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## **Collaboration Between Athletic and Campus Advisors: Ensuring College Athletes' Success**

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*The purpose of this study was to determine how athletic and campus advisors collaborate to ensure college athletes achieve academic success. Athletic and campus advisors at various NCAA member institutions in the U.S. were interviewed to discuss their roles in advising athletes, communication modes and barriers between athletic and campus advising professionals, education and knowledge of sport governing body academic regulations, campus locations and their impact, trustworthiness across units, and collaborative techniques employed. Ethnomethodology was used as a lens to analyze the results, leading to implications for campus advisors, athletic advisors, and advising administrators.*

*Keywords: collaboration, communication, advising athletes, academic advising*

The academic experience for college athletes at NCAA member institutions is aided by institution-specific academic support services, including team-specific athletic academic advisors or counselors, academic program or major-specific advisors, and faculty advisors. The manner and degree to which these various actors collaborate and communicate across a campus can indirectly impact the college athlete academic experience. To this end, the geographical and social barriers that exist between these advisors may prove detrimental to student success. Primary role advisors are professional staff advisors, in the position to support student development and guide students through their curriculum (Self, 2011). For this study, we refer to primary role, major-specific, and faculty advisors as campus advisors (CA) and athletic academic advisors and counselors as athletic advisors (AA). AA are in a relatively unique position to work exclusively with the college athlete population.

Though they might have a general knowledge of academic programs on a given campus, AAs tend to rely on CAs in colleges, major exploration programs, and advising centers to ensure college athletes have access to departmental and curricular information and expertise geared toward their individual academic and career goals (Friedman, 2008; Kelly, 2009; Rubin, 2015). The collaborative effort between these parties can require navigating a campus culture that is complicated, given stigmas on campus about college athletes (e.g., Rubin, 2015; Simons et al., 2007; Valentine & Taub, 1999). With over 400,000 athletes enrolled in NCAA institutions, many college athletes will need academic support to navigate college. With limited research in this area, it is critical to study how AAs and CAs might best support athletes academically. Thus, the focus of this work is on that collaborative process and how CAs and AAs come together to better serve the academic interests of college athletes.

## Literature Review

A mix of challenges tend to create barriers between AAs and CAs. The individual roles that CAs and AAs play on a campus and the perceptions each group has of the other impact the way duties are carried out and, thus, the quality of academic support provided to student-athletes. Too, the manner and degree to which CAs and AAs collaborate with one another on a given campus affects the efficacy of student-athlete guidance and degree-completion.

### *Advisor Roles and Perceptions*

In addressing the academic needs of college athletes, recent literature has proven significant that all advisors understand both the individual role they play in an athlete's college experience as well as the role of their campus counterparts. An important concern is that CAs are unfamiliar with NCAA eligibility rules and have not connected or worked with the athletic department (Stokowski et al., 2016). AAs are commonly located in advising centers that specifically serve the athlete population, separate from CAs. Consequently, AAs tend to feel misunderstood, both within the athletic department and on campus (Rubin, 2017). They feel that CAs do not understand the pressure AAs are under to support students who are trying to balance the athletic student roles while staying eligible to compete (Friedman, 2008).

Stokowski et al. (2016) found that CAs view athletes and the athletic department negatively, and these views maintained a noticeable correlation: the more CAs viewed the

athletic department negatively, the more they adversely stereotyped athletes on campus. Likewise, college athletes can find themselves confused as to why they must even meet with two academic professionals in separate units and locations albeit for similar academic and career development purposes and tensions may surface between these two places of support (Friedman, 2008). Yet, Stokowski et al. (2016) found that as CAs gained more knowledge about eligibility rules for athletes, the more positively they perceived athletes and the athletic department, concluding, “Ultimately, academic advisors can increase their understanding of this population to make the advising experience more productive and meaningful for both parties involved and ensure student-athletes are given the proper support for academic success” (p. 68).

Some methods for promoting collegial relationships between these advising units have been noted before. College athlete support professionals have evolved their titles to avoid this concern:

Many (if not most) academic support offices that serve college student-athletes have abandoned the advisor title when referring to the professionals in the athletic academic-support area. Several reasons account for this, not the least of which is the adversarial relationship that can ensue across campus when professionals in very different roles with very different job expectations are using the same title. Those working in athletic academic support are commonly referred to as *academic counselors*, *academic coordinators*, or *academic specialists*. (Friedman, 2008, pp. 50-51)

To wit, an institution recently changed its titles from “Athletic Academic Advisor” to “Academic Eligibility Specialist” to better differentiate roles (Hott & Bricker, 2018). Friedman (2008) also recommended that AAs report to an academic affairs administrator or similar reporting line as other academic advising units on campus to maintain integrity of their work. Annual information sessions for both CAs and coaches together were recommended to help all professionals identify problematic college athlete behaviors (Coogan & Bacon, 2009). The professional organization for AAs, National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals (N4A) (2011), has a Code of Ethics that encourages campus collaboration and supports college athletes’ pursuit towards the degree of their choice.

### *Collaboration and Communication*

Literature has also shown that familiarization with the roles of advising counterparts is key to enhancing cross-campus communication and collaboration. To achieve collaborative partnership success, “each member of the collaborative needs to understand the organizational context of the other members, in order to understand what their colleagues are (and are not) capable of within the confines of their job, and to work in a strategic way to overcome organizational barriers by drawing on the collaborative’s collective capacity” (Crooks et al., 2018, p. 103). Clear communication between academic advising and career services units has been shown to improve the collaboration between the two offices (Ledwith, 2014; Lenz et al., 2010). Further, cross-training and knowledge sharing has proven to be an effective way to avoid duplication when both parties work with the same students and strengthen the quality of services offered (Kelly, 2009; Ledwith, 2014; Lenz et al., 2010).

A Division II institution completely revamped its approach to supporting athletes to take advantage of resources across campus. To justify this process, the collaborators explained,

college athletes benefit from navigating the complexity of higher education with support...No single entity can address and solve the multiple social, emotional and behavioral needs of collegiate athletes, much less offer all the programs and services for academic success. Therefore, it is imperative the colleges and universities develop interdisciplinary approaches to coordinate efforts to meet these needs. (Hodes et al., 2015 pp. 57-58)

This campus emphasized the importance of collaboration to engage athletes with high impact practices (HIPs) (Hodes et al., 2015). This is especially important as athletic departments do not always have the relationship with campus to support athlete participation in HIPs (Ishaq & Bass, 2019).

In addition, communication across campus units is imperative to successful collaboration for ensuring college athlete academic success and protecting the institutional mission (Hill et al., 2001; Kelly, 2009). Campus collaboration is critical when offering resources to athletes with learning disabilities (Clark & Parette, 2002; Hodes et al., 2015). Collaboration is particularly important when working with a special population of students, and a team effort brings both skill sets together to help students achieve success (Ledwith, 2014). Examples of collaboration in the literature between different units have shown positive effects on both units and the students they serve. One example is clear communication between academic advising and career services has been shown to improve the collaboration between the two offices (Ledwith, 2014; Lenz et al., 2010).

In a study of academic library liaisons, collaboration often worked well when liaisons went to their colleagues' locations, were proactive in promoting their services and roles on campus, and anticipated the needs of their constituents (Thull & Hansen, 2009). This finding demonstrates the importance of connecting despite differences in campus location, and being proactive rather than reactive when working together. Ultimately, Himmelman provided the most succinct summary, stating, "There is a clear need to move beyond silos to a coordinated approach; such an approach requires a collaborative partnership, defined as an 'alliance among people and organizations from multiple sectors working together to achieve a common purpose'" (Himmelman, 1992, as cited in Crooks et al., 2018, pp. 97-98), the common purpose of CAs and AAs being the academic success and advancement of college athletes. To avoid silos that harm both campus culture and student success, it is imperative that AAs and CAs work together to support college athletes academically.

## Theoretical Framework

Ethnomethodology (EM) is a sociological theory that "refers to the methods people use to make sense of the world around them" (Slattery, 2003, p. 104). Ethnomethodology encompasses "collective [sensemaking]" where communication is central to the social process in the study of human interaction (Linstead, 2006, p. 400). Maynard and Clayman (1991) further explained that EM "investigates how members are from the outset embedded in contingently accomplished structures of social action consonant with their acting and reacting to one another in real time" (p. 388). Yet EM rejects structures and rules as determinants of social behavior. Rather, it is the ways in which people create their own sense of social order when they interpret one another, no matter how an organization is structured (Edwards & Skinner, 2010; Rawls, 2008). Therefore,

societal norms do not dictate or explain behavior, nor do preconceived notions of people based on their profile characteristics. A member is considered a person “who has mastered the natural language of that group and does not have to think about what he or she is doing as the routines of everyday social practice are known” (Edwards & Skinner, 2010, p. 298). Collin (1997) referred to these members as “natives” who comfortably become members of a group participating in social exchange (p. 27). Ethnomethodology as a theory is based on four major concepts: accounts, reflexivity, indexicality, and the et cetera principle.

