



Supporting the Supporters:

Decreasing Workaholism in Athletic Academic Advisors

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Previous scholarship contends that workaholism is a common feature in intercollegiate athletics. However, limited scholarship has applied this perspective to examine the experiences of athletic academic advisors. Through the lens of workaholism, this study used survey methods to explore what factors contributed to feelings of workaholism amongst Atlantic Coast Conference athletic academic advisors ($n = 68$) and what resource improvements these advisors feel are needed to decrease workaholism. Through affective coding methods, factors contributing to workaholism were categorized into three major themes. First, personal characteristics of advisors, such as individuals' value systems and internal motivation, perpetuated workaholism. Second, components of the athletics environment (such as competition between colleagues and inefficient processes) fostered advisors' workaholism. Third, parts of the athletics culture, mainly high standards of leaders and the perception that individuals must always be working, contributed to workaholic tendencies. To combat workaholism, athletic academic advisors noted resources centering the athletics environment would lessen their feelings of workaholism. These improvements centered around enhanced salary/benefits, better financial support for academic programming, and more academic support staff.

Keywords: athletic academic support, advising, workaholism

Academic support programs for athletes play an important role in Division I athletic departments of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). At the heart of these departments are athletes' academic advisors. These advisors counsel athletes in selecting courses (and majors) that align with both athletic goals and future career aspirations, while also assisting athletes in cultivating time management and the development of other social/life skills. Unfortunately, these unique athletics employees are often overworked and under-supported (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018; Vaughn & Smith, 2018). Feeling overworked and underappreciated could stem from the diverse roles they play as advisors and sometimes athlete engagement or career development coordinators (Rubin, 2017). Additionally, such feelings may arise from pressure—from coaches, administrators, and/or themselves—to ensure athletes perform in the classroom despite some athletes entering with lower levels of preparedness (Smith & Willingham, 2019). Such conditions often breed workaholism.

Previous research has examined workaholism in intercollegiate athletic spaces, noting significant and positive relationships between workaholism and burnout (Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2018). However, limited research has explicitly explored this phenomenon as it relates to academic advisors for college athletes (Hardin et al., 2020). This is a gap in the college athletics and student affairs literature that should be addressed for two reasons.

First, workaholism is correlated with lower levels of job satisfaction and higher rates of burnout and turnover (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). This makes for inefficient operations, while potentially placing additional stress on advisors who remain in support programs. Similarly, low satisfaction, high turnover, and ineffective operations could hinder the ability for athletes to receive the best quality advising when it comes to their educational endeavors. Second, stress and lack of support can result in employees making poor decisions for themselves, athletes, and the athletic department as a whole. This can lead to academic misconduct from major clustering to over-assisting athletes on coursework (Fountain & Finley, 2011; Smith & Willingham, 2019).

With this in mind, the purpose of this research is two-fold: (1) explore what factors contribute to feelings of workaholism amongst athletic academic advisors at institutions in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and (2) to understand what resources athletic departments and institutions could provide to reduce workaholism and better assist this population of athlete supporters.

Theoretical Framework

This research is examined from the theoretical principles of workaholism, which has traditionally been defined as an intractable need to constantly work, resulting in negative impacts on life outside of work (Oates, 1971). There are three key characteristics of workaholics: (1) feeling compelled to work, (2) high involvement in one's work, and (3) minimal enjoyment from working (Spence & Robbins, 1992). Workaholism is distinct from work engagement, which is a positive "work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). While workaholism often emerges in work environments with less support and high levels of distress, work engagement appears in workplaces that value employee support. Work engagement leads to positive results for employees and employers such as higher levels of commitment and job satisfaction (Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2018).

On the other hand, workaholics have been described as "work[ing] harder than their job prescriptions require and putting much more effort into their jobs than is expected by the people

with whom or for whom they work, and in doing so they neglect their life outside their job” (Schaufeli et al., 2008, p. 175). Workaholism occurs when an individual commits an exorbitant number of hours to work, takes on additional responsibilities, and feels determined to continue to work even if the workday is over or the office is closed (McMillan et al., 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2008). In this way, workaholism has been compared to addictions like alcoholism as these compulsive behaviors can compromise one’s mental and physical health and relationships with others (Hancock et al., 2019; Oates, 1971).

Closely tied to workaholism is the concept of burnout, which is often the result of a workaholic environment (Taylor et al., 2018). Burnout is a state of stress-induced emotional and/or physical exhaustion, coupled with feelings of decreased accomplishment and loss of one’s identity (Perlman & Hartman, 1982). The study of this phenomenon evolved from fields involving human services due to the high emotional investment required in the industry. This emotional investment is not unlike the investment stakeholders make in the field of intercollegiate athletics. Like workaholism, burnout occurs in environments with high demands and low levels of resources and often lead employees to leave their jobs or even find new career paths (Alarcon, 2011; Taylor et al., 2018).

Workaholism can increase or decrease depending on the organization’s environment and culture. A workaholic culture is catalyzed by high work involvement and high drive, resulting in a low gratification from work (Stefano & Gaudino, 2019). The culture of intercollegiate athletics is likely to breed workaholism (Hancock et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2018). Taylor and colleagues (2020) contended the field of sport cultivates an environment of “sacrifice, extreme pressure to win, and high competition for jobs” which ultimately results in a workaholic culture (para. 2). Similarly, workaholism is fostered as work and life boundaries are blurred due to athletic departments’ environment and culture (Taylor et al., 2021).

Workaholism is arguably present in all participants and stakeholders of college sports from athletes and coaches to administrators and support personnel. Weight and colleagues (2021) contended that stakeholders across all levels of sport have felt or continue to feel undervalued, underpaid, and overworked. For example, the most recent NCAA (2020) GOALS findings show that athletes self-reported spending anywhere from 27 to 42 hours per week on their athletics obligations. Coaches in the football bowl subdivision (FBS) report spending up to 110 hours per week and support staff, like athletic trainers, spend almost 60 hours per week fulfilling their duties (Alexander, 2020; Verified Athletics, 2018). While dedicating copious hours to athletics or one’s job does not automatically signal workaholism, the rise in cases of athlete mental health struggles and coach and administrative burnout and early retirement from the industry likely does support the notions of a workaholic culture (Dellenger, 2021; Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012; NCAA GOALS, 2020). Thus, there is a need to better understand the presence of workaholism in intercollegiate athletics and best practices to ensure the job performance of athletic stakeholders (Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012; Taylor et al., 2018).

