between universities and divisions, but in Division I athletics this is largely the case. In terms of academic performance and contribution to a university's academic mission, revenue generating sports underperform and are considered a liability (Brecht, 2014). In contrast, non-revenue generating athletics, such as track and field and other Olympic sports, are found to have student-athletes equally committed to athletics as their academics (Brecht, 2014). Logically, this can be correlated to the demographics and genders of its participants, and the lack of notoriety around these sports. Like in Filsinger's (2013) study of high school athletes, female student-athletes consistently outperform male student-athletes at the collegiate levels (Brecht, 2014). However, in most Division I athletics, the revenue generated from these programs keeps them and other programs running and provides a dilemma for university leadership between academic and financial concerns.

One of the challenges that face college student athletes is that some studies suggest that they enter college less prepared than their peers and therefore their academic experience differed than the norm. One study evaluated student-athletes in a Division I research university and found that compared to their peers, college student-athletes had significantly lower ACT/SAT scores and GPA's upon entering the collegiate level (Brecht, 2014). Of the student-athletes evaluated, the greatest disparity was in the revenue generating sports (Brecht, 2014). This same study identified GPA as an important predictor of academic success for college student-athletes. Of the

data available, outside of gender and demographics, the most likely predictor of retention into year two for collegiate student-athletes is their first year GPA (Brecht, 2014). The greatest predictor of academic success, and therefore a higher first year GPA, is the student-athletes high school GPA (Brecht, 2014). This study lends to the belief that promoting academic success in high school athletes and aiding first year collegiate student-athletes in the same endeavor, will lead to greater retention and overall academic success for all collegiate student-athletes. The implications that Brecht (2014) drew were in the predictability of academic success and retention. This is critical in understanding how to best serve the collegiate student-athletes and allow them to achieve academic success while they continue to participate in athletics. Additionally, this shows that student-athletes face challenges based on their sport and a football student-athlete will have different challenges than that of a cross country student-athlete.

A significant challenge for the college student-athlete, is that they have a different collegiate experience than traditional college students (Godfrey, 2010). Collegiate student-athletes, from a qualitative perspective, were found to have different background circumstances than what the quantitative data presents (Godfrey, 2010). The typical picture painted from relevant quantitative studies is that of dysfunctional studies athletes, “especially those participating in football and basketball, as academically deficient and regarded as lesser students by higher education professionals” (Godfrey, 2010, p. 169). Godfrey’s (2010) qualitative study examined student-athletes and what makes them different, not less, than a typical college student. Godfrey (2010) found that academic measures, such as GPA, is often used by professors and administrators as an evaluator of student-athletes’ college experience. However, Godfrey (2010) argued that GPA and academic success alone isn’t enough to understand the complete experience of college student-athletes. Student-athletes experience collegiate life through a separate lens

than traditional students (Godfrey, 2010). Everything about their experience is impacted by athletics. Athletic participation restrains their time through practice and responsibilities, and an equal amount of additional time is invested in individual commitment to growth and training. A typical expectation of student-athletes is to just win (Godfrey, 2010). Winning is the expectation from the “general student population, fan base, alumni” (Godfrey, 2010, p. 182). The perspective of a college football student-athlete is cloaked in this expectation. Wins and losses impact not only the student-athletes experience, but almost everything on a college campus. Godfrey (2010) concluded that winning makes the campus better, impacting academic performance of students’ athletes as well as the general student population (p.183). Student-athletes understand the expectations, and it impacts their collegiate life and educational experience. They have difficulty escaping the expectations that surround them and must learn to deal with them as part of their educational experience.

With these burdens, college student-athletes either maintain academic standards set forth by their institution or risk their athletic status and scholarship (Brecht, 2014; Godfrey, 2010). A student-athletes’ life on campus is impacted by their participation in sports in a variety of ways (Brecht, 2014; Godfrey, 2010). Student-athletes are often told what to wear, what foods to eat, can experience students or alumni as fans of their sport, and can receive either praise or criticism regarding their participation in their sports success (Brecht, 2014; Godfrey, 2010). This can create a college experience that is vastly different than that of a traditional student (Godfrey, 2010). Studies indicate it isn’t responsible or appropriate to measure their success by the same means as that of a traditional student and continuing to do so only furthers the current stereotype and deepens the burden of student-athletes (Brecht, 2014; Godfrey, 2010).

Drop-out rates among student-athletes. Dropping out of school has a significant impact on outcomes in life. Data shows that participation in extracurriculars, athletics or otherwise, decreases drop-out rates (Wilcock, 2012; Filsinger, 2012; Camire, 2013; Rainer, 2009; Redalen, 2017; Mahoney, 1997). This decrease in drop-out rates is magnified in those students at high risk due to demographics, gender, and reduced lunch status (Rainer, 2009; Redalen, 2017; Mahoney, 1997). The impact of lowered drop-out rates can have a profound and meaningful impact on those students and their communities. High school graduation is seen as one of the key contributors to a successful life as the likelihood of a person going to prison, living in poverty, and raising children in one parent homes, and all decrease dramatically from simply graduating high school.

Athletics may also impact drop-out rates. Participation in sport is identified as one of the primary positive effects leading to high school completion in African American males, the largest at risk drop out population (Rainer 2009). Rainer (2009) interviewed seven African American males considered likely not to graduate high school, who were on track to graduate, and observed contributions that aided in their success. Of the seven, all of them participated in extracurriculars and contributed them to a huge part of their success. Five of the students played either football or basketball or both and intended to do so at the collegiate level. One of the factors for success included in Rainer's (2009) study was that as freshman, these students were able to connect with other students with similar interests and goals. This aided in creating a network where students were able to lean upon each other for support and work towards common goals and develop needed social skills. Rainer (2009) cited work by Pascarella and Smart (1991) that found African American men found similar success from athletic participation at the collegiate level, achieving high social skills development, bachelor's degree completion,

and a high sense of self-esteem. Both Rainer's (2009) and Pascarella and Smart's (1991) work lend credence to coaches' encouragement as well as academic requirements of their sports as factors for student-athlete success.

Student-athletes identify sport as a factor in drop-out rates. In a study of student-athletes participating in a newly formed football program at a Canadian high school, many student-athletes spoke of football's impact on their ability to complete high school and desire to further their education (Camire, 2013). One student stated "if you're not motivated to do something, you won't persevere. That transfers well to everyday life" (Camire, 2013, p. 44). Another student stated "I find having good grades is as important as performing in football because we won't be playing football our entire lives. If we can apply what we've learning in football to real life, it's better" (Camire, 2013, p. 46). Multiple students in Camire's (2013) study pointed to football as being a key contributor to their academic engagement, success, and completion of high school.

Sport and extracurriculars may provide opportunities for learning outside of the classroom. One study, where at-risk students were interviewed, found that participation in sport and fine arts not only increase likelihood of graduation, but provided additional instructional opportunities (Redalen, 2017). One of the student-athletes in the study stated that he would have been locked up if not for football, and now he anticipates a college scholarship for his participation (Redalen, 2017). Participation in sports and fine arts were transformative learning experiences for these students. This transformative change allowed students to develop as independent thinkers and form their own values and purposes, rather than being subjected to the actions or opinions of others (Redalen, 2017). Students, while considered at-risk, found academic success and were on a trajectory for graduation. The factor considered the most influential in this change of pathways was participation in sports and fine arts (Camire, 2013; Redalen, 2017).

Extracurriculars reduce drop-out rates, and at-risk students see the biggest impact. Mahoney's (1997) study identified the direct connection between participation in extracurriculars and a reduced dropout rate. The group most impacted by participation in extracurriculars are those most likely to drop out (Mahoney, 1997). Of the extracurriculars available to students, athletics has the biggest impact and a more significant impact is seen when a student participates in multiples sports. Mahoney (1997) contends that trends in meeting financial constraints by cutting athletic budget further excludes students deemed most at risk from participation. Mahoney's (1997) study accounted for several factors such as school demographics, socio-economic status, race, and gender in showing a significant impact for total student drop-out rate. More recent studies (Redalen, 2017; Rainer, 2009; Filsinger, 2012) have further verified Mahoney's (1997) conclusions.

Student-athletes' intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation typically refers to an individual's internal spark to undertake a task. Commitment to excellence and motivation levels are known factors in determining success, academic or otherwise. Students, as well as student-athletes, have varying levels of intrinsic motivation (Swanson, 2016). Understanding what increases a student's intrinsic motivation aids educational leaders in creating an ideal education experience.

Intrinsic motivation may have a significant positive impact for student-athletes. Swanson (2016) studied the influence of sport relationship on collegiate student-athletes' intrinsic motivation levels. Swanson (2016) studied relationships with both coaches and teammates. Additionally, areas such as gender and sport type were evaluated for impact on the student-athletes' intrinsic motivation levels. Experiencing cohesion was identified as the most impactful aspect in increasing intrinsic motivation. When student-athletes experience cohesion in sport,

regardless of gender; type of sport, whether the cohesion is with teammates or coaches, it is likely that the student-athletes' intrinsic motivation levels will be significantly increased. Swanson (2016) theorized that it is logical then that educational leaders seek to hire sport coaches who are skilled at creating environments that are developing and where cohesion can be experienced, as opposed to coaches with any certain coaching style or set of behaviors. Increased intrinsic motivation in student-athletes not only aids in the sport performance of those student-athletes, but in their academic success as well (Swanson, 2016). Swanson's (2016) study shows that sport participation has a beneficial impact on areas ranging through academics, life, and physical and mental health. This benefit is found in other studies and is covered in more detail in the sub-section student-athlete health and wellbeing (Belton, 2017; Cohen, 2007).

Student-athletes' engagement levels. Student-athlete engagement levels have been measured through participation in educationally purposeful activities (Gayles, 2009). Astin's (1985) theory of involvement leads to the belief that "students learn by being involved" (p.133). Chickering and Gamson's (1987) work *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* expands Astin's (1985) theory by defining what educationally purposeful activities students should be engaged in for development and growth. Student-athletes' engagement levels are measure on the same educationally purposeful activities. The seven principles encourage: (1) student-faculty contact; (2) cooperation among students; (3) active learning; (4) prompt feedback; (5) time on task; (6) communication of high expectations; and (7) respect of diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Student engagement in educationally purposeful activities has become a leading measure of reform in higher education institutions, especially regarding the student-athlete population.

Recent higher education reform, with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) being one such initiative, has placed an emphasis on understanding and increasing student-athlete engagement in educationally purposeful activities. Student engagement in educational activities is one of the key factors in student learning and development (Gayles, 2009). Research of current student-athlete engagement levels has gathered mixed results, with implications varying based on the criteria and focus in the studies involved. Student-athletes participating in revenue sports such as football and basketball have garnered a reputation amongst educational leaders as the least likely to be engaged in academic endeavors. These revenue generating sports are commonly known as “American higher education’s ‘peculiar institution’” (Thelin, 1994, p.1) within the higher education environment. Questions regarding to what degree academic missions are benefited from revenue generating sports have persisted and furthered the need to understand what place these sports have in higher education, as well as the impact on the student-athlete educational experience.

Sports for student-athletes demand a significant amount of their time, some sports more than others, often leaving little time for educationally purposeful activities (Gayles, 2009). One study sought to identify more clearly what aids engagement levels amongst student-athletes in educationally purposeful activities (Gayles, 2009). Additionally, with the recent movement in higher education aimed at increasing student-athlete engagement as a method to aid the student-athlete educational experience, this same study sought to provide a pathway to more balanced goals of both intercollegiate athletics and higher education (Gayles, 2009). In this quantitative study, student-athletes regardless of background data and sport profile were found to be equally likely to engage in educational purposeful activities (Gayles, 2009). Additionally, all student-athletes were shown to benefit significantly from such engagement (Gayles, 2009). High profile

sports student-athletes were the least likely to seek engagement with student's that were not teammates (Gayles, 2009). Time constraints were the biggest concern in this regard, as some sports, such as football, occupied as much as 40 hours per week of the student-athletes time (Gayles, 2009). This is concerning due to the lack of time remaining to commit to academic responsibilities and endeavors. Studies indicated that understanding the balance in student engagement levels of student-athletes, as well as its benefits and influences, provides institutional leadership with more tools to aid the student-athlete and provide an educational experience more aligned with its mission and purpose (Carrier, 2013; Gayles, 2009; Thelin, 1994).

Student-athlete engagement may vary in different types of college settings (Carrier, 2013). In Carrier's (2013) study, student-athletes' engagement in educationally purposeful activities consists of five levels: (1) level of academic challenge; (2) active and collaborative learning; (3) student-faculty interaction; (4) enriching educational experiences and (5) supportive campus environment (p.100). Carrier (2013) sought to determine if there was a difference in student engagement across the different divisions of collegiate athletics. Carrier (2013) examined and gathered data from NCAA Division I, NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, and NAIA institutions. Carrier (2013) concluded that within collegiate athletics there is a difference in the amount and level of student engagement. NCAA Division III institutions exhibited the most engagement levels, with student-athletes attending small, residential, liberal arts colleges likely to be engaged at the highest levels (Carrier, 2013). Further data revealed that gender wasn't a significant factor amongst the different levels of collegiate athletics, however, gender itself created a significant difference in overall student engagement levels. Female student-athletes had significantly higher levels of engagement than male student-athletes (Carrier, 2013). This data

lends credence to student athletic participation enriching student-athlete engagement in educationally purposeful activities (Carrier, 2013), but on varying levels of impact. For community college football players' data suggests that student engagement is increased due to participation, but to what degree is uncertain (Carrier, 2013).

Literacy. One of the more compelling arguments about academic impact from extracurriculars was regarding a connection between academic and athletic literacy in collegiate football student-athletes. Segal (2013) used qualitative methods, primarily interviews and focus groups, gathered data regarding the role literacy plays in football and its correlating academic impact. In each instance student-athletes saw literacy playing a significant role in football, including: communication between coaches and players, speaking to members outside the team such as the media, reading football plays and strategy, and executing plays on the field, all demonstrating skills in literacy that are also needed to succeed in an academic or professional setting.

As student-athletes mature, they appear to get more out of their athletic and educational experiences. Football student-athletes participating in Segal's (2013) study understood and demonstrated the connection of literacy from athletic to academic settings, with varying depth of understandings. The further along the student was in their academic journey, the more developed their connection between skills that translate from football to academics and professional arenas (Segal, 2013). Segal (2013) compared responses from sophomores to that of seniors to emphasize this point. These data align with Godfrey's (2010) assessment of student-athletes' growth and development, noting that they mature along a similar path to typical college students. It is logical to conclude that like other college students; student-athletes grow through their educational experience. A senior student-athlete is more likely than a freshman student-athlete to

handle their responsibilities more expertly, understand connections in their learning experiences, and show more wisdom in their knowledge application. The same is true of non-student-athletes.

Student-athletes appear to grow intellectually and continue to develop their literacy the more time spent in their sport. Segal's (2013) study continued to conclude that football aided in the development and understanding of literacy in participating student-athletes. Additionally, this development carried over into academic and professional endeavors. Furthermore, Segal (2013) sought to change the negative stereotype of football student-athletes as non-academics. By better educating educational leaders on the impacts of participation in football and its correlating impact, Segal (2013) aspired to promote a more balanced and supportive educational experience for the college football student-athlete.

Retention of community college student-athletes. The outcomes that student-athletes earn can vary significantly between community college and a four-year school. Community college student-athletes have a significantly lower graduation and retention rate than student-athletes at 4-year schools (Bentley, 2017). NCAA Research (2017) showed that graduation rates for NCAA student-athletes is on the rise, with baccalaureate student-athlete graduation rates reaching 86% in 2016. High school student-athletes experience similar success, as student-athletes perform better academically and are more likely to graduate than non-athletes (Krings, 2014). This is in direct contrast to graduation rates of community college student-athletes, who may earn high grades and more college credit, but are less likely to graduate with a 2-year degree than non-athletes (Moltz, 2009). Moltz (2009) and other researchers agreed that the academic standards and requirements set forth by the NJCAA (2017) play a significant role in the contrast of graduation rates of community college student-athletes, opposed to high school and NCAA student-athletes. The NCJAA (2017) requires student-athletes to be enrolled and in good

standing during the student-athletes' season but doesn't place the same emphasis and requirements on the time the student-athlete is out of season.

Student-athletes need resources available that are unique to their situation. Bentley's (2017) study examined Delaware Technical Community College student-athlete's graduation rates and academic results and provided suggestions that would aid in increasing the performance of student-athletes. Bentley (2017) stated that the most critical aspect of a student-athletes' academic success is that the student-athlete is committed to college completion. Student-athlete's daily lives are filled with distractions that other students don't have to compete with (Gayles, 2009). Therefore, once enrolled in college the support system available becomes a crucial component that allows a student-athlete to find academic success (Bentley, 2017). Changes in how and who community colleges recruit, as well as ensuring that resources are available to student-athletes, will allow for community college student-athletes to find improved academic success (Bentley, 2017). Similar changes implemented in the NCAA (2017) has created rising academic performance and graduation rates amongst student-athletes and supports Bentley's (2017) suggestions for community colleges to follow.

Non-Academic Impact of Participation in Extracurriculars

These next sub-sections review the literature that discusses non-academic impact of extracurriculars. Participation in extracurriculars has a wide-ranging impact on student-athletes, both academically and non-academically (Filsinger, 2012; Skaza, 2014). Mezirow's (1991) TLT indicates that when student-athletes experience events that challenge meaning schemes, transformative change and learning can occur in those individuals. This change in meaning schemes and perspectives is evident in the non-academic impact of extracurriculars and is seen in

the student-athlete's development of life skills, relationships, and the change in their outlook on life (Ehrmann, 2011).

Student health and well-being. Predictably, participating in extracurriculars benefits student's overall health and well-being (Belton, 2017; Swanson, 2016). More specifically, participating in extracurriculars that are physical such as sport improves a student's overall physical activity levels and psychological well-being (Belton, 2017; Swanson, 2016). In Belton's (2017) study, students wore activity monitors and partook in surveys that evaluated the impact extracurriculars had on their activity levels. This study found that students who participated in sport had high physical activity levels and were more likely to continue this activity levels from adolescents into adulthood. Additionally, students who didn't participate in sport had lower levels of physical activity and a higher percentage indicated that they were never physically active (Belton, 2017). Belton (2017) also connected the higher physical activity levels to a better overall well-being and psychological health of the student. This finding is supported in other studies (Cohen, 2007; Swanson, 2016).

Further supporting the health benefit of extracurriculars, and sports specifically, is the call from the Surgeon General's office to expand after school programs to aid in thwarting the obesity epidemic (Cohen, 2007). Much of the reasoning for this expansion is based on the data surrounding sports increasing physical activity in adolescents and a high likelihood of that physical activity carrying over into adulthood (Belton, 2017; Cohen, 2007; Swanson, 2016). Other benefits have been presented for the expansion of extracurricular sports programs (Cohen, 2007). In Cohen's (2007) study of Los Angeles County Public High Schools, schools that offer more than 16 extracurricular sports have 31% of the student population participating, while schools which offer 13 or less only have 14% of the students participating (Cohen, 2007).

Participation rates and sports offered showed a connection to juvenile arrests, teenage births, and STD's (Cohen, 2007). Neighborhoods with 13 or less sports had a juvenile arrest rate of 30.9 per 10,000 youth, while those with 16 or more had a juvenile arrest rate of 1.6 of 1.7 per 10,000 youth (Cohen, 2007). Similar results were found in teenage births, as neighborhoods with 11 sports or fewer had 26 teenage births per 1000 and schools with 16 or more had 19 teenage births per 1000 (Cohen, 2007). School participation rates in sports showed a correlation in STD data, regardless of sport programs available (Cohen, 2007). Schools with a participation rate of 15%-25% had a STD rate of 5.3 per 1000 students, while those schools with 35%-45% participation rate had a 2.2 per 1000 STD rate. Cohen's (2007) study accounted for demographic data, and that factors such as economic status was known contributors. Cohen (2007) acknowledged that further studies would need to be done to further determine demographics impact on the data found. Even so, Cohen's (2007) study produced significant data and correlation between availability of sports programs and participation, and the corresponding effects in juvenile arrest rate, teenage birth, and occurrence of STD's in our youth.

Relationships with coaches and peers. Relationships with coaches in sports, specifically football, have the potential to transform lives (Ehrmann, 2011). In the book *Insideout coaching: How sports can transform lives*, Ehrmann (2011) describes the various types of coaches. While many coaches fail to take advantage of the opportunities for growth presented or are in coaching for selfish reasons (transactional coaches), a large portion of coaches are classified as transformational coaches (Ehrmann, 2011). This term is used to describe coaches who use their sport and platform to make life changing impact on others (Ehrmann, 2011). Ehrmann (2011) contended that there may not be a more influential group of leaders than that of transformational coaches.

