UNDERSTANDING THE HIGH ATTRITION RATES OF MALE COLLEGIATE BASKETBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

by

Landon Hughey

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied study was to gain a better understanding of the high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes and to recommend practices that institutions can implement to address and solve this increasing problem. The study utilized a multimethod approach and collected data through a series of interviews, a focus group, and a survey. Based on the results of the data, a series of recommendations have been included to address the high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. Most of the recommendations are based on how the recruiting process can be better handled by representatives of the institutions as well as by the potential student-athletes that are being recruited. Additional recommendations are based on Tinto’s theory of departure, which states that a student who is integrated and involved with a community is more likely to be retained.

*Keywords*: attrition, retention, student-athlete, college, athletics, basketball
Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my family, beginning with the generations that came before me – my parents, Bob and Garlanda Hughey, and my grandparents, Harold and Bonnie Hughey, and Garland and Vanda Parker. Each of these role models played a major part in my journey by instilling and modeling the values and principles that have greatly influenced and impacted my life. Mere words cannot express the enormity of my gratitude. They served as my greatest source of constructive criticism and encouragement, and without their guidance along the way, I would not be the man I am today.

This paper is also dedicated to my wife Jennifer, and our two daughters, Remie and Ruthie. Thank you. Thank you for allowing me to pursue this degree, and for inspiring me to achieve great things. I could not accomplish much without your support and encouragement. The words of an old poem often resonate in my mind, and are fitting to include with this dedication:

We build on foundations we did not lay
We warm ourselves by fires we did not light
We sit in the shade of trees we did not plant
We drink from wells we did not dig
We profit from persons we did not know
This is as it should be.
Together we are more than any one person could be.
Together we can build across the generations.
Together we can renew our hope and faith in the life that is yet to unfold.
Together we can heed the call to a ministry of care and justice.
We are ever bound in community.

May it always be so. (White, 2019).
Acknowledgments

A sincere acknowledgment of gratitude and appreciation goes to my chair, Dr. Amy Jones, and my committee member, Dr. Roger Stiles. Your guidance and advice along the way proved to be treasured and irreplaceable. This last year has been hectic and tedious with the pandemic, but you continued to make yourself available to offer support and mentor me through this entire process. The wisdom, expertise, and guidance you offered assisted me greatly in being able to complete this finished product. Thank you for helping to keep me grounded when the conclusion of this journey seemed unobtainable, and for keeping my viewpoint broad enough to understand how everything fits together.

An additional thank you goes out to all of the former student-athletes and coaches that participated in this study. You took time out of your demanding schedules to assist in surveys and interviews. I am hopeful that this research can assist in initiating a change in the future culture of college athletics for a healthier, more holistic environment for the students.
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Academic Progress Rate (APR)

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)

National Basketball Association (NBA)

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

National Football League (NFL)

National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to solve the complex and concerning issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. The interest in this topic is that the attrition rates among the specific population of male collegiate basketball student-athletes is high when compared to traditional students, as well as when compared to their athletic peers from other sports (Eckard, 2010; NCAA, 2019; Steinbach, 2011; Turner et al., 2015). Attrition among collegiate student-athletes can take on many forms, such as being cut or dismissed by the coaching staff, dropping out of school, opting to transfer to another institution, or the rare instance where a student foregoes the remainder of their college career due to the immediate opportunity to play the sport professionally. While each student likely has unique reasoning in his departure, this study aimed at understanding the general mindset of male collegiate basketball student-athletes and determined overarching themes that lead to attrition among this population so that this concerning phenomenon of high attrition could be better understood and resolved.

Unfortunately, the decision to voluntarily transfer to a different institution is exceedingly rampant among the sub-group of collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes, and continues to trend in a worrisome direction (Associated Press, 2017; Hopkins, 2014; NCAA, 2019). This alarming phenomenon has been referred to as a ‘transfer epidemic’ on multiple occasions in recent years in response to the continued exponential increase in the number of transfers among the sport (Associated Press, 2016; Cleveland, 2017; Williams, 2019). One reason for the recent uptick in transfer rates is the NCAA’s constantly evolving policies. The NCAA serves as the largest governing body of intercollegiate athletics in the United States, and as a result, the organization’s actions have had much influence over collegiate sports. On multiple occasions,
changes made to the NCAA’s prior restrictive policies have resulted in making the decision to transfer more easily accessible to student-athletes, which has served as a catalyst in increasingly high attrition rates among student-athletes, particularly those who participate in the high-profile sports of football and men’s basketball (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; Johnson, 2019; Tapp, 2019). Because of its position of esteemed influence and power, the decisions made for NCAA Division I often impact the other divisions and affiliations with official policy changes or social implications.

Several other unique factors have also contributed to the phenomenon of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. These other factors include how the increase in technology and social media have changed the recruiting process as well as assisted in creating a generation that expects instant gratification and satisfaction (Roberts, 2014; Yiran et al., 2020). This craving for instant gratification influences the high attrition rate in men’s basketball because when these athletes encounter adversity at their initial college or university, instead of trying to work through the obstacles, the current generation’s student-athletes are more likely to transfer to a new institution as a solution (Favor, 2017; Woods, 2017). Other impacting factors include how the recruiting process has evolved and become a more-public courtship between the coaching staff and the recruit, and how recruits are recruited earlier and earlier in their high school careers, which often adds pressure and compels young recruits to make more uninformed decisions (Jackson, 2019).

The unintended consequences of high attrition rates in collegiate athletics can be harmful on multiple fronts. First, the decision to depart an institution can negatively affect the student-athlete. On average, a student who transfers before graduating will lose 43% of their already completed credits (Lederman, 2017). Additionally, the decision to transfer has a financial burden
as well, where the cost to transfer adds approximately $36,000 to the average tuition bill so students can take classes that meet the new institution’s criteria. While many student-athletes receive scholarships that cover the considerable financial cost associated with transferring, the decision to transfer still usually moves the student further away from the academic goal of graduation. Generally, student mobility from one institution to another has negative consequences for the student (Bidwell, 2014; The Hechinger Report, 2016; Rumberger, 2016). A high attrition rate may not only detrimentally affect the individual departing, but can also have negative consequences for the athletic team from which the student-athlete is departing (Barreira et al., 2019; Fanney, 2009; Kahane & Shmanske, 1997; Siler, 2019). While some personnel turnover is to be expected and is even considered part of the normal ebb and flow of any organization, teams that have more stable rosters, especially among individuals that are major contributors, are more likely to experience on-court success in the future. Experience and retention among a team can be an accurate predictor of future wins. When a student-athlete opts to transfer, it immediately detracts from the program they are departing from, most notably by leaving a void in the lineup (Greene, 2018). Beyond taking away from potential future on-the-court success, a high amount of roster turnover has also been demonstrated to decrease ticket sales as well as fan interest and devotion (Kahane & Shmanske, 1997; Morse et al., 2008). Overall, there is an apparent theme of stability that exists between organizations and enduring success. A higher attrition rate of student-athletes lessens the perceived level of stability, hurting the overall well-being of the athletic program (Greene, 2018; Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013).

Because this topic was narrowly focused, there had not been much previous scientific research that pertains to the issue of attrition specifically among the unique population of male collegiate basketball student-athletes; however, several in the industry of college athletics had
already taken public notice of this concerning trend of high attrition among the sport (Associated Press, 2017; Barnett, 2019; Boettger, n.d.; Cleveland, 2017; Levitt, 2019; Norlander, 2015; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). This study is recommended primarily for athletic administrators and coaches, specifically those who work with men’s basketball at the collegiate level, but this research may also be beneficial for admissions departments at institutions of higher learning that might be struggling with retention strategies. Furthermore, this study may also be valuable to potential student-athletes who are interested in recognizing what factors lead to higher rates of student-athlete retention among the sport. The first chapter of this dissertation discusses the background of the issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes and provides in-depth insight. After examining the problem, the purpose statement will identify the goals of this research. Lastly, the significance of this study will be presented, followed by a brief introduction to the research methods.

**Background**

Male collegiate basketball student-athletes are transferring at higher rates when compared to other students. This notable trend of higher attrition rates among men’s basketball participants holds true when compared to traditional students, as well as student-athletes affiliated with other sports. While the observation of this phenomenon is relatively new, the concern about the trajectory regarding the high attrition rates among the sport has already begun to garner much attention on a large scale (Dambra, 2019; Johnson et al., 2018; Levitt, 2019; Morse et al., 2008). Like most complex issues, in order to gain an accurate understanding of the topic, it is necessary to examine the intricate background of men’s collegiate basketball, as well as the history of the issue of attrition among the sport. This section will explore the historical background, the social background, and the theoretical background of the topic.
Historical Background

Institutions of higher education and the athletic programs that they sponsor have a unique symbiotic relationship. This partnership between colleges and athletics is predominately unique to institutions of higher learning located in the United States of America; whereas, the rest of the world tends to operate their institutions of higher learning and athletics independently and unaffiliated with one another (State University, 2020). Due to collegiate-sponsored athletics existing predominately in the United States, and being a fairly modern development over the last 150 years, there are very few enduring examples of how to properly integrate and consistently incorporate athletics into the college or university identity. The first intercollegiate athletic competition in the United States occurred in 1852 when Harvard and Yale competed against one another in crew regatta (Smith, 1988; State University, 2020). A few years after the initial regatta meeting, colleges introduced baseball and then football to their campuses. Initially, there was much resistance by campus administrators on how much support, if any, they should pledge towards institution-promoted athletics, as the primary belief at that time was that the chief obligation of colleges and universities was to provide an education, and that activities such as athletics might detract from that goal. However, business proprietors, specifically those involved with the railroad, helped to sponsor the initial regatta teams at Harvard and Yale with the vested interest that if the college athletics industry expanded, there could be an immediate uptick in business using the college athletics industry as a potential permanent clientele base (Smith, 1988). The result of this partnership would eventually evolve into the advent of the college athletics industry.

As college athletics multiplied, football immediately became the popular sport on many campuses; however, the rough nature of the sport led to much resistance from university
administrators, faculty, and staff (Smith, 1988). In the late 1800s, a student journalist at Rutgers described football as “bleeding hands, scarred limbs, and clogged breath” (Smith, 1988, p. 69). Broken bones and even death were not unheard of in the early days of collegiate football (Weathersby, 2016). Although the sport of football proved to be dangerous in nature, college and university administrators faced a conundrum based on how popular the game had quickly become on campus. College athletics, and specifically college football, were very close to being abolished if not for the creation of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, which took action in prioritizing student-athlete safety and well-being. With the creation of the NCAA and the safety measures and stability that coincided, collegiate athletics were invited to establish a more permanent position on the campuses of colleges and universities.

Over the last century, the collegiate athletics industry has experienced a dynamic transition, evolving from highly unstructured chaos and disorder to the popular, well-organized business it is recognized as today. Presently, the NCAA offers three unique levels of competition—Division I, Division II, and Division III. The three different divisions within the NCAA serve to keep competition more balanced by reflecting the commitment and resources that each specific college or university might be willing to invest in their athletic programs. Additionally, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) was established in the 1940s as a similar, yet alternative affiliation to the NCAA. At its creation, the NAIA, known at the time as the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball, rivaled the prestigious NCAA basketball tournament, and although the NAIA membership has gradually transitioned to serving smaller colleges and institutions, even today the NAIA remains one of the most distinguished and longest-running athletic affiliations in the country (NAIA, n.d.). Furthermore, the National
Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) similarly oversees the affairs of collegiate athletics affiliated with junior colleges and community colleges across almost the entirety of the country. The organizations of the NCAA, NAIA, and NJCAA still foundationally prioritize student-athlete safety and well-being, but have grown to emphasize fairness in competition and recruiting as well. With the development of organized collegiate athletics being relatively contemporary, the issues and concerns have often been addressed reactively and only as deemed necessary.

With regard to the uptick of transfer rates for men’s basketball student-athletes, there is no firm historical timeline. While the decision to transfer was not unheard of among men’s basketball student-athletes decades ago, most affiliated with the industry of collegiate athletics acknowledged an increased trend in transfer rates in men’s basketball beginning around 2005 (Hamilton, 2005; Woods, 2017). Serving as a catalyst to high attrition rates was the NCAA’s introduction of the ‘graduate transfer exemption,’ which went into effect in 2006. The graduate transfer exemption allowed student-athletes who still had a year of eligibility to compete and who had completed their undergraduate degree the opportunity to transfer for their final season with immediate eligibility, as opposed to having to sit out the traditional year to obtain residency. Although many of these policy changes only directly affect NCAA Division I, because of its position of influence and power, the decisions made for NCAA Division I often impact the other divisions and affiliations with official policy changes of their own as well as social implications and expectations. While the attrition rate among the sport of men’s basketball has continued to gradually increase over the last 15 years, the issue was again recently augmented by the creation of the NCAA’s transfer portal (Greene, 2018).
The transfer portal was introduced for NCAA Division I sports in the fall of 2018 “as a compliance tool to systematically manage the transfer process from start to finish, add more transparency to the process among schools and empower student-athletes to make known their desire to consider other programs” (Johnson, 2019, para. 4). The transfer portal has helped to effectively streamline the decision to relocate at a new institution by having all necessary documents at one centralized location. While the notion of the transfer portal was introduced with the fundamental intention of assisting student-athletes with the complicated transfer procedure, an unintended consequence of the transfer portal is the highly publicized and glamorization of a student-athlete’s decision to transfer (Harty, 2020; Tapp, 2019). The introduction of the transfer portal has simplified the process not only for student-athletes but for coaches as well, with one coach referring to the system as “an eBay for coaches”, where within a few clicks they could identify and connect with experienced student-athletes departing from other institutions (Romine, 2020). This tool has inadvertently changed the landscape of transfers within collegiate sports dramatically.

Social Background

The primary emphasis of colleges and universities is their role as academic establishments (Smith, 1988). Their main purpose is to teach and inspire the leaders of tomorrow, most of which occurs in a formal scholastic classroom setting. Assembling and organizing athletic teams is not a fundamental obligation for colleges or universities; however, there are many advantages to institutions that sponsor athletic programs. The benefits of athletics are widespread, such as being a focal point of university branding and marketing (Emma, 2017). Athletic success has the unique ability to quickly bolster school pride and even drastically increase enrollment numbers. This trend, known among the industry as the “Flutie Effect,”
describes the phenomenon of increased popularity and substantial enrollment growth of a college or university due to an athletic program’s recent success (Chung, 2013; Eggers et al., 2019; Litan et al., 2003; Potter, 2008). This effect is especially effective when success is experienced at major universities in the high-profile sports of football or men’s basketball, which often sit at the forefront of popularity among college campuses.

Collegiate athletics can help to create a vested interest among alumni and the community, as well as a sense of pride (Emma, 2017). There is even a social aspect involved, where fans attend games in large part for the sense of camaraderie with the team and other passionate fans (Kahane & Shmanske, 1997; Tamari, 2017). Athletic competitions can also be used as a learning environment to teach lessons and life skills to not only participants, but also spectators. Athletics has the ability to help contribute to a greater awareness of cultural sensitivity and acceptance of different races and ethnic backgrounds (Comeaux et al., 2014). With colleges and universities having so much to gain from the success of their athletic programs, one can see why institutions of higher learning continue to invest in athletics. As integral as collegiate athletics are to their individual college campuses, there is a concerning trend regarding the high attrition rates among student-athletes, especially those who participate in men’s basketball. Student-athletes who participate in men’s basketball have higher attrition rates than their peers (Eckard, 2010; NCAA, 2019; Steinbach, 2011; Turner et al., 2015).

Although student-athletes are technically graduating at a higher overall rate than their non-athlete peers, most studies are skewed to show a more favorable approach towards the student-athletes by comparing them to the entire student body, including part-time students, instead of only comparing them to similar full-time students (NCAA, 2018; 2019; Steinbach, 2011). Additionally, athletes generally have greater access to academic resources on campus,
including tutors, learning specialists, and multimillion-dollar academic centers and computer labs—all of which are intended to keep players academically eligible and on track to graduate (Marot, 2014). Lastly, many critics believe that student-athletes are being steered towards the degrees that offer the path of “least resistance,” with their sole focus in higher education being athletics instead of academic progression (Marot, 2014; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). With the stakes of successful athletic programs being so high, it is easy to understand why this “win-at-all-cost” mindset prevails at many colleges and universities. Additionally, this focus on athletic success has unintentionally promoted an environment where coaches are interested in recruiting transfer students that can have a greater immediate impact on the success of the program, regardless of if they only have one remaining year of eligibility or even questionable character traits. The intrinsic social impact of the collegiate athletics industry can be highly beneficial—to the students, to the institution, and to the community—yet due to the high-stake rewards involved, it is not uncommon to see institutions of higher education compromise their vision for academics in order to create an environment that is more conducive to athletic success.

**Theoretical Background**

Many ideas exist about what has led to the creation of an environment that encourages student-athletes to transfer, and specifically those that transfer within the sport of men’s basketball. Tinto’s theory of departure is relevant to this study because Tinto believes that a lack of integration and involvement with a community can doom a student’s retention from the start (Tinto, 1987; 1993; 2006). While student-athletes may face unique challenges, one of the biggest apparent issues is that male collegiate basketball student-athletes fail to become deeply involved with their collegiate institution beyond the individuals in their locker room. This failure to connect with other areas of campus can lead to the student-athlete longing for more authentic
relationships outside of their sport. In some situations, student-athletes might experience feelings of neglect and unimportance, especially when they are underperforming athletically but have spent a considerable number of years investing primarily in their athletic identity (Smart & Paulsen, 2011).

The unique circumstances student-athletes face can create a perfect storm ripe for higher attrition rates. The combination of unique circumstances for student-athletes begins with the simple challenge of balancing academic workloads with athletic endeavors, which might include upwards of 40 hours a week spent on athletic activities (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011). Participating in athletics at the college level requires a strenuous commitment of time and effort. The student-athlete must be able to properly manage and balance their time among practice, weight and conditioning sessions, and traveling for road games, along with their overarching academic coursework as well. Due to the physical demands and busy daily schedules affiliated with athletics, it is not uncommon for fatigue to set in as an additional stressor. Based on the highly competitive nature of athletics, as well as the commitment to the team, if a conflict exists between the demands of academics and athletics, student-athletes often make athletic commitments the priority (Simons et al., 1999).

While all student-athletes are challenged to successfully balance their academic studies with their athletic endeavors, there is a notable difference in the struggles and challenges faced by those who participate in the high-profile revenue sports of football and men’s basketball. The challenge is that revenue sports are more popular and more visible, and therefore, the successes or failures that these teams experience carry more weight, albeit wrongfully skewed, in how the university is unofficially marketed and branded. As a result, there is an increased emphasis placed on winning within the revenue sports, especially at the NCAA Division I level. One
outcome of this unrelenting, high-stakes nature of the revenue sports is that football and men’s basketball programs bring in student-athletes based primarily on their athletic ability, with little regard to whether the student-athlete is adequately prepared to begin an academic career at the institution (Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). Consequently, student-athletes that participate in the revenue sports of football and men’s basketball consistently underperform academically when compared against their athletic peers that participate in other sports (Simons et al., 1999). Again, this is likely due to the fact that student-athletes that participate in the high-profile revenue sports of football and men’s basketball are recruited predominately based on their athletic skill set and potential with minimal regard given to their academic preparedness (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; Weiss & Robinson, 2013).

