



Antiblackness in College Athletics: Facilitating High Impact Campus Engagement and Successful Career Transitions among Black Athletes

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There are increasing concerns about the quality of educational experiences of NCAA Division I Black athletes in big-time college sports. Calls for reform have come from within colleges and universities and beyond. This article presents findings from a review of the extant research on high-impact engagement activities of Black athletes, which have been shown to be conditional on the campus racial climate and antiblack racism in the multibillion-dollar athletics enterprise. The article concludes with an introduction to the Career Transition Scorecard, a mechanism and process designed to shift cognitive frames among practitioners, foster evidence-based practices, and improve campus experiences and subsequent outcomes for athletes.

Keywords: Black athletes, race, antiblack racism, antiblackness, campus racial climate, engagement, data-driven practices, practitioners, Career Transition Scorecard

As National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and member institution profits and commercial interests continue to grow, athletes face expanded game schedules, increased travel, and longer practice hours. Unfortunately, it is becoming more and more difficult to ignore the effects of these changes on students who participate in Division I college athletics. In a study that gathered data on the experiences of 409 athletes in the Pac-12 Conference, Penn Schoen Berland (2015) reported that athletes were spending an average of 50 hours per week during the season on sport-related activities, such as practice, team meetings, film study, strength and conditioning, and game competition. Specifically, 21 of these hours were spent on required athletic activities, with an additional 29 hours on other activities, including voluntary workouts, medical treatment, and traveling for competitions. Additionally, 66% of study participants reported that their time commitment to athletic activities prevented them from engaging in educationally purposeful activities, such as joining clubs and organizations, participating in campus speaker series, and studying abroad.

Although NCAA rules limit athletes to 20 hours per week of supervised practice and training time during the season and eight hours per week in the off-season, there are many ways coaches can evade the NCAA limit. For example, so-called voluntary practices and traveling for athletic-related competitions do not count toward the 20 hour per week time-demand rule. It is painfully apparent that the structural arrangement of big-time athletics can create significant challenges for students who strive to engage purposefully with college in the same ways that their non-athlete counterparts do (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Indeed, in 2014, NCAA President Emmert asserted that he and the Division I Board were “searching for solutions to ensure that student-athletes maintain a better balance between academics and athletics with an emphasis on dedicating additional time to academic pursuits to promote their success once their playing days are over” (para. 46). The level of engagement in high impact campus activities within the broader academic community likely contributed to a successful transition out of sport (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Importantly, opportunities for athletes to fully engage in both meaningful educational campus activities and quality school-to-career transitions seem to be more pronounced in certain sports and for students of certain races. On average, 45% of football players in Football Bowl Subdivision schools—who are disproportionately Black—are not receiving college degrees (New, 2015). Harper (2018) reported that only 55.2% of Black male athletes graduated within six years, compared to 69.3% of athletes overall. The lower average graduation rates for Black athletes compared to other groups is perhaps due in part to the commercialism of the intercollegiate athletics business model which supersedes academic goals and obligations (Comeaux, 2018). Further, Black athletes, unlike their nonblack counterparts, tend to be viewed as mentally inferior and as disposable commodities, possessing value only relative to the interests of primarily white ¹athletic stakeholders, while their intellectual abilities and academic talents are ignored (Gayles, Comeaux, Ofoegbu, & Grummert, 2018).

¹ We do not capitalize the terms “white” or “whiteness” because both have been constructed based on violence and exclusion of people of color and thus do not equate to other racial/ethnic groups as having a legitimate claim to a shared culture/identity outside of violence (Harris, 1993; Roediger, 1994). We do this not to absolve white people of their racial identity, but rather to contextualize the history from which whiteness was formed and disrupt any power it attempts to claim.

The material reality of Black bodies as property, as subhuman, and as separate from their nonblack college athlete counterparts must be located within a larger historical framework of antiblackness and white supremacy. Antiblackness is part of the psyche and frame of reference in the United States. In this context, antiblackness is a social construction of racial meaning and identity that manifests as Black athletes being viewed and treated as inferior and not fully human irrespective of their level of intelligence (Vargas, 2018). We use the term antiblackness because all ethnic groups might encounter discrimination and racial stereotypes, but Black men and women athletes do not face the same ongoing struggles as their nonblack counterparts, as we will illuminate throughout this article.

