

Balancing Books and Ball: The Academic Challenges Facing Black Student-Athletes in Big-

Time College Sports

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Abstract

The pressures of big-time college sports coupled with NCAA academic legislation has set up a system of inequality among student-athletes to achieve academic success. Blackman (2008) emphasized that NCAA academic legislation was racist in nature. Several researchers (Eitzen & Purdy, 1986; Hawkins, 2010; Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982) determined that Black student-athletes are woefully underprepared for college but are heavily recruited for athletic ability. Black student-athletes are often isolated from the rest of campus, especially given the stereotypes others have about their motives, academic ability, or skin color. Revenue sport student-athletes have performed worse academically than other athletes and general students on campus (Purdy et al., 1982; Upthegrove et al., 1999). The purpose of this study was to examine grade point average (GPA), time-to-degree, and demographic characteristics of student-athletes entering in 2004 at Division I institutions, comparing Black and White student-athletes in order to examine disparities and the detrimental effects of the system on Black athletes. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, results indicated that Black athletes are disadvantaged prior to enrollment from the pressure to focus on athletic pursuits and struggle to graduate in a timely manner.

Keywords: NCAA, College Sports, Black Athletes, Critical Race Theory

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Academic Performance Program

As college athletics becomes more like a business, institutions rely heavily on the athletic performance of their student-athletes. The big-time college sport mentality especially emphasizes the popular sports of football and men's basketball, which are considered revenue-generating sports in comparison to other fielded programs such as softball and soccer (Ervin et al., 1985). Over the past few decades, the NCAA has implemented different academic regulations that have affected student-athletes who wish to play at the highest level of college athletics, Division I or Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). There is a dichotomy in these rules which disadvantage minority students but also are beneath institutional standards, setting up students for failure in the classroom.

In 2003, the NCAA launched the Academic Performance Program (APP), which created several metrics, including the Academic Progress Rate (APR) meant to measure eligibility and retention, and the Graduation Success Rate (GSR). The metrics only measure student-athletes receiving athletic scholarships. Students entering college in the 2004 cohort would be the first class under these new rules. According to Blackman (2008), these rules were disproportionately affecting Black student-athletes and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). He also emphasized that previous academic legislation implemented by the NCAA was also racist in nature. The APP's penalty structure took away athletic scholarships for schools that did not meet its minimum standards. Blackman (2008) argued, "The NCAA cannot ensure a student-athlete's educational opportunity if it eliminates the only practical means many student-athletes have to attend college. The athletic scholarship has been and should continue to be an avenue for many

at-risk student-athletes to attend college” (p. 257). The term “at-risk” conveys that students are “ill-equipped for the academic challenges they face as they graduate from high school to college, increasing the risk of academic failure” (Heddy, Sinatra, Seli, Taasobshirazi, & Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p. 1). Often, the “at-risk” students are those from minority backgrounds, often with low socioeconomic status. Additionally, football and men’s basketball have overrepresentation of Black male athletes, and most of them receive athletic scholarships.

A disadvantaged background influences limitations of access to educational opportunities at the secondary level. Blackman (2008) noted that the NCAA did not consider student-athletes’ academic preparation for college when the metrics were designed. Singer (2008) agreed, emphasizing both sides of the landscape:

On the one hand, it has been argued that intercollegiate athletics provide educational and career opportunities to these athletes, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds (i.e. low socioeconomic status, inadequate preparation). On the other hand, some have argued that the college sport enterprise exploits the athletic prowess of these athletes and ignores their academic and social development. (pp. 399-400)

Several researchers (Eitzen & Purdy, 1986; Hawkins, 2010; Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982) have determined that Black student-athletes are woefully underprepared for college but are heavily recruited for athletic ability. Eitzen and Purdy (1986) commented, “The practice of giving scholarships to academically ill-prepared [Blacks] perpetuates the common belief that [Blacks] have superior physical ability but inferior mental ability” (p. 23). In light of the changing NCAA academic standards, they emphasized that there will continue to be an increasing gap in education preparation between Black and White athletes as well as athletes and the general student body (Eitzen & Purdy, 1986).

The student-athletes in this study entered college in the year the NCAA's APP was implemented, which enabled the examination of variables over time.

