



## **An Examination of Culturally Responsive Programming for Black Student-Athletes' Holistic Development at Division I Historically White Institutions (HWIs)**

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*There are significant gaps in positive educational outcomes of Black student-athletes when compared to their peers. These gaps reflect deficits in culturally responsive support for the academic success and holistic development of Black student-athletes at historically White institutions (HWIs). While research has examined athletic academic support programs, there is limited attention towards programming efforts that consider the unique experiences and needs of Black student-athletes at HWIs. Discrepancies in Black student-athletes' academic performance and graduation rates at Division I HWIs question the effectiveness of athletic academic support programs. The purpose of this manuscript is to examine literature on culturally responsive programming efforts at Division I HWIs. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (CRT) (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and student involvement theory (Astin, 1984, 1999), a content analysis of publicly accessible information on support programs were analyzed to identify themes in programming efforts. Key findings revealed that while programs supported by the NCAA or athletic departments support Black student-athletes broadly, faculty-led programs are more likely to incorporate culturally responsive programming that stimulates positive educational outcomes and holistic development for this population of students. Implications for athletic departments and higher education professionals are discussed.*

*Keywords: Black student-athlete support, culturally responsive programming, culturally relevant pedagogy, diversity and inclusion, student-athlete development*

Though some may consider their role at postsecondary institutions to be controversial, it is an undeniable fact that Black student-athletes play a prominent role in big-time college sports in the United States (U.S.) (Bailey & Littleton, 1991). Despite having a dominant presence in intercollegiate athletics, negative academic trends associated with Black student-athletes reflect noteworthy gaps in adequate support for this sub-group of student-athletes. Baker and Hawkins (2016) noted that Black student-athletes do not perform as well academically compared to their counterparts in the general student body. Current statistics highlight how Black student-athletes graduate at the lowest rates among all student-athlete cohorts at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I institutions. Based on the NCAA's metric of the graduation success rate (GSR), White athletes graduate at higher rates (93%) compared to Hispanic/Latino (87%), and Black athletes (76%) (NCAA, 2018, 2019). Moreover, the campus climate at postsecondary institutions play a significant role in the experiences of any college student. Navigating environments that include multi-level racism (e.g., individual, institutional, societal and civilizational) (Oseguera, 2010) presents uniquely difficult challenges for groups that are racially marginalized such as Black students in general and Black student-athletes more specifically. For Black students attending historically White institutions (HWIs), the campus climate can be explained as tenuous due to perpetual encounters with both overt and covert racism (Feagin, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Thus, the experiences of Black student-athletes at HWIs can be shaped by racial, social, and cultural factors that influence their holistic development including their academic success outcomes.

In addition to the hindrances from campus climate, Black student-athletes, particularly Black males, struggle with being underprepared when compared with their White and non-athlete peers who are equipped to excel in college (Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006). It is worth noting, in contrast to traditional deficit-based explanations, the academic under-preparation trends associated with Black male student-athletes is less a reflection of their academic motivation, effort, and capabilities. Rather, from an anti-deficit perspective, these trends are more a byproduct of systemic (gendered) racism (e.g., perceived innate intellectual inferiority, criminality/deviance, etc.), which includes a myriad of unfavorable conditions facing Black males in the U.S. such as, intergenerational economic deprivation, perpetual academic underfunding, disparate suspensions and expulsions, underrepresentation in academically gifted courses, misdiagnosis of cognitive and behavioral propensities and disproportionate incarceration, and unnatural deaths to name a few (Cooper, 2016; 2019). In turn, Cooper and colleagues (2019) examined Black student-athletes' academic success at a Division I institution, and revealed that this marginalized group experiences compounded stress associated with seeking to perform at higher levels at an academically rigorous institution, while trying to maintain a rigorous athletic schedule as a Division I student-athlete. Though this study was conducted with eight Black student-athletes at a single HWI, and is not generalizable to all HWIs, it provides relative insight to the potential unique experiences of Black student-athletes at HWIs broadly.

As an underrepresented and stigmatized population at HWIs, Black student-athletes often encounter negative psychosocial experiences such as social isolation and stereotyping – both, as an athlete (i.e., dumb-jock) and a racialized student (i.e., affirmative action admit versus a student admitted based on their own merit). Howard (2014) stated the dumb jock stereotype carries a gendered racist undertone when attributed to Black male student-athletes because of the

historical oppressions in the U.S. (i.e., disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates in primary education that perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline). Similarly, the daily experience of Black female student-athletes consists of racial marginalization, as well as stigmatization based on their gender, class, and sexual orientation (Carter-Francique, 2013; Bruening, 2005; Bruening et al., 2005; Smith, 2000). Microaggressions experienced by Black student-athletes link the perceptions of culture with one's identity and thus there is a need for culturally responsive programming to assist students with navigating their roles as Black student-athletes at a HWI. As a result, the purpose of this conceptual manuscript is to examine the literature on culturally responsive programming efforts at Division I HWIs that are designed to improve Black student-athletes' positive educational and developmental outcomes.

