

**The Complex Identities of International Student-Athletes Competing in the NCAA:**

**An Exploratory Qualitative Case Study**

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Approval Page

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## **Dedication**

To my wife, Summer, whose love, support, and constant encouragement propelled me to reach my goal and finish my education. My diploma should have both of our names on it because you worked just as hard as I did to see this completed.

And to Matot. Ever since seventh-grade language arts, I've wanted to be a teacher. That was all you, homie.

## **Abstract**

An international student-athlete is a student who is living abroad in the United States and competing in a sport at a National Collegiate Athletic Association member institution. These students are unique, as they face the challenges inherent to both student-athletes and international students. Although international student-athletes typically arrive in the country better prepared for academic challenges than their domestic student-athlete counterparts, international student-athletes drop out of college prior to completing their degrees at higher rates because of the substantial challenges they face while adjusting to life at American institutions of higher education. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of international student-athletes at National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I institutions. A total of 13 international student-athletes from nine different countries were interviewed, guided by social identity theory, which can explain how the in-groups to which people belong can impact their behavior. The international student-athletes reported common academic issues brought on by the language barrier and poor time management, socialization issues brought on by cultural differences and homesickness, and support barriers brought on by a lack of available campus resources and international student-athletes showing a lack of initiative. The findings reinforce the literature surrounding international student-athletes and can inform meaningful measures that can be taken to minimize the negative academic and socialization experiences that many international student-athletes encounter. There is a greater need for engagement and oversight from those who work most closely with international student-athletes. Future research should concentrate on the needs of international-student athletes from specific countries rather than all international student-athletes as a whole.

## Acknowledgements

The amount of assistance, love, and support I received throughout my educational journey is both overwhelming and humbling. I rarely find myself at a loss for words, but I genuinely don't know where to start. For this reason, I will rely on the infinite wisdom of the greatest basketball coach of all-time (no citation necessary), Michael William Krzyzewski.

**“Family is a fist — complete with communication, caring, trust, pride, and collective responsibility. Family makes individuals part of something bigger.”**

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**“We’re a part of this university in many respects. You can’t put a price tag on that.**

**This has been the perfect place to coach and teach and learn.”**

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**“Confidence shared is better than confidence only in yourself.”**

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**“I remember the values my folks taught me. Back then, you grew up believing in God, you told the truth — and you loved your country and playground basketball.”**

Finally, I would like to thank my Father in Heaven, who at all times knows what is best for my family and me. Only now, as I complete my formal education, am I beginning to understand why Sum and I were led to Cedar City.

I love my God, I love my family, I love my country, and I love my basketball.



Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction..... 1

    Statement of the Problem..... 3

    Purpose of the Study..... 4

    Introduction to Theoretical Framework ..... 6

    Introduction to Research Methodology and Design ..... 8

    Research Questions..... 11

    Significance of the Study..... 12

    Definitions of Key Terms ..... 13

    Summary..... 19

Chapter 2: Literature Review..... 21

    Theoretical Framework: Social Identity Theory..... 22

    SIT Applied to Sport..... 26

    Social Identity Complexity ..... 29

    SIC Applied to Sport..... 30

    Collegiate Athletics in the United States ..... 32

    Student-Athletes ..... 34

    International Student-Athletes ..... 36

    Participation Trends of ISAs..... 38

    Regional and Cultural Differences of ISAs ..... 42

    Adjustment & Transitional Issues Facing ISAs..... 46

    Socioeconomic, Gender, and Organizational Issues Facing ISAs..... 49

    Summary ..... 55

Chapter 3: Research Method..... 56

    Research Methodology and Design ..... 57

    Population and Sample ..... 59

    Materials ..... 62

    Study Procedures ..... 63

    Data Analysis ..... 64

    Assumptions ..... 66

    Limitations ..... 66

    Delimitations..... 67

    Ethical Assurances ..... 67

    Summary ..... 69

Chapter 4: Findings..... 71

    Trustworthiness of the Data..... 71

    Results..... 73

    Evaluation of the Findings..... 93

Summary .....	97
Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions .....	99
Implications .....	101
Recommendations for Practice .....	107
Recommendations for Future Research .....	110
Conclusion .....	112
References.....	114
Appendix A IRB Acceptance .....	137
Appendix B Non-Disclosure/Confidentiality Agreement.....	138
Appendix C Informed Consent .....	139
Appendix D Recruitment Email .....	142
Appendix E Interview Protocol .....	143
Appendix F APR Calculation Formula .....	145
Appendix G GSR Calculation Formula .....	146
Appendix H Search Parameters .....	147

**List of Tables**

*Table 1* Percentage of ISAs in NCAA Division I Sports in 2020 ..... 39

*Table 2* Home Country of First-Year ISAs in NCAA Division I Sports 2015-2020 ..... 40

*Table 3* Percentage Change in the Number of ISAs in NCAA Division I Sports 2015-2020 ..... 41

*Table 4* Coding Process ..... 76

*Table 5* Emergent Themes ..... 77

*Table 6* Self-reported Demographic Information of ISA Participants ..... 79

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Social identity theory suggests that people are a mosaic of the many groups to which they belong (Kreindler et al., 2012; Kreindler et al., 2021). A mosaic is a piece of art produced by arranging small pieces of various materials that come together to form a larger, beautiful picture or pattern. I find it easy to agree with this metaphor because it focuses on the small details of what makes every single person a unique, imperfect, complex, and beautiful individual. Throughout my academic journey, I have found one specific group of people to be among the most complex and unique: international student-athletes (ISAs); those students who qualify as both international students living abroad in the United States and student-athletes competing in a sport at a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)-member institution (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2017). These students are unique, as they face the inherit challenges of both international students and student-athletes (Bentzinger, 2016; Newell, 2016; Pierce et al., 2012). Bentzinger (2016) found some of the difficulties unique to ISAs are initial eligibility, language barriers, and a completely new educational system. These findings were consistent with Newell (2016), who found the key issues facing ISAs were homesickness, cultural adjustment difficulties, and language barriers. Specific to female ISAs, Vadopalaitte-Witt (2020) found that ISAs felt extreme pressure to deal with the language barrier, learn a new academic system, and face unrealistic expectations from their coaches.

About two years ago, my wife and I had the opportunity to serve as the host family for an ISA. This student recently completed her secondary school education (the equivalent of high school in the United States) and was preparing to begin her first year of college. After spending some time with our new student, I began to learn about some of the many barriers facing ISAs. The more I worked with our host student, the more I was surprised to learn of the many

responsibilities ISAs were forced to manage on their own. Even more troubling was that new ISAs seemed to rely more on the other ISAs than the university's international student services for assistance. After some investigation, I learned that the university's international student services knew very little about the support that the university athletic department had to offer ISAs, and the university athletic department grossly overestimated the support and guidance that the university's international student services could offer every ISA. After a year of struggling to adapt and manage her various stressors and responsibilities, our host student decided to retire from playing her sport. Less than a year after that, she dropped out of school entirely, failing to complete her education or earn an associate's degree.

In 2003, the NCAA Board of Directors implemented an academic reform package designed to hold athletic programs, coaches, and players more accountable for the academic progress of student-athletes (Johnson et al., 2018). Under these ground-breaking guidelines, the NCAA instituted plans to penalize programs that failed to promote student-athlete academic success with the potential loss of scholarships and bans on post-season play for repeat offenders. These plans included establishing a minimum Academic Progress Rate (APR) and a minimum Graduation Success Rate (GSR). In 2008, the NCAA revealed that over 200 programs failed to meet the established academic standards and, as a result of their academic failures, would forfeit athletic scholarships for the next academic year (Coakley, 2021). Ultimately, about one-third of all NCAA Division I member institutions had at least one team penalized for failing to meet the acceptable APR or GSR minimums (Coakley, 2021). As the NCAA has continued to enforce its stricter, and necessary, academic standards, coaches and athletic administrators have been forced to take academic issues much more seriously.

Although ISAs typically arrive in the United States better prepared for the academic challenges they will encounter compared to domestic student-athletes (Forbes-Mewett & Pope, 2019), ISAs drop out of college prior to completing their degrees at higher rates than domestic student-athletes because of the substantial challenges they face adjusting to life at an American college (Popp et al., 2010). This information, coupled with the fact that ISA participation in the NCAA has grown yearly since 2014 (NCAA, 2021), illustrates the need to better understand ISAs and the issues they encounter. As participation in NCAA athletics continues to grow, so does the number of ISAs competing in the NCAA.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem addressed by this study is that ISAs have less healthy social and academic environments compared to their peers from the United States (Hauff et al., 2021; Newell, 2015; Newell, 2016; Pierce et al., 2011; Turick et al., 2022). Although there has been substantial research conducted on international students, ISAs have been the focus of relatively few researchers (Bentzinger, 2016). This specific group of students faces many of the same obstacles of international-students with the additional obstacles that student-athletes encounter, which means ISA adjustment and socialization experiences are also vastly different than international student or student-athlete experiences (Newell, 2015; Newell, 2016; Popp et al., 2010).

ISA participation in the NCAA has grown yearly since 2014 (NCAA, 2021). From 2015 to 2020, ISA participation in NCAA athletics grew 75.87% (NCAA, 2021). At the same time, NCAA student-athletes began transferring at higher rates than ever before, a trend tied directly to the implementation of the NCAA Transfer Portal (Gallup, 2020). The NCAA Transfer Portal is a digital compliance tool used to systematically manage the transfer process from start to finish, increase transparency, and empower student-athletes during their collegiate careers (Johnson,

2019). While the NCAA transfer portal offers student-athletes significantly more freedom and control (Dohrn & Lopez, 2022), transfer students face myriad issues that can cause them to struggle academically and fail to earn a college degree (Chamely-Wilk et al., 2021). Multiple studies have shown transferring to another institution often negatively impacts a student's ability to earn a bachelor's degree (Chamely-Wilk et al., 2021; Smith, 2022; Smith, 2021). Although ISAs typically arrive in the United States better prepared for the academic challenges they will encounter compared to domestic student-athletes (Forbes-Mewett & Pope, 2019), ISAs drop out of college prior to completing their degrees at higher rates than domestic student-athletes because of the substantial challenges they face adjusting to life at an American college (Popp et al., 2010; Newell, 2016). Successfully identifying what can be done to provide ISAs with healthier college experiences so they are not forced to transfer to a different institution or drop out of school before completing their education was a driving focus of this research. While multiple studies have successfully identified the obstacles and issues ISAs may encounter during their collegiate journeys (Hauff et al., 2021; Newell, 2015; Newell, 2016; Popp et al., 2010, Turrick et al., 2022), this study sought to fill a gap in the research about the measures that can be taken to mitigate these obstacles, which are tied to the negative trends of ISAs dropping out of college or transferring to another institution (Popp et al., 2010; Newell, 2016). This study sought to uncover findings related to this problem through a qualitative single case study design focused on identifying the common experiences ISAs encounter as international students playing college sports in the NCAA.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs at NCAA Division I-member institutions that may lead to

dropping out and other adjustment struggles. The method employed for this study was a descriptive qualitative case study. A case study is one of the most widely used and accepted means of qualitative research methods in the social sciences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2022). The case study design is preferred as a research strategy when “how,” “why,” and “what” questions are the interest of the researcher (Yin, 2018). Descriptive case studies usually require document review and in-depth interview methods to truly understand the experience or phenomenon under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In an instrumental case study, the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If the researcher only wants to study one single thing (such as single person from a specific group) or a single group (for example a specific group of people within a bounded system), a case study is the best choice (Yin, 2018). If the objective of a case study is to construct a comprehensive portrait of an experience, such as the ISA experience, researchers can study several instances of the phenomena to identify commonalities (Ragin & Amoroso, 2019). This study utilized a descriptive case study design. Purposive sampling, a selection method with the purpose of selecting participants who yield the most relevant and plentiful data (Yin, 2016), was used to select 13 ISAs from a pool of 25 volunteers currently competing in NCAA Division I athletics at Western US State University (WUSU), a pseudonym for a NCAA Division I institution located in the Western United States. The ISAs were recruited via email under the direction of the WUSU Assistant Athletic Director of Academics. Purposive sampling demands that researchers exercise their best judgement by intentionally inviting those people or selecting locations, documents, or artifacts that can help accomplish these tasks (Staller, 2021). Creswell (2018) suggested phenomenological case studies use a range of 3-10 participants. While 25 ISAs volunteered for the study, data saturation was reached at 13 participants. Individual one-on-one



interviews were conducted with out-of-season ISAs via Zoom. Two focus group interviews for in-season ISAs were also conducted via Zoom. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The interview transcripts served as the textual artifacts, which were analyzed through the theoretical lens of social identity theory (SIT) and social identity complexity (SIC). The qualitative research management software NVivo was used to organize and thematically analyze the data.

### **Introduction to Theoretical Framework**

The concept of a group identity being stronger than an individual identity is part of social identity theory (SIT). According to Festinger's theory of social comparison, social identification is constructed via social comparisons and reflections made by the individual (1954). However, Tajfel suggested that an individual's self-perception may not be sufficient to determine one's social identification as "he is a member of numerous social groups and that membership contributes, positively or negatively, to the image that he has of himself" (1974, p. 69).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) established SIT to explain and understand the phenomena of belonging. Social identity theory is described as a theory that predicts certain intergroup behaviors on the basis of perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those status differences, and the perceived ability to move from one group to another (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT has since grown into a prominent theory in sports management studies (Martyn et al., 2019). However, much of the previous research has been focused on single group identification without evaluating how membership may overlap between two competing groups, such as student-athletes and international students.

Tajfel put forth that identities should be evaluated through four related concepts: social categorization, social identity, social comparison, and psychological distinctiveness (Tajfel,

1974). Social categorization is the process of bringing together social objects or events in groups which are equivalent with regard to an individual's actions, intentions, attitudes and systems of beliefs (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Social identity is the part of an individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of membership with social groups together with the emotional significance attached to those memberships (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Social comparison is the process by which we compare our groups with other groups, creating a favorable bias toward the group to which we belong (Charness & Chen, 2020). Psychological distinctiveness is "knowledge that he [sic] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him or his [sic] membership" (p. 70). An individual's identification is developed through multiple simultaneous group memberships, and in-group or out-group membership play a significant influence on an individual's social identity (Martyn et al., 2019). Psychological distinctiveness and the studying of group memberships is a branch of SIT called social identity complexity (SIC) (Martyn et al., 2019; Seering et al., 2018).

Whereas SIT is used to understand the phenomenon of belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), SIC was developed by Roccas and Brewer to explain how identities are formed through attachment to multiple groups (2002). SIC refers to an individual's subjective representation of the interrelationships among their multiple group identities and is commonly defined as the degree of overlap perceived to exist between groups of which a person is simultaneously a member (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). In this seminal publication, it was reported that membership in many different groups (multiple social identities) can lead to greater social identity complexity, which causes one's identity to develop through one of four distinct models: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, or merger (Martyn et al., 2019; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Seering et al., 2018).

According to Roccas and Brewer (2002), intersection occurs when an individual can achieve simultaneous recognition of more than one social identity and maintain a single in-group representation. The dominance construct represents how an individual adopts one primary group identification, and other identities are subordinated (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Vargas-Salfate, 2018). With dominance, one identity will take precedence over another, and only the dominant membership will be the source of identification (Martyn et al., 2019). Compartmentalization occurs when an individual's identity can be activated and expressed through a process of differentiation and isolation (Petsko, 2020; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Compartmentalization allows identities to become cataloged, whereby different contexts bring forth certain identities (Martyn et al., 2019). Merger occurs when non-convergent group memberships are simultaneously recognized and embraced in their most inclusive form, which allows for an individual to develop their identity through the sum of collective memberships (Campo et al., 2019; Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Recent studies focused on SIT and how group affiliations influence behavior greatly impacted the development of this study's research questions. The conditions under which an ISA's social identity becomes more important than their identity as an individual and the ways in which social identity can influence behavior are at the core of this study's purpose. How an ISA perceives their social standings, social expectations, and acceptable behavior can be understood through the theoretical framework of SIT.

### **Introduction to Research Methodology and Design**

A descriptive case study was employed to reveal participant experiences that could reveal potential ways to target solutions to the research problem. A descriptive case study design is a common qualitative research method used to provide an intensive description and contextual-

bounded analysis of a social phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study is one of the most widely used and accepted means of qualitative research methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2022). When conducting case study research, the researcher explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These sources of information could include individual interviews, researcher observations, focus groups, or various types of documents and reports. Emergent coding is used when analyzing the raw data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2022). A case study research design aligned with this study because ISAs competing at WUSU provided the researcher with a bounded system, as these ISAs are bounded to a single university at which they attend and for a finite amount of time.

The three most common methods of data collection in qualitative research are interviews, focus groups, and textual analyses (Saldana, 2021). Data were gathered using all three of these sources. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2022), all three data sources are commonly utilized in case study research and will provide good data if the problem statements, purpose statements, and research questions are adequately aligned. The term “alignment” refers to the logical and congruent progression between each element of a research proposal (Booton, 2018). Miles (2019) proposed three rules for achieving research alignment. First, each problem statement based on a study needs its purpose statement and research question. Second, alignment cannot be achieved if there are a mismatched number of problem statements, purpose statements, and research questions. Third, an equal number of statements per element are required to achieve proper alignment (Miles, 2019).

Interviews can come in the form of structured interviews, unstructured interviews, or semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews are verbally administered questionnaires in

which a predetermined list of questions is asked (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2021).

Unstructured interviews do not reflect any preconceived theories or ideas and are performed with little organization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews consist of key questions that help define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer to diverge to pursue a response in more detail (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2021).

In qualitative research, a focus group is a group of people who are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, experiences, or attitudes (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). While focus groups may share many common features with less structured interviews, there is more to them than merely collecting data from multiple participants at once. A focus group is a group discussion on a particular topic organized for research purposes, guided, monitored, and recorded by a researcher (Saldana, 2021). Focus groups are a widely used source of qualitative data because they often produce useful, rich understandings of participants' experiences and beliefs (Nyumba et al., 2018; Saldana, 2021).

The final method of qualitative data collection is through document and textual analysis. Documents or texts can be interview transcripts, field notes, lesson plans, photos, or other documents that offer some insight on a subject's perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Many documents relevant to a case study will be collected during the course of a study (Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) suggests keeping these documents carefully organized with the use of an annotated bibliography.

Braun and Clark (2019) explained that thematic analyses are appropriate to use when seeking to understand lived experiences. If the objective of a qualitative study is to construct a comprehensive portrait of a phenomena, researchers can study several instances of the phenomena to identify commonalities (Ragin & Amoroso, 2019). In this of ISAs at NCAA

Division I institutions, information regarding academic and socialization experiences that are unique to this specialized group of students was collected with the objective of developing a complete, detailed portrayal of the ISA experience at NCAA Division I institutions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

According to Yin (2018), there are six steps to a thematic analysis: planning, designing, preparing, collecting, analyzing, and sharing. Planning refers to having a logical design, pre-described data collection techniques, and pre-determined data analysis methods (Yin, 2018). The primary goal of the second step, designing, is to identify the theory that will be examined in the case study. A secondary goal of this step is to successfully identify any rival hypotheses. The third step, preparing, researchers need to prepare themselves and create a case study to protocol. The next step in this process is collecting. According to Yin (2018), the six sources of evidence are documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. The three most important concepts of data collection are triangulation, reliability, and quality control (Yin, 2018). The fifth step, analyzing, can involve examining theoretical propositions, creating a description, using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data, and examining rival theories. It is in this step that utilizing qualitative data collection software can become especially helpful. The last step is sharing. Sharing refers to composing a record of one's research and publishing it in a peer-reviewed academic journal (Yin, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by three overall research questions. These questions helped to frame the study and the scope of the eventual interview protocol.

***RQ1***

What are the perceptions of the academic issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I institution?

***RQ2***

What are the perceptions of the socialization issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I institution?

***RQ3***

What are the barriers to effective support for ISAs by their respective institution, athletic department, and other members of the campus community?

**Significance of the Study**

As ISA participation in the NCAA continues to grow, these students will necessitate great care, direction, and counsel from their advisors, coaches, athletic and academic administrators, and educators. The growth rate of ISA participation in NCAA athletics illustrates how urgently coaches and athletic administrators have begun to rely on these students. ISA participation in the NCAA has grown yearly since 2014 (NCAA, 2021). The NCAA (2021) revealed that 12.9% of all first-year student-athletes participating in the NCAA were ISAs. In the fall of 2020, 3,585 first-year ISAs were competing in NCAA Division I athletics (NCAA, 2021). At the same time, NCAA student-athletes began transferring at higher rates than any other group of student-athletes or non-athletes (Gallup, 2020). As previously mentioned, these high transfer rates are further compounded by the NCAA Transfer Portal and the NCAA Division I one-time transfer legislation (Dohrn & Lopez, 2022).