Many dynamics exist in the relationship between a player and their coach. One study examined the relationships between an athlete and their coach and found that certain common expectations persisted (Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). These expectations are that a coach will lead, instruct, and provide support while the athlete executes, learns, and receives the support (Jowett and Nezlek, 2012). The relationships between athletes as coaches is one where the athlete is looking to grow, and the coach is seeking to help the athlete grow, both members gain a sense of satisfaction and success from this relationship (Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). Transformational coaches use this relationship to teach not just the specifics and technical nature of their sport but also values such as: responsibility, respect, and hard work (Ehrmann, 2011; Skaza, 2014). These coaches believe that by teaching these values they will be helping their student-athletes find success throughout life, and that their sport can become bigger than just a game (Ehrmann, 2011; Skaza, 2014). This type of relationship is shown to deepen the relationship between athlete and coach and provide both with more satisfaction (Jowett & Nezlek, 2012).

Commonalities exist in football relationships. A 2014 study identified five major themes related to the relationship between football player and coach (Skaza, 2014). Those themes were; relationship, values, discipline, family, and team. The themes of family and team were evident in the study for 100% of the participants, whereas the other themes were present 75% of the time. This study interviewed 12 participants across 2 different school districts that were significantly different in terms of demographics and successes of the various football programs (Skaza, 2014). Additionally, all participants had participated in football for at least 3 years. District 1 was 54% Caucasian with a high school population of 1,112 students, while District 2 was 91% Caucasian with 462 high school students. This is important because one of the major limitations in the study is that 10 of the 12 participants identified themselves as Caucasians. The participant selection

was based on access and convenience. Even with this limitation, Skaza's (2014) study provides key insight into the perceptions of student-athletes and their participation in football.

Skaza's (2014) five themes identify a common understanding of the experience and perceptions of student-athletes participating in football. In exploring the relationship theme, Skaza (2014) identified eight sub-themes that occurred in the relationship between player and coach. Those sub-themes found that student-athletes identified their coaches as effective communicators, teachers, father-figures, friends, advisors, support figures, leaders, and confidants. The sub-themes of coach as a teacher, friend, and leader all were found in over 75% of participants. The relationship theme and its sub-themes show a connection between football players and their coaches that is both beneficial and influential.

The values theme of Skaza's (2014) study has five sub-themes which are; more than winning games, an environment for teaching values, responsibility, respect, hard work. Each of the five sub-themes were found to be present for at least 75% of the study participants. Participants noted that the values and their sub-themes not only related to the presence of values in football but in their coach's responsibility and efforts to teach and instill values in their programs (Skaza, 2014).

Discipline is something that is often associated with football and is sought after by coaches for their programs. The perceptions of what discipline is may be subjective but within Skaza's (2014) study, participants found common experiences. The discipline theme in the study (Skaza, 2014) had four sub-themes; structure, guilt tactics, personal attacks, and coach's temperament. The sub themes structure and coach's temperament were found with every participant. Most participants found the structure of football and its demands to be something that taught them to be disciplined in their lives with their time, energy, and actions (Skaza,

2014). The participants found that they learned about discipline through the example of their coaches, and their temperament. At times coaches were angry with players, raising their voices and being expressive to get their lessons across (Skaza, 2014). Athletes stated that while this could be embarrassing or intimidating, it was effective, and they understood their coaches' intentions. Many athletes went on to say that their coaches would be exclamatory during practice and then pull them aside afterwards for more direct and clear teaching (Skaza, 2014). In the sub themes regarding personal attacks and guilt tactics, less than 40% of participants experienced them. Personal attacks and guilt tactics referred to using public shame or punishment as a method of correcting behavior (Skaza, 2014). Ultimately, students felt that both personal attacks and guilt tactics were extremely effective but weakened the relationship between players and coaches (Skaza, 2014). Players continued to say that they understood their coaches' intentions and purpose, and couldn't argue with the results, but they grew to fear those experiences not only for themselves but for their teammates (Skaza, 2014).

Many athletes choose to participate in football because of the culture and environment. Adolescents develop meaning schemes and find successes in structured family like environments and settings ((Forneris, 2015; Skaza, 2014; Schaefer, 2011). Skaza's (2014) theme of family found two different sub-themes, with 10 out of 12 participants stating a social aspect occurred in football, and 100% of participants felt like their participating in football was influenced by a desire to be part of something. Participants stated that playing football was like having a big family at school, one where everyone had responsibilities, a role, and was accountable to each other (Skaza, 2014, p. 105). Additionally, participants felt that being a part of the football program impacted their academics, civil, and social lives in positive ways. This has been found

in other studies as well, strengthening the student-athletes' perception (Camire, 2013, Carrier, 2013; Forneris, 2015; Schaefer, 2011)

The final theme of Skaza's (2014) study involved participants' relationships and feeling part of a team. The theme "team" was further examined to hold two sub-themes, "brotherhood" and "no one is bigger than the team" (Skaza, 2014). Participants stated that being part of the football team created memories for a lifetime (Skaza, 2014). Multiple participants felt that the brotherhood of football gave students common ground that helped to develop lasting friendships (Skaza, 2014). This perception by the participants appears to have validity from outside data, as studies have shown that extracurriculars aid in building lifelong friendships, and the overall health and development of adolescents (Forneris, 2015; Schaefer, 2011). One participant shared a story of recently attending the funeral of his father's high school football coach and felt inspired by the depth of the relationships and care former teammates still felt towards each other many years later (Skaza, 2014). Participants also stated that they learned responsibility and punctuality, because their coach made sure they knew nobody was bigger than the team (Skaza, 2014). This evenness of the rule's players stated taught them that they knew that they may decide to do their own thing, but they wouldn't be allowed to remain on the team if they acted in ways that hurt the team (Skaza, 2014).

Student development from participation in extracurriculars. Participating in extracurriculars can aid in a student's development. Current data available suggests and recommends that parents encourage and support their youth to be involved in extracurriculars, including sports, to aid in their development and positive influences (Forneris, 2015). A recent study (Forneris, 2015) expanded on the data available and found that students experience more opportunities for external and internal development through the participation in extracurriculars.

Forneris (2015) also found that being involved in multiple extracurriculars, including sports, was more beneficial to students than belonging to just one or none. Those who participate in extracurriculars outperform those who don't in categories such as commitment to learning and school engagement (Forneris, 2015). Within this context, students who participated primarily in sport had the highest levels of school engagement (Forneris, 2015). Additionally, data suggested that academic requirements for sport participation increased commitment to learn in students who didn't particularly enjoy common academic activities (Forneris, 2015). Forneris (2015) stated that their study largely verified previous studies on extracurriculars and student development, however additional measures were enacted to control for moderating and self-selection factors.

Participation in college athletics impacts student-athletes in a myriad of ways (Hamilton, 2001; Swanson, 2016). College student-athletes can face unique challenges that often aren't well understood or experienced by others (Swanson, 2016). Some of these challenges can impact their development and in other areas such as; performance enhancing drugs, struggles in team dynamics and cohesion, depression, anxiety, identity issues, and career development issues (Swanson, 2016). Participation in college athletics can also expose student-athletes to different cultures and diverse peer groups (Hamilton, 2001). Interactions with peers outside of our own culture and ethnic background can develop respect and cognitive abilities, as well as increase critical thinking skills (Hamilton, 2001). Both Hamilton (2001) and Swanson (2016) identified common developmental challenges that can occur through participation in college athletics, as well as methods to help support student-athletes and promote the positive development that occurs. Swanson (2016) highlighted the importance of the coach-athlete relationship in

navigating challenges, while Hamilton (2001) identified a thorough support system from college administration as beneficial to aiding student-athletes and their unique circumstances.

Eliminating extracurricular programs. Data is limited on the specific impact on students when extracurricular programs are eliminated (VanRheenan, 2011). One of the available studies examines the student-athlete impact when the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) cancelled several Varsity sports programs in 2010-2011, only to reinstate several of them after a public fundraising effort to keep the programs going (VanRheenan, 2011). UCLA cited financial reasons as the primary concerns when eliminating the sports program and stated the need to raise \$100 million to fully endow the programs (VanRheenan, 2011). Ultimately, \$20 million was raised and they reinstated the programs on a temporary basis until the remaining funds were raised (VanRheenan, 2011). One concern from students and the community, was the apparent hypocrisy displayed by UCLA between the various sport programs (VanRheenan, 2011). Revenue generating sports such as football, basketball, and baseball were not getting cut and had seen recent large investments into facilities and operations (VanRheenan, 2011).

Students at UCLA were impacted by the elimination of their sports programs in multiple ways. One student voiced frustration over a lack of consideration of the student-athletes involved, citing that they were called down to the Athletic Director's office and simply told their program was eliminated (Vanrheenan, 2011). In addition to concern over their lack of involvement in decision, students and experts wondered if the entire process was a money grab that would and could happen again (Vanrheenan, 2011). The most concerning impact on student-athletes was the total chaos that eliminating the sports programs had on their lives. With their sports programs cancelled, student-athletes were left with just a few choices. Many students left UCLA and transferred to another program, sometimes with a penalty or with losing scholarship

funding (VanRheenan, 2011). Some students considered dropping out of school, while others claimed that the event and resulting stress impacted their academic achievement and overall health (VanRheenan, 2011). One student transferred away from UCLA, her dream school, only to find out her program wasn't eliminated in the end and unable to transfer back (VanRheenan, 2011). Ultimately, VanRheenan's (2011) study identified significant negative impacts on the student-athletes involved in UCLA eliminating several sports programs.

Cuts to university sports programs raise concerns and brings about numerous questions. Sports programs are touted as providing a unique educational experience with student-athletes learning traits and skills that aren't readily available in a classroom (Suggs, 2003). At universities such as UCLA, where revenue generating sports such as football and basketball cost tens of millions (VanRheenan, 2011), financial concerns are often used to justify the elimination of programs that are provided at a fraction of the cost (Suggs, 2003). Additionally, data suggests that athletes participating in non-revenue sports and women's sports significantly outperform revenue generating sports athletes academically (Suggs, 2003). Another reason often cited in the elimination of collegiate athletic programs, is Title IX, which places mandates and regulations regarding equal opportunity (NCAA, 2017). In program cuts at West Virginia (2003), the university cut their \$24 million athletic department budget by \$500,000 (Suggs, 2003). In addition to financial reasons, Title IX was cited as a potential motivator (Suggs, 2003). Cuts largely came from non-revenue generating sports, including eliminating programs entirely (Suggs, 2003). These cuts left West Virginia with only 16 athletic programs, the minimum number required by the NCAA for Div. 1 schools, and with a better male to female athlete ratio (Suggs, 2003). Suggs (2003) and other experts (VanRheenan, 2011) challenged the thinking

behind cutting programs that provide opportunities to many being the best method to ensure Title IX compliance while providing limited financial savings.

Review of Methodological Issues

The purpose of this section is to review methodological issues related to my study that are found in the literature, and to examine their strengths and weaknesses to help guide this study (The Literature Review, 2016). Within the literature both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. However, a quantitative approach isn't prudent or practical in addressing the research question in seeking to understand how elimination of a community college football program impacts student-athletes. This section will explore the strengths and weaknesses of the most abundant qualitative research designs found in the literature; ethnography, phenomenology, and case study.

The key to ethnographic research is that it focuses on a culture-sharing group (Al-Busaidi, 2008). Ethnography explores the shared experiences of the culture-sharing group around a common event to develop understanding (Creswell, 2018). The ethnographic research process most often includes detailed interviews and observations (Creswell, 2018). When developing analysis for the data, the participants own perspectives often provide the interpretations and can lead to the development of a new understanding of the group (Creswell, 2018).

Strengths and weaknesses were found from ethnographic designs in the literature. One prominent study (Rainer, 2009) sought to answer how some African American males were able to complete high school when their peers fell short. Another (Segal, 2013) sought to understand how participation in collegiate football affected literacy development for student-athletes. As a strength, both studies were immersive, collecting interview data from a culture-sharing group at a single campus. Researchers often are connected to or belong to the culture-sharing group,

which was found to be the case in some studies from the literature (Rainer, 2009; Segal, 2013). This potentially allows the researcher's experiences and biased perspective to influence the study, with the readers able to determine how the study is impacted when the researcher reveals a bias and how it is counterbalanced through methods (Reeves et al, 2008). Concerns for ethnography often revolve around the time commitment needed for detailed interviews and observations, as well as potentially limited funding due to the typically narrow focus and lack of generalizability of the research (Creswell, 2018).

Phenomenological research design describes the meaning of lived experiences of individuals from a common phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). The phenomenon being explored can be an exact experience such as a car accident or can be an idea such as being in love (Creswell, 2018). Phenomenological research analysis can include the researcher's interpretation, however, one concept known as bracketing focuses on the researcher separating their own judgement from the analysis to focus on the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2018; Priest, 2002). Bracketing, also known as epoche, seeks for the researcher to examine everything as if it were completely new to them (Creswell, 2018).

Within the literature (Camire, 2013; Skaza, 2014) phenomenology presented varied strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, to ethnography, phenomenology requires detailed interviews. This can create significant data, but also limit the number of participants a researcher can include in a study due to time constraints (Creswell, 2018). Bracketing, or epoche, techniques may prove difficult for many researchers, which can also present as a significant challenge to phenomenology research (Creswell, 2018).

Case study research design can focus on individuals, groups, and events (Creswell, 2018). These cases are often studied while in progress to provide the most accurate data (Creswell,

2018). Some in the academic community argue that case study isn't a methodology, but rather something to be studied. However, both Yin (2018) and Creswell (2018) support its use as a research design. Further issues for case study design has been criticism surrounding a lack of rigor found in some studies (Creswell, 2018). Again, Yin (2018) and Creswell (2018) offer support for case study and counter that rigor can be ensured through the use of organized and systematic procedures.

In the literature (Suggs, 2003; VanRheenen, 2011) case study design offered comprehensive information from multiple sources as a significant strength. Creswell (2018) stated that the broadness of a case may present as a potential challenge, however studies in the literature (Suggs, 2003; Vanrheenen, 2011) offset this by narrowing their focus and staying organized. Further challenges present case study design such as deciding the boundaries of the case, constraints regarding time, urgency in an ongoing case, and varying amounts of data that can be collected (Creswell, 2018). Creswell (2018) both encourages more use of case study and offers further warning regarding perceptions of rigor from the academic community.

Synthesis of Research Findings

A synthesis of research is designed to conjoin findings of similar topics, allowing for implications to be created and an understanding of how the available research addresses the research questions (The Literature Review, 2016). Literature that focused on sports, specifically football, were prioritized in this literature review. However, research regarding sport specific impact on the student-athlete was limited. This section focuses on synthesizing the research findings from the impact on student athletes when participating in extracurriculars. The body of research covering the impact of extracurriculars on the student-athlete provided multiple concurring themes or "relevant theories" yet consistently left open questions regarding sport

specific impact providing “central issues for future research” (Cooper, Hedges, & Valentine, 2009, p. 6). Research showed concurring relevant theories regarding extracurricular participation impacted student-athletes both academically and non-academically in areas outside the classroom. These relevant, central theories and issues for future research guided the creation of my research question: “How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?”

Academic Impact

Current research indicates significant academic impact from participating in extracurriculars. Generalizing the data shows that students benefit academically in at least the following seven ways when participating in extracurriculars:

1. Improved GPA (Filsinger, 2012)
2. Improved testing scores; ACT, SAT, Standardized Testing (Wilcock, 2012)
3. Lower drop-out rates (Wilcock, 2012; Filsinger, 2012; Camire, 2013; Rainer, 2009; Redalen, 2017; Mahoney, 1997).
4. Improved outcomes for high risk students (Rainer, 2009)
5. Increased literacy development (Segal, 2013)
6. Increased student engagement levels (Gayles, 2009)
7. Higher retention rates (Moltz, 2009)

In general, the research above shows that students and schools’ benefit from participation in extracurriculars. Students participating in extracurriculars receive higher scores in class and on test, are more likely to stay in school and graduate, and care more about their educational experience. Students who are considered high risk often benefit the most from participation in extracurriculars. Schools experience less discipline issues and higher attendance and retention

rates from students who participate in extracurriculars. Because of this significant academic impact, extracurriculars may be a vital component of the educational experience for student-athletes.

Non-Academic Impact

In addition to benefiting students academically, participation in extracurriculars impacts students non-academically as well. Generalizing the data, they show the non-academic student impact in the following five ways:

1. Positive relationships with peers (Camire, 2013; Rainer 2009)
2. Beneficial influences (Forneris, 2015)
3. Healthy relationships with coaches (Ehrmann, 2011)
4. Overall health and psychological well-being (Belton, 2017)
5. Development of values and character traits (Skaza, 2013)

Multiple sources, including Camire (2013) and Ehrmann (2011), discussed the importance of the various relationships formed when participating in extracurriculars. Rainer (2009) and Camire (2013) specifically discussed how students form relationships in sports that connect them with other students and has a significant positive influence on their life. Studies examined how healthy relationships with coaches provide student-athletes with mentors that aid in their development of values and character traits (Camire, 2013; Ehrmann, 2011; Skaza, 2013). Belton (2017) found that students participating in sports are less likely to be obese, participate in more physical activity, and have improved overall and psychological health compared to those who don't participate in sport. The literature and data available allow for the generalization that participating in sport impacts student-athletes non-academically in a multitude of positive ways.

Much of the literature available sought to identify how extracurriculars improved student results, to validate or argue for their inclusion and importance in the educational experience. In these studies, researchers exploring the impact of extracurriculars took the perspective of the school or district. Many of these studies followed a quantitative or mixed methods approach, using statistical data to showcase the results and impact of extracurriculars on outcomes instead of the perspective of the students involved. These studies provided evidence that when students participate in extracurriculars, positive academic outcomes occur (Filsinger, 2012; Wilcock, 2012; Gayles, 2009; Moltz, 2009). Studies used data such as the overall GPA's of athletes and non-athletes (Filsinger, 2012), test scores such as ACT and state standardized testing (Wilcock, 2012), and graduation and retention rates (Moltz, 2009). The case was made, and evidence was provided through a multitude of studies that extracurriculars including athletics and football, improve academic outcomes for schools and administration.

Other studies focused on telling the impact of extracurriculars from the student's perspective. For these studies, researchers took on a qualitative approach. Researchers conducted interviews and surveys with various students on their experiences to illustrate the importance of extracurriculars. Some of these studies sought to understand why a certain group of students were able to find academic success, when their demographics suggested they shouldn't (Rainer, 2009). Other studies sought to understand how football and other extracurriculars played a role in their character traits, asset development, and relationships (Camire, 2013; Ehrmann, 2011; Forneris, 2015; Skaza, 2013). The literature and research provided evidence that extracurriculars, including athletics and football, had a positive impact on student's overall development. Students were found to benefit from extracurriculars: socially; physically; cognitively; mentally;

psychologically; in development of character traits; life skills development; and in their relationships with peers and adults.

Critique of Previous Research

This section explores previous research regarding the impact of extracurriculars on the student, especially the impact of football on the student-athlete, and provide the reader with an assessment, analysis, and interpretation of the breadth of the literature reviewed as related to my research question (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The purpose of this section is to employ research findings, provide a critique of the claims and evidence, illustrate the gaps that exist, and provide validation for the research question (The Literature Review, 2016; Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

In the breadth of the literature, significant gaps became evident. One gap presented as the lack of sport exclusive data. Studies often bundled sports with extracurriculars. Many of the studies that did separate athletics from other extracurriculars saw limitations in telling the students experience. In trying to correlate research with the purpose of this study, limited literature was available on the impact when a program is eliminated. A study by Suggs (2003) examined the elimination of college programs from a financial impact perspective and challenged the reasoning or motives behind cutting programs. Another study (VanRheenan, 2011) examined the effects and results when UCLA temporarily cut multiple sports programs, only to reinstate them once funding was secured. Both studies (Suggs, 2003; VanRheenan, 2011) didn't prioritize the impact of their programs being eliminated from the student-athlete perspective. No literature was readily available from the perspective of the student-athlete of the impact of a college eliminating its football program. These gaps in the literature have shaped this study and my research question, "How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?"