In an effort to support the academic success and development of student-athletes, the NCAA mandated the implementation of support programs and services in the early 1990s (NCAA, 2019). Programs such as Challenging Athletes Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS/Life Skills) (NCAA, 2008), now known as NCAA Life Skills and the Scholar-Baller (SB) program (Harrison et al., 2010) are two notable frameworks for athletic departments across the nation to reference and utilize for fostering student-athletes' holistic development. While this programming has proven beneficial to student-athletes' development broadly, the continued graduation deficits between Black student-athletes and their peers as well as the persistent negative psychosocial experiences among this sub-group (Beamon, 2008; Melendez, 2008; Singer, 2009) prove there remains a gap in effective program outcomes. Along the same lines, Comeaux (2007) posited that athletic departments have produced tailored programs and services that do not fully support or affirm student-athletes' cultural differences, and thereby limit the full participation of certain groups such as Black student-athletes. The lack of research on the unique experiences and needs of Black student-athletes leave a substantial gap in addressing holistic development and academic success at HWIs. A study conducted by Arvan (2010) found significant differences in student-athletes' perceived needs for athletic development along gender (females more than males) and ethnicity (minority more than non-minority) lines, which further supports the notion that culturally responsive programming and practices that reflect and benefit all students is imperative (Comeaux, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive programming has been recommended as a viable approach for improving academic achievement among Black students without forsaking their cultural and psychological development (Carter-Francique, 2013; Fine, 1986; Fordham, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). To fully support Black student-athletes, culturally responsive approaches must apply elements and experiences of the Black community to their curricula and programming (e.g., social support and Black cultural expressions including music, dance, art and representation of identity etc.).

## Theoretical Frameworks

### *Critical Race Theory*

According to Bell (1992), race is a critical social construct in the analysis of social, political, and educational problems of people in society. Critical race theory (CRT) theorists argue racism is deeply rooted in the U.S. society and embracing this reality is the first step towards attaining true equity (Bell, 1980, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995). The following five key tenets of CRT challenge traditional models of scholarship regarding race

and culture: (a) intercentricity of race and racism; (b) challenge of dominant ideology; (c) commitment to social justice; (d) centrality of experiential knowledge; and (e) transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, in press). CRT acknowledges the intersection of racial, gender, and class injustices that people of Color experience, but are oftentimes not considered collectively (as opposed to separately) when examining causes for observed and lived outcomes. CRT also challenges traditional claims of objectivity, race neutrality, meritocracy, equal opportunity and color-blindness, proclaiming that such notions function as camouflage to promote and protect the self-interests and privileges of the dominant groups (Bimper 2015; Tate, 1997; Solórzano, 1997). Moreover, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe how CRT is a useful lens to examine racial inequalities and inequities in the American educational system. Post *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), which was the Supreme Court's first step in desegregating U.S. schools, a new direction of literature focused on how to effectively teach multiculturalism to an increasingly diverse student population. Two forms of engaging diverse students academically include culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy surfaced (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Sleeter, 2012).

### *Student Involvement Theory*

Astin's (1999) Student Involvement Theory (SIT) refers to the level of mental and physical commitment a student is willing to exert in their academic experience. Furthermore, students, including student-athletes, experience positive gains in learning and personal development by becoming involved on campus (Comeaux et al., 2011). In addition, SIT is a vital component of connecting students to the campus environment, which is important in combating feelings of social isolation that Black student-athletes experience at HWIs. Astin (1999) outlined five factors related to student involvement: (a) academic involvement; (b) involvement with faculty; (c) involvement with student peers; (d) involvement with work (arguably the role sport plays considering the student-athlete time and effort commitment to sport); (e) and other forms of involvement. In essence SIT suggests that for Black student-athletes to be engulfed in the learning experience, they must be personally invested in the pursuit of learning. However, it is the lack of personal involvement in academic and social pursuits outside of athletics due to the history of institutional racism that compounds the challenges many Black student-athletes face at HWIs (Njororai, 2012; Harper 2006).

For example, institutional racism is reflected in the fact that Black males constitute 55% and 56% of football and men's basketball teams while simultaneously only comprising 2.6% of the general student population (Harper, 2018). In addition, studies have shown that Black male student-athletes lack agency and control to determine their academic majors and spend upwards of 40 hours a week on athletic-related tasks. In many instances, student-athletes are socially and physically isolated from their non-athlete peers due to the structural arrangements of where athletic facilities are located in conjunction with their schedules (e.g., practices, film sessions, athletic center academic study halls, etc.) (Comeaux, 2015). In Cooper and Cooper's (2015) study, participants felt pressured to focus more on athletics than academics due to their scholarship status and the control coaches wielded over financial support. Lastly, academic support programs often ignore racial, gender, and cultural differences whereby the unique needs of Black student-athletes are overlooked and underserved (e.g., experiences of racial microaggressions, lack of sense of belonging, cultural shocks at HWIs, the need for Black

cultural products for personal maintenance, etc.) (Bernhard, 2014; Carter-Francique, Dortch, & Carter-Phiri, 2017; Cooper et al. 2019). To drive the holistic development and positive academic outcomes of Black student-athletes, the NCAA and its Division I member institutions must engage in more concerted efforts to create and foster student involvement within culturally responsive programming.