Despite evidence supporting a longstanding tradition of workaholism in college athletics, only recently has there been a rise in using workaholism as a theory to better understand and improve the experiences of athletics stakeholders (Taylor et al., 2018). One particular group that remains underrepresented in college athletics literature and workaholism research is athletic academic advisors. Given that athletic academic advisors have self-reported dedicating 37.5-80 hours per week to their work and the presence of high turnover rates in this unit (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018), it is likely this professional population is entrenched in a workaholic environment and culture.

Examining the experiences of athletic academic advisors through a workaholism lens is appropriate and significant for three reasons: First, workaholism literature is predominantly

siloed in business and human services fields. With intercollegiate athletics spanning both of these industries (Clotfelter, 2019), it is important to expand the use of workaholism as a theory to sport spaces. Second, using workaholism to understand how athletics departments can support and retain athletic academic advisors is key to boosting employee satisfaction (and potentially, athlete academic success). Third, such understanding may also result in decreased turnover rates for a field that is experiencing low employee retention (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018; Vaughn & Smith, 2018). Ultimately, athletics departments and institutions addressing workaholism may result in improved individual and organizational effectiveness, along with a competitive advantage over those shying away from such discussions (Weight et al., 2021).

Literature Review

Building off the theoretical framework, this literature review provides the background necessary for understanding the importance of athletic academic support programs and the advisors that comprise these critical units. First, a brief history of athletics departments' academic support programs are provided to offer context within which advisors operate. Next, is an overview of the culture of Division I athletics departments. This information further situates support programs for athletes within a win-at-all-costs, commercialized, and business-like culture of collegiate athletics, which may contribute to workaholism (Taylor et al., 2020).

Academic Support Programs for Athletes

For roughly three decades, the NCAA has required member institutions to provide academic support services for athletes (Huml et al., 2014; Southall, 2014). The establishment of academic support centers was likely done in an attempt to combat the strong athletic identity of many Division I institutions (Huml et al., 2014) and preserve the NCAA student-first "brand" that the organization has propagated over the years (Southall, 2014, p. 121). These services include academic advising, eligibility oversight, career support, tutoring, mentorship programs, study hall, and other resources. The provision of these services within support centers have corresponded with increases in athlete retention and graduation, demonstrating a positive influence these centers and advisors can have on athletes' academic experiences (Harry, 2021; Huml et al., 2014). However, other scholarship also notes an over-reliance on these resources for athletes to maintain eligibility rather than fully develop educationally and prepare for futures outside of sports (Huml et al., 2014; Rubin & Moses, 2017; Smith & Willingham, 2019).

Athlete Academic Advising. Research by Rubin (2017) demonstrated that athletic academic advisors are a heterogeneous group, coming from a myriad of educational backgrounds (mostly student affairs, athletic counseling, and athletic administration), holding varied levels of degrees, and having mixed levels of training and experiences to be an advisor. Rubin's (2017) sample of advisors also discussed what their profession meant to them, stating that the heart of their work was helping athletes and having a rewarding career. This fostered an emotional connection with their work; however, the participants also perceived a lack of respect for their position from the rest of the athletics community and frustrations related to meeting standards and shouldering blame if athletes struggled. This emotional connection and feeling of lack of respect/support can contribute to workaholism (Schaufeli et al., 2008; Spence & Robbins, 1992).

Still, athletes often turn to their athletic academic advisors, not just for educational questions, but also for career tracking, mentorship, and life advice (Bell, 2009; Harry, 2021; Rubin, 2017). Thus, advisors serve multiple roles, which further contribute to workaholism and

experiences with burnout (Alarcon, 2011; Hardin et al., 2020; Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). Hardin and colleagues (2020) examined burnout amongst a sample of athletic academic advisors, too. The participants in their study expressed passion for assisting athletes in their endeavors, but experienced significant levels of “compassion fatigue” (Hardin et al., 2020, p. 103). Indeed, it is this breadth of support that caused Meyer (2005) to claim that athlete academic advisors have “one of the most challenging jobs in higher education” (p. 15).

There are two major types of advising experienced in athletic academic support programs: transactional and integrative advising (Martin, 2017). Transactional advising solely focuses on providing athletes information about eligibility and graduation requirements rather than holistic academic development. While transactional advising is a component to all advising philosophies, it tends to occur when advisor caseloads are too large to individualize support (Martin, 2017). Thus, transactional advising may be more likely to emerge when advisors are in a workaholic culture or are experiencing workaholicism and burnout. Indeed, transactional advising may be part of the root cause for academic-athletic scandals (Smith & Willingham, 2019).

The second form of advising is integrative advising which is designed to help athletes find meaningful curricular paths to meet their short and long term aspirations (Lowenstein, 2014; Martin, 2017). This model of advising honors athletes as individuals, teaches developmental skills (e.g., time management and critical thinking), and encourages resiliency in the face of adversity. This keeps athletes engaged and emphasizes education, not just eligibility (Martin, 2017). Importantly, integrative advising is more likely to happen when advisors are not overworked, undervalued, or experiencing workaholic symptoms.

Academic Advising Metrics. As part of their participation in intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA requires Division I athletes to complete a certain amount of coursework each year in order to remain eligible and stay on track for graduation. These policies are seen as advantageous to some, as they allow for easy measures/comparisons of academic success and incentivize athletic programs to foster athletes’ academic identity (NCAA, 2013). Athletic academic advisors work with the athletes to ensure their coursework is completed, while also ensuring that athletes remain eligible for competition and on-track for graduation. Two example policies include the NCAA’s Progress Toward Degree (PTD) and Academic Progress Rate (APR).

For athletes to maintain their PTD, 40% of required courses must be completed by the end of the athlete’s second year, 60% by the end of their third year, and 80% by the end of their fourth year (NCAA, n.d.). With such PTD mandates, advisors must ensure each athlete completes those percentages of their coursework toward a selected degree while maintaining a yearly grade point average (GPA). Some athletes may struggle to meet these academic requirements, which can raise concerns about how athletic academic advisors work to foster athletes’ academic and personal development versus work to simply maintain eligibility (Harry, 2021; Huml et al., 2014; Southall, 2014; Smith & Willingham, 2019). In fact, the need to ensure athletes meet the aforementioned requirements often results in a phenomenon called academic clustering, which exists when 25% or more of one team’s roster falls within a particular major for efficiency in keeping the athletes eligible (Fountain & Finley, 2011; Smith & Willingham, 2019).

