University Selection Factors For Division II Softball Student-Athletes

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The purpose of this study was to determine which factors most influence the selection of an institution for student-athletes competing on National Collegiate Athletic Association Division II softball teams. Sixty-nine student-athletes from an NCAA Division II Conference in the southwest participated in this study. The Strength of University Selection Factors survey, made up of 24 items, was used to investigate six university selection factors: (a) family and friends, (b) location of the institution, (c) academic characteristics, (d) softball program, (e) financial aid, and (f) coaching staff. The frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were determined for each survey item. The items in the survey were rank ordered. Composite mean scores and standard deviations were also calculated for the six university selection factors. Four of the six factors were perceived to be influential or very influential. Those four factors in rank order were coaching staff, academic characteristics, softball program, and financial aid.

Introduction

The highly competitive environment of collegiate athletics is not limited to the playing field, but commences with the recruitment of top student-athletes. The ability of a coach to recruit student-athletes who have the appropriate skills and abilities to compete in the college ranks is one of the differences between successful and unsuccessful programs (Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003). As a result, competition among collegiate sport teams for potential student-athletes is intense. Letawsky et al. stated, “Because the athletic record is identified with the prestige of the university, acquiring ‘blue chip’ athletes through active recruitment is a major concern of university coaches” (p. 607). Therefore, coaches must understand what influences a student-athlete’s institutional choice in order to develop an effective recruiting plan.

The focus on recruiting top athletic talent has long garnered attention for revenue generating sports; however, the rising participation trends and the increased media coverage, particularly on television, of “minor” sports has increased the pressure on non-revenue generating programs such as softball to recruit top talent. Since the enactment of Title IX, softball has become one of the fastest growing sports for high school female athletes (Jamieson, 2005). Softball is ranked the third most popular and fourth most participated in girls’ high school
sport (National Federation of State High School Associations [NFHS], 2007). Across the three NCAA-sponsored divisions, there are 932 softball teams in the nation. In 2007, 87.6% of NCAA member institutions sponsored a softball team with 16,609 student-athletes listed on team rosters (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2007). Additionally, the Women’s College World Series (WCWS), the championship event for NCAA Division I softball, is aired on the ESPN family of networks. The 2007 WCWS was the most viewed and highest rated softball championship final ever aired on ESPN, with an average 1.363 million households viewing the games (Associated Press, 2007). Similarly, attendance increased for the fourth straight year, from 46,122 in 2006 to 62,463 in 2007 (Associated Press) and a new record of 67,631 was set in 2011, almost 5,000 more than in 2010, according to the Oklahoma City All Sports Association, an organization that tracks attendance in the host city.

Despite the sport’s growing popularity, university selection factors for softball student-athletes below the NCAA Division I level have not been adequately investigated. Based on the authors’ review of the literature, the majority of research to date has focused on the influential factors of student-athletes who participate in revenue generating sports at Division I institutions. It is possible that the influential factors for student-athletes in nonrevenue sports at lower divisions of the NCAA are different than those for student-athletes in revenue generating sports at Division I institutions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine which factors most influence college selection decision-making for student-athletes competing on NCAA Division II softball teams.

**Literature Review**

**Institution Selection Factors**

A review of the literature found a number of factors that have been used to determine the influence on student-athletes in selecting an institution. Those factors were generally grouped into six categories: family and friends, location of the institution, academic characteristics, the athletic program, financial aid, and coaching staff.

**Family and Friends.** The thoughts, feelings and opinions of parents or legal guardians are generally considered to be primary influences in the university selection process of a student-athlete (Maher, 2007). In most circumstances, the prospective student-athlete trusts the opinions of relatives and discusses the matter several times with family members throughout the recruiting process. In a study of 290 student-athletes competing at the University of Nevada – Las Vegas (UNLV), a NCAA Division I member, family perceptions of the institution was found to be one of the two major components in the decision making process (DeWaele & Lounsbery, 2007). Other studies report similar findings that suggest parental influence is an important factor for high school student-athletes (Ryan, Groves, & Schneider, 2007).