### *Culturally Responsive Programming*

*Culturally relevant pedagogy.* Culturally relevant pedagogy is defined as an educational approach for teachers/educators that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The framework for culturally relevant pedagogy consists of the following three components: (a) think in terms of long-term academic achievement and not merely end-of-year tests; (b) focus on cultural competence, which helps students recognize and develop pride in their cultural beliefs and practices while learning about other cultures; (c) seek to develop sociopolitical consciousness (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Each of these three components could inform how Black student-athletes, as well as their student-athlete peers and the athletic department staff (including coaches), understand the importance of sociocultural competence so behaviors and mindsets are not viewed from a deficit-based lens. In other words, differences in culture, learning, knowing, and behaviors are not viewed in a hierarchical manner, but rather as a horizontal or circular constellation of human diversity and multiculturalism. In order to sustain culturally relevant pedagogy, continuously evolving practices must be enacted by placing the experiences and needs of students at the forefront.

*Culturally responsive teaching.* Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p.31). Culturally responsive teaching places a major responsibility on the instructor. There are six elements of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teachers engage in (a) empowering students socially and academically; (b) demonstrating multidimensional practices; (c) validating every student’s culture;(d) presenting social, emotional, and political content; (e) establishing transformative schools and societies; and (f) exhibiting emancipatory and liberatory approaches against oppressive educational practices and ideologies (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2010). Culturally relevant instructors have to make connections with students’ cultural associations and academic concepts. To enhance one’s cultural competence, instructors should unmask oppressive systems and allow students to reflect on their lives, community, and society as a whole. For example, culturally relevant teaching for Black student-athletes would include acknowledging the sources and perpetuating factors that contribute to negative educational outcomes for this sub-group such as the dumb jock stereotype and the myth that intelligence is separate from athletic participation and excellence. Black student-athletes will benefit from programs that incorporate culturally responsive teaching because it considers their unique experiences, which creates a more inclusive and conducive classroom for positive learning outcomes (Gay, 2010).

*Excellence Beyond Athletics*. Cooper's (2016) Excellence Beyond Athletics (EBA) approach was created as a series of strategies to help enhance Black male student-athletes' educational experiences and holistic development at postsecondary institutions in the U.S. The purpose of EBA is to empower, educate and inspire students of Color (athletes and non-athletes) to maximize their full potential as holistic individuals both within and beyond athletic contexts. Although the concept was designed to address Black male student-athletes, the recommendations to support academic success and holistic development are transferable when supporting Black female student-athletes as well (Carter-Francique, 2017; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The paradigm consists of six holistic development principles (HDPs): (a) self-identity awareness; (b) positive social engagement; (c) active mentorship; (d) academic achievement; (e) career aspirations and (f) balanced time management. Cooper (2016) purported that the quality and nature of Black student-athletes' experiences and outcomes at institutions of higher education are predicated on three factors: (a) conditions, (b) relationships, and (c) expectations (CRE). The recommendations of EBA require institutions to enhance academic and educationally purposeful engagement expectations for Black male student-athletes. Empowering Black male student-athletes with a strategic responsiveness to interest convergence (SRIC) mindset will address some of the criticisms of big-time college athletics as a vehicle of exploitation rather than a source of educational development (Cooper, 2012; 2016; Benford, 2007; Davis, 1995; Donnor, 2005; Hawkins, 2010; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). EBA is relevant to developing culturally responsive programming to support the holistic development and academic success of Black student-athletes at HWIs. EBA considers the experiences of this marginalized population and the importance of cultivating culturally conscious and inclusive communities at educational institutions for Black student-athletes to thrive.

## Methods

For this content analysis, due to the lack of research on culturally responsive programming for Black student-athletes, the first author examined articles focused on the broader areas of student-athlete development and culturally responsive programming (Biddle et al., 2001). In addition, the authors examined websites for publicly accessible information, and engaged in informal personal correspondence with key stakeholders. The following databases were used: a) *Google Scholar*, b) *SPORTDiscus*, c) *Academic Search Premier* and d) *Education Research Complete*. In addition, the authors searched the *Journal of Sport Management (JSM)*, *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics (JIIA)*, *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education (JSSAE)*, *Sociology of Sport Journal (SSJ)*, and *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport (JIS)*. Articles reviewed were published between 1991 and 2019. The year 1991 was selected as a baseline date because this was the year that the NCAA established Bylaw 16.3.1.1., which requires athletic departments to provide academic counseling/support services for all student-athletes (NCAA, 2019). From this data collection procedure, 231 peer reviewed articles were identified, and of the collection, 47 manuscripts were selected for this content analysis based on their relevance to the focus on culturally responsive programming for Black student-athletes. Of the 231 peer-reviewed articles that covered student-athlete support broadly, only the identified 47 discussed support for Black student-athletes specifically.