Similarly, there are other disadvantages regarding APR. Research using APR data has demonstrated that this metric favors wealthier institutions, often Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), that can put more financial resources in academic support programs for athletes (Johnson, 2013). Thus, APR tends to penalize less wealthy schools (such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities; HBCUs), further placing them at a competitive disadvantage

(Johnson, 2013). Southall and Southall (2018) contended that the NCAA and its metrics and academic reform policies are tied to neoliberal practices in sports, like efficiency, eligibility, and winning, rather than education. These metrics allow institutions and their actors (e.g., advisors, coaches, administrators) to potentially do the bare minimum and allow athletes to remain on their fields and courts, preserving their entertainment value for the school/department's financial gain (Comeaux, 2018). Thus, these metrics may actually foster transactional advising, rather than integrative advising (Martin, 2017).

Culture of Division I Athletics

Some scholars have argued that the neoliberal culture of intercollegiate athletics has created a need for academic support programs for athletes (Huml et al., 2014; Rubin & Moses, 2017). Athletics culture is defined as the “phenomenological environment in which college students who are athletes live and move when they are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities” (Despres et al., 2008, p. 200). Employees of athletics departments also live and move within this culture. Norms commonly found in Division I athletics culture, including within academic support programs, include neoliberalism, commercialization, an emphasis on eligibility over education, pressure to win, and the “dumb jock” stereotype (Clotfelter, 2019; Comeaux, 2018; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Rubin & Moses, 2017).

For example, sport scholars have voiced that neoliberalism fosters commercialization and the business-like nature of intercollegiate athletics (Comeaux, 2018). In fact, most of the revenue from Division I athletics programs is reinvested into coach and administrator salaries/benefits or luxurious facilities (Blue, 2019). Thus, this emphasis on revenue-generation has thus superseded the importance of athlete education (Comeaux, 2018). With this, athletes may be clustered into less time consuming majors or experience over-assistance in order to ensure their eligibility, and therefore, their team's chances of on-the-field success, as is common in academic-athletic scandals (Smith & Willingham, 2019). Clustering and/or over-assistance perpetuates the dumb jock narrative that athletes are academically inferior to their non-athlete peers and lack educational motivation, causing further strain between academics and athletics. These cultural norms cultivate a tense relationship between academics and athletics, potentially placing athletic academic advisors in challenging and conflict-filled positions (Bell, 2009; Clotfelter, 2019). Because of this tension, there is potential for advisors to feel torn in how they provide support strategies (i.e., transactional versus integrative advising) to athletes in their caseloads (Bell, 2009; Martin, 2017; Smith & Willingham, 2019).

Based on this conflict and desire to mitigate it, these professionals may overwhelm themselves and burnout (Huml et al., 2021; Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018; Taylor et al., 2018). This leads to advisor turnover, which further places athletes at an academic disadvantage. Because academic support programs for athletes are critical components to athletes' success, understanding athletic academic advisors' workaholism and necessary resources to improve working conditions benefits these professionals, their field, and the athletes they assist.

Ultimately, this background scholarship helps address this study's research questions concerning (1) what factors contribute to feelings of workaholism amongst athletic academic advisors at institutions in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and (2) what resources athletic departments and institutions could provide to reduce workaholism and better assist this population of athlete supporters.

Methods

Site and Participants

The site of this study spanned across the 15 Division I ACC institutions. Division I was the focus of this study because this is where previous scholars noted the tension between academics and athletics are highest (Clotfelter, 2019; Sperber, 2000). With tension being the most palpable in Division I, this may also contribute to high levels of burnout and therefore workaholism. Similarly, the ACC is perceived as a strong academic and athletic conference, making this a potentially stressful nexus for athletic academic advisors and a unique context to explore workaholism within this population (Hardin et al., 2020; Lifschitz et al., 2014; Somers & Wood, 2022). By collecting data from across the conference, we can gather more variety in experiences of athletic academic advisors, enabling greater generalizability of the results and the ability to more practically apply the information gathered.

Athletic academic advisors' ($N = 214$) email addresses were obtained from ACC athletic departments' online staff directories and the survey was distributed via email. Sixty-eight advisors participated, yielding a 32% response rate. As demonstrated in Table 1, most of the participants identified as white women who were relatively early on in their careers as athletic academic advisors. This matches with the athletics employee early career archetype proposed by Weight and colleagues (2021) and this sample is similar in demographics to other research that surveyed athletic academic advisors (Hardin et al., 2020; Rubin, 2017).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

| Race | <i>n</i> | % |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----|
| Asian | 2 | 3% |
| Black or African American | 14 | 21% |
| Hispanic or Latino/a | 2 | 3% |
| Mixed race | 5 | 7% |
| White | 40 | 59% |
| Prefer not to Answer | 5 | 7% |
| Gender Identity | | |
| Man | 18 | 26% |
| Woman | 40 | 59% |
| Prefer Not to Answer | 10 | 15% |
| Years in Academic-Athletic Advising | | |
| 1-5 Years | 20 | 37% |
| 6-10 Years | 18 | 33% |
| 11-15 Years | 9 | 17% |
| 15-20 Years | 6 | 11% |
| 21+ Years | 1 | 2% |
| Consideration of Leaving Profession | | |
| Yes | 49 | 72% |
| No | 15 | 22% |
| Prefer Not to Answer | 4 | 6% |

Instrument

This study utilized a survey based on the existence of workaholism in intercollegiate athletics. Surveys are commonly used in research examining workaholism in athletics (Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019; Weight et al., 2021), and in previous scholarship studying experiences of athletic academic advisors (Hardin et al., 2020; Rubin, 2017; Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). Thus, this is an appropriate method for this research.

The survey questions were developed based on three factors: (1) the researchers' personal experiences as former employees for athletic academic services, (2) the literature surrounding athlete academic support programs, and (3) the literature on workaholism in intercollegiate athletics. Three former/current athlete academic advisors served as content experts and reviewed the survey (Alreck & Settle, 2004; Miles et al., 2020). Adjustments to the survey were made based on the content experts' feedback and the instrument received institutional review board approval. The aforementioned procedures also helped ensure content validity of the instrument (McMillan, 2015; Miles et al., 2020).