The next ingredient in the perfect storm that leads to high attrition among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes is a lack of identity beyond athletics (Beamon, 2012; Chen et al., 2010; Nash, 2017). Student-athletes—especially those who participate in high-profile sports—often face identity crises. These identity crises begin early in the recruiting process, where most elite athletes are recruited by university representatives based on their athletic ability, not their academic ability, and therefore make their university decision solely based on athletic opportunities (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). A consequence of having an identity solely based on athletics is that when an individual’s athletic endeavors are less than expected, the individual often fails to remain content and satisfied attending their current institution which they chose specifically for athletic reasons. In fact, one study has shown that nearly 90% of all men’s basketball transfers depart their initial institution strictly for reasons pertaining to their sport (NCAA Research, 2017). Alternatively, if their athletics journey is
successful, their identity in athletics is reaffirmed through their college experiences, and dreams of professional sports often enter their mindsets. In a study that surveyed student-athletes at 611 institutions of higher learning, 76% of men’s basketball student-athletes believed that they were “somewhat likely” to become a professional and/or an Olympic athlete in their sport (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011). Obviously, this number is astronomically high and unrealistic, yet demonstrates the mindset and priority that the importance of athletics has on collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes. Unfortunately, the current policies in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Football League (NFL), which are the primary professional leagues in the revenue sports of men’s basketball and football, do not allow athletes to join their professional leagues straight out of high school. As a result, even the few athletes that are actually capable of competing in the NBA immediately after high school go to college for at least a year before they are old enough to join the professional level. These athletes have earned the moniker “one-and-done” due to their single year spent at the college level before turning professional. Over the last five years there have been on average less than 15 one-and-done college basketball players per year that are successfully able to join the NBA after a single season at the college level, which demonstrates just how improbable this feat is (Stark-Mason, 2019). Fittingly, there are many concerns about the effects of the one-and-done policy. While this policy only directly affects a small group of athletes, it indirectly affects many more. When an NBA-caliber player chooses to attend college for a year because they are ineligible to immediately join the professional ranks of the NBA, in all likelihood, this individual athlete is not seriously concerned with academics. This high-caliber player ends up taking a coveted roster spot and scholarship opportunity away from someone who might be planning on attending the college or university for four years and obtaining their degree.
The number of elite players who remain in college through graduation and then enter the draft ticks lower each year. In 2018, only 11 seniors were drafted, down from 19 a decade earlier. The trend is clear: Of the 1.2 percent of men’s basketball student-athletes who are drafted by the NBA, more are taking the leap as early as possible. (Stark-Mason, 2019, p. 5)

Although the opportunity to play professional basketball will only realistically present itself to a small percentage of student-athletes, those who are able to do so have such influence that many other men’s basketball student-athletes will try to follow their lead and focus solely on prioritizing their athletic experience, often unsuccessfully. One of the consequences of this unlikely dream of playing professionally is that many collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes irrationally believe that they will soon be well-paid professionals in their sport, therefore their academic journey is irrelevant (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Farmer, 2019; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007).

The final ingredient in the perfect storm that has created an environment conducive to high attrition rates among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes is technology. The advancement of technology has already played a significant role in the recruitment and retention (as well as the attrition rates) of the student population at institutions of higher learning, including men’s basketball student-athletes (Bigsby et al., 2019; Favor, 2017; Jackson, 2019; Turner, 2020). Technology, and specifically social media, can be beneficial, especially with regards to “promoting feelings of belongingness, maintaining relationships, and providing social support” (Vogel et al., 2015, p. 255). Furthermore, social media has become a standard tool in the student-athlete recruiting process (O’Flannigan, 2017). However, social media can prove to be negative as well, as the constant comparison and awareness of others can “lead to negative
psychological outcomes such as depression, low self-esteem, and poor self-evaluations” (Vogel et al., 2015, p. 255; see also Konnikova, 2013). In the highly competitive minds of student-athletes, seeing peers having a better experience at another college or university can likely be more detrimental than to the average student. Additionally, in the pre-digital age it was not uncommon to have to patiently wait for gratification, but with technology easily accessible the human race has become greedy, craving instant satisfaction. This search for instant satisfaction has become entrenched and deeply rooted in the mindset of Generation Z, which suggests that when adversity becomes challenging, Generation Z is more likely to search for an easier alternative that often appears in the form of a fresh start at a different institution; whereas, previous generations would sacrifice and overcome obstacles with a sense of loyalty until they achieved and manufactured the results they wanted (Roberts, 2014). In addition, with a multitude of social media platforms made available to everyone it is easier to become aware of players transferring and available to recruit (Jackson, 2019). Holtmann, head men’s basketball coach at Ohio State University, attributed social media as the main catalyst in the transfer epidemic among men’s basketball, saying, “Ten, 12 years ago, not every transfer was being mentioned on social media. It just didn’t happen. It kind of went, to some degree, unnoticed” (Woods, 2017). While social media certainly creates a culture of constant comparison and unhappiness, technology has also assisted in directly altering the landscape of college basketball (Norlander, 2015). With the creation of the NCAA’s transfer portal in 2018, the decision for student-athletes to transfer from one institution to another has never been easier (Greene, 2018; Johnson, 2019). While the transfer portal ultimately helps serve the student-athlete, it also implicitly further promotes a transfer culture. From a recruiting standpoint, many college coaches now regularly wait to recruit experienced student-athletes who have announced their decision to transfer from
another institution, largely because these veteran athletes are often better basketball players and are able to immediately make the program better than an incoming freshman who might take years to develop.

The recruiting process has evolved since the early 2000s, and some have theorized that this has led to more discontent relationships between student-athletes and athletic programs (Favor, 2017). A primary factor in this evolution is that coaches are becoming more apt to recruit experienced players transferring from another institution, which subtly endorses a transfer culture among the sport (Norlander, 2015; Woods, 2017). Another factor is that during this timeframe recruiting services began to rank potential student-athletes based on athletic ability, which has increased an overall competition to sign specific top prospects while diminishing a coach’s own perspective and perceived value of a player’s ability. Over the last two decades, coaches have also started recruiting potential student-athletes earlier in their high school careers, which has sped up the time frame for recruits to make a college decision (Infante, 2014). A recent study regarding the recruiting process for student-athletes shows that over one-third of men’s basketball recruits were initially contacted by college coaches when they were in 9th grade or earlier (Jackson, 2019). A result of this recruiting process beginning earlier and earlier in the student-athlete’s life is that potential recruits feel compelled to commit prematurely, which might prevent them from thoroughly examining the institution or understanding what they should be looking for in a college or university. Additionally, this premature recruiting process only adds to the student-athlete’s identity becoming dependent upon their participation in athletics. An early commitment between young recruits and college basketball programs can be like a doomed arranged marriage—as they grow and develop their needs and desires may change and they are no-longer a good fit for one another.
As the competitiveness of collegiate athletics continues to grow, and the impact of successful athletic programs continues to show major benefits to the college or university, there is more pressure to win and to do so immediately (Favor, 2017; see also Chung, 2013; Emma, 2017). Again, this emphasis on winning is especially true in the high-profile sports of football and men’s basketball, particularly at the NCAA Division 1 level. This pressure to win and to do so immediately also hints to coaches that they should actively recruit the best available basketball players, who are often older and more experienced transfers from other institutions, which again contributes to the culture of instant gratification (Sperber, 2000).

By applying Tinto’s theory and finding ways to get students more involved and connected to their campus and community, institutions can help student-athletes feel more integrated and comfortable, which has the potential to curb the current rise in transfer numbers among all students, including men’s basketball student-athletes (Tinto, 1993; 2006). While student-athletes will likely continue to make their college decision based mainly on athletic opportunities, it is important that they feel welcome and socially integrated across their campus and throughout the community (Beamon, 2012). Additionally, by becoming more socially and academically connected to the institution and community, students will develop a more well-rounded self-identity that extends beyond simply being labeled as a basketball player (Savage et al., 2019).

**Problem Statement**

The problem is that there is an abnormally high attrition rate among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes across the country, but by thoroughly examining an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States, this study gained a better understanding of the issue and formulated a solution to address the problem. The
prevalence of the number of transfer students in collegiate athletics has trended upward at an increasing rate in recent years, and this is especially true for participants of men’s basketball (Barnhill et al., 2013; Gerace, 2019; Keshtidar & Behzadnia, 2017). What makes the attrition rate alarming among the sub-group of collegiate male basketball student-athletes is that their transfer rates are high when compared to traditional non-athlete students, as well as when compared to their athletic peers from other sports (Eckard, 2010; NCAA, 2019; Steinbach, 2011; Turner et al., 2015). While transferring from one institution to another might sometimes be necessary, generally speaking, the decision to transfer almost always has negative consequences for the student (Lederman, 2017; Rumberger, 2016). These negative consequences include losing a high percentage of already completed credits, the financial burden of having to retake already completed courses, and the overall fact that the decision to transfer almost always pushes a student further away from graduation. Unfortunately, this concern has only rarely been examined and addressed through the lens of empirical research. While there is a public concern about the high transfer rates of collegiate male basketball student-athletes, most of this worry is expressed through newspaper articles and athletic industry related works; but although these sources lack the formality of empirical research, they still contain factual information about the concerning trend (Associated Press, 2017; Barnett, 2019; Boettger, n.d.; Cleveland, 2017; Levitt, 2019; Martin, 2019; Norlander, 2015). Furthermore, while there has been a significant amount of research done on the topic of student retention and attrition, studies indicate that retention models designed to study the overall general student population are largely ineffective for gaining insight into a unique sub-population, leaving institutions largely guessing into how to solve the high attrition rate among their male collegiate basketball student-athletes (Tinto, 1993; 2006).
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this applied study was to examine the problem of high attrition rates among collegiate male basketball student-athletes for institutions of higher learning and their athletic departments to gain a better understanding of the issue and to formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design was used that consisted of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach was structured individual interviews with former collegiate men’s basketball student athletes. The second approach was a focus group with basketball coaches and athletic administrators. The third data collection method was a digital quantitative survey of former men’s basketball student-athletes who represented the same institution.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study begins with the practical contribution of how a university in the southwestern United States can better retain their male basketball student-athletes. Additionally, this study may also be valuable by filling a void in the empirical research regarding the retention of the population of this particular subgroup. Based on the current trend, this epidemic transfer rate among male collegiate basketball student-athletes is expected to continue to grow if changes are not made (Eckard, 2010; NCAA, 2019; Turner et al., 2015). While each institution, along with their athletic departments, should be diligently working to find ways to enhance the retention among this specific sub-population, additionally student-athletes can benefit from this study by gaining insight into what they should be looking for as they choose an institution of higher learner so that they find a more holistic college fit that extends beyond athletics. Overall, students are more likely to be retained by an institution if they become more involved and connected on campus and in the community (Tinto, 2006). However, upwards of
80% of men’s basketball student-athletes base their college decision on athletic opportunities, with more than half admitting that they would not attend the same institution if a different coach was leading the basketball program, which demonstrates limitations on their willingness to consider factors outside of basketball in making a college decision (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011). Furthermore, every time a student transfers, they lose some of their college credits, and often move considerably further away from graduation (Bidwell, 2014; Lederman, 2017; Rumberger, 2016; The Hechinger Report, 2016). This research is even more significant for coaches, athletic administrators, and admission departments who may regularly face the challenge of retaining collegiate male basketball student-athletes.

**Research Questions**

In order to address the purpose of this study, the following research questions were presented:

**Central Question:** How can the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes be solved at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?

**Sub-question 1:** How would former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes in an interview solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?

**Sub-question 2:** How would collegiate men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators in a focus group solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?
**Sub-question 3:** How would former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes in a quantitative survey solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?

**Definitions**

1. **2-4 transfer** – A student who transfers from a two-year institution to a four-year institution (NCAA, 2019). For this research it is important to differentiate between a 2-4 transfer and a 4-4 transfer. Although both circumstances are labeled as transfer students in academic literature, a student who has completed their associate’s degree at a two-year institution and then transfers into a four-year institution represents a natural and necessary linear academic progression and should be encouraged from an educational standpoint (Lederman, 2017; Shaw & Chin-Newman, 2017; Taylor & Jain, 2017).

2. **4-4 transfer** – A student who transfers from one four-year institution to another four-year institution (NCAA, 2019). Unlike the previous 2-4 transfer situation, a 4-4 transfer often hinders the student’s academic progression as they are more likely to lose a large portion of their already completed credits, and as a result move considerably further away from completing the requirements necessary to achieve graduation (Bidwell, 2014; Lederman, 2017; Rumberger, 2016; The Hechinger Report, 2016).

3. **Attrition** – This phrase refers to students who prematurely discontinue at an institution before completing a degree. Tinto, whose research on student retention is highly regarded, prefers the phrase attrition to the moniker “dropout”, which often implies a negative connotation (Tinto, 1987).
4. *Flutie effect* – The Flutie effect describes the phenomenon of increased popularity and enrollment at a college or university based on an athletic program’s recent success (Chung, 2013). The phenomenon was first recognized in 1984 after the remarkable ending to a college football game. Boston College’s quarterback, Doug Flutie, threw an extraordinary pass from near mid-field that was caught in the endzone as time expired to help Boston College defeat the defending national champions. Based on the excitement and media attention, Boston College experienced an immediate increase in applications of approximately 30% (Chung, 2013). Since the 1984 football game at Boston College, this phenomenon has been well-documented at other institutions following similar notable athletic success. This trend is especially prevalent following achievements in the high-profile sports of men’s basketball and football (Chung, 2013).

5. *Graduate transfer* – The NCAA introduced the ‘graduate transfer exemption’ in 2006, which allowed student-athletes who had completed their undergraduate degrees, but still had a year of eligibility to compete, the opportunity to transfer to another institution for their final season with immediate eligibility, as opposed to having to sit out the traditional year to obtain residency (Greene, 2018). The implementation of the graduate transfer exemption served as a catalyst to the current high attrition numbers in collegiate men’s basketball (Hamilton, 2005; Woods, 2017).

6. *NAIA* – The NAIA is a governing body of athletic programs generally serving smaller four-year colleges and universities that are dedicated to character-driven intercollegiate athletics (NAIA, 2016). From a competition standpoint, the NAIA is generally comparable to NCAA Division II or NCAA Division III (Sports Recruiting USA, n.d.). NAIA institutions offer quality athletic programs yet do so with a 70% less financial
investment in athletics than NCAA schools (NAIA, 2016, 2020). The NAIA does offer athletic scholarships to student-athletes. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) was established in the 1940s as a similar yet alternative affiliation to the NCAA. At its creation, the NAIA, known at that time as the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball, rivaled the prestigious NCAA basketball tournament, and although the NAIA membership has gradually transitioned to smaller colleges and institutions, even today the NAIA remains as one of the most distinguished and longest-running athletic affiliations in the country (NAIA, n.d.).

7. **NCAA Division I** – NCAA Division I is widely accepted as being the highest level of collegiate athletics. Generally speaking, Division I schools have the largest student body populations and also benefit from having the largest athletic resources and budgets. NCAA Division I institutions also offer the most generous number of athletic scholarships (Burrell, 2017; NCAA, 2019). Due to the notoriety of Division I athletics, its student-athletes also face higher expectations and a more strenuous workload than those of lower divisions (Leonard, 1986). Additionally, because of the higher-profile status of NCAA Division I, of the finite amount of research pertaining to student-athletes, most studies specifically examine NCAA Division I participants.

8. **NCAA Division II** – Among the three NCAA divisions, Division II schools often represent institutions with intermediary-sized student populations. Most NCAA Division II schools are regional universities (Burrell, 2017). Division II colleges generally restrain from investing as much financially in athletics as Division I institutions, which hinders their ability to consistently compete with the larger Division I schools (NCAA, 2019).
While NCAA Division II offers athletic scholarships, they do not offer the same number of athletic scholarships as NCAA Division I (Burrell, 2017; NCAA, 2019).

9. **NCAA Division III** – Among the three NCAA divisions, Division III caters to the largest number of NCAA schools and student-athletes. Generally, NCAA Division III institutions are made up of smaller student bodies. What makes Division III unique is that there are no athletic scholarships given to student-athletes, which helps these institutions maintain a healthier balance between their commitment to academics and athletics (NCAA, 2019). A common perception is that Division III schools focus primarily on the academic achievements of their student-athletes, with athletic success playing a secondary role (Burrell, 2017; NCAA, 2019).

10. **NJCAA** – The NJCAA serves as the primary governing body for junior college athletics (NJCAA, n.d.; 2020). Because NJCAA institutions are all two-year institutions, their athletes will aim to finish their playing career at a four-year institution after their athletic eligibility at the junior college level is exhausted (Sports Recruiting USA, n.d.). A common perception about the NJCAA is that it has lower academic standards than four-year institutions (Sports Recruiting USA, n.d.). Most NJCAA institutions offer athletic scholarships (Sports Recruiting USA, n.d.). The level of competition at NJCAA institutions can greatly vary, from student-athletes who will go on to play at the high NCAA Division I level to other student-athletes who might not get the opportunity to continue their playing career. Participation in NJCAA athletics is a great way for student-athletes who are overlooked, or who have academic concerns, to begin their college career academically and athletically. The NJCAA governs almost the entirety of athletics
among junior colleges and community colleges in the United States, excluding California, which created its own junior college league in the 1950s (NJCAA, 2020).

11. **Redshirt** – The term redshirt is used in the college athletics industry to describe student-athletes who are withheld from competition for a season, but are able to practice with a team and attend classes while not being charged one of their four years of athletic eligibility. This tactic is often used to help student-athletes who might not immediately be ready for athletic competitions to prepare for a year (Reiderer, 1982; SportingCharts, 2015).

12. **Retention** – Many scholars consider a student retained when they continue their education at the same institution following the conclusion of their first year; however, the phrase can also interchangeably be used in reference to persistence to the completion of the degree (Burke, 2019). For the purpose of this study, retention will be used to define a student who persists at a single institution until they complete their degree there.

13. **Revenue sports** – Revenue sports refers to the high-profile sports of football and men’s basketball because these are the sports that have a greater ability to produce a profit for athletic departments and their athletic affiliations (Simons et al., 1999). Because of the popularity of these sports, they are able to generate more interest that correlates to ticket sales, marketing, television and radio contracts, endorsements, licensing and donors, and various other sources of income (Blackstone, 2019). With that being said, it is important to note that not all men’s basketball programs or football programs bring in a net-profit (NCAA, 2020b). One major difference between the sports of men’s basketball and football when compared to other sports is that student-athletes who participate in revenue sports are recruited by the university primarily for athletic reasons, and due to the
popularity of these sports, there tends to be a greater emphasis on being successful and winning games (Simons et al., 1999).

14. **Student-athlete** – A student-athlete is defined as “an enrolled student at a member institution who was solicited or reports for an intercollegiate squad that is under the jurisdiction of the athletics department” (NCAA, 2020c). Not all student-athletes will have the opportunity to participate in competition; however, they are still considered to be student-athlete if they were recruited and are participating in team functions (NCAA, 2020c).

15. **Transfer portal** – The transfer portal was introduced for NCAA Division I sports in the fall of 2018 “as a compliance tool to systematically manage the transfer process from start to finish, add more transparency to the process among schools and empower student-athletes to make known their desire to consider other programs” (Johnson, 2019). While the idea behind the transfer portal was to assist NCAA student-athletes with transferring to a new institution, the implementation of the transfer portal has unintentionally promoted a culture of attrition by making the decision to transfer too easy and efficient. With the application of the transfer portal being so recent, the full effects of its implementation have yet to be fully studied; however, the trend is clear—the creation of the transfer portal has increased the number of student-athletes transferring among the sport of men’s basketball (NCAA, 2019; Norlander, 2015).

**Summary**

This research focused on utilizing a multimethod design consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the complex and concerning issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. The prevalence of the number of transfer
students in collegiate men’s basketball is trending upward at an alarming rate (Associated Press, 2017; Barnett, 2019; Gerace, 2019; Greene, 2018; Keshtidar & Behzadnia, 2017). While the issue of high attrition numbers among men’s basketball is concerning across the entire country, the institution examined in this research was in the southwestern region of the United States, but this institution should still provide excellent insight into this phenomenon. By gaining a better understanding of this issue, institutions of higher learning and their athletic departments can better formulate a solution to address the problem and assist in retaining collegiate male basketball student-athletes through the completion of their degree.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter will provide a literature review that analyzes and investigates the existing information related to the topic of abnormally high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. This chapter will begin by considering the issue of high attrition rates from a theoretical standpoint before examining related literature and academic research through a critical lens. Due to the relatively recent recognition and identification of the high attrition phenomenon among male collegiate basketball student-athletes, there is a very limited amount of scholarly research that pertains to the topic of attrition rates among this population. Although there might be a finite amount of academic research on this unique topic, every effort was made to give preference to modern, scholarly studies. Additionally, as this issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes has begun to pick up momentum in recent years, the phenomenon was documented initially in articles and stories produced by the mainstream media (Associated Press, 2017; Barnett, 2019; Gerace, 2019; Greene, 2018; Keshtidar & Behzadnia, 2017). As the related literature was examined, several recurring themes were identified, such as differences between student-athletes and traditional students, student-athlete identity, the decision to attend an institution, the decision to transfer, and possible solutions to the transfer epidemic, all of which will be reviewed in this chapter. By utilizing previous articles and research as the foundation for this study, the extent of knowledge in this area may be furthered while also addressing gaps in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

Research on the broad topic of student persistence and retention at institutions of higher education is not revolutionary or new. Institutions of higher learning have long-valued retention,
and as a result, the general topic of student retention and persistence has been prominently studied, historically as well as currently (Andrade et al., 2020; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Van, 1960). One of the most widely referenced theories is Tinto’s theory of departure, which recognizes the importance of social and academic integration and its effects on student retention (Tinto, 1987; 1993; 2006). Tinto theorized that the more integrated a student is in an institution, both socially and academically, the greater the student’s commitment to the institution and the less likely the student is to depart before completing their degree. Tinto (1993) stressed this notion by stating that “an institution’s capacity to retain students is directly related to its ability to reach out and make contact with students and integrate them into the social and intellectual fabric of institutional life” (p. 204). While Tinto’s theory is useful in gaining a better understanding of the driving forces behind the premature departure of college students, Tinto also acknowledged that retention models designed to study the overall student population are limited in their effectiveness for understanding the unique issues and motives of a specific student population. With that being said, as this study examines the high attrition rates of male collegiate basketball student-athletes, Tinto’s theory of departure will serve as the foundational backing to provide a general understanding of the issue of attrition; however, due to the examination of a very unique student population, there are times that Tinto’s theory of departure only stingily applies.