During the 2019-2020 academic school year, institutions of higher education awarded approximately \$4.23 billion of athletic scholarships to cover tuition and fees, room, board, and

course-related books, with \$2.76 billion going to student-athletes in NCAA Division I (Knoester & Ridpath, 2021; NCAA, n.d.; Scholarship Stats, 2021). This number does not include the costs required to recruit a student-athlete, which is also a substantial financial investment. Recruiting internationally can incur significant costs, as it includes sending coaches overseas on expensive flights, hotel stays, ground transportation, meals, and any other material or resource the trip may necessitate (Newell, 2016). According to NCAA Division I financial data, schools competing at the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level spent an average of \$1 million on recruiting annually (Fulks, 2014; Peterson, 2017). Additionally, international students routinely pay up to three times as much as in-state domestic students do in tuition and fees (Buckner, 2019). This would mean university athletic departments are forced to invest substantially more in ISAs per capita than domestic student-athletes.

In 2003, the NCAA Board of Directors implemented an academic reform package designed to hold athletic programs, coaches, and players more accountable for the academic progress of student-athletes (Johnson et al., 2018). Under these ground-breaking guidelines, the NCAA instituted plans to penalize programs that failed to promote student-athlete academic success with the potential loss of scholarships and bans on post-season play for repeat offenders. These plans included establishing a minimum academic progress rate (APR) and a minimum graduation success rate (GSR). In 2008, the NCAA revealed that over 200 programs failed to meet the established academic standards and, because of their academic failures, would forfeit athletic scholarships for the next academic year (Coakley, 2021). Ultimately, about one-third of all NCAA Division I NCAA-member institutions had at least one team penalized for failing to meet the acceptable APR or GSR minimums (Coakley, 2021). As the NCAA has continued to



enforce its stricter, and necessary, academic standards, coaches and athletic administrators have been forced to take academic issues much more seriously.

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

### ***Academic Progress Rate (APR)***

The Academic Progress Rate, or APR, is a term-by-term measure of eligibility and retention for Division I student-athletes that was developed by the NCAA as an indicator of eventual graduation rates (NCAA, 2022). Every NCAA Division I sports team calculates its APR each academic year, based on the eligibility and retention of each scholarship student-athlete, which is then calculated into a score based on the past four years' performance (NCAA, 2022). Currently, teams must earn at least a four-year APR of 930 to compete in NCAA championships (NCAA, 2022). While the APR is intended as an incentive-based approach, it does come with a progression of penalties for teams that under-perform academically over time. The first penalty level limits teams to 16 hours of practice per week over five days, with the lost four hours to be replaced with academic activities. The second level adds additional practice and competition reductions, either in the traditional or non-championship season. Additional penalties are added by the NCAA as needed (NCAA, 2022). See Appendix B for the APR Calculation Formula.

### ***Adjustment***

Adjustment is the act or process of adjusting; to bring to a more satisfactory or comfortable state; to adapt (Zhou & Brown, 2015).

### ***Amateurism***

An amateur is someone who does not have a written or verbal agreement with an agent, has not profited above his/her actual and necessary expenses or gained a competitive advantage in his/her sport (NCAA, 2022). The most widespread definition of amateur sport is based on

those individuals who practice sport casually, for pure pleasure and not by profession (Rocco, 2021). It differs from professional sport, in that amateurs do not exercise this function as a way of life to earn remuneration, not receiving any financial benefit for their practice (Rocco, 2021). In a contemporary way, the concept of amateurism defines the athlete who has never accepted money, or who accepts money under restrictions specified by a regulatory body, for participating in a competition (Rocco, 2021).

### ***Athletic Department or Department of Athletics***

An athletic department is the entity which exercises control over the intercollegiate sports programs at a public or private institution of higher education (NCAA, 2022). An athletic department operates under the guidance of an Athletic Director (AD), whose primary role is serving as the institution's senior administrator for its athletics programs (Forsyth, 2021).

### ***Cross-cultural Adjustment***

Cross-cultural adjustment is the process of adaptation to living and working in a foreign culture (Dang & Chou, 2019).

### ***Culture***

Culture refers to a pattern of shared behaviors, beliefs, values, and attitudes that give expression and meaning to a social world (Stensland, 2021).

### ***Division I (D-I)***

NCAA Division I (D-I) is the highest level of intercollegiate athletics sanctioned by the NCAA in the United States (NCAA, 2022). NCAA D-I-member institutions have to sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women (or six for men and eight for women) with two team sports for each gender (NCAA, 2022). Each playing season must be represented by each gender, as well. There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling

criteria. D-I schools must meet minimum financial aid awards for their athletics program, and there are maximum financial aid awards for each sport that a D-I school cannot exceed (NCAA, 2022).

### ***Factors of SIT***

Social identity theory was developed to explain how individuals create and define their place in society (Tajfel, 1974). According to the theory, three psychological processes are central in that regard: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Sears & Cianfrone, 2021). Social categorization involves how one categorizes people, actions, values, and belief systems within a group (Tajfel, 1974). Social identification involves one adopting the identity of the group they ascribe to, which brings emotional and esteem significance to the individual (Tajfel, 1974). Social comparison involves comparing oneself both to members of the in-group, and also comparing groups needs to those of other groups (Tajfel, 1974).

### ***Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR)***

The Faculty Athletics Representative is a member of the faculty at an NCAA member institution who has been designated by the institution to serve as a liaison between the institution and the athletics department, and also as a representative of the institution in conference and NCAA affairs (Martyn et al., 2019). The role of the FAR is to ensure that the academic institution establishes and maintains the appropriate balance between academics and intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2022).

### ***Graduation Success Rate (GSR)***

The Graduation Success Rate, or GSR, is a measurement of student-athlete graduation success designed to reflect modern-day patterns of student enrollment and transfer (NCAA,

2022). The GSR is calculated only for student-athletes who are on a team that plays at the NCAA Division I level (NCAA, 2022). The NCAA GSR differs from the federal calculation in two important ways. First, the GSR holds colleges accountable for those student-athletes who transfer into their school. Second, the GSR does not penalize colleges whose student-athletes transfer in good academic standing (NCAA, 2022). See Appendix C for the GSR Calculation Formula.

### ***In-Group***

A social group to which a person psychologically identifies as being a member (Funkhouser, 2020; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

### ***Intercollegiate Athletics***

Intercollegiate athletics is inclusive of organized college sport programs, not to be confused with leisure sport activities, which are closely linked by governing associations who provide specific laws and guidelines (Feezell, 2015; Molly & Weight, 2019).

### ***International Student***

An international student is a degree-seeking student who has left their country, or territory of origin, and moved to the United States on an F-1 visa with the singular objective of studying (Adewale et al., 2018).

### ***International Student-Athlete***

An international student-athlete, or ISA, is an F-1 international student who participates in varsity athletics at an NCAA-member institution (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2017). An ISA is required to comply to all regulations set forth by the NCAA and U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

### ***International Student-Services or International Student Office(s)***

International student services are offered at most institutions of higher education (Durrani, 2022). The primary purpose of these offices is to advise, support, and aid international visitors attending an institution of higher education.

### ***National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)***

The National Collegiate Athletic Association, or the NCAA, is a non-profit organization in the that administers intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2020). It was formed in 1906 as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association to draw up competition and eligibility rules for gridiron football and other intercollegiate sports (Wallenfeldt, 2022). The NCAA functions as a general legislative and administrative authority for men's and women's intercollegiate athletics. It formulates and enforces the rules of play for various sports and the eligibility criteria for athletes (NCAA, 2020).

### ***Out-Group***

A contrast to in-group, an out-group is a social group with which an individual does not identify or ascribe to belonging (Rathje et al., 2021; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

### ***Social Capital***

Social capital refers to the presence of active member and their extensive networks that facilitate a culture or community. The conceptualization of social capital, which emphasizes trust, network creation, and reciprocal interaction, has been embraced by a number of sport studies (Gang & Jo, 2021).

### ***Social Class***

The term social class refers to a group of people characterized by the same living condition, exposed to specific chances in life, and particular perspectives on the world around them (Manstead, 2018).

### ***Socialization***

Socialization is defined as a lifelong, complex, and interactive process of learning and social development that allows people to familiarize themselves with the social world they live in (Bourdieu, 1984). Through socialization, people are shaped and conditioned by the global and local societies in which they live, as they learn, internalize, and integrate the skills, attitudes, values, and norms in a manner that is socially accepted (Schoch, 2021).

### ***Student-Athlete***

Student athlete refers to an individual who engages in any intercollegiate sport at an NCAA-member institution (NCAA, 2022).

### ***Transfer Portal***

The NCAA Transfer Portal is a digital compliance tool used tool to systematically manage the transfer process from start to finish, add more transparency to the process, and empower student-athletes during their collegiate careers (Johnson, 2019). The transfer portal was designed to eliminate the confusion and expedite the process by removing potential barriers to the transfer process by allowing student-athletes to enter on their own accord without requiring them to get approval from a coaches or administrators (Dohrn & Lopez, 2022).

### **Summary**

This study was designed to identify how to provide ISAs with healthier educational and athletic environments while enrolled at an NCAA Division I-member institution. The problem

the study addressed is that ISAs have less healthy social and academic environments compared to their peers from other countries. Studying ISAs is an important field for various reasons, including the growing number of ISAs, the financial commitment required to recruit and educate an ISA, and the negative impact that ISAs who transfer, drop out, or fail to graduate can have on an athletic program's APR and GSR. This study aims to not only identify both the shared positive and negative experiences of ISAs, but also to analyze them through the theoretical lens of SIT to explain the socialization experiences ISAs encounter. Individual one-on-one interviews and focus groups were used in a phenomenological single case study design focused on identifying the common socialization experiences ISAs encounter as international students playing college sports in the NCAA.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs at NCAA Division I-member institutions that can lead to providing them with healthier academic and social environments. The problem the study addressed is that ISAs have less healthy social and academic environments compared to their peers from the U.S. The identification of common socialization experiences of ISAs was accomplished through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, which were coded and analyzed through the theoretical framework of social identity theory (SIT). This chapter provides an exhaustive review of the relevant and recent literature surrounding SIT and ISAs. A general overview of the seminal research surrounding SIT is addressed, followed by a review of current research applying SIT to sport. A branch of SIT, social identity complexity (SIC), is also reviewed. A general overview of the seminal research surrounding SIC is addressed, followed by a review of recent research applying SIC to sport. Next, seminal literature surrounding ISAs is addressed, including literature relevant to international students and student-athletes. Recent research specific to ISAs, including the growth of ISAs in the NCAA, ISA cultural issues, and ISA adjustment issues, is also reviewed. This literature review was compiled using the Northcentral University Library Roadrunner Search and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global databases. Search parameters included: Social Identity Theory, Social Identity Complexity, International Student-Athletes, Intercollegiate Athletics, and Single Case Study. Grey literature sources, including reports and handbooks published by the NCAA or the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, were used only when essential. Recent research searches were limited to 2015-2022, although cross-referenced sources and seminal publications were used when applicable. Detailed search parameters are located in Appendix H.



## Conceptual Framework

According to Festinger's theory of social comparison, social identification is constructed via social comparisons and reflections made by the individual (1954). However, Tajfel (1974) suggested that an individual's self-perception may not be sufficient to determine one's social identification as "he is a member of numerous social groups and that membership contributes, positively or negatively, to the image that he has of himself" (p. 69). In other words, SIT proposes that interrelationships between in-groups and out-groups cultivate individual and collective self-concepts (Hogg, 2016; 2018; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Established by social psychologist Henri Tajfel in the 1970s, social identity theory was developed to explain how the groups with which someone affiliates are influential in cultivating and sustaining their self-esteem and self-concept (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These group affiliations manifest into a person becoming part of an "in-group." An in-group is commonly described as a social group of which a person psychologically identifies as being a member (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These in-groups can come from political affiliations, religious groups, a field of employment, athletic teams, and more (Sears & Cianfrone, 2021). In-group affiliation often leaves one feeling a sense of belongingness greater than possible with individual affiliation (Hogg, 2016; 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

SIT is a popular theory among social psychologists because it can predict certain intergroup behaviors on the basis of perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those status differences, and the perceived ability to move from one group to another (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). One's social identities differ in strength and content (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). The strength component of SIT is conceptualized in terms of social identification, such as an ISA identifying as a student-athlete,

while the content of social identity is determined by the group's feature and norms, such as wearing team gear and athletic shorts around campus (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). SIT can help one determine their emotions, such as experiencing depression after a team loss, and behavior, such as discrimination against another team (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Tajfel put forth that identities should be evaluated through three related concepts: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (1974). A fourth group, psychological distinctiveness, was also mentioned (Tajfel, 1974).

Social categorization is “a process of bringing together social objects or events in groups which are equivalent with regard to an individual's actions, intentions, attitudes, and systems of beliefs” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). Social categorization can also be explained as the process of sorting or categorizing others based strictly on the groups to which they belong (Sears & Cianfrone, 2021). An example of this would be seeing a person in the grocery store wearing a shirt with a Northcentral University (NCU) logo. Immediately, one could assume that the other person attended NCU, is a donor or booster for the school, or works for the university. This is a heuristic process of categorizing the other person into various groups. Regardless of the truthfulness of these assumptions and categorizations, you can make direct inferences about them, which directly result from social categorization. This social categorization usually results in people emphasizing the similarities of those in their in-group, with differences between people in out-groups also being emphasized (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As someone's identity evolves and grows increasingly more complex, they will start belonging to a variety of social categories. Still, certain categories will become more or less important depending on their social circumstances (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Social identification is “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge of his [sic] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). The process of social identification refers to how someone’s behavior changes to match the behaviors of others in the in-group they have attached themselves to (Sears & Cianfrone, 2021). The way an individual identifies with a group can lead them to behave in a way they believe members of that group should or do behave. For example, someone who identifies as part of the Northcentral University (NCU) community, be it a student, faculty, staff, or administrator, could allow this identity to dictate their actions in various ways. It could be as simple as wearing a polo with the NCU logo to an academic conference, or more intense, such as searching out and networking with NCU alumni at the conference. Social identification is an important concept to understand, as it affects both the satisfaction of the individual and the effectiveness of the group (Steffens et al., 2021).

The third mental process of SIT is social comparison. Tajfel’s definition of social comparison states that “no group lives alone-and the reinterpretation of attributes and engagement in social action...only acquire meaning in relation to, or in comparisons with, other groups” (1974, p. 70). In this process, people compare the prestige and social standing of the group they belong to with other groups (out-groups). The differences that one perceives with other groups are often exaggerated. Still, in order to maintain high self-esteem, one must perceive their in-group as having a higher social standing than the out-group (Steffens et al., 2021). An example of social comparison would be comparing NCU to other online universities, such as Liberty University Online, the University of Phoenix, or Capella University. The person affiliated with NCU would compare things like class size, cost of attendance, course length, or professor publications, assuming their alma mater is superior to the other universities. This

process of social comparison is highly interactive and facilitates one's effort to boost their self-esteem and ego (Sears & Cianfrone, 2021).

The final concept of SIT is psychological distinctiveness. Tajfel defined psychological distinctiveness as the "knowledge that he [sic] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him or his [sic] membership" (1974, p. 70). Psychological distinctiveness can also be explained as wishing to be different from, but comparing favorably to, other groups (Croes & Bartels, 2021). An example of social-psychological distinctiveness would be an NCU student differentiating themselves among other NCU students by mentioning they are a doctoral candidate rather than an undergraduate or master's candidate, thereby employing an intergroup comparison. Since Tajfel's seminal publication on SIT, Vingnoles et al. (2002) built on this theory by proposing that in-group members have three sources of psychological distinctiveness: position, difference, and separation. Position refers to the distinctiveness of an individual's place within social relationships. Difference refers to the implied distinctiveness in individual qualities. Separation refers to distinctiveness in terms of psychological distance from others, including physical and symbolic boundaries (Goldman et al., 2016). Psychological distinctiveness has branched off to form SIC (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). SIC and psychological group distinctiveness will be discussed further in this chapter.

Much of the recent literature surrounding SIT attempts to build on the foundation Tajfel created by using it to explain other phenomena. These phenomena are also rooted in social psychology and include topics such as intergroup conflict, group prejudice, and behavioral implications of collectivist versus individualistic cultural identities, among others (Becker & Barreto, 2019; Hogg et al., 2017;). Researchers actively use SIT to identify the ways individuals

form a self-concept through the merger and balance of their in-groups (Smith, 2020). Likewise, SIT has been described as a unifying theory because what and how people think and act as members of a social group influences subsequent behavior and attitudes in social systems (Agbo et al., 2020).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed SIT to explain and understand the phenomena of belonging. An individual's identity is developed through multiple simultaneous group memberships and in-group or out-group membership (Martyn et al., 2019). SIT's relevance is widespread because it can be applied to almost any person in any social situation, including athletes, coaches, and administrators (Sears & Cianfrone, 2021). The focus on group membership has seen SIT develop into a prominent theory in sport management studies. However, much of the previous research has been focused on single group identification without evaluating how membership may overlap between two competing groups, such as student-athletes and international students.

### ***Social Identity Theory Applied to Sport***

Thinking about how players and coaches come together to form teams (or groups), it's easy to see why SIT is a popular theory in sports management studies. Applying one of Tajfel's (1978) definitions of SIT, "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge of his [sic] membership of a social group [team] together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 63), to sport team participation, it is reasonable to conclude that team identity warrants further examination. In 2004, Heere and James examined sport team identities as a multi-dimensional construct through SIT. This quantitative study was designed to provide an initial structure for a multi-dimensional scale of team identity. The study produced a six-dimensional model on team identity, with the constructs

including public evaluation, private evaluation, interconnection of self, sense of interdependence, behavioral involvement, and cognitive awareness (Heere & James, 2007; Wear & Heere, 2020).

This research is notable because it provided a reliable and valid instrument to measure team identity and allowed for studying the influence of team identity on group member behavior. By developing an instrument that could be applied in many different group settings, researchers can examine the influence of particular group identity on an individual's other identities. An example of this would be examining how being an international student influences an ISA's identity as a student-athlete, or vice versa.

Moving away from individual and group identification, SIT has also impacted consumers' attention to the media coverage of their favorite teams and players. Since the 1990s, SIT has been used to understand the in-group fan experience and explain team identification and attachment (Sears & Cianfrone, 2021). Sports fans are frequently engaging in "basking in reflected glory" (BIRGing) after their team wins and "cutting off reflected failure" (CORFing) following a loss (Hirshon, 2020; Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Zhang et al., 2018). In fact, people may become fans of a winning team purely for the opportunity to BIRG, thus increasing their self-esteem as part of the winning team's in-group. These actions are directly related to SIT, as a fan enters into an in-group when they identify with a team (Delia & James, 2018). Hirshon proposes that depending on the success or failure of a team, which results in BIRGing or CORFing on the fan's behalf, this group membership shapes the fan's own self-image (2020). Media-attentive fans who can watch most or all of a team's games frequently internalize victory and externalize defeat, as they proudly wear a winning team's gear in public or retreat into their homes and avoid socializing when their team loses (Hirshon, 2020). While the researcher hoped this article would examine how SIT could be utilized as a theoretical lens for media-related

research, which it accomplished, it also made a strong connection between sports in-group membership and the development of one's social identity, as both are driven by the desire to maintain a positive self-image (Hirshon, 2020; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). These concepts are interconnected, as they are grounded in a psychological process that leads people to feel a sense of belonging to a group that is clearly distinct from others that they hate, dislike, or discriminate against (Hishon, 2020). Once again, these findings can be applied directly to ISAs, who belong to a sporting in-group, which weighs heavily on their social development. Being both an international student and a student-athlete, ISAs are encountered with a desire to maintain a positive self-image as members of two very different and distinct in-groups.

SIT-based research has been applied directly to student-athletes, as well. Parker et al. (2021) found that student-athlete social identity successfully predicted psychosocial adjustment in college and indirectly enhanced academic control and lowered negative emotions via reductions in perceived stress. This study illustrated how student-athlete social identities might promote positive adjustment during the critical transition to college life (Parker et al., 2021). Hawley et al. also utilized SIT to find social benefits that extend to student-athletes (2015). In this study, the researchers explored the degree to which collegiate student-athletes and a comparison group of non-athletes would demonstrate in-group favoritism and out-group bias. They found a high level of leniency for student-athlete actions compared to non-athletes from out-group members (Hawley et al., 2015). However, Hawley et al. also found that student-athletes were recipients of harsher out-group bias, as participants indicated higher punishment and higher negative reflections on the university if the main character was described as a student-athlete compared to a non-athlete student (2015; Tucker et al., 2016). Again, it is easy to connect these findings to ISAs, as ISAs are first and foremost student-athletes in the minds of many on a

college campus. The added layer of depth, ISAs also being international students, make their identities increasingly complex.

### ***Social Identity Complexity***

Roccas and Brewer developed the concept of social identity complexity (SIC) to explain how identities may be developed through attachment to multiple groups (2002). SIC is a branch of SIT and can be defined as the degree of overlap perceived to exist between groups of which a person is simultaneously a member (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). However, simply belonging to multiple social groups that may overlap is not sufficient for positive intergroup attitudes to emerge (Maloku, 2019). Instead, it is crucial to understand how much overlap and similarity people perceive between the multiple in-groups that define their social identity (student-athlete and international student). Roccas and Brewer (2002) posit that membership in many different groups (multiple social identities) can lead to greater social identity complexity, which causes one's identity to develop through one of four distinct models: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, or merger.