### *Accounts*

Social reality is derived from consensus about processes, known as accounts (Collin, 1997). People create accounts of their interactions with others to make their behavior appear rational in a social context (Kurthen & Smith, 2005). In the context of work, “at worksites and in interactions where nothing is ever exactly the same twice, something nevertheless makes it possible to discriminate the orderly and expected social ‘things’ from purely contingent happenings” (Rawls, 2008, p. 705). Through the routine of work, social order and structural arrangements are created based on the actions and conversations between members of groups, or in this case, departments (Rawls, 2008; Webster & Sell, 2012).

### *Reflexivity*

Meaning making occurs through reflexivity of behavior, since there are no preconceived notions about how people will behave (Rawls, 2008). According to Edwards and Skinner (2010), “Reflexivity is a radical concept. It asserts that while we are talking – the meaning, the order, and the rationality of what we are doing are being produced” (p. 297). Collin (1997) discussed how meaning making occurs through reflection of past actions. Rawls (2008) articulated how trust is built through reflexivity, as “each next thing done or said is taken in relation to the last” (p. 712). People working together then have a back-and-forth interaction that develops relationships as their input is required through mutual work (Rawls, 2008). Context is of critical importance at the root of ethnomethodology as theory, referred to as indexicality.

### *Indexicality*

The concept of indexicality involves negotiated meaning between people – referred to as actors – to situate words and actions in context (Collin, 1997; Edwards & Skinner, 2010). This is how people who do not have the same values or beliefs are still able to work together (Rawls, 2008). Words retain specific meaning in particular contexts, determined by those who communicate with each other in particular work contexts (Rawls, 2008). The way work processes are successful is directly connected to communication about them by involved participants (Rawls, 2008). The negotiation of contextual meaning between members of groups working together is critical (Collin, 1997). Essentially, no social behavior has objective meaning; it is co-created through interaction and subsequently, reflection by the members involved.

### *Et Cetera Principle*

The final concept of ethnomethodology is the et cetera principle, coined by Howard Garfinkel, which refers to “common knowledge based on previous shared social situations” (Kurthen & Smith, 2005, p. 238). Thus, the more familiar people are with each other, the simpler their interactions will be based on the shared understanding of language in context. According to Maynard and Clayman (1991), people who work together share “internalized frames of reference and value systems that enable common definitions of situations” (p. 388). In a work environment, those who might communicate with each other may not have to say or write much to understand meaning in language. Rawls (2008) eloquently stated, “Displays of competence are also displays of trust” (p. 723). Trust, in turn, improves the effectiveness of working relationships, as people communicate and collaborate across units by anticipating actions through the et cetera principle. Even with incomplete information, members can imply outcomes with short communications or brief actions by others participating in the interaction.

### *Ethnomethodology Applied in Previous Research*

*Ethnomethodology in Sport and Academic Advising Research.* Ethnomethodology has been limited in application in sports research. Evans (2017) reviewed the application of the theory in sport research, which has focused primarily on “participants’ situated accomplishment” in sport and leisure activities (e.g., yachting, rock climbing, long-distance running) and the “use of identity categories within sports teams’ discussions and meetings” (pp. 115-116). In her research, Evans (2017) noted a lack of applying ethnomethodology in coaching research. Edwards and Skinner (2010) provided information on the framework in a research text for the field of sport management, but did not share specific examples of its application to sport. After a thorough search within NACADA: The Global Community of Academic Advising’s database of all global publications on academic advising since 2002, no research using EM was found in this field’s literature (Troxel et al., 2018).

*Application in This Study.* Ethnomethodology was applied to how campus advisors (CA) and athletic advisors (AA) communicate and collaborate to benefit college athletes’ academic success. Because ethnomethodologists observe phenomena in real time, they traditionally do not utilize theory to form research questions prior to the study (Maynard & Clayman, 1991; Rawls, 2008). The purpose of this study was to determine how athletic and campus advisors collaborate and communicate to ensure athletes achieve academic success in college. We posed the following research questions:

How do athletic and campus advisors collaborate to support college athletes?

RQ 1: How do athletic and campus advisors communicate about college athletes’ academic pursuits/progress?

RQ 2: Are there barriers to communication between athletic and campus advisors?

RQ 3: In what ways do athletic and campus advisors build relationships with each other?

RQ 4: How do athletic and campus advisors collaborate to support college athletes?

## Methodology

We conducted a qualitative study to explore collaboration and communication between AAs and CAs at institutions with athletic departments. Through the constructivist paradigm, we sought to understand our participants' experiences through semi-structured interviews (Stewart, 2010). Our roles as researchers involved serving as the instrument in how we developed and asked questions, and interpreting responses, thus making meaning through our interpretation (Labaree, 2002; Stewart, 2010). As members within the groups we recruited for this study, there was opportunity for established trust; yet, membership does not always have an advantage (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Our positionality can significantly influence our findings as we navigated the space between researchers and insiders (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Labaree, 2002; Stewart, 2010; Taylor, 2011).

### *Positionality Statement*

We recognize that as the researchers in a qualitative study, we also served as a research instrument in developing and asking questions to our participants. Through our own experiences in the roles of participants we contacted, we understand that our meaning-making processes are influenced by our knowledge of academic advising work in athletics, as faculty, and as a primary role advisor. We have also both worked in roles supporting college athletes, a critical reason we conducted this study.

### *Data Sources and Collection*

Athletic and campus advisors at various institutions in the U.S. were interviewed to discuss their roles in advising athletes, chosen modes and experienced barriers of communication between athletic and campus advising professionals, their education and knowledge of sport governing body academic regulations, the impact of their campus geography on communication, trustworthiness across campus units, and techniques employed in cross-campus collaborative efforts. According to Baker (2004), interviews are an "interactional event in which members draw on their cultural knowledge" which create EM accounts of "cultural particulars" attributed to members of groups. We developed a set of interview questions (see Appendix A) to address our research questions through our interviews.

After receiving IRB approval, we sought participants who are full-time academic advisors within the United States at institutions that sponsor intercollegiate athletics, whether NCAA, NAIA, or NJCAA affiliated. The advisors could be campus or athletic advisors, but were not specialists in career development or focusing on other non-academic areas. Employing convenience sampling, both researchers emailed our respective campus advising council listservs with information about the study and provided an informed consent form (Etikan et al., 2016). We also solicited participation via the listservs of the Advising Student-Athletes Community of NACADA, and National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals (N4A). Interested potential subjects submitted the signed informed consent form to an email address created specifically for this study. Potential subjects were then sent information on how to schedule an interview through a scheduling web site between July and August 2019. Those who scheduled an interview were sent information on how to connect to the interview via Zoom, audio only.

The interviews were semi-structured with follow-up questions added as necessary, and subjects were given opportunities to share any thoughts on the topics discussed (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). We conducted interviews with 28 advising professionals, representing AAs and CAs, with both researchers present for the majority of the interviews. We also took individual notes during the interviews. Interview recordings and notes were stored on a password-protected Google drive account shared by the researchers.

### *Data Analysis*

The interview recordings were submitted to Scribie, a service that transcribed the recordings. These transcripts were then stored along with the recordings and notes. Each researcher reviewed the transcripts individually through an initial coding process, and did the same with interview notes. We then met to review our initial codes and look for relationships between codes and specific participant quotes that stood out. Patton (1999) called this process analyst triangulation, where the researchers' unique perspectives coupled with the separate notes during the process, constitutes the triangulation of data through consistency. The purpose of analyst triangulation is to reduce "systematic bias in the data" (Patton, 1999, p. 1197). A variety of important considerations surfaced from our coding of data, which cannot simply be labeled "themes" as many codes may lead to in other qualitative studies. These codes were generated through consensus as they related to the research questions posed, rather than frequency of mention (Paulsen, 2018). These are shared in the following section.

## **Results and Discussion**

Our participants shared many different experiences and ideas regarding collaboration and communication across advising units to support college athletes. The RQs asked: How do AAs and CAs communicate about college athletes' academic pursuits/progress? Are there barriers to communication between AAs and CAs? In what ways do AAs and CAs build relationships with each other? How do AAs and CAs collaborate to support college athletes? We reviewed the data from interviews through an EM perspective.