**Academic Integration**

Tinto’s widely documented theory is interesting on multiple fronts. First, Tinto acknowledges that enhanced student integration and involvement begins in the formal classroom environment (1993; 2006). There is a correlation between a student’s academic involvement and the quality of their effort, learning, and persistence—after all, these are institutions of higher
learning whose primary mission involves the education process. Tinto (1993) observed that at most institutions of higher learning, student engagement is centered in and around the classroom. Tinto also quickly recognized a correlation between higher ACT or SAT scores and the chances that a student would persist at an institution, which demonstrates that some rational level of academic aptitude is necessary to be successful at an institution of higher learning. Lastly, as Tinto researched student retention and its effects on the broad student population, Tinto noticed that a large portion of students who depart prematurely make the decision to depart in their first year of attending the institution.

While the value of academic integration plays an important theme in overarching retention strategies, it is likely that among the population of male basketball student-athletes, academic integration and assimilation carries less value that it does to the general student body. The reason for the apparent divergence from the overall student population is that student-athletes are more likely to find out about campus engagement opportunities through their sport and not through their classrooms, as Tinto’s theory suggests (1993; 2006). Student-athletes will interact with their athletic coaches and teammates almost daily—even on weekends, throughout the summer and winter breaks, and consistently throughout the student-athlete’s entire career at the institution—whereas they would only likely interact with each of their academic classes two or three times a week for a single semester. Furthermore, coaches often provide an additional level of support and supervision to their student-athletes by mentoring, advising, and continuously holding student-athletes accountable. While it is important that student-athletes are academically integrated into their institution, the value of academic integration is less impactful for students whose primary reasoning for attending a particular institution might be solely for
athletic opportunities (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Jozsa, 2018; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

**Social Integration**

In addition to neatly assimilating students into the “intellectual fabric of institutional life,” Tinto (1993) recognized the merits of social integration as well (p. 204). A deeper social engagement to the campus and the community can help the student in identifying social norms and values, which in turn assists in preventing a premature departure (Tinto, 1993; 2006). In relation to this research, the feeling of inclusion and camaraderie that comes from being a part of an athletic team can certainly assist with social integration to a new campus. According to Tinto’s theory, while both academic and social integration are important factors that lead to a student’s persistence at an institution, the social aspect is perceived to be more important to the student, especially younger students, while academic integration appears more valued by the institutions of higher learning. Tinto’s theory of departure is relevant to this study regarding the high attrition rate among male collegiate basketball student-athletes because Tinto believes that a lack of integration and involvement, both academically and socially, can be a predictable precursor to a student leaving an institution. While it is often easier for student-athletes to feel immediately socially included because of their membership with an athletic team, one disadvantage is that student-athletes fail to become properly integrated with their collegiate institution beyond their sport. While the support system of their athletic team can be highly beneficial in helping most student-athletes avoid feelings of isolation on campus, the high level of commitment to the team coupled with the lack of free time can hinder student-athletes from developing deeper connections beyond the locker room (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS Study”, 2011). While the social aspect of athletics is valuable and even necessary, the
failure to foster authentic connections with other areas of campus or peers outside of the team can lead to the student-athlete feeling neglected, especially when they are underperforming athletically (Smart & Paulsen, 2011). Imagine a student-athlete who suddenly feels disregarded and rejected by the athletic team which also serves as their primary social connection to the institution. Taking Tinto’s advice to the next level, student-athletes should assimilate with the campus’s social community beyond their athletic team to feel a more durable connection that is less based on athletic performance.

**Related Literature**

While the general topic of student retention and attrition has been widely examined, only a limited amount of scholarly research pertaining to the persistence of student-athletes exists, and there is even less academic research related to the specific sub-population of male collegiate basketball student-athletes (Weiss & Robinson, 2013). With that being said, the issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes has been a subject of much recent interest and discussion among the industry of college athletics and in the national media. While the decision to transfer from an institution is nothing new, what makes this issue highly concerning is the alarming increase in the rate of transfer numbers. Over the last 15 years, there has been a major spike in the number of transfers and premature departures across the sport of men’s basketball, an increase that has been referred to as a transfer epidemic (Associated Press, 2016; Cleveland, 2017; Greene, 2018; Williams, 2019). When prompted about the concerning issue of high attrition rates, Self, head men’s basketball coach at the University of Kansas, said, “I do think it's a big-time problem in college basketball. It's a problem in college athletics” (Associated Press, 2016). Other basketball coaches overwhelmingly share similar concerns (Feinstein, 2020; Greene, 2018). While their acknowledgement of the fearful trend is a starting
point, it does little to rectify the situation. This is where the literature review is important. Although the amount of scholarly research pertaining specifically to this unique subject might currently be limited, the research that is available allows for a better understanding into underlying reasons as to why male collegiate basketball student-athletes are departing at excessive rates, as well as possible solutions to this epidemic. Several recurring themes through the related research will be examined, such as the differences between student-athletes and their traditional non-athlete peers, the complex identity issues that a student-athlete faces, academic ability, and factors that impact a student-athlete’s decision to attend and depart an institution. By recognizing the multiple aspects of this issue, a more accurate assessment of the high attrition phenomenon among this sub-population can be identified, as well as hopefully lead to possible solutions to curb the high departure rates.

**Differences Between Student-Athletes and Traditional Students**

While there are many similarities between student-athletes and their traditional non-athlete peers, it is the differences between the two groups that must be examined, especially if one is seeking insight into why high attrition rates exist among one sub-population but not the other. As elementary as it seems, the most notable difference between student-athletes and their traditional peers is that student-athletes participate in college athletics as an extracurricular activity while their peers do not have that opportunity or the responsibility that comes along with it (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). While this sounds fundamentally simple, a further examination recognizes that the opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics comes with its own unyielding demands. The persistent commitment required to participate in college athletics puts student-athletes at a greater risk of attrition (Johnson et al., 2013; Menke, 2016; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). Student-athletes must be able to successfully manage and balance
their athletic activities with their academic endeavors. This is no small accomplishment considering that athletic activities often consist of practice, weight and conditioning sessions, film sessions, individual workouts, traveling for road games, and potential rehabilitation of injuries. These athletic activities require a valuable time commitment. Unfortunately, the hours set aside for collegiate athletics detract from the time that a student could set aside to focus on their academics or to socialize and connect with peers outside of the locker room. Time management becomes a vitally important skill.

Balancing the demands of sports, academic, and social life is probably one of the most stressful experiences student-athletes face other than game day and exam day. The combination of these stressors can result in detrimental consequences related to mental health, such as anxiety, depression, and substance use. (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017, p. 246)

The time commitment can certainly be a challenge (Eiche et al., 1997). A survey of collegiate student-athletes indicated that it is not uncommon for student-athletes to spend upwards of 40 hours a week on athletic activities (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS Study”, 2011, p. 17). It is no wonder that in a different study, 65% of student-athletes said that they believed their participation in sports had a negative effect on their cumulative grade point average (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007, p. 960). Their self-assessment is on par with other studies that have also demonstrated that a commitment to athletics often distracts from academic undertakings (Vogel et al., 2019).

Being a college student is stressful enough, but when you add in all of the elements of being a responsible student with the responsibilities of also being an athlete, basically every minute of every day is systematically planned. As a student-athlete, you are expected to excel in your academics as well as your sport. (Davis, 2015, para. 1)
Student-athletes often sacrifice their leisure time and miss out on social events across campus because of their athletic commitments, all while traditional students typically enjoy more flexible class schedules, spring break trips, and overall freedom (Davis, 2015). This commitment to athletics not only deeply effects a student-athlete’s routine on a daily level, but also impacts the athlete’s broader schedule as well. Student-athletes are significantly less likely than their peers to have an opportunity to return home and spend time with their family, including over summer break (Eiche et al., 1997; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). This information is critical to properly understand the major commitment that participating in collegiate athletics requires.

While there are several other contrasting differences between student-athletes and their traditional student counterparts on campus, the other disparities pale in comparison to the time commitment necessary to compete in college athletics. However, another notable difference between the two groups is that student-athletes are less likely to be concerned about their ability to afford college than their non-athlete peers (Eiche et al., 1997). This is largely due to the performance-based athletic scholarships that are often available for student-athletes to receive. While athletic scholarships can help to ease the financial burden associated with attending college, the scholarship amounts available to the athletic program vary depending on the sport and the level of competition. With that being said, contrary to popular belief, most student-athletes do not receive a full scholarship, and as a result, most student-athletes will be required to pay a portion of their cost of attendance out-of-pocket (Weiss & Robinson, 2013). The variance in financial expenses that students pay to attend an institution can impact their retention rates.

Another variance between student-athletes and traditional students surrounds their personal characteristics and intrinsic traits. Student-athletes are perceived to have better leadership skills than traditional students, and usually find it easier to adjust socially to college
life (Eiche et al., 1997). One important advantage of being a student-athlete is the immediate social inclusion in identifying as a part of the group or team. This camaraderie assists in helping student-athletes to socially connect, which according to Tinto’s (1993; 2006) theory of departure is an important factor in student retention. Even more important is that the student-athlete is a member of the athletic team upon arrival on campus, which is beneficial because the student-athlete instantly feels welcomed and connected, which can help to ease the awkward transition, especially for first-year college students.

Another noticeable difference that must be addressed between student-athletes and traditional students is their underlying reasoning for attending college (Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). While both groups recognize that a college education can assist them in getting a better job in the future, student-athletes are far more uncertain about their specific academic path and choosing a major, and as a result student-athletes are far more likely to change their major than their traditional peers (Eiche et al., 1997; Vogel et al., 2019). Additionally, some suggest that student-athletes have been given an admissions advantage, with institutions of higher learning lowering the academic standards for premier student-athletes that are unprepared to adequately handle the academic rigors of the institution (Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). This lack of firm academic direction for student-athletes is likely the result of a poor understanding of what colleges offer coupled with a diluted long-term vision of personal direction beyond athletics. One can reasonably deduce that a high percentage of student-athletes, especially those that participate at a high level of competition in the revenue sports of football and men’s basketball, attend college initially because of their sport and athletic opportunities, and not because of academic ambitions. This clouded sense of direction will be examined more deeply in the next section regarding student-athlete identity.
Student-Athlete Identity

The next recurring theme throughout the related literature is that it is not uncommon for student-athletes to base their identity exclusively on their athletic ability and affiliation with their sport (Beamon, 2012; see also Chen et al., 2010; Foster & Huml, 2017; Moazami-Goodarzi et al., 2020; Nash 2017). This identity founded on athletics is especially true for participants of the revenue sports of football and men’s basketball, which are often more predominately featured (Beamon, 2012). While identifying as an athlete is not an issue in itself, when a student-athlete’s entire identity is centered solely on their role as an athlete, the shallow self-perception becomes a larger concern that can lead to consequences in other areas of their life. There is much research that demonstrates that a one-dimensional identity, such as only identifying as an athlete, cannot sufficiently express the multitude of human complexities and can have a negative impact on one’s self-perception and value (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Melewar & Akel, 2005; Miller & Hoffman, 2009; Moazami-Goodarzi et al., 2020). A real-life concern of having an identity based in athletics is that when a conflict exists between the rigorous demands of academics and athletics, individuals who prioritize their identity in athletics will almost always favor their athletic endeavors, while disregarding their commitment to academic responsibilities (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Simons et al., 1999; Moazami-Goodarzi et al., 2020). Amateur athletic affiliations such as the NCAA have done a great job of marketing athletes as ‘student-athletes’ to highlight and prioritize the importance of their role as a student first and their role as an athlete second; however, this emphasis on academics might not be hitting home with all student-athletes (Beamon, 2012; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). “The issue at hand here is whether or not student-athletes are students that participate in extracurricular competitive sports, or have become athletes that also go to classes whenever their athletic schedules allow” (Saffici & Pellegrino,
Unfortunately, this shallow self-perception that is dependent on an identity in athletics is deeply rooted and appears far too common on college campuses.

The term athletic identity has been used to describe the extent to which a person identifies with the role of an athlete. In most cases, college student-athletes have participated in their sport for the majority of their lives. They develop a personal connection to their sport, and may evaluate a good part of their self-worth in terms of their athletic performance. Athletic identity can serve to create a variety of emotional stressors that can hinder academic progress. (Johnson et al., 2013, p. 136)

A consequence of basing an identity solely on athletics is that this mindset compromises and undermines the academic mission of the institution and the student. A further concern with this athletics-based identity is that athletic performances can be volatile and highly unpredictable—even elite athletes experience drastic ebbs and flows to their performance levels. An athlete with a one-dimensional identity who is not experiencing the playing time or success on-the-court they envisioned is not only unhappy about their athletic performance, but may also experience challenges regarding their sense of self. Moreover, the timeframe for which an individual can identify as a student-athlete is temporary, as that window of opportunity only applies to a relatively short period of one’s life. If an individual’s identity is based exclusively in athletics, once their playing career has concluded, they can quickly lose a sense of who they are (Beamon, 2012; Moazami-Goodarzi et al., 2020; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007).

What further complicates this issue of identity as an athlete is that there are differing degrees to which individuals place their identity in their sport. Generally speaking, research shows that male student-athletes are more dependent on their identity in athletics than female student-athletes, and that this is especially true for male student-athletes that participate in higher
profile sports (Beamon, 2012; Chen et al., 2010; Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007; Simons et al., 1999). The high-profile sports consistently referenced are football and men’s basketball, which are also often referred to as revenue sports, and participation in revenue sports often comes with its own unique challenges (Dilley-Knowles et al., 2010; Farmer, 2019; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Simons et al., 1999). Because the revenue sports are more popular and more visible, the successes or failures that occur among these sports are more influential in representing the institution. Colleges and universities have much to gain through successful athletic programs, especially in the higher profile sports, and as a result, there is often a higher burden placed on winning among the revenue sports (Chung, 2013; Eggers et al., 2019; Litan et al., 2003; Potter, 2008). The consequences of over-emphasizing winning in revenue sports often leads to football and men’s basketball programs bringing in student-athletes based primarily on what they can contribute athletically to the team (Chenoweth, 2013; Dealy, 1990; Figone, 2019; Marcus, 2018; Milroy, 2019; Peoples, 2009; Stewart, 2012; Zvosec et al., 2019). This notion is especially true for NCAA Division I, which is the highest level of college athletics. As athletic programs seek out and recruit individuals based on their ability as an elite athlete, it is easy to understand the mixed message this sends regarding identity and how student-athletes, especially those who participate in high-profile sports, can often face an identity crisis (Beamon, 2012; Chenoweth, 2013; Dealy, 1990; Marcus, 2018).

While a student-athlete’s identity—as either a student, an athlete, or both—is often largely outlined during high school, one’s identity can certainly be skewed as their environment changes (Moazami-Goodarzi et al., 2020). Thus, the recruiting process and college decision is highly impactful in shaping the future of an individual (Hilton & Bonner, 2017; Jackson, 2019; Newman & Newman, 1978). Throughout the recruiting process, elite athletes are recruited by
university representatives based primarily on their athletic ability, not their academic ability. As a result of this process, these recruits learn to base their college decision specifically on athletic opportunities (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Jackson, 2019; Jozsa, 2018; Miller & Kerr, 2002). This identity in athletics can quickly consume an individual, and can also lead to a clouded sense of direction. In a survey among student-athletes at 611 institutions of higher learning, 76% of men’s basketball student-athletes believed that they were “somewhat likely” to become a professional and/or an Olympic athlete in their sport (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011). Obviously, this survey demonstrates an extremely high bias of self-perception concerning one’s basketball ability, as well as very little comprehension and awareness regarding the few professional opportunities that exist in sports. Realistically, less than 2% of male collegiate basketball student-athletes will have the opportunity to play professionally, and even then, the average professional sports career is very short-lived (Farmer, 2019; NCAA, 2020a). Although the chances of making a sustainable, livable wage by playing the game of basketball are extremely small, this slight glimpse of hope profoundly impacts and motivates the students of the game. A negative aspect of this delusion is that male athletes, especially those that participate in high-profile sports, irrationally believe that they will soon be well-paid professionals in their sport; therefore, their academic journey is irrelevant (Farmer, 2019; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). This erroneous and extravagant collection of responses captivates the unreal expectations of male basketball participants, and how many often refuse to believe they will need a college education at all since they expect be high-paid basketball professionals soon (Reynolds et al., 2012). In addition, male collegiate basketball student-athletes, more so than the participants of any other sport, appear to have no identity when
basketball is taken out of the equation (Beamon, 2012; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Reynolds et al., 2012).

Based on the literature, it is clear that student-athletes have a unique identity on campus, complete with distinct obstacles and challenges. Furthermore, even within the population of student-athletes, those that participate in the high-profile revenue sports of men’s basketball and football are even more unique. It is important to recognize the contributing factors and attributes that are commonly associated with the population of male collegiate basketball student-athletes because these characteristics will likely play a large factor in a student’s decision to attend a particular institution. In future research, it will be interesting to see how this identification as an athlete was perceived and affected during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, which shelved many athletic seasons impulsively out of necessity to prevent the virus from spreading. The complete removal of athletics for the spring, summer, and most of the fall of 2020 likely forced many student-athletes to reflect on their identity grounded in sports. Unfortunately, this identity that is largely dependent on athletics has played a large factor in the decision to depart from an institution prematurely for athletic reasons. By understanding the unique identity, insight is gained into the perspective of this sub-population.

**Academic Ability and Expectations**

One commonly referenced statistic is that student-athletes are better students than their traditional peers, as noted by their grade point average and graduation rates (Dealy, 1990; Forster, 2012; Hamilton, 2005; Marot, 2014; NCAA, 2019; Simons et al., 1999; Steinbach, 2011). The information regarding academic comparisons between student-athletes and traditional students can be widely misleading and distorted depending on which agenda is being promoted (NCAA, 2019; Steinbach, 2011). There is much research that states the exact opposite—that
traditional students have better academic success than student-athletes (Chen et al., 2012; Christopher Jolly, 2008; Forster, 2012; Jozsa, 2018). One reason for the fluctuation in this data is that many studies are skewed to show a more favorable approach towards student-athletes by comparing them to the entire student body, including part-time students, instead of only comparing student-athletes to other similar full-time students (NCAA, 2018; 2019; Steinbach, 2011). Although the data regarding graduation rates and GPA can be presented in a multitude of ways, one commonality is that the GPA of student-athletes is largely dependent on the academic success of non-revenue sports, which generally boast higher academic success (Johnson et al., 2010; Marot, 2014; NCAA, 2019; Paule & Gilson, 2011; Simons et al., 1999; Steinbach, 2011; Weatherly, 2019). Traditionally, it is the high-profile men’s sports of football and basketball that struggle the most academically (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; Forster, 2012; Hamilton, 2005; Jozsa, 2018; Steinbach, 2011). What is more enlightening than the numerical data that can be twisted and skewed is that student-athletes are less confident in their ability as a student, and often have a weak self-image of themselves academically (Christopher Jolly, 2008; Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). These negative self-perceptions are especially true for men’s basketball student-athletes, and unfortunately these perceptions often become reality, even if they were not to begin with (Tudor & Ridpath, 2018). Demeaning self-efficacy has lasting effects beyond college, as student-athletes feel less prepared for careers than their traditional non-athlete peers (Van Raalte et al., 2017).

Typically, recruits affiliated with high-profile revenue sports are not as prepared to handle the academic challenges of college as traditional non-athlete students or even their peers that participate in other sports (Brecht & Burnett, 2019; Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; Hamilton, 2005; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012; Weatherly, 2019). Instead of being adequately equipped and
trained for the academic rigors of the college classroom, many high-level recruits for men’s basketball and football are simply unprepared for the transition (Stokowski, 2019).

It seems possible that many of these individuals have been passed through academics since an early age (maybe early high school). Thus, they may have developed a sense of entitlement, and expect that they will again be passed in a similar way through college.

(Weiss & Robinson, 2013, p. 100)

This lack of preparedness coupled with a lack of academic motivation can lead to lower thresholds of academic success among student-athletes associated with the revenue sports of men’s basketball and football (Figone, 2019). Concerningly, many familiar with the college athletics industry have theorized that elite athletes who might not be up to par academically are often guided into academic majors that offer the path-of-least-resistance to satisfy eligibility requirements while competing in their sport (Beamon, 2008; Cox, 2016; Marot, 2014; Paule & Gilson, 2011; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012; Shropshire & Williams, 2017).