According to Roccas and Brewer (2002), intersection occurs when an individual can achieve simultaneous recognition of more than one social identity and yet maintain a single in-group representation. The dominance construct represents how an individual adopts one primary group identification, with other identities being subordinated (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). With dominance, one identity will take precedence over another, and only the dominant membership will be the source of identification (Martyn et al., 2019). Compartmentalization occurs when an individual's identity can be activated and expressed through a process of differentiation and isolation (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Compartmentalization allows identities to become cataloged, whereby different contexts bring forth certain identities (Martyn et al., 2019). Merger occurs



when non-convergent group memberships are simultaneously recognized and embraced in their most inclusive form, which allows for an individual to develop identity through the sum of collective memberships (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Multiple studies have discovered social benefits associated with a high level of social identity complexity. Some of these benefits include healthier intergroup outcomes, a higher level of openness toward both in-group and out-group members, being more likely to evaluate others positively (Hogg, 2021; Miller et al., 2009; Verkuyten et al., 2019), perceiving lower threat levels to group distinctiveness (Benet-Martinez et al., 2021; Guerra et al., 2022), and higher levels of trust among both in-group and out-group members (Xin et al., 2016). Higher levels of social identity complexity have also been found in those who are more frequently exposed to diverse and multicultural societies (Benet-Martinez et al., 2021; Brewer, 2010, Guerra et al., 2022). It can be assumed that ISAs, coming from multicultural backgrounds and living in an altogether new culture as a student-athlete, have higher levels of social identity complexity compared to domestic student-athletes.

### ***Social Identity Complexity Applied to Sport***

In 2019, Martyn et al. examined faculty athletics representatives (FARs) through the theoretical lens of SIC. The purpose of this research was to explain the way by which FARs psychologically align with their various memberships. The results indicated that FARs see themselves as a member of both athletics and the academy and consequently think of themselves as facilitators or moderators between the groups (Martyn et al., 2019). This study also revealed the existence of four separate categories of SIC that can be used to help explain how FARs balance various group memberships. These groups are intersection, dominance,

compartmentalization, and merger, categories that will be used in the analysis of this dissertation research.

Intersection is the achievement of simultaneous recognition of multiple social identities by an individual while they still maintain an affinity for one identity over another (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Martyn et al. (2019) found that FARs at the Division I level may identify as both an academic and athletics member and define their in-group membership as the intersection of multiple group memberships, as participants viewed academics and athletics as parallel yet separate entities. Dominance occurs when an individual adopts one primary group membership, and all other groups are subordinated (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Tibbets et al., 2022). Likewise, the FARs indicated that they perceive a dominant in-group membership as a member of the academic community, as all participants in the study viewed themselves as a professor first (Martyn et al., 2019). While most of the FARs in this study emphasized their affinity for athletics, all of them commented that they would not sacrifice their faculty position for the betterment of college athletics (Martyn et al., 2019). However, multiple FARs also mentioned how their research interests have become focused on sport and the challenges facing student-athletics (Martyn et al., 2019). Compartmentalization occurs when identities are context or situation specific (Petsko, 2020; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Participants suggested that FARs at Division I institutions faced a degree of compartmentalization, as other faculty members needed continual reminders that a FAR does not work for athletics, despite spending considerable time with the athletic department (Martyn et al., 2019). Merger represents the process by which an identity can be formed when multiple non-convergent group memberships are simultaneously recognized and embraced in their most inclusive form (Liu et al., 2021; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Despite FARs highlighting the struggles associated with maintaining a single social identity with

academics, the FARs pointed towards the recognition and embracing of both the academic and athletic communities, stressing the importance of understanding multiple perspectives (Martyn et al., 2019). This study is a prime example of how SIC occurs with those who assume multiple roles on a college campus and how maintaining relationships with members of multiple in-groups can be challenging.

### **Intercollegiate Athletics in the United States**

There are over a dozen collegiate sport governing associations in the United States, but the most common sports governance bodies are the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) (Hofman, 2021). Current collegiate governance structures provide athletic opportunities for over 600,000 athletes spread out amongst various levels, philosophies, and geographies in the United States and played at almost 2,000 two-year or four-year institutions. These institutions offer athletic opportunities through a governing body and structure that provides guidance and rules for the games that student-athletes participate in every season (Hofman, 2021). For brevity and applicability to this dissertation, only literature focusing on NCAA Division I will be addressed in this review.

As defined in the previous chapter of this dissertation, the NCAA is a non-profit organization that administers intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2020). It was formed in 1906 as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association to draw up competition and eligibility rules for gridiron football and other intercollegiate sports (Wallenfeldt, 2022). The NCAA functions as a general legislative and administrative authority for men's and women's intercollegiate athletics. It formulates and enforces the rules of play for various sports and the eligibility criteria for athletes (NCAA, 2020). Currently, the NCAA hosts over 1,200 member institutions and just over half a

million student-athletes competing for NCAA championships in 90 sports (NCAA, 2020). In 1973, the NCAA established a three-division philosophy, which it still operates under today (Osborne et al., 2020).

Division I-member institutions must sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women, or six for men and eight for women, with two team sports for each gender, and each playing season must be represented by each gender (Hofman, 2021). Division I institutions are often large, well-funded research universities that can offer substantial scholarships to their recruits due to media contracts and televised games that bring in funding for the institution (Osborne et al., 2020). Student-athletes must maintain certain levels of academic achievement, but often, their focus is on their respective sports (Osborne et al., 2020). In 1978, Division I further subdivided its membership into two categories based on football competition (Osborne et al., 2020). These subdivisions are commonly referred to as the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) for the schools competing in the College Football Playoff (CFP) and postseason bowl games, and the Football Championships Division (FCS) for the schools that compete for an NCAA title (Hofman, 2021). FBS Division I is the highest level of competition for amateur football in the United States, and the CFP is the only championship the NCAA does not govern (Hofman, 2021).

Before the NCAA Division I Council's one-time transfer legislation in 2020-21, which allows all student-athletes to transfer one time without penalty, NCAA transfer rules were overly complicated and required student-athletes to meet at least one of 11 various exceptions via an appeals process (Dohrn & Lopez, 2022). Further complicating the matter was that transfer rules varied by sport, division, and classification (Johnson, 2019). The transfer portal was designed to eliminate the confusion and expedite the process by removing potential barriers to the transfer

process by allowing student-athletes to enter on their own accord without requiring them to get approval from coaches or administrators (Dohrn & Lopez, 2022). Because of the transfer portal, all student-athletes can now explore transferring without fear of penalty (Johnson, 2019). ISAs enjoy the same transfer rules as all other NCAA student-athletes.

The other two divisions comprised in the NCAA are Division II and Division III. Division II-member institutions are required to sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, or four for men and six for women (Osborne et al., 2020). Division II members philosophically seek balance in providing high-level competition for student-athletes while maintaining academic rigor, with student-athlete opportunities to be more engaged in their campus community (Hofman, 2021). Division II awards athletics scholarships on a more limited basis than Division I due to smaller budgets, which also impacts the number of sports opportunities overall. NCAA Division III membership requires each member institution to sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, with two team sports for each gender and each playing season represented by each gender (Osborne et al., 2020). The single quality of Division III athletics that differentiates this level from its counterparts is that division III membership stipulates that student-athletes receive no financial aid related to their athletic ability. The Division III model embraces a system in which academics are the priority (Hofman, 2021). Student-athletes can be awarded financial aid based on need but not athletic ability (Osborn et al., 2020).

### ***Student-Athletes***

Student-athlete refers to an individual who engages in any intercollegiate sport at an NCAA-member institution (NCAA, 2022). Student-athletes must meet eligibility requirements to compete in college sports (Posteher, 2021). To maintain eligibility, they must progress toward a

college degree and maintain the academic standards specified by their division (NCAA, 2022). Student-athletes must also adhere to amateur status, which prevents them from participating in professional sports or receiving payment for athletic competition (Posteher, 2021). Amateurism is a pillar of the NCAA model of athletics (Weight & Zullo, 2016). An amateur does not have a written or verbal agreement with an agent, has not profited above their actual and necessary expenses, or gained a competitive advantage in their sport (NCAA, 2022). The most widespread definition of amateur sport is based on those individuals who practice sport casually for pure pleasure, and not by profession (Rocco, 2021). It differs from professional sport in that amateurs do not exercise this function as a way of life to earn remuneration, not receiving any financial benefit for their practice (Rocco, 2021). In a contemporary way, amateurism defines the athlete who has never accepted money or accepts money under restrictions specified by a regulatory body for participating in a competition (Rocco, 2021).

Athletic scholarships are awarded to student-athletes who play in college, a rare practice in other countries (Posteher, 2021). The NCAA and the NAIA regulate the scholarship process. These organizations establish protocols for student-athlete eligibility and provide rules for universities regarding scholarship allocation (Posteher, 2021). The NCAA awards nearly \$3.5 billion in full or partial athletic scholarships to over 180,000 student-athletes yearly (NCAA, n.d.). Less than 2% of high school students who compete in a varsity sport receive an NCAA athletic scholarship (NCAA, 2020).

Student-athletes devote significant time to academic and athletic success, which can cause their two roles on campus to often compete for their time (Posteher, 2021). Student-athletes are forced to regularly manage competing priorities to meet the many expectations of coaches, teachers, family members, peers, and fans (Posteher, 2021). In 2020, a study on mental

health wellness among first-year university students found that student-athletes experienced depression more often than the average first-year university student (Cheung et al.). Likewise, English and Kruger (2020) identified many preconceived stereotypes facing student-athletes entering college. These stereotypes commonly associated with student-athletes included being unintelligent and academically lazy (English & Kruger, 2020). English and Kruger found that these stereotypes can negatively impact a student-athlete's academic performance, and threat mitigation measures should be taken by coaches and academic advisors to help student-athletes overcome any damage these stereotypes may have caused.

### **International Student-Athletes**

Research on international students attending university in the United States has been conducted for over 60 years. Oberg (1960) focused his research on the mental health effects of migrating to another country for a college degree and cultural learning differences encountered during this migration. The 1980s and 1990s saw the focus of international student-related research shift to the learning experiences encountered by these students, with the culture shock of adapting to a new learning environment being at the center of these studies (Anderson, 1994; Furnham & Bochner, 1986). More recent studies of international students have focused on language barriers (Leong, 2015), relationship concerns (Newell, 2015; 2016), the financial difficulties encountered by international students (Cantwell, 2015), and the importance other nations place on studying abroad (Wu et al., 2015).

The research conducted on international students that is most significant to this dissertation are those studies focused on the adjustment process international students face. Life transitions affect everyone, and each transition is typically followed by a period of adjustment (Haslam et al., 2019; Haslam et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2018). Even when a transition is a positive

experience, it has the capacity to have a negative impact on an individual's well-being, primarily because the process of change brings with it various challenges, such as changes in lifestyle and a sense of uncertainty (Haslam et al., 2019; Ng et al., 2018). One of the major transitional periods facing emerging adults is the adjustment to college life (Newell, 2016). International students typically face a range of challenges from the time they leave their home country such as the need to adapt both to a new culture and norms and to a new educational landscape (Ng et al., 2018).

Although there has been substantial research conducted on international students, ISAs have been the focus of relatively few researchers. An ISA is an F-1 international student who participates in varsity athletics at an NCAA-member institution (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2017). Despite being both a student-athlete and an international student, an ISA is distinctly different. An international student is a degree-seeking student who has left their country, or territory of origin, and moved to the United States on an F-1 visa with the singular objective of studying (Adewale et al., 2018). An ISA is required to comply with all regulations set forth by the NCAA and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. This specific group of students face many of the same obstacles of international-students with the additional obstacles that face student-athletes, which means ISA adjustment and socialization experiences are also vastly different than international student or student-athlete experiences (Newell, 2015; Newell, 2016; Popp et al., 2010). Unlike many international students, ISAs often enter college in the U.S. as part of a pre-formed socialization network comprised of teammates, coaches, and other student-athletes (Popp, 2007; Popp et al., 2010; Popp et al., 2011). Likewise, research shows that ISAs adjust to university differently than domestic student-athletes, as ISAs are often better prepared for the academic rigors of college (Popp, 2007; Popp et al., 2009; Ridpath, 2019). A



deeper review of the literature on the adjustment and transitional issues facing ISAs will be later in this chapter.

### ***Participation Trends of International Student-Athletes***

According to the NCAA, ISA participation in NCAA Division I athletics has grown yearly since 2014 (2021). In a report filed in August 2021 titled, “Trends in the Participation of International Student-Athletes in NCAA Divisions I and II,” the NCAA revealed that 12.9% of all first-year student-athletes participating in the NCAA were ISAs. In the fall of 2020, there were 3,585 first-year ISAs competing in NCAA Division I athletics (NCAA, 2021). Table 1 shows that ISAs make up a significant portion of the current student-athlete landscape, even comprising the majority of in men’s and women’s tennis.

**Table 1***Percentage of ISAs in NCAA Division I Sports in 2020*

Men's Sports		Women's Sports	
Tennis	63%	Tennis	59%
Ice Hockey	39%	Ice Hockey	44%
Soccer	37%	Golf	35%
Golf	24%	Field Hockey	27%
Fencing	20%	Water Polo	24%
Water Polo	19%	Beach Volleyball	17%
Basketball	17%	Rowing	16%
Swimming	14%	Fencing	16%
Volleyball	12%	Basketball	15%
Track	12%	Swimming	14%
Cross Country	10%	Soccer	12%
Gymnastics	8%	Cross Country	11%
Lacrosse	4%	Track	11%
Baseball	2%	Volleyball	9%
Football	2%	Bowling	9%
Wrestling	<1%	Gymnastics	7%
		Lacrosse	3%
		Softball	1%

According to the NCAA in 2020, 119 different countries were listed as at least one ISA's home country (NCAA, 2021). Table 2 shows a breakdown of the five countries that most ISAs listed as their home country in 2020.

**Table 2**

*Home Country of First-Year ISAs in NCAA Division I Sports 2015-2020*

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Canada	28.3%	24.4%	23.3%	22.3%	22.0%	22.1%
United Kingdom	7.5%	8.4%	7.0%	8.5%	8.0%	8.5%
Germany	6.5%	5.3%	6.2%	6.1%	5.3%	6.3%
Spain	4.5%	4.6%	4.1%	4.8%	4.9%	5.2%
Australia	5.1%	5.2%	5.4%	5.1%	5.6%	5.0%

\*119 other countries were listed as an ISA's home country in 2020.

Significant growth in the participation rates of ISAs in most NCAA-sanctioned sports has also been reported (NCAA, 2021). With the exception of men's lacrosse, every NCAA-sanctioned sport showed growth between 2015 and 2020 (NCAA, 2021). Table 3 shows the breakdown in the growth of ISAs in NCAA Division I-sanctioned sports over this five-year period.

**Table 3***Percentage Change in the Number of ISAs in NCAA Division I Sports 2015-2020*

Men's Sports	2015	2020	Change	Women's Sports	2015	2020	Change
Football	27	82	203%	Water Polo	18	37	106%
Soccer	248	334	35%	Basketball	101	172	70%
CrossCountr	59	79	34%	Tennis	204	345	69%
Basketball	143	184	29%	CrossCountr	66	108	64%
Baseball	30	38	27%	Field Hockey	73	115	58%
Golf	114	144	26%	Track	172	266	55%
Ice Hockey	127	150	18%	Rowing	74	111	50%
Track	177	197	11%	Soccer	209	284	36%
Tennis	283	304	7%	Golf	141	186	32%
Swimming	92	98	7%	Ice Hockey	73	92	26%
Lacrosse	52	31	-40%	Swimming	136	167	23%
				Volleyball	77	94	22%

Although ISAs typically arrive in the United States better prepared for the academic challenges they will encounter compared to domestic student-athletes (Forbes-Mewett & Pope, 2019), ISAs are shown to drop out of college prior to completing their degrees at higher rates than domestic student-athletes because of the substantial challenges they face adjusting to life at an American college (Popp et al., 2010; Newell, 2016). This information, coupled with the fact that ISA participation in the NCAA has grown yearly since 2014 (NCAA, 2021), illustrates the

need to better understand ISAs and the issues they encounter. As participation in NCAA athletics continues to grow, so does the number of ISAs competing in the NCAA. Ensuring these students do not drop out of school and successfully complete their educations should be prioritized by all involved in collegiate athletics.

### ***Regional and Cultural Differences of International Student-Athletes***

Research has shown that ISAs possess a unique view of the purpose of athletic sport participation compared to domestic student-athletes (Bentzinger, 2016; Jones et al., 2008; Popp et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2015). Jones et al. explored ISA motivations for participating in intercollegiate athletics (2008). They found that ISAs were motivated to compete in intercollegiate athletics for four primary reasons, including intercollegiate athletics attractiveness, school attractiveness, the desire for independence, and environmental attractiveness. Likewise, Popp et al. (2009) assessed the differences in the purpose of intercollegiate athletics perceived by ISAs and domestic student-athletes. The overall results indicated that domestic student-athletes tend to see intercollegiate athletic participation as the pinnacle of sport participation and prioritize competition more than ISAs (Bentzinger, 2016; Popp et al., 2009). The findings of these studies help explain how ISAs view collegiate sport participation from domestic student-athletes, which may impact ISA socialization and transition issues.

Another critical aspect of understanding ISAs is recognizing the difference in the international sport participation structure. In the United States, most competitive athletic options operate in a school-based system, while in many countries outside the United States, an external sports club-based system exists (Popp et al., 2009; Ridpath, 2018). Unlike the educational core of sports in the U.S., the international sports club is the center of international sport development

and operates independently from academic institutions (Ridpath, 2018; Ridpath et al., 2019). The governance structure of international sport clubs allows foreign governments to have a significant oversight role via national sport policies (Popp et al., 2009; Ridpath et al., 2019). These policies can determine participants' access to sports opportunities, determine which sport organizations will have access to resources, affects national health issues, and helps foster national pride (Popp et al., 2009; Ridpath, 2018). This model is structured as a pyramid, with independent local sports clubs being organized into regional and national sport federations, thus acting as the pyramid's foundation (Ridpath et al., 2019). At the top of the pyramid are international organizations that are representative, regulatory bodies of all disciplines at a global level (Ridpath, 2018).

For many prospective ISAs, the NCAA intercollegiate model of athletics is unfamiliar (Bentzinger, 2016; Popp et al., 2009). Instead, many prospective ISAs are often unaware of the option to study and compete in the United States until they are in high school (Bentzinger, 2016), thus, ISAs often do not have different built-in perceptions about schools in the United States, which can have a large impact on where they ultimately decide to attend (Bentzinger, 2016). Furthermore, ISAs are often dependent on the schools that are interested in them as possible choices. Instead of having a long list of schools they would like to attend, ISAs instead utilize a small list of schools that have offered them scholarships from which to make a choice (Bentzinger, 2016). In 2019, Ridpath et al. found that European ISAs believed media coverage, sport environment, and facilities are the most significant advantages of the NCAA educational-based sport structure, while coaches, talent development, and levels of competition are the advantages of the international sport structure. Likewise, before ISAs are granted an international student work visa to study in the United States, they must show how they are going to financially

cover the costs of receiving their education (Bentzinger, 2016). As a result, an athletic scholarship can become extremely valuable to someone coming to study in the United States (Bentzinger, 2016; Popp et al., 2011). This difference between a club-based international system and a school-based system like the NCAA is essential to understand when studying ISAs.

Due to an ISA's inability to frequently visit the campuses of potential universities like domestic student-athletes do when being recruited, Bentzinger (2016) found that ISAs place significant importance on the personalities of coaching staffs and institutional factors when being recruited. Because ISAs are generally dependent on the schools that are interested in them, in most instances, the only representatives from the institution that ISAs interact consistently with during the recruiting process are the coaching staff (Bentzinger, 2016; Popp et al., 2011). Because of this, the personalities of the coaches who are recruiting an ISA can have a significant impact on whether the ISA ultimately decides to attend the institution (Bentzinger, 2016; Popp et al., 2011). Likewise, because domestic student-athletes have they have the ability to go on campus visits often, they have greater levels of accessibility to schools than ISAs do, thus institution factors such as regional location, academic programs offered, and campus amenities are of much higher importance to domestic athletes than international student-athletes (Bentzinger, 2016; Popp et al., 2011).

Another significant difference separating ISAs from their domestic counterparts is the NCAA eligibility process. As defined in the previous chapter of this dissertation, an amateur is someone who does not have a written or verbal agreement with an agent, has not profited above their actual and necessary expenses, or gained a competitive advantage in their sport (NCAA, 2022). The most widespread definition of amateur sport is based on those individuals who practice sport casually for pure pleasure and not by profession (Rocco, 2021). It differs from

professional sport in that amateurs do not exercise this function as a way of life to earn remuneration, not receiving any financial benefit for their practice (Rocco, 2021). In a contemporary way, the concept of amateurism defines the athlete who has never accepted money or who accepts money under restrictions specified by a regulatory body for participating in a competition (Rocco, 2021). The NCAA guidelines mandate that to be eligible for athletic competition, a student-athlete must be an amateur and at no time received unnecessary compensation for their sporting abilities (NCAA, 2022). Because of this, the NCAA Eligibility Center is forced to repeatedly research the structure of an ISA's educational systems and relate them to the American educational system and investigate what to do if an individual has lived in multiple countries (Bentzinger, 2016). This investigation includes determining if an ISA employed a manager while part of a club system, worked with agents, or were compensated for their sporting abilities (Bentzinger, 2016).