Under the white gaze, Black bodies and Blackness have been ascribed contested meanings that too often fall outside the historically constructed norms of whiteness (Yancy, 2008). This ongoing trauma of antiblackness affects almost every aspect of campus life for Black athletes, as reflected in their glaring disconnect with faculty members and other students as well as in the everyday antiblack racism encountered in a variety of academic and athletic settings (Comeaux, 2018). The campus environment for Black men and women athletes can be unwelcoming, unsupportive, alienating, and even racially hostile (Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005; Singer, 2005). The mere possibility of being judged is enough to deter Black athletes from raising a hand in class or integrating within the broader academic community, and can distract them from contributing to group discussions if they are triggered to become hyperaware of their performance. At present, colleges and universities have done very little to address what amounts to a racially exploitative, culturally vile, oppressive arrangement.

In this article we critically review what is known empirically about educationally purposeful, high-impact engagement activities for Division I Black college athletes. Given the limited scope of literature explicitly focused on the engagement activities of Division I Black college athletes published in the field, our review focuses on documents published between 2005 and 2019, but we also discuss some earlier pieces that have made substantial contributions to our current understanding of the Black athlete experience. The topical scope for the review is delimited to peer reviewed journal articles and dissertations that focus on engagement activities such as first-year seminars, internships, study abroad, undergraduate research projects, meaningful interactions with faculty, collaboration with peers on problem-solving tasks, service learning, and community-based learning (Kuh, 2001, 2008). In this review, we explain that Black college athlete engagement activities are conditional on the campus racial climate and antiblack racism in a highly commercialized athletics industry. We then introduce the Career Transition Scorecard (CTS)—a valuable tool and process designed to shift cognitive frames and foster an evidence-based approach for improving the well-being of Black college athletes, including their involvement in campus engagement activities. To begin, we provide an overview of academic support centers to understand the academic culture of athletic departments as well as services offered to meet the personal and academic needs of Division I athletes.

Academic Support for College Athletes

Differences between Division I college athletes and their non-athlete counterparts can be quite subtle. Both groups tend to enroll as full-time students and, at times, are faced with the same types of stresses and expectations of the academic and social environment (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Unlike students in the general population, however, college athletes have many demands outside the classroom as a result of their participation in sport (Shropshire & Williams,

2017). Within highly commercialized, big-time athletic departments, coaches expect a great deal of recruited athletes' time and energy for sport-related activities. These same students also endure mental fatigue, physical exhaustion, and nagging injuries, leaving considerably less time for academic obligations and other engagement activities (Eitzen, 2016).

In 1991, the NCAA implemented Bylaw 16.3.1.1, which mandated that NCAA member institutions provide general academic counseling, tutoring, and other academic services to all Division I athletes. These services were designed to enhance athletes' experiences, maintain their academic NCAA eligibility, and support other desirable educational outcomes. Practitioners in academic support centers for athletes offer specialized programs such as faculty–student mentoring and projects specific to study skills, time management, career counseling, and academic scheduling (Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Comeaux, 2010). The ultimate goal is to enable athletes to develop skills for academic, athletic, and personal growth and success.

Many big-time athletic departments have expanded to state-of-the-art academic facilities over the years and also hired more specialized personnel—such as life skills coordinators and academic coaches—to better address athletes' specific academic needs, to attract top recruits, and compete in the “athletic arms race” (Covell & Barr, 2010). These new facilities generally include a plethora of desktop computers in academic center laboratories for exclusive use by athletes to develop their academic talent. Yet while athletic programs are amassing the best academic resources for athletes and practitioners are employed to work closely with them and provide responsive intervention strategies that lead to positive gains in their development and learning, these efforts generally have been ineffective (Comeaux, 2015). Many academic support centers overemphasize merely keeping athletes eligible, which clearly creates a subculture of low academic expectations, thus reducing opportunities to maximize learning—for example, critical thinking and writing skills (Comeaux, 2015). The effects are evident in the dismal graduation rates of Black athletes in football and men's basketball (Harper, 2018).