### *Participant Information*

Appendix B is a chart of participant information with pseudonyms, titles, athletic affiliation within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) divisional structure, and caseloads of athletes and all students (if relevant). The 28 participants included advisors in different roles: 17 AAs, and 11 CAs (three faculty advisors, eight primary role advisors). Many have other roles beyond what their title may indicate. Six of the 28 participants were at private institutions, and 22 at public institutions. All participants' institutions were members of the NCAA Division I except for one representing a Division II institution. The 27 participants within Division I represented the following sub-groups: Football Bowl Championship (FBS) Power 5 (Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big 12, Southeastern, Pacific-12) conferences (12), FBS Group of 5 (American Athletic, Conference USA, Mid-American, Mountain West, Sunbelt) conferences (4), Football Championship Series (FCS) (7), and No Football institutions (4).



## Accounts

Advisors working with each other to support college athletes negotiate rational behavior through their interactions with each other. Accounts are the ways participants described their interactions and make sense of their behavior within them (Kurthen & Smith, 2005; Webster & Sell, 2012). To address our RQs, we analyzed our participants' accounts of communication models, modes, frequencies, and documentation. We included their perceptions of job titles and roles and how students may also view them.

*Communication and Liaison Models.* We observed a common strategy for organized communication between CAs and AAs to be the assignment of an AA as a liaison to a specific campus advising center or college within an institution. Henry (AA) referenced the use of software such as Microsoft Teams to organize and streamline liaison efforts between his office of athletic advisors and their primary and faculty advising counterparts across campus. Star (AA) collaborates with other student support services on campus while coordinating tutoring and mentoring for athletes. Cynthia's (CA) campus had a novel idea, though it did not always work so smoothly: a mentor program for new staff. However, she lamented, "I had a mentor and then she quit like a week later, and then we never got assigned a new one. So I think people are not always taken around to see where offices are and see where people are and to introduce to people. That was probably the biggest barrier." At Aron's (AA) institution, his unit decided to move to a liaison model where each AA is assigned to two colleges to "work more with them intentionally, and more frequently" with CAs.

*Modes of Communication.* Overall, e-mail was reported by participants as a universal mode for advisors to communicate across campus. Other notable modes reported include phone calls, face-to-face meetings, and alternative campus communication networks such as listservs, instant messaging, and advisor notes systems and repositories. Face-to-face meetings between advisors might occur when new advisors arrive on campus, such as a veteran advisor taking a new advisor out for coffee to establish a relationship.

When offices are located near each other, there is the possibility for daily interaction and meeting new advisors quickly. According to Yvette (AA), this is a major benefit of being housed in a centralized advising center rather than in the athletic departments for her team. Rick (AA), in athletics, discussed, "I try to get stuff in writing as much as possible as well. So that's a scenario where if it's really something that needs to be documented, I'll follow up with an email after speaking with them either in person or on the phone, just to confirm and verify everything." Anna (AA) lamented, "I'd love to meet with people in person, but it's not always the easiest thing to do just because we're so physically separated." Physical location, thus, plays a role in the type of relationship and modes of communication used.

*Notes Systems.* Interestingly, among our participants' institutions, some do not have any internal advisor notes systems or repositories for advising notes, some have one, and others have at least two separate systems. Issues with notes systems shared by participants included the lack of mandatory use, access to notes between campus advising units and athletic advising units, lack of use by faculty advisors, and confusion between what goes in each system when there are multiple systems used on a campus.

Of the 28 participants, 22 (79%) reported having at least one campus advising notes system where information about advising meetings is recorded and stored. However, seven of these 22 participants (32%) reported that their systems were either ineffective or undergoing improvements or were not accessible by all advisors on campus. Dana's (AA) institution has a cloud storage system where she could upload notes and documents to the cloud that advisors and coaches could then access.

Some campuses have a degree audit system that advisors can set-up so students can pick classes within options presented. At Maggie's (AA) institution, faculty have their own feedback portal that advisors can access. According to Monica (AA), "The best way we communicate as advisors is based off seeing each other's notes." However, Valerie (CA) cautioned, "I think that the note system would be more effective if everyone on campus used the same one and used it consistently." With two systems, usage is more complicated. Winnie (CA) expressed,

We've got two systems, and one system is specifically for advising staff, which has an open section and then a private section. If they've been designated an advisor, they could see it. If not, they cannot see any of it. But they have a system which they report in, which I can see and they can see, but I don't have to report in that system.

At Gabrielle's (AA) institution, lower division CAs are required to use the campus notes system, but once students declare a major and are assigned an upper division CA (often a faculty advisor) there is less information reported as faculty advisors specifically are not required to use the notes system in the same way as their lower division colleagues. This inconsistent usage by different advising units on campus presents a notable barrier to communication.

Rawls (2008) suggested, "There is another problem resulting from the accountable character of records. Because workers are oriented toward the need to produce certain documentary records of their work, while also attending the often conflicting situated requirements of work, they make sure that records are complete in just and only the ways they need" (p. 716). If CAs limit access to AAs and vice versa, then information sharing is incomplete, which could result in problems with athletes' academic progress. Transparency in advising can make a big difference in how campus and athletic advising units support each other's work when helping college athletes persist towards graduation.

*Average Time Communicating Weekly.* Most participants stated they would spend between one and three hours per week communicating with an advising counterpart across campus. For some, they may communicate daily based on their close physical proximity. A few participants noted they may only communicate during registration periods. Penny (AA) reported:

If we need to call somebody about a graduation issue or we're not sure where a class counts for a transfer student, for example, we'll pick up the phone or send an email. But our interactions with them are pretty limited, honestly, unless we really need something, with the exception of the monthly meetings that we go to. I am currently on a committee for an academic advising kick-off that we're doing in the fall. So I saw a bunch of advisors last week, but we're not meeting every single week. It's kind of an every two weeks type of thing right now.

Rick (AA) said, "I'm usually on the phone with someone probably for a couple of hours a week" and "it really just depends on the student and the amount of collaboration that needs to be had for that student." Valerie (CA) commented, "I would say on a weekly basis probably less than an hour, I really sort of only reach out when I have a student that I'm anticipating seeing or either is in my office that I know is an athlete."

*Differentiation of Roles and Titles.* A common refrain from both the CAs and AAs interviewed was a perceived misunderstanding from the other about their roles, motivations, and intentions in working with student-athletes. In EM's principle of accounts, advisors must try to find consensus about processes and roles in their efforts to support students (Kurthen & Smith, 2005). AAs in many Division I athletic programs, as reported by many of our participants, tend to have smaller caseloads of students than CAs. Participants expressed concern that it appears athletic advisors do less work because of this. Penny (AA) shared, "I think there's just misconceptions sometimes about what we do and maybe just a lack of understanding of why we need certain information in a more timely fashion." Aron (AA) also mentioned that some advising units are not very responsive to his unit's time sensitive requests. A recurring theme from AAs is that faculty advisors, in particular, are not engaged. In describing role and title differentiation, Erica (CA) explained,

I think we try to do is not refer to athletic advisors to work with athletes, that they're not advisors but that they're counselors. In that way then, it's important for the student to know that they have an academic advisor and then they have an athletic counselor, so they kinda tend to have different terminologies[...] I know there is kind of that separation there, 'cause we wanna be sure that each role is met and that we don't cross over.

This demonstrates the need to have students identify different responsibilities based on the title of the advisors they meet with throughout their enrollment. To explain why this is important, Erica continued,

I've been here 13 years, and when I first started here, we did have an athletic counselor who crossed a lot of boundaries, and who tried to advise students along with their academics, and we did find that there was more problems with that, and the athletic department worked with us and kinda helped train everyone that you know the certain roles that we have and that their job isn't to pick up classes and to help them with their academic side, but they're there for all those other very important things that an athlete has. So I think there has to be a distinction between what an academic advisor does and what an athletic counselor does, and both should be committed to the success of that student.

Because people with limited experience with specific degree programs can make mistakes that are detrimental to students' academic progress, Erica's (CA) institution uses this distinct differentiation in both title and roles. Similarly, Benjamin's (CA) institution experienced some NCAA violations when athletes were misadvised and the registrar was left in the dark. His institution now mandates every college have an advisor specifically to work with athletes on his campus.

What concerned Maggie (AA) is that her students did not know why they had two advisors and what their roles are. She mentioned that they viewed her as a “one-stop shop” and that she had to emphasize that campus advisors were more equipped to answer their questions about curriculum to avoid mis-advising them. Her title in athletics is academic counselor rather than advisor. Olivia (CA) expressed an interesting concern about collaborating with the athletic departments:

I'm gonna try to be frank but diplomatic. They tend to come to me now, ‘they’ meaning the athletic office, come to me now for all kinds of issues rather than just academic advising, because I have established a kind of...open channel of communication, where I have a reputation for being responsive and athlete friendly. So they will come to me with things that I can't really help them with, like admissions. And the barrier is not so much between me and them, ‘them’ meaning the athletic office, but when there's a third party involved from the university like admissions. I wish I could help but I can't because the admissions office is its own thing.