Race's Impact on Academic Performance and Graduation

As college athletics becomes increasingly competitive for revenue and athletic success, the landscape of intercollegiate athletics is constantly in flux. Eitzen and Purdy (1986) noted that big-time college sports and the emphasis on winning and profits have superseded the pursuit of higher education. However, these athletic programs are connected to institutions of higher education, and the participating student-athletes are enrolled in academic programs. The majority of high profile athletic opportunities are at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Hawkins (2010) declared,

How ironic that is today, when we have many predominantly White universities known nationally and internationally because of Black athletic excellence. It is a major contradiction and a twisted irony to have institutions of higher learning known by the American public more for their football and basketball teams, specifically, than their academic exploits. (p. 7)

Research on the Black male athletic identity (e.g., Adler & Adler, 1985; Adler & Adler, 1987; Cooper & Hawkins, 2014; Hawkins, 2010; Martin, Harrison, Stone, & Lawrence, 2010; Singer, 2008) has shown that Black student-athletes are often isolated from the rest of campus, especially given the stereotypes others have about their motives, academic ability, or just about their skin color.

The two revenue-generating sports of football and men's basketball are often the focus of fans, the media, and research. Lapchick, Fox, Guaio, and Simpson (2015) shared that in 2014, Black student-athletes accounted for 46.9% of Division I football athletes, and Whites were

41.3% of this group. In men's basketball, Blacks were 57.6% of athletes and Whites were 27.1% of this group. The most high profile women's sport is basketball, where 51.1% of participants were Black and 33.6% White. In all men's sports at the Division I level, Lapchick et al. (2015) found that 57.5% of athletes were White, and 25% were Black. In women's Division I sports, 65.7% of participants were White and only 15% were Black athletes. In Women's Track and Field, White athletes were 57.4% of all participants, and Black women accounted for 26.8% (Lapchick et al., 2015). Though Black athletes have a large representation in football, men's basketball, women's basketball, and track and field, overall, there is low representation of Black athletes in all Division I sports.

This is alarming but not surprising for those who watch and study college sports. Upthegrove, Roscigno, and Charles (1999) studied the educational performance of 2,921 students from 42 institutions, including 1,327 athletes from football and men's basketball. They found that male revenue athletes tended to repeat courses and get placed on academic probation more frequently than non-revenue sport athletes. Due to the high number of Black athletes in the revenue sports, Upthegrove et al. (1999) determined this to be as a result of the concentrated number of Black athletes and their pre-college academic backgrounds. In their study on a football team and its socialization process, Beamon and Bell (2006) confirmed Upthegrove et al., finding "Black players had higher incidences of probation, suspension, and ineligibility than White players did" (p. 402). Purdy et al. (1982) also studied a large number of students, 2,091 athletes over a period of 10 years at a big-time sports program. They looked at pre-college factors including test scores and high school GPA, finding "black athletes had significantly lower scores on the entire range of educational achievements" (Purdy et al., 1982, p. 443). Purdy et al. (1982) also discovered that athletes on scholarship had the lowest GPAs of all athletes studied,

especially among the revenue sport athletes. They concluded, “There is evidence that athletes in the male revenue sports of football and basketball have a relatively low probability of receiving an education compared to non-athletes or athletes in the other sports” (Purdy et al., 1982, p. 445).

Interestingly, Purdy et al. (1982) also discovered that student-athletes on athletic scholarship performed worse academically than athletes not receiving athletic aid. However, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2004/2005) offered a positive twist, that Black student-athletes excel academically in comparison to Black students who are not athletes. Also, the journal reported that Black athletes persist towards graduation because of the athletic scholarship, and Blacks not on scholarship are more likely to drop out of college (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2004/2005). However, because the scholarship is given for athletic ability rather than academic achievement, Black student-athletes may not feel motivated to pursue academics or persist toward graduation. Hawkins (2010) proclaimed, “The dehumanization of Black athletes takes place when these institutions value Blacks more as athletes than as students, especially when output (athletic performance) does not equal input (educational opportunities)” (p. 71). The problem affects graduation rates too. Hawkins (2010) noted that low graduation rates of Black males participating in revenue sports were reported despite the large numbers of Black participants, and “this simply cannot be attributed to racial intellectual shortcomings” (p. 14).