### *Data Analysis*

The authors utilized CRT and SIT frameworks to deductively analyze the articles that were used for this manuscript. The frameworks helped the authors examine how institutions and programming was used to support the experiences and needs of Black student-athletes. CRT was used to examine how a program acknowledged racism as a potential barrier for Black student-athletes (e.g., institutional, interpersonal, cultural, and systemic), and its influence on their academic success at Division I HWIs. Culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching and EBA were incorporated into the analysis to determine how programs or institutions intentionally develop support programs to foster and empower the holistic development of its Black student-athletes. Finally, SIT was used to gauge how programs encourage its student-athletes to be committed and invested in the academic learning experience on campus beyond their athletic involvement. After applying these frameworks to each article, the authors selected articles that discussed the unique needs and experiences of Black student-athletes and the importance of culturally responsive or relevant programs to support those athletes. The authors then identified seven programs that are currently being implemented at HWIs and are structured to support the holistic development of its athletes. The programs were separated based on their support framework- (a) institutionally-sponsored (2); (b) faculty-led (3); or (c) NCAA-sponsored. The theoretical frameworks were also used to analyze these programs to identify how Black student-athletes are being supported, as well as pros and cons of each. The following research questions guided the current analysis:

- RQ 1: What support programs at Division I HWIs incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching practices for enhancing Black student-athletes' holistic development outcomes?
- RQ 2: How do support programs at Division I HWIs incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching practices to enhance Black student-athletes' holistic development outcomes?

## **Culturally Responsive Programming for Black Student-Athletes at Historically White Institutions (HWIs)**

In a review of scholarly literature on Black student-athletes, support programs and related websites for publicly accessible information, the authors identified seven programs at different Division I HWIs. These were the only student-athlete specific support programs identified in the literature on Black student-athletes. Similar to Comeaux and Harrison (2011) and Cooper's (2016) previous contributions, this content analysis seeks to build upon the literature by highlighting the landscape of current culturally responsive programs involving Black student-athletes at Division I HWIs. The extant literature over the past four decades has indicated the various academic, athletic, and social challenges facing Black student-athletes at these institutions, but there is a dearth of exploratory understandings of intervention efforts and their subsequent impact. Thus, this conceptual manuscript provides foundational knowledge on the heterogeneous approaches employed in culturally responsive programming efforts involving Black student-athletes.

The programs were separated based on their source of support: (a) institutionally sponsored (2); (b) faculty-led (3); or (c) NCAA-sponsored (2) (see Table 1). A common trend among these programs is the lack of heterogeneity in the source of oversight and sponsorship of these support programs. Conversely, convergent components of these student-athlete development programs included: (a) holistic self-identity; (b) personal and professional mentorship; (c) leadership; and (d) career development. Together, these individual components are used to better support the holistic development of Black student-athletes, which led to the authors' development of a Culturally Responsive Programming Concept Map to better support Black student-athletes (see Figure 1). Using the guiding theoretical frameworks CRT (Bell, 1992) and SIT (Astin, 1999), along with relevant student-athlete development literature (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Cooper, 2016), the four common components were identified among the seven programs. Noticeably, the programs that are supported by the NCAA or athletic programs do not offer comprehensive culturally responsive programming to address the experiences of Black student-athletes specifically. This observation reiterates the notion that the NCAA and its member institutions continue to adopt and enact an abstract liberalism and colorblind racism approach to student-athlete development programming, which results in both benefits and detriments for different sub-groups of student-athletes (Bimper, 2017; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017). In contrast, the programs that were faculty-led, backed by the institution, and/or an outside agency offered a more in-depth look to enhance the holistic experiences of Black student-athletes particularly from a sociocultural standpoint. Institutions attempting to foster student-athlete development must implement culturally responsive programming (culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching) in their initiatives in order to eliminate achievement or CRE gaps (Cooper, 2016).

Table 1  
*Student-Athlete Support Programs*

Initiative	Support	Framework	CRP	Framework / Theory	Athlete only	Classification	Gender specific	Race specific	Outcomes
Life Skills + N4A	NCAA	Excellence through academic support, personal well-being & development of life skills	No	SIT	Yes	Cross classifications	No	No	Vary among school implementation
Scholar Baller	NCAA	Curriculum that develops leadership skills and education through cultural interests	Yes	Conceptual Model of Academic Success	Yes	Freshmen cohorts	No	No	43% Average cohort GPA increase; average team GPA increase; decrease in academic eligibility
SADL	Institutionally sponsored (Stanford Athletics)	Support through transition: education, well-being & development of leadership skills	No	SIT	Yes	Cross classifications	No	No	Perfect 1000 in APR scores; 17 teams earned APR Public Recognition Awards
Heman Sweatt Center for Black Males	UT- Austin Faculty-led	Promote the academic success and acclimation of Black males at UT- Austin through holistic development	Yes	CRT / EBA	No	Cross classifications	Male Only	Yes - African - American / Black	increase in Black male graduation rates; increase in Black males enrolled in graduate programs; Black males linked to mental health services