Athletes spend 30-40 hours per week on their sport which is mentally and physically exhausting, allowing them little time or energy to put toward their studies. This is one of the reasons why coaches tend to require they take “easy” courses and “easy” majors so that they have a better chance of maintaining academic eligibility and can still compete.

(Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012, p.1)

This theory would also help to explain why student-athletes are more likely to change their academic direction more often than their traditional student counterparts (Eiche et al., 1997; Vogel et al., 2019). Student-athletes often arrive on campus uncertain about the direction they want their individual academic journey to go, are less prepared for the academic coursework, and must also balance their athletic obligations. As the student becomes an upper-classmen,
counselors and advisors simply want to see the student graduate, and as a result, the student-athlete is ‘pushed’ towards the degree that will be easiest and timeliest to obtain based on which courses the student has already completed and their academic ability, even if it is not in a field of study that interests the student-athlete (Beamon, 2008; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). Another common obstacle for student-athletes at smaller colleges and universities is finding class times and labs that do not interfere with practice, which can influence student-athletes on their academic journey as well as discourage student-athletes from pursuing certain degrees that are in constant interference with their athletic obligations (Beamon, 2008). Regrettably, men’s basketball student-athletes frequently view college as a stepping stone used to advance their often-unrealistic basketball career, unconcerned with taking ownership of their academic journey until it has been decided for them. As a result, these student-athletes are systematically pushed through degree plans that are of no interest to them but do not realize it until it is too late (Tudor & Ridpath, 2018). “Unfortunately, the players’ athletics, social, and classroom experiences created an anti-intellectual atmosphere that, over time, inhibited academic success” (Adler & Adler, 1987, as cited in Tudor & Ridpath, 2018, p. 125).

**Critical Views of Tinto’s Theory of Departure**

While Tinto’s research on student retention has been highly regarded in the field of higher education, one concern with Tinto’s widely-referenced theory of departure is that it focuses on examining the issue of student attrition on an individual level (Lee, 2006). While understanding an individual student’s context and background is important in the persistence or attrition of that particular student, it is also vitally important to consider the context and background of the specific institution of higher learning, especially when trying to understand persistence or attrition themes that are resonating among a student body. Tinto often fails to
“critically examine the larger cultural context in which individual action occurs, the context that makes dropping out or committing suicide possible” (Lee, 2006, p. 7; see also Braxton, 2000).

For the purpose of conducting this research and gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon of the high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes, it is imperative that the background context of the institution, as well as the social climate of men’s collegiate athletics, are appropriately taken into consideration so that an accurate assessment, as well as underlying themes, can be properly identified and solved.

Another criticism of Tinto’s valuable research on retention is that it paints attrition in a negative light (McCubbin, 2003). While persisting in college until a degree is obtained is normally the traditionally desired route for most students, there are circumstances where an early departure from an institution of higher learning can be more advantageous to an individual. The primary example that comes to mind with regard to the attrition rate of male collegiate basketball student-athletes is when an individual has an opportunity to be drafted to play professional basketball despite not finishing their collegiate playing career or completing their college degree. While opportunities to join the work force and immediately earn an inflated salary are rare, it is a prime example of where an individual’s decision to depart early can be beneficial to the student. Another more prominent example of premature departure among the sport is when a student-athlete transfers to a different institution because they perceive better athletic opportunities there, such as more playing time or an enhanced role on the team. In this example, the student-athlete is still attending college and working towards completing their degree, however they simply changed which institution they are identifying with in hopes of finding an institution that is a better fit. Tinto (1993) recognized the importance of finding the right “fit between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution,” noting that a mismatch
in ideals between the individual student and the institution can lead to incongruences that can be hard to overcome (p. 50).

While ample research has been done on the generic topic of student retention and attrition, Tinto acknowledged that retention models designed to study the overall general student population are limited and largely ineffective for gaining insight into a unique sub-population (Tinto, 1993; 2006). Part of what will make this research valuable and significant is how it examines student retention and attrition specifically with regard to the unique population of male collegiate basketball student-athletes.

**The Decision to Attend an Institution**

Part of what makes the student-athlete’s situation unique from their traditional peers is how they go about deciding which institution to attend. The recruiting process simply defines the “manner by which a team or an organization enlists new members” (Green, 2005, p. 236). For traditional students that are not affiliated with collegiate athletics, the recruiting process usually exists between the institution’s admissions office and the individual student, but when student-athletes are being recruited, it is often coaches and athletic representatives that substitute for the admissions office as the primary university contact (Cross, 1973; Figone, 2019; Green, 2005; Jackson, 2019; Posteher, 2019; Scott, 2018). To better understand the recruiting process, it must be examined from the perspective of both parties involved—the student-athletes and the institution’s coaches that are spearheading the recruitment of student-athletes.

**The Student-Athlete’s Perspective on Recruiting**

To some extent, student-athletes and traditional students are searching for similar qualities as they make their college decision—both groups of students generally value a college or university that has a great reputation, where they believe their social needs will be met, and
where financial aid is readily available (Davies & Burakowski, 2015). While there are other similarities in what future students are looking for, overwhelmingly, student-athletes let athletic opportunities play a highly influential role in their college decision (Davies & Burakowski, 2015; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014; Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2014; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012; & Zócalo Public Square, 2015). There are several athletic-specific factors that student-athletes take into consideration as they make their college decision, including the athletic reputation of the school, the characteristics of the recruiting process, the characteristics of the coaching staff, the campus visit, and the general influences of family, friends, and community towards the athletic program and university in question (Davies & Burakowski, 2015; Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014; Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2014). Student-athletes will often examine the current roster of the team to better understand their opportunities for immediate playing time (Davies & Burakowski, 2015). A student-athlete is also more likely to commit to a college or university if they already have a friendly relationship with other student-athletes on the team (Davies & Burakowski, 2015). Other athletic-specific factors include the importance of athletic tradition or the opportunity to be a part of something special with the team, the amount of athletic scholarship offered, the opportunity to compete for championships, athletic facilities, and the visibility and marketability of the athletic team, which includes factors such as televised games and even the apparel brand the institution is partnered with (Davies & Burakowski, 2015).

While there are numerous factors that can be examined and play a significant role in an individual’s decision to attend one institution over another, previous research has shown that the importance of athletic-specific features is especially true for the student-athletes that participate in the high-profile revenue sports of men’s basketball and football, where the majority of their
college decision is often based on athletic opportunities (Davies & Burakowski, 2015; Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011). A previous portion of this chapter discussed the complicated identity issues of student-athletes, and this identity as an athlete can motivate a student-athlete to make a decision based primarily on athletic opportunities instead of incorporating other factors in their college decision. Although very few collegiate student-athletes will have the opportunity to play professionally in their sport, once this potential seed of hope takes root in a student-athlete’s mind, it can be hard for them to overcome this obsession for their sport (Beamon, 2012; Farmer, 2019). Instead of basing a college decision on stable and enduring academic factors or other elements that might have a longer-lasting impact, men’s basketball and football student-athletes often get consumed by the idea that when given the opportunity, they will be able to achieve greatness in their sport and move on to the professional level (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011). As a result, athletic-specific features have a distorted level of importance.

**The Coach’s Perspective on Recruiting**

The other side of the college athletics recruiting process involves the representatives of the institution. Traditionally, the admissions office representatives oversee the recruitment of the general student body for institutions of higher learning; however, this typical recruitment method changes drastically when student-athletes are involved (Cross, 1973; Figone, 2019; Scott, 2018). For the recruitment of student-athletes, coaches often serve as the primary university contact to interact with the potential student (Cross, 1973; Figone, 2019; Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014; Scott, 2018). While this process is beneficial in regards to building a strong, personal relationship between the coaching staff and the potential recruit, it can also systematically stimulate the internal identity problem (Shropshire & Williams Jr., 2017). Most student-athletes
affiliated with revenue sports make their college decision primarily based on athletic opportunities because they were identified and recruited by athletic representatives for their potential athletic ability, not their academic ability (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). While all student-athletes must be able to meet basic academic requirements, athletics is the primary reason that many student-athletes, especially those affiliated with men’s basketball and football, are able to attend and afford college and their financial scholarship is dependent upon athletic performance (Beamon, 2012; Green, 2005). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for colleges and universities to lower their admission standards for high-caliber student-athletes (Ladenson, 2002, as cited in Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). “On average, student-athletes enter in the bottom 25% of their freshman class,” unprepared for the academic rigors of college-level courses and the proper study habits necessary to be successful in a college environment (Eitzen, 2000, as cited in Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). Weiss and Robinson (2013) addressed the issue of student-athletes being “subjected to an environment where they will have difficulty succeeding” by recognizing that precollege academic preparation plays a considerable factor in future academic success (p. 102).

Since initial success in college is strongly related to precollege academic preparation, athletes who are given an admissions advantage need added nurturing through their academic experience. However, this early intervention often is not enough to make up for the lack of initial preparation. (Weiss & Robinson, 2013, p. 102)

There has been much deliberation about how academic preparation can be accurately assessed before attending college, but most researchers recognize that there is a correlation between a student’s high school grade point average and their preparedness level for college (Brecht & Burnett, 2019; Saunders-Scott et al., 2018). Other researchers recognize a similar relationship
between a student’s standardized test scores on the ACT or SAT and their preparedness level for college (Johnson et al., 2013; Mattern et al., 2015; Wao et al., 2017). Students who are adequately prepared for the rigors of college upon arrival are more likely to be successful and graduate from the institution, which means this is an important factor that coaches should consider during the recruiting process (Weiss & Robinson, 2013).

As coaches begin to identify and recruit individuals to their athletic program, many factors are taken into consideration, but none are more emphasized than the prospect’s athletic ability and skill set (Bastie, 2006; Conley, 2008; Lewis, 2009). The coach’s primary obligation is to build and manage their team based on the team’s positional needs. It is often the prospect’s athletic ability and sport-specific skill set that serves as the initial foot-in-the-door. “The vitally important physical elements—height, weight, speed, quickness, leaping ability, change of direction, strength and technical skills—are among the characteristics evaluated by coaches before making that highly sought-after scholarship offer” (Conley, 2008, para. 1). There are, however, other factors that coaches will investigate before pursuing a prospective student-athlete. These other factors include a wide array of intangibles such as work ethic, perseverance, effort, and attitude. Coaches will spend hours upon hours investigating and getting to know an individual in order to better understand if the prospect’s intrinsic traits will be an asset or liability to the program (Bastie, 2006; Conley, 2008; Flett et al., 2010). Academic ability is included in this overall analysis, however a prospect’s academic shortcomings in the classroom can often be systematically over-looked if the student’s athletic ability is worthwhile (Gurney, 2011). Former NCAA basketball coaching icon Charlie Spoonhour summed it up nicely when he was asked what skills he looked for in the recruits. Spoonhour’s response was, “Quickness is by far the most important single ingredient. However, it’s difficult to focus solely on athletic skills when
academics play as large a part as they do” (“Coaches corner”, 1997, p. 53). Unfortunately, the overall recruiting process in college athletics has become nearly uncontrollable and over-hyped since the turn of the century, with academics prioritized lower than being the first to identify and recruit potential student-athletes in hopes of gaining an inside edge of landing an elite athlete, which translates into wins for the program (Jackson, 2019). An issue with this trend is that because technological advances are making it easier for coaches to become more aware of potential recruits, coaches are now reaching further beyond their own geographical areas, but for student-athletes, a further distance from home could potentially be disastrous (Barden et al., 2013). This trend of recruiting prospects younger and from further away is especially true among the sport of men’s basketball, where over one-third of recruits received their first contact from a college coach in or before their freshman year of high school (Jackson, 2019).

The accelerated pace of recruiting, and the demands it placed on athletes during their sophomore and junior years of high school, left many of them feeling overwhelmed. Some [recruits] said they were uncomfortable with having to make hasty decisions during their senior year, sometimes in a matter of days, about whether to accept scholarships. And the majority of athletes said they had little exposure to the academic side of campus life, such as meeting with professors or sitting in on classes, during their campus visits. (Sander, 2008, para. 3)

The recruiting process of student-athletes is unique (Davies & Burakowski, 2015; Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014; Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2014). Behind all of the fancy bells and whistles that regularly accompany the student-athlete recruiting process is an open agenda by the coaching staff and the institution to assemble the best athletic team possible. Certainly, most coaches aim to run their program in an ethical manner that has the student’s best
interests at heart, but with an over-emphasis placed on winning and the benefits that comes with that success, the line quickly gets blurry (Chenoweth, 2013; Dealy, 1990; Lumpkin, 2016; Marcus, 2018; Stewart, 2012). Once a student-athlete commits to an institution and arrives on campus, the expectation is that they continue to perform at a certain standard or they will be replaced. Unfortunately, this high-stakes environment frequently ignores the need for potential student-athletes to find the right fit for themselves and instead accentuates the need to recruit the best athletes, regardless of overall fit, in order to win more games (Lumpkin, 2016; Sander, 2008).

**The Decision to Depart an Institution**

The storyline is predictable—if a student-athlete’s identity is one-dimensionally grounded in their ability as an athlete, and then that athletic ability goes awry, suddenly, not only are they unhappy about their athletic experience at the institution, but they have also lost a large portion of their self-identity. Unfortunately, most athletes affiliated with the revenue sports of men’s basketball and football chose to attend their particular institution because of athletic opportunities, so when things do not go as planned within athletics, the student-athlete often loses sight of the selling point that initially attracted them to the college or university (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011). Instead of reshaping their sense of self and minimizing the role that athletics plays on their identity at their initial institution, many athletes often opt to transfer to another institution as an attempt to successfully regain their identity as a contributing athlete. In fact, one study has shown that nearly 90% of all men’s basketball transfers depart their initial institution strictly for reasons pertaining to their sport (NCAA Research, 2017; see also Brecht & Burnett, 2019).
The truth is that attrition in collegiate athletics is a complex issue that can take on many forms, such as being replaced by the coaching staff, dropping out or failing out of school, opting to transfer to another institution, or even declaring for the professional draft (Gerace, 2019; Gleddie et al., 2019; Greene, 2018; Hamilton, 2005; Lossiah, 2018; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). While the literature is already limited on the study of student-athlete retention, it almost entirely focuses on occasions where the student-athlete chooses to voluntarily depart the program and institution of their own free will (Barnhill et al., 2013; Gerace, 2019; Greene, 2018; Feinstein, 2020; Norlander, 2015; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). However, it must be noted that in the industry of collegiate athletics, like all competitive industries, opportunities are performance based—and failure to perform can forfeit game minutes, roster spots, and athletic scholarships (Beamon, 2012; Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; Feinstein, 2020; Green, 2005; Hamilton, 2005). If a student-athlete does not continue to function well enough athletically to maintain their position on the team, it might very well become the coach’s decision as to why that student-athlete departs the program (Feinstein, 2020; Gleddie et al., 2019; Hamilton, 2005; Morris, 2019). If a student-athlete fails to maintain certain academic standards, it might be the institution’s decision to dismiss the student (Petr, 2012). If a student-athlete breaks the law or behaves in a way that is detrimental to the institution or program, the dismissal might be enforced to help the institution save face publicly, although as a side note athletes have been shown to receive far gentler punishments for serious crimes (Benedict, 2010; Jacoby, 2019; Lavigne, 2015). There are certainly multiple facets of behaviors and expectations that must be met if a student-athlete wishes to continue in their current role. However, what makes the attrition rate among male collegiate basketball student-athletes concerning is that the number of students who are voluntarily departing a program or institution on their own is increasing drastically. Most sources
that identity the transfer epidemic among the sport recognize that students are choosing to depart their initial institution for opportunities perceived to be better elsewhere (Associated Press, 2016; Cleveland, 2017; Weiss & Robinson, 2013; Williams, 2019).

There are many unique factors that contribute to the increasingly high attrition rate among the sport of men’s basketball. First, technology has made a permanent imprint on the younger generations that have grown up affluent in it (Roberts, 2014). Technology, being highly accessible, has given nearly everyone an individual platform to promote or complain on social media. While technology certainly has its countless benefits, the internal trap of constant comparison with others on social media can have highly negative unintended consequences (Turner, 2020; Konnikova, 2013; Vogel et al., 2015). The overuse of social media can lead to depression, low self-esteem, and poor self-evaluations among any user, but it likely has a deeper influence among student-athletes due to their highly competitive and comparative nature (Vogel et al., 2015). Seeing student-athletes from other institutions having a better experience at another college or university is probably more detrimental to an athlete’s competitive mindset than to the average student. With the advent of social media comes the pressures of living continuously under a microscope as well. Even for the individuals who can successfully navigate the challenges and responsibilities of being a student-athlete, they are constantly observed, and that constant observation can lead to a mounting pressure to perform (Roberts, 2014; Yiran et al., 2020). Additionally, technology’s ability to provide users with endless resources has led to a human race that is becoming increasingly impatient. The mindset of persistence and endurance has devolved into one that craves instant gratification (Roberts, 2014). This correlates to the high attrition rate among the sport of men’s collegiate basketball because student-athletes who might not be satisfied with their current situation now quickly give up on patiently trusting the process
and overcoming obstacles until they achieve the results they want, and instead try to find greener pastures elsewhere immediately (Favor, 2017; Roberts, 2014; Woods, 2017). Furthermore, because everyone has a platform on social media, student-athletes are more aware of their peers at other institutions who are transferring, and this publicity and glamorization of transferring can lead to a domino effect and even collaboration on something that prior to social media went largely unnoticed (Bigsby et al., 2019; Favor, 2017; Woods, 2017). Ultimately, everyone innately desires to be wanted and appreciated, and student-athletes share this attitude. If a student-athlete is no longer appreciated for their athletic ability at their initial institution, re-opening their recruitment can help them to find that satisfaction from other suitors.

The NCAA’s policies are another factor that has helped to create an environment conducive to high attrition rates among student-athletes over the last 15 years. While an increase in the number of transfers among the sport of men’s basketball began around 2005, this slight increase could be attributed to any number of factors and by itself arguably did not constitute a major concern (Greene, 2018; Woods, 2017). But in 2006, the NCAA introduced the ‘graduate transfer exemption,’ which allowed student athletes who had completed their bachelor’s degree but still had a year of eligibility to compete the opportunity to transfer to another institution for their final season with immediate eligibility, as opposed to having to sit out the traditional year to obtain residency (Greene, 2018). This ‘graduate transfer’ policy arguably promoted and endorsed a culture of departing an institution for a better opportunity. What makes the graduate transfer policy unique is that it only applies to student-athletes who have already graduated with their bachelor’s degrees. Most of the negative consequences of transferring that impact an individual—such as a large percentage of credits not carrying into the new institution, or the cost affiliated with retaking courses that match the new institution’s requirements—do not apply to
students who are transferring in order to begin a new graduate degree (Lederman, 2017; Rumberger, 2016). Often, a graduate transfer is a student-athlete who has put together a solid playing career at a smaller school and uses this opportunity to play their final season at a bigger, higher-profile institution. On the NCAA Division 1 level, this frequently plays out as a decent student-athlete from a mid-major school looking to move to a high-major program (Feinstein, 2020; Greene, 2018). Unfortunately, this policy has created a way for bigger schools with better resources to legally poach the best players from smaller schools with lesser athletic resources. While the decision to transfer for graduate school might not be harmful to the individual student, there are still unintended negative consequences to the institution and program from which the athlete is departing (Barreira et al., 2019; Fanney, 2009; Kahane & Shmanske, 1997; Siler, 2019). A program’s experience and retention can be a fairly accurate predictor of future wins. Teams that return more of their roster, especially among individuals that were major contributors, and have higher age and experience are more likely to experience on-court success in the future (Barreira et al., 2019; Siler, 2019). When a student-athlete opts to transfer out of their initial institution, even as a graduate transfer, it immediately diminishes the basketball program they are departing from, most notably by leaving a void in the lineup and reducing the age and experience that was perceived to be returning (Greene, 2018). Additionally, a higher amount of roster turnover has been shown to decrease overall fan interest as well as reduce ticket sales (Kahane & Shmanske, 1997; Morse et al., 2008). Stability is a common component in organizations that are consistently successful and viable, but a high attrition rate of student-athletes, even with regard to graduate transfers, lessens the perceived level of stability and hurts the overall well-being of the basketball program, which decreases the chances of the team’s future success (Greene, 2018; Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013).
The NCAA’s policies and procedures are highly influential among collegiate sports, and the effects of the NCAA’s strategies often have deeply resonating impacts. A consequence of the introduction of the graduate transfer policy was that it served as an initial catalyst in the uptick in the number of men’s basketball transfers, but the additional decision to implement the transfer portal in 2018 even further encouraged a culture of attrition and transferring. The purpose of the NCAA’s transfer portal was to streamline the transfer process and make the entire procedure more efficient and visible. Now with the transfer portal in place, when an NCAA student-athlete in select sports wishes to transfer, there is less administrative paperwork for the student and the institution, and the student-athlete’s name is listed on a website that is visible for all coaches to see (Greene, 2018; Johnson, 2019). Unfortunately, this transfer portal has quickly evolved into a free-agency aspect for collegiate sports while further promoting a culture of attrition by simply making the decision to transfer too easy and efficient. With the application of the transfer portal being so recent, the full effects of its implementation have yet to be fully studied. However, the trend is clear—the creation of the transfer portal has increased the number of student-athletes transferring among the sport of men’s basketball (NCAA, 2019; Norlander, 2015). Furthermore, the changes made by the NCAA Division I soundly resonate throughout all of collegiate athletics. Due to its position of power, changes made by NCAA Division I can greatly influence other divisions and affiliations with policy changes or social implications as well.