Martin et al. (2010) interviewed 27 African American males from football, men’s basketball, track and field, and soccer at four prestigious California institutions about their academic experiences and confidence in academic achievements. The participants were focused on quashing negative stereotypes surrounding Black students as they navigated elite academic institutions. Singer (2008) conducted a focus group with and individually interviewed four

Black male football players at a major university, learning that the students were confident they could be outstanding students, perhaps even better than non-athletes, if it were not for the physical and time demands of their sport participation. Smith (2014) argued, “African American student athletes do not differ from White students in the *desire* to get a degree” (p. 110). The students were confident in their academic abilities but struggled with time management given the focus on athletic success in their roles as football players. Adler and Adler (1987) studied a Division I men’s basketball team over a four-year period. The structure of big-time athletics programs already isolates student-athletes from the rest of the student population, generally, but since Black athletes are the minority at PWIs, they are often further isolated. In their basketball study, Adler and Adler (1987) explained that the athletic peer subculture affected students in a variety of ways, including discouraging effort towards academics, isolating them from non-athletes in academic settings, and justifying academic struggles due to a commitment to sport participation.

Student-athletes inhabit a subculture that renders academic performance attainable yet undervalued and deprioritized. Because of this athletic-focused subculture permeating the student-athletes’ lives, academic performance, while absolutely attainable, becomes a low priority. Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, and Bimper (2011) studied 109 football student-athletes at a Division I PWI, finding that Black football student-athletes had a higher athletic identity score than the White football players did. This study showed how Black student-athletes are internalizing the stereotypes and pressure placed on them by the big-time college sports arena. In the PWI environment, the perceptions of others have a significant influence on Black athletes’ identity development. According to Harrison et al. (2011), “Being viewed as an athlete...fails to acknowledge other coexisting identities and magnifies prevailing stereotypical views” (p. 98).

Purdy et al. (1982) added that scholarship athletes feel like “they ‘owe’ their coaches undivided attention because these coaches are paying the bills. This creates a role conflict...with the student role often being neglected or de-emphasized” (p. 445). Hawkins (2010) cautioned, “I only wonder if these athletic departments feel that not having control over their lives would jeopardize the potential productivity and profit of their commodity” (p. 128). Staurowsky (2014) agreed, referring to a long-term development of student-athletes to this point:

The framing of young men as children becomes a very effective lens to ignore the demands that are placed on them, the pressures they are under, and their treatment by the people who benefit economically from their labor and the mass multibillion dollar industry that is built on their backs. (p. 140)

Hawkins (2010) suggested that future research focus on graduation rates of Black student-athletes. Simiyu (2012) pointed out that the revenue sports have both a heavy concentration of Black athletes and low graduation rates. This could be attributed to a focus on athletics over academics throughout secondary education. Institutions also admit students with athletic ability below their minimum standards. Smith (2014) added, “By lowering the bar for student athletes, and especially African American male athletes, we have shown them that their aspirations in life do not matter very much” (p. 113). This is unfortunate because there is a disconnect between the academic mission of institutions and the athletic emphasis (Smith, 2014). Simiyu (2012) concluded that the negative environment perpetuated by big-time college sports hurts Black student-athletes’ chances to graduate.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) provides a lens to view the dimensions of race in this study. Its premise is that “people of different races have radically different experiences as they go through

life” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 47). Their experiences, framed by racism, give them a voice (Ladson-Billings, 2010; Tate, 1997). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), there are three tenets of CRT: 1) “racism is ordinary,” with “a system of white-over-color ascendancy [that] serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group”; 2) “interest convergence,” meaning “racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class Caucasians (psychically)”; and 3) “social construction” which “holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations” (pp. 7-8). In CRT, though the concept of race is complex, in society, people generally default to considering Blacks because it is a way to simplify the discussion on race to Black and White (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Tate, 1997). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained, “Long preoccupied with issues of identity, American society prefers to place its citizens in boxes based on physical attributes and culture. No science supports this practice; it is simply a matter of habit and convenience” (p. 78). Tate (1997) noted this simplification in society: “Whites are an intelligent, diligent, and deserving people; Blacks are a simple, lazy, and undeserving people” (p. 200). The idea of Whiteness is “normative” in that it “sets the standard in dozens of situations” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 84). This membership in the dominant race comes with advantages in society. This even means that “Whites do not see themselves as having a race, but as being, simply, people” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 89). Ladson-Billings (2010) added, “Our notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to ‘make sense’ we continue to employ and deploy it” (p. 9). CRT, she insisted, is a valuable tool for “deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (Ladson-Billings, 2010, p. 9).