Chapter 2 Summary

Participation in extracurriculars has many stated positive academic and non-academic benefits to students and educational institutions. The elimination of an extracurricular program can have a significant impact on the students that were participating. From the perspective of the student-athletes, this study seeks to understand the specific impact on SWCCCD football student-athletes after their program was eliminated.

SWCCCD is a community college district that recently eliminated all four of their football programs. SWCCCD is not only the main choice for many student-athletes, but they are one of the only community college options for many students in their coverage area. This is significant because an entire group of student-athletes who were previously attending college and participating in community college football had their football program eliminated. This may be a significant event in those student-athlete's lives. Currently, evidence-based understandings do not exist for of how these student-athletes are being impacted by such a decision.

This chapter demonstrated an extensive review of the literature surrounding the impact of participating in extracurriculars and the available literature on the impact when a program is eliminated. The literature provides strong evidence that there is a direct connection between participating in extracurriculars, and a positive impact on students both academically and non-academically. Some of the positive academic impact found in the literature for those participating in extracurriculars includes: improved GPA (Filsinger, 2012), improved test scores (Wilcock, 2012), lower drop-out rates (Redalen, 2017), improved outcomes for high risk students (Rainer, 2009), increased literacy development (Segal, 2013), increased student engagement levels (Gayles, 2009), and higher retention rates (Moltz, 2009). The literature also showed evidence of positive non-academic impact from participating in extracurriculars by: students

forming positive relationships with peers (Camire, 2013), beneficial influences from their extracurricular (Forneris, 2015), healthy relationships with adult coaches and mentors (Ehrmann, 2011), improved overall health and psychological well-being (Belton, 2017), and the development of positive values and character traits (Skaza, 2013).

The literature showed significant positive benefits from participating in extracurriculars for students. However, minimal literature was available about the impact when extracurriculars were eliminated. I was unable to find any literature from the perspective of the student-athlete on the direct impact when their program was eliminated. This leaves a significant gap in the literature available regarding the student impact when programs are eliminated. This is a vitally important gap as this research could aid education leaders in their decisions on whether to eliminate specific extracurriculars or not. This process has led to the research question this study will seek to answer: “How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?”

Chapter 3 explores and provides detail on study design, methodology, specific details for how the study will be conducted, instrumentation samples, and details regarding how the data will be collected, analyzed, and validated.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will explain the methodology and specifics of the research design that will be used to understand how participation in community college football impact the student-athletes from their perspective. A gap exists in the literature regarding the specific impact on student-athletes when their program is eliminated. The goal of this study is to add an evidence-based understanding of how students are impacted when their programs are eliminated, as this information can be critical to the decision-making process of education leaders. Such data could aid them as they deliberate on funding cuts to extracurriculars, and in how they decide to go about implementing any changes.

Research Question

Many studies have explored the benefits of extracurriculars on students and on schools (Filsinger, 2012; Rainer, 2009; Redalen, 2017; Skaza, 2013). Few studies (VanRheenan, 2011; Suggs, 2003) have explored the fallout that can occur when a program is eliminated. However, no studies examine the fallout of a program being eliminated from the student's perspective. This has framed my research question, "How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?"

Purpose and Design of the Study

This study examined the impact from the perspectives of the student-athletes and evaluated how they have been impacted both academically and non-academically. It isn't uncommon for colleges and schools to eliminate extracurriculars for many reasons, some of which include financial, low participation, equality initiatives, or alignment with organizational goals. However, very little data is available to education leaders about the impact that occurs

from the student's perspective when their program is eliminated. This study sought to provide that perspective and aid education leaders in having an evidence-based understanding of the ramifications of eliminating programs. To best serve this purpose a qualitative approach was taken. Furthermore, social constructivism has been chosen as part of the philosophical framework of this research. The goal is that this approach and framework will afford for this study a way to gain a deeper awareness of the lived experiences of the participants and afford for a sensible, valid interpretation of the data.

Research Philosophy

Philosophical assumptions are the beliefs and preconceived notions brought into a research project (Creswell, 2018). These beliefs are formed during certain life experiences and a particular educational journey (Creswell, 2018). Creswell (2018) contended that philosophical assumptions impact our choices in theories and guides our research. Operating with a non-positivist assumption is an integral part of my research philosophy. A non-positivist researcher is one who maintains or conducts a study based on the belief that truth or reality varies between different people. The philosophical assumption regarding truth or reality of this study is an epistemological assumption. Interpretive frameworks, also a part of my philosophy, discussed below, engage a researchers' assumptions about how to conduct data analysis (Creswell, 2018). The interpretive framework this study is philosophically aligned with is the social constructivist worldview, also described as interpretivism (Creswell, 2018).

Epistemological Assumption

One type of epistemological philosophical assumption seeks knowledge in the form of the subjective experiences of study participants (Creswell, 2018). My epistemology is based on getting close to the participants, minimalizing the distinction between researcher and participant

in order to become as much of an “insider” as possible (Creswell, 2018). Assuming subjectivity, my view of how truth gets constructed is non-positivist, one who maintains or conducts a study based on the belief that truth or reality is a function of subjective, multiple perspectives. Hence, methodology becomes interpretivist, the researcher seeking to interpret the reality and lived experiences of the participants. Further, the researcher collaborates with participants and relies on quotes and subjective views from participants as the foundation of their evidence (Creswell, 2018).

Social Constructivism

In conjunction with non-positivism, social constructivism is a worldview in which individuals develop understandings from the subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2018). Social constructivism as an interpretive framework guides the researcher to look for complex views, relying on the participants understanding of various situations. Researchers actively listen as participants describe their reality in open-ended interviews, acknowledging that their own subjective experiences impact the interpretation of the evidence gathered (Creswell, 2018).

Methodology

In addition to understanding the fundamental assumptions that undergird a study, researchers should recognize how different methodologies impact findings (The Literature Review, 2016). Furthermore, a thorough understanding of methodology affords the opportunity for the researcher to be more efficient and effective in their study. The research approach I chose is indicative of the type of data I want to generate. Qualitative research includes interpretive and material practices that provide an insight into others perspective (Creswell, 2018). A qualitative approach, or methodology, takes the experiences of both the researcher and the participants into

its interpretive findings, while being considered inductive and emerging (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative inquiry offers the researcher an approach that focuses on the experiences of those being researched, from their perspective (Creswell, 2018). A constructivist framework acknowledges that multiple realities are constructed from many various lived experiences and therefore interpret data through the shared experiences of the researcher and researched (Creswell, 2018). For researchers seeking to fully understand the shared connections and perspectives, a social constructivist framework is a prudent choice (Thomas, 2014). Accordingly, my study is one of qualitative inquiry from a constructivist framework.

Study Design

The following sub-sections will explore different qualitative designs considered for this study: phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study, and seek to understand their potential impact on research findings. Additionally, these sub-sections will also determine their strengths and weaknesses as methodologies for this study.

Phenomenological Research

As defined by Creswell (2018) a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences of many individuals experiencing a phenomenon or theory (p. 75). The purpose of the phenomenology methodology is to take many experiences of a similar phenomenon to form a basis for understanding both the phenomenon and its impact on those experiencing it (Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology has been used often for studies in social and health sciences, psychology, nursing, and education. The phrase phenomenology of practice was adopted by Van Manen (Creswell, 2018, p. 75) to describe the use of phenomenology as the meaning-giving methodology. There are several defining features that are typically included in all phenomenology studies:

- The phenomenon being studied is phrased in a single term, such as “football program eliminated” (Creswell, 2018)
- The study of this phenomenon is focused on the experiences of a group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon.
- Phenomenology involves a philosophical approach to addressing the key components of a phenomenological study. Furthermore, phenomenology falls somewhere between qualitative and quantitative as both the subjective and objective experiences of participants are considered (Creswell, 2018).
- Data for the study is often collected through interviewing participants, however other means of understanding perspectives and experiences can be used. A focus is placed on summarizing “what” the individuals have experienced and “how” they have experienced it (Creswell, 2018) in the data analysis phase of the study.
- Some phenomenological studies include a phenomenological reflection, or otherwise known as bracketing, which allows for the researcher to remove themselves from the study by stating their own experiences and allowing their subjectivity to be known (Creswell, 2018, p. 77).
- Studies using phenomenology often end with a descriptive practice that describes the “essence” of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018)

One of the benefits of phenomenology is that the researcher can often collect all their data through interviews with participants. The researcher can then analyze this data based on the “what” and “how” approach. This presents challenges as well, as the researcher needs to find individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. This can vary in difficulty based on the phenomenon. Further difficulties revolve around removing assumptions of the researchers.

Phenomenological reflection (Creswell, 2018) can aid in this challenge, however it is difficult to remove all effects of prior assumptions.

Grounded Theory Research

Grounded theory seeks to develop a theory or explanation from the process or action that those in the study participate in (Creswell, 2018, p. 82). This is different from phenomenology in the fact that grounded theory places emphasis in the “unified theoretical explanation” gained from the study (Creswell, 2018). That the theory is “grounded” to the data of the participants is where the phrase “grounded” comes from (Creswell, 2018). There are several defining features that are typically included in all grounded theory studies:

- Grounded theory research focuses on a process or action that the researcher is attempting to develop a theory explaining.
- An example of an action would be “participating in extracurricular activities” (Creswell, 2018).
- Grounded theory research can also include a process that evolve over time, such as “developing football programs in Canada” (Creswell, 2018).
- Data from grounded theory is most commonly gathered through interviews with participants and it isn’t uncommon to have multiple interviews with the same participant as the theory develops (Creswell, 2018).

Grounded theory presents multiple challenges to the researcher. One challenge is the highly structured approach the researcher must take. Multiple interviews are conducted, and it can be difficult to under when a theory has enough data. Furthermore, once a theory is being developed a researcher must then apply that theory to other participants to see if it applies. This process can be made difficult by the necessity that researchers remain unbiased and remove any

prior assumptions to be able to accurately develop the theory from the data gathered (Creswell, 2018).

Case Study Research

Case study research explores a system (or case) which can consist of individuals or groups by using data collected from multiple sources such as interviews, observations, and reports (Creswell, 2018). A case study can consist of a singular case (within a single system), or multiple cases (multiple systems) (Creswell, 2018). There is some dispute among academics of case study being a methodology, with some arguing that case study is more a choice of what is to be studied (Creswell, 2018). A stance of some supporting case study as a methodology state that it is a type of design to qualitative research where the case might be both the object of the study and the outcome (Creswell, 2018, p. 96). There are several features that are typically included in all case study studies:

- Case study starts with a selection of a specific individual, group, process, or event to be studied.
- Researchers often study cases that are current or currently ongoing to collect the most accurate data (Creswell, 2018).
- Can have specific boundaries or parameters that make up the case. Such as a specific place, time, or community.
- Can use multiple forms of data collection such as interviews, reports, and observations.
- Case studies are often concluded with explanations or “assertions” that deliver an overall meaning of the case (Creswell, 2018).

Case study research present many challenges for the researcher. One of the first challenges is choosing which case to use. This can be difficult because a researcher may choose

too wide of a case, or too small. Additionally, deciding which parameters to set for the case can present difficulties (Creswell, 2018). Another challenge with case study research is in the many examples of other case studies that lack rigor and quality (Creswell, 2018). This stigma often creates additional hurdles for the researcher when choosing to use case study as their methodology (Creswell, 2018). Yin (2018) advises not to create a hierarchy in methodologies, when a study is about answering research questions. Yin (2018) continues to defend case studies by stating that with organized procedures case studies can address many of the concerns regarding rigor.

The specific design chosen for this study is case study, a flexible approach to deploying philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks (Harrison et al., 2017). This flexibility in design, with an ability to determine boundaries for the case, as well as the methods of data collection, make case design a suitable choice for this study (Creswell, 2018). This design also fits well with the research question because this study sought to understand the impact on student-athletes of a specific ongoing event, the elimination of football programs at SWCCCD, with case study being a prudent choice for research of an ongoing issue (Yin, 2018).

The time period shortly after student-athletes program elimination may prove to have been optimal for case study data collection, as student-athletes would have been finishing their next season at SWCCCD. This contrast or cohesion could have allowed them to provide more detailed feedback on the impact from their program being eliminated. Furthermore, the separation from the immediate loss of their participation may have allowed study participants to be further along in the KRM and therefore increase the depth of their stories, relevant details, and energy.

Research Population, Sampling Method, and Procedures

This section will explore the target population for this study and the sampling methods used. Research population selection and sampling methods lead to a meaningful choice of study participants (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). As the framework for data collection, population and sampling methods influence the credibility and rigor of a study (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017), hence, calling for a strategic sampling approach (Creswell, 2018). Generally, three considerations form a strategic sampling approach, including, the sampling strategy used, and the size of the sample to be studied (Creswell, 2018).

Target Population

This study has a general population, a target population, and an accessible population. The general population consisted of all football players on one of the four SWCCCD programs that were eliminated after the 2018-2019 seasons. Within the general population, 312 community college football student-athletes are listed on the school websites. The NJCAA (2017) allows for two years of participation in community college athletics. Therefore, all student-athletes who were listed as sophomores on the roster would have exhausted their eligibility at the end of the season, and the impact of their football program being eliminated is marginalized. This indicated the student-athletes listed as freshman were the target population for this study. After eliminating sophomore student-athletes from the research population, 200 freshman student athletes remained in the target population. Multiple student-athletes have an out of state address listed, and others didn't have valid or available email addresses and phone numbers. These factors continued to eliminate potential participants and defined who eventually made up the accessible population, or sample.

The target population was the individuals who were both qualified to participate and would contribute to the research goals and credibility. However, the target population included some individuals who couldn't participate in the study for various reasons (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). This left the accessible population, or sample, as those participants who were both qualified and would contribute to the research goals and credibility of the study.

Purposeful Sampling

It was important for the participants of the study to have lived experiences that could add to the relevance of the data being collected (Creswell, 2018). One study in the literature explored the impact of participation in football in Canada (Camire, 2013). This study's sample consisted of players and coaches that had participated in the football program and who therefore could add relevant experiences to the data. One qualitative study sought to understand what factors impacted high school completion amongst African American males (Rainer, 2009). That study selected participants who had recently graduated high school, were African American males, and were enrolled in a community college or university (Rainer, 2009). Both studies provided valuable examples of carefully selected samples adding valuable lived experiences to the data and findings. This study sought to follow the examples laid out by Rainer (2009) and Camire (2013) for selecting a sample that can contribute to answering the research question.

Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research (Palinkas et al, 2015) where the researcher intentionally selects a sampling strategy as an aid for a deeper understanding and answering of the research question (Creswell, 2018). Factors such as the number of individuals or sites needing to be sampled, what form the sampling will take, and mitigating circumstances such as time and travel need to be considered as part of the sampling strategy selection (Creswell, 2018). While many strategies could work for a purposive sample, I

chose to use a maximum variation and criterion-based strategies due to the benefits the diverse perspectives could bring to this study.

Maximum variation is a strategy often recommended for case studies (Creswell, 2018). This is a way to determine beforehand the distinctions that will separate different participants, then selecting participants based on these distinctions to ensure representation of diverse perspectives (Creswell, 2018). In this study, several criteria served as distinctions for participant selection. Participants came from one of three different community college football programs, ensuring that perspectives from each school were represented. Additionally, the trajectories of the student-athletes differed, with some staying in college and others dropping out. Some of the student-athletes had continued in another football program, while others could not. Maximum variation isn't widely used in the literature, which made it appealing for this study. Many of the studies from the literature are limited by their small sampling size or lack of diverse perspectives. In this study, the different perspectives provided a more thorough understanding of the research question.

I also chose to use specific criteria to increase the quality of the participants in this study (Creswell, 2018). Criterion sampling is a strategy that requires participants to meet a specific set of criteria to be involved in the study (Creswell, 2018), and may be implemented through a questionnaire (Palinkas et al, 2015). I chose this sampling strategy due to the target population size of 200 student-athletes, and the need to narrow down the participants.

Sample Size

The literature offers a few different examples about what type of sample size is needed when conducting qualitative research. Camire's (2013) study interviewed nine coaches. Rainer's (2009) study interviewed seven African American males. Skaza's (2014) study interviewed 12

student-athletes. These studies provide evidence that interview data is substantial and time consuming (Creswell, 2018). These size precedents helped to provide direction for this study which had a sample size of 6 student-athletes from the accessible population.

Procedures for sample selection. Studies often use surveys or questionnaires as an effective means of data collection. One study received responses back from 229 student-athletes (Swanson, 2016). Their data proved to be the main source of data collection for the study. Surveys and questionnaires can also be a method of identifying the research participants from the general population. This study used survey data in this manner to aid in the sampling strategies of maximum variation and criterion. Surveys were not used as a data collection means. Recruitment efforts to coaches and through social media garnered 120 student-athlete email addresses that matched the published rosters of the community colleges whose football program had been eliminated. These 120 student-athletes were sent the survey. A total of 13 responded, 6 accepting requests for interviews and becoming the participant group. For maximum variation, it was my goal, which was met, to achieve the following distinctions from my participant group: participants from different community college football programs eliminated, participants who are no longer playing football as well as those who have found another program, and both participants who had continued school as well as those who dropped out. For the criterion sampling the following criteria were identified in the survey: on the roster of one of the four community college programs eliminated, at least one year of NJCAA (2017) eligibility left and planned to continue participation in football before the program was eliminated. A copy of the survey used is found in Appendix: A.

Instrumentation

As a qualitative case study deploying the given epistemological approach and social constructivist framework for interpretation, the evidence gathered relied upon the perspectives of the participants. Additionally, as a non-positivist, constructivist researcher, I identified participant's interactions with others, as well as the specific context where they live and work in order to better understand the participants background (Creswell, 2018). To best achieve this, interviews and focus groups were the methods of data collection used.

In developing the questions for the interviews and focus group sessions, the aim was to create a controllable conversation (Jamshed, 2014). Research experts (Creswell, 2018; Jamshed, 2014) recommend a semi-structured approach with questioning remaining as open-ended as possible. In standardized interviews the wording for each question remains the same so that the variance in responses comes from the variance in participant, not the question, in order to promote reliability and validity in the data collection process (Barriball, 1994). However, in a semi-structured approach, questions seek to achieve this reliability through the similar meaning of questions, which affords the interview a way to have a more conversation-like flow (Barriball, 1994).

To reflect this approach to interview questions, the following is an example of an open-ended question from Appendix B: "How has your football program being eliminated impacted your college attendance?". Note how the question can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" response. Often open-ended questions will begin with "why" or "how", enabling the interviewee to answer freely and in their own words (Guion, 2001). When interviewing it is also important for the researcher to follow up on responses with more open-ended questions. For example, after a response the interviewer can ask, "how so" or "what do you mean by that". This allows for

clarification and furthers the understanding of the experiences and perspective of the interviewee. These techniques can help ensure reliability and validity in the data collection process, a common critique of open-ended questions (Guion, 2001).

Researcher-As-Instrument (Creswell, 2018; Whiting, 2008)

It is important for a researcher to understand how they fit into the research process. Identifying this and their assumptions is known as reflexivity (Creswell, 2018; Whiting, 2008). As a researcher I have biases regarding this study and the research question, “How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?”. My biases are influenced by my life experiences and by having conducted a thorough review of the literature surrounding participation in extracurriculars. These factors have contributed to the following two biases: having participated in and coached football I believe it is inherently beneficial to its participants, and, the literature widely supports and furthers this bias by showing evidence that participation benefits students both academically and in non-academic areas. In addition to reflexivity, and therefore introducing my biases, I also used member checking to further counterbalance my bias. Member checking is a widely accepted validation and reliability technique that involves taking the data and interpretation back to the participants, usually in a focus group setting, and getting confirmation on the themes and direction the study took (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The feedback from participants is then included in the conclusion of the study as confirmation of the results.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Data collection is the processes and procedures within a study designed to gather evidence from the sample for interpretation. The case study literature provides examples (Camire, 2013; Rainer, 2009) of typical methods, like interviews and focus groups, and how they

become a valuable and prudent choice for data collection because they can produce data rich sources for analysis (Creswell, 2018; Jamshed, 2014).

Semi-Structured Interviews

In this study, the sample was identified through the survey and then all were invited to participate in an interview and a focus group session. Interviewing participants is one of the most widely used methods of data collection in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2018; Jamshed, 2014). Using a semi-structured interview approach, allows the researcher to guide the conversation (Jamshed, 2014). The reasoning behind choosing interviewing as a method of data collection lies in the root of why we interview, which is to understand the stories of others (Siedman, 2013). Siedman (2013) argued that interview research shows an interest in other people lived experiences because they are of worth. As a non-positivist, interviewing as a data collection method is an appropriate choice to understanding the impact on the student-athletes in this study, as told from their perspective.