These decisions are why ISA amateurism issues make up for 90% of violations found by the NCAA Eligibility Center (Bentzinger, 2016). Before the creation of the NCAA Eligibility Center, the responsibility of regulating the eligibility of prospective ISAs fell to the individual colleges that were recruiting the ISAs (Covell & Barr, 2016). As the number of ISAs applying for NCAA eligibility grew and college coaches and administrators proved unable or untrustworthy to complete the process, the NCAA was forced to take over (Weight & Zullo, 2016). During this time, many NCAA employees who were directly involved with this transition of authority admitted that this process was rife full of issues, as the NCAA was simply unprepared for the abundant amount of international student applications that were submitted during its first year of existence (Covell & Barr, 2016). Among the problems that arose during the transition was how NCAA rules and regulations created for domestic students were now



being applied globally (Ridpath, 2018; Ridpath et al., 2019). Subsequently, the NCAA's amateurism cabinet was forced to loosen many of the stricter definitions of amateurism within the NCAA's legislation regarding prospective ISAs, as the NCAA's definitions regarding amateurism and participation with foreign professional teams were considered to be excessively broad and unjustifiable punitive to prospective ISAs who had never meant to forego their amateur status, as many of these ISAs were victims of predatory practices of professional clubs (Covell & Barr, 2016).

These NCAA regulations have continued to evolve with the international landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic brought on the most recent change to international student requirements within the NCAA. Because of the pandemic, the NCAA Eligibility Center loosened the standards for ISAs who initially enrolled full-time and intended to play NCAA Division I or Division II sports during the 2020-21 or 2021-22 academic school years (NCAA, 2020). ISAs are no longer required to take the ACT or SAT (NCAA, 2020). It is currently unknown if this will be a permanent change to the NCAA eligibility standards or a temporary one.

### ***Adjustment and Transitional Issues Facing International Student-Athletes***

Identifying and recognizing the many social challenges that ISAs face is one of the prime directives of this research, however much research about the issues ISAs face as they transition to life as a student in the United States has been published. A thorough review of ISA-related scholarship revealed three primary authors who are frequently cited in ISA research. These authors include Popp (2007; Popp et al. 2009; 2010; 2011), Pierce et al. (2012), and Newell (2015; 2016).

In the late 2000s to mid-2010s, Nels Popp published a series of articles about ISAs and the cultural adjustments they face. Throughout his research, Popp found that ISAs form a

stronger attachment to their institutions than other international students (2007; Popp et al., 2010; Pierce et al., 2012). In 2009, Popp et al. found that ISAs view the competition aspect of the purpose of college sports much lower than domestic student-athletes. The result of this study showed that ISAs might view the university athletic experience as more than just a sporting endeavor which could cause them to de-emphasize the athletic component while emphasizing other aspects of the university experience (Popp et al., 2009). Another possible justification regarding the differences found in the importance of competition for university athletes may rest in differences in psychological motivation between athletes raised in the United States compared to those raised elsewhere (Popp et al., 2009). In 2011, Popp continued his research alongside various colleagues to learn how international and domestic student-athletes compare colleges during the recruitment process. They found that ISAs rated school attributes significantly lower than domestic student-athletes (Popp et al., 2011). These findings possess significant implications for the coaches who regularly recruit ISAs.

In 2012, Popp again worked with several colleagues to set out to answer five questions about ISAs: what is the most challenging aspect of the international university experience, what do ISAs identify as the most important factor for a successful transition to college in the United States, how did ISAs hear about athletic opportunities in the United States, what advice would current ISAs give prospective ISAs considering a move to the United States to participate in an intercollegiate sport, and what would the ISAs have done had they not played college sports in the United States (Pierce et al., 2012). Homesickness and adjustment to the U.S. culture were identified as the most challenging aspects of the university experience for international athletes (Peirce et al., 2012). The most important elements to a successful transition for ISAs were a robust support system from teammates and coaches and friends and family in their native country

(Pierce et al., 2012). A quarter of the respondents reported learning about athletic opportunities from coaches in the U.S., while an equal number of respondents learned about these opportunities from friends, family, and other athletes (Pierce et al., 2012). Key discoveries from this study included current ISAs reporting that prospective ISAs need to realize that playing sports in the U.S. requires important traits like focus, dedication, hard work, and persistence to succeed (Pierce et al., 2012). This study highlighted the importance of having a university staff member dedicated to helping ISAs transition to college life in the United States, being especially attentive to homesickness, adjustment to U.S. culture, and the language barrier.

More recently, Emily Newell has focused her research on supporting ISAs during their transition into life as college students in the U.S. Based off previously conducted research, in 2015, Newell created a support model explicitly designed to assist with adjustment issues ISAs may face. This model covered topics including homesickness, adjusting to U.S. culture, language barrier, adjustment to competing demands, coping with athletic success or failure, socialization, dealing with the end of one's athletic career, and adjusting to U.S. education (Newell, 2015). Because the ISA transition is affected by both academic and athletic factors, practitioners from both academics and athletics must work together to provide advising and support services that address the issues specific to ISAs (Newell, 2015). In 2016, Newell revised her model to provide additional guidance to advisors and coaches of ISAs, further distancing the literature existing between ISAs and the general international student population. Newell found that a statistically significant difference exists between the needs of ISAs and non-athlete international students on items related to the transition to college and sources of academic, personal, and athletic support (2016).

### *Socioeconomic, Gender, and Organizational Issues Facing ISAs*

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines socioeconomic status as the social standing or class of an individual or group. Socioeconomic status is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation (APA, n.d.). Examinations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power, and control (APA, n.d.). Socioeconomic factors that impact an ISA's experience at a university vary depending on the culture in which one is reared and individual university and team factors. The term "culture" refers to a pattern of shared behaviors, beliefs, values, and attitudes that give expression and meaning to a social world (Stensland, 2021). As sport serves as an institution within society, cultural symbols, practices, and meanings are embedded throughout the structure; thus, a sport culture exists through the lived experiences and cultivated behavior of individuals within the institution (Stensland, 2021).

In 2021, Manwell et al. studied Hispanic ISAs competing in NCAA Division I sports through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). This study revealed several socioeconomic factors that impact Hispanic ISAs. Despite all participants having substantial experience with the English language before coming to the United States, language was the predominant theme that made the collective experience most difficult (Manwell et al., 2021). The Hispanic ISAs reported experiencing new situations daily, constantly making cultural adaptations, such as linguistic changes like translating in their heads, decoding slang and humor, and having trouble keeping up with the pace of conversations. The Hispanic ISAs also reported that language deficiencies in social situations caused significant anxiety (Manwell et al., 2021). The pursuit of balance was another intense adjustment, and the Hispanic ISAs struggled to adapt to different cultural mindsets, new demands between academic and athletic workloads, and having less time for

socializing (Manwell et al., 2021). The Hispanic ISAs also reported struggling with cultural adaptation. The theme of cultural adaptation encompassed themes including independence, individualism, physical closeness, food, environment, athletics, and academics. Many Hispanic ISAs also grew up in ultra-urban environments such as Madrid, Santiago, and Mexico City before moving to the U.S. to attend colleges in small towns or rural settings, which was reported to be a significant challenge (Manwell et al., 2021). From a political perspective, several participants acknowledged varying degrees of stereotyping that they had not faced before but experienced in the U.S. due to their nationality or language, including comments about drug use, migrant workers, and teammates failing to acknowledge the differences between European and South American Hispanic countries (Manwell et al., 2021).

Despite a supportive social network proving extremely useful for navigating a new environment, imbalance still existed in the lives of the Hispanic ISAs due to discontinuity between the demands of being an intercollegiate student-athlete and ingrained cultural identities (Manwell et al., 2021). In today's globalized economy, cultural sensitivity is essential, and understanding and knowing about cultural differences is a crucial skill for success in any field (Orejan, 2021). Ignorance of cultural differences can result in missed opportunities, reputational damage, legal challenges, productivity losses, expatriate failure, and the premature termination of partnerships (Orejan, 2021). The misunderstandings, tensions, and biases caused by cultural differences can even lead to outright failure (Orejan, 2021). Understanding language nuances, etiquette, and cultural time management differences can help navigate many complex interactions (Brown, 2019).

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female and the socially constructed roles and responsibilities that societies consider, expect,

allow, and value for the two (Schoch, 2021a). These attributes and expectations are assimilated through the processes of socialization. Socialization is a lifelong, complex, and interactive process of learning and social development that allows people to familiarize themselves with the social world they live in (Schoch, 2021c). Through socialization, people are shaped and conditioned by the global and local societies in which they live, as they learn, internalize, and integrate the skills, attitudes, values, and norms in a socially acceptable manner (Schoch, 2021c). Sport is an important sector to study and understand gender, as it is one of the essential cultural practices that demarcates and defines genders (Schoch, 2021a). Because most mainstream sports at the professional and collegiate levels of participation are male-dominated, hegemonic masculinity is constantly reconstructed in the field through symbolic representation (Bowes et al., 2021; Schoch, 2021a). This field perpetuates and reinforces a male model of (heterosexual) physical superiority based on physical dominance, aggression, and competitiveness, which tends to legitimize men's perceived natural superiority and reinforces women's inferiority (Schoch, 2021a; Schoch & Clausen., 2019).

Gender equality refers to ensuring equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for women, men, girls, and boys across all sectors of society (Schoch, 2021b). This implies that the different behaviors, aspirations, and needs of women and men are equally valued and favored (Schoch, 2021b). Gender equality in sports refers to the equal integration of men and women on and off the field of play (Boczek et al., 2022; Elling et al., 2018). While substantial research has been completed on gender equality in sports, very little focusing on ISAs has been published.

In 2020, Milica Veselinovic completed her dissertation on ISAs who identify as women (ISAWs). As a former ISAW herself, Veselinovic was keen on the various adjustments and socioeconomic challenges that face this specialized group of ISAs. The purpose of this study was

to describe the college adjustment experiences of ISAWs (Veselinovic, 2020). This qualitative case study found that ISAWs had to overcome language challenges and discover how to navigate a novel academic system efficiently, ISAWs experienced homesickness, ISAWs had to adjust to higher performance expectations and different athletic resources, ISAWs mostly socialized within their athletic structures, and did not form meaningful relationships outside their athletic circles (Veselinovic, 2020). Additionally, Veselinovic found that ISAWs felt more aggressively forced to adjust to their immediate social structures to interact with coaches and teammates than ISAs who identify as men.

ISAs are also forced to manage various organizational issues during their time as college students in the United States. Organizational culture can be defined as the assumptions, values, and symbols shared by an organization and its members over a period of time (Onwumechili, 2018). An organization's assumptions are beliefs about relationships and tasks within the organization. The values they hold are those things that the organization deems important (Onwumechili, 2018). The symbols are the artifacts of the organization, such as written materials. Albeit difficult to achieve, cultural change can be accomplished. Cultural change requires new thinking about how things are done (Onwumechili, 2018).

One major organizational issue facing ISAs exists within the messaging of international eligibility requirements. A 2015 study evaluated the level of congruency that exists between the NCAA's messaging of initial eligibility requirements and the actual understanding of prospective student-athletes (Currie). After surveying current student-athletes across all three NCAA divisions of participation about their recruitment and initial eligibility experiences, the researcher found that discrepancies regarding the importance of initial eligibility requirements did indeed exist (Currie, 2015). This study effectively illustrates a need for the NCAA and its member

institutions to improve communications surrounding initial eligibility requirements for prospective student-athletes (Currie, 2015).

Another organizational issue that ISAs face is fair and balanced standards for every ISA, regardless of their respective country of origin (Baghurst et al., 2018). As previously stated, since the NCAA's rules and regulations of amateurism are being applied on a global scale, they cannot consistently and adequately address the potential issues of amateurism facing ISAs (Ridpath, 2018; Ridpath et al., 2019). This is significant because competitive equity between prospective international and domestic student-athletes cannot be achieved if amateurism standards vary from country to country (Baghurst et al., 2018). The primary area of focus when dealing with amateurism standards is the ability of the NCAA Eligibility Center to discern ISAs who had never meant to forego their amateur status when participating with foreign professional teams (Covell & Barr, 2016).

Improvement opportunities for the athletic departments and coaching staffs that recruit ISAs also exist. These opportunities include employing more inclusive mission statements and attending to the identity needs of ISAs. In 2020, Ortega et al. established the need for athletic departments to go beyond a broad athletic mission statement and create an athletic diversity mission statement. In an analysis of 250 NCAA Division I institutions, the authors found that only 62% of athletic departments published a mission statement on their respective websites, and just 11.6% featured a published diversity mission statement (Ortega et al., 2020). The authors also utilized content analysis to find that the diversity referenced in mission statements mainly focused on female students and gender equity. In contrast, diversity mission statements focused on both students and coaches regarding gender, race, and sexual orientation. The need to address all types of diversity in the ever-evolving social landscape of collegiate athletics is essential to



foster a healthy atmosphere and culture for all student-athletes, including international student-athletes. This finding upholds the notion that the NCAA fails to live up to the diversity and inclusion statements in the treatment of ISAs (Ortega et al., 2020).

Individualism versus collectivism in athletics is a frequent area of study, as the differences affect an athlete's individual freedom and relationship to their team (Onwumechili, 2018). In individualistic cultures, athletes are highly independent, whereas, in collectivistic cultures, athletes spend significantly more time with their teammates (Onwumechili, 2018). Due to the unique requirements and obligations placed on collegiate athletes, student-athletes are most likely to self-identify based on their campus role as an athlete, rather than as a student (Ng et al., 2018). In fact, student-athletes relate so strongly to their athletic identities that they can sometimes lose their identities as college students (Hawley et al., 2015; Tucker et al., 2016). Because of the common identity many athletes share, athletes tend to favor group identities rather than individual ones (Hawley et al., 2015). Likewise, due to the many legal requirements international students often encounter as they attempt and prepare to leave their home countries, this group of students also tends to favor a group identity (Ng et al., 2018). For these reasons, ISAs typically prefer to take on a collectivistic identity. Still, sometimes this isn't possible due to the conflicting nature of being a part of two different groups (a student-athlete and an international student). This lack of attachment has been found to lead to lower retention rates among international student-athletes, as a lack of collective identity and low attachment is directly related to a student-athlete's willingness to transfer to a different institution than the one they initially enrolled at to complete their athletic eligibility (Popp, 2007; Newell, 2015; 2016; Ridpath, 2018).

## Summary

This chapter reviewed the relevant and recent literature surrounding SIT and ISAs. A general overview of the seminal research surrounding SIT was addressed, followed by a review of current research applying SIT to sport. A branch of SIT, social identity complexity (SIC), was also reviewed. The seminal literature surrounding ISAs was addressed, including recent research published about the growth of ISAs in the NCAA, ISA cultural issues, and ISA adjustment issues, which revealed a research gap regarding the academic and socialization issues ISAs face.

ISA group affiliations that materialize by joining an in-group and feeling a sense of belongingness include international students, student-athletes, specific team groups (basketball players, football players, tennis team, etc.), college students, and more. Being part of these groups brings feelings of belongingness to a group more significant than an individual. However, distancing oneself from any of these groups or positioning an in-group against an opposing out-group (such as a rival team) is also crucial to developing one's social identity. SIT looks at individuals as "mosaics" of the many groups to which they belong (Kreindler et al., 2012; Kreindler et al., 2021). Ascribing to this metaphor, ISAs would undoubtedly be some of the most colorful and complex mosaics in sports today.

### **Chapter 3: Research Method**

The problem addressed in this study was that international student-athletes (ISAs) have less healthy academic and environments compared to their peers from other countries. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs at NCAA Division I member institutions. The study was designed to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences that ISAs encounter as they possess multiple group affiliations as both an international student and a student-athlete. The methodological approach adopted for this study was a descriptive single case study. Descriptive case studies usually require document review, participant observation, and in-depth interview methods to truly understand the experience or phenomena under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

With this research, I sought to better understand the ISA experience and the support measures that are most helpful, and the additional support needed to enhance the academic and social experiences of international student-athletes in the United States. Social identity theory (SIT) served as the theoretical framework for understanding the issues and experiences that ISAs encounter during their collegiate careers. SIT is described as a theory that predicts certain intergroup behaviors on the basis of perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those status differences, and the perceived ability to move from one group to another (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Since its inception, SIT has grown into a prominent theory in sports management studies (Martyn et al., 2019).

The arrangement of this chapter's contents is presented in the following sequence. The research methods and design addressed a single qualitative case study and specified this selection as the appropriate choice to identify and analyze academic and social experiences of ISAs

competing in NCAA Division I athletics. This study's population sample will be comprised of ISAs aged 18 - 22 who are currently competing at NCAA Division I institutions. Purposive sampling was used to select participants that could yield the most relevant and plentiful data (Yin, 2016). Semi-structured, individual and focus group interviews were conducted with the ISAs via Zoom. The interviews were recorded, then transcribed manually, and these transcripts served as textual artifacts, which were analyzed through the theoretical lens of SIT. Data were coded and analyzed through the qualitative research management software NVivo. Additional topics addressed in this chapter include study design assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and ethical assurances.

### **Research Methodology and Design**

The research methodology and design of this study consists of a qualitative single case study and was used to explore the academic and socialization experiences of ISAs competing in NCAA Division I athletics. ISAs possess multiple in-group affiliations, including those of international students, student-athletes, a specific team member, and college students (Cranmer, 2018). Possessing multiple group affiliations can produce unique lived experiences, including socialization and role development issues (Nelson et al., 2018). The issues surrounding ISAs are a relatively new field of study at the intersection of athletics and education, with the majority of studies focusing on the shared trials, difficulties, and issues encountered by new ISAs during their transition to life in the U.S. (Newell, 2016; Veselinovic, 2021). The aim of the study is to address an existing gap in the literature, specifically identifying the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs and what can be done to meet the needs of ISAs more effectively.

A qualitative single case study was selected for this research because it is exploratory and contains descriptive questioning, which provided rich data through personal experiences and feedback (Yin, 2018). Case studies provide researchers with an opportunity for greater depth of understanding of an issue (Stake, 2010). The single case study allows for researchers to make an in-depth examination, observing and listening for contextual information from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2018) of the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs competing at NCAA Division I institutions. Case studies incorporate exploratory measures to identify and address a particular phenomenon (Stake, 1995). The case study design is preferred as a research strategy when “how,” “why,” and “what” questions are the interest of the researcher (Yin, 2018), as is the case of this research. Moreover, case study research is appropriate when a researcher’s goals are to examine a contemporary issue that involves real-life topics (Yin, 2016).

Prior to the selection of the single case study research design, various other research designs were considered. Survey research was considered due to the availability of phenomenological scales; however, quantitative studies do not allow an exploration into an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon as a qualitative study can accomplish (Tenny et al., 2021). Compared to quantitative research, which requires test scores and numerical analysis data, qualitative studies are distinguished by the data collection of non-numeric data, such individual and focus group interviews (Yin, 2018). While quantitative research bases assumptions on statistical outcomes (Li, 2019), it remains absent of social observations (Rahman, 2017) and does not require follow up to personal experiences that a case study otherwise encompasses (Cresswell, 2016). Another strength of a qualitative case is the ability to review a variety of

triangulated evidence, which establishes validity and reliability of data (Fuchs et al., 2017; Yin, 2016).

After settling on a qualitative methodology, alternative qualitative research methods, including narrative research and grounded theory, were considered but found to be inappropriate for this study. Narrative analysis is classified as a story-telling approach, highlighting personal events on an individual's private life experiences (Cresswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach would not be appropriate for this study on ISAs, as focus of this study is on the shared, common experiences of multiple ISAs competing across the NCAA. Grounded theory was heavily considered, but this research design relies on a much larger pool of participants, upwards of 60 individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which made it an improbable fit for this study given the timeframe for completion. Alternatively, research utilizing a combination of interviews and focus groups can produce high confidence levels with as few as four expert participants if they are recruited within the intended field of study (Guest et al., 2017). A descriptive single case study approach to this research effectively addressed the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs across multiple nationalities, cultures, and group affiliations.

### **Population and Sample**

The sample for this study was comprised of ISAs competing in NCAA Division I athletics, including men's basketball, women's basketball, football, women's soccer, and women's golf. International student-athletes currently attending Western US State University (WUSU), a pseudonym being used to protect identities, served as the research participants. Western US State University was chosen because of the number of ISAs currently attending the institution, the variety of ISAs' reported home countries, the variety of sports in which ISAs are currently competing, and the willingness of the WUSU Athletic Department to help facilitate

recruitment of research participants. A total of 25 ISAs volunteered to participate in the study, though only 13 ISAs were interviewed as data saturation was reached prior to interviewing all 25 volunteers. The pool of 13 ISA participants included ISAs from nine different countries (American Samoa, Australia, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iceland, Nigeria, Senegal, Sweden, and Thailand), participating in six different sports (football, men's basketball, women's basketball, women's golf, women's soccer, and women's track and field). The 13 ISA participants included six females and seven males, aged 18-24 years, from multiple graduation classes (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate student).