In American society, those who do not identify as White face disadvantages. Race challenges, for example, includes “barriers to upward mobility for minority populations, especially old-fashioned tests and standards for merit, such as the SAT, that stand in the way” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 146). These education-related barriers envelop students preparing to attend college. Aronson, Fried, and Good (2002) emphasized, “Because education is the surest route to social equality, the academic underachievement of Black Americans tends to be regarded as both an educational and a social problem” (p. 113). Because of the societal norms pushing minority students toward athletic over academic pursuits, minority students are doubly disadvantaged because of race as its place in society and due to these pressures and expectations. Tate (1997) emphasized, “CRT recognizes that racism is endemic in U.S. society, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (p. 234). Ladson-Billings (2010) agreed, noting how racism “is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture” (p. 11). However, Taft (1997) wondered if there is a way to determine how “traditional interests and cultural artifacts serve as vehicles to limit and bind the educational opportunities of students of color” (p. 234). This is quite a challenge due to the systematic, historical context of racism in American society. Ladson-Billings (2010) described, “Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power” (p. 14). She emphasized the need for minorities to have a voice in the “deep understanding of the educational system” (Ladson-Billings, 2010, p. 14).

Yet the problem being so enmeshed has perpetuated these internalized stereotypes. According to Ladson-Billings (2010),

CRT suggests that current instructional strategies presume that African American

students are deficient. As a consequence, classroom teachers are engaged in a never-ending quest for “the right strategy or technique” to deal with (read: control) “at-risk” (read: African American) students. Cast in a language of failure, instructional approaches for African American students typically involve some aspect of remediation. (p. 19)

The experience of Black students in the classrooms then centers more on developmental education and reading rather than college preparation. Students who have academic aptitude may be discouraged or overlooked because of this view of being “at-risk” based on skin color.

Thompson (1998) added, “African American students will not receive the kind of guidance and support that they need to flourish if teachers teach them not to know or mention what their communities have taught them or what they can see for themselves” (p. 540). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) emphasized the need to recognize intersectionality, “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (p. 57). When someone is disadvantaged by many factors, there is a deeper level of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine grade point average (GPA), time-to-degree, and demographic characteristics of student-athletes entering in 2004 at Division I institutions, comparing Black and White student-athletes. The research questions were “What are the differences in GPA and time-to-degree between Black and White athletes, considering sport and scholarship status?” “What are the demographic differences between students in the cohort who graduated and those who did not graduate?”

Method

Data was collected from eight Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions, consisting of 596 student-athletes from 10 sports who entered college in 2004 under the initial implementation of the NCAA Academic Performance Program. The institutions were all large, public institutions around the United States: one in the Northwest, two in the Midwest, three in the Southwest, one in the Southeast, and one in the Mountain region. Several institutions were contacted, and these institutions agreed to participate. The eight institutions had 10 sports in common, three men's and seven women's. The data included cumulative GPA, if the student graduated within seven years or not, race, sex, and sport. Semesters-to-graduate was calculated for the students in the data set who graduated. Sport was further organized into sport type (team or individual) and team type (revenue or nonrevenue). The 10 sports included three men's (football, basketball, golf) and seven women's (basketball, cross country, soccer, softball, tennis, track and field, and volleyball). The researcher looked at frequencies and means for basic comparison, ANOVA, to test certain variables' significance, independent t-tests to look at the significance of differences between Black and White students in the sample, and also conducted a logistic regression with the variables of race, sport, scholarship, GPA, and sex.

Results

Black and White student-athletes comprised the two largest racial groups in the sample. Of the 596 participants in the study, 137 (approximately 23%) of the student-athletes in the study identified as Black for the race variable. The breakdown of Blacks by sport was men's basketball (17), football (66), men's golf (2), women's basketball (12), women's cross country (12), women's soccer (2), softball (1), women's tennis (4), women's track and field (17), and women's volleyball (4). The Black students in the study included 85 males (62%) and 52 females (38%). 110 Black students (80.3%) of the 137 received athletic scholarships, whereas 27 were walk-ons

(19.7%). Of the 85 Black males in the study, 74 (87.1%) were on athletic scholarships. 36 of the 52 Black female participants (69.2%) were athletic scholarship earners. This reinforces the literature that Blacks at PWIs and non-HBCU institutions are provided scholarship aid as a means to access a college education based on athletic ability (Blackman, 2008; Eitzen & Purdy, 1986; Hawkins, 2010; Singer, 2008).