Several other factors have impacted the landscape of college basketball and have likely helped in creating the current climate that is conducive to the concerning high attrition rates among the sport. Just as the streamlined transfer portal, although more efficient, has made the process of transferring seem less personal, a similar result has occurred throughout the recruiting process in college basketball. “The recruitment of men’s basketball and football prospects has
become more public and more transparent with the creation of websites such as 247Sports, Scout, and Rivals,” which openly track and monitor the recruiting process of individual athletes (Krul, 2019, p. 2; see also Fader, 2016; Frank, 2017). Additionally, coaches of all levels increasingly utilize and depend upon subscription recruiting services, which rank prospects based on skill set and ability to assist in identifying recruits and justify the recruitment of individual student-athletes instead of relying solely on their own judgment and coaching experience (Jara, 2015; Kartje, 2017; Krul, 2019; Winemiller et al., 2020). A result of this streamlined and transparent recruiting process is that a program’s recruitment of elite athletes often rivals the attention of the program’s actual on-the-court performance (Wittry, 2019).

With the intensification of recruiting, the signing of high school athletes to college teams has grown to be somewhat of a media spectacle. Television channels like ESPN now provide around-the-clock coverage of National Letter of Intent signing day for high school athletes, even offering interactive social media content to engage fans in real-time. In reality, athletic recruiting only continues to escalate in importance and in public following. (Posteher, 2019, p. 2)

Some coaches will try to downplay the hype and stress that comes with recruiting highly-prized prospects by acknowledging that recruit rankings do not always pan out or translate into on-the-court success (Fader, 2016). Underwood, head men’s basketball coach at the University of Illinois, accepts recruit rankings only at face value and with reservations about their validity or accurateness (Richey, 2020).

Brad Underwood’s take on recruiting rankings are a little bit like the scoring system from “Whose Line is it Anyway?” You know … everything is made up and the points don’t matter. That’s how Underwood views the different rankings that hand out anywhere
between (usually) three and five stars to players in each recruiting class. (Richey, 2020, para 1)

Because of overfocus on the recruiting process, coaches sometimes feel outside pressure to recruit a specific student-athlete to their program, overlooking potential issues that might prevent the program and the student-athlete from finding a better fit elsewhere (Gurchiek, 2017). And when a student-athlete is underperforming or disruptive to the organization, a coach is more likely to second-guess that player’s value if they signed the recruit based primarily on outside pressure instead of their own desires (Favor, 2017; Gurchiek, 2017; Reeves et al., 2019). This continuous cycle can lead to student-athletes who never find the right fit for themselves and coaches who never find the right players for their programs. Another piece of the complex puzzle is that because recruits are identified earlier in their high school career, potential recruits feel pressure to commit earlier as well, which might prevent them from thoroughly examining the institution or understanding what they should be looking for in a college or university (Fader, 2016; Infante, 2014; Jackson, 2019; Lumpkin, 2016; Magnusen et al., 2017; Sander, 2008). This current system frequently leads to forced partnerships between players and coaches that might not be good fits for one another, and when personalities or playing styles do not align, the player often finds themself in the transfer portal (Borghesi, 2018; Fader, 2016; Hilton & Bonner, 2017).

Another factor that has detrimentally impacted the landscape of collegiate athletics is the excessive importance placed on winning (Chenoweth, 2013; Dealy, 1990; Lumpkin, 2016; Marcus, 2018; Stewart, 2012). The stakes are high in collegiate athletics. There are many benefits from winning, especially in the high-profile sports of men’s basketball and football (Chung, 2013; Emma, 2017; Favor, 2017; Figone, 2019; Lumpkin, 2016; Marcus, 2018; Sperber, 2000). Institutions have highly valuable branding and marketing opportunities to gain from
sponsoring successful sports programs, and the antes are high for the coaches as well, who at the highest college levels might see paychecks that exceed six-figures (Chung, 2013; Favor, 2017). With the high incentives comes the expectation to win, and to do so immediately. This focus on winning games bluntly implies to most coaches that they should actively recruit the best-skilled basketball players available, with little time to take the athlete’s ability as a student or character into consideration (Figone, 2019; Lumpkin, 2016). In seeking the best basketball players available, coaches have turned to recruiting transfers from other institutions who bring in age and experience. (Ironically, coaches do not want to see their players depart from their program prematurely but often have little concern in recruiting a transfer from another program). When institutions place pressure on coaches to win and to do so immediately, they add to the culture that expects instant gratification (Sperber, 2000).

**Possible Solutions to the Transfer Epidemic**

The simplest solution to the current high attrition rates among the sport of collegiate men’s basketball is that student-athletes and coaches should focus more on finding the right fit for all parties involved (Fader, 2016; Hilton & Bonner, 2017). Part of the equation of the right fit includes factors that are often overlooked by student-athletes, such as proximity to home and more time devoted to exploring the institution’s academic offerings (Barden et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2013; Sander, 2008). While finding the right basketball fit is important, it is even more imperative for a student-athlete to find an institution that will promote and invest in their growth beyond the sport. It is necessary for student-athletes to place a high level of consideration on factors outside of athletic opportunities if they hope to find an institution that will fulfill their needs on a deeper level. Tinto acknowledged the importance of a student’s social and academic integration to an institution, but through participation in team sports, this social involvement is
largely addressed (Tinto, 1987; 1993; 2006). While most student-athletes quickly feel a comfortable social connection through their team sport, it is important that student-athletes are encouraged to find avenues to become socially and academically engaged with their campus and community outside of their sport as well (Huml et al., 2019; Lafferty et al., 2017). While several studies acknowledge the importance of academic integration to a student’s success, only 27% of college athlete recruits sit in on a class or visit with a professor during their campus visit (Sander, 2008). This reflects the current disconnect between athletics and the rest of the institution among most campuses (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; New, 2016). By focusing on helping student-athletes integrate with an institution beyond their sport, student-athletes can enhance their identity while forming deeper, more permanent relationships and connections among campus (Huml et al., 2019). While student-athletes will likely continue to make their college and university decisions based primarily on athletic opportunities, it is important that they feel welcome and have ample opportunities to become socially and academically integrated across campus and throughout the community if retention through graduation is the goal (Beamon, 2012; Tinto, 1993; 2006).

**Summary**

This literature review provides a detailed analysis of the research and articles related to the topic of attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. The topic of attrition has been highly examined in regard to the general student population, but a detailed analysis of attrition among male collegiate basketball student-athletes requires comprehending a large amount of inferences that exist in between the gaps of the current research. Ultimately, collegiate male basketball student-athletes face a unique set of circumstances, and one must understand their environment and other influential factors to extrapolate the concerns about the
high attrition rate among this sub-population. Student-athletes have a distinct identity, and the dependence and influence of sports is even more substantial among athletes who participate in the high-profile sports of men’s basketball and football (Green, 2005; NCAA Research, 2017; Shropshire & Williams Jr., 2017). This research has practical and theoretical value in helping to address the concerning trend of high attrition among male collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes. By applying Tinto’s theory of departure and helping student-athletes to become more integrated and connected with the campus and community both academically and socially, student-athletes will likely be satisfied and content at their institution and not feel the need to depart early to find satisfaction elsewhere.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of high attrition rates currently plaguing collegiate men’s basketball by thoroughly examining the phenomenon at a singular institution located in the southwestern United States. Through this study, insight was gained as to why male basketball student-athletes transfer at such a high rate and possible solutions that could be utilized to address the high attrition rates among this sub-population. This chapter examines the multimethod research design being utilized, including the proposed research questions, as well as the process of selecting the setting and participants. Furthermore, the procedures for this study will be presented, followed by the data and analysis.

Design

This research utilized a multimethod design which consisted of a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the complex and concerning issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. A multimethod research design was specifically chosen for this study largely in part due to the more powerful implications of research that combines multiple perspectives and approaches (Almalki, 2016; Bickman & Rog, 2008; Seawright, 2016). By combining both the qualitative and quantitative approaches, researchers can often come away with a better, more complete understanding of the issue. Because the issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes has not been sufficiently examined, it was important that this research aims to gain a complete, in-depth examination of this phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

Three unique data collection approaches were used for this research. The first approach was individual interviews with former collegiate male basketball student-athletes who departed
prematurely at some point during their college career. The second approach was a focus group consisting of collegiate men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators, which provided a unique and useful perspective as to what they believe the underlying themes are concerning the high attrition rates among the sport. The third data collection approach was a quantitative survey that was digitally sent to former men’s basketball student-athletes.

**Research Questions**

**Central Question:** How can the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes be solved at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?

**Sub-question 1:** How would former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes in an interview solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?

**Sub-question 2:** How would collegiate men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators in a focus group solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?

**Sub-question 3:** How would former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes in a quantitative survey solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?
Setting

The setting for this research was a singular institution of higher learning located in the southwestern region of the United States. For the purpose of this research, Winfield Christian University (WCU) was the pseudonym used to reference the private, faith-based, four-year university located in a rural city in the southwestern United States affiliated with this study. WCU is categorized as a Medium Level 2 Master’s University, meaning that the institution awards between 100-199 master’s degrees annually, but fewer than 20 doctorate degrees (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2017). The annual student enrollment numbers at WCU fluctuates around 3,500 students. From an athletic standpoint, WCU participates in the NAIA, which is athletically similar to NCAA Division II, yet with a much more limited financial investment from the institution (NAIA, 2016; NAIA, 2020).

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes, this phenomenon was examined at WCU from the perspectives of both the student-athletes as well as of the coaching staff. This multiple-perspective process was deemed necessary to identify insight and themes as to why collegiate male basketball student-athletes transfer at such a high rate, and possible solutions that could be utilized to address the high attrition rates among this sub-population. To protect the identity of individuals involved with this study, each participant was given a pseudonym as well.

Participants

Three unique data collection approaches were used for this research. The first approach was individual interviews with former Winfield Christian University basketball student-athletes who prematurely departed an institution at some point during their college career. From a strategic timeline, participants were limited to those who were members of the basketball team at
the institution within the last five years but are no longer participating in collegiate athletics.

Four personal interviews were conducted, and purposeful stratified sampling was utilized to conduct the interviews. The stratified sampling was important so that the interviews were conducted with student-athletes who had prematurely departed at some point during their college career (Bickman & Rog, 2008; Liberty et al., 2016; Neyman, 1992; Tipton, 2013). This method of purposeful stratified sampling was especially useful in making proportional generalizations and identifying themes that existed among those men’s basketball student-athletes who departed early. Additionally, a purposive sample allowed this research to examine select cases that were expected to likely yield the most pertinent information.

The second data collection approach was a focus group of four participants conducted with the current collegiate men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators or those who had been formerly affiliated with the men’s basketball programs at Winfield Christian University within the last five years. These specific participants were chosen because of their first-hand familiarity and experience with the issue of high attrition rates among the sport (Hollis et al., 2002). A focus group can be beneficial when it comes to revealing the perspective the group shares on a specific phenomenon (Cyr, 2016). The purpose of this focus group was to understand the unique perspective and observations that coaches and administrators have towards the growing attrition rate in collegiate men’s basketball and what they believe are the underlying causes of the issue. This focus group provided valuable insight into the institution’s perspectives on the issue of high attrition rates among men’s basketball student-athletes.

The third data collection approach was a quantitative survey that was digitally sent to former men’s basketball student-athletes from Winfield Christian University. The survey was sent to individuals who participated in the men’s basketball program within the last five years
but are no longer participating in collegiate athletics. By excluding student-athletes that were currently participating in college athletics, the participants hopefully felt more open and transparent with their responses because that superior-subordinate relationship dynamic from the basketball program was removed from the equation.

The sample pool for participants in the survey was based on using maximum variation purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016; Huarte & Barrios, 2006; Laerd Dissertation, 2012; van Hoeven et al., 2015). The reasoning behind this sampling procedure was to efficiently restrict participants to those who had participated in collegiate men’s basketball at Winfield Christian University within the parameters of the last five years, yet be broad enough to include those who had transferred as well as those who had persisted at a single institution to compare and contrast their journeys. The quantitative survey was sent to an estimated 50 participants, however it was estimated that a much lower number of individuals would be willing to participate (Salge et al., 2018). To encourage participation, participants who completed the electronic survey had the opportunity to be entered into a raffle to receive one of four $25 Amazon gift cards. Furthermore, it was expected that most responses solicited from the digital survey would convey negative responses, as millennials tend to share more pessimistic reviews when provided with the opportunity to give feedback, but often fail to provide feedback from positive encounters (Chinedu et al., 2017; Soares et al., 2017).

**The Researcher’s Role**

I was personally invested in this research because of my dual role as the researcher as well as a veteran collegiate men’s basketball coach. Throughout my coaching career, I had noticed first-hand the high attrition rate among male basketball student-athletes, and how this trend was increasing annually, but I was optimistic that this study would help provide insight into
the reasons why the specific population of male basketball student-athletes are transferring at a higher rate than their peers, as well as assist in identifying solutions to rectify the issue. I was further tied to this research because I was familiar with the current and former student-athletes and coaches of the basketball program at Winfield Christian University. However, due to the minimal-risk nature of the study and the fact that I was not in a position of authority over the research participants, there was no ongoing power imbalance that could significantly impact the study or potentially bring any harm to those involved with this research (Bickman & Rog, 2008). Additionally, this minimal-risk study had the possibility of high beneficence towards the retention rates of the basketball program at Winfield Christian University, as well as across the board for the sport of collegiate men’s basketball. Participants were made aware of my intentions in addressing the high attrition rates among collegiate male basketball student-athletes through this study, and due to my personal and direct involvement with this issue, I believed there would be a deeper respect and rapport between the participants and myself as the researcher, which likely enhanced the quality of this research.

**Procedures**

This section will examine, in detail, the procedures necessary to conduct this study. This includes securing approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), eliciting participants for the study, and the process of collecting the data. An application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that included the dissertation proposal, how participants were to be recruited for the study, the interview and survey questions, the procedures on gathering the data, and recording procedures. Permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained before the research and data collection occurred in the form of an exemption (see Appendix B for IRB approval). In compliance with IRB standards, this included gaining approval from the
Dissertation Chair. Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the proper administration as well as athletic department representatives at Winfield Christian University before data collection occurred (see Appendix C for permission request letter and permissions).

Potential participants were recruited by working with the athletic department and men’s basketball program at the selected institution. It was anticipated that while the institution would likely be supportive of this research, much of the groundwork for identifying the pool of potential participants would be reliant on the researcher’s efforts and knowledge of players who had passed through the program. The researcher successfully identified a majority of the participant pool by going through Winfield Christian University’s men’s basketball rosters, game stats, and programs over the last five years. Often, student-athletes who departed the program in good standing are left on the online roster, but student-athletes who have departed in poor standing might have their names removed from the online roster, which is why game stats and game programs were also highly useful. A concern was that some student-athletes—especially those who redshirted—might not be traceable through rosters or game stats; however, assistance from coaching staff members and athletic departments members at Winfield Christian University was valuable in identifying potential participants who fit the criteria that might have been undiscernible otherwise. Furthermore, after identifying the potential participants, it was even more challenging to contact these individuals to invite them to be a part of the study if their contact information had changed since attending Winfield Christian University. When this occurred, the use of technology and social media played a large role in reaching out to potential participants, especially student-athletes that departed from the institution on poor terms and failed to update their contact information since. For the focus group portion of this research, it was much easier to solicit involvement from the coaching staff and athletic administrators to
invite them to participate. Even coaches who had since moved on from the institution were easier to track down and invite to participate in the study than a multitude of former student-athletes. Once contact information was established with potential participants, they were invited to participate in this minimal-risk study, which had beneficence towards the future of the sport of collegiate men’s basketball.

For this study, data was collected through three unique collection approaches. The first approach was individual interviews with former basketball student-athletes from Winfield Christian University who transferred prematurely at some point during their college career. Four individual interviews were conducted utilizing purposeful stratified sampling so that a transfer affiliated with each institution was represented. After participants were identified, the individual interviews were conducted in the most convenient manner possible, which was through a phone call. The individual interviews were semi-structured in nature with each interview lasting roughly 30 to 45 minutes (see Appendix D for Interview Questions). The audio from each interview was recorded so that it could be transcribed and further analyzed upon the completion of the interview.

The second data collection approach was a focus group made up of collegiate men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators. The focus group consisted of four participants and provided valuable insight into the issue of attrition rates in men’s basketball from the institution’s perspective. The focus group was conducted using a digital video conferencing system, was semi-structured in nature, and lasted roughly an hour (see Appendix E for Focus Group Questions). The audio and video from the focus group was recorded so that it could be transcribed and further analyzed upon the completion of the interview.
The third data collection approach was a quantitative survey sent to former men’s basketball student-athletes from Winfield Christian University. The survey was sent electronically, and participants had a two-week window to take part in the voluntary survey. It was expected that the survey itself would take approximately 30 minutes to complete. One week after the initial invitation, a formal reminder was sent to potential participants who had yet to complete the survey to encourage participation. At the conclusion of the survey window, the data was collected and analyzed using a descriptive analysis (see Appendix F for Quantitative Survey Questions).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was gathered through three unique collection approaches. The first approach was individual interviews with former men’s basketball student-athletes who had previously experienced a premature departure from an institution of higher learning at some point during their college career. The second approach was a focus group with coaches and athletic administrators. The third approach was a survey that was sent to former men’s basketball student-athletes. These approaches will be discussed in further detail below.

Interviews

The first sub-question asked former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes in an individual interview how they would solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States. For the purpose of this research, four personal interviews were conducted with student-athletes who prematurely departed an institution of higher learning at some point during their college career. Purposeful stratified sampling was utilized to ensure equal opportunity of representation and also to assist in identifying overarching
themes among all of the transferred student-athletes interviewed (Liberty et al., 2016; Neyman, 1992; Tipton, 2013). Categorical codes and themes were identified throughout the data collection process. Refraining from predetermining the specific categorical codes provided optimal flexibility as significant themes became identified and defined. By purposefully selecting the participants for this interview, participants were carefully chosen to allow this research to examine select cases and individual journeys that were expected to yield the most pertinent information (Bickman & Rog, 2008).

The group of potential participants for the individual interviews was made up of former basketball student-athletes from Winfield Christian University who transferred prematurely at some point during their college career, however participants were limited to those who were members of the basketball teams at the institution within the last five years but were no longer participating in collegiate athletics. Part of the selection method included an informal recommendation by the individual’s former college coaches and the potential participant’s ease of contact was also taken into consideration. It was important that this research did not examine certain situations at the expense of failing to look at others. An ambition was that the backgrounds and journeys from the individuals chosen for the interviews would vary. Participants were selected purposefully among the stratified sampling groups so that interviews reflected some student-athletes prematurely departing Winfield Christian University, while others reflected student-athletes prematurely departing a different institution to transfer into Winfield Christian University. Another variable that was considered was the number of times a student-athlete transferred. To be comprehensive, it was ideal that this research represented participants who had transferred only once, as well as individuals who had transferred multiple times.
Once potential participants were identified, the researcher, through the assistance of the athletic department and men’s basketball program at Winfield Christian University, began contacting former student-athletes and soliciting individuals for contribution and input into this study. Each of the four individual interviews was conducted in the most convenient manner possible, which was through a phone call. The interviews were voice recorded so they could be further analyzed and accurately transcribed. The individual interviews were semi-structured in nature to provide a general direction to the conversation, while also allowing the participant to freely respond and talk openly and candidly about their time as a collegiate men’s basketball student athlete (Drever, 1995; Longhurst, 2003). The questions were specifically chosen to help gain insight into a student-athlete’s decision to attend a school, and then what factors played a role in that student-athlete prematurely departing the institution. The personal interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, however there was no set time limit. The 25 structured questions asked in the individual interviews are below:

1. What factors led you to attend your initial college/university initially?
2. How important was the opportunity to join the basketball program at your initial college/university in making your college decision?
3. Describe your interest in your initial college/university beyond the opportunity to participate in collegiate basketball.
4. What role did your parents/guardians/mentors have in your decision to attend the initial college/university?
5. Describe any initial hesitations about the initial college/university beyond basketball.
6. Describe any initial hesitations about the initial basketball program at college/university.
7. How far was the initial college/university from your hometown, and what role did that play in your decision to attend?