Black Student Athlete Summit	UT- Austin Faculty-led	largest gathering of supporters to openly examine the issues surrounding the Black Student-athlete	Yes	CRT / EBA	No	Open to public	No	No	Many new culturally relevant programming tailored to meet needs & experiences of Black Student- athletes
Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male	Institutionally Sponsored	Examines & addresses critical issues that impact quality of life for Black males through the lifespan	Yes	Conceptual Model of Academic Success	No	All inclusive	Male Only	Yes-African-American/ Black	increase in Black male student satisfaction; increase in Black male student retention & graduation
Collective Uplift	University of Connecticut - Faculty- led	Cultivate, sustain & optimize holistic development of culturally underrepresented student-athletes	Yes	EBA	Yes	Cross classifications	No	Underrepresented races	An increase in student athlete satisfaction; accumulation of curricula to be implemented at other colleges

*Note:* Culturally Responsive Programming (CRP); Student Involvement Theory (SIT); Critical Race Theory (CRT); Excellence Beyond Athletics (EBA)

### *Programs Supported by NCAA*

#### *Life Skills + N4A Partnership Program – NCAA Sponsored Initiative*

**Program Design.** The NCAA's Life Skills program is an adaptation of the original CHAMPS/Life Skills program. This initiative provides support for excellence through academic support/achievement, personal well-being and development of life skills, such as leadership, identification, financial literacy, mental health, and transitioning life after college (NCAA, 2015). The NCAA's curriculum has been adopted by many athletic programs throughout the U.S. The program features elements of the SIT (Astin, 1999), as it aims to help students develop skills to help establish identity, define purpose, manage emotions, develop interpersonal relationships and more. In an effort to help its athletes establish their identity and develop personal skills, this programming promotes student involvement with faculty and peers, which in turn fosters positive academic involvement. In addition, the program is available across classifications.

**Program Outcomes and Limitations.** Although the initiative is available to student-athletes only, it does not offer race specific or gender specific programming. Additionally, another limitation of the program is the measure of outcomes. Results of the programming are not broadly measurable, as the NCAA's member institutions decide how to implement the curriculum (e.g. University A may only allot \$5,000 for the Life Skills program, whereas University B may have created a position for someone to institute Life Skills).

#### *Scholar Baller (SB) – NCAA Sponsored Initiative*

**Program Design.** The SB initiative was created to inspire youth and young adults to develop leadership skills and to excel in education and life by using their cultural interests in sports and entertainment. The program has created its own theoretical framework (Scholar Baller Theory) on the basis that academic success can be fostered by involving cultural involvement with sport and media. In addition to Scholar Baller Theory, this initiative has elements of the EBA approach, as a cultural lens is applied to the development of athletes. The initiative takes into consideration student-athletes' cultural backgrounds and utilizes them as empowerment

tools to encourage academic and holistic development. The NCAA supports this curriculum to be instituted within its member institutions; currently worked with over 50 institutions throughout the U.S. since its inception (scholarballer.org). This program is for student-athletes only and does not offer gender specific or race specific programming. However, culturally relevant programming is implemented by utilizing multimedia messaging via Hip-Hop culture, videos and similar content. The program is based on a cohort system, in which freshmen enter together and are followed through their college career.

*Program Outcomes and Limitations.* On average, the GPA of the freshmen cohort increased 43%, an increase in average team GPA with cumulative GPAs over 3.00. Similarly, the percentage of student-athletes who are academically ineligible decreased significantly as well (Scholar Baller, 2011). A limitation of this program is the lack of attention to race-based or gender-based programming. In addition, the program does not provide data to support a numeric percentage decrease in student-athletes who were academically ineligible, thus the authors have also identified this as a limitation.

### *Programs Supported by Institution or Faculty-Led*

#### *Heman Sweatt Center for Black Males – University of Texas | Austin (Faculty-led Initiative)*

*Program Design.* The Heman Sweatt Center for Black Males is a University of Texas-Austin initiative housed in the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (diversity.utexas.edu/sweattcenter/). The center is faculty-led and provides enrichment for Black males at the university. The center offers programming for Black male student-athletes and students who are non-athletes. The program uses theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (Bell, 1992), as well as EBA (Cooper, 2016). The initiative identifies the influences of racism and colorblindness on the academic success of Black students. The center utilizes a holistic approach (culture, self-identity, mentorship, social engagement and more) to better serve Black students, as a marginalized population at the University of Texas-Austin. In addition, the center has a direct relationship with the UT-Austin athletic association and provides diversity training and aids in the recruitment of Black male student-athletes. In addition, the program offers culturally responsive programming, such as a mentorship program with Black community stakeholders, enrichment trips to meet Black researchers, entrepreneurs and professionals in Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and other occupational fields.

*Program Outcomes and Limitations.* Outcomes of the program have seen an increase in Black male student graduation rates, an increase in Black males enrolled in graduate programs, an increase in Black male student-athletes and students who are non-athletes connected to mental health services, career preparation resources, and research opportunities. Although, this program offers robust culturally responsive programming for Black male student-athletes, the limited focus on support for Black female student-athletes serves as a limitation. In an effort to address the needs for support of Black female athletes, the program sponsors an annual Black Student-Athlete Summit.