The emphasis on maintaining player eligibility is largely shaped by a variety of externalities that include television networks and corporate sponsors. Economic and commercial interests in athletics create an organizational culture whereby academic goals and obligations of athletes are devalued or less of a priority among primarily white athletics stakeholders—including coaches, athletic directors, conference commissioners, and corporate sponsors—who significantly benefit financially from this arrangement (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). The NCAA and member schools support commercial policies that shape athletic department operations in ways that may or may not be consistent with the fundamental values and mission of U.S. higher education (Comeaux, 2019; Southall, Nagel, Amis, & Southall, 2008). For example, Brown (2011) reported that Division I men's and women's basketball players tend to miss the most classes during an athletic season—2.4 and 2.5 per week, respectively—largely due to coaches' demands and television networks' dictation of schedules and times for games.

Some studies have underscored the importance of a multifaceted approach to academic support for athletes (e.g., Cooper, 2016; Gaston-Gayles, 2003). In 2010, Comeaux explored the complex negotiations of first-year Division I football players' role identities in the context of a formal faculty–athlete mentor program. Using focus groups and pre- and post-test questionnaires, the study showed that the program had a positive influence on academic and future goals of first-year athletes, despite potential role conflicts. Specifically, the studied athlete participants, many of whom were Black, reported having more balanced academic and athletic identities by the end of their first year. Some were even more optimistic about their future trajectories, reporting a willingness to discuss career aspirations with faculty mentors while

receiving substantive mentor feedback. These findings illuminate the possibility that institutions have to counteract athletes' unique educational challenges early in the college years through purposeful activities such as a mentoring program.

Nonetheless, we know that under the robust structural arrangement of athletics, it is more challenging—and perhaps less likely—for athletes to fully engage in meaningful educational activities or to fully integrate into the larger campus community. The quality of athletes' experiences, including their academic engagement activities, is largely shaped by the campus racial climate and the increasing commercialism of intercollegiate sports (e.g., Clotfelter, 2011; Comeaux, 2017, 2018; Gurney, Lopiano, & Zimbalist, 2017; Nocera & Strauss, 2016).

Engagement in the Academic Experience

Scholars have produced a small but growing body of empirical research on the academic engagement of college athletes. These studies have examined the environments of current athletes, specifically how these individuals engage with various members of the campus community. In this section, we review the related literature as it pertains to Black athletes on college campuses within a multibillion-dollar commercial industry. We focus explicitly on career transitions because they are largely influenced by the quality of student participation in educationally purposeful engagement activities.

Engagement Activities of Black Athletes

Studies have suggested that differences in students' academic performance are influenced by college environmental characteristics, such as educationally purposeful engagement activities (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Hu & Kuh, 2003; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006). Dating back more than three decades, Chickering and Gamson (1987) proposed seven principles of good practice associated with student engagement in undergraduate education: student–faculty interaction, task orientation, cooperation among students, opportunities for communication, active learning, respect for diverse talent and ways of learning, and prompt feedback. Subsequent studies have pointed to the important role that these and similar engagement activities have on a range of college outcomes for students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, Kuh, & McCormick, 2011).

There is little extant research on the specific purposeful engagement activities of Black students who participate in intercollegiate athletics, and no direct studies on antiblackness. We do know that, compared to non-revenue athletes, revenue athletes—who are disproportionately Black—have lower levels of interaction with students other than teammates (Gayles & Hu, 2009). In addition, Comeaux and Harrison (2006), using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, discovered differences between Division I white and Black athletes in their various forms of interaction with faculty members. Faculty who provided assistance in achieving professional goals and help with study skills were positively associated with white athletes' academic success, whereas these same variables were not significant for Black athletes. More recently, studies have explored the international educational experiences of Division I Black college athletes (Walker, 2018; Walker, Harrison, & Bennett, 2019). For example, in a phenomenological study, Walker (2018) examined the experiences of 20 Division I Black athletes who participated in a study abroad enrichment program. The author found in part that international education experiences enhanced the process of their identity development.

Research related to the effects of academic engagement activities on the career transitions of college athletes has been thin. In a qualitative interview study, Riley (2015) explored how former Division I Black football players viewed the influence of participation in high-impact engagement activities during college—including internships, first-year seminars, interaction with faculty, undergraduate research, and writing-intensive courses—on their career transitions. Participants varied in their views on campus activities, and some were aware of the educational benefits of purposeful engagement activities on the quality of their career transitions. Nevertheless, they would have preferred more support and guidance from coaches and academic personnel. All of the study participants also reported they were limited in their engagement activities because of time constraints as a result of tremendous sport and coaching demands in a highly commercialized enterprise.