In the sample, 374 students identified as White for the race variable. The breakdown of Whites by sport was men's basketball (11), football (100), men's golf (28), women's basketball (9), women's cross country (39), women's soccer (54), softball (30), women's tennis (11), women's track and field (61), and women's volleyball (31). There were 139 males (37.92%) and 235 females (62.8%). 214 White students (57.2%) of the 374 received athletic scholarships, and 160 (42.8%) were walk-ons. Of the 139 White males in the study, 74 (53.2%) earned athletic scholarships. 140 (59.6%) of the 235 White females in the study earned athletic scholarships.

In the group of 137 Black student-athletes in the study, 74 (54%) student-athletes graduated, while 63 (46%) did not graduate within seven years (46%). Of the 371 White student-athletes who reported graduated status, 264 (70.6%) graduated, and 107 (28.6%) did not graduate within seven years. Though the graduation metrics of GSR and the Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) are six-year rates, the data collection period allowed for a seventh year in case students returned to campus to complete their degrees. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare Black and White student-athlete GPA in this sample. There was a significant difference in the scores for Blacks ($M = 2.52$, $SD=0.63$) and Whites ($M=3.07$, $SD=0.61$); $t(498) = -8.771$, $p<0.001$. These results suggest a meaningful disparity in GPA between Black and White student-athletes. Independent-samples t-tests were also conducted to compare Black and White student-athlete GPA by gender. There was a significant difference in the scores for Black males

($M=2.32$, $SD=0.55$) and White males ($M=2.77$, $SD=0.64$); $t(220) = -5.317$, $p<.001$. Among the female student-athletes, there was also a significant difference:

for Black ($M=2.85$, $SD=0.62$) and White ($M=3.25$, $SD=0.51$); $t(276) = -.4756$, $p<0.001$.

Regardless of gender, race is a factor in these differences.

When considering if students graduated or not, the mean GPAs Black and White student-athletes were compared within and between groups. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the GPAs between Blacks who graduated and those who did not. There was a significant difference for Blacks who graduated ($M=2.83$, $SD=0.50$) and for Blacks who did not graduate ($M= 2.16$, $S=0.58$); $t(131) = -7.121$, $p<0.001$. This comparison was also conducted to compare the GPAs between Whites who graduated and those who did not. There was a significance difference for Whites who graduated ($M=3.25$, $SD=0.45$) and Whites who did not graduate ($M=2.61$, $SD=0.71$); $t(365) = -10.221$, $p<0.001$. Of the Black males in the data set, 42 graduated and 43 did not. Essentially, Black male student-athletes have a 50-50 chance of graduating college. However, there were similar numbers for White males: 73 graduated and 66 did not. Of the Black females in the study, 32 graduated and 20 did not. 191 (81.3%) of the White females in the study graduated, whereas only 41 did not. Independent-samples t-tests were also conducted to compare the GPAs between Black and White student-athletes who did not graduate as well as Black and White student-athletes who did graduate. There was a significant difference between the GPAs for Whites who did not graduate ($M=2.61$, $SD=0.71$) and Blacks who did not graduate ($M=2.16$, $SF=0.58$); $t(163) = -4.289$, $p<0.001$ as well between the GPAs for Whites who graduated ($M=3.25$, $SD=0.45$) and Blacks who graduated ($M=2.83$, $SD=0.50$); $t(333) = -6.852$, $p<0.001$. Whether the student-athletes in this sample graduated or not, the White students had a statistically significant higher GPA in each group.

Considering the number of Black students in the study's 10 sports, the researcher compared the mean GPAs of the three sports with higher numbers of Black students to the White participants' GPAs. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare Black and White student-athletes' GPAs in these particular sports. There was a significant difference in the men's basketball GPAs for White ($M=2.89$, $SD=0.56$) and Black ($M=2.49$, $SD=0.41$); $t(26) = -2.175$, $p<0.04$). In football, there was a significant difference in GPAs for White ($M=2.78$, $SD=0.68$) and Black ($M=2.24$, $SD=0.55$); $t(162) = -5.358$, $p<0.001$. In women's track and field, there was a significant difference in GPA for White ($M=3.24$, $SD=0.52$) and Black ($M=2.84$, $SD=0.60$); $t(75) = -2.709$, $p<0.01$. In these three sports, the Black mean GPA was much lower than the mean GPA for White participants in these sports, which was statistically significant.