In contrast to the influence of family, several studies have found that the persuasion of friends is not a predominant factor in the student-athlete’s selection process. Research conducted by Letawsky et al. (2003) involving 126 first-year student-athletes attending a large university found that friends and high school teammates ranked among the least influential factors used by student-athletes in the university selection process.
**Location of the Institution.** The location of the institution may influence a student-athlete in selecting a university in several respects. The geographic location of the university, the weather in the surrounding area, the proximity of the institution to home and relatives, and the appeal of the area (for example, opportunities for entertainment), are all considered components of the “location factor.” Location may also be extended to include the atmosphere of the campus and city. A majority of the research combines all of these aspects under the heading “location” (see Doyle & Gaeth, 1990; Letawsky et al., 2003).

In a study of 605 NCAA Division I baseball and softball players, atmosphere and location were the third and fourth most influential factors, respectively, in the selection of an institution (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990). Softball players credited campus atmosphere as the most important attribute while physical location ranked sixth among total possible factors (Doyle & Gaeth). Student-athletes at a large four-year institution mentioned the type of community in which the institution was located as the fourth most influential factor in selecting a university (Letawsky et al., 2003).

**Academic Characteristics.** The academic characteristics of an institution may include a variety of different factors including the reputation of the university, the availability of a desired major or program, the perceived quality of the education and academic support services offered for athletes. Female student-athletes tend to place a higher value on academic characteristics than male student-athletes, who regard athletic factors as more important (Judson, James & Aurand, 2004). A similar result was observed in the findings of a study by Doyle and Gaeth (1990) which surveyed 344 baseball and 261 softball student-athletes at the Division I level.

Female student-athletes reported a quality academic program was third most influential among the possible factors in the Doyle et al. study. The same study also found that female softball players value the availability of a desired curriculum or major. Additionally, research conducted at a large four-year university suggests that two of the top three most influential factors in selecting a university are academic based (Letawsky et al., 2003). Letawsky et al. found that the most frequently considered attribute was the degree-program options at an institution, with the availability of academic support services listed third. In a study involving 246 student-athletes, academic support services were also found to be an influencing factor in selecting a university (Gabert et al., 1999). Judson and colleagues found that three of the four most important characteristics for university selection in their study were related to academics. Goss, Jubenville, and Orejan (2006) suggested that in order to increase the success of a recruiting strategy, recruiters should emphasize the academic characteristics of a university.

**Athletic Program.** Characteristics of the athletic program may greatly influence the decision of prospective student-athletes. Characteristics include such things as the reputation of the program and its traditions; the level of competition in the member conference; and the importance of the athletic program at the institution. Also, the athletic facilities available to the program, including practice and game fields, locker rooms, offices, and sports medicine resources, may influence potential student-athletes. Another major concern of recruits is the potential for playing time available in the program (Pauline, Pauline, & Stevens, 2005).

In a survey of 605 NCAA Division I athletes, the athletic team was found to be the fourth most important attribute in the university selection process for female student-athletes. The athletic facilities available were also in the 10 most significant factors (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990). In a separate study of 229 freshman student-athletes at what the study defines as “six small
colleges,” four of the 10 most influential attributes were associated with the athletic program (Goss et al., 2006). In the Letawsky study, student-athletes ranked the tradition of the program as the fifth most influential attribute in the selection process (Letawsky et al., 2003).

Financial Aid. The prospective student-athlete’s perceived financial need greatly impacts the weight he or she places on the value of the scholarship offered (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990). The total amount of the scholarship is not restricted to athletic financial aid but also includes academic grants provided by the institution. However, non-athletic related financial aid was found to be one of the least influential decision factors (Letawsky et al., 2003). In Doyle & Gaeth (1990), female student-athletes rated the amount of scholarship as the second most influential factor in their selection process. However, when financial need was identified as moderate to great, the amount of scholarship was rated as the first consideration. Conversely, the authors found the importance of the scholarship amount was decreased to the sixth position when female student-athletes did not have a perceived financial need.

Coaching Staff. Gabert et al. (1999) found that in selecting a university, student-athletes ranked the head coach as the most influential decision factor. NCAA Division I female student-athletes competing in softball ranked the reputation of the coaching staff as one of the top five most influential factors (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990). Similar results were found in research involving first-year student-athletes who listed the head coach as the second most important factor in determining school choice (Letawsky et al., 2003). In a study of basketball recruits, the coach’s commitment to the program, player-coach relations and the team’s style of play were the most influential of 40 variables in the decision making process (Cooper, 1996). The relationship with the coach during the recruiting process also greatly impacted the university selection of student-athletes attending UNLV (DeWaele & Lounsbery, 2007).