Most interviews are conducted in a manor where the researcher holds the control with interviewer asking the questions and interviewee answering them (Creswell, 2018). This can create an environment where the research participant may not express themselves fully or accurately potentially limiting the reliability of the data collected (Creswell, 2018). To combat this Creswell (2018) recommends a collaborative interviewing approach, where researcher and the interviewee approach the questions and interpretation of responses together. The interviews in this study were done from a collaborative approach, with the goal of this interview process being for participants and researcher alike to consider the research question asked and interpret experiences of the participants to find meaning.

Procedures. Selected participants were asked to meet the researcher at a convenient location for the participant, which also included the option to meet online. This was due to many of the college student-athletes having financial and travel limitations. Siedman (2013) recommends that interviews are about 90 minutes in length. This is rooted in the belief that two hours is too long and one hour can lead to participants watching the clock. This expectation was communicated beforehand so that the participants were adequately prepared. Additionally, for in person interviews I provided water and snacks to make the environment comfortable. A semi-structured strategic interview process was employed, and each participant was interviewed once. After the interview the participant received communication regarding their focus group. This process was repeated until all 6 participants were interviewed.

While a semi-structured interview doesn't follow the same questions word for word, it is crucial to have a strategic interview process (Jamshed, 2014; Whiting, 2008). Whiting (2008) outlined six phases for a semi-structured interview for the novice researcher. The interview questions were integrated within these phases. Phase one is the "building rapport phase" where a relationship and trust is formed between the participants and the researcher. Phase two is known as the "apprehension phase" where a casual dialogue develops regarding the research topic. The purpose of this phase is to transition the interview and make the process less awkward for the participant. Next is the "exploration phase" where experiences are explored, and new knowledge can potentially be generated. Fourth is called the "Co-operative phase", where researcher and participant have a more open dialogue and the interview appears more as a conversation. Phase five is the "participation phase" where an established rapport leads to a conversation where the participant may take control of the direction of the conversation. Whiting (2008) stated that this

phase often isn't achieved. The last phase is the "concluding phase", where the conversation is wrapped up and the researcher thanks the participants.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a reliable method of data collection in qualitative studies and have been used by researchers since at least the 1950's when first used in marketing products (Creswell, 2018; Krueger, 2002). Since then they have become more common in studies for non-profits, academics, and government agencies (Krueger, 2002). Krueger (2002) created a guide to creating and conducting effective focus groups interviews. Common characteristics of focus groups include a group that has similar experiences relevant to the topic, a limited size of participants can stimulate the participation, hold separate focus groups for different topics, and to ensure participants feel comfortable sharing (Krueger, 2002). It is recommended that focus groups are held in neutral locations such as a school or gathering spot, and that people can see everyone in the group. Additionally, it is best to record the discussion for thorough review later. The moderator, or researcher, should strive to make people comfortable, listening attentively, and minimize their influence on the responses (Krueger, 2002). Questions should be predetermined, and open-ended. However, Krueger (2002) recommends avoiding "why" questions as it can make participants feel uncomfortable. Concluding the focus group should be a mutual decision, and the moderator should pay attention to the mood of the group and the effectiveness of the responses when proceeding to close the session.

Procedures. In this study, 5 participants participated in a focus group after being interviewed. The purpose of this was to expand the understanding of the perspective gained during interviews of study participants (Creswell, 2018; Seidman, 2013). The focus group was conducted virtually, due to the scheduling and travel restrictions of the participants. Guidelines

and procedures of the focus group outlined in Appendix: D were reviewed prior to the start of the session. Themes were discussed at length during the focus group, providing additional verification and understanding. At the conclusion of the focus group participants were thanked and given communication regarding further member-checking processes and to contact the researcher with additional questions.

Identification of Attributes

The purpose of this section is to discuss and identify key attributes that define this study. Gathered from the literature, attributes to be identified in the interviews are academic and non-academic impact, and the impact of sudden and immediate. Academic impact specifically includes graduation, retention in college, academic achievements, motivation and engagement in academic settings. Non-academic impact specifically includes: enriching relationships, acquiring life skills, physical and psychological health. Definitions are listed in Appendix: C.

Data Analysis Procedures

This section serves to identify the specific methods of data analysis used in this study. Creswell (2018) offers guidance through a concept known as “data analysis spiral” (p. 183). This concept refers to a spiral metaphor in which the data is first organized and stored, then as ideas and understandings emerge, codes or categories are formed which allows for further interpretation of the data. The spiral continues as themes are developed from codes as a clearer understanding of the data unfolds, this is concluded with an organized written account of the findings (Creswell, 2018).

A common theme from the literature regarding data analysis is the need to immerse yourself in the data (Creswell, 2018; Seidman, 2013). The researcher conducts the interviews, reads and rereads the transcripts, studies relevant literature, and lives the study (Seidman,2013).

Due to this immersion, the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data is important and significant. It is critical that the researcher feels comfortable with not only the analysis outcomes but also the analysis methods (Seidman, 2013). Yin (2018) supports this position by suggesting that researchers should develop their own analysis process that they feel confident in as they interpret and identify patterns in the data.

Seidman's (2013) preferred process of data analysis is like Creswell's (2018), stressing the importance of storing and organizing the data first, followed by a repeating review process where ideas, categories, and themes emerge. Seidman (2013) recommends physically examining the transcripts even if the researcher is using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). Lin (2018) also suggests the use of physical maps and matrices to help organize the data and uncover patterns. While reading the transcripts, the researcher should create labels on different sections of note (Seidman, 2013). These labels may or may not turn into categories, also referred to as codes that then become grouped into themes. Seidman (2013) stresses the need for the researcher to not project themes from outside sources onto the data. Noting that the point of a rigorous data collection process is to ensure that the experiences of the participants is what is interpreted, not outside influences (Seidman, 2013).

CAQDAS has become commonly used in studies (Creswell, 2018; Seidman, 2013). CAQDAS offer many advantages, such as a secure storage method and not having to physically carry around data in order to access it. This affords the opportunity to access data in multiple locations, and with varying amounts of time available to spend on analysis. One common misconception exists is that CAQDAS interprets the data for the researcher (Seidman, 2013). This is not accurate and to counter this conception I became familiar with the software and its strengths and limitations before considering one to use in this study (Seidman, 2013). Common

pitfalls of using CAQDAS exist, such as: a researcher feeling the need to code everything due to the capabilities of the software leading to over coding, and in relying solely on examining data on the screen as it is possible to miss connections (Creswell, 2018; Seidman, 2013).

Understanding these pitfalls aided me as I considered using CAQDAS in this study.

Procedures. In this study the 6 interviews and the focus group session were transcribed by a professional transcription company. I reviewed a physical copy of the transcripts as I began to formulate ideas and applied initial labels, also known as “first cycle coding” (Saldana, 2016, p.67). The transcripts and labels were then loaded into a Microsoft Word program, which allowed for secure organization and storage, and a flexible way to access the data (Seidman, 2013). The coding process consisted of structural and elemental methods of coding (Saldana, 2016). Structural coding was chosen because it is known to be effective when working with interview transcripts and the initial categorization of the data (Saldana, 2016). Structural coding consisted of the labeling process of general and initial categories that emerged in the transcripts. Elemental coding provided a means to assign value to the subjective experiences of the study participants (Saldana, 2016). As a non-positivist, in-vivo made sense as it is considered a coding method that “honors the participants voice” (Saldana, 2016, p. 106). Furthermore, I employed a *lumper* pattern with in-vivo coding. *Lumper* is a coding pattern that can develop larger more big-picture codes, versus smaller and more numerous codes. In-vivo was used to identify larger themes that the participants’ experiences indicated.

Validation

Seeking after validation in qualitative research requires addressing issues of credibility and dependability, to increase rigor and quality of research (Golafshani, 2003). This is what differentiates ‘good’ research from ‘bad’ research (Golafshani, 2003). Qualitative researchers

achieve validation by determining the correctness of their results, and through evaluating their research methods (Creswell, 2018; Golafshani, 2003). For this, researchers need to understand how participants, themselves, and readers fit into their studies (Creswell, 2018).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the correctness of results, and to the process of determining said correctness (Creswell, 2018; Golafshani, 2003). In this study, credibility specifically includes the correctness of the data collected from participant experiences in interviews and focus groups and in alignment of interpretations of data between researcher and participant. To ensure credibility procedures were followed, the use of triangulation and member-checking was implemented.

Procedures. Multiple procedures were taken to instill credibility in this study. Strategic sampling methods were employed to achieve a sample that represented the diverse nature of the total affected population and provided data from student-athletes with varying experiences. Qualitative interview and focus group methods were researched, and guides were developed to aid in the interview process (Jamshed, 2014; Krueger, 2002, Seidman, 2013; Whiting, 2008). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted centering around open-ended questioning to ensure the data collected was being guided by the participants' experiences (Seidman, 2013). Furthermore, institution guidelines and protocols were followed.

Triangulation. Triangulation is the process of combining varying aspects of research methods or data collection (Creswell, 2018; Golafshani, 2003). As a credibility tool triangulation is respected by researchers and can prove effective for both quantitative and qualitative studies (Creswell, 2018; Golafshani, 2003). From a social constructivist paradigm, triangulation can mean collecting data from varying perspectives and experiences (Golafshani, 2003). This is achieved in this study through interviewing 6 participants and conducting a focus group of

interviewed participants selected through maximum variation and criteria-based sampling strategies.

Member Checking. Member checking ensures credibility of the data by involving participants in the interpretation process (Creswell, 2018). During the initial steps of data analysis, I reached out to participants to determine correctness of language used and initial interpretations of participant experiences. Furthermore, communication continued throughout the analysis process by seeking clarification of experiences directly from participants. As categories and themes developed, I reached out to participants to determine if conclusions were accurate and credible (Creswell, 2018).

Dependability

Testing and strengthening credibility can maximize validity, trustworthiness, and dependability, therefore, strengthening the quality of research (Golafshani, 2003). Research quality correlates to the dependability of a study and the generalizability of results, enabling the implications to be applied on a larger scale.

To ensure dependability Creswell (2018) recommends examining the design of a study and the researcher assumptions. This study sought to answer the research question, “How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?”. The design of the study serves this question by seeking to understand the student-athletes’ perspective and through interpreting their experiences to gain meaning. Researcher assumptions have been addressed throughout sections identifying philosophical assumption, research design, and interpretive frameworks. Reflexivity and the practice of the researcher to explicitly state their positions and biases is covered more thoroughly in the Researcher-As-Instrument section.

Expected Findings

The purpose of this study is to better the understanding of how student-athletes are impacted when their football program is eliminated. To my knowledge, no studies have focused on the experiences of community college football student-athletes after their program has been eliminated. In this study I expected to find that most of the student-athletes had been impacted in a significant way, with this event creating a major change in their lives. I anticipated that some student-athletes may still be playing community college football at a different school, while others may have stopped attending college altogether. Understanding the experiences of these student-athletes can lead to more awareness in the education community about the impact of extracurriculars on students, and potentially improved processes when it is decided a program needs to be eliminated.

Ethical Issues of the Proposed Study

Research projects must consider potential ethical issues that can occur throughout a study (Creswell, 2013). This study addressed potential ethical issues by following the study procedures laid out by the IRB committee, and through researcher integrity.

One potential ethical issue was in connecting with participants with similar biases. As I may share similar football related experiences to the participants, this possibility was likely. To address this, I referred to my interview techniques of asking open-ended questions and probing then clarifying to get to the participants' specific experiences that may create their bias. This aided me in interpreting their experiences. Another potential ethical issue was in selecting participants whom I have coached or already know. This can create social dynamics that may create unreliable data. To avoid this and continue with researcher integrity, no participants were selected with which I had a relationship with.

Conflict of Interest Assessment

The football programs eliminated are in the same region in which I live. This allows for relative ease of access to potential participants. As a local football coach, I know many in the community. This provided a useful tool in gaining “insider” status and in connecting with participants but may have affected how the participants perceive me. My relationships with coaches and student-athletes in the area, even though I won’t have a relationship with the participant specifically, could have influenced participants. Conflicts of interests may be present if there is a potential for personal gain, financial or through status or progress (Romain, 2015). My intent was to have integrity as a researcher and follow protocols outlined by my institution. However, participants could have seen me as someone who could aid their future efforts in football, instead of as a researcher. To balance this, I sought to connect with participants from my football background in a general way and limiting conversation about my specific experiences. I avoided mentioning places and names. Additionally, I avoided talking about my accomplishments as a coach or player to prevent any perceived need for the participant to build up their own experience or accomplishments. This helped keep the focus on the participants’ experiences and not about who I am, who I know, where I have worked, or if I could help their football pursuits (Seidman, 2013).

Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter examined my philosophical assumptions and beliefs regarding reality as a researcher and the methodological process and methods used for my case study. The purpose of this study was to better understand how college student-athletes are impacted when their football program is eliminated. The research question is: How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?

As a researcher, I am non-positivist believing that truth or reality differs between individuals based on the subjectivity of their lived experiences. This study was conducted under an epistemological assumption, seeking to understand those lived experiences of the participants while I the researcher got close to them and became an “insider”. Furthermore, the data collected was interpreted with a social constructivism framework, developing meaning from the subjective experiences of the participants.

Data was collected from participants who were selected using maximum variation and a criteria-based sampling method. All who met the criteria were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview that used open-ended experiences to ensure data collected was the participants’ perspective. All 6 participants interviewed were invited to participate in a focus group session, with 5 participating. Data gathered was analyzed through a data spiral process detailed by Creswell (2018) and supported by Seidman (2013).

Researcher biased was addressed and included that as a coach and former football player I may have assumptions regarding the impact football has on individuals. Additional bias includes that of a researcher having reviewed the literature and aware of the potential positive impacts to a student-athlete both academically and non-academically. This bias was counter-balanced through reflexivity and member-checking. This study followed all procedures and guideline outlined by the IRB committee. These methods worked to establish further validity and trustworthiness for this study and avoid any ethical issues from arising.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this study was to explore how eliminating community colleges football programs have impacted student-athletes. My primary motivation for conducting this study correlated to my personal experiences as a former football player, and current coach and teacher. I desired to understand how student-athletes experienced this event, and what areas in their life were being impacted. During the literature review ample data-rich evidence was found concerning the impact from participation in extra-curriculars (Filsinger, 2012; Rainer, 2009; Redalen, 2017; Skaza, 2013), however, little to no research has been conducted examining the experiences of student-athlete when their extracurricular program is eliminated. Some literature did explore extracurricular program elimination at various institutions (VanRheenan, 2011; Suggs, 2003). However, these studies did not examine the student-athlete experience or impact. This gap in the literature led to the development of my research question, “How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?”

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the processes undertook to collect, analyze, and interpret the data acquired, and how it relates to the research question. Extensive efforts were made to make the opportunity to participate in this study available to as many student-athletes from eliminated community college football programs as possible. These recruitment efforts included emails, phone calls, social media posts, to coaches and those with relationships to student-athletes. Data collection methods included recruiting student-athletes affected by this case study event, conducting both interviews and a focus group with selected participants.

Conversations in the interviews and focus group centered around the student-athletes perspective, focusing on experiences concerning their football program being eliminated. This process included a back and forth dialogue from participant to researcher, seeking to

collaboratively understand experiences discovered in the data. Data was examined with a desire to understand both the how and why behind experiences, in relation to the research question.

Description of the Sample

Recruitment emails and phone calls were placed to coaches of the four community colleges whose programs were eliminated. Of those four, three were willing to aid in the study and provided email addresses for student-athletes they had acquired through their football recruitment efforts. The three coaches who aided in my recruitment efforts were no longer employed by the community college, while the coach who abstained was still employed by the college and cited this potential conflict of interest. From this collection I was able to match and confirm 120 student-athletes who had eligibility remaining and were on official rosters for the 2018 season. These 120 student-athletes were sent a recruitment email with an invitation to participate in a survey that informed them of the option to be involved by participating in an interview and a focus group. I received 13 responses to the survey, with 11 expressing a willingness to be involved in the study. However, five of those who completed the survey never responded to requests for interview, with six total participants interviewed. Of the six, five were also able to participate in the focus group.

All six participants had eligibility remaining following the 2018 season and were on the official roster. Of the four schools in the community college district whose football program was eliminated, three were represented in study. All six participants had intended to continue with their football program for the 2019 season had it been continued. Three of the participants played football in a new program in 2019. Two participants dropped out of school, while four continued to take classes at least part time. One of the participants was still attending the same college. Details of participant demographics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant*	On 2018 Official Roster of Eliminated Program**	Eligibility Remaining	Intended to Participate and Attend in 2019	2019 Football Participation	College Enrollment Status
Participant 1 (P1)	Yes, School A	Yes	Yes	Yes, At Another CC	Yes, At Another CC
Participant 2 (P2)	Yes, School A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes, Same CC
Participant 3 (P3)	Yes, School D	Yes	Yes	No	Dropped Out
Participant 4 (P4)	Yes, School D	Yes	Yes	Yes, At a 4- Year School	Yes, at a 4- Year School
Participant 5 (P5)	Yes, School A	Yes	Yes	Yes, At Another CC	Yes, At Another CC
Participant 6 (P6)	Yes, School B	Yes	Yes	No	Dropped Out

*Participants were given numbers according to order they were interviewed.

**Schools were given a letter A-D according to how they were presented in the Survey

Research Methodology and Analysis

Most of the literature surrounding extracurriculars, explored thoroughly in Chapter 2, focuses on areas outside of the student experience. Literature provides significant data regarding academic outcomes and benefits to the school systems. However, the focus of this study was to explore the student-athlete perspective and employed a qualitative approach within a constructivist philosophy. Research indicates that the perspective of student-athletes varies between individuals and their experiences, supporting a non-positivist position (Creswell, 2018). Interpretation of student-athletes experiences was based and supported through social constructivism, deriving understanding from the subjective meanings of both participant and the researcher (Creswell, 2018).

The best study design to understand the student-athlete perspective was within the flexibility provided by a case study (Harrison et al, 2017). This design allowed for study boundaries to be established, as well as utilizing multiple methods of data collection (Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the use of case study is supported through literature as a credible choice to understand current and ongoing issues, such as the elimination of a community college district's football programs (Harrison et al., 2017; Yin, 2018).

The procedures and protocol followed the outline given in Chapter 3. Six student-athletes were interviewed and then participated in a focus group. For the focus group, five out six participants were involved. A flexible format was used for both the interviews and focus group, employing open-ended questions. Follow up questions were asked to help clarify the meaning behind the participants responses. Interview and focus group procedures can be found in Appendices B and D. Interviews and the focus group were recorded and then transcribed using a professional transcription company. During the coding process I referred to both the transcripts

as well as the recordings to further my understanding. Member-checking was heavily utilized as I frequently reached back out to participants to seek clarification on their meanings and experiences (Creswell, 2018).

Raw Data and Coding Process

Processing and deriving meaning from raw data includes multiple techniques that can happen fast and at times occur naturally. One way of looking at the process is as a “data analysis spiral”, where the researcher uses the initial steps of data breakdown to organize and then compact the results (Creswell, 2013, p 183). This is also referred to as “first-cycle coding”, where initial codes are streamlined into larger codes, patterns, and eventually themes (Saldana, 2016). Using a “first-cycle” approach to create a “data analysis spiral” allows for consistency to be maintained during the data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2016). In my study, consistency within my process allowed for more accurate interpretations of participants experiences, as they related to the research question.

The coding process used was multi-faceted. To ensure the meanings developed belonged to the participants, and not from my own biases, I employed an in-vivo technique developing the initial codes using verbatim text from the transcripts (Saldana, 2016). To organize the data, I used a lumpers approach, taking smaller more numerous codes and merging them into larger more encompassing codes (Saldana, 2016). I then aligned codes to the research question through structural coding (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011; Saldana, 2016). Figures 4 and 5 below provide a visual representation of this process.