To begin the survey, participants were provided with the definition of workaholism from McMillan et al. (2003), commonly used in the management literature (Taylor et al., 2019). This portion read: "Workaholism is defined as committing an exorbitant number of hours to work, taking on additional responsibilities, and feeling determined to continue to work even if workday is over or the office is closed (McMillan et al., 2003)." Participants were then asked a closed-ended Likert style question to demonstrate their identification as workaholics. The rest of the survey included closed- and open-ended questions about advisors' feelings toward workaholism and resources for limiting such feelings. For example, one closed-ended Likert style question asked participants to rate, on a scale of 1 (strongly contribute) to 5 (do not contribute), how certain factors—like working with athletes, colleagues, and coaches—contributed to their feelings of workaholism. Another closed-ended question prompted advisors to pick from a list of additional resources they felt would be enhance their support and decrease feelings of workaholism. Some of these resources included increased salary/benefits, more advisors/support staff, improved professional growth opportunities, and more advising space. They could also opt to "write in" other resources not provided on the list.

Next, open-ended questions from the survey instrument served as the basis for this manuscript and answering both research questions about what factors contribute to workaholism and what athletics departments/institutions can do to better support athletic academic advisors. These items included: (1) what factors contribute to your feelings of workaholism? (2) how does the competitive environment of your job influence your workaholism? (3) please elaborate on factors that have influenced your desire to leave athletic academic support, and (4) please elaborate on what keeps you motivated to stay in athletic academic support.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved a deductive process based on workaholism literature (Huml et al., 2021; Spence & Hobbins, 1992; Taylor et al., 2018) and a hybrid of affective coding methods including evaluation and emotion coding (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2013). First, evaluation coding was helpful when examining participants' perceptions of judgements and appraisals of certain contexts, such as programs and environments. In this case, participants provided insights into their workaholism as a result of their assessments of their work environment and culture (Patton, 2002). Saldaña (2013) also contended that evaluation coding aligns with critical scholarship, an area that this study also falls into. Second, emotion coding was beneficial for

understanding participants' experiences and/or reflective feelings and was particularly helpful in research examining intrapersonal experiences, which was done as advisors reflected on their personal feelings of and about workaholism (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2013). Thus, this coding method was also appropriate (Saldaña, 2013).

The combination of evaluation and emotion coding led to first and second cycle coding and researchers' memoing that narrowed the results into three major themes (Miles et al., 2020). These themes included: workaholism as a result of personal characteristics, workaholism as a result of the athletics environment, and workaholism as a result of athletics culture. These analysis methods were particularly helpful in addressing the first research question regarding factors influencing participants' workaholism. From there, the themes helped categorize responses addressing the second research question about reducing workaholism amongst athletic academic advisors.

Results

This section presents descriptive statistics of the participants' responses concerning workaholism. However, the primary focus is on the three aforementioned themes that emerged from the narrative responses of advisors as they discussed factors contributing to their workaholism and ways they could be more supported.

Descriptive Results

First, participants were asked if they self-identified as workaholics. After presented with the definition of workaholism, advisors were asked, on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being "I strongly identify as a workaholic" and five being "I strongly identify as not a workaholic," to self-report their levels of workaholism. On average, athletic academic advisors rated their workaholism as moderately high with a mean of 2.29 and a standard deviation of 1.33.

Similarly, participants were asked to rank from 1 to 5, with one being "strongly contribute to feelings of workaholism" and five being "do not contribute to feelings of workaholism at all," how workplace factors contributed to their experiences with and feelings of workaholism. The strongest contributors toward participants' feelings of workaholism included ensuring athletes receive a proper education ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.00$), working with the athletes themselves ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.19$), and working with coaches ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.24$). Moderate contributors in perceptions of workaholism encompassed working with colleagues in athletic academic advising ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.10$), working with bosses ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.16$), working to maintain athlete eligibility ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.38$), handling criteria from bosses to ensure athlete education ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.29$), handling criteria from coaches to ensure athlete eligibility ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.42$), and handling criteria from bosses to ensure athlete education ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.43$). Finally, handling criteria from coaches to ensure athlete education ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.24$), maneuvering competition with colleagues ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.40$), and working with colleagues outside of athletic academic advising ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.24$) were rated as the least stressful factors contributing to workaholism.

Despite these feelings of workaholism, determination, and the above workaholism elements, participants noted that they enjoyed their work in advising. On a scale of 1 to 5, with one being "I very much enjoy my work as an academic-athletic support staff member" and five being "I very much do not enjoy my work as an academic-athletic support staff member," this sample averaged a score of 1.79 and standard deviation of 0.82, indicating relatively high levels of career enjoyment.

Narrative Results

As a result of evaluation and emotion coding, narrative responses generated three key themes. First, workaholism was a result of personal characteristics, or an advisors' individual traits and career position. Second, workaholism stemmed from the athletics environment, or the surrounding conditions in which the advisor worked. Third, workaholism was a result of the athletics culture, or the attitudes, beliefs, and values that permeated their work ecosystem. These themes are discussed in response to the two research questions.

RQ 1: What factors contribute to feelings of workaholism amongst athletic academic advisors at institutions in the ACC?

Personal characteristics. Of the participants who expanded on other areas—outside of those mentioned above in the descriptive results section—many noted that personal characteristics contributed greatly to their workaholism. These characteristics fell into two main categories: one's background and one's position in their career. Thirty-two percent of advisors explicitly stated that workaholism was related to their individual background with 24% adding more specifically that they wanted to “people please” staff in their department. For example, one advisor reflected that it was her “own self-need with successfully completing this job and my need to people please” that made her a workaholic. Another added that her “personal upbringing and values contribute to [workaholism].”

More advisors added that it was their internal competitive spirit that made them feel like workaholics. Sixteen percent of advisors reflected that they wanted to match or exceed colleagues' success, another 16% stated they wanted to “be the best,” and 8% stated they were competitive with themselves. In competing with others, one advisor said she has to “keep up with everyone else” in order to “not be seen as the one that is ‘lazy,’” while another was more intrinsically motivated “I am more competitive against myself than comparing with others.”