Characteristics related to the head coach and coaching staff are the most frequently mentioned influential attributes for university selection in a study of 27 NCAA Division I male football players (Klenosky, Templin & Troutman, 2001). For many student-athletes, it is important to be compatible with the coaching staff in terms of style of play and personality. Other coaching traits desired by prospective student-athletes may include the coach’s honesty, sincerity, and enthusiasm (Ryan, Groves & Schneider, 2007). The authors suggested it is imperative for coaches to communicate these qualities during the recruiting process.

Method

Population

The population of this study consisted of 239 members of varsity softball teams competing in an NCAA Division II conference in the southwest. The participating sample included players from fourteen different schools in the conference. Softball team rosters range from 13 to 21 players with an average roster size of 17.

Procedures

Prior to any data collection, authorization was obtained from the university’s Human Subjects Committee. A pre-experimental research design was used to determine if differences existed in university selection factors among student-athletes competing in softball at the NCAA
Division II level and to test the instrument used in the study. The researchers developed a survey instrument for this study, the “Strength of University Selection Factors Survey,” after a review of a number of questionnaires found in the literature. The survey items were developed primarily from DeWaele and Lounsbery (2007) who considered relationship to the coaching staff, success of the program, academics, teammates, and the university and found Cronbach’s alpha to be above .7 on each component. Additionally, several of the survey items were modified from the Student-Athlete College Choice Profile developed by Gabert et al. (1999) which was tested for content validity and reliability with Cronbach’s alpha of .84. The survey included 24 items distributed among the six factors that appeared most frequently in the literature. The six factors in the study were family and friends, location of institution, academic characteristics, softball program, financial aid, and coaching staff. All 14 head coaches in the selected conference were contacted by electronic mail to secure permission and invite cooperation for their student-athletes to participate in this study. A survey package was mailed to the head coaches who agreed to participate. The package consisted of an introduction letter, instructions, informed consent forms, surveys, and a pre-paid, self-addressed return envelope.

The authors performed an analysis of the surveys that were returned. Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to determine relative influence of college selection factors in decision-making. SPSS statistical package (Version 16.0) was used in the analyses.
Results

A rank order analysis of the means for each of the 24 items comprising the six factors was computed and is shown in Table 1. Mean scores for 12 of the 24 items were equal to or greater than 4.0. Means were rounded to the nearest whole number to determine placement on the scale established by the study.

Five of the top nine ranked items were related to the coaching staff. The honesty and sincerity of the coaching staff ranked first with a mean of 4.52 and standard deviation of 0.655. Sixty-three participants (91.3%) scored it as either influential or very influential. The level of competition in the softball program ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.717$) ranked second. Sixty-two participants (89.9%) scored it as four or greater. Availability of degree program ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.937$) and academic reputation ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.949$) were third and fourth, respectively.
Other coaching staff-related factors ranked influential or very influential were personal attention, ranked fifth \( (N = 56, 81.1\%) \), reputation of the staff, ranked seventh \( (N = 57, 82.6\%) \), ability of the staff to develop skills, ranked eighth \( (N = 53, 76.8\%) \), and personalities and coaching styles, ranked ninth \( (N = 54, 78.3\%) \). Rounding out the top 10 was the amount of athletic scholarship \( (M = 4.07, SD = 1.287) \), part of the financial aid factor.

Additional softball program items were sixth-ranked potential to play early in career \( (N = 55, 79.7\%) \), 11th ranked athletic facilities used \( (N = 51, 73.9\%) \), and 12th ranked program reputation \( (N = 49, 71.0\%) \).

The composite mean and standard deviation of each of the six factors is reported in Table 2 below.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Staff</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Characteristics</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball Program</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of Institution</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friends</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.753</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest rated of the six factors was the coaching staff \( (M = 4.23) \). Other influential factors were academic characteristics \( (M = 4.11) \), softball program \( (M = 4.08) \), and financial aid \( (M = 3.95) \). The location of the institution \( (M = 3.18) \) was rated somewhat influential, while the influence of family and friends \( (M = 2.99) \) was the lowest rated factor. A more extensive discussion of the results and tables follows.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to determine which factors most influence an NCAA Division II softball player’s selection of a college. The six variables investigated were family and friends, location of institution, academic characteristics, softball program, financial aid, and coaching staff. Four of the six factors were rated as influential by the participants: coaching staff, academic characteristics, softball program, and financial aid. Means were rounded to the nearest whole number for this discussion.