In sum, studies have documented, albeit conditional on sport demands and expectations as well as the campus climate, the relationship between educationally purposeful engagement activities and academic success for college athletes (Gayles & Hu, 2009a; Umbach et al., 2006). The degree to which athletes interact with faculty members will increase the likelihood of academic success, and these interactions may vary by athletes' race (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Gayles & Hu, 2009). As well, career transition is a dynamic and complex process. Riley (2015) used participant interviews to document the structural impediments that make it more challenging for Black athletes to fully engage in meaningful educational activities and to enhance the quality of school-to-career transitions. For many campus stakeholders, the Black body has been and continues to be a site of contestation for the white imaginary between the inferior intellectual and the elite athlete (Comeaux, 2018). Thus, in the next section, we discuss the ways antiblack logic and oppressive systems reduce opportunities for Black athletes to fully engage in high-impact engagement activities and to maximize both their learning during college and their postgraduation outcomes.

Centering Antiblackness: Black Athletes as Property

As described by Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe, we are living in the “afterlife of slavery” (Hartman, 2007, p. 6) or “in the wake” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 1). More precisely, the core concepts that slavery was founded on have never been eradicated from social life—they have merely been reinscribed into other forms of systematized subjugation that ultimately rely on Black suffering and death as normative processes (Hartman, 1997; Sharpe, 2016; Vargas & James, 2012; Wilderson, 2016). For example, scholars have located this within systems and health outcomes such as access to food, death by preventable disease, education, policing, imprisonment, and housing segregation, among others (Anderson, 2017; Vargas, 2018; Vargas & James, 2012).

Within higher education, antiblackness permeates both policy and social interactions. Dumas (2016) provided an analysis of school desegregation and brought attention to how a denial of antiblackness in educational policy research has influenced current discourses of diversity and inclusion within higher education. In this discourse, institutions celebrate racial diversity and inclusiveness that are ironically earned by excluding Black students and enrolling more nonblack students of color; this ultimately reveals how antiblackness is a foundational logic that impacts what is considered a “diverse” student body (Dumas, 2016). Stewart (2019) presented a similar analysis and critique of higher education student affairs programs. Despite espoused values of social justice in these programs, faculty and administrators consistently enact

multiple, intersecting forms violence toward Black students, furthering a disregard for their humanity. As such, it is important to connect Black athlete experiences of racism to historical and ongoing projects of oppression rooted in antiblackness.

Hawkins (2013) paralleled the current structure of college athletics to slavery, highlighting how it recreates a racist exploitative system using predominantly Black men to generate revenue. Further, Dancy, Edwards, and Davis (2018) asserted that the equating of Blackness with property has never been eradicated from white imagination, structures, or society. Rather, it has shifted and is seen in various sectors of society—including college athletics. Universities moved from relying on enslaved Black labor to build and maintain institutions to relying on predominantly Black athletes to generate revenue and promote the university under the guise of amateurism (Dancy et al., 2018). The hostile conditions, undercompensated labor, insufficient opportunities to maximize learning, and toll on Black athletes' bodies and psyche reinforce the idea that these students are the property of the university; thus, the Black college athlete is yet another tool to extract revenue for the white capitalistic enterprise (Gayles et al., 2018; Hawkins, 2013).

As evidenced by the disparity in graduation rates between Black male athletes and the rest of the student body, institutional priorities are clear: Athletic administrations are largely preoccupied with maintaining athlete eligibility rather than fostering educational success (Harper, 2018). The subsequent athlete socialization processes prevent Black athletes from fully engaging on campus, leading to disparate academic outcomes (Gayles et al., 2018; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). For example, Shulman and Bowen (2001) examined athletes' experiences at 30 mostly selective private colleges and universities in the United States. They found that Division I athletes tended to underperform academically, and this underperformance was more pronounced for those who played football or basketball—namely, Black athletes. Black athletes in particular are more likely to repeat classes and be placed on academic probation (Uptegrove, Roscigno, & Charles, 1999). Relatedly, studies have found that Division I college athletes, largely those in revenue sports, become increasingly disengaged from their academics due to the commercialized nature of college athletics and the priorities of their coaches (Adler & Adler, 1991; Owens, 2015). Other studies have revealed that grades for revenue athletes are lower during their sports' respective seasons, suggesting that sport demands contribute to undesirable educational outcomes (Maloney & McCormick, 1993).