Finally, 28% perceived that workaholism was a result of where an athletic academic advisor was in their career. For example, participants working in athletic academic advising for six or more years noted that they were more of a workaholic earlier in their careers, with one advisor emphasizing that the “intern role in general breeds workaholism.” Similarly, 20% of the advisors expressed a desire for a promotion and that made them more of a workaholic than when they were more content with their position.

Athletics environment. The athletics environment was another factor contributing to feelings of workaholism. Most notably, 47% of advisors perceived the environment to be competitive which fostered workaholism. One advisor discussed how the competitive nature of some colleagues made others competitive, even if they did not want to be. They stated:

I think certain people's desire to advance in the field can lead to you being pulled along for the ride. Often against your will. If you work with a sport that has someone that works until midnight and starts again at 6am every day then you're going to be working those hours, too.

On the other side of the spectrum, another participant noted that she has to “work harder because my teammates don't work as hard,” which not only added to competition but also resentment.

Other parts of the athletics environment that bolstered workaholism were perceived inefficiency of the athletics department and additional programming (i.e., hosting time management clinics for athletes, monitoring late night study halls, putting on career fairs, etc.) that forced them to work outside of traditional hours. The former factor was expressed by 16% of advisors, while the latter was noted by 26%. In expressing both of these concerns, one advisor stated that “workflow for task completion” was inefficient, particularly concerning “late night”

programs for athletes. She continued, “I prefer to complete a task/project regardless of business hours, instead of leaving a small portion to complete later.”

Athletics culture. Issues related to athletics culture and workaholism centered around two areas: athletics norms and high standards of the athletics department, which is consistent with previous scholarship (Taylor et al., 2018; Weight et al., 2021). Thirty-two percent of advisors reflected on how norms of their athletics department compelled them to be workaholics. Mainly, these norms concerned the need for employees to constantly be working, rather than working efficiently and the need to always be responsive or available. In describing the need to always be working, one advisor expressed concerns that the culture of athletics is to:

Always [be] busy and trying to do more, instead of reflecting on what we are doing well. Work/life balance is not viewed as a priority in order to keep employees healthy and sustain their workload over time (often resulting in yearly turnover).

Similarly, another advisor described her experience of always working and being responsive when asked about factors that contributed to her workaholism: “The immediacy of the questions/issues asked. The ability for [athletes], coaches, staff to text at all hours.” The requirement of athletics personnel to constantly be responsive or available has been shown to be a contributor to burnout and workaholism in previous research in this area (Hardin et al., 2020).

Finally, 28% of participants felt that the high standards of the athletics department and/or the athletic academic advising office influenced workaholism, with a handful of advisors (12%) feeling that these standards were particularly impractical. One participant stated: “The very high standards of the department for having student-athletes make high marks while still wanting the student-athletes to focus more on sports just makes academic achievement sometimes an unrealistic goal for us advisors.” Thus, if athletics departments want to maintain and meet such high standards, an examination of how to better support this group of athlete supporters is necessary.

RQ2: What resources do athletics departments/institutions need to provide to reduce workaholism and better assist athletic academic advisors in the ACC? In the survey, participants were asked: “What resources can the athletics department and/or institution provide to better support academic-athletic support staff? Select all that apply.” They received a list of potential supports, had the availability to write in other support ideas, and had the option for an open-ended response to elaborate if they wanted to. The following list ranks this sample of advisors’ preferred methods of support: improved salary/benefits (68%), more money dedicated to academic support for athletes (41%), more tutors, mentors, and/or learning specialists (38%), improved professional growth opportunities (28%), more physical space for advising (28%), more collaboration across departments/campus (26%), improved technology (26%), more advisors (25%), more collaboration within the academic-athletic advising department (19%), and improved mentorship for advisors (15%). There was less consensus on the supports that advisors wrote in on the survey. These additions included a desire for more mental health days, more realistic expectations, and an updated organizational structure.

The list of options and responses largely indicate that in order to better support advisors, there is a need to address aspects of the athletics environment in which they work. This was also reflected in their open-ended responses. However, there are still important personal and cultural components to consider.

Athletics environment. The athletics environment played a large role in advisors’ potential desire to leave the profession with 72% ($n = 49$) of advisors reflecting they had

considered leaving athletic academic advising. The biggest environmental concern for participants when it came to overcoming workaholism and staying in athletic academic advising was the lack of money and the fact that their salary did not match their time devotion or degree attainment (Rubin, 2017). Encompassing both of these issues, one advisor offered the following: “There does not seem to be a structure for growth or promotion within the department. Base pay for long hours and salary does not meet standards for required education, experience or rising cost of living.” Another participant who had been advising for five years stated: “We just don't get paid enough. Coaches and other admins work long hours and are better compensated. However, we work tirelessly to ensure athletes get an education AND remain eligible and we're just barely scraping by sometimes.”

Interestingly, while advisors noted they wanted higher pay in the open-ended and closed-ended questions on the survey, they only reported needing more money as a department in the closed-ended question. Other common environmental reasons participants considered exiting the profession was working with colleagues, bosses, and/or coaches. One advisor succinctly summarized her feelings and noted struggles with collaboration, which was one of the areas advisors wanted enhanced support: “My colleagues don't have what it takes to be successful in athletics and they are selfish.” Another added that there were not enough advisors to efficiently accomplish tasks and responsibilities which contributed to workaholism and tensions between colleagues and bosses. This was also reflected in the quantitative data as advisors requested more support in the form of not only more advisors, but also more tutors, mentors, and learning specialists.

Still, some advisors ($n = 15$, 22%) noted that they had not thought about leaving the field and wanted to stay in athletic academic support. This subgroup noted that the money was sufficient and that they enjoyed being around athletics and/or their colleagues, boss, and organization. One advisor noted a host of reasons she appreciated her job, hinting at a level of work engagement instead of workaholism for this participant (Schaufeli et al., 2002):

I truly enjoy working with most of the student-athletes and feel that I am making a difference; I enjoy most of my co-workers and have a great deal of respect for my boss; the salary and benefits help my family; and I feel a sense of loyalty to my institution due to being an alum.

While most responses centered around environmental characteristics, some of the responses related to personal characteristics.