The factor rated highest, based on a rank order of composite means, was the coaching staff \( (M = 4.23) \). Each of the five individual items that comprised this factor, honesty and sincerity of staff, personal attention, reputation of the staff, ability of the staff to develop skills, and personalities and coaching styles, was in the top nine of the rank order analysis, including the highest rated influential item, honesty and sincerity of staff.

However, academic characteristics \( (M = 4.11) \) was similarly ranked as influential and two of the three items in academic characteristics factor, availability of degree program and
academic reputation, were listed in the top five. The lowest ranked item to be considered influental was academic support services, which ranked 18th with a mean score of 3.72.

With a comparable composite mean to coaching staff and academic characteristics, the softball program factor ($M = 4.08$) was perceived to be influential as well. Four of the five items from this group, level of competition, potential to play early in career, athletic facilities used, and program reputation, were in the top 12 of the rank order analysis, including the second-ranked item, level of competition. The last factor rated as influential in this study was financial aid ($M = 3.95$). The three items in this factor, amount of athletic scholarship, cost of tuition and living expenses, and academic scholarships, were each rated influential with the amount of athletic scholarship being ranked 10th overall.

The location of the institution ($M = 3.18$) was rated as somewhat influential; however, there was disparity among the items in the group. Appeal and atmosphere of the campus was rated influential with a mean of 3.87, but weather in the geographical region was rated somewhat influential with a mean of 2.61. Attraction of the area had a mean of 3.07. It is possible the composite score was affected by the broadness of the category. A similar pattern exists in the lowest ranked factor in the study, family and friends ($M = 2.99$). The opinion of a parent or guardian had an influential mean of 3.72, but the opinion of a close friend had a minimally influential mean score of 2.49. Also, while the advice of a coach ($M = 3.35$) and location to family ($M = 3.01$) were both rated influential, a friend attending the same institution ($M = 2.35$) was rated minimally influential and was the lowest ranking item in this study.

The highest rated influential factor for university selection in this study was the perceived honesty and sincerity of the coaching staff ($M = 4.52$). In addition, the amount of personal attention received from the coaching staff during the entire recruiting process ($M = 4.20$) and the reputation of the coaching staff ($M = 4.17$) were the fifth and seventh highest rated factors, respectively. Several studies found that the head coach was the most influential decision factor as well (Gabert et al., 1999; Klenosky et al., 2001). Also, Ryan et al. (2007) found the perceived honesty, sincerity, and enthusiasm of the coach was influential. Doyle and Gaeth (1990) found softball players ranked coaching staff based on reputation in the top five most influential attributes. The consistent results across the two divisions are likely due to the amount of time spent with the head coach and coaching staff during the student-athletes’ careers. Also, student-athletes committed to competing at the college level are understandably concerned with improving their play and may view coaches as a means to that end.

Academic characteristics ($M = 4.11$) were also determined to be influential in this study. This is corroborated in the literature by Judson et al., (2004). The availability of a desired degree or academic program ($M = 4.35$) was the third-ranked influential factor in the current study, with the next factor being the academic reputation of the university ($M = 4.26$). The Judson study found three of the four most influential characteristics were related to academics. Similarly, Doyle and Gaeth (1990) reported a quality academic program was the third most influential factor for Division I softball student-athletes. Letawsky et al., (2003) found that degree options was the most considered factor.

In the present study, the availability of academic support services ($M = 3.72$) was rated somewhat influential and ranked 8th out of 24 items. This differs from the study conducted by Gabert et al., (1999) that demonstrated academic support services were an influencing factor, while Letawsky et al. found it to be the third most influential factor. The difference in these findings may be related to when the survey was administered. Gabert et al. researched high school student-athletes while the present study surveyed student-athletes already in college. It is
possible that a student-athlete’s experiences in college may have influenced the results. Letawsky et al. focused on Division I student-athletes and larger institutions tend to have more extensive academic support services available to student-athletes than Division II institutions do. Many Division I universities have specific departments dedicated to providing student-athletes with academic support while Division II schools frequently rely on the coaching staff and university tutoring services to monitor and aid the student-athletes. Thus, athletes at Divisions II institutions may not perceive academic support services as influential.