8. Approximately how much were you paying financially out of pocket to attend your initial college/university?

9. Describe your home life when you made the decision to commit and attend the initial college/university.

10. Describe the recruiting process by the basketball staff at the initial college/university.

11. Describe the recruiting process by the admissions office at the initial college/university.

12. Describe the relationships you had at your initial college/university—this can include faculty, staff, coaches, classmates, peers, the community.

13. What factors led you to a premature departure from your initial college/university?

14. When did the thought of departure from your initial college/university enter your mind?

15. What role did your parents/guardians/mentors have in your decision to prematurely depart?

16. What role did basketball have in your decision to depart?

17. What would have prevented you from prematurely departing your initial college/university?

18. How many of your teammates/peers also chose to depart from your initial college/university? What factor did their decision have on your decision to leave?

19. How successful were you as an athlete at your initial college/university? How successful was the team?

20. How did you feel about the amount of playing time you received at your initial institution?
21. How successful were you academically at your initial college/university?
22. How connected were you to your initial college/university academically?
23. How connected were you to your initial college/university socially?
24. In your opinion, why is the attrition rate among men’s basketball student-athletes so high at the collegiate level?
25. How can the issue of high attrition among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes be solved?

The initial 11 questions were foundational in nature and established what factors led to the student-athlete attending a specific institution. Factors such as distance from home, athletic opportunity, out-of-pocket cost, and interest level from the university have all been previously demonstrated to have an impact on a student-athlete’s college decision (Barden et al., 2013; Davies & Burakowski, 2015; Johnson et al., 2013; Klenosky et al., 2001; Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014; Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2014; Sander, 2008). Based on the limited previous research, student-athletes, especially those who participate in the high-profile sports of men’s basketball and football, are more likely to make their college decision based on athletic opportunities (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011). While the importance of athletic opportunities has been demonstrated to show substantial influence on a recruited student-athlete’s decision for NCAA Division I, there is less research that shows the influence for the other levels of competitive collegiate athletics. For this study, it was important to determine what factors a recruited student-athlete considered and gave priority to during the college selection process.

Questions 12-23 dealt with the student-athlete’s college experience at their initial institution. These questions were beneficial in identifying themes as to why the student departed
their initial institution prematurely. This group of questions attempted to put value on the integration and connection a student had with the institution, both academically and socially, which correlated with Tinto’s theory of departure (Tinto, 1993; 2006). Additionally, this group of questions considered the aspect of social influence that peers can have on a student’s decision to remain at or depart from an institution (Krezel & Krezel, 2017; Siebert, 2018). For example, students who are affiliated with peers that depart prematurely from an institution are more likely to do the same. Athletic-specific aspects were also examined in this portion of questions, such as the role that winning or losing placed on a student-athlete’s decision to remain at or depart from an institution, as well the impact that playing time had on an individual’s decision to remain or depart from a program (“Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Hickman & Meyer, 2017; Peterson, 2017).

With the questions being open-ended in nature, the participants were able to provide ample feedback as they saw fit. While the first 23 structured questions regarded the participant’s unique journey, the final two questions served as a parting opportunity for the participant to share their opinion and insight as to why the sport of collegiate men’s basketball is currently suffering from high attrition rates on a broader scale, and what could be done to rectify this trend. Because of their first-hand experiences as former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes who had experienced a premature departure at some point during their college career, these participants had valuable insight that was highly beneficial on the topic of high attrition rates among the sport.

Following the conclusion of the individual interviews, the recordings were transcribed and the data was analyzed by recognizing consistent patterns and themes that emerged from the participant’s answers (Griffee, 2005). Each interview was unique and offered personal insight
into that participant’s journey, but recurring themes emerged. Purposeful stratified group sampling was also used to help understand the phenomenon of attrition among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes on a broader scale, which likely led to more accuracy and greater insight (Bickman & Rog, 2008). The individual interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

**Focus Group**

The second sub-question asked how collegiate men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators in a focus group would solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States. The purpose of the focus group was to gain insight into the issue of high attrition rates among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes from the perspective of the institutions. The focus group consisted of four participants who had formerly or currently served as basketball coaches or athletic administrators at Winfield Christian University within the last five years. The participants were chosen due to their first-hand familiarity and direct experience with the issue of high attrition rates among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes (Hollis et al., 2002). By interviewing institutional representatives, this research was able to better understand the unique perspective that men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators have towards the issue of high attrition rates among the sport. Furthermore, this additional perspective assisted in providing a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of this topic.

The focus group was conducted digitally and lasted approximately one hour in length. The program used for the focus group was Zoom, so that the focus group members were able to participate both visually and verbally with one another. The focus group was semi-structured in
nature, led by a moderator representing this study (Carey & Asbury, 2016). The moderator led the conversation using the structured set of questions below:

1. What characteristics do you look for when you recruit to your basketball program?

2. What are the primary factors that you believe potential student-athletes are looking for when they make their college decision?

3. What is your process for building a relationship with a potential recruit?

4. What is your process for building a relationship with a potential recruit’s parents/guardians/mentors?

5. How do you balance the needs and interests of a potential student-athlete who might be better served at a different institution with the desire to have them in your program?

6. Once a student-athlete is in your program how do you continue to build that relationship with them?

7. What do you do to help your student-athletes connect with the campus academically?

8. What do you do to help your student-athletes connect with the campus socially?

9. What do you do to help your student-athletes connect with the community?

10. Describe how you understand and address the needs of your student-athletes.

11. How do you measure success and satisfaction as a coach? Would you consider your program successful?

12. How do you perceive that your student-athletes measure success and satisfaction? Would your student-athletes consider your program successful?

13. Describe the culture of your program.

14. How often do you lose student-athletes due to their decision to prematurely depart your program?
15. How often do you benefit from student-athletes who chose to prematurely depart or transfer from a different institution and join your program?

16. What perceived factors lead student-athletes to transfer or persist at an institution?

17. What role do you believe that parents/guardians/mentors/peers have in a student-athlete’s decision to transfer or persist at your institution?

18. How often are you surprised or caught off guard to hear that a student-athlete wants to prematurely depart from your program?

19. How often do you "run off" a student-athlete so that you can free up a roster spot within your program? Or so that they can find a better fit?

20. Based on your knowledge and first-hand experience, why is the attrition rate among men’s basketball student-athletes so high at the collegiate level?

21. How can the issue of high attrition rates among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes be solved?

The first five questions were in regard to the recruiting process. This was an important topic because previous research has shown that student-athletes affiliated with high-profile sports are recruited primarily for their athletic ability (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010). It was also interesting to see what factors, especially those outside of sport-specific attributes, coaches took into consideration to recruit a student-athlete. The fifth question asked coaches how they balanced the needs and interests of a potential student-athlete who might be better served at a different institution with the desire to have that particular prospect in their program. The underlying purpose with the fifth question was to identify if the coaches truly have the prospective student-athlete’s best interest at heart, or if the appeal of having that student-athlete in their program outweighed helping the prospect understand the disadvantages of attending their
institution. Interestingly, each of the coaches that participated in the focus group were also former men’s basketball student-athletes during their college years. Because these coaches had experience on both sides of the recruiting conversations, as both the sought-after prospect and now as the coach, their responses were very insightful (Johnson et al., 2017).

Questions 6-18 all correlated to the student-athletes’ experience on campus and what the coaching staffs were doing to integrate their student-athletes to the campus and community. Based on Tinto’s theory of departure, a student’s integration academically and socially is imperative to a student’s persistence at an institution (Tinto, 1993; 2006). This set of questions was important because it asked what initiatives coaching staffs were taking, if any, to ensure that their students were connecting academically and socially. Another aspect that was examined in this group of questions was the success of the basketball program based on the definitions of success that the coach and student-athletes of each program wished to utilize. Being a part of a successful group can positively influence an individual to persist with the organization, but being a part of a group that is perceived as unsuccessful can breed a climate of attrition within the organization (Hickman & Meyer, 2017; Peterson, 2017). While it was expected that winning basketball games would be foundationally incorporated into the definitions of success of each of the basketball programs involved in this study, other goals and measurements of success were also offered. Seeing how different programs defined success was important. If success was only defined as winning a national championship, but that moment never occurs, the coaching staffs and student-athletes might never feel satisfied and successful despite other monumental achievements that might have been accomplished—leading to frustration and attrition within the organization. This segment of questions was also intriguing because it asked how often a coach was caught off-guard by a player announcing their intentions to transfer, while also
acknowledging that sometimes coaches force players out of the program. Question 15 had the potential to be very interesting because up to this point, attrition had been discussed in a negative light, but this specific question asked instead how often these coaches benefited from a player opting to transfer into their program. This question could have undermined the endorsement of a stable team environment by instead cunningly promoting a culture of attrition when it was to the coaches’ benefit (Sperber, 2000).

This set of questions, in their entirety, aimed to give the researcher insight into the entire timeline of what it is like to be recruited and then experience life as a member of a specific men’s basketball program. These questions examined who does the recruiting of student-athletes, and then identified what the coaches were doing, if anything, to cultivate a successful culture once the students are on campus. Additionally, coaches had an opportunity to communicate what attributes they believed lead to attrition within their program. The final two questions covered the broad nature of this study by asking the coaches and administrators to share their opinions and insight as to why the sport of collegiate men’s basketball is currently facing increasingly high attrition rates, and what solutions could be implemented to correct this trend.

The audio and video from the focus group was recorded so that it could be further analyzed and examined upon the completion of the interview. Following the conclusion of the focus group, the audio was transcribed and noticeable body-language and tone was documented as well. The analysis of the focus group primarily focused on the use of grounded theory in order to find shared themes on which the participants responses were based (Carey & Asbury, 2016; Griffee, 2005). Categorical codes and themes were identified throughout the data collection process. Refraining from predetermining the specific categorical codes provided optimal flexibility as significant themes were identified and defined. The perspective of the institution,
which was represented in this focus group as coaches and athletic administrators, was highly valuable in understanding the issue of high attrition rates of collegiate male basketball student-athletes (Bickman & Rog, 2008). The focus group questions can be found in Appendix E.

Survey

The third sub-question for this study asked how former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes in a quantitative survey would solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States. The survey was sent in a digital format to former student-athletes from Winfield Christian University who participated in college basketball within the last five years but have since finished their collegiate athletic career. The sample pool for participants in the survey was based on using maximum variation purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016; Huarte & Barrios, 2006; Laerd Dissertation, 2012; van Hoeven et al., 2015). The reasoning behind this sampling procedure was to efficiently restrict participants to those that had participated in collegiate men’s basketball at Winfield Christian University, yet be broad enough to gain insight from individuals who had transferred as well as those who had persisted at a single institution. Based on this sampling procedure, there were an estimated 50 potential participants.

The digital survey primarily utilized a unique six-point Likert scale to assign numerical value to participant’s responses unless otherwise noted (Boone & Boone, 2012; Dawes, 2008; Harpe, 2015; Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). The six-point Likert scale was beneficial in research because it removed the neutral middle option. The scale points were strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree, and strongly agree. The survey was entirely electronic, using the online survey program Google Forms. This electronic method meant that participants
could take part in the survey from the ease and comfort of their current location. The survey likely took between 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Participants had a two-week window to take part in the voluntary survey. One week after the initial invitation, a reminder was sent to potential participants who had yet to complete the survey to maximize responses. The survey consisted of mostly quantitative questions that were chosen to specifically examine factors in the student-athlete’s recruiting process as well as their decision to either persist or transfer. The survey was broken into five unique sub-sections. Section 1 consisted of five questions that assisted in gathering necessary background information on the participants. The portion of questions from Section 1 of the survey are below:

1.1 Did you prematurely depart from a college or university before completing your degree there? Y / N

1.2 Did you transfer to a different college or university after completing your degree at your institution? Y / N

1.3 Were you a graduate transfer. Y/N

1.4 Please list all colleges and universities you attended below:

Institution 1 ___________________________________________.
Did you complete your degree at this institution? Y / N

Institution 2 ___________________________________________.
Did you complete your degree at this institution? Y / N

Institution 3 ___________________________________________.
Did you complete your degree at this institution? Y / N

Institution 4 ___________________________________________.
Did you complete your degree at this institution? Y / N
1.5 Levels of collegiate athletics you participated in: (select all that apply)
- NCAA DI
- NCAA DII
- NCAA DIII
- NAIA
- NJCAA
- Other

While questions 1.1 and 1.2 might appear redundant, they were both necessary and insightful in helping to determine when a student prematurely departed from an institution versus a situation where a student had completed their degree at an institution and then decided to transfer and begin an advanced degree elsewhere. Part of the necessity of this segment was that student-athletes who spent two years at a junior college and complete their associate’s degree and then transfer to a four-year institution are considered transfer students in academic literature, however for the purposes of this study this type of transferring should be encouraged as it is a natural and necessary linear academic progression for an individual to move to a four-year school after receiving their associate’s degree (Lederman, 2017; Shaw & Chin-Newman, 2017; Taylor & Jain, 2017). Therefore, in an effort to differentiate between the premature departure from an institution versus the necessary advancement to a new institution, additional background information was needed. Question 1.4 asked the participants to list all of the institutions of higher education they attended and if they graduated from each institution. While the responses collected to Question 1.4 potentially had information that could be triangulated to decipher a participant’s identity, it was determined that because this was a minimal-risk study, and because the responses could help to clarify if a departure was naturally occurring after the completion of a degree instead of a premature departure, the benefits of including this question in the survey outweighed the minimal risks (Hansson et al., 2016). With that being said, information that could potentially be used to re-identify a participant—such as noting all of the institutions which an
individual attended—was withheld from the published study so that participants will have a reasonable protection of privacy.

Section 2 brought light to the recruiting process at the student-athlete’s initial institution of higher education. This portion of the survey was necessary to understand the factors that influenced a recruit’s decision to attend a specific institution. All of the questions in this section utilized the six-point Likert scale for responses. The questions from Section 2 of the survey are below:

2.1 My initial college/university was close to my hometown.
2.2 I was paying a large financial amount out-of-pocket to attend my initial college/university.
2.3 I received a large amount of scholarship to attend my initial college/university.
2.4 I had parents/guardians/mentors that helped me make the decision to attend my initial college/university.
2.5 Academics were the primary reason I attended my initial college/university.
2.6 Basketball was the primary reason I attended my initial college/university.
2.7 I was heavily recruited by an admissions department or an academic department to attend my initial college/university.
2.8 I was heavily recruited by the basketball staff to attend my initial college/university.
2.9 I expected to complete my degree at my initial college/university when I enrolled there.
2.10 I expected to play an important role in the basketball program at my initial college/university when I enrolled there.
2.11 Academically and socially, my initial college/university was perceived as the best fit for me.
2.12 The basketball program at my initial college/university was perceived as the best fit for
me.

2.13 I would have attended my initial institution even if I did not participate in college athletics.

2.14 I had friends that already attended or were planning to attend my initial college/university.

2.15 I believed I had the potential to play professional basketball.

Factors such as a further distance from home and an excessive financial cost-to-attend can be precursors to student attrition (Barden et al., 2013; Tinto, 1987; 1993; 2006). Notably, student-athletes, especially those that participate in the higher-profile sports of men’s basketball and football, prioritize athletic opportunities over academic opportunities when making a college selection (Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; “Division I Results from the NCAA GOALS”, 2011; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Williamson, 2017). To determine if previous research holds true, Questions 2.5 and 2.6 examined academic opportunities against athletic opportunities to determine which factor played a more influential role in the decision to attend an institution. Through these questions and by asking participants to identify their level of athletic play in Section 1, this research was able to differentiate between student-athletes that formerly participated at the highest level of NCAA Division I versus the other collegiate levels. Furthermore, the results from this segment helped this study to quantify the amount of influence that athletics had in a student-athlete’s decision to attend an institution. Additionally, if it appeared that high-profile student-athletes were only being recruited by athletic department representatives and failed to connect with the academic side of campus during the recruiting process, one could theorize that this skewed process could be potentially detrimental and lead to a short stay at the institution (Green, 2005).

Section 3 of the survey focused on the student-athlete’s college experiences at their initial
institution. This section attempted to quantify intrinsic values, such as feelings of happiness and connectiveness to the college or university. The results from this section, when cross referenced with the information of a student’s attrition or retention at their initial institution, were highly valuable. All of the questions in this section utilized the six-point Likert scale for responses. The questions from Section 3 of the survey are below:

3.1 I was happy as a student at my initial college/university.
3.2 I was happy as a member of the basketball program at my initial college/university.
3.3 I was a successful student at my initial college/university.
3.4 I was successful as a basketball player at my initial college/university.
3.5 Our basketball program was successful at my initial college/university.
3.6 At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the college/university.
3.7 At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the community.
3.8 At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the basketball program.
3.9 At my initial college/university, I felt valued.
3.10 At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with the academic faculty.
3.11 At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with non-athlete students.
3.12 At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with my teammates.
3.13 At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with the basketball coaches.
3.14 I was proud to attend my initial college/university.
3.15 I was proud to be a member of the basketball program at my initial college/university.
3.16 Several of my peers prematurely departed from my initial college/university.
3.17 There was a head-coaching change made during my time affiliated with my initial institution.
According to Tinto’s theory of departure, a student’s academic and social integration can be an accurate predictor of that student’s decision to persist or depart at that institution (Tinto, 1993; 2006). If Tinto’s theory of departure were to hold true with the population of male collegiate basketball student-athletes, there should be a correlation between the participants’ responses to these questions and their individual outcome at their initial institution. Question 3.16 also considered the social implications of being around peers who prematurely depart an institution and the negative effects that can have on an individual (Krezel & Krezel, 2017; Siebert, 2018). Another aspect of this set of questions was that it asked participants to identify their self-perceived level of success, both academically and athletically. Without adding parameters to what defines success, these questions allowed the researcher to understand how an individual’s perceived level of success can lead to attrition or persistence. Generally speaking, individuals will make personal sacrifices to be a part of a successful organization, and the same holds true for athletic teams (Hickman & Meyer, 2017; Peterson, 2017). If a team is perceived to be successful, an individual student-athlete is more likely to be content with a lesser role to be a part of something special. However, the opposite also holds true, and individuals are generally less willing to make personal sacrifices to be a part of an unsuccessful organization because the value of the organization has decreased (Rosner & Shropshire, 2011). If the previous research on organizational retention holds true, there should be a correlation between Question 3.5, which asked students to quantify how successful their collegiate basketball organization was, and the student-athlete’s decision to persist or depart.

The next portion of the survey, Section 4, only pertained to student-athletes who had prematurely transferred or departed from an institution. This section asked participants to quantify the factors that might have led to their decision to leave. All of the questions in this
section, except for 4.15, utilized the six-point Likert scale for responses. The questions from Section 4 of the survey are below:

4.1 My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on academic reasons.

4.2 My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on basketball reasons.

4.3 My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on financial reasons.

4.4 My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on personal reasons.

4.5 I was on track to graduate when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.6 I was on pace to play a larger role in the basketball program when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.7 I was homesick when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.8 I was performing well academically when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.9 I was performing well as a basketball player when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.10 I was satisfied with the academic experience at my initial institution when I made the decision to prematurely depart.

4.11 I was satisfied with the basketball experience at my initial institution when I made the decision to prematurely depart.