Susie (CA) suggested that there might be a duplication of efforts from both advising units. She warned,

Maybe they don't know as much as they think they know. And then sometimes I think there could be misunderstanding on the student's part. And it probably really kinda depends on who the student trusts or listens to more...sometimes, that advice doesn't maybe always align with what I think might be in the best interest of the student.

Wanting to be certain the differentiation of roles was very clear, Edward (AA) described,

We changed our title, formally from athletic academic advisor, to academic eligibility specialist...we are not actual advisors, our job is to make sure that our athletes are obviously making progress towards graduation, but most importantly, being eligible to compete in their sport, which is the reason why we're here in the first place. The advising centers are the go-to when it comes to formal advising and graduation, and we did not want to be lumped in with them mostly because they don't believe that we are actual academic advisors. And even though I have a wealth of knowledge of every degree on campus, we are not an official advising department, so that is why we changed our name.

When title changes occur, the differentiation between roles of AA and CA can be clearer to both campus constituents and students alike (Friedman, 2008). Advisors who develop congruent working relationships align with the EM principles, especially reflexivity (back-and-forth meaning making), indexicality (negotiated meaning in context), and et cetera (common knowledge in shared social interactions) (Kurthen & Smith, 2005).

### *Reflexivity*

How advisors perceive the actions and communication of others they work with is based on their reflexivity, the order of actions and discussions about the students they serve. Rawls (2008) described a group as one that is “playing the same game” through their work as they

establish meaning (p. 702). We consider what reasons participants might communicate with advising counterparts, as well as misconceptions of their work with athletes, barriers to communication and collaboration, and perceptions of trust.

*Reasons for Communication.* Common reasons for communication reported by participants involved course registration issues and verifying curriculum requirements. Dana (AA) noted that she manages the transfer evaluations for incoming athletes at her institution:

I reach out to the individual departments across campus to have them evaluate the syllabi to see if there is an equivalency on our campus...Any time I have a question that comes up in terms of what the degree requirements are, or how things are kind of weaving in, I will reach out to someone across campus.

Penny (AA) noted that football counselors on her campus often will include CAs in their weekend presentations for recruits on visits. Benjamin (CA) echoed this practice, noting, “Whenever a coach has a recruit, and they wanna know about our major, I will spend 20 to 30 minutes with the recruit and their family, explaining what all our major is, what the classes are, what they would then be able to do once they graduated with that degree.” These collaborative activities support students well, as evidenced by previous studies (Hill et al., 2001; Hodes et al., 2015; Kelly, 2009; Ledwith, 2014; Lenz et al., 2010). Luna (AA) described her working relationship with CAs:

Usually, we have conversations about where the student is in their four-year plan, if they're meeting major requirements, if they're having any difficulty in a course, if it's a semester when they shouldn't be taking the class because the professor can't work with them on the number of days that they've missed, then we need to move it to a different semester, so that it doesn't interfere so much. And we work directly with the advisor to get them overrides into those classes.

Peter (CA) has helped specific incoming athletes who may have been “stuck in limbo in the admissions process.” Gabrielle’s (AA) unit manages requests for graduation plans each semester. Edward (AA) finds the degree audit system often rejects electives that should count, so contacts the advising center for that program to get that correct so a student can graduate. Another commonly reported need for communication is for AAs to have students’ registration holds lifted by CAs so they can register.

*Barriers to Process.* Several participants mentioned issues in processes across campus. Regarding power to access certain processes, Maggie (AA) complained,

We have just an electronic form that any student can access and fill out if they want to drop a class, and there are a couple of different parties who are mandatory approvers on that form, and my unit is not on that form at all. In fact, I can't even look it up. If I'm aware that a student athlete from one of my teams is looking to drop a class, I can't even go anywhere and find out that this form has been initiated or which stage of approval it's in, so that's a little bit scary because I don't feel that they're necessarily thinking about how this could impact eligibility.

This lack of access to information about students' dropping classes is alarming for advisors who monitor NCAA eligibility.

Henry (AA) discussed not having the power to edit a student's degree audit. He has to contact advisors to adjust elective choices to see if they work in a degree plan, for example. Another challenge he mentioned is that on his campus, CAs will not meet with students until they apply for a program, so it is hard for him to help students plan in advance for majors/colleges that have restrictions or prerequisites prior to applying. Fiona (AA) echoed Henry's issue, noting, "We do have some advisors who refuse to talk with students until they get admitted into the program." Fiona's (AA) institution faces another challenge. It has strict requirements for students to complete 130 credit hours or less within eight semesters. She commented, "So that's one of the things where, when the campus advisors are meeting with our student athletes [...] they don't understand the concept of... a fifth year." When college athletes redshirt, they might extend their enrollment to a fifth year which may cause advising issues that clash with campus policy.

Gabrielle's (AA) previous supervisor held her and another AA back from communicating with anyone on campus. When the supervisor left, her role changed drastically. She explained, "Prior to that, I had no contact with people on campus; it all had to go through her. Now, I've been able to meet so much more people and been working with them so much more intensely." The structure of communication is highly relevant, as limiting contact reduces efforts to support students. Edward (AA) discussed struggles with some of the veteran advisors that have been on campus a long time. He explained,

I think the newer advisors that have come on campus, some of the younger generation, they're more willing to adhere to us as athletic eligibility specialists; it's the older group that have been around for a very long time, that are for lack of a better phrase, they're set in their ways, they view themselves as the one-stop-shop and they really don't see that we... I don't know the best way to say it, that we are the authority on being able to advise the students. So, we run into a lot of roadblocks when we need certain things, because they want to see the student directly, but in that case, it'll take two weeks to get an appointment, because they're booked out.

This is another example of the difficulty between units understanding time sensitive processes more common in the athletic department. The sense of urgency AAs have to get a quick answer or approval may not be perceived the same way by CAs. Yet, through an EM perspective, Rawls (2008) cautioned, "Mutual attentiveness and conversation reduce accidents and make high-risk work more reliable," suggesting that better communication and shared understanding can lead to more streamlined interactions (p. 702).

*Miscommunication.* Often, miscommunication may occur when strong relationships have not been established or communication channels are undefined. Valerie (CA) explained,

I definitely think there are things that get lost in translation or a loss of information or communication on our end. I've definitely seen situations where academic advisors are saying one thing for a student, but then they're going to their athletic counselors that are

saying something different, and we don't always understand what's going on with a certain athlete or team and their obligations and vice versa.

Susie (CA) suggested that AAs have one-way communication to her, so no relationship exists. She described, "They ask for input. What they do with that I don't know directly. That's more probably as an instructor when I have students in classes that are athletes and then they ask for progress reports, I try to report on those. I don't know that I always get it done every time or in a timely fashion." Anna (AA) had concerns with faculty advisor communication. She provided an example:

We'll have some advisors who will recommend classes that aren't offered that semester or that are offered at the same time, and then they kinda get, especially faculty advisors, get frustrated. "Well, I advised the student to do this, and they didn't do it." "Well, did you realize that you advised them to take three classes that are only offered at one time?"

According to Winnie (CA), "Communication is a two-way street" but unlike Susie's (CA) experience, Winnie (CA) felt that communication is only one-way from her to the AAs. These examples of miscommunication and one-way communication indicate a struggle for consensus of accounts, and roadblocks with reflexivity, indexicality, and the et cetera principles (Maynard & Clayman, 1991).

*Misconception of Athletes and Their Academic Support.* Many participants held concerns about misconceptions of athletes and the support they require and need to succeed in college. Maggie (AA) discussed how her institution has "one-size-fits-all" academic policies that limit advisors' understanding of special populations. She explained, "I don't know that [campus advisors] fully appreciate the gap that exists between the incoming profile of a lot of our student athletes, especially on our higher needs teams, and how...Why that gap might be between them and the typical student who's getting access to our institution." Monica (AA) felt that CAs just do not want to understand what AAs do, which creates barriers to communication. However, CAs have also witnessed athletes' being placed in courses they did not choose or in programs that do not align with interests, which can create these negative perceptions of the athletic advising unit. Valerie (CA) shared,

Sometimes I feel like the academics may not be the top priority there. We have also found some [scenarios] among student-athletes across the majors, in our college, where we find students taking courses that don't really seem relevant to their interests or career goals or things like that, and when we ask them or look into it they say that they were either placed in that class or told they needed to register for that class from their athletic advisor.

Winnie (CA) added, "The athletic counselors do a good job in terms of making sure [athletes] go to class, making sure they're tracking what's going on [in] their day-to-day. And sometimes I feel bypassed, 'cause they will make a decision on behalf of the student because it's what's best for the sport and the student moving forward, but not necessarily what the student wanted."