The softball program factor ($M = 4.08$) was rated as influential in this sample and four of the items in this factor, level of competition, potential to play early in career, athletic facilities used, and program reputation, were among the top 12 ranked influential items. The level of competition in the member conference and the potential to play early in the student-athlete’s career were the second and sixth ranked influential items, respectively. Goss and colleagues found that four of the 10 most influential attributes were program-related. Similar findings were reported by Pauline et al., (2005).

The program’s athletic facilities were ranked 11th most influential in the present study. Doyle and Gaeth (1990) found the athletic facilities were among the 10 most influential factors. The similar results suggest student-athletes value strong competition and the opportunity to play, regardless of whether they participate in Division I or II. Ultimately, prospective student-athletes are competing in their sport at a high level and program characteristics will most likely be important to them in the decision-making process.

The participants of this study perceived financial aid ($M = 3.95$) to be influential, with three of the items in this factor, amount of athletic scholarship, cost of tuition and living expenses, and academic scholarships ranking in the top 15 most influential items. The amount of athletic scholarship was ranked as the 10th most influential item in the present study and the amount of academic scholarship was 15th out of 24 items. Doyle and Gaeth reported participants considered the amount of scholarship to be the second most influential factor. Although both studies found financial aid to be influential, the direct comparison of rank order analysis suggests the participants of this study were not as influenced by athletic scholarship as the participants in the Doyle study. This difference may stem from the size of the institution and related costs. The Doyle study was conducted on Division I student-athletes. Division II universities are traditionally less expensive to attend than larger Division I institutions. Also, a majority of student-athletes that compete at the Division II level are recruited regionally and may receive in-state tuition to offset costs. Letawsky et al., (2003) found non-athletic related financial aid was one of the least influential factors in the decision making process.

The results of this study suggest this sample perceived the location of the institution to be somewhat influential. Campus appeal and atmosphere ($M = 3.87$) and attraction of the area ($M = 3.07$) ranked 14th and 20th respectively. Doyle and Gaeth (1990) reported contrasting findings. In their study, campus atmosphere was ranked first and physical location was ranked fourth among softball players. Letawsky et al. found the type of community in which the institution was located was the fourth most influential factor. The disparity between the literature and this study may be related to the population being investigated. The participants in the Doyle and Gaeth study competed in Division I, whereas the present study surveyed Division II student-athletes. Division I universities tend to have larger facilities, greater television exposure and more community involvement, all of which may affect the atmosphere on campus. Division II institutions are usually located in less populated areas than the larger Division I universities which could account for the lower influence of attraction of the area. The Division II universities
participating in this study are also located in similar climates and settings. In the present study, the location category included questions about the campus, surrounding area, and weather. The location category may have been too broad to obtain results similar to potentially more focused categories in other studies.

The family and friends factor ($M = 2.99$) was perceived to be somewhat influential and had the lowest composite mean in this study. These results differ from the majority of the literature (DeWaele & Lounsbery, 2007; Maher, 2007; Ryan et al., 2007). Maher reported that the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of parents were primary influences in the selection process. DeWaele and Lounsbery, (2007) found parental perceptions of the university to be one of two major factors in the student-athlete’s decision. The influence of family and friends was further supported in a study by Ryan and colleagues. However, it should be noted that other category items in the present study were scored as minimally influential, thereby lowering the composite mean for the factor. In the present study, the opinion of a parent or guardian was ranked as influential ($M = 3.72$), 17th out of 24 items, and 66.7% of participants scored it as either influential or very influential.

The differences between prior studies and the present study may be related to the population researched. The DeWaele and Lounsbery study surveyed student-athletes from every sport at a NCAA Division I institution. The present study only surveyed female student-athletes competing in softball at the Division II level. There are also multiple differences between universities at the Division I and II levels that likely contributed to the contrasting results. For example, Division I universities are usually larger than Division II universities and offer more academic programs, whereas Division II universities may offer a more limited undergraduate curriculum. Also, Division I programs tend to recruit nationally whereas Division II programs tend to recruit regionally. Thus, the proximity of a Division II institution to a student-athlete’s home may result in greater parental influence in selecting that school.

In addition to family, this study also found that factors related to friends were ranked in the five least influential items from the survey. The opinion of a close friend ($M = 2.49$) and a friend attending the same institution ($M = 2.35$) were 23rd and 24th respectively. These results were consistent with Letawsky and colleagues who reported friends and high school teammates ranked among the least influential factors.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

In conclusion, this study found four of the six factors included in the survey - coaching staff, academic characteristics, softball program, and financial aid – to be influential in selecting a university while family and friends had the lowest composite mean of the six factors in the study. However, it is important for recruiters to explore how the influence of family and friends may relate to student-athletes on an individual basis.