4.12 I was satisfied with the amount of game minutes I played at my initial institution.

4.13 I was "run off" by the coaching staff at my initial institution.

4.14 My parents/guardians/mentors supported my decision to prematurely depart from my
After departing from my initial institution, I ____________. (choose the option that best fits)

- dropped out of school, pursued other options
- pursued professional basketball opportunities
- transferred, but quit participation in college athletics
- transferred, and moved to a lower level of college athletics
- transferred, and moved to a similar level of college athletics
- transferred, and moved to a higher level of college athletics

Questions 4.1 through 4.4 were all worded in a way that fairly allowed participants to identify multiple reasons that might have led to their departure. While one factor might be the primary reason a student chooses to depart, there are often multiple complex layers in the decision to transfer or depart (Tinto, 1993; 2006). Based on the very limited amount of previous research on the topic of premature departures in collegiate men’s basketball, an observed theme is that students who prematurely depart do so strictly for reasons pertaining to their sport (NCAA Research, 2017). The questions in this survey—such as Questions 4.11 and 4.12 which asked about satisfaction with the basketball program and the individual’s game minutes—provided a beneficial reexamination to this aspect for this study. Other notable factors that generally lead to higher attrition rates—such as a further proximity from home, financial concerns, satisfaction with the university and basketball program, and being properly integrated to the campus and community—were also investigated throughout this survey (Barden et al., 2013; Davies & Burakowski, 2015; Johnson et al., 2013; Klenosky et al., 2001; Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014; Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2014; Sander, 2008). Question 4.13 asked the participant if they were “run off” by the basketball coaching staff at their initial institution, and this addressed the important distinction that sometimes a student-athlete departs not of their own free will, but instead because the coaching staff believed the team would be better served going in a different direction (Feinstein, 2020; Gleddie et al., 2019; Hamilton, 2005; Morris, 2019).
Lastly, Question 4.15, which featured a drop-down option to complete the sentence, allowed student-athletes who prematurely departed an institution an opportunity to explain where they transitioned to after their departure. This question was important, especially in the rare instance a student-athlete departed early for the opportunity to play professional basketball.

Section 5 was the final portion of the survey, and was made up of four open-ended questions that assisted in reinforcing the data given with the Likert scale responses. The final questions asked the participants to share any other thoughts related to what would have prevented their premature departure, the topic of recruiting, and their unique college experience. The open-ended questions from Section 5 of the survey are below:

5.1 If you prematurely departed from an institution, what would have prevented you from leaving?

5.2 Any other thoughts you'd like to share on the recruiting process?

5.3 Any other thoughts you'd like to share on your college experience?

5.4 Any other thoughts you'd like to share on your decision to persist or depart an institution?

The benefit of the open-ended questions was that they allowed the participants to answer freely, beyond the restriction of the close-ended Likert scale responses, so that accuracy was maintained (Friborg et al., 2013). This section was primarily analyzed by attempting to identify themes that exist among the participant’s responses (Carey & Asbury, 2016; Griffie, 2005). Categorical codes and themes were identified throughout the data collection process. Refraining from predetermining the specific categorical codes provided optimal flexibility as significant themes became identified and defined.

Once the opportunity to complete the survey closed, the data was collected and analyzed using a descriptive approach, which provided insight into the collected data that was easy to
comprehend and understand. This approach summarized the characteristics of the data by explaining its features numerically, and was especially useful in giving meaning to the six-point Likert scale responses. By providing a detailed summary of the data, the characteristics of the data set can be quickly and simply understood. Additionally, for easy visual comprehension, bar graphs and pie charts were illustrated. It was anticipated that a low percentage of potential participants would actively participate in this research (Salge et al., 2018). To encourage participation, participants who completed the electronic survey had the option to be entered into a raffle to receive one of four $25 Amazon gift cards.

**Ethical Considerations**

Although this study was minimal risk in nature, there were still ethical considerations that had to be addressed. Confidentiality among the participants and institutions involved was always imperative. To ensure the greatest degree of confidentiality, personal identifying information was stripped from the data once the data had been properly utilized. In Question 1.3, participants were asked to list all colleges and universities they attended, as well as if they completed their degree at that institution. The information in Question 1.3 was highly valuable in differentiating a student-athlete who transferred prematurely versus one who transferred after completing their degree at the initial institution. Because the data in Question 1.3 could potentially be triangulated to identify the participant, once the data was analyzed, the individual institutional names were removed. When applicable, individuals and institutions were assigned pseudonyms so that they were unidentifiable (Bickman & Rog, 2008). A code book was kept to link pseudonyms to individual participant’s responses. The code book is being stored on a computer that is password protected, and when this computer is not in use it will be locked away in a secure room. Only researchers have access to the code book. There were further concerns working with a focus
group, since it is virtually impossible to ensure confidentially among the group. To ensure the greatest degree of confidentiality and professionalism with the focus group, participants of the focus group were reminded at the start of the meeting and in the final debriefing that the conversation within the group was to remain private.

All data collected for this research, including audio and visual recordings of the interviews and focus groups, is being stored only on password protected computers (Bickman & Rog, 2008). The same holds true for the data collected from the survey. Physical copies of the data, when necessary, are stored in a locked cabinet and in a locked office when not in use by the researcher. Furthermore, the consent forms are being stored separately from the research data to ensure that identifiers cannot be pieced together. Upon the conclusion of collecting data for this study, the contact lists made up of potential participants was destroyed.

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the multimethod research design process being utilized for this study on a highly detailed level to the point that, if necessary, a reproduction of this study could be carried out successfully in the future. For this particular research, three unique data collection approaches were utilized, including individual interviews with former collegiate male basketball student-athletes, a focus group with collegiate men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators, and a quantitative survey that was digitally sent to former men’s basketball student-athletes. One of the advantages of utilizing a multimethod approach was that researchers were more likely to come away with better, comprehensive understanding of the issue (Almalki, 2016; Bickman & Rog, 2008). This entire process aimed to gain insight as to why an increasingly high attrition rate among collegiate male basketball student-athletes exists, as well as possible solutions to rectify the issue.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this applied study was to examine the problem of high attrition rates among collegiate male basketball student-athletes for institutions of higher learning and their athletic departments to gain a better understanding of the issue and formulate a solution to address the problem. This study incorporated Tinto’s theory of departure, which recognizes the importance of social and academic integration and its effects on student retention (Tinto 1987; 1993; 2006). This study also examined other variables, such as the heightened level of importance that athletics has for student-athletes, the institution’s setting and environment, and financial factors that also have an impact on student retention. While this study specifically examined the issue of high attrition rates in collegiate men’s basketball at a single institute of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States, the findings of this study may be generally applied to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the abnormally high attrition rates that has been plaguing all of collegiate men’s basketball. Three unique data collection methods were conducted—individual interviews, a focus group, and a quantitative survey; this chapter will present the data collection results and analysis. The individuals and institutions represented have been assigned pseudonyms so that confidentiality can be maintained (Bickman & Rog, 2008).

Results

As mentioned previously, this study utilized three data collection methods. The first approach was structured individual interviews with four former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes. The second approach was a focus group with current and former basketball coaches and athletic administrators. The third data collection method was a digital quantitative
survey of former men’s basketball student-athletes who previously represented the institution. Very early on in the data collection process, recurring themes emerged as factors as to why collegiate male basketball student-athletes have high attrition rates.

Central Question: How can the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes be solved at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?

While there were several themes that could be inferred based on the data collected for this study, the primary themes were two-fold. Most notable was the strong influence that basketball-specific factors had on a student-athlete’s decision to attend and persist at an institution. The second recurring theme was the lack of emphasis that was consistently placed on the role of academic factors by the student-athlete.

Theme #1. The primary theme from the three data collection methods centered on the importance of the influence of basketball in a men’s basketball student-athlete’s decision to continue to persist at an institution. The data collected from the quantitative survey clearly demonstrated that recruits make their college decision based on basketball-specific opportunities. Seventy-seven percent of survey participants strongly-agreed that basketball was the primary reason they attended their initial college/university. Further reinforcing the importance of basketball, 67% strongly-disagreed that they would have attended their initial institution even if they did not participate in college athletics. The emphasis on basketball was demonstrated in the recruiting process, and it continued to play an important role in the student-athletes’ decision to persist at the institution. In an individual interview, when asked why the attrition rate among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes is so high, participant Colbert said:

Guys leave because everyone wants to be the main guy, and if they’re not the main guy,
and doing that right away, they just transfer to where they think they can be great right away, not realizing it’s the same issue elsewhere.

Again, this theme of importance of basketball and instant gratification in the sport reemerged during the focus group, when Coach Holland said:

Social media and instant gratification play a big factor [in the attrition rates]. Players want instant gratification in life and it pours into basketball, too. If they’re not playing or the main guy right away they feel they’re missing out and they start looking elsewhere. If they don’t have instant success or positivity they fall out. Before social media there were more four-year guys that understood it might take a few years to earn a certain role on campus. Now freshmen get frustrated if they’re not playing major minutes right away.

Opportunities within the sport seem to motivate the student-athlete to a greater degree than other factors. Unfortunately, the data collected also showed that students often experience unrealistic basketball expectations and crave instant success. In the individual interview, participant Colbert said that in his experience the main reason he has seen players transfer is because they are “usually unsatisfied with playing time.” This notion was reinforced in the focus group, where Coach Carroll advised that men’s basketball student-athletes are looking for the place where they can get the largest amount of playing time. And, probably most evident of unrealistic basketball expectations was that in an industry where only about 2% of men’s collegiate basketball players are offered professional contracts, over 80% of survey participants agreed, to some extent, that they had the potential to play professional basketball. The importance of the game of basketball was evident in all of the data collection methods.

**Theme #2.** The second primary theme was the little amount of emphasis that men’s basketball student-athletes placed on academics in their decision to attend or persist at an
institution. This theme was present in each of the three data collection methods, sometimes by a well-defined distinction, and other times this theme appeared through its notable absence in the data collection methods. The quantitative survey showed that 67% of participants strongly disagreed that they would still have attended their initial institution if they did not participate in college athletics, and to put it even more bluntly, in another survey question 77% of participants disagreed, to some extent, that academics were the primary reason that they attended their initial institution. Based on the data, academics play a minor role in a male basketball recruit’s decision to attend a specific school, and academic-factors continue to have only minor influence in the student-athletes’ decision to persist or depart from the institution.

In each of the four individual interviews that were conducted, each of the participants mentioned that they were performing well academically at the time of their premature departure. This data also aligned with one of the survey questions, where over 75% of survey participants agreed, to some extent, that they were on track to graduate at the time of their premature departure. Yet despite a self-perception of academic success and being on track to graduate with a degree, the overwhelming portion of participants prematurely departed from their initial institution before achieving graduation, which reinforced the notion that athletic endeavors have a stronger influence on retention than academic-specific opportunities. Furthermore, in the focus group with current and former men’s basketball coaches, the discussion about academics was limited at best, which again demonstrated the little amount of importance that is truly given to academics.

**Sub-question 1**

Sub-question one for this study was, “How would former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes in an interview solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate
basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?” Four individual interviews were conducted with student-athletes who prematurely departed from an institution of higher learning at some point during their college career. The group of potential participants for the individual interviews was made up of former basketball student-athletes from Winfield Christian University who transferred prematurely at some point during their college career; however, the other requirement was that participants were limited to former student-athletes that were no longer participating in collegiate athletics at all. Part of the selection method included participants who expressed an interest in the phone interview portion of the data collection, an informal recommendation by the individual’s former college coaches, and the participant’s ease of contact and availability. Participants were purposefully selected among the stratified sampling groups so that two interviews reflected student-athletes prematurely departing Winfield Christian University, while the other two reflected student-athletes prematurely departing a different institution to transfer into Winfield Christian University (Liberty et al., 2016; Neyman, 1992; Tipton, 2013). Another variable that was considered was the interview with a former student-athlete who had prematurely departed multiple times. After the four interviews were conducted, the transcripts of the interviews were examined to properly identify categorical codes and themes. A scissor-and-sort technique was utilized by going though the transcript of the interviews and applying codes to the themes as they related to the topic (Stewart et al., 2007). The codes that were identified and the frequency of each code were recorded. The codes assigned from the interviews, as well as their frequency, can be seen on the following page in Table 1.
Table 1

*Frequency of Codes from Individual Interviews*

<table>
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<th>Codes</th>
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From there, based on the frequency of the codes and how they were used, themes emerged. The main themes that appeared consistently throughout the individual interviews were basketball, balance, and academics. The documentation of the themes and how they appeared from the coded transcripts is evident on the following page in Table 2.
Table 2

Frequency of Codes Grouped into Themes

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Theme #1. The easiest theme to depict from the individual interviews was the influence that the sport of basketball had on the former student-athletes. When asked what factors led the four interview participants to attend their initial college/university, they all emphasized basketball opportunities. Participant Colbert said, “I always dreamed of getting to play college basketball and the school seemed like a good fit.” Meanwhile, participant Gray said, “Mostly my
decision was based on the opportunity to play basketball. The school itself was further from home than I was really looking for, but I connected with the coaches and had an opportunity to play.” Participant Adkins acknowledged that the institution was one of the only places that gave him a chance to play basketball, and that while other institutions recruited him as a traditional student, it was the draw of college athletics that caught his eye. “The hopes and dreams of a successful basketball career can be hard to turn down,” said participant Lawson before adding, “Basketball played the largest role [as a factor in my college decision], without a doubt.”

Indeed, not only did all four participants mention the draw of basketball opportunities during the initial recruiting process, but they all referenced the influence of the sport multiple times throughout the interview. Even when basketball endeavors were not going as anticipated, the basketball team still deeply impacted the individuals. “…I wasn’t playing as much as I had hoped, but it was a good place for me. I enjoyed my teammates and being a part of a team,” said participant Adkins. Participant Lawson pointed out that because of the rigorous demands of collegiate athletics, it can be challenging to find the time to network and connect with individuals outside of teammates. “For the most part, basketball players were really only consistently social with the other members of the basketball team, and when basketball doesn’t work out there aren’t any fallback connections. That’s mostly what happened in my situation.”

Another participant pointed out that student-athletes have to have a serious love of their sport to compete and stay focused at the college level. He said:

Basketball takes a large leap from high school to college in competitiveness and devotion. A lot of kids love basketball but underestimate the commitment to play at the college level. It’s a business at the college level and coaches’ livelihoods are on the line. Multiple participants referenced the higher level of commitment to the game that was
required to play at the college level. The following quote from participant Adkins reiterated the point, “I guess the other thing that played a factor is I just wasn’t expecting college athletics to require the amount of time and investment that it did. There’s not much free time, that’s for sure.” When asked about the cause of high attrition rates in men’s basketball, participant Gray said:

There’s a lot going on. I think the biggest issue is that kids aren’t aware of what it takes to play college sports. We see the success of NBA and NFL superstars and they make it look easy, but in reality, there’s so much going on behind the scenes. I mean I went to a small college, and I don’t know what I was expecting in hindsight, but it takes a firm commitment and true dedication to play college sports.

**Theme #2.** The second theme that recurred was the importance in finding a proper balance in life, school, and basketball. Although participant Lawson prematurely departed Winfield Christian University, he credited the relationships he was able to make on his own with keeping him grounded, connected, and satisfied at WCU as long as he was. “I had good relationships with the faculty members in my major, and also with other students outside of basketball. I wasn’t as socially isolated as most athletes. I had close friends outside of the program.” Participant Lawson mentioned that his biggest social connection and support group during his time at the university was through a church in town. However, he commented on the relationships he had with his teammates as “kind of rocky, filled with ups and downs.” While his quote primarily referenced his healthy connections to the community and campus, the fact that his relationships with his teammates were “filled with ups and downs” and that he ultimately departed early likely demonstrates the powerful influence that teammates have. Participant Colbert referenced an “unsatisfied fit” that led to his departure. He went on to mention that the
thought of departure entered his mind when he came in and realized things weren’t going immediately how he expected them to go. Colbert said:

I was struggling on the court. I was feeling homesick. It wasn’t the same treatment I was used to in high school. My parents played a major part in my departure because they supported it. People back home were telling me I needed better, giving me what turned out to be bad advice. I missed my girlfriend back home. Things like that.

Participant Gray also touched on the issue of finding a healthy environment and balance by saying:

There’s just a lot going on [for new students] and it can be hard for a student to juggle it all. Classes, basketball, trying to fit in, not to mention it can be an awkward stage of life anyway. Students don’t know what to look for when they go to college and what they thought they wanted probably changes along the way.

Participant Gray opened up about his departure from his initial program, where he was dismissed from the team for breaking team rules. “Well, and this hurts a bit to think about it, but I messed up, and broke team rules, and the coaching staff had to let me go. That was the main reason [for my departure].” Participant Gray owned up to the error and took responsibility for the mistake that cost him his affiliation with the program, but he also mentioned that he was affected by individuals that he let into his sphere of influence on campus. Participant Gray’s emphasis with this was to point out how important it is to surround one’s self with the right people. Participant Gray self-described his basketball ability at the time of his dismissal as a work in progress, with his best days ahead of him. When asked about his relationship with his coaches he said, “We spoke mostly about the work I would need to do to reach my potential as a basketball player. It was good to hear that they saw so much potential in me, but we probably should have spent time
more talking about other areas of life too.” Participant Gray’s experience showed the need for balance in life beyond the sport and even beyond academics. Participant Gray inferred multiple times that he was seeking a father-figure, someone who would mentor him in life, but his story implies that his failure to follow good influences led to his premature departure at his initial institution. “Students just need to do a better job of looking into all schools, and also looking at schools for more than just being a basketball factory. It’s important for students to find a healthy fit.”

**Theme #3.** A third theme that emerged was how a successful academic journey does not necessarily correlate to a student that was satisfied or going to persist at the initial institution. Each participant was asked about how academically successful they were at their initial institution, and each of the four participants responded or inferred that they were good students. “Very [successful academically]. Straight As!” “Generally doing okay academically.” “I was pretty good in the classroom.” “I mean not to brag but I was a pretty good student… almost a 4.0.” While this was their own self-perception of their academic success, and their perspective could have been biased or flawed, one could reasonably deduct that this showed that men’s basketball student-athletes are not foundationally finding their purpose in their academic journey since they appear to be successful academically but were prematurely departing anyway. Participant Adkins even noted the challenges of scheduling courses that worked around his basketball obligations. “I was scared to schedule some classes because they might slightly interfere with practice.” The participants’ comments certainly gave the impression that, although these individuals were successful in the classroom, academic endeavors were not of major importance when it came to the trajectory of their college careers and their decision to persist or depart from their initial institution.
Sub-question 2

Sub-question two for this study was, “How would collegiate men’s basketball coaches and athletic administrators in a focus group solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?” The focus group consisted of four individuals who currently or formerly served as basketball coaches or athletic administrators at Winfield Christian University within the last five years. The idea behind this focus group was that this study could investigate the issue of high attrition rates in men’s basketball from the perspective of the institution’s coaching staff. An additional, but unintentional, interesting factor was that each of the four coaches who opted to participate in the focus group also formerly played collegiate basketball. This factor was noteworthy because these four individuals have been on both sides of the college basketball experience, initially as a student-athlete and more recently as a coach, which provided them with very comprehensive experiences and insights. Categorical codes and themes were identified using the scissor-and-sort technique, by going through the transcript of the focus group and applying codes to the themes as they related to the topic (Stewart et al., 2007). The codes that were identified and the frequency of each code were recorded. The codes and their frequency can be seen on the following page in Table 3. Based on the frequency of the codes and how they were used, themes emerged. The primary themes uncovered though the focus group were a basketball-centric passion, factors beyond basketball and academics, outside influences, and finances. A final notable theme was identified not by its overbearing presence in the conversation, but instead by its obvious void in the discussion, and that theme was academic factors. The documentation of the themes and how they appeared from the coded transcripts is evident in Table 4.
Table 3

Frequency of Codes from the Focus Group

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<th>Codes</th>
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Table 4

*Frequency of Codes Grouped into Themes*

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**Theme #1.** As the focus group began, the first theme that stood out was the importance of basketball. A student-athlete’s recruitment begins because of their athletic ability and sport-
specific skill set. Coaches look for certain abilities and positional needs as they assemble their rosters to be as competitive as possible. The focus group participants made it clear that the potential to contribute as a basketball player is what leads to the identification of recruits. Physical attributes such as height and speed also play a factor. Beyond acquired physical skills and abilities, when asked what coaches look for in the recruiting process, Coach Carroll said “You’re looking for guys that are focused. Guys that are down to play basketball and get their education.” Coach Holland added to that notion, “You gotta get kids that truly love the game and aren’t going to want to find distractions that are detrimental to the program…” The basketball-centric passion and focus quickly emerged as a requirement for a basketball student-athlete to get their foot in the door as part of a collegiate basketball program. Not only are recruits expected to have a basketball skill set and ability that enhance the team, but they are also expected to have a certain seriousness and dedication to the sport as well. One coach said it best when he acknowledged that “student-athletes connect through basketball first and foremost.”

The focus group participants acknowledged that the prioritization of basketball occurred from the coaches as well as the student-athletes. When the focus group was asked what they believed the primary factors were for student-athletes who were making a college decision, one coach responded, “Recruits are mostly looking for a place where they can get a lot of minutes and be the man [on the basketball court]. They’re definitely more focused on basketball over education.” Another coach reflected on his own experience from when he was being recruited as a student-athlete and described how his college decision was biased towards the colleges where he thought he would get more playing time right away. This focus group’s words reinforced the notion that the sport has power when it comes to impacting a student’s college choice.