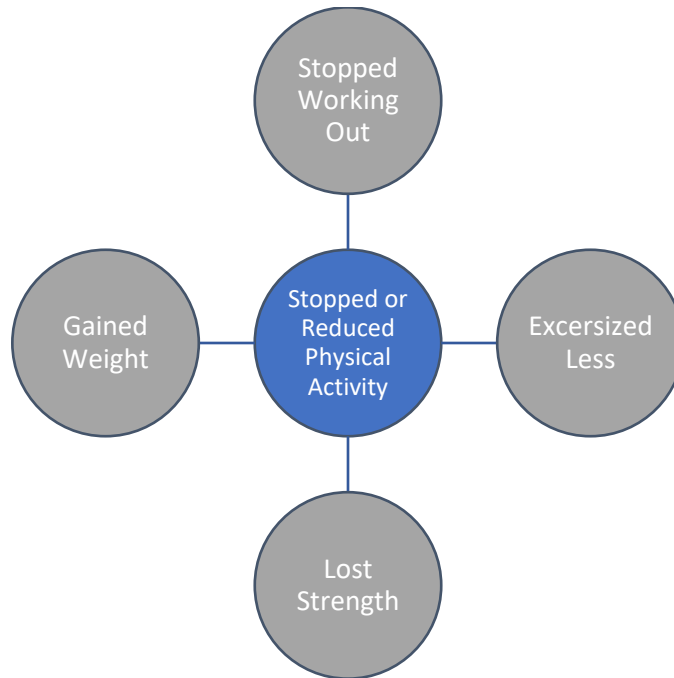


Figure 4: Visual interpretation of the coding process. Applied a lumpner strategy to the initial in-vivo or verbatim text, creating a larger more encompassing code from smaller more numerous ones. Created by Joshua Denhalter using Microsoft Word.

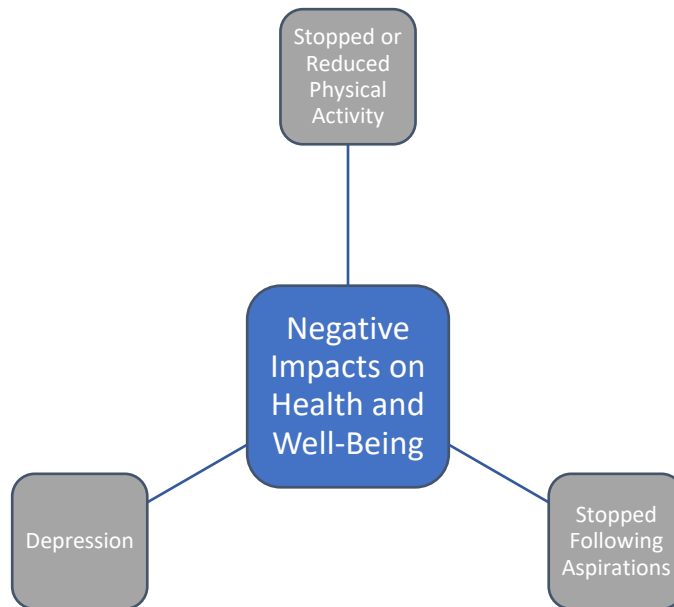


Figure 5: Visual representation of developed structural codes aligned to research questioned and grouped together to develop themes. Created by Joshua Denhalter using Microsoft Word.

Throughout this process raw data was compiled and used to identify prevalence in codes and in developing themes. During the focus group raw data was used to confirm results and probe for deeper understanding through member-checking techniques. The process of documenting the raw data consisted of creating a table that noted each time a code was presented during the individual interviews. Presentation of codes was documented for the focus group, however, not included in overall numbers since codes were introduced to participants. The occurrence of each code in comparison to total codes presented also aided in understanding the significance each code carried. When codes were merged, occurrences were also merged for the purpose of documenting the raw data. Table 2 below depicts the raw data collected.

Table 2

Raw Data Collected – Codes and Occurrences

Structural Codes	Total Times Presented	Total Times Presented (%)	Number of Participants that Presented (%)
Research Question: How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?			
(1) Lost Opportunities to Pursue Dreams and Goals	21	10.14%	100
(2) Lost Opportunities to Reduce Cost of Education	14	6.76%	100
(3) Decreased Academic Motivation	7	3.38%	83%
(4) Decreased Attendance or Dropping Out of College	7	3.38%	66%
(5) Declining Grades	4	1.93%	66%
(6) Plans Changed: Life, Football, Academic	21	10.14%	100%
(7) Change in Perspective	25	12.08%	100%
(8) Changes in Relationships: Teammates, Coaches, Friends, Family	12	5.80%	100%
(9) Unsure of What to Do: Lost, Confused, No Direction, No Control Over Situation	33	15.94%	100%
(10) Feelings of Grief: Loss, Sadness	22	10.63%	100%
(11) Feelings of Frustration – Angry, Stressed	18	8.70%	100%
(12) Depression, Stopped Pursuing Aspirations	14	6.76%	100%
(13) Stopped or Reduced Physical Activity	9	4.35%	66%
TOTALS:	207	100%	

Summary of Findings

Findings showed that student-athletes experienced impact from their community college football program being eliminated. While the meanings of the impact varied amongst the different student-athlete perspectives, overlapping experiences emerged. Through coding the transcribed interviews and focus group, these experiences developed into five common themes as they related to the research question: “How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?” Five themes regarding the impact on the student-athlete included how the student-athletes experienced:

1. Loss of opportunities to pursue dreams and goals.
2. Significant decrease in academic outcomes and results.
3. Forced life changes.
4. Emotionally challenging experiences.
5. Negative impacts to health and well-being.

The options available to the student-athletes to continue their academic and athletic careers created varying experiences through this period of change. Regardless of these variations, the five themes identified were common amongst all participants.

Overall, student-athletes experienced a loss of opportunities, including ones to pursue their dreams and aspirations. This loss created diminished levels of academic motivation, correlating in decreased academic outcomes and results. Student-athletes had forced life changes thrust upon them, which they felt they had no control over. Changes in student-athletes lives included moving to new states, changing schools, and an altered worldview. These experiences were emotionally challenging, with student-athletes experiencing a range of emotions from grief

and sadness to anger and frustration. Overall, the impact of their football program being eliminated put a strain on their health and well-being.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The purpose of this section is to present the data and results of the study, derived from the coding and theme-building process. As stated in Chapter 3, structural and elemental coding methods were used for their value with interview transcripts and application to the subjective meanings of participants (Saldana, 2016). Additionally, a lumpers strategy was employed, merging smaller more numerous codes into fewer big picture codes (Saldana, 2016). The five themes identified are examined from their relation to the research question, with subsections for the structural codes that make up each theme. Evidence from the transcripts is included with the use of direct quotes from participants, providing a more detailed and credible understanding of the structural codes (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Theme 1: Loss of Opportunities to Pursue Dreams and Goals.

Student-athletes indicated during interviews and in the focus group that the loss of opportunities impacted them significantly. Specifically, the lost opportunities to pursue their dreams and goals. The opportunities included those from both a football and academic perspective, as well as opportunities to reduce the cost of their education. Codes relating to lost opportunities made up over 17% of all codes. Each participant spoke about the lost opportunities they experienced in their interviews, and during the focus group student-athletes ranked this theme as the most significant impact from their football program being eliminated.

Structural Code 1: Lost Opportunities to Pursue Dreams and Goals. Student-athletes shared that the elimination of their community college football program impacted them through the loss of opportunities where they could pursue their dreams and goals. P6 stated, “I had

dreams, I had goals, and they just got shut down”. In the focus group student-athletes agreed that this was the biggest impact, explaining that football provided an opportunity to do something in life they couldn’t get elsewhere. Without football many opportunities, not just the ability to play a game, were lost to student-athletes. P5 stated “JUCO’s kind of a way for people to pick their families up out of the dirt in a lot of ways”, and “football’s their way out, and if there’s no football, then what are they going to do?”.

One of the dreams that participants shared was to have a career in football. Several stated an outward desire to make it the NFL and viewed these dreams as an opportunity to lift their families out of poverty. P6 stated, “I know my situation was I had a one-year-old at the time. That was my goal. My plan was to go to the NFL and give him a million and put it in his savings and then just have it add up.” P6 continued to explain that the financial windfall from making it the NFL would have altered his son’s life, “he would have money to go to college. He’d have something to fall back on”. P4 and P5 also stated a goal to go as far as they can with football, with hopes of either having a career playing or coaching. In his interview P5 stated, “I want to go to the league. Play in the NFL. That’s my dream, my end goal. I’m going to go until the wheels fall off and I can’t chase it no more”. Student-athletes felt that with their football program being eliminated, they also lost the most direct and effective route to their dreams and goals.

Student-athletes also expressed concern for future generations and what the elimination of the community college football program means to them. P3 felt that if kids didn’t get recruited out of high school and were financially limited, they didn’t have anywhere they could go to get a “shot”. The term “shot” was used often throughout the interviews and focus group. As a football coach I generally understood their meaning, but when asked to clarify P4 explained it as an opportunity “To prove you can play, get to a bigger school”. P3 expanded on this, “It really hurt

a lot of people, a lot us kids. That generation, the younger generation, it really hurt us. Basically, you need to get a scholarship (to a 4-year school) or you're done. Because there is no football here anymore (community college football)". In the focus group P4 further emphasized this same point, calling community college football a "second chance" and that the other options aren't realistic for those who are financially limited. P2 followed that comment by stating, "People are chasing dreams. Most of us are chasing a dream, or most of us were chasing a dream. And slowly but surely, its diminishing."

Structural Code 2: Lost Opportunities to Reduce Cost of Education. When their football program was eliminated student-athletes lost their athletic scholarships. For some student-athletes attending college was an opportunity they felt they lost as they were unable to continue without the scholarship. P6 stated, "I couldn't do it financially. Financially, I just couldn't.", P6 continued to later state, "I just didn't understand why they would take away an opportunity for people to succeed". P3 discussed losing his financial aid and its impact, "I am off financial aid, so it's rough. I had to take the year off to work, so I can pay it off". P2 believed he lost an opportunity to earn a scholarship to a better school, stating "I believe if we had another year, I would have potentially received more offers, more opportunity to play at a bigger school". With that opportunity gone, P2 saw himself prioritizing financial savings over educational quality and pursuing his dream of attending a better school.

One component that all participants spoke to was that community college offered a "shot to get film". When asked to clarify, participants explained that by getting film of their football abilities at the community college level, more opportunities could become available to play football at bigger schools. These opportunities typically came with scholarship money. P4 clarified this, stating that the point of community college football was, "Get your grades, get

your film, and get out”. P1, P2, P4, and P5 all received opportunities to play football at other schools when their program was eliminated. However, only P4 and P5 accepted these opportunities. P1 and P2 stated the opportunities they received didn’t have enough scholarship money, and to accept them they would have required they take on significant loans. They chose to stay at a community college to save money. P1, P2, P4, and P5 all felt that if they had another year in their program, they could have earned more scholarship offers and reduced their total cost of school while still pursuing their dreams and goals.

Theme 2: Significant Decrease to Academic Outcomes and Results.

Student-athletes experienced a significant decrease to their academic outcomes and results. Participants attributed these decreases to reduced levels of academic motivation. Decreased academic outcomes and results refer to declining attendance, dropping out of college, and declining grades. Most participants experienced decreased academic outcomes to varying degrees. Over 8% of total coded segments involved decreased academic outcomes.

Structural Code 3: Decreased Academic Motivation. Student-athletes directly connected the fallout of their lost opportunities to pursue their dreams to a decrease in academic motivation. Five of six participants stated that their concern for their academic outcomes decreased when their program was eliminated. P2 stated that he had to “refocus my goals to find another motivation to be in school”. P3 felt that there was no reason to continue “there was no point of going up there if there weren’t sports”. P5, who had opportunities lined up to keep playing football, didn’t feel his academic motivation decrease. P5 attributed his focus on academics to his need to keep good grades to qualify for the scholarships with his new football program. P5 clarified that while he had other motivators for school football was primary, “because more importantly, I love the game of football, and I knew the only way I could get to a

university was if I fixed my GPA and applied myself. There was no other way.” This resonated in the focus group with P4, who stated he felt his academic motivation drop initially, but it quickly rebounded when he got offered an opportunity at another football program. P4 explained, “I knew I needed a 3.0 to get more scholarship money”.

In the focus group student-athletes shared how when football was eliminated, their academic motivation decreased because their “why” behind academics was gone. P2 found ways to regain motivation through finding other reasons to stay in school, stating “Just kind of figuring out what interests me. What I was passionate about. That is why I chose exercise science, having played football all my life, athletics, things like that were always a big part of my life”. P4 and P5 found that their academic motivation returned when they found a new school to play football at. P1 stated, “I didn’t realize how lackadaisical I was being until I saw my GPA. I was like, I need to get on top of this. So, I’ll do way better next year than this year.” When asked if he was doing better, P1 felt that he had improved, but still was struggling to regain his motivation. P4 and P6 felt they needed to get back to school, but it wasn’t as big of a priority anymore in their lives. P6 clarified that when he started school, he struggled both from an academic and athletic perspective. This struggle affected his confidence and he almost quit, however, “(coach) came to my house and talked me out of it. They saw something in me that other people didn’t see”. When his program was eliminated P6 felt that “Once it got taken away from me, I thought, maybe it wasn’t for me. Maybe this was a sign”.

Structural Code 4: Decreased Attendance and Dropping Out of College. Four out of the six participants saw their attendance decrease following their football program being eliminated. P1 described his experience as “Classes were just a little harder to go to. It was a little harder. I missed a lot”. P2 said his attendance dropped, which he partly attributed to the

schedule that the football program had established being gone. P2 expanded by saying that before the program was eliminated his schedule was built around class, study hall, practice, weights, and film. Teammates provided additional support “In a lot of cases I had teammates in my classes. We would sit by each other. Study together, do homework together.” Additionally, football coaches were constantly stressing the importance of academics for student-athletes to continue playing football at a university. Without the support of a structured schedule, P2 said “without that structure, there just a lot of times I am not as motivated”. P1 said he stopped going as often, “I missed more classes this last year than I did in high school or at community college (before football was eliminated) combined. I was all over the place”.

Two of the six participants dropped out of college altogether. P3 stated that “I didn’t do so well. I was averaging a D and didn’t even finish the classes. I got dropped out of them and that’s when they cut my financial aid.” When asked about his plans, P3 stated he had a goal to get back in school in the fall, but he had things to take care of first. P6 at first reduced his classes “when I found out football was gone, I didn’t go full time, just part time”. P6 eventually dropped out of school altogether, “I kind of just started lacking. I started procrastinating. I wasn’t coming to class often. We got to the point where I just dropped classes”.

Structural Code 5: Declining Grades. Common sense would indicate that if student-athletes experience a decrease to their academic motivation, a drop in attendance, then they would also receive lowered grades. Participants found this to be the case, with four out of six stating that their grades dropped immediately following their football program being eliminated. P4 and P5 both maintained their academics while transitioning to a new football program, citing the requirements of their scholarships they received as motivation.

GPA is an often-used reflection of academic results, calculated directly from grades. Study participants saw a decrease to their GPA immediately after their program was eliminated. P1 explained that in high school he maintained a 3.8 GPA and during his first community college football season he earned a 3.5 GPA. However, P1's GPA dropped in the immediate term after football was eliminated. P1 stated, "Right now I have a 2.6 GPA. I have never had below a 3.0". When asked about his grades, P2 stated "they have actually declined for this last year". P2 had a similar experience with his GPA falling from around a 3.4 to below a 3.0. P3 and P6 both dropped out in the term after football ended and received incompletes or failing grades in their courses.

Theme 3: Forced Life Changes.

Student-athletes found themselves having to explore other options to accomplish their goals, which were often more difficult or burdensome. The forced changes referred to in this theme consists of student-athletes having changes in their life that they did not seek out or desire. These changes included: changes to their life plans, an altering of their perspectives, and shifting dynamics in their relationships. The codes associated with forced changes represents 27% of total codes.

Structural Code 6: Plans Changed: Life, Football, Academic. Every participant spoke about changes to their plans in their interviews and it was discussed at length in the focus group. Changes in plans refers to a student-athlete taking a different path due to direct impact from their community college football program being eliminated. These changes in plans encompassed different paths to accomplish both academic and football goals, as well as to their life as whole. In the interviews, changes to student-athletes plan made up 6% of all codes. In the focus group changes in plans was the most common code, slightly outpacing pursuit of dreams and goals.

Student-athletes felt that their football program being eliminated created forced changes to their life plans. P6 spoke about having to find a new path to accomplish his goals “I was unemployed, and I was really living off of financial aid and taking care of my son.”. P6 stated he needed to drop out of school and start working full time “I started working at my job now, I work in a gym daycare, I take care of a lot of kids”. P3 went through drastic changes trying to find a new path to success, stating “We’re still struggling right now. I have moved twice now, things still not going right. I am just trying to help a little bit. I got 3 jobs now, and man things have changed drastically”. P4 sought multiple opportunities to get film so he could continue playing football “I would call schools and ask them if I could just come out for spring ball to get film to send to universities”. P4 stated “I’d say it ruined my plans. Like I said, I wanted to do spring ball to get more film and scholarship money. Without that (film) I got less. That actually made me take jobs at nightclubs as a bouncer to get extra money because I was on a partial (scholarship)”.

With student-athletes football plans being changed, their daily routines became disrupted. P1 specifically mentioned that he lacked structure immediately following his program being eliminated, which impacted him significantly, “I wasn’t strong enough to make my own schedule”. P2 referred to how his schedule was mapped out with football, and without that schedule and his routines he struggled “I had my school scheduled out, my homework schedule figured out. Without these I became less productive”. P4 and P5 discussed how they had traditionally done spring ball to get film, and without that as an option they had to resort to alternatives. P4 reached out schools outside of his state, stating “So I reached out to JUCOs in Mississippi, California, just to see if I could come out for spring ball to get film to send to universities”. P5 felt with spring ball film he would have more options, without it, he ended up moving states to accept a new opportunity to continue playing football. P5’s network aided his

ability to find another school with limited film “One of my buddies from (school omitted) he got the opportunity first (at new school). And I didn’t know where I was going to go. I thought I was done with JUCO”. P5 stated he took the opportunity because “I didn’t really have any offers I wanted. So, I (thought) got one more year of eligibility, let’s get it done.”

With student-athletes football programs being eliminated, they were forced to either find another program to be involved in or stop their football pursuits. Of the six participants in my study, three participated in another football program the following year. P3 and P6 chose not play football because they were unable to accept the options available due to financial limitations with P3 stating, “I couldn’t afford it. Couldn’t afford it”. P2 had a partial scholarship offer that would have left him with significant student loans and required him to move his family across the country, with no other options he chose to stop playing football. When for clarification, P2 explained “Virginia is obviously very far away. Family reasons were a little part of it, but it was mainly financial reasons. Just trying to figure out how I was going to pay for the schooling”. P1 participated in a start-up JUCO league formed in his area after his program was eliminated. P1 stated that he had to pay to play in the league, occurring costs of over \$1000 to do so, and didn’t receive a scholarship. P1 chose to play even with the expense because “My plan was I am going to give this one more year (of football) and see if I can get a Div 1 offer. If I don’t, I am going to move on and probably hang up the towel (for football) and move on with my career in college”. P4 and P5 both took scholarship opportunities to play football in different states, however still had expenses that were uncovered. As of our interviews all six participants expressed a desire to still play football and they were still trying to find options to do so, one example of this came when P2 stated “I am actively searching for schools I could play at”.

Student-athletes experienced changes to their academic plans. Some of these changes were transferring schools, such as with P4 and P5. P6 changed programs stating, “I also changed my major. I went to general studies, just because I wanted to get school over with. I wasn’t following my aspirations. I was kind of going with what the easiest thing was. The easy route”. P6 ended up dropping out in that next term, not finishing his associate degree. P2 spoke to the need to change academic plans for motivation reasons, “Just try and place this passion that I had for the game of football into something else”. P2 changed his majors to Kinesiology and Exercise Science after finding enjoyment in power lifting, though he is still unsure if it can equal his passion for football.

Structural Code 7: Change in Perspective. A change to participants perspective and worldview was the 2nd most common code in interviews, occurring with all participants and receiving 12% of all codes. As a researcher I feel it is important to acknowledge that changes to someone’s worldview occur naturally throughout life. The change in perspectives coded were from a direct impact from student-athletes football program being eliminated. To ensure codes we in connection with the research question, I clarified with participants on why they experienced a change in their perspective, and how this differed than if they had stopped playing on their own accord. P2 went on a religious mission for 2-years, choosing to not pursue football. When I asked him how this experienced differed, he clarified, “When I stopped playing after high school for two years, I knew that in two years there was still going to be an opportunity to play football that was feasible. Here, in this situation, I knew that the opportunity really had been taken away”.