With the apparent gap in literature explaining how possessing multiple group affiliations affects ISAs, it is important to understand what steps can be taken to provide ISAs with healthier academic and social environments. To better offer unique perspectives in a specialized field (Ellis, 2020), two focus groups consisting of three ISAs and seven individual interviews with ISAs were conducted. Purposive sampling was used to collect data until saturation was reached (Young & Casey, 2019). Saturation is reached when responses to the interview questions become repetitive and no longer produce new information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Young & Casey, 2019). This non-random sampling technique is most appropriate for this methodology and design because provided rich data through participant perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ramlo, 2020) and helped to identify the academic and socialization issues that cause ISAs to have less healthy academic environments than their domestic counterparts.

Participants were recruited through the WUSU Athletic Department. A recruitment email was first sent to the WUSU Assistant Athletic Director of Academics, who then forwarded the email to all of the current ISAs at WUSU. The ISAs who expressed interest were then directed to a Qualtrics survey that gathered voluntary demographic information, provided ISA participants

with informed consent, and allowed them to set up a time to be interviewed via Zoom. While 25 ISAs expressed interest in this study, data saturation was reached at 13 participants. Contact with the ISAs was initiated after receiving approval from the Northcentral University (NCU) Institutional Review Board (IRB).

## **Materials**

This qualitative descriptive case study utilized three instruments for data collection: semi-structured individual interviews, semi-structured focus group interviews, and researcher field notes. Focus groups can elicit highly effective data collection in qualitative research (Luke & Goodrich, 2019), while interviews offer uniform value directed toward addressing research questions (Braaten et al., 2020). Handwritten field notes taken during the interviews and focus groups were also utilized. Collecting multiple types of information is a process called data triangulation (Yin, 2018). Data triangulation encourages researchers to collect information from multiple sources that corroborate the same findings (Yin, 2018). Individual interviews and focus group guides containing open-ended, semi-structured questions were created to generate relevant feedback from participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

As the study was designed to provide an understanding of the academic and socialization experiences of ISAs, the interview guide consisted of semi-structured interview questions guided by the study's research questions. The interview guide was created under the direction of the NCU IRB after consulting seminal literature on qualitative data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Yin, 2018) and academic interview protocol (Katz-Buonincontro & Nezu, 2022; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Straus, 2019). The interview protocol was reviewed by several experts in the field who provided feedback on improving the final version of the interview guide and questions. Field testing measures were also employed with a researcher at a



different institution who works closely with ISAs prior to conducting any participant interviews. Lastly, member checking efforts were made during the interview process at the conclusion of the interviews and focus groups. The final interview guide that was followed through the duration of this study can be found in Appendix E.

Aligning the interview questions with the research questions helped to ensure content validity (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Semi-structured interviews contain open-ended questions that are structured in a way that allows for participants to respond freely without any constraints (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Open-ended questions provide valuable insight and opportunities for researchers for a unique perspective into the respondents' thinking (Morse, 2015; Roberts et al., 2014). Semi-structured interviews also allow researchers to ask follow-up questions that the participants did not express clearly and introduce other questions to gather more detailed information (Morse, 2015). As semi-structured interviews generally allow for the gathering of new insights, they also allow respondents to ask questions and gain clarity about the topic (Roulston & Choi, 2018). The research materials were also compared to recent literature and other qualitative research materials to ensure that the research materials are trustworthy (Hayashi et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs at NCAA Division I member institutions. The semi-structured interview is designed to elicit in-depth responses from study participants (Beadell, 2019). Interview questions were approved through the NCU IRB and the WUSU IRB to ensure their ability to gather the necessary data required to answer the three research questions listed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Individual interviews took place via Zoom on a date and time that are mutually agreed upon by both parties and were recorded. The focus groups were

composed of ISAs who compete on the same team. Teammates can make for effective focus groups, as the participants are typically comfortable together and share potential interest in, passion for, and feelings about the topic (Cyr, 2019). Focus groups are a useful method for researchers who wish to gather in-depth information about social processes (Kruger & Casey, 2015). Focus groups are similar to individual qualitative interviews, but also offer researchers the opportunity to observe group dynamics that cannot be observed in one-on-one interviews (Cyr, 2019).

### **Study Procedures**

The initial steps of this project began with obtaining approval from the NCU IRB. Obtaining IRB approval for this project involved completing a CITI program course, drafting a non-disclosure and confidentiality agreement, letter of consent, recruitment email, interview guide, and obtaining necessary site permissions. Site permissions for this project included obtaining full IRB approval first from the WUSU IRB. Letters of support from my department chair, the Director of Athletics at WUSU, and the WUSU IRB Director were also obtained.

After receiving approval from the NCU IRB, recruitment materials were emailed to the WUSU Assistant Athletic Director for Academics, who then forwarded the recruitment materials to each of the ISAs currently competing at WUSU. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants. The focus groups were scheduled for two separate 60-minute sessions, with the participants able to congregate together or separately over a recorded Zoom room. The individual interviews were scheduled for 45-minute sessions. Data from the focus groups and individual interviews were collected through open-ended, semi-structured questioning. Handwritten field notes taken during the interviews and focus groups will also be used to gather data. Collecting multiple types of information is a process called data triangulation (Yin, 2018). Data

triangulation encourages researchers to collect information from multiple sources that corroborate the same findings (Yin, 2018). Transcripts from the interviews and focus groups provided the textual artifacts that were coded and analyzed with NVivo software. This descriptive case study provides a better understanding of contextual meanings and implications described through participant dialogue.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis starts with the researcher creating units of analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). A unit of analysis is a meaningful segment that has the potential to respond to part of a research question (Elliot, 2018). It can be as short as one word or as long as a paragraph (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The unit needs to satisfy two requirements: it must be relevant for the study and inspire the researcher to think beyond a specific word, phrase, or concept, and it must be the smallest piece of information that can be interpreted without any additional information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Since the purpose of this qualitative case study is to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs at NCAA Division I institutions, units of analysis in this study are academic difficulties and socialization issues that ISAs face while attending school and competing in NCAA sports.

As previously stated, data were collected from ISAs through individual and focus group interviews, the data were analyzed through an open coding process. Data recordings from the focus groups and one-on-one individual interviews also provided feedback on verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Morgan, 2019). All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in a Word document. Upon completion of each interview session, the transcripts were imported into the NVivo software, which provided a structured atmosphere for the data to be coded according to the categories of SIT (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Kreindler et al., 2021), which can

be found in the literature review and theoretical framework. Coding is the process of examining qualitative data by reducing them down to see what is generated before putting the data back together meaningfully (Elliott, 2018). NVivo software is widely used in qualitative research, as it can authenticate qualitative investigations by organizing and classifying data sequences into essential themes, patterns, and topics (Bonello & Meehan, 2019). Once the data was compiled, it was organized into clustered data arrangements, which aided in alignment of the research questions (Yin, 2018). Through the use of multiple data collection methods, the data was triangulated, which established validity and reliability of the data (Fuchs et al., 2017; Yin, 2016).

While NVivo software can provide a model atmosphere for qualitative research, researchers are still responsible for defending how and why thematic phrases align with the research questions (Yin, 2018). In a qualitative study, data collection should provide a baseline of interpretive analysis that addresses themes, patterns, and codes across proposed study components (O’Kane et al., 2021). For this study on ISAs competing and attending NCAA Division I institutions, the four branches of SIT (social categorization, social comparison, social identification, and psychological distinctiveness) was used as the conceptual framework surrounding the academic and socialization issues that ISAs encounter (Martyn et al., 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Further synthesis and analysis provided a further conceptual understanding (Houghton et al., 2017) of the academic and socialization issues that ISAs encounter. This synthesis was used to answer the research questions listed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

### **Assumptions**

When a researcher does not possess personal experiences related to participants' viewpoints, assumptions become a process to make sense of information that may need further

exploration to become validated (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). Several assumptions will be made throughout this study. The first and arguably most important assumption made is that those ISAs who participate in the study will be honest during the interview process and not provide inaccurate or intentionally misleading representations of their academic and socialization experiences as ISAs attending an NCAA Division I-member institution. Other assumptions include the belief that participants will produce enough data to support the study (Poucher et al., 2020) and that the participants will be an accurate representation of all ISAs attending NCAA Division I institutions.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are present in all investigative studies, which can refute research findings (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The first and most relevant limitation of this study is that it focuses exclusively on ISAs who compete at the NCAA Division I level, and does not address the experiences of ISAs at other levels of collegiate athletics, including Division II, Division III, NAIA, or NJCAA. This research seeks to provide a better understanding of the ISA experience at the Division I level. Rather than evaluating any single coach, team, or institution; rather, this research seeks to identify the support measures that are most helpful and the additional support needed to enhance the academic and social experiences of international student-athletes in the United States. In the future, it could be beneficial to research the academic and socialization experiences of ISAs at the other levels of collegiate athletics. A second limitation is the participant pool was comprised of ISAs attending WUSU. While the impact of this limitation can be minimized by including ISAs from multiple countries and nationalities, this limitation is tied directly to the assumption that the participants will be an accurate representation of all ISAs attending NCAA Division I institutions. Because of the presence of study limitations, data

triangulation must be utilized to authenticate participant response consistencies by maintaining a logical sequence of events that were followed throughout the study (Fusch et al., 2018). Lastly, there are various limitations associated with the research methods. According to Theofanidis & Fountouki (2018), the limitations of any study concern potential weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control and closely associated with the chosen research design, statistical model constraints, funding constraints, or other factors. An exploratory procedure using open-ended questions may cause a limitation in the answers given as personal and subjective (Straus, 2019). Another potential limitation is researcher bias (Goodrick, 2020).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations provide researchers with an opportunity to set specific parameters around a research study and to create a manageable timeline of events (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study was delimited to ISAs attending WUSU, an NCAA Division I member institution. This institution is located in the intermountain west regions of the United States. My pre-existing relationship with the WUSU Department of Athletics and the many ISAs that attend WUSU will allow data to be gathered promptly once IRB approval is obtained. WUSU boasts a diverse population of ISAs from various countries in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. This diverse sample should provide this study with broad and rich data that is representative of the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs across the NCAA. The sample size will be delimited as necessary once saturation is reached (Yin, 2018).

### **Ethical Assurances**

Written approval from the Northcentral University IRB and the Western US State University IRB will be obtained before any research or data has begun. This procedure ensures that each participant's rights and privacy will remain protected throughout the entire course of

the study. Specific ethical considerations must be taken for all research that involves human subjects (Yin, 2018). Once IRB approval is received, a recruitment email will be sent to the Assistant Athletic Director for Academics at WUSU, who will then forward the email to all of the ISAs at WUSU. Interested ISAs will be prompted to complete a survey that will inform them of all the steps and ethical assurance taken in the research process. This survey will also serve as the consent form for the ISA participants. Upon completion of the survey, the ISAs will then be contacted via email to schedule an interview over Zoom. Participants will be advised that if they wish to continue with this study, confidentiality and anonymity will be achieved through informed consent of the recorded focus groups or one-on-one interview sessions' rights and responsibilities. Data collections will be secured on an encrypted drive in a password-protected folder and be stored for three years, per IRB requirements. Data analysis will be secured in a locked cabinet inside the Doctoral candidate's home office. All research records and data collected during this study will be destroyed after seven years.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. Names and any other personal information of participants in this study will be kept strictly confidential. No student names will be mentioned at any time in this dissertation. No unnecessary participant data will be included in the dissertation that would allow for identification of the participants. Despite these efforts to minimize risk, participants could still elect to skip any question they did not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time without fear of penalty.

Personal bias can emerge if the researcher possesses intimate knowledge or experience of the study (Trnka & Smelik, 2020). I have never been an NCAA student-athlete, nor am I an international student. While I am not, nor have I ever been, an ISA myself, I have interacted with many ISAs. Therefore, data will be carefully collected, coded, and subjectively analyzed, while

participants will be encouraged to report personal experiences rather than opinions (Trnka & Smelik, 2020). Qualitative methodology calls for the researcher to be a key instrument in the research process. This concept is known as “researcher-as-instrument,” and refers to the idea that qualitative research doesn’t concern itself with remaining objective. Instead, it openly relies on researchers utilizing their unique life experiences and perspectives in each step of the research process (Langley & Meziani, 2020). Through observing of behaviors and interviewing of participants, researchers constantly analyze data from their own unique perspectives (Langley & Meziani, 2020). The lived experiences, personality traits, and relationships with their subjects make qualitative researchers instruments in every stage of the research process (Sandivik & McCormack, 2018). My role as the researcher was primarily to oversee this study as a facilitator and guide the participants to provide feedback relevant to the research questions.

### **Summary**

Due to ISAs possessing multiple group identities, this qualitative case study was designed to explore the academic and socialization experiences of ISAs attending NCAA Division I institutions. Case studies are descriptive in nature and support research criteria by providing thematic patterns while aligning data with contextual interpretations from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2018). ISAs were recruited through the athletic department at WUSU. Purposive sampling was used to ensure participants would yield the most relevant and plentiful data (Yin, 2016). The sample size, 13 ISA participants, was determined by data saturation. Data collections were facilitated and coded with NVivo software, which authenticated the classifications and sequencing of obtained information (Bonello & Meehan, 2019). Efforts to eliminate bias from the participants and the researcher were facilitated. All ethical assurances were maintained during the entirety of the research. This case study conformed to all IRB standards so that the



data's trustworthiness would contribute to credibility of the research findings. These research findings, including the trustworthiness of the data, results, and evaluations of the findings are addressed in the following chapter. The findings of this dissertation are directly impacted by the methods discussed in this chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of international student-athletes (ISAs) attending an NCAA Division I institution. The problem the study addresses is that ISAs have less healthy social and academic environments compared to their peers from the U.S. The common socialization experiences of ISAs attending Western U.S. State University (WUSU) were identified through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. These were then coded and analyzed through the social identity theory (SIT) theoretical framework.

Established by social psychologist Henri Tajfel in the 1970s, SIT was developed to explain how the groups with which someone affiliates are influential in cultivating and sustaining their self-esteem and self-concept (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). SIT can help one determine their emotions, such as experiencing depression after a team loss, and behavior, such as discrimination against another team (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Tajfel put forth that identities should be evaluated through three related concepts: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (1974). A fourth group, psychological distinctiveness, was also mentioned (Tajfel, 1974). These four categories served as the primary method for coding the interview data.

### **Trustworthiness of the Data**

The most credible studies in academic research provide assurance that data has been properly collected and interpreted so that any findings or conclusions accurately reflect what was studied (Yin, 2016). In qualitative research, the best studies are those which establish trustworthiness throughout the study (Adler, 2022). Trustworthiness in qualitative research can only be established if a study displays the four aspects of trustworthiness: truth, applicability,

consistency, and neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These four criteria are also referred to by their qualitative values of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, respectively (Carminati, 2018).

The value of truth and credibility ensures that researchers have established confidence in the truth of their findings for the subjects and the context in which the study was performed (Amin et al., 2020). This value can also be defined as how a researcher establishes confidence in the truth of the findings of a particular inquiry (Morgan & Ravitch, 2018). Qualitative studies can be considered truthful and credible when they present descriptions of a phenomenon that are so accurate that any person who has also experienced this phenomenon would immediately recognize the description (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Establishing truth in this study on ISAs in the NCAA was achieved through the triangulation of data. Data triangulation encourages researchers to collect information from multiple sources that corroborate the same findings (Yin, 2018). I triangulated data by utilizing both semi-structured one-on-one individual interviews and focus groups when interviewing ISA participants. I also interviewed ISAs from multiple schools, sports, and nationalities.

The value of applicability and transferability in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts or with other groups (Amin et al., 2020). In other words, applicability can be defined as how generalizable the findings of a study are to larger populations (Yin, 2016). Transferability is often facilitated by well-written descriptions of the research context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), which I accomplished by defining terms, producing a comprehensive literature review, producing a well-written methodology, and clearly explaining how I produced and conducted the study.

The third value of trustworthiness is consistency and dependability. This criterion is concerned with the study's ability to be replicated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The value of consistency considers whether the study findings would be consistent if replicated in a similar context (Amin et al., 2020). Because variability is expected when studying unique human experiences, Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented the concept of dependability, which explains that any level of variability can be ascribed to identifiable sources, including informant fatigue, evolving researcher insight, or changes to informant life situations. Producing a consistent study is to clearly explain the research process in a way that could be easily replicated (Upright & Forsythe, 2021), which I accomplished by having a clearly written methodology that was planned out and scrutinized by advisors before the data was gathered.

The fourth and final value of trustworthiness is the value of neutrality and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described neutrality as the degree to which the findings of a study come from informants and the settings of the research rather than any biases, motivations, or perspectives on behalf of the researcher. The value of neutrality concerns both the researcher and the quality of the data being analyzed (Amin et al., 2020). While researcher bias is undoubtedly a concern, confirmability can be established by producing a comprehensive, recent literature review (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

## **Results**

This study utilized a qualitative, descriptive case study to analyze the common academic and socialization experiences of ISAs competing at NCAA Division I member institutions. After sending out a recruitment email to the WUSU Assistant Athletic Director of Academics, 23 ISAs volunteered to participate in the study. However, only 13 participants were interviewed before data saturation was reached. The sample of 13 ISAs included four men's basketball players, three

women's basketball players, three football players, and one ISA competing in track and field, women's golf, and women's soccer respectively. These ISAs were from various countries, including Australia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sweden, Senegal, Canada, Nigeria, Thailand, American Samoa, and Iceland. This study was guided by social identity theory. SIT explains how the in-groups to which people belong can impact their behavior (Sears & Cianfrone, 2021; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). The theory is comprised of four processes: social categorization, social identification, social comparison, and psychological distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1974). The relevance of SIT is widespread because it can be applied to nearly any person's behavior in any social situation (Sears & Cianfrone, 2021). Permission for this study was granted by the NCU IRB. Data from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed by the researcher and coded using NVivo qualitative research software.

### ***Research Questions***

This study was guided by three research questions that helped frame the study and scope of the interview protocol. The research questions were:

#### ***RQ1***

What are the perceptions of the academic issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I member institution?

#### ***RQ2***

What are the perceptions of the socialization issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I member institution?

#### ***RQ3***

What are the barriers to effective support for ISAs by their respective institution, athletic department, and other members of the campus community?

### ***Initial Interviews***

ISAs were recruited by email through the WUSU Assistant Athletic Director for Academics. Once an ISA volunteered, they were sent a consent form and an invitation to partake in a Zoom interview. The semi-structured interviews took place in October 2022. The focus groups were also conducted via Zoom and took place in October 2022, as well. The ISA participants were asked eight questions, shown in the interview protocol, which can be found in Appendix E. While conducting the interviews, follow-up questions were periodically asked in order to gain a better understanding if any information was unclear.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

After transcribing the interviews, I examined each text transcript individually several times. The texts were analyzed through the theoretical framework of SIT, specifically identifying themes and examples of social categorization, social identification, social comparison, and psychological distinctiveness. The last theme, psychological distinctiveness, included four sub-themes: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, and merger. The frames of analysis through which the data were viewed were guided by the research and interview questions. From these frames, the data were coded.

### ***Code Identification***

A code in qualitative data is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based data (Saldana, 2021). In other words, a code is a word or short phrase assigned to capture the essence of a portion of the text. Initial coding was accomplished by importing the texts into NVivo. The codes were then analyzed through the theoretical framework of SIT, sorting them into themes. After the themes were established, I read through the transcripts again to look for any codes I

may have missed that would fit into a theme, thus supporting its emergence (Saldana, 2021). The specific steps of the coding process used are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Coding Process*

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Gathering Data: Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

- Step 1: Conducted 45-minute initial interviews that consisted of eight questions and various follow-up questions for six participants.
- Step 2: Transcribed the interviews.
- Step 3: Member-checked the data by emailing transcriptions to the ISA participants.

Gathering Data: Semi-Structured Focus Group Interviews

- Step 1: Conducted 60-minute focus group interviews that consisted of eight questions and various follow-up questions for six participants divided between two groups.
- Step 2: Transcribed the interviews.
- Step 3: Member-checked the data by emailing transcripts to the ISA participants.

Analyzing the Data

- Step 1: Read through transcripts multiple times.
  - Step 2: Utilized initial coding methods with the assistance of NVivo qualitative software. Coded words or short phrases assigned to capture the essence of a portion of the text that directly related to the research questions (Saldana, 2021).
  - Step 3: Identified relationships and patterns among the codes.
  - Step 4: Collapsed codes through identifying and refining salient codes (Saldana, 2021).
  - Step 5: Identified emergent themes from the collapsed codes.
-

After identifying emergent codes in the texts through the theoretical lens of SIT, I noted salient codes and created eight collapsed codes. These collapsed codes were then applied to the research questions. These themes and the supporting collapsed codes can be found in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Emergent Themes*

Research Question	Present Themes
What are the perceptions of the academic issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I member institution?	Language barrier issues, time management issues.
What are the perceptions of the socialization issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I member institution?	Adjustment to a new culture, homesickness.
What are the barriers to effective support for ISAs by their respective institution, athletic department, and other members of the campus community?	Availability of resources, lack of ISA initiative.