In addition to a lack of adequate support to facilitate their academic success, Black men and women athletes tend to perceive the campus racial climate as hostile (Bruening et al., 2005; Comeaux, 2018; Singer, 2005). Through document analysis and interviews, Bruening and colleagues (2005) examined the collective experiences of 12 Division I African American women athletes at a large Midwestern university. They discovered that the mass media, coaches, athletic administrators, and other athletes played a role in virtually ignoring their experiences and concerns. Further, Singer (2005), using critical race theory as an analytical lens, examined four African American male football players at predominantly white Division I institutions to understand the potential impact of antiblack racism on the quality of their college experience. Through focus groups and in-depth interviews, Singer discovered that these African American participants believed they were treated differently than their white counterparts in the scheduling of classes, random drug tests, and consequences for poor behavior off the field that could be detrimental to the team.

Interactions within teams themselves are also reflective of, and reproduce, antiblackness rather than healthy, humanizing interactions. For example, in Beamon's (2014) study of former

football and male basketball players, 15 out of 20 participants rejected the notion that sport brought teammates together, and instead explained that their teams were segregated by race. More recently, Hextrum's (2019) study of gender and race reproduction within track and field and rowing teams at an NCAA Division I school found that several Black athletes were subjected to racist stereotypes, microaggressions, and racist nicknames by their coaches and teammates. For instance, this took the form of track coaches policing a confident Black student's behavior, in which his demeanor was deemed too aggressive. Further, Black women participants recalled experiences with white teammates asserting that they were in a "bad mood," thus reproducing gendered, racist ideologies (Hextrum, 2019, p. 10).

These findings echo previous experiences Black women and Black queer women have reported of hostile team and campus climates (Bernhard, 2014; Bruening et al., 2005; Foster, 2003; Melton & Cunningham, 2012). Black women athletes have reported being silenced and policed within athletic departments while also being hypersexualized by coaches, administrators, and members of men's teams (Bruening et al., 2005; Foster, 2003). In a case study of a Division I women's basketball team, five Black women participants talked about both the hypervisibility and invisibility they felt on campus; each participant commented on the lack of racial diversity within the athletic department and on campus and how this contributed to feelings of isolation on their team and on campus (Bernhard, 2014).

Research on the experiences of queer Black women in sport reveal overlapping experiences of isolation and constant threats. For example, in a study of queer women-of-color athletes, a Black woman described being threatened by a resentful teammate who planned to out her to her parents; a coach threatened to out a different Black woman to her parents as a punishment for low grades (Melton & Cunningham, 2012). Across participants, the hostile environments they endured led many to hide their sexual identities from teammates and coaches to avoid further discrimination and hate, and they relied on other Black women for support within the team (Melton & Cunningham, 2012). This is consistent with Foster's (2003) findings that Black women are hypersurveilled and controlled within athletic departments, and that resistance to these conditions is often met with new terrorizing threats from athletic administrations.

Lastly, the disregard for Black athletes' lives is most overtly evident through the deaths of Black college football players over the years. In the last two decades, Teg Agu, Ereck Plancher, Braeden Bradforth, and Jordan McNair, among others, lost their lives during practice due to overexertion, heat stroke, and abusive conditions (Hruby, 2018). In each instance, coaches and administrators were complicit in creating an environment with little regard for athlete well-being, with the most devastating outcomes affecting Black men. Indeed, Black men who participate in athletics are largely positioned outside of the dominant norms, rendering them structurally vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exploitation (Comeaux, 2018).

The discrepancies in graduation rates, the concentration of Black athletes in athletics—and specifically in revenue-generating sports—as opposed to in the general student body, and the unhealthy isolating climate shed light on the larger exploitative system that is driven by antiblack logics of fungibility and disposability (Comeaux, 2018). It is imperative that scholars and athletic practitioners examine the ways in which college sport is reflective of a global antiblack orientation in order to guide institutional change. In light of all this, it is clear that practitioners in academic support centers will have to forge more responsive approaches to address the needs of Black college athletes. This approach must include fresh and creative ways of thinking about the root causes of their inequitable experiences and outcomes. As a starting point, practitioners

must shift from a deficit frame to an anti-deficit, anti-racist, data-driven frame, and organizational problems must be understood in radically different ways (Comeaux, 2015). Moreover, practitioners must be willing to ask honest questions about the Black college athlete experience. But how can practitioners and other athletic leaders begin to shift their frames to better understand how racialized structures impede the quality of Black athletes' campus engagement and school-to-career transitions?