*The Black Student-Athlete Summit – University of Texas | Austin (Faculty- Led Initiative)*

*Program Design.* The Black Student-Athlete Summit is an annual summit hosted by the University of Texas-Austin's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, specifically an initiative of the Heman Sweatt Center for Black Males (blackstudentathletesummit.org). The summit attracts hundreds of Black male and female student-athletes, administrators, leadership and stakeholders. The summit is the largest gathering of supporters to openly examine and candidly discuss the numerous and complex issues surrounding the Black student-athlete. Elements of CRT and EBA are present in this programming as the summit recognizes the role race plays in the experiences of Black Student-athletes (male and female), especially at major HWIs. The summit plays on EBA by incorporating a holistic approach to create a series of best practices for supporting Black Student-athletes. The summit constitutes the most comprehensive national forum on issues related to the black experience within amateur athletics.

*Program Outcomes and Limitations.* Outcomes of the summit lead to new culturally relevant programming tailored to meet the needs and experiences of Black student-athletes. For example, from 2015 (the start of BSAS) to 2020, there has been an increase in specific Black student-athlete programming efforts at different institutions (e.g., The Ohio State University, Allegheny College, University of Arizona, Texas Southern University, and Old Dominion University to name a few). In addition, there has been a significant increase in presenters, presentations and attendees at the annual summit (blackstudentathletesummit.org). Despite accounts from previous attendees to discuss what new initiatives were birthed or implemented at their campuses, a lack of measurable benefits of the Summit is a limitation of this initiative.

*Collective Uplift - University of Connecticut (Faculty-Led)*

*Program Outcomes.* Collective Uplift is an organization that is housed at the University of Connecticut (UConn). The framework of this program is to cultivate, sustain, and optimize the holistic development of student-athletes who are culturally underrepresented and marginalized at UConn. The fabric of this program incorporates the Excellence Beyond Athletics Approach (Cooper, 2016), which identifies the strengths of athletes and builds on the strengths to develop skills to support holistic growth - self-identity, academic achievement, career development, interpersonal communication and more. Involving CRT, the program identifies the unique needs and experiences of Black Student-athletes and works to play off of cultural differences to promote positive academic outcomes for its participants. The program offers culturally responsive programming through its mentorship program, diversifying teacher development program, social engagement and development workshops. Noticeably, the structure of programs that are racially and/or gender conscious differ significantly from those that are not. Those that are, incorporate a level of cultural competence to their initiatives and programming. They are invested in understanding the cultural knowledge of the population they serve by considering the social, cultural, individual and institutional factors that influence the holistic development and academic success of Black student-athletes at an HWI. Factors such as, entering college academically underprepared, growing up with a low socioeconomic status, social isolation, racial and athletic stereotypes.

*Program Outcomes and Limitations.* Program outcomes were examined qualitatively, and former participants of the program outlined several benefits including: a) sense of belonging beyond athletics; b) holistic identity development; c) racial and cultural empowerment; and d) personal and career self-efficacy (Cooper et al., 2019). In addition, four out of the eight

participants in Cooper et al.'s (2019) study enrolled in graduate school. However, a limitation of the program is a lack of quantitative assessments of student-athlete progress or recording of pre- and post-program GPA.

*Student-Athlete Development & Leadership (SADL) – Stanford University Athletics (Institutionally Sponsored)*

*Program Design.* Stanford University's athletic department developed SADL under the framework of supporting its student-athletes in their transition through college with educational enrichment, fostering well-being, and developing their leadership skills (SADL, 2019). This program follows the framework of aspects of SIT (Astin, 1999) as the primary goals are to enhance the student-athlete's engagement with enrichment activities to foster academic success. The program works to encourage students to spend more time on their academic experience. Programming such as mentoring, leadership opportunities, internship programs and more are an effort to instill a level of commitment to succeed academically, graduate and have successful futures post college. Exposing student-athletes to this type of programming reinforces SIT, as the students are being connected to the campus environment, which will enhance positive academic outcomes. SADL's services are only available to student-athletes and are not race specific. The program is available across classifications (first year to seniors). However, there is a gender-based program that focuses on female athletes and relationship abuse.

*Program Outcomes and Limitations.* The program engages student-athletes in a mentorship program, as well as hosts workshops to prepare its athletes for employment post college. Stanford Athletics earned perfect 1,000 Academic Progress Rates (APR) scores, 17 teams have earned APR Public Recognition Awards from the NCAA. Despite the benefits this programming offers its Student-athletes, there is a limitation in addressing educational gaps between Black Student-athletes and their athlete peers.