*Participant Demographics*

Purposive sampling was used to identify and select the research participants. Purposive sampling occurs when the researcher asks participants to recommend other people to be sampled



(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This technique is used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information and is a way of identifying and selecting cases that will use limited research resources effectively (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling was used to identify ISAs, who then recommended other ISAs on campus, which resulted in snowball sampling. Table 6 contains relevant demographic information of the participants. All participant names are pseudonyms.

**Table 6***Self-Reported Demographic Information of Participants*

Name	Age	Class	Home Country	Race-Ethnicity	Sport	Interview Type
Avery	18	Frosh	Australia	White	W. Basketball	Group 1
Blake	20	Junior	Australia	White	M. Basketball	Individual
Chris	24	Grad	DR Congo	Black	M. Basketball	Individual
Devin	23	Senior	Sweden	White	M. Basketball	Individual
Eve	19	Soph	Australia	White	W. Basketball	Group 1
Finn	22	Senior	Senegal	Black	M. Basketball	Individual
George	23	Grad	Canada	Black	Football	Group 2
Heidi	21	Junior	Australia	White	W. Basketball	Group 1
Isaac	23	Grad	Nigeria	Black	Football	Group 2
Julia	19	Soph	Canada	White	Track & Field	Individual
Katie	20	Junior	Thailand	Asian	W. Golf	Individual
Logan	19	Frosh	Samoa	Pacific Islander	Football	Group 2
Morgan	22	Senior	Iceland	White	W. Soccer	Individual

***Research Question 1***

RQ1 asked, “What are the perceptions of the academic issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I-member institution?” Existing literature shows that ISAs adjust to university differently than domestic student-athletes, as ISAs are often better prepared for the academic rigors of college (Popp et al., 2011; Ridpath, 2019). Despite arriving

on campus better prepared than their domestic counterparts, ISAs have reported language barriers to be a significant academic obstacle (Newell, 2015; 2016). The ISA participants of this study shared various experiences of the academic issues they've experienced at WUSU, which were consistent with the pre-existing literature.

**Theme 1: Language Barrier.** The first theme related to academic issues experienced by ISAs were those issues caused by the language barrier. Both ISAs who spoke English fluently when they arrived at WUSU and those who spoke English as a second language consistently reported issues associated with the language barrier caused problems for them academically. Participant George reported academic issues brought on by the language barrier despite speaking English fluently prior to arriving at WUSU:

Coming from Canada, things were totally different because all of my school had been in French. Sure, everyone was bilingual in Montreal, but it's still predominantly French. So, coming to (WUSU) where everything is in English, and no one really speaks French and can help me through classes was a big shock.

Participant Katie also reported language barrier issues, which she didn't expect due to her previous experiences learning the language:

I took classes in English back home (in Thailand), so I wasn't very worried about the language barrier being an issue. But when I actually got here, I was very overwhelmed by the thought that I had no one to even express thoughts to in my own language. And when classes started, I was very surprised by how fast the professors would speak and I couldn't really keep up with how fast they moved. I felt like I was always trying to catch up.

Participant Eve, a native English speaker from Australia, reported experiencing difficulties in class due to unfamiliar slang and jargon.

The language barrier has definitely been an issue. Like, sometimes I would say things in my papers or discussion boards that are just usual slang back home. And my teachers are just like, “Oh, what does that mean?” And working in group projects, like on teams or group work, is sometimes an issue because I feel like Australians, we talk a lot faster, too. I feel like like a lot of times my classmates aren’t following me because I’m talking too fast or maybe because of my accent that I have to tell myself to slow down.

Participant Finn spoke very little English when he arrived on the WUSU campus and expressed language issues causing a disconnect between his academic advisor and the WUSU International Office, finally getting help once he found a French student to help him:

I didn’t speak English more than just a few sentences and some songs when I got here, you know? I could read okay, but I grew up speaking Wolof and I went to school in French. The international office had tons of help and resources, but I couldn’t really get the help I needed from my advisor in athletics because she didn’t know what help the international office could offer me. I ended up finding a student from France and brought him to me with my advisor so I could figure everything out.

**Theme 2: Time Management.** The second theme related to academic issues experienced by ISAs were those issues caused by a lack of or poor time management skills. Many of the ISA participants mentioned a failure to properly manage their schedules or being unaware of how much autonomy they would have as college students caused academic issues early in their college careers. Participant Chris reported time management issues as a freshman causing him to fall behind academically:

The biggest challenge for me is that kind of everything is on your own schedule... You know, if you're doing the right things like staying on top of your schoolwork and studying, it's a positive experience. But there were times when I just haven't used my time wisely and it's caused a lot of problems for myself. So, I think a lot of it just comes down to self-management, learning how to use your time better, and be self-driven. And that's been tough for me because I'm someone who likes to procrastinate work and, you know, all that kind of stuff. But I'm just learning to be more self-sufficient. I think that's the biggest, the immediate change that was bit of a shock. It was tough learning on the fly to become more independent.

Participant Devin also reported time management issues and that he had to further develop these skills in order to succeed academically:

One of the biggest adjustments was being on my own to handle my own school schedule. When I first started, I thought I was managing well, but I really wasn't and got into some academic trouble. And compared to what I've been doing the past two years, I feel like I've done so much better and learned so much about academics that I wonder how much better things would be going now if I was more self-sufficient in the beginning.

Participant Avery reported developing time management skills was an immediate priority due to a lack of attention from her coaches:

I spent half a year here (at WUSU) because I graduated secondary early. So, I came in in December, and my teammates were already mid-season and always traveling on the road. I was kind of thrown in the deep end and had to figure all my school stuff out myself. I didn't have a coach or anyone to help me navigate campus or know where the student-athlete books were. I had to learn a lot of time management skills very quickly.

Participant Isaac mentioned the need for strong time management skills for ISAs who want to experience the benefits of being an international student:

As I mentioned, I wasn't just a football player here. I did a lot of other things like internships and student government. You always hear athletes talk about how bust they are, but it's really not that bad if they are just playing a sport and going to school. You have to organize your time really well if you want to do more than that, though. That is one piece of advice I'd give other internationals who play sports; you have to prioritize and organize your time because there is so much you must do.

Participant Morgan reported that she had to overcome procrastination and become more responsible with the time she dedicates to her education:

I'd say, I think where I'm from, school is pretty tough, like education-wise. So, when I got here, it wasn't too bad of a transition academically. But I think because I thought school would be so easy, there were times where you can, I don't know, get stagnant procrastinate. And so just learning that time management by myself is what really helped my academics. I find it easier with in-person classes. Like, I like going to in-person classes because I feel like I learned more there, I feel like the teachers are more open than what I'm used to, like more, they try to connect with you on a personal level. But in the online classes, you are forced to be more responsible and do everything on your own, so you must manage your time without that extra help from your professors and class.

### ***Research Question 2***

RQ2 queried, "What are the perceptions of the socialization issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I-member institution?" The ISA participants of this study shared various socialization issues they've experienced at WUSU, many of which

were consistent with the pre-existing literature covered in chapter two. The two consistent themes that emerged through coding were socialization issues caused by difficulties adjusting to American culture and socialization issues caused by homesickness.

**Theme 1: Cultural Adjustments.** The first theme related to socialization issues experienced by ISAs were those issues caused by forced cultural adjustments as they were learning new societal norms. Cultural issues included such events as greeting others on the street, the amount of attention they receive from their coaches, and learning how to acquire essential items such as groceries, furniture, and personal hygiene products. Participant Blake reported everyday cultural norms are a continual adjustment for him:

I was surprised by how people interact with each other here. Like, I know in Australia, it's a lot more friendly. Like you'll say, 'Hey,' to a random person walking down the street. And here, it's more like, keep your distance. I got a few weird looks the first couple of weeks because I was here saying hi to everybody, and my teammates were like, 'You do that?' And I was like, 'Yeah, it's just comes natural.' So yeah, I'd say that big cultural thing of just minding your own business out in public, rather than saying hello has been strange for me to wrap my head around.

Participant Blake also mentioned how different school was from a social view, commenting on how his relationships with his professors:

I will say here, you have to sort of reach out to the professors, and they will, they're willing to help you out, but if you don't build that connection with them, they're like kind of hesitant to help you out. You have to have sort of a relationship and be cool with your professors, and definitely keep in contact and spend the time getting to know them first couple of weeks, so they're willing to and able to help you out.

Participant Devin reported feeling lost after arriving on the WUSU campus, unaware of how to get essential items:

Going from Sweden to adjusting to the dorms and everything that was kind of that's one thing that I feel like could be a little bit better. And it wasn't just the dorms, I'd say like being able to get settled in overall needs to be better. Like, I needed help getting furniture, how to get some food, and all the papers and stuff from being an international. It's a whole different world, like where can I go for food? Where do I go for this? What's the best place for that?

Participant George reported encountering a faster lifestyle in the United States and surprise associated with how passionately Americans follow sports were some of his biggest cultural adjustments:

Just adjusting to the lifestyle and dealing with the culture shock was difficult. Like, just adjusting to the lifestyle. I think lifestyle in the U.S. is that so much goes a lot faster, and things seems smaller and slower in Canada. The magnitude of sports in the U.S. is so much more intense than in Canada; it's just not there back home yet. Here, everywhere you go, they love their football, they love their basketball, like Americans just love sports so much in general. In Canada, it's still a big deal, but for the most part, it's not a huge thing no matter what sport it is.

Participant Heidi reported that various minor cultural differences overtime grew into a large adjustment:

The moving process wasn't hard because I've moved around and traveled a lot, but just getting acclimated to the culture was difficult at times. Like, learning how things work here was sometimes difficult. Like, one big thing I never knew before was tipping. Tips



and tipping aren't really a thing in Australia. Learning little society things like that kind of added up and made the biggest adjustment for me.

Participant Avery mentioned the special attention she received from her coaches caused her cultural discomfort, as she was unsure if her domestic teammates received the attention:

Sometimes I feel bad because (my assistant coaches) are always in contact with my parents and me over eligibility and insurance and stuff like that. They had to do so much work to get me here, then helped me get settled. At times I was worried because I felt like I was getting special treatment, but really it's just stuff that the rest of the gals don't understand because they just moved from another state.

Later in the interview, participant Avery made a statement regarding how she enjoys spend time with other international students, as they are learning cultural norms together:

Through the international office and the activities they put on for us, I've met a lot of students from France and Congo, which I'd say some of them are my closest friends here. Like, we're all experiencing this new stage of life together, and a lot of them don't even know I'm on the (women's basketball) team, so it's not like I get any special treatment or anything like that. We're all in the same boat, kind of, so we can share tips and learn and grow together.

**Theme 2: Homesickness.** The second theme related to socialization issues experienced by ISAs were those issues caused by homesickness and missing their families. ISAs frequently mentioned being homesick as a primary concern during their first year on campus, while also mentioning the efforts made by their teammates and coaches making a positive difference for them. Participant Julia reported that homesickness was the biggest socialization issue she faced:

I was incredibly homesick last year (her freshman year). Like, I was crying all the time and was on the phone or FaceTiming with my mom as much as I could. And it, like, affected school, my times on the track, and I had a hard time making friends because I just went to school, practice, then went home straight to my bedroom.

Participant Morgan experienced homesickness issues brought on by to the COVID-19 pandemic:

I was here in 2020 when COVID broke out and I was just kind of stuck. Like, obviously I couldn't go back home, but all my American teammates got to go back to their homes, and I was stuck in my apartment by myself. There was a period of time where I was left here for weeks, and I had to do everything by myself. I had to rely on the school and my coaches to help me get around or even buy food because I didn't have a driver's license or a car. My team were really my only social circle and I just had to figure it out on the go.

Participant Blake reported initially feeling homesick, which he was able to overcome because of his coaches who paid him closer attention:

I think the first couple of years I was here, I dealt a lot with homesickness and missing my family. There were times I was feeling quite down because I had never gone so long without seeing my mom, so my coaches paid a little more attention to me, making sure I wasn't homesick or if I was homesick, they're there to help me out and stuff. And being supportive with me, like if I needed anything, if I need to go to shops or anything like that. They just said no hesitation, give us a call, we'll organize something for you. So, yeah, my coaches were huge in helping me get comfortable and not miss home so much.

Participant Heidi mentioned the need to stay busy as a means for combating homesickness:

I mean, I was like, super busy in high school. And that was good. I think the main thing is just like, being independent, which everyone gets going to college, but it's just kind of on another level, because you're so far from home. It's like, you can just go home over breaks, go home for like the weekend, or have parents come up and visit you. It's like, you're basically just alone out there. And it's really easy to get on Instagram and look at photos and really start missing home. You just have to stay busy because, like, when you homesickness sets in, it's really hard to get yourself motivated on the court or just to go out with friends. It's easier to stay home in your room and cry.

Participant Avery mentioned the efforts of the WUSU International Office made the biggest difference in her adjustment away from home:

The people in the international office were actually very helpful. When I started in spring, semester, they had, I think it was international orientation, where they helped me with my paperwork and visa and made sure I knew what was what and how to get places. They also take us shopping every Monday, if we need it, they have shuttles and they've also like taken us on field trips to national parks and other places. Those activities and events really made a huge difference when I first got here when my team was on the road because I met so many people, which kept me feeling somewhat normal.

Participant George reported his coaches have consistently helped along his journey, making sure he is always taken care of:

My coaches have all helped because they just, they all understand, you know, that it's hard, especially in your first year to being an international student, just being away from

home for so long. And then during the breaks, you know, the little breaks in between semesters and holidays, like Christmas, Thanksgiving, all that kind of stuff, you have to stay here while everyone else goes home, so the coaches always do a good job of checking in on you. I've always been really grateful for that.

### ***Research Question 3***

RQ3 explored, "What are the barriers to effective support for ISAs by their respective institution, athletic department, and other members of the campus community?" This question set out to identify the support barriers for ISAs across the various levels of the WUSU campus community. The two barriers that emerged were campus resources not being readily available and ISAs showing a lack of initiative to find answers on their own.

**Theme 1: Availability of Campus Resources.** A barrier of effective support for ISAs from the campus community was campus resources not being readily available or ISAs unsure of how to take advantage of campus resources. Many ISAs relied extensively on resources provided by the WUSU campus community, but those who were unfamiliar with the resources experienced various difficulties. Participant Eve reported a lack of support:

Well, my mom basically did all the like insurance stuff. But I had to find my own housing by myself. I mean, it wasn't that hard, but still, I was expecting like a little bit of guidance... The international office did an orientation thing, but I've never really gone into the international office myself other than one time. And even though it was a dread to go to and took forever, it was helpful.

Participant Chris, who has attended multiple universities, reported his coaches as a greater support than any campus resources:

Everywhere I've been, it's been the assistant coaches who have helped me the most.

Assistants are usually the ones recruiting you, and they are kind of the ones who always helped me with stuff like eligibility, visas, and knowing what I could and couldn't do as an international. So, it's like, just having someone who's older that you can talk to about that kind of stuff. I know it definitely made a huge difference for me. The coaches kind of treat us like family, so I feel like that is what made for an easier transition... I haven't ever messed with the international advisors much.

Participant Devin also reported his coaches to be the biggest help, relying on them instead of WUSU campus resources for international students:

My coaches are one of the big reasons I came here. One of my coaches played overseas, has been to Europe, and played a European style. So, they kind of knew the culture I was coming from, they kind of knew what type of kid they were getting, so they really helped me get adjusted that way. He's always been, like, my point man before I got here and even to now. So, I don't really go over to the international office much because he's the one who helps me with that stuff.

Participant Isaac reported a high level of reliance on the university resources for ISAs:

I remember when I first got here, I would go in to the international office almost daily to really make sure that I had all my business in a row and all that so they would really make sure that I was communicating with government so I wasn't missing any paperwork or breaking any rules. Like, on a student visa there's certain stuff you can and cannot do, like, you can't like work outside of campus, you can't have an NIL deal, and you can't just go leave whenever. They also had me take an acculturation class to kind of teach you the rules and about being in America, like how the F1 visa works and how to maintain

like my student status. They've also answered questions for me about doing a master's program and how to stay in the country if I want to go do more school somewhere else.

Participant Blake reported it was his assistant coaches who helped him with his initial transition, but the international office has provided continued support:

It was my assistant coaches who were very in contact with us, my parents and myself, with working on eligibility and getting over here, health insurance, and housing as well. Once I got here, our graduate assistant for the team at the time really helped me out and let me settle in quite nicely... The week before school started, we had a little international orientation thing and they shared some pretty good, cool resources, like places to go to shop and stuff like that. They made sure I could see a different side of WUSU life than just from the college basketball standpoint that my teammates see. They're also very approachable with any problems I have as an international student. So anytime I have an issue with anything or I don't know what to do, I always hit them up and they're happy to help.

**Theme 2: Lack of Initiative.** The second theme that emerged was ISAs displaying a lack of initiative to find answers for themselves. This includes ISAs not seeking help or direction from any campus entities. Participant Finn reported it is his support back in his home country that helped with his transition, rather than the support resources at WUSU:

The person that helped me, like, even get recognized or help me come to the States, the first was my coach back home. He helped with all the paperwork and always kept me throughout the years to make sure I've got my paperwork and stuff in. He's still on me.

Participant Julia reported eligibility issues brought on because she was unsure of where to start looking for help.

I got in trouble because I had, like, problems with my paperwork and stuff. Like, I almost got sent home and my coaches were all mad... I had a bunch of paperwork I guess I didn't do, and I'd get emails about it, but I didn't know where to go so I just kind of spaced it... It eventually became a big problem and my coaches held me out of practice and had a (graduate assistant) take me over to the (international office) to figure things out. I was held out of practice for a while after that while we got things worked out.

Participant Logan reported dissatisfaction with the support for ISAs due to the size of the WUSU campus:

I haven't really interacted much with my international coordinator, or the office or whatever, much since I've been here. I had to stop in a few times when I first got here just to get some stuff done. But also, like, the campus is so big, and it's hard to get there and stuff like that. So, I didn't really need to go in there that much. And when I when I did, my position coach would go in with me to make sure I got all the papers and stuff figured out.

Participant Morgan reported that being white and not having a strong accent made it easier for her to pass as an American, which allowed her to avoid some of her obligations and responsibilities:

The regular international students came specifically here to study what (WUSU) offers. But I came here because of soccer. It's not that I don't care about school, but I wouldn't have even known (WUSU) existed if I wasn't recruited... There's just not that much in common with other internationals for me. Like, I'm white and don't have a strong accent compared to other (international students), so all most students know is that I'm a soccer player... Even my coaches forget (that I'm an ISA), I think. So I kind of took advantage

of that when I was a freshman because they weren't on me to get my visa paperwork and eligibility done until the last minute... It usually wouldn't get done until the last minute when (the international office) would come and find me or one of my coaches.

### **Evaluation of Findings**

Social identity theory (SIT) provided the theoretical framework to study ISAs at NCAA Division I institutions. SIT allowed for researching the experiences under which an ISA perceives their social standings, social expectations, and acceptable behavior. From the interviews and focus groups previously stated, there is clear evidence of numerous academic and socialization issues facing ISAs when they begin their collegiate careers, but also a clear need for education for coaches, staff, and administrators on the many issues and barriers that ISAs are confronted with that their domestic counterparts are unaware of. These results align with the existing research on ISAs and their unmet needs (Charitondi & Kaburakis, 2022; Hauff et al., 2021; Newell, 2015; Newell, 2016; Parker et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2011; Turick et al., 2022). The themes that emerged through coding interview and focus group transcripts included academic issues stemming from the language barrier and poor time management skills, socialization issues stemming from adjusting to a new culture and dealing with homesickness, and support barriers including a unavailability of campus resources and a lack of ambition to find answers.

### ***Research Question 1***

RQ1 asked, "What are the perceptions of the academic issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I-member institution?" The two prominent themes related to academic issues that emerged through the coding process were focused on the language barrier and time management. Despite arriving on campus better prepared than their



domestic counterparts, ISAs have reported language barriers (Newell, 2015; 2016) and issues managing their obligations as students and student-athletes (Parker et al., 2021; Streno et al., 2020) to be significant academic obstacles.

**Theme 1: Language Barrier.** The impact of the language barrier varied among the participants, with the participants who spoke English as a second language reported feeling overwhelmed specifically during lectures. However, some of the Australian and African participants, who did identify English as their first language, also reported the occasional issue with accent and speech pacing. As a result, all of the participants reported relying on teammates and roommates for help with their coursework during their first year in college. Issues with the language barrier can lead to some of the struggle that occurs in the classroom, which greatly impacts the ability to transition to an academically successful college student (Newell, 2016). These results were consistent with existing research, which states the most consistently significant issues associated with the ISA experience are language barrier and difficulties with both speaking and comprehending English (Newell, 2015; Newell, 2016; Pierce et al., 2011; Turick et al., 2022).