Personal characteristics. The major personal characteristics participants mentioned when discussing needing more support to limit workaholism included feeling as if they were not valued, a lack of growth/promotion opportunities, and family reasons. Multiple advisors reflected on the underappreciation they experienced. One advisor noted “this is a thankless job and it can be very frustrating at times.” Other participants had strong opinions reflecting minimal enjoyment from work, a key component to workaholism (Spence & Robbins, 1992). One participant stated: “this is not a pleasant place to be. The job is thankless and pays little and the people are horrible.” Another advisor who left her advising position after receiving the survey noted: “It was obvious my previous job did not understand my value nor pay me my worth. I also did not have a supportive boss.” In discussing the lack of promotion and mentorship available, which was also noted in the closed-ended survey responses, one advisor summarized the issue:

At some point, you hit the ceiling in the profession on some campuses. You can continue to grow by taking on additional projects, but that growth might not show up in your title

or salary. Some institutions have academics under the Provost, while others have it under Athletics. The ambiguity leaves the next logical step for advancement uncertain. It's not always feasible to move across the country for advancement opportunities.

Another participant noted the growing importance of having work-life balance due to family obligations. However, she also reflected that the cultural norm of being consistently available got in the way of her personal desire to prioritize family: "I have a young child and after having the child, I wanted to spend more time at home and to be able to focus on family rather than constantly answering texts, phone calls, and emails from work." Often times, the schedules of athletics personnel, like advisors, are contingent upon the whims of those needing support. For example, an athlete with a project due may text or call their advisor at 10pm before a midnight deadline in order to ask questions or get feedback prior to submission. This tends to result in work-life boundary crossing and longer and non-traditional hours for support staff (Taylor et al., 2021). Thus, advisors' personal time outside of work is diminished. Still, family support was not an option advisors reported when they could write in "other" ways the department/institution could support them.

Still, some advisors offered personal reasons as to why they are likely to stay in the advising space, mainly to help the athletes in their department. One participant stated: "The students are mainly what keep me in it. I love working with them and seeing the impact that I make on them daily—it makes the job worth it." Another reflected: "I was a football coach prior to this job. I did that because I like helping people achieve their goals. I do this for the same reason."

In further elaborating on what keeps them motivated to stay in advising, a few athletic academic advisors expressed they felt supported by their office and/or the athletics department. This support was key in their desire to remain in the field. Although this was not a common finding from this sample, one advisor expressed:

I do feel I'm paid well and even though there are times when it feels like my work life balance is off, there are other times when I'm really free to do whatever I want/need to for my own personal life. For example, I never take time off to go to the dentist, I just go. Or when I have finished things early on a Friday, I leave because I know I've worked enough week hours to cover it. That freedom and flexibility are big for me. Also, my boss and colleagues are great people. I love the diversity within athletics and value that, and I don't think it exists in other places. I also know I'm trusted and respected in my current role and have worked hard for that.

Despite athletics culture options not being represented in the closed-ended support question on the survey, advisors did reflect on the significance of athletics culture in their workaholic experiences.

Athletics culture. In their narratives, athletic academic advisors mainly expressed downsides of the athletics culture that fostered workaholicism and their desires to leave. These issues focused on working hard and long hours despite a growing misalignment of athletics and their own personal values. Much of the concern of value disagreements focused on some of the recent changes in college athletics. One advisor provided a list of conflicting values:

Stress, pressure, NIL, Transfer Portal, getting no recognition when things go right, but all the blame when things go wrong, entitled students/coaches/staffers, higher education in general.

Another expressed similar sentiments on the “general direction of college athletics”:

I don't think where things are going fits my value system or why I got into this in the first place, so I think to keep my values aligned with my day to day work a change might be needed.

However, another participant offered a slightly different angle, noting that “sometimes the values of athletics don't align with mine as some decisions can picture student-athletes as products instead of humans.”

Finally, others expressed issues with the immediacy of the athletics culture and the resulting blurred boundaries between athletics and their home lives. This lack of boundaries is in line with previous scholarship noting that boundary crossing between work and home life is a key component to workaholism in sport spaces (Taylor et al., 2021). This boundary crossing is key to feeling compelled to work, which breeds workaholism (Spence & Robbins, 1992). One advisor reflected that she and her colleagues are “expected to go above and beyond to meet the needs of students and/or coaches, and do not have boundaries that exist in other departments (ex: students call your personal cell phone and send messages after hours).”

The descriptive statistics and narratives of athletic academic advisors in this study demonstrate that workaholism is prevalent amongst this group of athlete supporters. Their experiences with workaholism related to personal characteristics and the environment and culture of athletics warrant further discussion.

Discussion and Implications

This research extends the scholarly use of workaholism as a framework to understand the experiences of college athletics personnel, particularly athletic academic advisors (Hardin et al., 2020; Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). There are a host of implications for practitioners in decreasing advisors' workaholism, improving their career experiences, and therefore, enhancing the academic opportunities and outcomes for the college athletes they support.

Personal Characteristics

Weight and colleagues (2021) noted that, as a field, sport management has expanded its knowledge of workaholism, work engagement, burnout, and work-life conflict; however, “we know much less about the individual characteristics of employees that are related to these work factors” (Weight et al., 2021, p. 365). This study helps fill this scholarly gap and unpacks some of the key personal characteristics contributing to athletics employees' workaholism.

While gender identity was not reported by participants as a factor in their workaholism, the findings of this survey support the idea that athletics employees who are in supporting roles and identify as white women who recently entered the profession, commonly noted experiencing workaholism (Taylor et al., 2019; Weight et al., 2021). Previous scholarship has demonstrated the athletics environment and culture are particularly challenging for women to navigate, which may be the result of hypermasculine spaces, gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, and work-family conflict (Taylor et al., 2019).

Additionally, other personal characteristics—such as individual traits and one's position in their career trajectory—were discussed by one-third of the participants as one of the main reasons they identified as workaholics. While these characteristics are mostly out of the control of

supervisors, athletics departments, and institutions, this is still critical to understand. This finding may be indicative that the athletics environment and culture can attract and appeal to people who already embody workaholism because they understand that the athletics environment and culture is fast-paced and promotes workaholism. Thus, workaholism could be a cyclical factor.

Interestingly, this sample of advisors simultaneously noted moderately high levels of workaholism while expressing high levels of career enjoyment. Such dissonance could be another personal characteristic unique to athletic academic advisors or those working in athletics. For this group, the narratives of passion for working with athletes and in the field fostered enjoyment that, for the time being, over-rode their feelings of burnout that could lead them to exit from the profession.