Looking at the students in the study who graduated, the general finding was that students on athletic scholarship graduated faster than walk-on student-athletes. To complete a college degree in four years would be eight semesters. However, football and men's basketball still had the highest (longest) semester-to-graduate average. It took an average of 10.22 semesters to graduate for men's basketball athletes and 9.30 for football athletes. The mean Black semesters-to-graduate in the study was 9.45, compared to 9.00 for Whites. The mean Black male semesters-to-graduate was 9.49, and mean White males semesters-to-graduate was 9.34. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare these groups by race and other factors. The only significant difference was between the female groups: Black female semesters-to-graduate ($M=9.41$, $SD=1.68$) and White female semesters-to-graduate ($M=8.87$, $SD=1.34$); $t(221) = 1.995$, $p<0.05$. Though female student-athletes generally perform better academically, there still remains a disparity in time-to-degree considering the factor of race.

In the data set, 200 students from all backgrounds did not graduate of the 596. Of the 200, 63 Blacks (31.5%) and 107 Whites (53.5%) did not graduate. 129 scholarship earners (64.5%) and 71 walk-ons (35.5%) did not graduate. Looking at sex, 122 males (61%) and 78 females (39%) did not graduate. By team type, 106 revenue (56%) and 94 nonrevenue (47%) did not graduate. By sport type, 49 individual sport athletes (24.5%) and 151 team sport athletes (75.5%) did not graduate.

A logistic regression was conducted with the variables of sport, scholarship, race, GPA, and sex. The model showed there is not an equal probability among the students to be a graduate based on these variables. 77.2% of cases are correctly predicted by the model. There is a positive correlation between GPA and graduation. For every one unit increase in GPA, the odds of graduating increase by 2.111 times holding all other variables constant. With a higher GPA, a student has an 8.253 times greater likelihood to graduate, all other independent variables held constant. Essentially, higher GPAs are associated with a higher probability to graduate. Race was not considered as a factor in the logistic regression, but given the correlation between GPA and graduation, the result of the logistic regression is important in this study.

Limitations

The study utilized data from eight large public institutions in Division I (Football Bowl Subdivision) in 10 specific sports, which may not be generalizable to all FBS institutions. The variable of scholarship status did not distinguish between partial and full scholarships. A larger sample size within the sports would allow for more comparisons between Black and White student-athletes in a variety of sports. Consideration of students' redshirting in the time frame was not included in the data, which could have a major impact on semesters-to-graduate.

Discussion

The first research question asked, “What are the differences in GPA and time-to-degree between Black and White athletes, considering sport and scholarship status?” Just over half (54%) of the Black student-athletes and 71.4% of White students in the study graduated within seven years. Black athletes who graduated had a higher mean GPA (2.83) than the 46% of Black students who did not graduate (2.16). In three of the sports (Men’s Basketball, Football, and Track and Field), there were significant differences between the Black mean GPA for each team and the White mean GPA. The mean Black GPA was 2.52 whereas the mean White GPA was 3.07, a difference of 0.55 (and a C to a B on the grading scale). For those who graduated, the mean Black semesters-to-graduate was 9.45 compared to the mean White semesters-to-graduate of 9.00. The difference indicates that White student-athletes graduate almost a semester faster than Black student-athletes. The results raise several concerns; for example, if a scholarship athlete exhausts his or her eligibility and still needs several semesters to graduate, will the athletic department cover the costs? For the department, there is a benefit for APR and GSR metrics, but are the students’ academic pursuits at the forefront? This also delays Black student-athletes’ ability to start their careers if they are taking long to graduate.

The second research question asked, “What are the demographic differences between students in the cohort who graduated and those who did not graduate?” In this study, 200 students did not graduate from the 596 who started college in 2004. Based on the results, students who are not likely to graduate can be described as White male scholarship student-athletes on a team sport. There was a slight lean toward revenue team sports in the results. Given the significant differences of GPAs between White and Black student-athletes whether they graduated or not, the logistic model and the power of GPA in relation to graduation, it is clear from this data that Black student-athletes have a major disadvantage.