**Theme 2: Time Management.** Time management problems that caused academic issues or were consistently reported, as well. Most of the participants reported that having a non-structured schedule they had to manage on their own was difficult, which was then exacerbated by the time commitment required of student-athletes. Existing literature has shown that skills associated with time management, such as adjusting to independent lifestyles, scheduling sufficient time to complete coursework, and prioritizing free time are unique demands of the ISA experience (Brown, 2019; Popp et al., 2010; Ridpath et al., 2019). Because ISAs face challenges inherit to both international students and student-athletes, they are forced to balance athletic,

academic, and eligibility obligations, which requires the balancing of multiple seemingly competing ideas (Newell, 2016; Parham, 1993; Ridpath et al., 2019). The ISA participants of this study required support to properly balance their various responsibilities. This finding is also supported by recent literature, which suggests direct and focused oversight by the coaches, advisors, and administrators who work most closely with ISAs (Streno et al., 2020; Turick et al., 2020).

### ***Research Question 2***

RQ2 queried, “What are the perceptions of the socialization issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I-member institution?” The socialization issues consistently reported by the ISA participants overlap with those established in other studies (Martyn et al., 2019; Veselinovic, 2021). The emergent themes included issues related to adjusting to a new culture and experiencing homesickness.

**Theme 1: Cultural Adjustments.** Socialization barriers caused by issues adjusting to a new culture were the most frequently reported issues throughout this study. These issues included varied statements about greeting strangers, the ability to buy groceries or furniture, the intensity in which Americans follow college sports, and tipping at restaurants, amongst others. Socialization issues caused by cultural adjustments have not been studied to the same extent as other aspects of the ISA experience (Brown, 2019; Manwell et al., 2021; Martyn et al., 2019; Veselinovic, 2021). The cultural adjustments ISAs encountered included seemingly minor adjustments, such as greeting others on the street and restaurant tipping practices, which added up to create larger barrier. Cultural adjustments also included more seemingly significant events, such as adjusting to a new educational system, navigating a new city, and learning how to acquire essentials, such as groceries and furniture. These findings address a gap in the literature

of the perceived socialization issues that ISAs encounter during their transition. Participant Avery expressed an intriguing perspective when she stated, “At the end of the day, I’m here to get an education, and an American college degree is a big deal everywhere else. This is the only place where you can get free school for playing basketball.” This statement was consistent with other studies that found ISAs consider academics to be a more significant aspect of their educational experience than participating in intercollegiate athletics (Newell, 2016; Popps et al., 2010).

**Theme 2: Homesickness.** Issues related to homesickness have been widely reported in ISA studies (Newell, 2016; Vadopalaitė-Witte, 2020). This study confirmed those findings, as issues of homesickness were widely reported by the ISA participants of this study. Examples of homesickness causing socialization issues for ISAs included ISAs withdrawing, spending excessive time video chatting or talking on the phone with family members, becoming overly emotional, and experiencing heightening stress due to isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ISA participants were also quick to mention the efforts made by coaches, advisors, teammates, and administrators to ensure they were managing their homesickness in healthy ways.

### ***Research Question 3***

RQ3 explored, “What are the barriers to effective support for ISAs by their respective institution, athletic department, and other members of the campus community?” The majority of the barriers to effective support for ISAs involved ISAs not being familiar with the resources available to them and a simple disinterest in seeking out answers on their own. Each of the participants reported support from at least one member of their respective coaching staffs. Likewise, each of the participants who reported a lack of support from the campus community

also reported relying on their coaches to help them maintain their visa or eligibility. Overall, the ISA participants reported a high level of support from their coaches and the international office, but none of them reported support from WUSU athletic administration.

**Theme 1: Availability of Campus Resources.** The first theme that caused barriers of effective support for ISAs was campus resources not being easily accessible and ISAs being unsure of how to use the available resources. These barriers included ISAs being unaware of the resources available through the international office, ISAs being overly reliant on their coaches and athletic administrators, and ISAs doubting the international office understood their athletic obligations. This finding also addressed a gap in the literature (Brown, 2019), explaining why some ISAs fail to utilize available resources provided by international student services.

**Theme 2: Lack of Initiative.** The second theme that resulted in the creation of support barriers for ISAs was ISAs failing to seek out solutions on their own. This theme was not anticipated, nor was it addressed by the existing literature. Examples of ISAs failing to display initiative included an over-reliance on family members back home to help them with paperwork, ISAs stating the campus was too big to find the international office on their own, failing to complete necessary paperwork until coaches held them out of practice, and taking advantage of being able to pass as a domestic student. These findings address a gap in the literature, explaining why some ISAs fail to utilize available resources provided by international student services.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of international student-athletes (ISAs) attending an NCAA Division I institution. The problem the study addresses is that ISAs have less healthy social and academic

environments compared to their peers from the U.S. Utilizing the SIT as the theoretical framework for studying the ISA experience at an NCAA Division I institution was originally proposed because SIT was established to explain and understand the phenomena of belonging. The conditions under which an ISA's social identity becomes more important than their identity as an individual and the ways in which social identity can influence behavior are at the core of this study's purpose. How an ISA perceives their social standings, social expectations, and acceptable behavior lead to the formation of the research questions, which successfully guided the interviews and this study. The identification of common socialization experiences of ISAs attending WUSU was accomplished through semi-structured individual interviews and semi-structured focus group interviews, which were then coded and analyzed through the theoretical framework of the SIT.

The two prominent themes related to academic issues that emerged through the coding process were focused on the language barrier and time management. The socialization issues reported by the ISA participants included adjusting to a new environment and homesickness. The majority of the barriers to effective support for ISAs involved ISAs not being familiar with the resources available to them and ISAs showing a simple disinterest in seeking out answers on their own. The analysis of these findings will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

## **Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of international student-athletes (ISAs) at NCAA Division I member institutions. The problem the study sought to address was that ISAs have less healthy social and academic environments compared to their peers from the U.S. This study utilized a qualitative, single case study to analyze the common academic and socialization experiences of ISAs competing at NCAA Division I member institutions. The common socialization experiences of ISAs were identified through semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups, which were then coded and analyzed through the theoretical framework of social identity theory (SIT). Utilizing the SIT as the theoretical framework for studying the ISA experience at an NCAA Division I institution was initially proposed because SIT was established to explain and understand the phenomena of belonging. The conditions under which an ISA's social identity becomes more important than their identity as an individual and the ways in which social identity can influence behavior are at the core of this study's purpose.

The two prominent themes related to academic issues that emerged through the coding process were focused on the language barrier and time management. The socialization issues reported by the ISA participants included adjusting to a new environment, leaving home for the first time and homesickness, developing effective study habits and time management skills, and identifying public cultural norms. The majority of the barriers to effective support for ISAs involved ISAs not being familiar with the resources available to them and ISAs showing a simple disinterest in seeking out answers on their own.

The limitations of this study comprised the sample and the location. It was decided early in the proposal of this dissertation study that the sample would be comprised of only ISAs who

compete at the NCAA Division I level. While it is the researcher's belief that this study's findings are applicable to ISAs at every level of intercollegiate athletics, only ISAs participating at the Division I level were interviewed. The sample was also impacted by location. The limitation of location is due to all the ISA participants being current student-athletes at Western U.S. State University (WUSU). The entire sample being comprised of WUSU ISAs was necessary due to the time frame this study required, but it assumes that WUSU ISAs are an accurate representation of all ISAs attending NCAA Division I institutions. There are also various limitations associated with the research design. According to Theofanidis & Fountouki (2018), the limitations of any study concern potential weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control and closely associated with the chosen research design, statistical model constraints, funding constraints, or other factors. An exploratory procedure using open-ended questions may cause a limitation in the answers given as personal and subjective (Straus, 2019). Another potential limitation is researcher bias (Goodrick, 2020). Because of the study limitations, data triangulation, expert review, and member checking efforts were made to authenticate participant response consistencies by maintaining a logical sequence of events followed throughout the study (Fusch et al., 2018).

Analyses and implications of the findings of this project are addressed in this chapter. Conclusions supported by findings derived from each research question are discussed, as will any factors that might have influenced the interpretation of the results. The results of the study will be presented by describing the extent to which they address the study problem and purpose while placing the results in the context of existing research and theory. Finally, the most significant implications of this dissertation and the desired outcomes stemming from this research will be discussed.

## **Implications**

This dissertation study was driven by three research questions focused on the experiences of ISAs competing in an NCAA Division I sport. The research questions were guided by the theoretical framework of the Social Identity Theory (SIT). The SIT suggests that experiences impacted by an individual's identity should be evaluated through four related concepts: social categorization, social identity, social comparison, and psychological distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1974). Social categorization is the process of bringing together social objects or events in groups that are equivalent with regard to an individual's actions, intentions, attitudes, and systems of beliefs (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Social identity is the part of an individual's self-concept that derives from their knowledge of membership with social groups and the emotional significance attached to those memberships (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Social comparison is the process by which an individual compares their group with other groups, creating a favorable bias toward the group to which they belong (Charness & Chen, 2020). Psychological distinctiveness can be explained as wishing to be different from, but comparing favorably to, other groups (Croes & Bartels, 2021). Coding of the interview transcripts revealed six emergent themes.

Overall, 13 ISAs were interviewed, with seven ISAs participating in individual interviews and two focus groups of three ISAs were conducted. Individual interviews included four men's basketball players, a women's track and field athlete, a women's golfer, and a women's soccer player. The first focus group was comprised of women's basketball players, and the second focus group was comprised of football players. Participants included ISAs from America Samoa, Australia, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iceland, Nigeria,



Senegal, Sweden, and Thailand. Diversity, including sports and nationalities, was prioritized so that results would be widely applicable to all ISAs.

### ***Research Question 1***

What are the perceptions of the academic issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I member institution? Two themes developed from this research question. First, and most prominently, were academic problems caused by poor time management. The second theme was academic issues caused by the language barrier.

**Theme 1: Academic Issues Caused by Poor Time Management.** The predominant theme that emerged while analyzing the data was ISAs being ill-prepared to manage their own schedules and use their time responsibly. ISA participants reporting that they experienced significant academic trouble during the beginning of their respective intercollegiate athletic careers because they were not managing their time wisely was one of the most common themes that emerged during data collection. The ISAs spoke explicitly about trying to find a balance between academic and athletic obligations and social outings. The majority of the ISAs were not prepared to live on their own and responsibly use the time required for their classes. Time management issues included not spending enough time reading course material, not setting enough time aside to complete coursework, and underestimating how much time would be required by their athletic obligations. Multiple studies have noted that ISAs struggle with time management issues (Brown, 2019; Newell, 2016; Pierce et al., 2012; Popp et al., 2010; Ridpath et al., 2019), and this study aligns with these findings. This finding suggests a greater need for oversight by administrators and coaches of ISAs.

**Theme 2: Academic Issues Caused by the Language Barrier.** The second theme that emerged from RQ1 was ISAs being academically impeded by the language barrier. The ISAs

who spoke English as a second language were overly confident in their language skills, all reporting they were overwhelmed by how fast the professors spoke and moved through their lectures. Understanding verbal and written English was a significant challenge for these ISAs. These ISAs also stated that the language barrier possibly affected their abilities to connect with their professors and classmates in class, which had an adverse effect on the level of communication needed for academic success. Likewise, the Australian ISAs were also surprised by how different American slang is, with some reporting difficulties understanding coaches and teammates because of the American idioms.

Unlike their domestic counterparts, ISAs experience added stress with their need to adjust to unfamiliar teaching styles and expectations in the classroom, as well as learn new means of communication (Newell, 2016; Sabourin, 2017). Language barrier issues can discourage ISAs from speaking in class, in front of their teams, or making meaningful connections with their professors (Veselinovic, 2020). Coaches, administrators, and staff who frequently work with ISAs should remain patient and engage with their ISAs in order to promote improvement and confidence in the ISAs' English language skills. Connecting ISAs with other international students who share a common language can also provide support through encouragement and positive reinforcement.

### ***Research Question 2***

What are the perceptions of the socialization issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I member institution? Two themes emerged related to this research question. First, and most prominently, were socialization issues caused by a difficult adjustment to American culture and difficulties learning new public norms. The second theme

was difficulty maintaining a social life due to homesickness. Cultural adjustment and significant homesickness are two major barriers unique to the ISA socialization experience.

**Theme 1: Socialization Issues Caused by Difficulties Adjusting to American Culture.** The predominant theme regarding socialization issues was difficulties adjusting to a new culture. In chapter 2 of this dissertation, common cultural adjustments for ISAs were identified through a thorough review of the pre-existing literature (Brown, 2019; Charitondi & Kaburakis, 2022; Newell, 2016; Pierce et al., 2011; Popp et al., 2011; Ridpath et al., 2019; Streno et al., 2020; Turick et al., 2022). This study revealed that learning cultural and public norms and a lack of assistance when adjusting to living independently are the most significant barriers to healthy socialization.

From adjusting to passionate sports fans to making eye contact with strangers, ISAs reported they needed someone, usually a teammate, to explain American cultural norms when they first arrived. Multiple ISAs also specifically identified an acculturation course offered to all new international students by the WUSU international office to be especially helpful. This type of program can help ISAs acclimate to campus culture and life in the university's city. Another measure that could prove effective is through providing resources to potential ISAs while they are being recruited to prepare them for the beginning of their academic and athletic careers at their potential university. These resources could include information regarding the campus, the city, athletic expectations, academic expectations, and the U.S. higher educational system. When an ISA arrives on campus, peer mentorship from teammates is also important. Coaches, administrators, and staff who work closely with ISAs should also be trained to recognize any cultural differences their ISAs may encounter when they arrive on campus. Coaches, in

particular, should mentor their ISAs and encourage them to connect with their nonathlete peers and classmates.

**Theme 2: Socialization Issues Caused by Homesickness.** The second theme that emerged from RQ2 was ISAs experiencing homesickness in abundance that caused them to withdraw or cease socializing. The umbrella term "homesickness" also included any stress attributed to an ISA being away from home. Homesickness is a common problem among all college students but is particularly prevalent among ISAs, as they cannot visit home regularly. Multiple ISAs interviewed for this study reported that they have not or will not be able to visit home until their collegiate career is over, which could be up to six years.

The primary concern surrounding this theme is that homesickness has been shown to lead to serious mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety (Hack-Polay, 2020). Helping an ISA through a bout of homesickness will not only lessen the possibility of them experiencing mental health issues, but it can also be a bonding opportunity for coaches, administrators, and staff who work closely with ISAs. It is crucial for an ISA's well-being to develop rapport with the ISA to provide a mentoring relationship that can help fill a familial void. Older peers and teammates should also look for opportunities to build strong friendships and bonds with ISAs early in their college transition.

### ***Research Question 3***

What are the barriers to effective support for ISAs by their respective institution, athletic department, and other members of the campus community? Two themes developed from this research question. The most consistent theme that emerged was keeping campus resources readily available. The second theme involved ISAs not showing the requisite initiative to seek answers independently.

**Theme 1: Barriers Caused by Campus Resources Being Readily Available.** Some ISAs reported that they were unaware of the available campus resources outside of relying on their teammates and coaches. Conversely, those ISAs who had an easier transition to college life reported they consistently relied on campus resources outside the athletic department, such as the WUSU International Office, for support. Ensuring that ISAs know what kind of services are offered to international students should be a priority for coaches, administrators, and staff who work closely with ISAs.

Many international offices on college campuses are tasked with providing a wide range of support for international students. Examples of support include providing help with student visas, health insurance, academic paperwork, and NCAA eligibility. However, some of the support the ISA participants cited as the most helpful also included practical assistance, such as help getting around the city and shopping trips, as many ISAs do not have a car or a U.S. driver's license. Other activities included networking events, social activities, and holiday parties during breaks when domestic students could travel home. Effective international student services provide essential technical and practical assistance to ISAs. However, it is first the responsibility of those who work the closest with ISAs (coaches and staff) to make this connection for their ISAs (Newell, 2016; Veselinovic, 2020).

**Theme 2: Barriers Caused by ISAs Not Displaying Initiative.** Among ISAs who reported a difficult transition to college life, one consistent theme that emerged was a lack of initiative in finding answers on their own. While most ISAs reported that they could go to their coaches for direction, some did not seek help beyond talking to their families back home. Two ISA participants mentioned they still turn to either their parents or high school coach for help before seeking answers from their college coaches, administrators, or staff. One participant

reported that he failed to complete the paperwork required by the government until one of his coaches picked him up and drove him to the international office, but he has since failed to return on his own.

The term “agentic engagement” refers to the action of taking initiatives that contribute to learning and teaching (Reeve & Shin, 2020; Reeve et al., 2022). While no research has been conducted on ISAs, collegiate student-athletes, or international students and agentic engagement, leading scholars suggest that teachers adopt an autonomy-supportive motivating style that will allow them to become increasingly in sync with their students. As the body of literature on agentic engagement focuses on the teacher’s role in inspiring students to show more initiative, these lessons can best be applied to coaches who work closely with ISAs.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Three recommendations were derived based on the study’s framework, findings, and implications. These recommendations include a coach-facilitated peer mentor program, an athletic department-facilitated acculturation program, and a university-mandated international student orientation program. These recommendations for practice are supported by the findings of this study, the body of literature surrounding ISAs, and the literature surrounding the development of a healthy social identity.

RQ1 asked, “What are the perceptions of the academic issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I-member institution?” The primary two issues ISAs reported were academic issues caused by poor time management and academic issues caused by the language barrier. Time management issues included not spending enough time reading course material, not setting enough time aside to complete coursework, and underestimating how much time would be required by their athletic obligations. Understanding

verbal and written English was a significant challenge for ISAs, who also posited that the language barrier possibly affected their abilities to connect with their professors and classmates.

These findings suggest a greater need for engagement from those who work most closely with ISAs. Overcoming these academic issues could be accomplished through a coach-facilitated peer mentor program. It is recommended that before an ISA arrives on campus, they should be instructed by a coach about program standards, academic obligations, and daily tasks they will encounter as a student-athlete. After the ISA arrives on campus, the coach should meet one-on-one with the ISA to reinforce the importance of these standards, obligations, and tasks. The coach should also provide the ISA with a peer mentor on the team, preferably an upper-classman ISA, if possible. The ISA should regularly meet with their peer mentor, as the peer mentor will be the ISA's first contact. Additionally, the coach should arrange the ISA with comprehensive tutoring for at least the first year to ensure the ISA is academically successful and confident from the start.

RQ2 queried, "What are the perceptions of the socialization issues experienced by ISAs attending and competing at an NCAA Division I-member institution?" The socialization issues the ISA participants reported were difficulties caused by cultural adjustments and homesickness. Difficulties adjusting to American culture included learning cultural and public norms and a lack of assistance when adjusting to living independently. Homesickness included missing family and friends, any stress attributed to being away from home, and being unable to visit home.

These findings suggest a greater need for oversight from those who work closely with ISAs. Overcoming these socialization issues could be accomplished through an athletic department-facilitated acculturation program. While many of the ISAs mentioned how helpful an acculturation course offered to freshman ISAs was, not all of the ISAs began their academic

journeys at WUSU. Each semester, an institution's athletic department should offer an acculturation course to all incoming ISAs, regardless of age or class, that focuses on the social aspects of being a student at their university. Having this course taught by the athletic department will also offer one more opportunity for ISAs to meet students outside of their respective teams. This course should be taught by an athletic administrator, such as the Assistant Athletic Director of Academics or an equivalent position. ISAs who have already completed the course could also help deliver the instruction. Educating ISAs about the university's counseling and psychological services should be a priority for this course.

RQ3 explored, "What are the barriers to effective support for ISAs by their respective institution, athletic department, and other members of the campus community?" The barriers to effective support for the ISA participants of this study included campus resources being readily available and ISAs showing a lack of initiative. ISAs who reported an easy transition to college life consistently relied on campus resources outside the athletic department, such as the WUSU International Office, for guidance on visa and government-related paperwork, health insurance, and expanding their social circles. Among ISAs who reported a difficult transition to college life, one consistent theme that emerged was a lack of initiative to seek help independently.

These findings suggest a greater need for urgency when an ISA arrives on campus. Helping ISAs get off to a successful start at a new university is of the utmost importance and can be accomplished through a university-mandated international student orientation program. While some ISAs reported that their international student orientation was highly beneficial, many reported that they were unaware of any program or simply chose not to attend. Making this orientation required will ensure that all ISAs are aware of campus resources and further reinforce the objectives of the other recommended programs.



## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was guided by three research questions which were developed through the theoretical framework of the social identity theory (SIT). Utilizing the SIT as the theoretical framework for studying the ISA experience at an NCAA Division I institution was proposed initially because the conditions under which an ISA's social identity can influence behavior were at the core of this study's purpose. A descriptive case study utilizing SIT allowed me to understand how ISAs perceive their social standings, social expectations, and acceptable behavior, which led to a successful study. However, multiple theories and methodological approaches to studying ISAs can and should be pursued in the future, which will be addressed in this section.