However, to better prepare employees while fostering healthier work-life balance, athletics departments should consider increased training/education on workaholism and developing healthy employment behaviors (Rubin, 2017; Taylor et al., 2021). Additionally, this training/education on workaholism could be a component to enhanced mentorship that was requested by participants as a resource to decrease workaholism and promote more staff success. Having more open communication about workaholism in the workplace can increase employee awareness of when they are succumbing to the negative ramifications of workaholism and work to make appropriate adjustments (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018; Taylor et al., 2021). This is likely to decrease employee burnout and turnover. In this way, advisors may be able to achieve their professional and promotion goals that this sample stated they struggled to attain due to turnover or having to move athletics departments/institutions. This mentorship and promotion opportunities may also help promote healthy work engagement rather than harmful workaholism (Huml et al., 2021). Still, this education and training regarding workaholism would require a shift toward increased transparency and commitment to employee satisfaction and growth opportunities, which is generally lacking in intercollegiate athletics (Huml et al., 2021; Rubin, 2017; Weight et al., 2021).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the main reason advisors noted that they remained in the profession was to work with the athletes. The bonds between advisors and athletes are commonly noted in the scholarship in this area (Harry, 2021; Rubin, 2017). However, working with athletes was also the second highest factor on the survey that contributed to workaholism. Thus, athletics departments should continue to find ways to foster healthy and strong advisor-athlete relationships, while decreasing workaholism related to this component of advising (Vaughn & Smith, 2018). In a similar vein, only one advisor mentioned that she struggled to work with underprepared athletes and that this situation contributed to workaholism. Given the plethora of literature noting how underprepared college athletes are when they come to college (Smith & Willingham, 2019; Vaughn & Smith, 2018), one might anticipate this discussion of athlete preparedness to be more prevalent. Another interesting finding was the limited discussion about familial concerns for leaving the profession, which is discussed at length in other workaholism scholarship (Taylor et al., 2018). Thus, it could be that this sample was less phased by these concerns. Or, underprepared athletes and family issues are not as big of a concern for athletics personnel, or advisors specifically, as previously thought (Huml et al., 2021; Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012; Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018).

Athletics Environment

Even though descriptive statistics showed competition with advisors in and outside of athletics was a low contributor to workaholism, almost half of the advisors surveyed provided narratives that the competitive environment in either athletics and/or their office fostered

workaholism amongst themselves and others. Thus, athletics departments should work to limit the competition between employees, and rather, focus on fostering camaraderie and teamwork. One way to accomplish this and bolster respect between advisors could be through peer recognition programs (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). Through such programs, advisors pay attention to each other's contributions. Supervisors could also take this into consideration and use peer recognition for their own evaluations or promotions (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). Decreasing competition may also lead to increased collaboration, which is another area of change that advisors said would limit their workaholism and bolster work engagement (Spence & Robbins, 1992).

This competition finding not only supports more recent scholarship highlighting the impact of competition on compelling workaholism amongst employees in order to achieve professional goals (Weight et al., 2021), but also further expands scholarly and practitioner understanding of this force in athletic academic advising specifically. However, departments should consider ways to decrease unhealthy competition. For example, in preparation for their season, athletics teams often do yearly team-building and growth retreats or activities in the off-season in order to build up trust and camaraderie amongst the group. This is often organized or conducted by athlete development personnel, which may include athletic academic advisors. Rather than just managing these for other units across the athletics department, advisors and upper level managers could consider organizing a similar opportunity for advisors to build respect and teamwork and decrease unhealthy competition.

In addition to competition, advisors' narratives included discussions of departmental and/or institutional inefficiency and the need for increased adaptation in how employees work. The inefficiency of the athletics environment coupled with the high demands and standards of the athletics culture, may create burnout (Alarcon, 2011; Taylor et al., 2018). This call for flexibility is likely particularly heightened after the COVID-19 pandemic and advisors' adaptations to working from home (Frawley & Schulenkorf, 2022). A handful of advisors reflected sentiments that the ability to work from home during the pandemic gave them more sense of a work-life balance and less feelings of burnout. However, only one athletic academic advisor stated that their department made adjustments to allow for increased flexibility in letting them work at home occasionally post-COVID. Still, balance of working from home and in the office might be especially challenging for athletics personnel, such as advisors, whose jobs hinge on relationships with athletes and being present (Rubin, 2017). So, athletics departments should consider more ways to provide such flexibility as a means to limit burnout and ultimately workaholism (Taylor et al., 2021). Similarly, while this may be a challenging task, athletic academic advisors must take steps to set firmer boundaries on their time, particularly when they are outside of the office. Such actions should also be encouraged from unit leaders either in a more laid back way through in-person discussions with advisors, or through stronger means, such as unit policies. Importantly, having stronger work-life boundaries allows advisors to be even more "present" while they are at work and supporting athletes (Taylor et al., 2021).

Other areas of the environment, like the creation of additional athlete development programming outside of traditional work hours, may be challenging to change. However, when considering the results of this study, one factor athletics departments and institutions should examine further is increasing the number of advisors and hiring more support staff, which were requested by 25% and 38% of participants, respectively. More personnel is likely to make work more efficient and more manageable for advisors, thus decreasing burnout (Taylor et al., 2018). Hiring more personnel may also assist in addressing work-life boundaries for this group of supporters. Subsequently, this is also likely to positively impact the educational experiences of the athletes they are supporting and developing.

Finally, in both the descriptive and narrative results, athletic academic advisors perceived that being more compensated would help them feel more appreciated by the athletics department and make their time and effort more worthwhile. Participants also indicated that improved salaries and benefits would make them more likely to remain in the profession, resulting in less turnover. Indeed, compensation was the both the biggest environmental issue and most prominent issue in general discussed by participants in this study. This finding supports other scholarship in which athletics personnel desire increased support via financial compensation and benefits (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018; Weight et al., 2021).

However, with the growing commercialization of intercollegiate athletics, it is unlikely that advisors will reap the financial benefits as the money continues to be distributed to football and men's basketball coaches and invested into facilities (Blue, 2019; Clotfelter, 2019). Arguably, if athletics departments/institutions still want to maintain the education-first philosophy of the NCAA and the collegiate model (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016), a reconsideration of where the money goes, such as to those who help athletics reach their educational goals, is warranted. Particularly, a comparison of the salaries afforded to members of coaching staffs—particularly football and men's basketball—to compensation of members of academic services gives insight into where institutions place the most value within the collegiate model (Blue, 2019; Clotfelter, 2019). For example, in 2019, an athletic academic advisor at Clemson University made \$45,000-\$50,000 (Clemson University: All Salaries for Full Time, Regular Employees, 2019). In the same year, the football coach at the institution made over \$9,000,000 (ESPN, 2019).