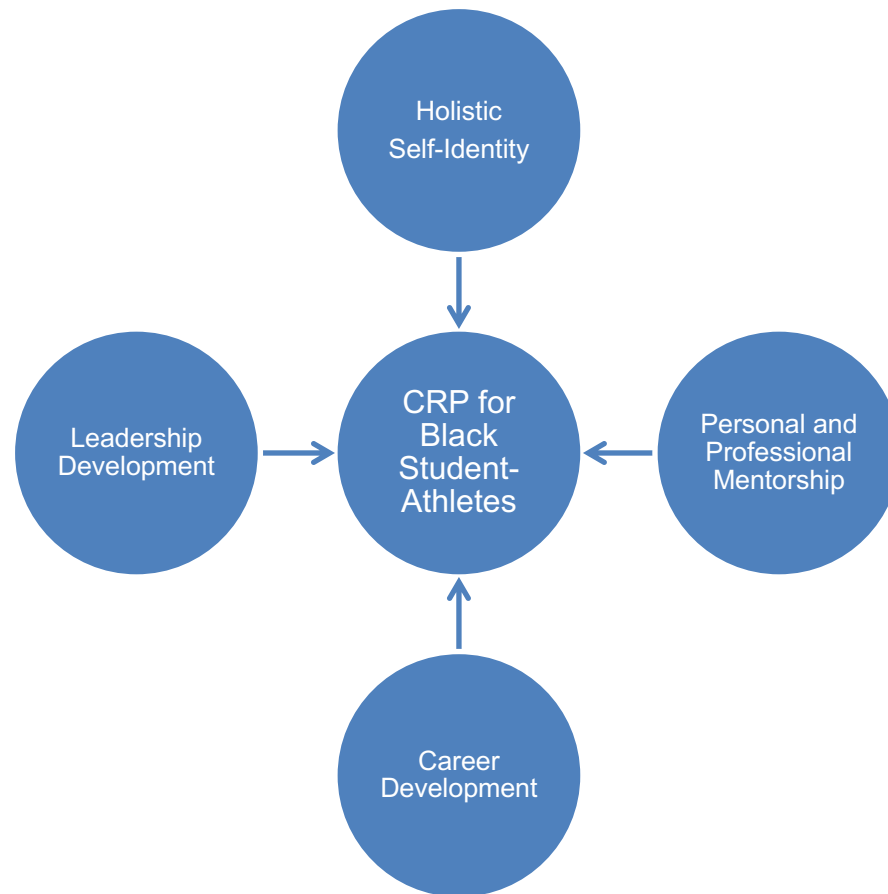
*Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male*

*Program Design.* The Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American male is a Black male initiative (BMI) instituted at The Ohio State University (<https://odi.osu.edu/bnrc>). The program is a partnership between the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Office of Student Affairs and faculty. The center incorporates elements of the conceptual model of academic success (Comeaux & Harrison's, 2011); taking a holistic approach to support both, Black student-athletes and non-athletes by considering the background, motivations, commitments and social environments of this population at Ohio State University. The framework of this center examines and addresses critical issues in society that impact the quality of life for African American males through the lifespan. The center develops research-based, culturally responsive programs, models and initiatives that can be replicated at other institutions. Previous initiatives have generated an increase in student satisfaction, and retention to graduation. A notable subsidiary of this center is the Redefining-Athletic-Standards (RAS) program, which is a student organization that gives a voice to and supports Black male Student-athletes at Ohio State University. RAS discusses issues around Black male Student-athletes on campus and hosts events to bring awareness to social issues, holistic growth and mental issues.

*Program Outcomes and Limitations.* No accessible or published program outcomes, which is a limitation of this initiative.

*Figure 1.*

## Culturally Responsive Programming for Black Student-Athletes Concept Map



*Note.* Culturally Responsive Programming (CRP) for Black students-athletes must be comprised of Holistic self-identity; leadership development; personal and professional mentorship career development. The arrows represent the individual characteristics being included to collectively implement CRP.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this conceptual manuscript was to examine the landscape of culturally responsive programming involving Black student-athletes by NCAA Division I member institutions in an effort to foster their holistic development and positive educational outcomes. There is limited research on high impact practices (HIPs) that include culturally responsive approaches for Black student-athletes. This manuscript adds value to existing literature and intercollegiate and higher education programming because it highlights the presence of existing programs, and the importance of considering the unique experiences of Black student-athletes and their subsequent experiences at these institutions. Considering the programs that were highlighted in this study, while there are some positive outcomes broadly, statistics have shown that Black student-athletes continue to graduate at lower rates than their different race student-athlete peers (NCAA, 2018), which reveals a missed opportunity for the NCAA and its member

institutions to fully support the holistic development of this sub-group of student-athletes. We posit that culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994) serve as viable tools for enhancing personal connections, a sense of self-discovery and self-pride while learning new material, and appreciation for diverse cultures. These personal connections not only lead to better learning, but they also are beneficial for reduced prejudice and improved intergroup relations (Byrd, 2016; Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979; Pettigrew, 1998; Singh, 1991). In addition, social ties perpetuate an acquisition of culturally relevant and responsive competencies that allows Black student-athletes to represent positive change within society (Bimper, 2016).

Moreover, *Collective Uplift*, *Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center* and the *Sweatt Center for Black Males* offered culturally responsive programming via a socially conscious environment to perpetuate positive outcomes for Black student-athletes at HWIs. Outcomes such as increased graduation and retention rates, enrollment in graduate programs and student satisfaction from Black student-athletes highlight the benefits of implementing tailored, holistic programming for this population of students. Utilizing CRT and the SIT as theoretical frameworks provided an opportunity to analyze the experiences, barriers and needs of programming to support Black student-athletes. In addition, Cooper's (2016) EBA approach highlights methods to purposefully engage Black student-athletes that account for their cultural backgrounds and holistic/intersecting identities, which play a substantial role in the experiences of Black student-athletes at HWIs. A call for culturally responsive programming can help mitigate the barriers these students face when navigating a HWI, and foster academic success while nurturing their holistic development.