In the next section we discuss an alternative methodology, the Career Transition Scorecard (CTS), which is designed to engage practitioners in collaborative inquiry so that they can more thoroughly understand the Black college athlete experience. This approach by no means serves as an all-inclusive corrective to the antiblackness that permeates higher education and college athletics. Rather, the CTS is a hands-on mechanism for athletic departments to address antiblack racism within their policies and practices. It is a tool and process through which practitioners can better guide their decisions and evaluate the cumulative effects of organizational actions so as not to enact layered forms of violence through everyday administrative practices.

Framework of the Career Transition Scorecard for Athletes

One possible approach to shifting cognitive frames—also known as “frames of reference,” “schemata,” and “orientations”—among practitioners is the Career Transition Scorecard (CTS). The CTS and its methodological approach, rooted in the Diversity Scorecard (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, & Vallejo, 2004), focus on assessments of the athletic department climate and student outcomes. It is an equity-minded and action-oriented approach to accountability and change. Comeaux (2013) designed the CTS for practitioners and other campus leaders to better interrogate the problems of learning systems and to challenge objectives, assumptions, practices, policies, and norms of a given organization. Overall, the CTS aims to create a culture of evidence to support student performance and to shift the cognitive frames of practitioners.

Investigatory Process

The CTS investigatory process is conducted by an evidence team of participating practitioners and researchers. A climate survey is administered to participating athletes, and data are used to increase awareness of existing problems and strengths, understand and recognize inequalities, promote critical thinking, and challenge underlying cognitive frames and intrinsic biases within the athletic department. This approach is designed to influence experiences and intended outcomes for athletes across race/ethnicity, gender, and type of sport, and to enhance the quality of athletes' school-to-career transitions. Thus, the CTS generally aims to bring about change at the individual and organizational levels.

The CTS employs the practitioner-as-researcher model as an alternative methodology of knowledge production (Bensimon et al., 2004). That is, practitioners within a support center for athletes become researchers, and an outside researcher takes on the role of facilitator. In this model, the facilitator determines the conceptual framework and research agenda, but the practitioner-researchers conduct the actual research and likewise assume responsibility for working closely with the facilitator to compile, analyze, and interpret existing survey data and

CTS data on the athlete experience and to develop and implement intervention strategies or concrete plans of action.

It is also the responsibility of the practitioner-researchers to maintain existing data on the athlete experience. For example, athlete participants provide feedback through journal writing and storytelling about their experiences under each selected performance perspective. This allows the evidence team to assess how athletic department professionals perform in facilitating quality career transitions of athletes across race/ethnicity, gender, and type of sport. Overall, this approach provides opportunities for practitioners in support centers to actively construct their own knowledge and ideas within their own organizational context, examine their own racialized assumptions, practices, and stereotypes about Black athletes and other marginalized groups, and provide new awareness and new knowledge of issues affecting these groups. Likewise, the practitioner-researchers maintain existing data on the college athlete experience to produce a collaborative culture of evidence that champions the use of evidence-based practices within the participating athletic department. When practitioners are engaged in the kind of research that influences their practices and decision making, they are more likely to be fully aware of the types and magnitude of academic and personal issues that athletes encounter, and they are more likely to respond in meaningful, supportive, engaging ways (Comeaux, 2015).