Still, athletic academic advisors are key players in the lives of athletes and maintaining the collegiate model. However, advisors alone cannot shift this environment or the stronghold of neoliberalism within athletics culture (Southall & Southall, 2018).

Athletics Culture

Athletics norms, such as immediacy, responsiveness, and the need to always be working greatly contributed to this sample of advisors' workaholism, which also aligns with prior burnout and workaholism studies in college sports (Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019). Additionally, the "unrealistic" expectations of athletics, mostly from coaches and bosses, also influenced participants' feelings of workaholism. Making these norms more manageable for advisors may be achievable with hiring more staff to tackle these normative high expectations. This may also decrease individual staff members' stress, likelihood of burnout, and turnover. This in turn, sets boundaries for athletic academic advisors between work and their outside life (Taylor et al., 2021).

Still, it is unlikely that these norms and high expectations—which have been around for decades—will change (Clotfelter, 2019). At the heart of these cultural norms is the neoliberal orientation of intercollegiate sports and the ingrained win-at-all-costs mentality (Southall, 2014; Southall & Southall, 2018). This championship mindset has become synonymous with being the first one to the office and the last one to leave, which only fuels the problem of workaholism in intercollegiate athletics because academic advisors are being influenced to work extended hours while on a salaried pay—meaning they receive no compensation for the extra time spent.

With recent changes, such as athletes' ability to transfer without sitting out a year for academic acclimation, opportunities to profit from name, image, and likeness (NIL) deals unrelated to education, and realignment stretching conferences coast-to-coast for increased money, advisors alluded to the fact that these neoliberal actions did not match their own values. But, just like the norms addressed above, the growth of commercialization and

professionalization of athletics and the athletes themselves are unlikely to dissipate (Clotfelter, 2019; Dellenger, 2022).

One advisor noted that she had “become disillusioned with the student-athlete model for revenue-producing sports.” One reason for this disillusionment could be from athletes’ profitability from NIL. As athletes continue to receive opportunities to make more money, such as through NIL and Alston funds for academic success (Associated Press, 2021), perhaps the advisors also feel like they deserve more compensation, which they are not receiving, per their own narratives. Another reason for this disillusionment for athletic academic advisors could be that the profession has traditionally attracted certain kinds of employees, such as those who value education. Thus, the new shifts to the “collegiate model” or the “student”-first ideals that were important to them—and appeared important to the department—when they entered the athletic academic advising profession are waning (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). In this way, advisors may struggle with their identity as their surroundings continue to diverge from academics and converge toward further commercialization and professionalization. This loss of identity is also a component of workaholism and burnout.

Many advisors get into athletic academic support due to their interests in the education of “student”-athletes (Rubin, 2017). Thus, the neoliberal values that have surfaced—a focus on efficiency and athlete eligibility from NCAA metrics (e.g., APR, PTD, etc.) and a centering of money and winning—do not match their values and may breed workaholism. Indeed, this supports narratives from previous surveys with advisors who argued: “APR... is more important than the actual future success of student-athletes” (Rubin, 2017, p. 42).

Similarly, advisors may organize their workdays around meeting NCAA metrics and high athletics expectations discussed above. A focus on these areas leads to transactional advising, and may result in a failing—or struggling—to actually work with athletes to properly educate and support them (Martin, 2017). This inability to truly educate athletes may lead to advisor dissatisfaction with their career choice and/or result in them working longer and harder hours in order to achieve their original goal of supporting athletes, and burnout.

A mismatch in values of advisors and intercollegiate athletics is a significant finding from this study. Ultimately, employees seek work in areas and cultures that are congruent with their own values (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). Thus, when athletics culture does not align with those values, there is a likelihood for decreased job satisfaction and increased employee turnover (Taylor et al., 2021). This is in line with the participant who noted that because of this new model of college athletics, “a change might be needed.” Such change should be explored in future scholarship about workaholism in sports.

Future Research and Limitations

Future studies should consider the potential for an exploratory factor analysis with the survey instrument involved in this study. This may provide further validation for the use of this instrument for other scholars examining workaholism in sports spaces. Second, future research should expand upon the personal, environmental, and cultural characteristics of athletics that this sample suggested promoted workaholism. Similarly, this study found that competition is not limited to the fields and courts of competition. Thus, examining perceived/actual competition between advisors and/or other athletics staff could provide interesting insights into the personal and environmental areas. Finally, exploring more about the misalignment of cultural values and what this mismatch means for workaholism and turnover is an important next step in expanding the nexus sport-workaholism research.

There are some limitations associated with this study. This was a relatively small sample of advisors from one conference and involved self-reported data. The small sample size may decrease the opportunities for generalizability, while self-reported data may be limiting due to participants' personal biases and potential inability to be introspective about their experiences. Still, this study offers enhanced understanding of workaholism amongst athletic academic advisors that leaders can use to enhance the experiences of this support group. Because these employees are critical to the academic success of ACC athletes, improving their environment and support structures will lead to better advising and support for athletes. This can result in improved retention, matriculation, and other educational outcomes for athletes, the ultimate goal of college athletics.

Conclusion

Other scholarship has noted the prevalence of workaholism amongst college athletics administrators and coaches (Lumpkin & Anshel, 2012; Taylor et al., 2018). This research supports extending the study of workaholism to a key group in intercollegiate sports: athletic academic advisors. The shifting intercollegiate athletics landscape has only exacerbated the historically complicated relationship between education and athletics that this unique group of athletics personnel must maneuver (Dellenger, 2022).

ACC institutions have tasked over 200 advisors to academically develop thousands of athletes across the conference. Given these high demands, this sample of athletic academic advisors noted feelings of workaholism that related to personal, environmental, and cultural characteristics of athletics. Advisors also offered examples of resources their athletics departments and institutions could provide to limit workaholism and improve their careers, particularly regarding their environment. It is critical that athletic department and institutional leaders heed these narratives, particularly concerning the lack of respect and compensation given to this group. Indeed, it is time that ACC institutions, and other NCAA members of Division I, truly work to support these supporters.

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