Student-athletes saw their perspectives change in a variety of ways. One common way was in how they viewed the importance of football. P2 felt that he had to reassess the role of

football in his life and come to terms that maybe that wasn't part of his future "I had to come to the realization that maybe I wasn't going to play football anymore. That was hard to accept, a hard pill to swallow. But I think (part of) the struggle of trying to find a life without football came from talking to coaches and other players going through the same thing. And just the positive attitude that football teaches you when things aren't going right, you seem to work through it and find the positive". P2 explained that this shift in perspective helped him recover some of his lost academic motivation as he sought after other passions and realized the importance of his schooling even without football. P1 had a similar experience, feeling the need to focus on what life would be without football, even as he participated in another season. This change also reemphasized the priority he placed on his academics, with football now coming second to his education, "I actually am getting a lot of D-II, D-III colleges talking to me. Which is awesome. I'm very grateful, but that wasn't part of my plan, if that makes sense. So, if football doesn't work out (scholarship to a preferred school), I will just go to (local university)". P5 saw his confidence increase, as he felt that if he could overcome this hurdle and still find a way to keep playing football, then he could overcome any obstacle. P5 stated, "the biggest thing that stuck with me is you can find a way through things". P5 also saw an increased value in education, and in how he feels he is more determined to make a career out of football, as either a player or coach.

Some participants cited this experience as changing how they saw other people. P4 stated that he saw teachers and school administrators in a new light, becoming distrustful. P4 expanded that before his program was eliminated, he didn't think he saw the true nature of people. This was significant to P4, who said that with football being eliminated a negative stigma developed surrounding football student-athletes, "They were bringing this up just to say football players had

bad character. There was a stereotype with us, they were attacking us”. From these experiences he became concerned of how others perceived and treated him differently because he was a football player. P4 expanded to state “They’re not there for you. They’re there for themselves, and they want to benefit themselves. Some people do have a good heart and are there for you. But at the same time, they need their piece of the pie. If their piece of the pie isn’t big enough, then they’ll cut corners”. P6 experienced a similar shift, become more inwardly focused, isolating himself. P6 stated that he felt that despite what school administrators said, he wasn’t a priority to them “Everyone has different lives. You don’t know whether they are poor, if they’re rich, if they have kids. You got to take into consideration everybody’s situations”. This shift in perspective made him feel like he needed to trust people less, waiting to see action and results first.

Structural Code 8: Changes in Relationships: Teammates, Coaches, Friends, Family. During student-athletes experiences after their football program was eliminated, all participants saw their relationships change. Changing relationships occurs normally on its own, however participants made the distinction that the change in their relationships was directly connected to the elimination of their football program. Codes for changes in relationships made up 6% of all codes during interviews with participants.

Participants felt that due to their football program being eliminated, their relationships with coaches and teammates ended prematurely and dramatically. One common element of concern amongst student-athletes was everybody was going in different directions and had to find new ways to take care of themselves. This was of significant concern to P4 who felt that his coaches were his connections and network to find additional opportunities. With the diminished relationship and everyone moving on, he feared losing these connections “I had fear for sure.

Because even though I knew I'd play somewhere, these coaches were also my ticket to talking to other coaches". P4 also lamented over how their relationships changed "I'm thousands of miles away from them. I mean, I still stay in touch with them on socials media and all that. But it's a little different when you can't just go in the coach's office and sit down and talk about what you did this week or what I need to improve on or these classes are hard, man. Can you send me somewhere to get some help? It's a little bit different". P5 brought up similar concerns in his relationships with teammates stating, "You played with those guys for two years, and then it's canceled. It's just going to be, where are they? You just hope the best for them.". P3 discussed how hard it was to go to the school and for all his teammates to just be gone, "Half of them, don't even see them no more".

Participants struggled at times in their relationships with family and friends because they couldn't understand why they were so impacted by losing their football program. While P1 felt that his personal impact might have been limited due to the financial support his family offered, his family also brought him internal conflict. His Dad pushed that maybe it was time to move on from football and his brother called his pursuits a waste of time. P1 clarified, "My Dad told me to get out of football. Well, he didn't tell me. He suggested maybe it was time to move on to more important things". These differences added stress to P1 familial relationships. P5 brought up how his family wanted him to consider other paths, but he disagreed stating, "It made me want to play football all that much more". Family and friends often interject opinions or offer their own advice. P6 explained how this can be challenging "My grandma is more of the support. She keeps asking, "Do you want to still play? You want to go to university?" My uncle, he's trying to get me to walk on at (local university), so he's helping with that. But other than that, those are kind of the main ones that still want to see me play. My sister's asking, "When you

going to step back out on the field?” I’m trying to play it off as like I’m trying, but I’m just kind of in-between if I want to still play or not”.

Theme 4: Emotionally Challenging Experiences.

Saying that student-athletes were emotionally impacted by their community college football program being eliminated doesn’t accurately reflect the significance of what was transcribed during the interviews. Emotionally challenging experiences included: feeling lost or unsure, feelings of grief and loss, and feelings of frustration and anger. Corresponding codes totaled more than 35% of all codes recorded. Every participant, whether they found a new program to continue with or not, voiced significant impact from the emotional experiences of losing their football program.

Structural Code 9: Unsure of What to Do: Lost, Confused, No Direction, No Control Over Situation. The most immediate aftermath of losing their football program led to student-athletes being unsure of what to do next. This was evident in raw data from interviews with 16% of all codes falling in this category. Student-athletes felt lost and confused, as if they had no direction in their lives, and no control over the situation. While P4 and P5 felt more confidence in their prospects, all participants identified with these emotions to some degree.

When asked how they felt immediately after their program was eliminated, student-athletes most often said “lost”. P2 stated “It was a confusing time. We didn’t really know what to do”. When asked how long he felt lost or confused P2 responded with, “a few solid months”. P3 had similar feelings, “I was lost. I felt like a ghost. I was just hovering around”. P6 said the experience “felt like a bad dream”. Participants felt lost regarding their direction and unsure of what to do next.

One aspect student-athletes cited regarding feeling lost was being unsure of their direction. P1 expressed uncertainty over football but was comfortable continuing on the same academic path “I really didn’t what to do with football, so I was just going to finish my classes at (same school)”. P4 was less certain “I had a game plan and then it was gone”. He didn’t initially know how to move forward. P2 echoed that sentiment, saying “Being a freshman and with the program (being eliminated) there was just kind of a lost feeling. I personally, and a lot of other freshman, felt because we had planned on being there for two years. We had planned to do our thing and hopefully perform well enough to make our way to a bigger school. And so, it was kind of a confusing time. We didn’t really know exactly what to do. I didn’t really know exactly what to do or what path to take”. P4 stated that he knew when the season was over he was going to be able to continue to play football because he had scholarship offers, but speculated that had he not had those offers he felt that “it would be a real tragic time. I don’t know what I would do because football’s the only that kept me in school, kept me out of trouble. Football taught me about life, family, teamwork.”. He continued later to say that “it would be real dark times for me if football, really, honest to God, was gone.”

Student-athletes spoke to their lack of control over the situation. P5 felt shocked by the suddenness of it all “it was kind of a shock because there’s rumors being thrown around, and I just thought we would get one more season, and then it was for sure done”. P5 also felt he couldn’t do anything to prevent it “People just didn’t seem to care much. They didn’t think it would impact people”. When asked to clarify his feelings over the situation, P5 stated “They shouldn’t have cancelled it. That would have been best. But if they had to cancel it, they should have given people and alternate route to continue”. P6 also lamented over the unwillingness of school administrator to work with them and come to a compromise, “What did we need that we

couldn't get? At least let us come to a compromise. It happened. There's no going back, I wish there was, but there isn't". He continued to state that getting to a point where he could accept the fact that it happened and he can't change it, took him a significant amount of time, and over a year later was still struggling with it. P1 reflected that if he could, he would ask school administrators why they eliminated the football program. When asked to clarify what he was looking for in response, P1 stated "I don't know if you know this, but I'm not an emotional guy. I don't tell people my feelings. I wouldn't go up to somebody and tell them what I feel. I would ask them why they did it." P1 continued, "So, if somebody was being a jerk to me, I wouldn't go up to them and say, "You've hurt me a lot!", because I think that gives them power. I would ask, "Why are you being this way?" Does that make sense?"

Structural Code 10: Feelings of Grief: Loss, Sadness. Participants expressed grief from the elimination of their football program. This code includes feelings of grief such as loss and sadness. At times student-athletes would offer this insight into the emotions bluntly and directly. Most often I had to ask for clarification for participants to acknowledge their own grief felt throughout this experience. Feelings of grief represented 11% of all codes recorded.

Feelings of grief are often associated with death or significant loss. To participants, many felt this way regarding their football program being eliminated. P2 spoke to how there was a unique bond between his teammates, due to a shared understanding of the pain from losing their dream "I think the people that were there were there because they loved football. And when you lose something you love there are going to be side effects. Feelings of loss, depression". P4 felt a sense of loss due to his relationships with his teammates and coaches, knowing that those relationship wouldn't ever be the same, stating "They literally just fall off the face of the Earth. You want to know what happened to them, make sure they are ok. Some got jobs, some people

went in different directions”. When asked to clarify his feelings P6 stated “I miss football. I miss my friends”.

Feels of sadness persisted for many student-athletes. Several participants described these feelings as lasting for several months or more. P2 stated he still feels it whenever “football is discussed”. P2 continued to explain “I have a brother that coaches football, and played in college, so whenever I talk to him or even see any college football or NFL, I’m just kind of being reminded of it all really, just kind of resurfaces those emotions”. P3 said that he went to the stadium a few months after his football program was eliminated and was overcome with sadness. Clarifying he said, “They gave it up. They gave up on us”. When asking P5 if finding a new school to play football impacted his emotions from his previous football program being eliminated, he stated “The sadness is still there. I still think about it. Why would they take that away?”. P6 echoed P5 feelings in his own interview stating, “I still have them (feelings of sadness) today, I just don’t understand why they’d take away an opportunity for people to succeed. Especially guys who couldn’t afford a four-year (university)”.

Structural Code 11: Feelings of Frustration: Angry, Stressed. Predictably, student-athletes felt feelings of frustration including anger and stress from their football program being eliminated. Every participant stated experiencing feelings of frustration during their interview, making up 9% of all codes recorded.

Participants expressed feelings of frustration that were based in anger. P2 identified that his feelings of sadness quickly turned to feelings of frustration and anger that his dream was taken away. When asked how long this lasted, P2 stated that he still finds himself getting frustrated whenever conversations turn to football, “whenever the subject turns to football”. Clarifying, P2 stated that he believes he becomes frustrated to avoid feeling sad. P4 stated that he

felt frustrated and angry because he believed somebody had hurt his family, his teammates “It (football) benefitted so many people it was ridiculous. It was just a whirlwind of emotions. Sadness, and then an anger towards them (school administrators). Why are they shutting down the programs? Where are my teammates going to go? Where is my coach going to go?”. For P4, seeing some of his teammates getting scholarship offers tempered his frustrations. When P6 was asked how he felt, he simply declared “I was angry”. When asked to clarify P6 explained, “I was angry, more disappointed than angry, but I just didn’t feel like me when I didn’t have football. Football has always been that go to for me. It’s been a release for a lot of things, like stress”. P4 felt angry because he didn’t believe the reasons given about why the program was being eliminated, stating, “I was angry because we found out everything was a lie. They were talking about how they didn’t have the funds for the cost to refurbish the stadium and get new equipment. It was a lie the whole time. We had the money to keep JUCO. The reason they wanted to take it away is because of us as football players, we were their (administrators) target. We have a bad outlook or grades or something”.

Participants also expressed frustration due to feelings of stress and anxiety. Student-athletes explained that most of the stress and anxiety came from not knowing what they were going to do, at times feeling helpless. P2 spoke to the unknown as a source of stress, explaining “it was kind of a stressful time figuring out what I was going to do”. P2 attributed part of this stress to “figuring out how to pay for school” with the loss of his scholarship. P2 also stated feeling stress and frustration because “there was nothing that we could do”. P3 also voiced frustration over feeling helpless “I feel like they failed us. They failed us”. P3 clarified that he was stressed and “I didn’t know what to do”. Frustrations were also discussed at length during the focus group. P4 commented “It caused stress. It affected my stress because I did not know

what was next. I trust God. And he has a plan. And we got through it. But it was a dark time”. P5 connected with P4 comments saying “There was a little bit of, I wouldn’t say hopelessness, but a little bit of like a restlessness. I was restless to find the answer to the path that I was going to take in the future. So, it was definitely a confusing time”.

Theme 5: Negative Impacts to Health and Well-Being

A common theme in the interviews was that participants referenced experiences that could only be described as detrimental to their health and well-being. I am not a medical professional. Therefore, I do not feel it appropriate to diagnose or offer insight into what conditions participants did or didn’t have. As these experiences directly addressed the research question, I have included codes exploring depression and physical health, as stated by participants. These experiences made up 11% of all codes recorded.

Structural Code 12: Depression, Stopped Pursuing Aspirations. Throughout interviews participants made statements declaring they were depressed, that they stopped following their aspirations, and that they felt tired. These codes made up 7% of the recorded codes and were found in all six interviews.

Participants expressed their experiences differently regarding their health and well-being. P1 openly admitted he struggled when talking about emotions. Regarding his personal happiness P1 stated “I was happier (at his community college)”. When asked to clarify P1 struggled to explain, but stated “I mean, I was never depressed. I was never feeling bad for myself. I mean, I guess I kind of am now”. P2 stated he felt “a depressing feeling, that there wasn’t any hope for football”. When asked how he deal with that feeling P2 explained he “just tried to fill the void with something else”. P3 felt that things were hard stating “I stopped going after my goals”. P4 felt that “those were dark times, dark feelings”. When asked to clarify, he said people were

depressed. P5 found himself praying for help to keep moving forward. When P5 thought he wouldn't find another program to play football he explained "I thought I was done because I didn't really have the opportunities to play anymore. That was kind of a sad time. Kind of depressing". P6 stated "I had depression in high school. I lost a really good friend of mine and so football was kind of an escape for me". When asked how he was adjusting to the loss of football P6 stated, "I am getting better. I'm not as depressed as I was". P6 also still felt feeling of sadness and depression, "I'm not crying about it every night, but I still think about it here and there. It'll bum me out".

Structural Code 13: Stopped or Reduced Physical Activity. Three of the six participants stopped playing collegiate football. Those three participants noted in their interviews that they had stopped or reduced their physical activity to varying degrees and noticed an impact. These codes made up 4% of total codes.

Reductions in physical activity differed amongst participants. P2 explained that he had "just kind of stopped working out because we weren't sure we were going to keep playing". P2 felt that because he stopped strenuous physical activity in the months after his program was eliminated, he lost strength. By the time of the interview, P2 had found a passion for powerlifting and was exercising frequently again. P3 was more direct in his assessment of his physical health classifying the physical impact as "Negative. Negatively. I used to be about 320. Now I'm like 410. So, I put a lot of pounds on". P3 explained his playing weight was much lower "I got to get the weight back down to my healthy size, which was 290. Get down to that size. I'll be fine. Got to lose a lot of weight". He was concerned about his health, and said he needed to do something to change it "I know I need to get down to a healthier size, lose a lot of weight". P3 also had experienced injuries that were limiting his physical capabilities while trying out for a semi-pro

football team. P6 explained the impact to his health “I’m just not as strong as I used to be. A lot of things seem a bit heavier than when I was lifting weights. I need to start working out more.”. P6 also stated that recently his medical doctor said “My blood pressure is a bit high, my doc said. So, I need to work on getting some cardio”.

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter served to present the data and results from this qualitative case study, addressing the research question, “How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?”. The data collection process was explained and discussed in detail. Six student-athletes were interviewed with five of those same student-athletes participating in a focus group. Participant demographics was detailed in Table 1. The strategies used to analyze the data and develop codes was discussed and thoroughly explained, and visually presented with both graphics and tables.

This study employed multiple coding methods. Participants verbatim responses were used to create initial codes through in-vivo techniques. A lumpers pattern approach was taken, combining numerous codes into larger big picture codes. A visual representation of in-vivo and lumpers process is given in Figure 4. Structural coding was used to align and shape codes to emerging themes, with a visual provided in Figure 5. Presentation of the data and results of the five themes that emerged was given. Student-athletes experienced impact from the elimination of their community college football program through:

1. Loss of opportunities to pursue dreams and goals.
2. Significant decrease in academic outcomes and results.
3. Forced life changes.
4. Emotionally challenging experiences.

5. Negative impacts to health and well-being.

Each theme consisted of multiple structural codes, with 13 structural codes in total. The structural codes were detailed, with the data was presented in a narrative form. Raw data of structural code occurrence and frequency was listed in Table 2.

Chapter 5 will consist of continuing the detailed analysis of the results and themes found in this study. Study results will be explored and examined for connection to the literature, key themes, and the conceptual framework supporting the study. Discussion will also occur regarding the implication of this study's finding, and how future studies can further the understanding of the impact on a student-athlete when their football program is eliminated.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the themes that formed from the data collected, and thoroughly discuss the results. Furthermore, this chapter will explore connections to the research question, the conceptual framework, and the literature collected in Chapter 2. Implications of how this study could impact future student-athletes will be explored. Additionally, areas for further research that can deepen our understanding will be addressed.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to explore how eliminating community college football programs have impacted student-athletes. Available literature provides data-rich evidence of the positive impact participation in extracurriculars can have (Filsinger, 2012; Rainer, 2009; Redalen, 2017; Skaza, 2013). However, limited data is available on what occurs when a program is eliminated. The studies that have been conducted do not seek to understand the student-athletes perspective (VanRheenan, 2011; Suggs, 2003). This gap in the literature led to the development of my research question, “How does elimination of a community college football program impact student-athletes?”.

To address this gap in the literature, and to answer the research question, it was crucial that this study explored the impact from the student-athletes perspective. Supported by research, this study took a non-positivist position and social constructivism framework (Creswell, 2018). To develop understanding this study interpreted the subjective meanings of participant experiences, acknowledging that the own objectives of the research would impact findings (Creswell, 2018). Steps taken to ensure dependability and reliability, including address potential researcher bias, were addressed in Chapter 3.

This study sought to understand the perspective of student-athletes from a specific event, the elimination of community college football programs for an entire community college district in a geographical area. This event occurred within the last year of this study starting. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative case study provided the best design and is research supported (Creswell, 2018; Harrison et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). Recruitment efforts sought to create a diverse sample, including multiple perspectives. Additionally, criteria were established to define the potential sample. A more detailed discussion regarding recruitment and sample procedures is outlined in Chapter 3. Ultimately, six participants were interviewed. All were invited to participate in a focus group seeking to further the understanding of experiences explored in interviews, five of the participants were able to attend.

Coding of the interviews and focus group occurred using both transcripts and recordings. Transcripts were acquired from a professional transcription company. I sought to create a “data-analysis spiral”, using an in-vivo approach to create the initial codes verbatim from the responses of participants (Creswell, 2018; Saldana, 2016). I then used a lumpers approach to combine similar codes and aligned these codes to the research question through structural coding (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011; Saldana, 2016). Member-checking techniques were used to validate the accuracy of findings, leading to the emergence of 5 themes. The specific structural codes and theme-building process used is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, themes developed are listed below.

1. Loss of opportunities to pursue dreams and goals.
2. Significant decrease in academic outcomes and results.
3. Forced life changes.
4. Emotionally challenging experiences.

5. Negative impacts to health and well-being.

Discussion of Results

A generally known male stereotype indicates a reluctance to talk about personal feelings. In my own personal experiences as a male, both in the Marine Corps and in sport environments, I have experienced this stereotype to be often true. As such, participants initially appeared hesitant to talk about their own personal impact. Some of their initial comments referred to the impact for others, using words such as “we” and “us”. When pushed to clarify they would often refer to a personal experience as an example, therefore making the inclusion of their personal impact permissible. During the rapport building stage of each interview, I would introduce myself as a former football player and a current coach. When this connection was made, participants appeared more comfortable sharing their experiences with me. I observed participants take a more relaxed approach, with participants often sitting back more comfortably in their chair and using with more frequency terminology common in football culture. Participants would at times use phrases such as “oh, so you understand” or “you get it”. Often after this connection was made participants would speak to their experiences more directly, enriching the meaning garnered from their experiences.

The focus group also greatly enhanced the depth of this study. I was able to clarify and confirm common findings from individual interviews, using member-checking techniques to validate and enrich the 5 themes. In the group setting, participants connected with each other and identified their shared experiences. At one-point participants specifically talked about how they all went through this unique experience together, connecting them. As a collective group they stressed the importance of keeping in touch and supporting each other. This created an environment where the participants spoke openly about their experiences, identifying which

experiences were most impactful and why. This enriched the accuracy of the study's results as participants spoke directly to the emerging themes, ranking and clarifying their impact.