## Limitations

While this study sought to highlight the strengths and positive outcomes from implementing culturally responsive programming to support diverse populations, there were limitations. This analysis primarily focused on race-based programming with the curriculum to enhance the success of Black student-athletes. It is important to note there are many other segments of culturally responsive programming such as gender-based, first-generation status, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, and non-gender conforming (LGBTQ+) identities, etc. that are offered through similar and/or different programs. Furthermore, there is a limitation in the outcomes of the programming. Some of the programs reviewed in this analysis did not have quantifiable results of their programs, which can raise questions of legitimacy (to some) regarding their positive outcomes. We also acknowledge our subjectivities as former Black (male and female) student-athletes that coach and mentor current Black student-athletes, and how that influences the research process. However, as opposed to viewing these subjectivities as constraints, we assert they are strengths of this study because of our unique positionality to the phenomena of interest whereby we possess an insider-outsider perspective (Cooper, 2015;2016).

## Implications

As athletic institutions continue to utilize the NCAA's Life Skills and SB as frameworks for student-athletes' holistic development, it is important to consider data-driven practices that reveal there is still room for improvement in terms of providing more culturally responsive programming to benefit student-athletes that are underrepresented and marginalized at HWIs,

such as Black student-athletes. Currently, no national assessment exists to ensure colleges and universities are providing consistently sound programming for student-athletes in general and student-athletes from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds more specifically (Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Murdock, 2010). The current manuscript had a primary focus on race-based programming. To truly be more culturally inclusive, it is important for future research to highlight programming that is gender-, first generation status-, LGBTQ+-, international student status and students with disabilities/unique abilities-specific, to a name a few. It is our hope that analysis offers insights into the best practices that incorporate a race-conscious and culturally responsive programming for positive educational and developmental outcomes for Black student-athletes.

It is our recommendation that stakeholders, such as NCAA and university leadership, athletic departments, coaches, and faculty lead their organizations with a culturally conscious framework to support the academic success of the marginalized populations it serves, such as Black Student-athletes. A recommendation for universities and athletic departments is to mandate implicit bias and racial equity training for all employees. These trainings can help bring attention to and mitigate some of the racist undertones that are present at HWIs and serve as barriers for academic success of Black athletes. Another recommendation is for coaches and athletic departments to develop collaborative alliances with their university's diversity, equity or inclusion office to streamline culturally relevant programming that addresses issues, such as social isolation and acknowledge how difficult the transition from a majority race to a minority can be for Black athletes at an HWI. Furthermore, university leadership, athletic departments, coaches and faculty should host recurring courageous conversations, which can intentionally promote a safe space for effectively engaging in dialogue on social justice, racial disparities and other culturally relevant conversations for athletes and non-athletes.

Another recommendation to promote culturally responsive programming is to incorporate racial equity action plans into the university and athletic department strategic plan. Leadership must be held accountable and intentionally do its best to support the unique needs and experiences of Black athletes. Also, the university and athletic department should partner to provide enrichment trips for student-athletes, such as visiting Wall-Street or Silicon Valley, ensuring to include culturally relevant business in the community, such as the NBA or NFL office. These enrichment trips can serve as encouragement for all (both minority and non-minority) athletes to foster a stronger level of commitment to their academic careers. Building on the success of these programs will involve increased support for culturally responsive and inclusive efforts including hiring and retaining diverse staff, adopting data-driven and theoretically grounded strategies for success, and concerted evaluative metrics for holistic development outcomes.

## Resources

There are a number of organizations that offer capacity building programming to support the holistic development of athletes broadly, as well as Black student-athletes specifically. See below for a list of resources and tools that can be used to implement culturally responsive programming to support Black student-athletes.

- **The Black Student-Athlete Summit** - (<https://diversity.utexas.edu/blackstudentathletesummit/>)
- **San Jose State University Institute for Sport, Society, and Social Change (ISSSC)** – (<https://www.sjsuwordstoaction.com/>)

- **National Alliance of Social Workers in Sport** – (<https://www.aswis.org/>)
- **The Ross Behavioral Group** – (<http://www.rossbg.com/>)
- **Student-Athletes Unite** - (<https://sauacademy.teachable.com/p/studentathlepreneur>)
- **National College Players Association (NCPA)** – (<https://www.ncpanow.org/>)
- **Life After Sports with Effective Results (L.A.S.E.R.)** - (<https://www.laser10.org/>)
- **Institute for Player Personal Development (IPPD)** – (<https://athleticidentity.club/>)
- **PrimeU** - (<https://www.primeu.org/>)
- **Dr. Tommy Shavers NESTRE** - (<http://www.tommyshavers.com/additional-resources/>)
- **Catch Education** - (<http://www.catchededucation.org/>)
- **NCAA Sports Science Institute Mental Health** - (<http://www.ncaa.org/sport-science-institute/mental-health>)
- **Association of Black Psychologists** – (<https://www.abpsi.org/>)
- **JenFrye Talks** - (<https://www.jenfryetalks.com/>)
- **Joi Walker Sets for Life** - (<https://www.joiwalker.com/bio>)

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