Alternatively, Fiona (AA) mentioned that CAs do not understand why athletes cannot take certain classes because of their travel schedule. Anna (AA) was concerned about several

different misconceptions CAs had about her students and colleagues. She felt that some CAs believe AAs only see athletes as money-making opportunities rather than as people. She also shared some unfortunate racial tensions:

So we have one particular advisor who's a large African-American male, and I think there have been some people who have been afraid of him, sadly. I don't think they're conscious of that, but just some of the feedback that I've gotten, that doesn't match his personality at all, about meetings that he's had or when he's been trying to help advocate for a student, I think they take his advocacy the wrong way.

Irma (CA), who certifies athletes, had a more positive outlook:

I think it's really important to do this for student athletes. I'm impressed with how hard they work. I'm impressed with how many of them are excellent students, and there's this... I think it's disrespectful and erroneous statement that athletes aren't smart, and that's just not true. Athletes are like everybody else, except they're working incredibly hard while they're also full-time students. And I think that this institution that I work for does appreciate that and acknowledge that, and I'm glad to be a part of it.

There are certainly mixed views on whether academics are a priority for athletes and AAs, and how advisors in both areas are perceived by each other. Though these misunderstandings may cause tension, Rawls (2008) noted, "Workers do not just 'resist' change, but defend practices essential to their work" (p. 723). The examples provided by participants suggest that there are detriments to lack of access or timely collaboration for advisors to be successful in their roles.

#### *Relationship-building and Trust Between the Athletic Department and Campus.*

Based on our interviews, AAs trust that CAs know specifics on degree programs/curricula better than they do. Also, if AAs get out and interact on campus, the negative stigma about the athletic department and its relationship to education lessens, similar to what the library liaisons experienced in Thull and Hansen (2009). Several participants shared that athletic departments invite CAs to weekend athletic recruiting events to meet with prospective students. While many are honored by this, Winnie (CA) said she is often invited with one day's notice for weekend events, which is not encouraging. Yet, Olivia (CA) has been honored as a guest coach at football and women's basketball games, and she finds that very rewarding.

Edward's (AA) unit hosted an open house for CAs to visit their center, but it was not well attended. Yet, he was happy his team still tried to share his unit's work and roles with campus advisors. Rick's (AA) campus fosters camaraderie with creative ideas:

One thing that I think our campus does very well, is they'll host a lot of little activities, like an ice cream social in the afternoon one day, or a coffee break on a Tuesday afternoon in the middle of campus for faculty and staff. And that's another great opportunity if you can wade through the entire staff to find the people that you're looking for to have some face time with someone like that and further that relationship.

Luna (AA) emphasized the importance of building relationships to eliminate the many misunderstandings that may occur. Maggie (AA) lauded her Business school's advising team:



Every summer they call a meeting where my group is invited over there, they give us breakfast or lunch, they prepare a very formal PowerPoint presentation that updates us on any changes in requirements with their majors. They just introduced several new minors...And they've even gone so far as to create team assignments, so they've got their staff broken down into being the point person for the individual teams, just mirroring the way that we divvy up our workload here in our caseloads.

Benjamin (CA) offers a presentation on curriculum changes for the Kinesiology program to AAs. Monica (AA) will boldly contact any new advisor, introduce herself, and take them to coffee and Fiona (AA) did something similar when she first arrived on her campus, recalling:

I looked at the majors my students were in that were not necessarily in Letters and Sciences, and I automatically reached out to them and just set up appointments just to, not just to get to know them but also it was a perfect chance for me to find out more about the major and develop that relationship 'cause I could literally claim pure ignorance on the major and it just kinda opened the door...And then therefore I now have a contact in that college who I can reach out to when I need different things or if I just have questions.

At Cameron's (AA) institution, the freshman studies unit offers "Advising Academies" a few times a year for professional development. Fiona (AA) suggested that her unit in the athletic department can do better at reaching out and establishing relationships with colleges who have fewer athletes enrolled than in the colleges where they liaise already. Ryan (AA) has a very positive working relationship with CAs. He shared,

Our registration system goes through the advisors here on our campus so they're a big piece of just the functions from semester to semester. And they're very receptive and open to talking about what makes sense for the students with all of their demands. So it's pretty effective. They're willing to schedule specific times to work with us. They come to our staff meetings on occasion when it's useful and we've gone to theirs when it's helpful as well.

According to Sierra (AA), established relationships between veteran AAs and CAs can help new advisors as well. She described how new advisors can namedrop a veteran colleague to get information in a timely manner. She explained that these efforts can help CAs see that AAs are not the enemy: "I've been here nine years. I think it's really improved over the past maybe four or five years that it's a more collaborative effort rather than kind of operating on two different islands."

*Trust in Support.* Some CAs do not understand college athletes' time constraints, which was previously mentioned regarding misconceptions of athletes' academic focus. Valerie (CA) reasoned, "I trust [athletic advisors]. I also feel like maybe it's a blind trust, because honestly, there's not a lot of communication between me or them with regard to progress for a student." Anna (AA) summarized, "Do I trust them in terms of understanding some of the nuances of especially at-risk students? Not always...People on campus have reasons for doing what they're doing, whether it's that they really want to, or like...Not necessarily on purpose but want to put

people in boxes.” Regarding faculty advisors, Gabrielle (AA) experiences more uncertainty than she does with primary role advisors.

*Trust in Communication.* The department or area can impact an advisor's trust in communication. For example, Winnie (CA) does not trust her football program in neither support nor communication “because of the pressure and what goes... Entails with that support, I do not trust... 'cause I've had students come in with me, and I picked one schedule out and I go back a week later, and they have a totally different schedule. I feel as if I'm bypassed completely.” In contrast, Irma (CA) has had no trouble with AAs. She is willing to work with them to ensure students meet progress-toward-degree requirements, and understands they might get frustrated if she does not immediately suggest an interdisciplinary program. The importance of trust in a working relationship must not be undermined.

Rawls (2018) noted, “Trust must be assumed first, by all members of a practice, and then confirmed constantly through various displays of attention and competence” (p. 712). Because working with a student requires back-and-forth communication over a long period of time (throughout enrollment), trust is constantly determined by reflection of actions by advisors communicating about a student's academic progress. Thus, trust is built over time, but each action by an advisor can have an impact on a collaborative relationship based on the sensemaking of the action (Rawls, 2008).

### *Indexicality*

All meaning is derived from context in EM, and context is situated in different aspects of advising work. A lot of social understanding comes from contextualizing the unknowns (Rawls, 2008). The contextual meaning of words and actions deepens through increased interaction between CAs and AAs, as responses (including verbal and non-verbal cues) develop further understanding (Collin, 1997; Edwards & Skinner, 2010; Rawls, 2008). Contextual meaning and communication are impacted by proximity between advisors, reporting lines, modes of communication, advising models, and the order in which students see AAs and CAs before registration.

*Physical Location and Reporting Lines.* Campus geography and the physical location of an advising office on campus relative to partner offices was consistently perceived as a barrier to cross-campus communication for most participants. Winnie (CA) noted, “The biggest barrier's distance because that affects communication and developing relationships and being able to be effective within those relationships.” Similarly, Jasmine (CA) commented, “It would be nice if the athletic academic advisors were closer so we could just pop in, because I would certainly be talking to them more if they weren't located so far away.” This sentiment was shared by AAs as well. At Sierra's (AA) institution, all athletic team staff and counselors are housed in the same building, but are physically isolated from CAs. Edward (AA), too, echoed this sentiment from the athletic angle:

The campus advising offices are spread out all over our campus. The advisors for exploring majors are literally down the hall from me. Some advisors are in close proximity, other advising centers such as engineering and sciences, and education are all the way on the other side of campus.

Interestingly, nine of the 17 athletic advisors interviewed report to an academic/administrative unit outside of the athletic department but were still housed in athletic facilities. One of the faculty advisors is located 15 miles away from the athletic facilities. In-person interaction and communication strengthen the relationships between CAs and AAs, which enhances mutual efforts and builds trust (Ledwith, 2014; Len et al., 2010; Rawls, 2008).

Nine of the CAs in this study report to an academic unit (department head or dean). Two CAs report to a centralized advising unit director or vice president. Nine AAs report to provosts or vice provosts. Of the eight remaining AAs in our study, four report directly to athletic directors, two to the centralized advising unit director, one to student affairs, one has a dual reporting line to a provost and an athletic director.

Cameron (AA) is a director and reports to his university's vice president of student services. He shared:

We're in a good situation...the structure where we report, I think is great because it just automatically lends legitimacy to it. Not that if we report to the athletic director, we wouldn't be legitimate, but when we're reaching out to the faculty and dealing with other offices on campus, they see we report to the same types of places as other offices, like Freshman Studies and EOP. We're a small campus, so our ability to interact with faculty advisors, very probably... I would say we interact a lot more with department chairs.