The student-athletes participating in this study were all in uniquely different places in their lives. Despite their difference's each student-athlete expressed that the elimination of their community college football program had a significant personal impact. The purpose of this section is to discuss my interpretations of the findings detailed in Chapter 4. Research objectives, as well as practical and theoretical implications, will be explored in connection with the interpretations. This section is organized by the five themes that were developed and detailed in Chapter 4.

Theme 1: Loss of Opportunities to Pursue Dreams and Goals.

Participants were attending community college to pursue their dreams and goals. Community college football provided an opportunity for student-athletes to, in their words, "get someplace else". This "someplace else" meant different things to each participant, but essentially equated a better position in life. While not all said it bluntly, student-athletes were chasing after their "shot" at being a professional athlete. Some were wanting to play football and attend the local Division 1 University. Others were trying to get reduced education cost to any 4-year school. For the most financially limited, the local community college presented their only option to both pursue their dreams and escape their current conditions through education. The elimination of their football programs took away opportunities that were previously available to help them pursue their dreams and goals. This was the most significant impact and glaringly evident in the findings.

It is commonly known that the likelihood of becoming a professional athlete is extremely rare. The student-athletes in the study acknowledged this, with an understanding that it was

unlikely they would have gone on to play football professionally. The unlikelihood of this possibility did not make their pursuit any less meaningful to these student-athletes. Student-athletes were pursuing their dreams, and the opportunity was taken from them. In the focus group, P5 stated, “We were chasing dreams. We were playing ball to go somewhere”. Like it would a film major dreaming of becoming a producer, or a business major hoping to own his own company, this lost opportunity significantly impacted these student-athletes.

Student-athletes also lost an opportunity for reduced cost of furthered education. The degree of impact from losing scholarship funding and future potential scholarship funding varied based on the background differences amongst participants. However, all participants saw an immediate increase in their educational expenses. For some, this cost was marginalized by their ability to obtain another opportunity to play football at another school. For those without this opportunity, they were left with choosing to stop their pursuit of their football dreams or occurring significant financial costs to do so.

This study didn’t specifically seek to differentiate impact based on variances amongst participants demographics or socioeconomic status. However, it was impossible to not observe how the elimination of their community college football program impacted some populations more significantly than others. The two African American males in this study both identified themselves as financially limited, with minimal family support. One was a father, and the other was trying to help support his grandmother who raised him. Both participants not only abandoned their football dreams at the loss of this opportunity but were forced to stop attending college. Neither could afford to continue. Demands to their time as well as limited awareness of financial aid opportunities played a role in this decision. Both players spoke to now being in debt to the school after their scholarship was revoked.

Ample evidence exists on how education can elevate individuals out of poverty. Poverty itself is a predictor for incarceration rates and life expectancy. It is impossible to understand the full impact that eliminating these student-athletes community college football program had for these student-athletes without further observing their life trajectories. Plainly put, the fallout could alter the course of these student-athlete's lives. Those student-athletes with more financial backing and family support were better equipped to deal with these consequences, disproportionately impacting their teammates without.

Theme 2: Significant Decrease to Academic Outcomes and Results.

Student-athletes attributed their decreased academic outcomes to a drop in academic motivation. Our personal intrinsic motivation impacts the level of effort we apply. Unsurprisingly, the loss of their football programs affected student-athletes ability to remain committed to their academics. Student-athletes were left unsure of their direction, and the priority they placed on their academics dropped. P3 explained that without football "there was no point". The decrease in academic motivation led to a significant decline in academic outcomes.

Student-athletes are required to take a certain number of credits and maintain a minimum GPA to qualify for scholarships and remain academically eligible to participate in athletics. The credit minimum and GPA required can vary between athletic conferences and school classifications. Additionally, football student-athletes were trying to earn a scholarship to a university, which had higher academic requirements. While not the primary motivator for all student-athletes, these requirements kept them moving forward in their academic direction.

Student-athlete's lives were scheduled around football, which mandated the need to go to class and study hall. Coaches constantly reminded them to keep their grades up, because even the best football players couldn't play at the Div 1 level without grades. When football was

eliminated student-athletes were left searching for other reasons to continue academically. P2 explained that after his football program ended, he needed “another motivation to keep going to college”.

Finding new motivations to continue school didn’t occur seamlessly for all student-athletes. Student-athletes able to continue with a scholarship at an alternative football program saw their academic motivation reinvigorated. These student-athletes didn’t see an overall decrease to their academic outcomes because their pursuit of their goals and dreams wasn’t eliminated, only momentarily interrupted. P4 described this experience as an initial drop, but once he realized he was going to continue to play football he found his academic motivation increase stating, “I worked even harder because I knew I needed a 3.0 GPA to get more scholarship money”.

Outcomes of student-athletes who didn’t continue with football scholarship opportunities saw more significant impact on their academic outcomes. This impacted those with limited financial capabilities and less family support disproportionately. Student-athletes who could financially afford college and whose families pushed them to continue, found either new motivations or kept going to school because of their family’s encouragement. These student-athletes saw a drop in GPA, and while it varied, was at least a .5 drop to their overall college GPA. This drop in GPA can be attributed to the loss of the schedule and purpose their football program provided. P2 discussed how losing his football program impacted his focus and altered his schedule, “I felt that I’ve struggled with that simply because there’s no time pertaining goal that I am focus on”. Regarding his schedule P2 added that he had to figure out how to accomplish things that used to just be scheduled, “Now, without that structure there’s a lot of times where I am just not as motivated to do things”. The sacrifice required to continue school

for these student-athletes was minimal. While the loss of their football program continued to impact them, the encouragement from their families stressed the importance of completing their college education. Either by their own choice or due to the promptings of their families, those student-athletes with the financial capabilities to do so, continued going to school.

Student-athletes who lacked the family and financial support dropped out of college because they couldn't justify the sacrifice to continue. These student-athletes found more pressing priorities, such as aiding their families financially. Some of these student-athletes had children of their own. Without a scholarship, financially limited student-athletes didn't see themselves attending a university. Without football to offset the community college cost and provide hope for a scholarship to a university, or a career in football, they found the sacrifice required to continue towards their Associate degree too much. These student-athletes dropped out of college in the term immediately after their program ended, with failing grades on their transcripts and owing debt to the school. The debt and poor transcripts will and have impacted their abilities and desires to continue school in the future.

Theme 3: Forced Life Changes.

Change is a common part of life, something we all must learn how to incorporate into our lives. Unwanted or forced change is not an exception to this. However, the validity of change itself creating impact is supported by both Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and the Kubler-Ross Change Model (KRM), which serve to provide the theoretical backing for this study (Kubler-Ross, 1969; Mezirow, 1991). The forced changes that impacted student-athletes most with their community college football program being eliminated was having to search for other pathways to accomplish their dreams and goals, perpetuating further life changes. These experiences also created significant change in the worldviews of student-athletes.

Student-athletes committed to pursuing their football goals were left scrambling to find another program to participate in, prioritizing this component of their life over essentially all others. For those unfamiliar with collegiate football, this isn't an easy pursuit. As a high school football coach, my experience is that very few student-athletes receive college scholarship offers out of high school. On an annual basis most successful high school football programs have a small handful, 3-4, receive offers. To complicate matters, not all offers are the same. Some scholarship offers pay for the entire cost of education and can even include allowances for living expenses. However, many offers to schools outside of Div 1 do not cover all or even most of the cost of education. Student-athletes in this study encountered this very scenario. P2 declined a scholarship offer to a university because it covered less than half of the tuition costs and would have still left him with educational expenses exceeding \$10,000 annually. P2 chose to stop pursuing his football dream because he couldn't justify the additional educational expenses.

Those student-athletes who received offers were faced with a multitude of potential life changes to simply continue with the path they had previously been on. P5 pursued a scholarship opportunity at another community college, hoping to get exposure that would allow him to receive a scholarship to a Div 1 school. Choosing to continue with football forced him to search for another school, and once he found one, he had to move to another state. This took him away from his current environment, leaving behind his support network of family and friends. P4 chose a similar path, accepting a partial scholarship to a university in another state. P4 was able to make this decision because of the financial support from his family, however, he lamented over the fate of his teammates, "Some of these guys I thought were going D1 or D2. But their careers just ended because they might not have had the financial support."

Student-athletes experienced a change in their worldviews, or perspective, from their community college football program being eliminated. TLT predicts that within meaningful experiences learning occurs and worldviews can be altered, redefining meaning schemes (Hodge, 2014; Mezirow, 1991). Student-athletes experiences' following their community college football program were meaningful and significant, as such, changes to perspectives were found and discussed with all participants. Predictably these alterations in student-athlete worldviews and meaning schemes varied.

While the change in student-athletes worldviews varied, some common perspectives developed. One common development was a lack of trust, preferring to see action and results first. One demonstration of this came from P4 when upon being asked to clarify how his perspective changed, he stated, "Nobody really cares about you. They just care more about themselves to be honest with you". A lack of trust in school administrators, and their intentions, was exhibited from all participants.

The importance of football in student-athletes lives also changed. Those who chose to stop pursuing football often lowered the priority they placed on their football dreams, while increasing the value of academics. One example came when P1 stated, "I would say don't depend on football so much, because they could just end up cancelling it". P2 discussed exploring new fields and passions, looking for another academic motivator besides football. P2 also reflected on the experience as a whole, "I think it's definitely been a year of change and kind of reevaluating myself and looking at different passions that I haven't thought of before or reevaluating myself as a person, as more than just playing football".

Those who chose to continue pursuing their football dreams placed an increased importance on football. P4 stated that he would pursue his dreams of playing professionally until

“my body breaks down”. P5 felt that the ability to overcome his recent hurdles made him feel that he could reach his football goals, stating, “you can find a way. And I think that stuck in my mind after I left. There’s a way and that I did find that way”. While P4 and P5 both acknowledged that a career as a professional football athlete was not likely to occur, they still found value and pride in their new sense of determination and perseverance.

Adversely, student-athletes who were limited by their financial and family situations became more discouraged in their outlook on the world. P3 expressed feeling like he didn’t have a choice, while others did. Specifically, P3 felt that school administrators pursued a choice they knew was wrong, stating “They have choices if they want to do right or if they don’t want to do right in life. But I guess the people didn’t want to do right, and they took all of this away”. P6 expressed similar frustrations, feeling as if the options he had to change his life weren’t realistic. The lack of choices perceived by P3 and P6 impacted how they saw their prospects in life now as compared to what expectations they had before their program was eliminated.

Theme 4: Emotionally Challenging Experiences.

The elimination of community college football programs impacted student-athletes through emotionally challenging experiences. With their football program gone, student-athletes were unsure of their direction in life, feeling as if they lacked purpose with no control to change their situation. Student-athletes also experienced feelings of extreme loss, grief, anger, and frustration. The Kubler-Ross Model (KRM) is a theoretical framework for this study. The KRM indicates that when individuals encounter sudden change and loss, they move through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-ross, 1969). These stages are not considered linear, and individuals can vary in the order they move through them. Some may move through multiple stages simultaneously. Participants in this study discussed

their emotions and actions as they moved through these stages, though they were unaware they were doing so.

Student-athletes found out their football program was going to be eliminated either before or during their final season. This decision led to action by the players and coaches at these community colleges. Football student-athletes, coaches, concerned faculty, and members of the community connected to the four campuses worked together to fight this decision by the community college district administrators. These efforts were exhaustive, and eventually led to a lawsuit that was dismissed when student-athletes and coaches ran out of funds to continue. Throughout this fight to keep their football programs, student-athletes convinced themselves they could win. When it was over, they found themselves lost, confused, and unsure how to continue.

With student-athletes football season over and coming to the realization their football program was officially eliminated, student-athletes found their entire world turned upside down. Their scheduled and structured world, that propelled them forward towards their collective goals was gone. Their friends, teammates, and coaches were gone or would be gone. All this occurred before student-athletes could figure out what their next steps were. Common emotions felt by participants during this time were “lost”, “confused”, “frustrated”, “angry”, “sad”. P2 stated that he felt abandoned. P6 couldn’t understand why the school would make a decision that would impact so many. As student-athletes dealt with these emotions, life occurred. Decisions were made, some found other programs, some stayed in school, and others dropped out. Through it all, student-athletes reflected on it with feelings that they had lost something. During the focus group participants discussed this, and felt they shared in a collective loss, which created a bond amongst them.

It is difficult to quantify the impact these challenging emotions had on student-athletes, other than to simply state they felt them. Throughout all our lives, we have felt feelings of grief, loss, sadness, and frustration. Understanding student-athletes felt these emotions should by itself communicate the emotional impact during this experience. From my perceptions, the most accurate correlation to how student-athletes emotionally experienced the loss of their football program, is akin to how someone would feel at the loss of a loved one. Participants described this time with phrases such as: “felt like a bad dream”, “I felt like a ghost”, “I was just going through the motions”. When asked to clarify his emotions, P2 stated, “On paper it doesn’t seem like a very big deal, but to me being impacted by it, it was a big deal to me”.

Theme 5: Negative Impacts to Health and Well-Being.

As someone who isn’t a medical professional, therefore unqualified to diagnose, I took the student-athletes declarations regarding their health to develop my understandings. Student-athletes experienced significant negative impact to their health and well-being due to their community college football program being eliminated. This impact was both to their mental and physical health. The impact experienced by student-athletes varied, with those finding new football programs seeing the least impact. Student-athletes who were financially limited and lacking in familial support saw the biggest impact.

Student-athletes experienced a negative impact to their mental health. All participants spoke to this and used the word “depression”. Participants also identified that they felt both stress and anxiety during this experience. Student-athletes who found new football programs communicated that these new opportunities helped to curb these feelings. Student-athletes also felt their families played a role as to what severity their mental health was affected. Those with supportive families felt they were encouraged and heard. They expressed their loved ones helped

anchor them during this experience and limited the impact of their depression. P2 specifically identified his wife as helping him “deal with the emotions that come from the loss of your dreams”. Adversely, participants whose families were less supportive felt “isolated”, “alone”, “abandoned”. These participants expressed feeling “tired”, and that their depression ultimately impacted their physical health as well. Feelings of depression while experiencing loss or grief is supported by the KRM (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

Most participants experienced minimal to no impact to their physical health, however for those who did the impact was significant. Those who continued to another football program felt their physical health had improved, while other participants noted they worked out less frequently. Those with limited financial and familial support who saw the most significant mental health impact, also experienced significant impact to their physical health. P3 and P6 stated they gained weight, with P3 explaining he had gained over 100lbs in 1 years’ time. P6 stated that his medical doctor recently told him his blood pressure was too high. The depression these student-athletes experienced, led to them becoming idle. They stopped working out, ate more, and spent their free time playing video games. P3 and P6 stated a desire to get healthier and get in better shape, but felt they had significant hurdles now in their way.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

This study conducted an exhaustive literature review. The purpose of this study was to explore how eliminating community colleges football programs impacted student-athletes. The rationale for the literature review was to develop an understanding as to how student-athletes are impacted by participating in extracurriculars, therefore, developing starting points for exploring potential impact from their program being eliminated. Additionally, this study sought out literature that examined what occurred when an extracurricular program was eliminated. The

limited literature available failed to explore impact from the student-athletes perspective. This gap in the literature led to the development of the purpose and research questions for this study.

The literature reviewed examined how students were impacted by participating in extracurriculars, both academically and non-academically. Specific attention was also paid to literature that was sport specific, as well as any study that examined a program that was eliminated. This section will discuss how the results of this study relate to the literature in the following areas: community of practice, the body of the current literature, and its relation to the community of scholars.

Relationship to the Community of Practice

It is important to acknowledge the many groups that could be included in this community of practice. The results of this study are certainly relevant to football student-athletes as well as those in the football community such as coaches and families. However, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact on student-athletes in order to provide data-rich evidence for school administrators who may face a similar decision. For this purpose, the main community of practice for this study is school administrators.

The primary perspective in the literature is of the academic impact of extracurricular programs. This perspective is valuable to school administrators who are tasked with allocating finite school resources. Available literature indicated that those participating in extracurricular programs saw improved GPA's, test scores, student engagement levels, retention rates, and lowered dropout rates (Filsinger, 2012; Gayles, 2009; Moltz, 2009; Wilcock, 2012). This study can't corroborate with data-rich evidence that participants benefitted in the above-mentioned areas from participation in their football program. However, this study does present clear data-

rich evidence that most student-athletes whose football program was eliminated suffered significant negative impact in those same areas.

Most community colleges seek to serve their community. In general, community colleges are the most affordable and available educational opportunities. For those with financial limitations, their local community college may be their only realistic option for furthering their education. Available literature specifically addresses the benefits to low-income, high risk students, who participate in extracurriculars (Rainer,2009; Wilcock, 2012). Participation in football was found to develop greater outcomes for high risk students, including graduation rates and literacy development (Rainer, 2009; Segal, 2013). This study found supporting evidence that the impact of eliminating their community college football program disproportionately affected those participants with limited financial options and less family support. Of the participants involved in this study, those who would commonly be considered high risk students in the academic environment were the only ones to drop out of college completely, citing no available option to continue.

Relationship to the Literature

The literature showed significant positive impact for students participating in extracurriculars. This impact in the literature extended beyond the boundaries of academic outcomes. Likewise, the results of this study indicate that student-athletes are also adversely impacted from the elimination of their football program in areas outside of academics.

Literature available provides evidence that students participating in extracurriculars are benefitted significantly in the relationships they form. Specifically, in relationships with peers and coaches. Studies showed that these benefits include making friends with likeminded individuals who share a motivation for success (Camire,2013; Forneris, 2015; Rainer, 2009).

Relationships with coaches aided in the development of values and character traits (Skaza, 2014). These relationships often help to steer students towards positive life choices. In Rainer's (2009) study, high risk students identified football as the primary contributor to the development of positive relationships, both with peers and coaches, aligning participants with others who had similar goals. While the relationships of participants in this study weren't closely examined, it was found that participants were all pursuing similar goals. Participants also expressed concern over how their teammates were doing, and how the elimination of football would impact future generations. While this study doesn't provide data-rich evidence confirming previous literature, this study does offer complimentary support and didn't find any contradictory results.

Literature also identified sports, including football, as a positive contributor to the overall health and well-being of its participants (Belton, 2017). Findings included better overall psychological health, increased levels of physical activity, and a decreased likelihood of obesity for those participating in sports (Belton, 2017). The findings of this study strongly support the literature. The elimination of student-athletes football program had a negative impact to all participants immediate psychological health. Feelings of depression and anxiety were expressed in interviews and the focus group. Participants identified different coping methods, such as trying to find something to replace football or trying not to think about it. Participants with strong family support felt their families helped to encourage them and limited the impact of their depression. Student-athletes who stopped playing football saw a decrease in their physical activity. In addition to reduced physical activity, those student-athletes who stopped participating in football and dropped out of school experienced significant detriments to their health. Some of

the health detriments found included weight gain of over 100 lbs. in a year, and a participant who healthcare provider said his blood pressure was too high.

Relation to the Community of Scholars

Most of the literature available is directed towards school administrators, highlighting how schools can experience academic benefits through extracurricular programs. Literature also examines how students are impacted when participating in extracurriculars, both academically and non-academically. This literature provides significant value to school systems and administrators. With schools constantly experiencing change, including both budget and regulation change, there is a valid need to understand and justify the impact of extracurricular programs.

While the literature provides ample justification for extracurricular programs, a glaring gap emerges when seeking to understand how students are impacted when those programs are eliminated. This study sheds light into that gap through exploring the student-athletes perspective. The qualitative and constructivist approach taken in this study adds value to scholars seeking to further their understanding of the role extracurriculars, including community college football, plays for students (Creswell, 2018).

This study found that while positive impact can occur when students participate in extracurriculars, it is likely that significant negative impact could also occur when an extracurricular program is eliminated. How impact varies across different populations, and extracurriculars, still needs further examination. Student-athletes participating in community college football experienced significant negative impact when their program was eliminated. These results could help scholars who seek to understand the impact that occurs when an extracurricular program is eliminated.

Implication of the Results for Policy, Practice, and Theory

Within educational settings extracurricular programs play a significant role in moving the proverbial ball. Students experience significant benefits, both within and outside of academics, through participation in extracurriculars. Sport, including community college football, is not an exception to this. Continuing research that provides data-rich evidence for school administrators on the impact of eliminating an extracurricular program is needed. This furthered understanding could serve to aid in the decision-making process, and when needed, improve change implementation.