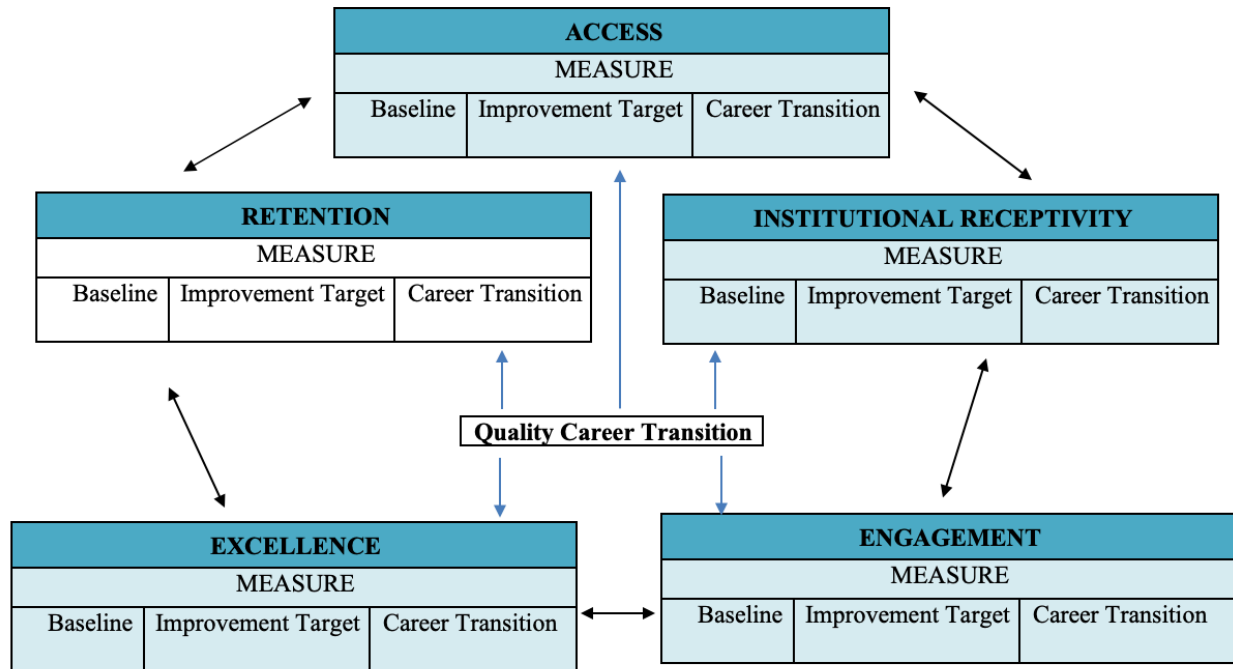
The Scorecard

The CTS includes a climate survey administered online to all college athletes in participating athletic departments. It also comprises five “performance perspectives” that are fundamental to achieving quality school-to-career transitions in order to assess department performance: access, retention, institutional receptivity, excellence, and engagement. Each of these perspectives uses baseline disaggregated data, targets a measurable improvement, and then defines a quality career transition. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the CTS with the five perspectives and the indicators developed for participating athletic departments. Measures are defined as indicators that highlight areas of equity or inequities of school-to-career transitions or educational outcomes for athletes. Baselines are the current status of the measures. Target improvements are the progress made to advance equity and enhance quality school-to-career transitions. Quality career transition is the point at which there are baseline improvements on multiple measures.

The access perspective might assess the distribution of athletes in certain majors and programs (e.g., engineering, computer science) as well as access to internship opportunities, which can influence intended outcomes (see Kuh, 2008). This perspective might also address such questions as: Do athletes have access to professional and graduate schools? Do athletes have access to campus resources such as diversity workshops? The retention perspective might focus on the completion rates and levels of success in basic skills courses among athletes, addressing questions like: What are the retention rates of athletes by program? What are the retention rate of athletes in, for example, competitive engineering and computer science programs? Under institutional receptivity, athletic departments might use existing data to answer questions about the extent to which coaches and administrators reflect the diversity of the athletes they recruit (see Comeaux & Fuentes, 2015). The department might also focus on the organizational culture and climate (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016), using empirical data collected from the climate survey and CTS framework.

Figure 1.

An illustration of the five performance perspectives of the Career Transition Scorecard for athletes.



Within the Framework of the Five Performance Perspectives, Disaggregate Data by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Sport

- **ACCESS**: majors; departments/schools; internships; graduate and professional schools
- **RETENTION**: course-taking patterns; degree-completion rate
- **INSTITUTIONAL RECEPTIVITY**: diversity of coaches, staff, and administrators; organizational climate and culture
- **EXCELLENCE**: course grades; GPA; academic honors and awards; postgraduation career placement
- **ENGAGEMENT**: interaction with faculty and non-athlete peers; cross-racial interaction; study groups; writing groups; study abroad; clubs and organizations; internships; tutorial sessions; volunteerism; internships

The excellence/high achievement perspective might examine existing data that provide answers to questions about athlete success in high-demand, competitive undergraduate programs of study, their post-graduation career placement, and the types and magnitude of academic honors and awards they have received. This perspective might address such questions as: What are the comparative completion rates of athletes by race/ethnicity, gender, and type of sport? What percentage of athletes graduated with a 3.0 GPA or higher? What percentage of athletes in

each race/ethnicity, gender, and type of sport transitioned to high-demand or high-paying career opportunities?