Similarly, Aron (AA) reports to an academic unit on his campus: "I am hired by an advising center academically, but my office is physically located in athletic department facilities. I'm in a satellite location. Extension of the office if you will..." Some of our other participants were also housed in an athletic building but report to an academic or student success unit.

*Campus Advising Models.* There is a mix of campus advising models at our participants' respective institutions. Some institutions feature individual colleges with only faculty advisors and some colleges with only primary role advisors. Participants indicated that communicating with faculty tends to be harder for AAs than with primary role advisors. Some institutions have freshman and sophomore (lower division) advising centers that meet with students before they move onto primary role and faculty (upper division) advisors for juniors and seniors.

Rick (AA) explained that a student's declared major and, therefore, their assigned primary role advisor can impact communication. He provided the example that if he cannot reach a specific primary role advisor in his university's business college, he is able to instead reach out to a different advisor within that college to ask his question. However, if one of his students is majoring in Sociology (which requires assignment to a faculty advisor) and he cannot reach the advisor, reaching out to another faculty member for help is not possible.

Cynthia (CA) works at a Division II private institution that does not currently have any AAs. Rather, two CAs in a centralized unit where all student support is organized manage caseloads that include athletes. Unlike most AAs, these two advisors barely communicate with the athletic coaches but do report academic information to them as necessary.

Cameron (AA) works at a Division I private institution with no football program wherein all students spend their first three semesters with a professional "freshman studies" advisor who also teaches a "First Year Experience" course on campus. He noted that athletes on his campus all work with a specific freshman studies advisor who also maintains a role as assistant director

for academic support services for athletes. Both the athletic academic support unit and freshman studies advising unit fall under the same reporting line of the VP of student services. Beginning sophomore year, students then move onto primarily full-time faculty advisors in their major of study, though some primary role advisors do exist at the upper level. Athletes will meet with both a CA and an AA each semester throughout their time on campus. Anna (AA), at a Division I Power 5 program, offered,

We have nine schools and colleges, most of them take freshmen and sophomores for staff advisors. The students will typically maintain that staff advisor for administrative stuff, but once they've declared their major at the end of sophomore year and junior year, they'll go to a faculty advisor in their major. That's most majors.

Yvette (AA) is in a unique position as a director that is located in a centralized advising unit on campus, reporting to the provost:

I think our challenge is not with communication with advising and our colleagues on campus here, 'cause we're part of that. I think we're seen as part of that group. Our challenge is communicating with athletics, 'cause they're halfway across the campus on the other side... We have to be intentional about meeting with coaches or reaching out.

Her institution's model is not as typical as other structures.

*Priority of Campus Advising Versus Athletic Advising.* Participants brought attention to the implications of meeting with either a CA or AA first in a registration cycle, noting that there is no one standard way this seems to occur. Indexicality is relevant here, as our participants shared different contextual situations for this order (Collin, 1997). For example, Dana (AA) shared, "Once they move into their degree granting school, then the athletic advisor becomes the secondary advisor." Both Cameron's (AA) and Luna's (AA) institutions require students to meet with a campus advisor before registering for courses, which includes acquiring a pin number to be able to do so. In Luna's (AA) case, this helps students get outside of the athletic advising center and have meaningful interactions with their campus advisor. Yet, Cameron (AA) found that the departmental administrative assistant in several programs handed out the pin numbers to students which has led to mis-advisement. He wants those departments to be held accountable for not providing proper advising to students.

At Maggie's (AA) institution, students are not required to see an advisor in-person each semester before registering for classes. Star (AA) offered,

We like to say that we're the secondary advisor and they're the primary advisors...we have the students meet with their advisors every semester before they can take part in priority registration. So us kind of forcing the students to meet with them, I think creates a healthy relationship between us and the advisors because the advisors feel like they're a part of the progress and it's not them... It's not us picking classes or doing that. It's led by them.

She also noted that requiring athletes to meet with primary role advisors first helps them build a relationship. She continued,

I think it takes the pressure off of us of knowing every single degree program on campus. 'Cause honestly that's not possible and we're bound to make mistakes. But if you're collaborating with the person who is an expert in that degree program, it makes it a lot easier and takes a lot of pressure off of you, and just helps create that double-checking system so that you can make sure you're getting it right for the student, and you're meeting their needs.

However, Cameron (AA) insisted that students prefer to meet with his unit first because his staff is more thorough, “so that when they meet with their advisor and their major, they're all well prepared.” Peter (CA) explained that when a new associate athletic director for academics was hired, athletes were then required to see their CA first before going to their AA. He announced, “This...was a very significant and very positive change.”

Yvette's (AA) institution, where athletic advising is part of centralized campus advising, “flipped the model where the student-athlete advisees in those programs will meet with that major advisor before they come to us. But for the most part, they're with us at least until they are at 45 credits and then they are assigned to their major advisor.” Winnie (CA) discussed,

[Athletic counselors] see the students more than that I do. So I'm just a mechanic within their...Something which they have to do so that they can enroll. Because at my institution requires that they have to see an advisor. It's required they see an advisor before they can enroll. And so in order to meet a requirement, that's why they're in my office. Not because of anything else, like, “Oh I'm here to explore. I'd like to talk more about these options.” If I had those type of conversation more frequently, they would trust me. But they tend to have those conversations with the athletic counselors, who don't tell me that information.

This lack of communication causes frustration between primary role advisors and AAs. Sharing information can be vital in working together to support athletes. Irma (CA) reflected, “We've over the years had an occasional counselor, who would then go in and change the classes that we put them in. We don't have that problem anymore. They will check with us first before they do that. We have a good rapport. And all that's important for these students.” As Edward (AA) mentioned previously, it can be difficult for athletes to schedule an appointment with a CA in a timely manner, thus the lack of availability of CAs for students to meet with in a timely manner is a barrier.

### *Et Cetera Principle*

Advisors who work together are able to develop a shared understanding of meaning in context, critical for long-term working relationships. As Rawls (2008) explained, “Out of just what people need to get the work done in mutually understood ways, then the order properties of that coherence will necessarily exhibit the constitutive expectancies used to make it” (p. 709). Many of our participants mentioned shared professional development and training opportunities for advisors that typically meet monthly. Many participants were invited to staff meetings to, for example, share curricular information and updates. Access to NCAA academic rules education is

also vital, as it creates a shared language and understanding for all of the intricacies AAs face when supporting athletes throughout their enrollment.

*Advisor Staff Meetings, Forums, and Councils.* As Thull and Hansen (2009) noted, it is important for campus collaborators to visit each other at their site locations to enhance their developing relationship. Of the 28 participants, 20 (71%) reported their campus having an established advising forum or council wherein advisors across a campus gather in some regular method to collaborate and share information. However, four of these 20 participants (20%) noted that while these opportunities exist on their campuses, the AAs do not participate in these meetings. Others did not know if AAs were invited or if they attend because they do not know what they look like.

Most advising meetings across campus met monthly, but some met a few times per semester. Also, faculty advisors mentioned being invited to campus advisor forums, but chose not to attend. Edward's and Monica's units in the athletic department send at least one of the staff to each advising forum meeting. On her campus, Irma (CA) shared that AAs are "not part of the advisor forum per se, they are more on their own." Of the 28 participants, 11 (39%) reported having been invited to the staff meeting of a counterpart unit (either an athletic advising meeting or primary/faculty advising meeting). Ten of the 17 AAs (59%) reported being invited to advising department or college meeting to present or receive information, whereas only one of the 11 (9%) CAs reported being invited to an athletic advising staff meeting on their campus.

Some AAs are very involved in their advising forums, serving on steering committees and planning professional development activities. Dana's (AA) unit invites CAs from programs which enroll several athletes to their staff meetings. Penny's (CA) undeclared advising center has invited AAs to its staff meetings too, and Luna (AA) has a standing weekly invite to her centralized advising center staff meetings. Several participants have invited themselves to staff meetings. Ryan (AA) explained the importance of meeting across campus by having his unit take responsibility for educating CAs on eligibility after his institution had an infractions case around improper certification.

In trying to eliminate misunderstandings of their work, Edward's (AA) director hosted an informal meet-and-greet for all CAs, "informed them what we do and how we work with them and how we're really both on the same page to make sure the student graduates, that's really what we're all here for." When everyone can see that their purpose is to support students toward graduating with a college education, it is more likely that communication and collaboration can improve between CAs and AAs. Our participants shared a few other examples of getting together on campus. Aron's (AA) institution offers a quarterly advising retreat. Gabrielle's (AA) office invites CAs to participate in summer bridge programming for incoming athletes.