The coaching staff was found to be influential; therefore, it may be important for coaches to ensure that their professional information is continually updated and available in multiple forms; for example, in media guides, on websites and in other recruiting material. It may also be beneficial for a coach to accompany the student-athlete as much as possible during an on-campus visit, rather than leaving the student-athlete with other university representatives during meetings and on the campus tour. The highest rated influential factor in this study was the perceived honesty and sincerity of the coaching staff; therefore, it is important to be honest with the student-athlete and take a genuine interest in the student-athlete’s non-athletic life.
The academic characteristics of the institution were also perceived to be influential in the decision making process. Student-athletes rated the availability of a degree and the academic reputation of the university as two of the top five most influential items in this study. The importance of academics should be conveyed by the coaching staff during the recruiting process. For example, during an on-campus visit it may be beneficial to arrange for a faculty member in the desired degree program to meet with the student-athlete. If the university does not offer the desired major, it may be important for the coach to determine if there is a similar or alternate degree available. Information should be provided to the student-athlete, either by the coach or another representative of the institution, regarding the standing of the program with national governing organizations. Also, it may be important to outline the academic accommodations available to the student-athletes when traveling for away contests; for example, the regularity of study sessions and the availability of internet connections at hotels.

Factors related to the softball program were found to be influential in the selection of an institution. The level of competition was reported to be the second most influential item of the 24 items in the survey. Therefore, it may be helpful for a coach to briefly describe the success of the team and conference at the regional and national levels. It may also be important to keep websites and other media updated to provide potential student-athletes with as much current information as possible regarding the status of the team. Additionally, it may be beneficial to highlight any new facilities or renovations to existing facilities along with future building plans involving the athletic department. Although the potential to play early in a student-athlete’s career was influential, a coach should be honest about expectations and not guarantee playing time to a recruit.

This study found that financial aid factors were also influential. Therefore, it is important to explore how important financial aid is to each individual and her family to determine the amount of influence this factor may have on university selection. A coach should also attempt to schedule appointments with admission counselors that have knowledge of academic scholarships and the financial aid department in order to provide the best and most accurate information to a student-athlete.

The results of this study suggest location of the institution was somewhat influential. The participants in the study rated the appeal and atmosphere of the campus higher than other items in this factor, perceiving it to be influential. It may be important for official or unofficial visits to be scheduled when selective athletic contests, such as Homecoming or games with important rivals, take place. Also, in regard to weather and attraction of the area, individual preferences may exist depending on where the potential student-athlete grew up or currently lives.

This study showed family and friends as a factor to be somewhat influential in university selection, whereas a number of studies found this factor to be a primary influence (see DeWaele & Lounsbery, 2007, and Ryan et al., 2007). The opinion of a parent or guardian was scored as influential in this study which is similar to the findings in the DeWaele and Ryan studies. It is important for a coach to determine the amount of influence each individual prospective student-athlete places on this category. Doing so may help to identify a point of contact other than the student-athlete. If the student-athlete is heavily influenced by a parent or coach, it may be beneficial to explain academic, athletic, and financial information to that person as well as the student-athlete.

Some limitations apply to this study. First, surveying only student-athletes in one Division II conference does not allow for generalizing the findings of this study to the overall population of NCAA Division II softball players. If the study were repeated, including softball
student-athletes from other Division II conferences would allow for more regional or general comparisons. Second, although this study has a small sample size, studies with less participants such as Klenosky et al. have contributed to the body of knowledge and have been cited in this paper. However, future studies may focus on further validating the “Strength of University Selection Factors Survey.” Third, the rating scale could have been refined to avoid possible confusion from a rating perspective, with the difference between somewhat influential and very influential being more specific. Finally, each of the six factors could have included the same number of items to maintain a uniform possible range for better comparison.

Future studies should be conducted on student-athletes in their freshman year, immediately after the recruiting process ends, to avoid the possibility that student-athletes have been influenced by their college experiences. Additionally, future studies should determine if the number of athletic offers a student-athlete receives influences the decision-making process. Another area of research could involve comparing the university selection process of walk-on student-athletes to that of scholarship student-athletes.

References