Lastly, the engagement perspective can bring attention to the kinds of high-impact engagement activities athletes take part in, including meaningful interactions with faculty and students other than teammates (Gayles & Hu, 2009). With a better understanding of the frequency and quality of athletes' interactions with faculty, for example, practitioners would be more likely and better able to implement concrete plans of action (e.g., establish a faculty–student mentor program) that could lead to positive gains in learning (Comeaux, 2010).

Athletic departments might have different needs, expectations, and interests within the CTS framework, perhaps in part based on the results of their climate survey, and they might select specific performance perspectives on which to focus. As such, the CTS team works collectively to examine data from the climate survey and other sources on the five performance perspectives. Then, based on this examination, they create an individualized version of the CTS that includes measures such as athletes' participation in purposeful engagement activities, their enrollment in competitive majors, the academic honors and awards they receive, or the racial and ethnic composition of athletic department personnel in comparison to the athlete population.

In all of this inquiry, it is essential that the CTS evidence team explore how athletes' performance on all of these aspects varies by subgroup (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, and type of sport). Given the issues discussed above, the CTS is especially important for Black athletes. Through the ongoing process of completing the CTS and examining data disaggregated by subgroups, practitioners essentially become knowledge *makers* rather than merely knowledge *users*. In so doing, they have the opportunity to shift their cognitive frames and more precisely learn to think from an anti-deficit, data-driven standpoint.

Effectiveness of the Career Transition Scorecard for Athletes

In athletic departments that use the CTS framework, practitioners have already observed shifts to their cognitive frames, including becoming more equity minded when analyzing disaggregated student data. Handwritten field notes, semi-structured interviews, and reviews of individualized versions of the CTS are ongoing at participating athletic departments. In one athletic department where the CTS was implemented, members of the team appreciated that the framework heightened critical awareness about campus socialization patterns of athletes by providing statistical evidence. They were somewhat disturbed to discover clear patterns of inequalities and to learn that many athletes were less likely to participate in high-impact engagement activities, such as internships and campus workshop series. These preliminary findings have triggered reflection, discussion, and information sharing among the evidence team about ways to understand, interpret, and critically evaluate this pattern.

The long-term intent is for the evidence team to be evidence monitors, keeping tabs on patterns and conditions of college athletes linked to their established CTS benchmarks while developing and implementing concrete intervention strategies based on available evidence, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, and type of sport. When asked to comment on this collaborative process of examining CTS data, one member of the evidence team said, “I’ve learned a great deal early on, simply by disaggregating data by race....I feel like I’m closer to the actual problems, and our team can begin to address them directly.”

Conclusion

This article was meant to review empirical research on the benefits of educationally sound engagement activities for Division I Black athletes, while highlighting their suffering and the ontological conditions of Blackness. It was also designed to introduce practitioners and campus leaders to the Career Transition Scorecard—a tool and process that can help practitioners understand their own blind spots, racial stereotypes, microaggressions, and patterns of racial exclusion. As well, the CTS can help practitioners see how race shapes their own views as well as opportunities for Black students who participate in athletics, and ultimately shift their frames of understanding (and interrupt and replace restrictive frames). While shifting the cognitive frames of practitioners in support centers is not sufficient to address antiblack structures and oppressive systems in higher education, it is a necessary precondition toward improving the campus experiences of Black athletes. An anti-deficit, data-driven approach like the CTS can increase critical awareness of strengths and problem areas in athletic departments and bring to light inequalities among athletes across race/ethnicity, gender, and type of sport.

Higher education practitioners and leaders face tremendous pressure to improve their academic production, even in the face of the centrality of commercialism in college athletics. It seems apparent that the quality of Black athletes' educational experiences will be shaped to a significant degree by the vision, knowledge, and competencies of those providing leadership in the multibillion-dollar athletic enterprise. NCAA schools must devote themselves to racial justice education in order to create more equitable experiences and subsequent outcomes for college athletes. The CTS, as outlined above, is a useful approach to broadening how we define and measure academic success and improving the quality of athletes' educational experiences, including Black athletes' participation in high-impact engagement activities.

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