*Rules Education.* Of the 28 participants, 10 (36%) reported their university offering some sort of NCAA academic rules education to primary role and faculty advising colleagues. Several mentioned that the rules education is offered annually, but some even hold training sessions every semester. Susie (CA) was unaware if her campus offered rules education. On Edward's (AA) campus, the director of his office meets monthly with the directors of college advising centers to update them on eligibility rules and information. Sierra's (AA) unit offers Q&A sessions for different units on campus but noted that her compliance office does not offer any campus-wide rules education to CAs. Most participants indicated it would be mutually beneficial if CAs had access to rules education.

*Innovative Practices: Examples of Collaboration.* One experience suggested by Rick (AA) and Ryan (AA) was to serve on search committees for each other's units. This helps establish rapport and also shows that input is appreciated from one advisor to another. Maggie's (AA) campus currently lacks a leader overseeing advising, a notes system, and an advising council. Her institution recently conducted an extensive review of academic advising, generated a report, and is starting to implement changes to address what is missing for student success.

Rick (AA) shared, "When we are forming freshman schedules, and we do this through a process that's called, it's called Academic Interest Questionnaire or an AIQ, and it's a tiered meeting system where we all get together in a computer lab and help each other register our incoming freshmen for their Fall semester." In this process, AAs also support the general student body with registration. Similarly, Monica's (AA) and Gabrielle's (AA) institutions require all advisors on campus to prepare for and participate in orientation for all new students.

On Star's (AA) campus, CAs in each college liaise to support and double-check the certification process. She has seen this eliminate errors and also help build relationships, especially because this process requires a lot of communication. Sierra's (AA) campus actually formed an "advising student athletes committee" that meets monthly, a mixture of "athletics, staff and academics, as well as advisors across a lot of different departments on campus. And we're able to kind of share resources, share challenges, share solutions." Sierra (AA) has also approached veteran advisors on campus and simply asked, "What can we do to better prepare the students to come in when they meet with you?"

Yvette (AA) is adamant that situating AAs within a campus advising center is the most ethical and appropriate way to support college athletes. She declared,

I think this is the way it should be. We should be seen as campus advisors and primary advisors for a group of students that happen to be unique. Just like Honors, just like TRIO, just like any major programs that have professional advisors. And I think we've done a good job of making sure that that's how we are viewed. I think it's frustrating for athletics, because we don't report, "to them," you know?

Her suggestion aligns with a recommendation by The Drake Group, a faculty athletic reform organization focused on academic integrity, for athletic advising to be part of the advising for all other students on campus and report to academic affairs (Gurney et al., 2014; Smith, 2011).

### *Limitations*

The researchers may have influenced the meaning making process through our experiences in advising roles, ordering and asking questions a certain way. We recognize we view college athletes positively which may have biased our analysis. With 28 participants, our results do not reflect the perspectives and experiences of all advisors in these roles of athletic advisor, faculty advisor, and primary role or professional advisor. We hope that the results of this study support further collaboration and beneficial communication between advisors in the athletic departments and on-campus to better support college athletes. In addition, EM is a very subjective framework for interpretation, and is in no way able to predict or explain behavior beyond the analysis for this particular study. EM also does not consider other background and profile characteristics that influence behavior and power dynamics.

### *Future Research*

Membership categorization analysis (MCA) is an EM approach to review interview transcripts and recordings. MCA is a way to analyze how participants identify others into categories (e.g., mother, woman, baker) that help describe boundaries within culture (Paulsen, 2018). These categories may create the illusion of hierarchy within an organization or interaction between groups, linking certain activities and behaviors to specific members of groups (Paulsen, 2018; Schegloff, 2007). Group comparisons can occur between what is called “standard relational pairs” (e.g., teacher, pupil) (Edwards & Skinner, 2010; Stokoe, 2012). Paulsen (2018) summarized MCA’s intended purpose: “Using MCA can identify the ways in which individuals define themselves, their work, and their roles and responsibilities at a deeper level that problematizes taken-for-granted information” (p. 144). There are five guiding principles and 10 key concepts of MCA outlined by Stokoe (2012), which would be the next phase of analyzing the interview data from this study.

Another area of future research we suggest is the advising of athletes majoring in interdisciplinary programs. The nature of these degree programs appears flexible, so they might attract athletes or be suggested to an athlete by AAs. Peter (CA) noted, “We end up being a sort of a catch-all office where students who aren’t able... Or for whatever reason, haven’t been helped elsewhere can get help.” His program had become popular and morphed into an academic program, which led the athletic department to try to have athletes admitted to the program or change their major to it for eligibility reasons. Winnie (CA) mentioned that the athletic department looks to the interdisciplinary major she advises for as a recommendation for transfer athletes. There have been many high profile news stories in recent years about athletes clustered into specific majors or programs, including interdisciplinary programs where graduates cannot even explain what they are studying. CAs like Peter and Winnie try to restrict athletes from these programs unless they are in a situation that requires flexibility, while still supporting students’ educational and career interests.

## **Conclusion**

Every institution and its advising practice will differ, despite being public, private, Division I, Division II, or any number of other characteristics. Through an EM perspective, Webster and Sell (2012) emphasized, “Institutions, like all social structures, permit, organize, and constrain action; in addition, they often define the meanings of various acts. Thus they create social realities for individuals” (p. 139). Yet, the culture within the institutions’ advising structures has the opportunity to allow for change to enhance collaboration and communication between AAs and CAs to support college athletes. Right now, “institutions constrain and enable differing types of interactions within and between groups” (Webster & Sell, 2012, p. 140). Yet people within the institutions can apply different practices that may work to change the negative perceptions about college athletes and athletic departments often seen on campus (Stokowski et al., 2016). As Rubin (2015) stated, “Through campus collaboration, advisors can ensure student-athletes have the necessary resources to be successful given time limitations for activities outside of their athletic participation” (para. 14).



## *Implications*

*Implications for campus advisors.* Several participants shared examples of working with AAs to support orientation sessions and registration for all new students, rather than just the athlete population. Establishing a thorough, written record of student interactions and storing those records in an accessible yet secure campus notes system can be a crucial mode of indirect communication with AAs and contributes to the transparency of the advising process. As CAs recognize the differentiation between their roles and those of AAs, they should consider establishing a point person with AAs. That way, AAs can reach out to a specific advisor for questions, approval processes, and feedback on particular students of concern.

Our participants shared the idea of inviting AAs to staff meetings to discuss curriculum changes, new minors, and other updates for colleges or majors that have significant numbers of athletes declared. In Maggie (AA)'s case, her college of Business provides an annual meal in conjunction with a prepared presentation on their curriculum including programmatic updates. This can be beneficial to maintain rapport between offices and to provide learning opportunities to new advisors.

Alternatively, CAs should seek out opportunities to learn more about the day-to-day lives of college athletes on their campus and the role that AAs play in serving this special population. If available on campus, professional development opportunities such as training courses or brown bags that can introduce CAs to an athletic department should be sought out. If not available, participants demonstrated that scheduling an informational interview with an AA or extending an invite to have coffee and a conversation at a neutral location on campus present meaningful alternative learning opportunities.

*Implications for Athletic Advisors.* When AAs are physically located separately from advising counterparts on campus, efforts should be made to interact with CAs. Planning in advance is also helpful, such as inviting CAs to participate in recruiting activities with more than a day's notice. Sierra (AA) co-instructs a training and development class on how to advise athletes for CAs on her campus in the athletic facility in partnership with CAs on campus. Inviting CAs into the space where athletes go to meet with AAs would be a great start to familiarizing them with the environment and location. To this end, initiating a liaison model with CAs similar to Aron's (AA) institution where each AA is assigned to two colleges would be a formal way to foster consistent communication across campus.

AAs and the athletic compliance office should work together to offer NCAA academic rules education to CAs on a regular basis. From the participants' comments, we suggest at least annually but every semester would be preferable. The session would be an overview of initial and continuing eligibility and academic integrity/improper assistance. All CAs would be encouraged to attend, including faculty advisors. In this setting, AAs could explain why faculty are asked to complete progress reports for athletes in their classes. Athletic departments should also take the time to recognize CAs, just as Olivia (CA) felt honored through the guest coach program. Perhaps most significant is establishing intentional follow-ups with CAs when advising plans are changed or altered. As in the case of several CAs in this study, one-way communication with no follow-up should be avoided for the sake of transparency to avoid feelings of mistrust and misunderstanding.