This study took a qualitative constructivist approach to understand the perspectives of student-athletes regarding the impact from their community college football program being eliminated. For school administrators considering eliminating an extracurricular program, these perspectives could prove valuable in evaluating the trajectories and potential outcomes of their decisions. Additionally, if a program needs to be eliminated, these results could better equip schools in their process to aid students and limit the potential negative impact. This section is organized through subsections that address this study's finding in connection with implications for policy, practice, and theory within educational settings. Consideration is also given to decisions regarding eliminating extracurricular programs. As this case study explores a community college football program being eliminated, implications as they relate to football programs are included where applicable.

Policy

Within every school system is a decision-making process that is unique to that school system. However, most school systems whether K-12 or Universities have a relatively similar organizational chart. Individual schools have administrators, who typically report to district or

organization-wide administrators. There is typically a singular administrator, such as a superintendent, who has the final say amongst administrators. This singular administrator is held accountable and often needs approval from a school board consisting of members from the community or appointed by trustees. Schools board accountability is held by state and federal departments of education, and the communities which they serve.

For the school system in this study each community college had a President (administrator) and each President reported to a Chancellor (district administrator). The Chancellor was held accountable by a school board elected from the community. This study didn't interview any of the administrators. However, study participants stated the decision to eliminate football was presented by the community college Presidents to the Chancellor. The Chancellor passed it to the school board, who ultimately approved it. Student-athletes explained the language used to communicate this change cited concerns regarding cost and serving the overall mission of the community college district. Student-athletes felt a lack of transparency existed and fought the decision both internally and through lawsuits. Ultimately the district went through with the elimination of the football programs. Student-athlete lawsuits ended after they ran out of funding.

According to student-athletes, after the football programs were eliminated most community college Presidents resigned, transferred, or retired. Some members of the school board lost their reelection bids to candidates who ran on football friendly campaigns. As of the time of this study, the newly elected school board had replaced its previous chancellor.

Findings from this study suggest that administrators and the school board were either unaware, unconcerned, or not optimally informed of the impact the decision to eliminate community college football programs would have on their students-athletes. While this study

can't speak to the decision-making process school administrators undertook, future policy changes can be made. Findings from this study offer guidance that school system policies should adjust to allow for a more informed decision-making process. If a program still needs to be eliminated, then school system policies need to account for the impact on students, including efforts to minimize it.

Policy change could appear in different forms but should seek to serve those being impacted. Every effort should be made by school administrators and other decision makers to explore available data and literature. Understanding how extracurriculars impact students' academic and non-academic outcomes should be included in the decision-making process. Exploring how different populations and socioeconomic groups are impacted, including correlating the impact to the demographics of the school system, should be considered. Understanding how populations will be impacted, such as their immediate concerns and potential consequences, could be completed through informal surveys or personal interviews. As most school systems are ultimately responsible to a community, that community should also have a say when considering such an impactful change, such as eliminating a community college football program.

Policy implications for football programs should center around ensuring the student-athletes retain their athletic eligibility and can find a place to play. Athletic conference's governing bodies establish the regulations followed by school system athletics, including transferring and eligibility. Student-athletes in this study experienced limitations in their options to keep playing due to the inconsistency amongst different athletic conference's regulations. Policy makers for athletic conferences should consider adding policy exceptions for student-athletes who face extreme situations, such as their football program being eliminated.

Practice

Implications for practice center around the perspectives of the students being impacted by change. The results of this study indicated that when extracurricular programs are eliminated, the impact to students is not adequately accounted for. These findings are supported in the limited literature available exploring other extracurricular programs eliminated (VanRheenan, 2011; Suggs, 2003).

Participants in this study explained that when their football program was eliminated, services and resources to adjust to this change were not provided by their schools. Resources available to them were the same resources available to all students. Student-athletes also immediately lost their scholarships, having to establish new financial plans to pay for school. These findings provided data-rich evidence of the limited emphasis placed on the experiences and perspectives of students adjusting to the change of losing their extracurricular program.

If an extracurricular program needs to be eliminated, school administrators should take action to help those in the program adjust to the change. In the situation of this case study, the population of those impacted was less than 100 students at each community college. Steps could and should be taken to ensure the impact to these students is minimized. Possible practice such as working to develop transfer agreements could be taken. School administrators could reach out to their professional networks, helping those students who wish to continue in an extracurricular program, such as football. Working to keep some staff, such as football coaches or other extracurricular leaders, with the school throughout the change process would help provide stability and support for students. For community colleges and universities, honoring any scholarships should students stay, would ease the anxiety and burden felt by students. Making

health and wellness professionals available to impacted students would ensure help was available for those who needed it.

Theory

Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and the Kubler-Ross change Model (KRM) provide theoretical support for this study (Kulber-Ross, 1969; Mezirow, 1991). The findings from this study further validated these supporting theories. Student-athletes experiences regarding their community college football program being eliminated altered their perspectives and meaning schemes (Hodge, 2014). As student-athletes experienced this change, they associated it akin to loss and progressed through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

These findings, in correlation to theoretical implications, create further importance on how school administrators plan and implement change. The experiences of students alter their perspectives, and life trajectories. Eliminating an extracurricular program such as football does create significant impact, and those impacted move through the KRM grief model. School administrators and decision makers can become more aware and better at accounting for this impact and providing support to those impacted.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study sought to understand how student-athletes were impacted when their community college football program was eliminated. Most literature regarding extracurricular programs doesn't consider the student perspective, and very little examines what occurs when a program is eliminated. No research was found that explored the student-athlete impact from their perspective. While this study helps fill some of the gap in the literature, the collective understanding of the impact from the student perspective when their extracurricular program is

eliminated is still minimal. The data collected and limitations of this study have led to the recommendations for further research.

Recommendations from Data

The data from this study indicates student-athletes impact varied based on a myriad of factors. Factors such as demographics, socioeconomics, family support, and financial support all appeared to influence the degree of impact experienced by student-athletes. Additionally, the opportunity to continue their football pursuits marginalized the overall impact of the experience, allowing those student-athletes to see fewer negative outcomes. Further research should explore different population groups, including those who had alternative routes to continue their extracurricular program, to determine if impact is indeed disproportionate. Further research could provide additional insight for school administrators looking to navigate potential extracurricular program elimination, hopefully creating a better experience for those impacted.

Recommendations from Study Limitations

This study was limited by time. As such six participants were interviewed and one focus group conducted. A more exhaustive study, or multiple studies, would add to the volume of data collected and could further validate the findings found in this study. Additionally, collecting widespread survey data could provide additional understanding to how students were impacted. For this case study, survey data from a significant population of all student-athletes impacted could have allowed for a richer understanding of overarching themes. Impact regarding percentages of students who dropped out, continued in school, or found other programs could have been more accurately explored. While the purpose of this qualitative study prioritized an understanding of the student-athletes perspective, future studies might consider including survey data to further the overall academic knowledge.

Conclusion

Extracurricular programs, such as including community college football, provide both academic and non-academic benefits to participants (Camire, 2013; Filsinger, 2012; Rainer, 2009). These benefits are widely known and supported throughout the findings in the literature. Varying circumstances at times dictate that a school administrator consider eliminating an extracurricular program, such as community college football. Few studies regarding eliminating extracurricular programs, including community college football, are available to support the decisions of school administrators, trustees, and other decision makers. The problem this creates for educators and administrators is that they don't know how student-athletes are impacted when their community college football program is eliminated. This problem and gap in the literature guided this study to explore how eliminating community college football programs impacted student-athletes.

This study has presented findings about how student-athletes are impacted when their community college football program is eliminated through the following five themes, specifically, how student-athletes experienced:

1. Loss of opportunities to pursue dreams and goals.
2. Significant decrease in academic outcomes and results.
3. Forced life changes.
4. Emotionally challenging experiences.
5. Negative impacts to health and well-being.

Student-athletes experienced substantial impact both in their academic and personal lives. Most noteworthy was the lost opportunity to pursue their dreams and goals. This loss impacted their

academic motivation, decreasing their academic outcomes as evidenced by some dropping out of college altogether.

Forced life changes were thrust upon student-athletes. Some student-athletes moved forward with new opportunities, some moved to other locations as they sought to adjust to their new reality. Those who stayed in school adjusted their academic plans to either simply finish school or realign to new pursuits. All student-athletes expressed a change in how they saw the world. This change in perspective, and corresponding meaning schemes, often included a more negative outlook from student-athletes. Student-athletes found themselves skeptical and distrustful of the intentions of others, specifically, those in the school systems. Some student-athletes showed a strengthened belief in their ability to persevere through adversity, gaining self-confidence.

The experience losing their football program was emotionally challenging for participants. Student-athletes progressed through the five stages of the Kubler-Ross change Model for grief (Kubler-Ross, 1969), experiencing feelings of loss, sadness, depression, anger, frustration, and depression. Negative impact to student-athletes health and well-being were stated repeatedly. Participants spoke to feelings of depression. Some saw themselves become less active, with one participant gaining over 100 lbs. in a year, and another receiving a warning from his doctor that his blood pressure was too high. Those who found other football programs saw a more marginalized impact, while those with limited financial and familial support appeared to suffer the most debilitating impact.

School administrators are often faced with challenging decisions, including having to eliminate an extracurricular program. My own experience has found most educators to be empathetic and focused on a quality student experience. A more thorough understanding of how

student-athletes are impacted when their community college football program is eliminated may improve future experiences for others. Specifically, improvements could include how school-systems implement programs to aid transitions or even choose to not eliminate a program. The participants of this study have experienced a life altering event. As a former football player and current football coach, coming to a deeper understanding of participant experiences brought compassion and empathy for student-athletes impacted by this event.

Participants felt concern for the future generation, addressing in both interviews and the focus group the lack of options younger football players coming up in the community would have to pursue their dreams and goals. They were visibly pained by this. I hope the contributions of this study help to guide those educators seeking to improve and understand the experiences of football student-athletes. I personally look forward to continuing research on the impact of football participation, while advocating for the opportunities that football can create for student-athletes.

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Appendix: A

Survey for Community College Football Student-Athlete Study Selection

Survey for Community College Football Student-Athlete Study Selection

Start of Block: Survey for Community College Football Student-Athlete Study Selection

Q1 Do you consent to participate in this survey?

- ☐ Yes, I agree to participate in this survey. (1)
- ☐ No, I do not agree to participate in this survey. (2)

Display This Question:

If Do you consent to participate in this survey? = Yes, I agree to participate in this survey.

Q20 Did you participate in a MCCCCD football program during the 2018/2019 season?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Display This Question:

If Did you participate in a MCCCCD football program during the 2018/2019 season? = Yes

Q19 Which MCCCCD program did you participate in?

- ☐ Mesa CC (1)
 - ☐ Glendale CC (2)
 - ☐ Scottsdale CC (3)
 - ☐ Phoenix College (4)
-

Q7

Did you make the official roster for you team?

- ☐ Yes (1)
 - ☐ No (2)
-

Q8 Did you still have CC eligibility left after the 2018-2019 season?

- ☐ Yes (1)
 - ☐ No (2)
-

Q9 Did you plan to continue participation in the CC football program for the 2019-2020 season before your program was eliminated?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q10 Are you participating in a football program now?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Q11 Are you willing to participate in a case study on the elimination of MCCCCD football programs, which requires both a 60-90-minute interview and a 60-90-minute focus group?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Display This Question:

If Are you willing to participate in a case study on the elimination of MCCCCD football programs, whi... = Yes

Q21 Please provide the best contact information in the spaces below.

☐ First and Last Name (1) _____

☐ Phone Number (2) _____

☐ Email Address (3) _____

End of Block: Survey for Community College Football Student-Athlete Study Selection

Appendix: B

Interview Procedures and Possible Questions

1. Establish date, time, and location with participant.
2. Inform and gather consent from participants of the confidentiality of the interview and that the interview is being recorded for transcription.
3. Provide drink or snack options.
4. Establish rapport with friendly conversation then begin initial questions.
5. Use active listening throughout
 - a. Refrain from expressing critique/judgement/opinion
 - b. Silence is ok, provide enough time for reflection and response
 - c. Be interested in the responses and ask why/how so/tell me more type questions
 - d. Clarify by, asking open-ended probing questions
6. Interview questions are a guide/resource. Let the participant lead the conversation
7. Wrap up interview
 - a. Ask a closing question that offers the participant to clarify or add to the interview
 - b. Clarify the process from there and ask if there are any questions
 - c. Thank the and ask them if they would be willing to participate in a focus group
 - d. Inform participant of follow up and include member checking and email if the participant has something, they want to add later

Potential Open-Ended Interview Questions

Rapport Building:

- How did you come about playing football at [community college]?
- Tell me about the positions you played.
- What kind of success did you have as a player?
 - High school?
 - Role player/Starter/Standout player
- When did you first start playing football? Walk me through your playing experience!

Academic Questions:

- Tell me about your academic experience at [community college]
 - How were your grades?
 - What was your plan?
- How has your football program being eliminated impacted your college attendance?
 - What about your plan?
 - Is it the same? Different? How so?
- Tell me how you view your academic pursuits today compared to [when at community college]
 - Is it different then before? How so? Why?

Non-Academic Questions:

- How is football going?
 - Playing? Plan to? Why? How so? Tell me more!
- How are doing physically since your program ended?
 - Mentally? Emotionally?
- How have your relationships changed since your program ended?
 - Coaches? Teammates? Friends? Family?
- How is your outlook on life?
 - What are your plans?
- What do you think the differences are in life now as compared to before your program ended?
 - Positive? Negative? Overall?

Change/process questions:

- Tell me about when your first found out your program was being eliminated
 - Thoughts? Actions? How did you feel?
- What about that first week/month after the season end?
 - What did you do?
 - School?
- Tell me about what you went through this last year?
- What could have made it better/worse?
- How did you feel? How so? What do you mean?
- Did you feel the same the whole time or did things start to change?
 - When?
 - How so?
 - What contributed to that?
- What do you want to say about the experience? How has it impacted you?

Closing Questions:

Is there anything you would like to add or talk about some more?

Any questions?

Appendix C:
Definition of Attributes

- Academic impact
 - Graduation
 - Retention in college
 - Academic achievements
 - Academic motivation
 - Engagement in academic settings
- Non-academic impact
 - Enriching relationships
 - Acquiring life skills
 - Physical and psychological health
- Sudden and Immediate Change

Appendix D: Focus Group Procedure

1. Set date, time, location – either neutral site or online
2. Send calendar invitation and send reminder email 3 days prior and on day of.
 - a. Send instructions for logins if online, directions to location if face-to-face.
3. Day of Preparations
 - a. Drinks, snacks (face-to-face), login early to ensure functioning properly (online)
4. Welcome
 - a. State goals and the session and brief overview of the study
 - b. Expectation of the focus group
 - i. It is voluntary – participants may leave
 - ii. All thoughts and feelings are welcome and appreciated
 - iii. All members will get the opportunity to speak, and all answers are valid
 - iv. Reminder/inform of confidentiality and recording for transcription
5. Inform the group of the procedures
 - a. As the moderator I will guide the group through some questions and get the conversation going
 - b. I will make sure everyone gets a change to speak, and I may ask for further clarification
 - c. The goal is to have a conversation, so it is ok if participants lead the group through different topics related to the study
 - i. If welcomed, participants can ask questions to each other
 - d. I will not insert my own views, but can offer guidance as to the meaning of questions

Potential Questions:

1. What was it like when you found out your program was being eliminated?
 - a. What did you do? What changed? Emotions? How so?
2. Walk me through your academic situation then versus now
 - a. What is different and why? What are your plans? Did they change?
3. Tell me about life outside of school, was it impacted by this?
 - a. How? Tell me more? What's next?
4. Tell me how you are doing now
 - a. Physically? Emotionally? Mentally? Relationships? Work? School?
5. Tell me about what this last year has been like
 - a. What could have made it better/worse? How did you deal with it?
6. What do you want to say about the experience? How has it impacted you?

Closing Questions:

1. Anything anyone want to add, clarify, or readdress?

Appendix E: Solicitation Letter (Email, Social Media, Physical)

Dear former [community college district] football student-athlete:

My name is Joshua Denhalter and I am a high school football coach, former football student-athlete, high school teacher, and a doctoral student at Concordia University- Portland. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral degree, under the supervision of Dr. James Therrell, Ph.D. This study has been approved by the Concordia University-Portland's Institutional Review Board (IRB). A description of the study and its purpose and procedures follows.

With [community college district] eliminating its football programs following the 2018 season, football student-athletes were faced with immediate and sudden change. Data-rich evidence doesn't exist about the impact on student-athletes when their football program is eliminated. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain an evidence-based understanding of the impact on the football student-athletes when their program is eliminated for education leaders and institutions to consider when faced with similar circumstances.

This study will identify potential participants through a brief survey, followed by an interview and focus group for selected participants. The survey is 10 multiple choice questions and should take just a few minutes. Individual interviews should take about 60-90 minutes. Focus group should take 60-90 minutes. By completing the survey, you are indicating your consent to participate in the interview and focus group.

If you are willing to participate, please click on the link below:

Insert Link Here

Thank you for considering being a participant in my study. Your involvement and input are appreciated and impactful in adding to the literature available on the student-athlete experience. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Joshua Denhalter

jjdenhalter@gmail.com

480-516-5656

Appendix F: CONSENT FORM

Research Study Title: A Case Study to Examine the Impact on Football Student-Athletes when their Program is Eliminated

Principal Investigator: Joshua J. Denhalter M.A.Ed.

Research Institution: Concordia University- Portland

Faculty Advisor: Dr. James Therrell

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this survey is to explore how eliminating community colleges football programs have impacted student-athletes. We expect approximately 12-14 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on [Insert] and end enrollment on [Insert]. To be in the study, you will need to complete the attached survey and agree to participate in an interview and focus group. Below is a list of each step and time commitment required.

1. Complete Survey (5-10 mins)
2. Participate in an Interview (60-90 mins)
3. Participate in a Focus Group (60-90 mins)
4. Be available for follow up regarding study outcomes (Via email or phone)

Risks:

The risks inherent in this study are no greater than those encountered from normal activities such as: local travel, meeting with individuals, meeting with a group, and using a computer.

Additional risk associated with the focus group involve discomfort of speaking about experiences with others, and a potential break of confidentiality from other participants speaking to individuals outside of the study about participants involved. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a filing cabinet. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will refer to your data with a code that only the principal investigator knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times.

Sessions will be recorded and all recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and member-checking process. All other study-related materials will be kept secure for 3 years from the close of the study, and will then be destroyed.

Benefits:

It is possible that participants will benefit from communication skills development in the interview and focus group process. Additionally, discussing the impact of their football program being eliminated could benefit participants by feeling that their voice is heard. The biggest benefit to participants is the benefit to other student-athletes and educators from the themes or findings that better inform educators about the impact of eliminating a sports program.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Joshua Denhalter at email jjdenhalter@gmail.com . If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranche@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



Investigator: Joshua Denhalter email: jjdenhalter@gmail.com
c/o: Professor Dr. James Therrell
Concordia University – Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix G: Letter of Permission to former CC Coaches

Dear former [community college district] coach:

My name is Joshua Denhalter and I am a high school football coach, former football student-athlete, high school teacher, and a doctoral student at Concordia University- Portland. I would like to invite you to help recruit for a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral degree, under the supervision of Dr. James Therrell, Ph.D. This study has been approved by the Concordia University-Portland's Institutional Review Board (IRB). A description of the study and its purpose and procedures follows.

With [community college district] eliminating its football programs following the 2018 season, football student-athletes were faced with immediate and sudden change. Data-rich evidence doesn't exist about the impact on student-athletes when their football program is eliminated. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain an evidence-based understanding of the impact on the football student-athletes when their program is eliminated for education leaders and institutions to consider when faced with similar circumstances.

This study will identify potential participants through a brief survey, followed by an interview and focus group for selected participants. The survey is 10 multiple choice questions and should take just a few minutes. Individual interviews should take about 60-90 minutes. Focus group should take 60-90 minutes.

You Can Help by contacting me by phone or email and aiding me in collecting current contact information for former [community college district] football student-athletes. Thank you for considering being involved in my study. Your involvement and input are appreciated and impactful in adding to the literature available on the student-athlete experience. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Joshua Denhalter

jjdenhalter@gmail.com

480-516-5656

Appendix H: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctor of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joshua J. Denhalter', with a stylized, flowing script.

Digital Signature

Joshua J. Denhalter

Name (Typed)

April 10, 2020

Date