The ISA participants of this study were recruited through the WUSU athletic department. While I believe these findings to be widely applicable, a participant pool consisting of ISAs across the nation attending any NCAA institution would ensure the applicability and generalizability of the findings. The ISA participants were also not sorted by individual or team sport, which could have influenced the socialization issues they encountered, as ISAs on team sports have an established social circle when they arrive on campus (Pluhar et al., 2019). Breaking down the ISAs by nationality could also produce unique results, as ISAs from every country all have very different life experiences; moving forward, I plan on immediately studying the academic and socialization experiences of Australian ISAs. Another factor that could lead to different results is comparing the experiences of ISAs who stayed at their original institutions against ISAs who transferred to a different institution. Lastly, this study could be replicated with ISAs competing at the various levels of intercollegiate competition. Because student-athletes competing at the NCAA Division II, Division III, NAIA, and NJCAA levels face different

obstacles than those who compete at the Division I level (Burgess & Cisneros, 2018; Sutcliffe & Greenberger, 2020), the perceived academic and socialization ISAs face are likely different.

Different theoretical approaches that could be used to study the ISA experience include various educational, communicative, and psychological theories. First and foremost, social identity complexity (SIC) provided one of the four branches of SIT (psychological distinctiveness) used throughout this study. In recent years, SIC has developed into a theory of its own and warrants consideration for future studies. Another applicable theory in the human communication field is communication accommodation theory (CAT). CAT seeks to explain and predict why, when, and how people adjust their communicative behavior during social interaction, and what social consequences result from those adjustments (Dragojevic et al., 2015).

Next, self-efficacy is related to a significant theme that emerged in this study, ISAs showing a lack of initiative in seeking out assistance and resources on their own. This theme could be studied more successfully through social learning theory (SLT) or social cognitive theory (SCT). Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in themselves to execute necessary behaviors required to produce a desired result (Bagley, 2022). SLT emphasizes the importance of observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Culver et al., 2019). SCT, which started as a branch of SLT, describes the influence of individual experiences, the actions of others, and environmental factors on individual behaviors (Beauchamp et al., 2019).

A psychological approach to studying ISAs could also be employed. The applicability of literature aimed at establishing a complete framework surrounding student-athletes and developing resilience and resilient characteristics that lead to success (Coombs, 2016) could be

explored. Another possible theory could be the dialogical self theory (DST), which describes the mind's ability to imagine the different positions of participants in an internal dialogue (Coombs, 2018). DST is an approach that could attempt to describe an ISA's relational concept of themselves.

Lastly, two learning theories that could provide unique findings in the study of ISAs are behaviorism learning theory (BLT) and experiential learning theory (ELT). BLT is based on the idea that all behaviors are acquired through conditioning, and conditioning occurs through interaction with the environment (Leeder, 2022). ELT takes a more holistic approach than behaviorism by emphasizing how experiences, including cognition, environmental factors, and emotions, influence the learning process (Sato & Laughlin, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter included the limitations and implications of this study, recommendations for practice, and suggested approaches for future research on ISAs. The problem addressed by this study was that ISAs have less healthy social and academic environments compared to their peers from the United States (Hauff et al., 2021; Newell, 2015; Newell, 2016; Pierce et al., 2011; Turick et al., 2022). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to identify the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs at NCAA Division I member institutions that can lead to providing them with healthier academic and social environments. After a thorough review of the literature, completing the data collection, and analyzing the data, the researcher has concluded that ISAs at NCAA Division I institutions experience common experiences of academic issues brought on by the language barrier and poor time management, socialization issues brought on by cultural differences and homesickness, and support barriers brought on by a lack of available campus resources and ISAs showing a lack of initiative. These

findings are consistent with existing literature that address the issues encountered by ISAs (Brown, 2019; Manwell et al., 2021; Newell, 2016; Popp et al., 2010; Ridpath, 2019), but they also addressed an existing gap in the literature by specifically identifying the shared academic and socialization experiences of ISAs and what can be done to meet those needs more effectively.

Social identity theory (SIT) suggests that people are a mosaic of the many groups to which they belong (Kreindler et al., 2012; Kreindler et al., 2021). SIT was utilized as the theoretical framework for studying the ISA experience at an NCAA Division I institution because the conditions under which an ISA's social identity can influence behavior were at the core of this study's purpose. How an ISA perceives their social standings, social expectations, and acceptable behavior led to the formation of the research questions, which successfully guided the interviews and this study. The common socialization experiences of ISAs attending WUSU were identified through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews.

The introduction of this dissertation proposes that ISAs are among the most complex and unique group of students in higher education. Because ISAs qualify as both international students studying abroad in the United States and student-athletes competing in the NCAA, these students face the challenges inherit in both of these groups. While this study reinforces the literature surrounding ISAs, it also suggests meaningful measures than can be taken to minimize the negative academic and socialization experiences that encounter many ISAs. It is my hope that this research can help provide healthier academic and social environments for all ISAs, so they may be able to have successful collegiate experiences and continue to pave the way for future generations of international student-athletes.

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## Appendix A

### IRB Approval



9388 Lightwave Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92123

**Date:** October 05, 2022  
**PI Name:** Hayden Coombs  
**Chair Name (if applicable):** Ryan Barnhart  
**Application Type:** Initial Submission  
**Review Level:** Exempt - Category 2  
**Study Title:** The Complex Social Identities of International Student-Athletes Competing in the NCAA: An Exploratory Qualitative Case Study

**Approval Date:** October 05, 2022  
**Expiration Date:** N/A

Dear Hayden:

Congratulations! Your IRB application has been approved. Your responsibilities include the following:

1. Follow the protocol as approved. If you need to make changes with your population, recruitment, or consent, please submit a modification form.
2. If there is a consent process in your research, you must use the consent form approved with your final application. Please make sure all participants receive a copy of the consent form.
3. **If there are any injuries, problems, or complaints from participants (adverse events), you must notify the IRB at [IRB@ncu.edu](mailto:IRB@ncu.edu) within 24 hours.**
4. IRB audit of procedures may occur. The IRB will notify you if your study will be audited.
5. When data are collected and de-identified, please submit a study closure form to the IRB. See the [IRBManager instructions on our website](#).
6. You must maintain current CITI certification until you have submitted a study closure form.
7. If you are a student, please be aware that you must be enrolled in an active dissertation course with NCU in order to collect data.

Best wishes as you conduct your research!

Respectfully,

Northcentral University Institutional Review Board  
Email: [irb@ncu.edu](mailto:irb@ncu.edu)

**NCU.edu**

## Appendix B

### Non-Disclosure/Confidentiality Agreement

#### Northcentral University Non-Disclosure/Confidentiality Agreement

I, Hayden Von Coombs, will not be using a transcription service, translator, interpreter, research assistant, or any other person or assistant to help me complete my research study titled "The Complex Social Identities of International Student-Athletes Competing in the NCAA: An Exploratory Qualitative Case Study."

My role will be that of the primary researcher.

In this role:

1. I will not disclose the names of any participants in the study.
2. I will not disclose personal information collected from any participants in the study.
3. I will not disclose any participant responses.
4. I will not disclose any data.
5. I will not discuss the research with anyone other than my dissertation chair.
6. I will keep all paper information secured while it is in my possession.
7. I will keep all electronic information secured while it is in my possession.
8. I will destroy any extra copies that were made during my work.



Researcher Signature

5-31-22

Date

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

#### Consent Letter

##### Introduction

My name is Hayden Coombs, and I am a doctoral student at Northcentral University (NCU). I also hold a role as Assistant Professor of Communication at Southern Utah University.

I am conducting a research study on the lived experiences of international student-athletes who compete in NCAA Division I sports. The name of this research study is “The Complex Social Identities of International Student-Athletes Competing in the NCAA: An Exploratory Qualitative Case Study.”

I am seeking your consent to participate in this study.

Please read this document to learn more about this study and determine if you would like to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary, and I will address your questions or concerns at any point before or during the study.

##### Eligibility

You may participate in this research if you meet all of the following criteria:

1. You are of age 18 or older.
2. You attend college at an NCAA Division I-member institution.
3. You qualify as an international student, meaning you attend college in the United States, but are from a country or territory outside of the United States.
4. You participate in an NCAA Division I sport and are therefore considered a “student-athlete.”

I hope to include up to 12 people in this research.

##### Activities

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Complete an online survey for 5-10 minutes.
2. Participate in a 1:1 online interview over Zoom for 45-60 minutes.
3. Review your interview transcript via email for 15-20 minutes.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Your age, gender, race, and nationality.
- The sport you play at the NCAA Division I level.
- The college you attend.

- Your adjustment transitioning from life in your home country to life as a college student in the United States.
- Your experience acquiring and maintaining an F1 visa.
- Your experience participating in NCAA Division I athletics.
- Your experience socializing with other international students.
- Your experience socializing with other student-athletes.

All activities and questions are optional: you may skip any part of this study that you do not wish to complete and may stop at any time.

If you need to complete the activities above in a different way than I have described, please let me know, and I will attempt to make other arrangements.

### **Risks**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. You can still skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time.

### **Benefits**

If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. This research may increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this study.

### **Privacy and Data Protection**

I will take reasonable measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but I cannot guarantee confidentiality of your research data. In addition to me, the following people and offices will have access to your data:

- My NCU dissertation committee and any appropriate NCU support or leadership staff
- The NCU Institutional Review Board

This data could be used for future research studies or distributed to other investigators for future research studies without additional informed consent from you or your legally authorized representative.

I will securely store your data for 3 years. Then, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

### **How the Results Will Be Used**

I will publish the results in my dissertation. I may also share the results in a presentation or publication. Participants will not be identified in the results.

**Recording**

I would like to record your responses with Zoom during the 1:1 interview.

**Contact Information**

If you have questions, you can contact me at: haydencombs@suu.edu or (503)779-8457.

My dissertation chair's name is Dr. Ryan Barnhart. They work at Northcentral University and are supervising me on the research. You can contact them at: rbarnhart@ncu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights in the research or if a problem or injury has occurred during your participation, please contact the NCU Institutional Review Board at irb@ncu.edu or 1-888-327-2877 ext 8014.

**Voluntary Participation**

If you decide not to participate, or if you stop participation after you start, there will be no penalty to you: you will not lose any benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.



## Appendix D

### Recruitment Email

#### Recruitment Email

My name is Hayden Coombs, and I am a doctoral student at Northcentral University (NCU). I am also an assistant professor in the communication department at Southern Utah University (SUU). I am conducting a research study on the lived experiences of international student-athletes who compete in NCAA Division I sports.

I am recruiting individuals who meet all of these criteria:

1. Are of age 18 or older.
2. Attend college at SUU.
3. Qualify as an international student, meaning you attend college in the United States, but are from a country or territory outside of the United States.
4. Participate in an NCAA Division I sport and are therefore considered a “student-athlete.”

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Complete an online survey for 5-10 minutes.
2. Participate in a 1:1 online interview over Zoom for 10-45 minutes.
3. Review your interview transcript via email for 15-20 minutes.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Your age, gender, race, and nationality.
- The sport you play at the NCAA Division I level.
- Your adjustment transitioning from life in your home country to life as a college student in the United States.
- Your experience acquiring and maintaining an F1 visa.
- Your experience participating in NCAA Division I athletics.
- Your experience socializing with other international students.
- Your experience socializing with other student-athletes.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click this link:

[https://ncu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3QTtcQZDKq2t4cS](https://ncu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3QTtcQZDKq2t4cS).

If you have questions, please contact me at [haydencoombs@suu.edu](mailto:haydencoombs@suu.edu).

Thank you!

Hayden Coombs  
Assistant Professor of Communication  
Southern Utah University

## Appendix E

### Interview Protocol

Introduce myself and ensure the participant(s) is/are in a comfortable and confidential place. Ask if the participant needs more time to ensure the videoconference is confidential. Review the consent form, which the participants signed virtually on the Qualtrics survey. Read the following statement: “The Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of Northcentral University and Southern Utah University have reviewed this study for the protection of the rights of human subjects in research studies, in accordance with federal and state regulations. If you have any concerns about this study, you may email the NCU IRB at [irb@ncu.edu](mailto:irb@ncu.edu).” Ask the participants if they have any questions.

### Interview Questions

1. Describe your adjustment to life as a student-athlete in the United States.
  - a. Who helped you with things like initial eligibility, housing, health insurance, transportation?
2. How did your coaching staff or athletic department help with the transition?
3. How did the international office at your university help with the transition?
4. Can you describe your academic experience as an international student-athlete? This can include any information about your adjustment to school at your institution.
5. Can you describe your relationship with your teammates?
  - a. How does being an international student impact your relationship with your team?
  - b. What about your coaches?
6. Can you describe your relationship with other international students?

- a. How does being a student-athlete impacts your relationship with other international students?
  - b. What about the international office?
7. How has being an international student effected your student-athlete experience?
  8. How has being a student-athlete effected your experience as an international student?

Ask the participant if they have anything else to add. Thank the participant for their involvement and remind them that they will have the opportunity to review the final transcripts before data analysis.

## Appendix F

### APR Calculation Formula

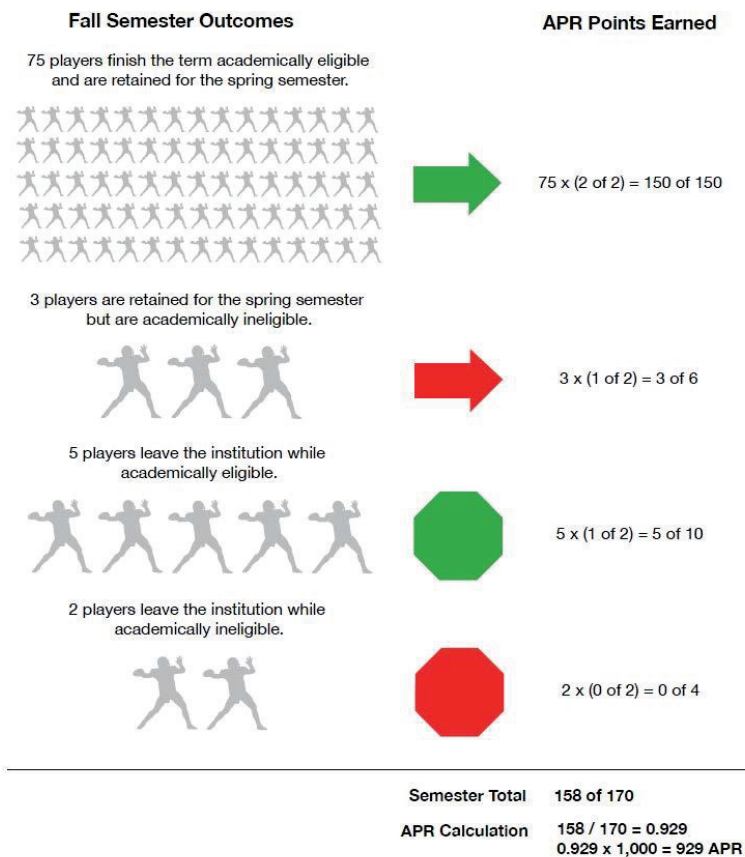
#### Example of APR Calculation for a Men's Football Team (n=85 at start of year)

Semester 1 (Fall)	Points Earned
75 student-athletes <u>eligible</u> and <u>retained</u> to next term (or graduate in that term)	$75 * (2 \text{ of } 2) =$ 150 of 150
3 student-athletes are <u>retained</u> to next term but are <u>academically ineligible</u>	$3 * (1 \text{ of } 2) =$ 3 of 6
5 student-athletes <u>leave the university</u> while <u>academically eligible</u>	$5 * (1 \text{ of } 2) =$ 5 of 10
2 student-athletes <u>leave the university</u> while <u>academically ineligible</u>	$2 * (0 \text{ of } 2) =$ 0 of 4
<b>Semester Total</b>	<b>158 of 170 (929 APR)</b>

Petr, T.A. & Paskus, T.S. (2009). The collection and use of academic outcomes data by the NCAA. In Jennifer Lee Hoffman, James Soto Antony & Daisy D. Alfaro, (Eds), *Data- Driven Decision-Making In Intercollegiate Athletics*, New Directions In Institutional Research. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

#### How APR is Calculated

Hypothetical Division I football team (85 members)



## Appendix G

## GSR Calculation Formula

$$\text{Rate} = \frac{\text{Cohort Members Graduating within 6 Years}}{\text{All Cohort Members}} * 100$$

Graduates:

[First-Time, Full-Time Fall Freshmen on Athletics Aid]

+

[2- and 4-Year Transfers on Athletics Aid]

+

[January Enrollees on Athletics Aid]

+

GSR =  $\frac{[\text{Non-Scholarship Student-Athletes if Institution/Team Does not offer Athletics Aid}]$

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{Enrolled:} \\
 \left( \begin{array}{c}
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{First-Time, Full-Time} \\ \text{Fall Freshmen} \\ \text{on Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{2- and 4-Year} \\ \text{Transfers on} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{January} \\ \text{Enrollees on} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{Non-Scholarship} \\ \text{Student-Athletes if} \\ \text{Institution/Team} \\ \text{Does not Offer} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right]
 \end{array} \right)
 \end{array}
 -
 \begin{array}{c}
 \text{Excluded:} \\
 \left( \begin{array}{c}
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{First-Time, Full-Time} \\ \text{Fall Freshmen} \\ \text{on Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{2- and 4-Year} \\ \text{Transfers on} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{January} \\ \text{Enrollees on} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{Non-Scholarship} \\ \text{Student-Athletes if} \\ \text{Institution/Team} \\ \text{Does not Offer} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right]
 \end{array} \right)
 \end{array}
 -
 \begin{array}{c}
 \text{Left Eligible:} \\
 \left( \begin{array}{c}
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{First-Time, Full-Time} \\ \text{Fall Freshmen} \\ \text{on Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{2- and 4-Year} \\ \text{Transfers on} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{January} \\ \text{Enrollees on} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right] \\
 + \\
 \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{Non-Scholarship} \\ \text{Student-Athletes if} \\ \text{Institution/Team} \\ \text{Does not Offer} \\ \text{Athletics Aid} \end{array} \right]
 \end{array} \right)
 \end{array}
 \end{array}$$

# Appendix H

## Search Parameters

The screenshot shows a search engine interface with the search term "International student athletes". The search results are displayed in a list format, with each result including a title, author information, a brief abstract, and a "Full Text" link. The results are filtered by "All Results" and "Academic Journals (2)". The search interface includes a search bar, a "Search" button, and a "Refine Results" sidebar on the left. The sidebar contains various filters such as "Full Text", "Academic Journals", "Peer-Reviewed", "Open Access", "Current Year", "Publication Date", "Source Types", and "Show More". The search results are numbered 1 through 4, and each result is accompanied by a small icon representing the journal or publisher.

The screenshot shows a search engine interface with the search term "Intercollegiate athletics". The search results are displayed in a list format, with each result including a title, author information, a brief abstract, and a "Full Text" link. The results are filtered by "All Results" and "Academic Journals (2)". The search interface includes a search bar, a "Search" button, and a "Refine Results" sidebar on the left. The sidebar contains various filters such as "Full Text", "Academic Journals", "Peer-Reviewed", "Open Access", "Current Year", "Publication Date", "Source Types", and "Show More". The search results are numbered 1 through 4, and each result is accompanied by a small icon representing the journal or publisher.

The screenshot shows a ProQuest search results page for the query 'social identity theory'. The search bar at the top contains the query and a search button. Below the search bar, there are several filters and options, including 'social identity complexity' and 'social identity theory'. The main results area displays a list of search results, each with a title, author, and publication information. The results are sorted by relevance. The first result is 'Identification in Sport and Religion: Exploring the Overlap Between Two Group Identities' by Mark, Spencer & Spencer, published in 2022. Other results include 'Understanding Camouflaging as a Response to Autism-Related Stigma: A Social Identity Theory Approach' and 'Managing an Identity: Social Identity Complexity and NCAA Faculty Athletics Representatives'. The page also features a 'Recommended Research Guides' section and a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section.

The screenshot shows a ProQuest search results page for the query '(single case study) AND (social identity theory)'. The search bar at the top contains the query and a search button. Below the search bar, there are several filters and options, including 'Applied filters', 'Show results outside my library's subscription', 'Sorted by', 'Limit to', 'Source type', 'Publication date', and 'Last 5 Years'. The main results area displays a list of search results, each with a title, author, and publication information. The results are sorted by relevance. The first result is 'Pathways to Professional Identity: A Narrative Research Exploring How Women Who Change Careers Make Sense of Their Professional Identity Using Social Identity Complexity Theory' by Davis, Micki Erin, published in 2020. Other results include 'Gender Dynamics in Small Group within a Student-Centered Physics Course: An Exploratory Single Case Study' by Akubo, Mark Okpanachi, published in 2021, 'The Perceptions of Border Educators regarding Successful Teaching Techniques in the Borderlands: A Single Case Study' by Glantz, Lexa Marie, published in 2021, 'Jrotc Instructor Professional Development: A Qualitative Single Exploratory Case Study' by Gonzales, Richard L. (Monty), published in 2021, and 'Where Have All the Student-Athletes Gone? The Relationships between High School Athletic Participation, School Size, Resources, and Location' published in 2021. The page also features a 'Recommended Research Guides' section and a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section.





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