*Implications for Advising Administrators.* Maggie's (AA) institution conducted a review of its academic advising. Assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to successful advising can make a significant impact on students' progression, retention, and completion. On Gabrielle's (AA) campus, the centralized advising center offers training to set the standard for advising across the institution and includes AAs. A review of advising could lead to the development of campus-wide advising standards and training. Advising offices should make the effort to introduce new hires to all advisors across campus. Face-to-face interaction is critical, and when physical distance on campus is a barrier, advising centers should be intentional about meeting with each other. This could be in a monthly advising council meeting, or through staff meeting invitations or open houses. Veteran advisors in all units should help new advisors meet liaisons across campus to eliminate uncertainty and reduce trust concerns. Campus culture certainly plays a role in how relationships might evolve between CAs and AAs. This relates to the order in which a student might see their advisors (be it CA then AA or AA then CA) before registration. However, it is vital that efforts be made by advising professionals and supported by administrators to improve communication and collaboration. If the ultimate goal is to retain and graduate college athletes, then cross-campus collaboration is critical.

Our participants shared some innovative ideas at their institutions. Luna's (AA) institution created a staff ambassador program "where every month you learn about a different sector of the university and how it functions and why we as staff have roles within that university function and there are a lot of professional advisors who sign up for that." Monica (AA) was able to witness a program sponsored by administration be highly successful when highlighting the athlete experience:

We actually put in a request to do a presentation on the life of a student athlete, where we had an advisor, we had the compliance officer with us and we actually had an athlete...who was an engineering major...we in front of a lot of faculty, staff...for them to understand what it takes for those who want to excel academically because we're known as a great academic school, but then to also want to excel athletically and you could just hear a pin drop. It was a lot of faculty, staff that were really impressed by this student athlete and really impressed with all that they can do...we were in such a good position that the VP of Student Affairs wants us to do the same presentation again.

Cynthia (CA) previously shared about her campus mentor program. While her mentor did not engage with her, the idea of pairing people across campus to get to know how it functions, and where advisors are physically located, could prove beneficial. Participants mentioned the positive experiences they had serving on search committees for other advising units, and we encourage this practice at all institutions. In addition, institutions should maintain an advising notes system, and preferably only one. All advisors, including faculty advisors, should input relevant notes that pertain to a student's academic progress that their collaborators who support that student can see. Hopefully, all CAs can provide timely feedback to AAs when solicited with more understanding of the reason behind more immediate requests.

## Final Thoughts

Our participants described a variety of barriers, challenges, and misconceptions that affect communication and collaboration across their campuses. Yet, they also shared many innovative practices, reflected on years of relationship building, and contributed collaborative ways to support college athletes, maintain trust, and educate each other about their roles. Most importantly, they all maintain the same aim to help students achieve their educational goals. Successful collaboration between AAs and CAs involved achieving EM principles including accounts (consensus), reflexivity (back-and-forth sensemaking), indexicality (negotiated meaning in context), and et cetera (common knowledge in shared social situations). Prioritizing academic success, and ultimately, the graduation of the athletes these campus and athletic advisors support, emphasize the need to build trustworthy relationships, understand each other's roles, and communicate with transparency.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

1. What is your title? If your title does not encompass all of your responsibilities, what are your other duties and roles?
  2. Who does your unit report to (e.g., Athletic Director, Provost)?
  3. What sport governing body/division is your institution in: NCAA DI, DII, DIII, NAIA, or NJCAA?
  4. If an Athletic Advisor:
    - a. What is your average caseload per semester and for which sports?
    - b. Geographically speaking, how close is your office to other advising offices on campus?
    - c. How frequently do you interact with coaches and how would you rate the typical interaction (positive, negative, etc.)?
- If a primary role advisor:
- a. What is your average overall caseload per semester AND your average number of student-athletes in that caseload per semester?
  - b. Geographically speaking, how close is your office to other advising offices on campus? Athletic units?
  - c. Do you interact with coaches and, if so, how frequently and how would you rate the typical interaction (positive, negative, etc.)?
5. On average, how many hours per week do you spend interacting with athletic or primary role advisors on campus?
    - a. What ways do you communicate with each other?

- b. Are these modes of communication effective? If not, how could communication be improved?
  - c. Do you have notes that are visible to each other in student records?
  - d. Are there any barriers to communication?
6. Would you say there is already an existing, collaborative relationship between Athletic Advisors and Primary Role Advisors on your campus?
    - a. If so, how effective would you say that relationship is currently?
    - b. If not, what are some challenges to establishing/maintaining this relationship?
  7. In what ways do you typically collaborate with primary role advisors/athletic advisors on your campus to support student-athletes? Provide examples if possible.
  8. Does your campus have an advising council/forum that brings advisors together from different units?
    - a. If so, are athletic advisors included/able to participate?
  9. How do you reach out to someone (e.g., a new advisor) if you want to establish a relationship with them between athletics and your unit (OR your unit and their unit)?
    - a. Do you provide rules education for campus advisors?
  10. [for primary role advisors] Have you ever received education or training on athletic governing body academic regulations?
    - a. If not, how do you navigate the rules when working with athletes?
    - b. If so, what kinds of education or training have you received?
    - c. Is it ongoing or was it a one-time training?
    - d. Do you have a copy of the sport governing body manual?
  11. Do you trust how the [athletic advisors OR primary role advisors] support student-athletes academically?
  12. Do you trust how the [athletic advisors OR primary role advisors] communicate with you about student-athletes' academic progress?
  13. Have you ever been invited to a staff meeting for [athletic advising unit OR primary role units]?
  14. Do you communicate with any other units regarding student-athletes on campus (e.g., faculty athletic representative, disability services, career center)?
  15. Any additional comments or thoughts on this?

## Appendix B

Participant Information Chart

#	Pseudonym	Title	Advisor Type	Institution Type	NCAA Division	Caseload (all)	Caseload (athletes)
1	Dana	Asst Dir Academic Services and Certification	Athletic	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	n/a	60
2	Penny	Asst Dir Athletics Academic Support	Athletic	Public	DI FBS	n/a	~100
3	Erica	Open-option (undeclared) advisor	Primary	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	~250	~12
4	Rick	Asst Dir, Student-Athlete Academic Enhancement Center	Athletic	Public	DI FCS	n/a	~110
5	Luna	Director Student-Athlete Support Services	Athletic	Public	DI FCS	n/a	~120
6	Maggie	Senior Academic Counselor	Athletic	Private	DI FBS	n/a	~100
7	Benjamin	Asst Clinical Professor, Kinesiology	Faculty	Public	DI No FB	~80	~35
8	Monica	Academic Advisor, Learning Specialist, & Tutor Coordinator	Athletic	Public	DI No FB	n/a	~25-30

9	Valerie	Academic Advisor I, Biological Sciences	Primary	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	~320-330	~5
10	Henry	Asst Dir, Football Academics	Athletic	Public	DI FBS	n/a	~60
11	Star	Asst Dir Academic Resource Center	Athletic	Public	DI No FB	n/a	120
12	Cynthia	Academic Advisor	Primary	Private	DII	~200	~133
13	Cameron	Director of Academic Support Services for Student-Athletes	Athletic	Private	DI No FB	n/a	90-100
14	Peter	Academic Advisor	Primary	Public	DI FBS	~200	"it depends"
15	Fiona	Academic Advisor	Athletic	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	n/a	~85
16	Olivia	Asst Dean for Academic Advising, Graduate School of Business	Faculty	Private	DI FCS	~500	20
17	Susie	Associate Professor	Faculty	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	70	2
18	Yvette	Director of Student- Athlete Success Center	Athletic	Public	DI FCS	n/a	ALL SAs: 420-450, advises 130 directly



19	Anna	Director of Academic Support	Athletic	Private	DI FBS (Power 5)	n/a	30 + returning athletes completing degrees, about 4-5/year
20	Ryan	Director for Student-Athlete Support	Athletic	Private	DI FCS	n/a	45
21	Gabrielle	Coordinator of Student-Athlete Development	Athletic	Public	Div. I FCS	n/a	150
22	Penelope	Undergraduate Academic Advisor, School of Science	Primary	Public	Div. I FBS (Power 5)	~200	6
23	Winnie	Open-option (undeclared) advisor	Primary	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	200-250	10-25
24	Edward	Asst Dir Student-Athlete Academic Services	Athletic	Public	DI FBS	n/a	85-95
25	Aron	Athletic Academic Advisor	Athletic	Public	DI FCS	n/a	180-200
26	Jasmine	Academic Advisor, New Student Services Coordinator for Kinesiology	Primary	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	285	36
27	Sierra	Director of Academic Support	Athletic	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	n/a	50

28	Irma	0.3 Academic Advisor, open option and social sciences & 0.3 Athletic certifying officer for college	Primary	Public	DI FBS (Power 5)	60-70+	7 athlete advisees, 133 majors to certify (30% of all SAs on campus)
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