The significance in this study is that 53.5% of students who did not graduate were White, and 31.5% were Black. This is not proportional to the percentage of Black and White students in the study, which included 23% Black participants and 62.8% White participants. The results also show that of the Black males in the study, about half graduated in seven years and half did not – it is important to take note of this given that Black student-athletes continue to struggle matriculating in the college environment when the ultimate goal for all students is graduation. Since scholarship student-athletes are described by the characteristics of Black male revenue team-sport student-athletes, this could explain why the percentage of Blacks who did not graduate is higher than the percentage of Blacks in the study – they are at a disadvantage given their intersectionality (Rubin & Rosser, 2014).

Despite NCAA rule changes to increase academic standards, multiple overhauls of standardized tests, and more resources to help struggling student-athletes with learning deficiencies, there is a repetitive cycle of educational disadvantages to Black student-athletes. Paul Simon (1970) sang, “After changes upon changes we are more or less the same” (track 6). As Blackman (2008) pointed out, the NCAA’s historical changes to academic regulations have not benefitted Black students whatsoever. There has been a continuing struggle in the revenue sports, essentially men’s basketball and football, where the majority of Black student-athletes participate. Blacks are overrepresented in these sports and that is not a coincidence. These students are recruited for college while significantly underprepared academically for the rigor of college-level work. This is due both to athletic talent and societal expectations, and Black students have internalized these stereotypes (Eitzen & Purdy, 1986; Hawkins, 2010). There is a focus on athletic ability, and scholarships to these students are awarded based on that and not on academic merit. Because of this, academic motivation is low, and athletic pursuits while in

college become the main focus, because it is like a full-time job. The literature has shown a historical problem with revenue sport athletes' underpreparedness (e.g., Purdy et al., 1982; Upthegrove et al., 1999). The view of Black students as at-risk in secondary classrooms has not allowed students to progress in the education system much beyond remediation (Ladson-Billings, 2010). In the view of critical race theory, minority students have not had a voice to share experiences and interests in the educational system.

The NCAA's Academic Performance Program and other academic legislation have never provided the best context for Black students to succeed. There is a high drop-out rate, increased time-to-degree especially in football and men's basketball, and lower mean GPAs in sports with more Black team members for both sexes. Though Black female student-athletes are more successful academically based on the study's results, the mean Black female GPA was still much lower than the White mean GPA. Because the APP program has such a strong focus on eligibility and retention, academic success is not important anymore. Academic success cannot be measured by APR points. Colleges can benefit from the athletic talent of students recruited for this ability, offering some students the incredible opportunity for a free education which for many was unimaginable possibility. However, there is a big cost to this – the students are not prepared for college-level work and must dedicate their time to playing a sport.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) noted, "Truth is a social construct created to suit the purposes of the dominant group" (p. 104). Offering a scholarship as a ticket to free education could be seen as a charitable gesture, yet there are strings attached to this opportunity, especially for minority student-athletes. Singer (2008) and Smith (2014) found that Black athletes have the same desire to earn a college degree, and even would be successful if athletic participation did not take up so much time. It is important for non-White students to "interject

minority cultural viewpoints, derived from a common history of oppression, into their efforts to reconstruct a society crumbling under the burden of racial hegemony” (Ladson-Billings, 2010, p. 13). This has to start at the elementary and secondary education levels, since Black and other minority students are disadvantaged early in their development (Aronson et al., 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Purdy et al., 1982).

Black students experience both the educational disadvantage and the pressure to excel at sports in their youth. From the at-risk lens of teachers in the education system to the burden of athletic success as the method to benefit the family, from the promise of an athletic scholarship as the entry point to a college education to the internalization of stereotypes that deemphasize academic ability and success, Black student-athletes have a tough road to face. The big-time college sports model and the NCAA’s less-than-impressive academic standards set the bar low while maintaining an uphill climb for Black student-athletes. Ladson-Billings (2010) cautioned, “Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing” (p. 22). There will not be much of a change in the near future without a stronger voice, but it must penetrate the system and overcome a structure dominated by colleges and the NCAA, who benefit financially and otherwise off of the talent of young Black athletes.

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