**Theme #2.** Although the relationship between an individual student-athlete and the
coaches/institution was initiated around the game of basketball, it was interesting how quickly the coaches in the focus group addressed the importance of connecting beyond the sport. Coach Green addressed this in the focus group when he said:

[Building relationships beyond basketball starts by] getting to know the kid during the recruiting process. What are their interests? What are their likes? Things like that can make the communication a little more casual and comfortable and make them feel welcome. It’s important for coaches to get to know kids beyond basketball, even though that’s what you’re recruiting them for.

It was interesting that this coach acknowledged the value in getting to know a student-athlete beyond basketball early in the relationship process, even before they commit to attending the school. Coach Worthy referenced how teams he has been affiliated with utilized team-bonding events and activities to help foster relationships beyond the court. Coach Worthy said:

It’s important to do team-bonding. We had a lot of team dinners in the past that we weren’t able to do this year due to Covid. But in previous years we did stuff like bowling and team dinners and we hung out as a team outside of playing basketball and lifting weights, and that played a big part in helping coaches and players connect, and even players connect with teammates, and everyone getting to know each other better.

Each of the coaches involved in the focus group expressed a shared understanding of the importance in coaches connecting with their players beyond the game of basketball.

Coach Carroll candidly suggested that while most coaches across the college basketball industry appear to understand the importance of having genuine relationships with their student-athletes that extend beyond the court, very few coaches truly find the time to give players the opportunities to open up and be authentic about things beyond basketball. “A lot of coaches say
they have an open-door policy, but most don’t mean it, or if they do it’s only for the main players in the program.” Coach Carroll also mentioned the hesitancy many players might have walking into a coach’s office just to talk, as well as the sense of authority and supremacy a coach has over a player if the coach only makes himself available to talk in the setting of his office. Although most coaches in college athletics advocate for deep, authentic relationships with their players, the failure to make time to connect creates a unique paradox that can hinder the student-athlete’s identity from growing above and beyond their identity as an athlete.

**Theme #3.** The phrase student-athlete is meant to represent the individual’s primary obligations as a student first, and then their secondary responsibilities as an athlete; however, another theme that emerged from the focus group was the noticeable absence regarding the topic of academics. During the focus group the topic of academic factors was very limited. Perhaps this void was because as the moderator I failed to steer the topic in that direction, but nonetheless, the topic of academics was mostly nonexistent. When asked how coaches help their student-athletes connect academically, Coach Carroll brought up the fact that students in the WCU basketball program are expected to sit in the first two rows in the classroom, as a way to force them to be more engaged in the classroom environment. Coach Holland also mentioned that he thought it was easier for students to connect academically and socially at colleges and universities with smaller student populations. “I think it helps being at a smaller college with smaller class sizes. It’s easier to know your classmates and teachers and to find your identity on campus.” Unfortunately, this was about as far as the topic on academics was carried, which is concerning, especially when coupled with the fact that most male basketball student-athletes are already failing to place a priority on academics when they get on campus (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Simons et al., 1999; Vogel et al., 2019). Again, perhaps this failure to properly discuss
how academics and athletics connect and intertwine with one another was due to the way the semi-structured questions directed the conversation, but that no one involved in the focus group adequately discussed academics probably speaks more about the hard reality of how college athletics, specifically men’s basketball, are less concentrated on academic responsibilities and more focused on athletic endeavors.

Theme #4. At one point or another, every participant involved with the focus group mentioned the detrimental effects that harmful influences can have on a student-athlete. Unfortunately, there is a wide array of potential harmful influences that successful student-athletes must keep at bay or learn to manage. Coach Worthy began by addressing the influences of club coaches and parents who often pump up their kids’ abilities, leading to an over-inflated assessment of self, ego, and entitlement. He stated:

You’ve got parents and AAU coaches telling kids that they’re better than they actually are, and it leads to recruits unable to accurately evaluate their ability as a basketball player. Some parents are in their kids’ ears telling them they can play at a higher level. All of these recruits think they should be playing at a higher level and a bigger school than what they are actually capable of.

Coach Carroll took the reins of the conversation from there, adding, “Yes, some parents are distractions. Teammates can also feed off of one another. Teammates complain to each other about their playing time. ‘I should be playing more, don’t you think?’ Peer influence can be powerful.” Coach Green mentioned that he thought once a player was a member of a program, the influence of the locker room and other players in the program would take on a greater role, becoming even more influential than family back home. He stated:

A teammate becomes more influential than a parent because they’re who you go into
battle with. You see them every day. You practice with them every day. They’re in the
trenches with you. If a player wants to transfer out of a program but his teammates
courage him to stay it reals them back in more than a parent could.

Certainly, peers have the ability to influence one another and it was interesting hearing peer
influence referenced in both negative and positive examples. The coaches in the focus group
addressed a wide array of outside influences, and Coach Holland brought up extensive concerns
with social media and a culture that desires instant gratification:

Social media and instant gratification play a big factor [in the attrition rates]. Players
want instant gratification in life and it pours into basketball, too. If they’re not playing or
the main guy right away they feel they’re missing out and they start looking elsewhere. If
they don’t have instant success or positivity they fall out. Before social media there were
more four-year guys that understood it might take a few years to earn a certain role on
campus. Now freshmen get frustrated if they’re not playing major minutes right away.

Theme #5. The final notable theme that was present in the focus group was the role that
finances play on a student-athlete’s decision to persist or depart an institution. It appeared that
this issue of finances was more specific to smaller colleges and universities where full-ride
athletic scholarships are not the norm. The majority of college athletics utilizes partial
scholarships, meaning that coaches can offer any amount of athletic scholarship they deem
necessary, up to a full, but full-ride scholarships are rare at most levels due to financial
constraints from the school and the need for coaches at these levels to stretch their scholarship
amounts as far as possible. The coaches in the focus group said that in their experience the
primary underlying reason for premature departure by student-athletes was caused by financial
burdens. “The biggest reason I’ve seen kids transfer is because of finances,” said Coach Worthy.
All of the coaches appeared to be in agreement, both verbally and in body language, that financial burdens were the biggest challenge when it came to retaining student-athletes. Coach Holland followed up by saying that, “If a kid is unhappy with the basketball side-of-things, but they’re on a full-ride, they’re more likely to stick it out longer.” It was also suggested that recruits join a program thinking that from a basketball standpoint they will have immediate individual success on the court and be a basketball star in no-time. This unrealistic basketball expectation often compromises their financial concerns, as many student-athletes come in thinking that once they quickly become a basketball star at that school, the coach will have to give them a full-ride scholarship.

While the financial burden is certainly a concern that is impacting retention rates, this issue alone is far from the root of the entire epidemic. At the NCAA Division I level, basketball programs can offer up to 13 full-ride scholarships, meaning that those 13 student-athletes have the entire cost of college covered, yet each year the premature departure rates at the NCAA Division I level are among the worst, showing that more scholarship money does not fix everything. As of early March 2021, the number of NCAA Division I transfers in men’s basketball was at an all-time high for any given year, with the expectation being that well over 1,500 student-athletes could announce their intentions to transfer. For comparison, this expected number is roughly more than double the previous high-water mark of any given off-season (Branham, 2021). The financial concern is real, and students with high financial burdens might be more likely to depart, but again, it appears that the financial aspect is more influential at the levels of collegiate basketball that are less likely to offer full-ride scholarships.
Sub-question 3

Sub-question three for this study was, “How would former collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes in a quantitative survey solve the problem of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States?” The survey was sent digitally to former men’s basketball student-athletes from Winfield Christian University who participated in the men’s basketball program within the last five years but are no longer participating in collegiate athletics. There was a pool of 50 potential participants that met the criteria that who received the digital survey. From this group of potential participants, 31 individuals chose to complete the survey. Immediately, the data collected showed that the student-athletes affiliated with Winfield Christian University were not immune to the on-going high attrition rates that are plaguing the sport on a wider scale. Figure 1, below, shows that over 80% of the student-athletes surveyed had prematurely departed an institution of higher learning at some point in their collegiate journey.

Figure 1

Premature Departure Rates in the Survey Response
This information is important because it reinforces the notion that this issue of high attrition rates among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes is a real concern that warrants attention. As the survey data was collected, three main themes appeared. The primary theme was that men’s basketball student-athletes were driven by their sport and the opportunities that existed within the team. Next, academics played a small role among the respondents in their decision to attend or persist at an institution. And lastly, survey participants demonstrated a clear unrealistic expectation regarding their basketball ability.

**Theme #1.** The primary theme from the survey data strongly reinforced the notion that basketball is the driving force behind the decision for collegiate men’s basketball recruits to attend an institution. Figure 2, below, shows that 77% of respondents attended their initial college/university because of basketball opportunities.

**Figure 2**

*Importance of Basketball on the Decision to Attend a College/University*

This graph bluntly demonstrates the strong influence that the sport itself has on a recruit’s college decision. Recruits appear to be largely driven by the opportunities that exist within the
sport, such as an opportunity to be on the team or roster, as well as to play a valuable role on the team immediately. Furthermore, the decision to attend an institution based on athletic opportunities is shaped and molded during the recruiting process, when student-athletes are much more actively recruited by coaching staffs instead of admissions departments. Below, Figures 3 and Figure 4 show a stark contrast in who is actively pursuing and recruiting student-athletes to campus.

**Figure 3**

*Recruitment by the Coaching Staff*

The data collected in Figure 3 demonstrates that the basketball staffs are the institution’s primary representatives when it comes to recruiting student-athletes to their programs, as most participants said they strongly agreed that they were heavily recruited by the basketball coaching staff from the institution.
Conversely, Figure 4 shows how little other representatives on campus were involved in the recruiting of men’s basketball student-athletes to campus, with an overwhelming number of respondents strongly disagreeing that they were heavily recruited by the admissions department or an academic department on campus. Perhaps these two contrasting graphs show the issue of how a recruit’s dependence on their identity in basketball is strongly reinforced throughout the recruiting process.

Emphasizing the importance of basketball on a student-athlete’s decision is Figure 5, which shows that 67% of participants strongly disagreed that they would still have attended their initial institution if they did not participate in college athletics.
Figure 5

Decision to Attend an Institution without Participating in College Athletics

The recruiting process sets the tone about the expectations for the student-athlete moving forward. When the recruiting process primarily focuses on athletic endeavors, it is easy to understand how basketball continues to sit in the forefront of the recruit’s main concerns.

The importance that basketball plays in an individual’s journey to persist or depart an institution is visibly evident. Figure 6 shows clear evidence that basketball is a powerful factor that student-athletes let influence their decision to depart an institution.
Figure 6

*Influence of Basketball on the Decision to Depart*

4.2) *My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on basketball reasons.*

29 responses

- 5 (17.2%) strongly disagree
- 2 (6.9%) disagree
- 3 (10.3%) slightly disagree
- 7 (24.1%) slightly agree
- 1 (3.4%) agree
- 11 (37.9%) strongly agree

Sixty-five percent of participants slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that their decision to depart their institution was based on basketball reasons. Overall, the data was clear—basketball factors are important to student-athletes during the recruiting process as well as in the decision to persist or depart an institution.

The survey concluded with several open-ended questions, and the majority of the responses in the open-ended comments continued to reinforce the importance of the role of basketball in the student-athlete’s journey. Notable responses included comments such as “I chose Winfield because of the basketball program, not the school,” and “basketball played the primary role in my decision to attend a college.” One participant even said, “Once I realized I wasn’t going to make it as a basketball player I recognized I did not need a college degree for my line of work,” meaning that his entire reasoning for attending college in the first place was because of the possibility of a successful basketball career. Overall, the data reinforced the importance of basketball opportunities on a student-athlete’s decision to attend and to persist or
depart from an institution.

Theme #2. The second theme that was noticeable was just how little academic endeavors impacted a student-athlete’s decision to attend and either persist or depart from an institution. One survey question asked participants if they agreed or disagreed that academics were the primary reason they attended their initial institution. Figure 7, below, shows the results from this question.

Figure 7
Influence of Academics on the Decision to Attend an Institution

This data speaks clearly, with 77% of participants slightly disagreeing, disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing that academics were the primary reason that they attended their initial institution. What was even more interesting, though, was the data from other survey questions that showed that student-athletes perceived themselves as being successful academically, but although academics will impact one’s life to a much further extent than athletic opportunities, the importance of academics was still not as important to the student-athletes.
Figure 8

**Perceived Happiness as a Student**

![Bar chart showing perceived happiness as a student at initial institution.]

Figure 8, above, demonstrates that the student-athletes surveyed felt happy as a student at their initial institution. Below, Figure 9 shows that the student-athletes surveyed perceived themselves as academically successful at their initial institution.

Figure 9

**Perceived Success as a Student**

![Bar chart showing perceived academic success as a student at initial institution.]

3.1) I was happy as a student at my initial college/university.

31 responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2  (8.5%)</td>
<td>0  (0%)</td>
<td>3  (9.7%)</td>
<td>7  (22.6%)</td>
<td>11 (35.5%)</td>
<td>8  (25.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>slightly disagree</td>
<td>slightly agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3) I was a successful student at my initial college/university.

31 responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  (3.2%)</td>
<td>2  (6.5%)</td>
<td>0  (0%)</td>
<td>4  (12.9%)</td>
<td>10 (32.3%)</td>
<td>14 (45.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>slightly disagree</td>
<td>slightly agree</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can reasonably be concluded that the student-athletes surveyed were experiencing at least moderate success academically when they were enrolled at their initial institution. Towards the end of the digital survey, the participants were asked a series of questions about themes that impacted their decision to depart. Figure 10, as shown below, illustrates that 72% of respondents slightly disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that their decision to depart from their initial institution was based on academic reasons.

**Figure 10**

*Influence of Academics on the Decision to Depart*

![Bar Chart](image)

What the overall results of this survey clearly indicate is that academic endeavors have very little influence in a men’s basketball student-athlete’s initial decision to attend an institution, and from there, to either persist or depart from that institution. To make matters even more perplexing is the data from Figure 11 that shows that an overwhelming portion of respondents stated that they were on track to graduate with a degree when they made the decision to prematurely depart.
There is the occasional situation where a student-athlete underperforms academically and might be declared ineligible to participate the following semester because they did not maintain certain academic standards that their affiliation requires, but overall, the data in the above graphs explains that academic failure is rare, and that student-athletes are generally successful scholastically. The data collected in the survey demonstrates that academics play a very small role in the decision for a men’s basketball recruit to attend a school, and from there, once the recruit is on campus as a full-time student-athlete, academics plays a very small role in their decision to either persist or depart the institution.

**Theme #3.** The final clear theme from the survey responses was the majority of the participants had unrealistic basketball expectations founded on an over-confidence in their individual abilities and skills. This distorted basketball ego was most evident in viewing the
responses to the survey question that asked if participants believed they had the ability to play professional basketball. This data is shown below in Figure 12.

**Figure 12**

*Self-Perceived Potential to Play Professional Basketball*

![Bar Chart](image)

Unfortunately, in an industry where only about 2% of men’s collegiate basketball players are offered professional contracts, not a single participant strongly disagreed that they did not have the ability to play professionally. Instead, over 80% slightly agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that they had the potential to play professional basketball.

The next concern is that the data showed that even when student-athletes are enjoying their time as part of a basketball program, and even if that basketball program is perceived to be successful, individual student-athletes are constantly looking for opportunities for more individual basketball success. On the following page, Figures 13 and 14 showcase this data. Figure 13 shows that the participants were generally happy as members of the basketball program at their initial institution, and Figure 14 shows that the participants overwhelmingly viewed the college basketball programs that they were affiliated with as successful.
Figure 13

Happiness as a Member of the Basketball Program

3.2) I was happy as a member of the basketball program at my initial college/university.
31 responses

- 0 (0%) strongly disagree
- 3 (9.7%) disagree
- 3 (9.7%) slightly disagree
- 7 (22.6%) slightly agree
- 4 (12.9%) agree
- 14 (45.2%) strongly agree

Figure 14

Self-Perceived Success of the Basketball Program

3.5) Our basketball program was successful at my initial college/university.
31 responses

- 1 (3.2%) strongly disagree
- 2 (6.5%) disagree
- 2 (6.5%) slightly disagree
- 3 (9.7%) slightly agree
- 9 (29%) agree
- 14 (45.2%) strongly agree
The over-arching concern, specific to the needs of men’s basketball student-athletes, is that being happy as a part of a basketball program did not stop them from prematurely departing. Furthermore, even being affiliated with a successful program did not stop the student-athletes from prematurely departing. Instead, it appears that while student-athletes want to be a part of a successful program, they want to play at a place where they can experience individual success as well.

Figure 15, below, shows how satisfied the participants were (or were not) with the amount of game minutes they got to play at their initial institution.

**Figure 15**

*Satisfaction with Game Minutes*

This graph is much more evenly distributed than the data collected from other questions in the study. Generally speaking, for every student-athlete that appeared satisfied with their amount of time on the court, there was another student-athlete who was unsatisfied. Although on the previous page in Figure 13 student-athletes mostly reported that they were happy as members of the basketball program at their initial institution, this graph shows that they were happy even if
they were not satisfied with their amount of playing time. Unfortunately, in the game of basketball, only five players can take the court at a time for each team. There are a finite number of minutes to be played. And when student-athletes do not receive the minutes they believe they are entitled to, it appears to disrupt their long-term plans to remain at the institution. One of the open-ended questions asked what would have prevented premature departure from the initial institution, and there were several responses that reinforced the notion that student-athletes have basketball desires that must be met. One participant commented, “I would not have left early if I had more playing time and felt like [I was] an important part of the team.” Another participant referenced that “maybe more assurance in the rotation” would have prevented his premature departure. Overall, the responses resonated with a cloud of delusional, individual basketball expectations. There is a fine line between being confident versus being unrealistically overconfident. Unfortunately, as demonstrated by the data, there is an ongoing ego problem in men’s basketball, and a student-athlete’s individual basketball expectations have more to do with their retention than the team’s success does.

Discussion

Tinto’s theory of departure is one of the most accepted theories regarding student attrition rates. Tinto’s theory recognizes the importance of social and academic integration and its influence on students’ decisions to persist or depart from an institution. Tinto theorized that the more connected an individual student is to the institution, both academically and socially, the stronger the student’s commitment to the institution; as a result, the student should be less likely to prematurely depart (Tinto, 1987; 1993; 2006). Tinto’s theory was the primary lens used to understand the issue of high attrition rates in collegiate men’s basketball; however, it appears that while academic and social integration is still vitally important for men’s basketball student-
athletes, there are many factors that lead to the departure of a student-athlete from this sub-population.

**Academic Integration**

In regard to academics, Tinto acknowledged that meaningful student integration and involvement and structure are initiated in the formal classroom environment (Tinto, 1993; 2006). Tinto’s theory of departure suggests that there is an important correlation between a student’s academic involvement and the quality of their effort, learning, and persistence. This theory was specifically examined through several of the questions in the data associated with this study. The four graphs below demonstrate the data results from the survey questions that were pertinent to former men’s basketball student-athletes and how they perceived their academic integration to be at their initial institution. In reference to Figure 16, the participants were generally very happy as students at their initial institution, with 84% agreeing that they were happy as a student to some extent. This data was surprising, especially since there were only two responses that strongly disagreed with the statement.

**Figure 16**

*Happiness as a Student*

![Graph depicting student happiness](image-url)
Next, Figure 17 shows that the participants believed that they were very successful academically as well, with only three of the 31 respondents disputing that they were experiencing academic success.

**Figure 17**

*Self-Perceived Success as a Student*

The data affiliated with Figure 18, on the following page, bluntly asked participants if they felt integrated with the college/university, and again, the participants overwhelmingly agreed that they did feel integrated academically.
Figure 18

Integration as a Student

3.6) At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the college/university.
31 responses

![Bar chart showing responses to the question about integration into college or university.]

Figure 19

Relationships with Academic Faculty

3.10) At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with the academic faculty.
31 responses

![Bar chart showing responses to the question about relationships with academic faculty.]

Lastly, the graph labeled Figure 19, shown on the previous page, shows that nearly 84% of participants agreed, to some extent, that they had a good relationship with the academic faculty at their initial institution.

The data from the four previous graphs paint an interesting picture. There were overwhelming trends with the data collected in regard to the academic integration on campus. Based on Tinto’s theory of departure (2006) students who are connected academically and socially are more likely to persist at their institution. The data above strongly suggests that the former men’s basketball student-athletes surveyed were convincingly academically integrated in their initial institution. However, despite the strong academic ties to their initial institution, 87% of the survey participants departed their initial institution prematurely. This data goes against Tinto’s theory, at least in part. The reason this data only partially disputes Tinto’s theory is that the famous theory of departure includes social components as well, and perhaps these students were connecting academically but struggling socially. With that being said, it should be noted that Tinto understood that meaningful student integration was initiated by the structure of the formal classroom environment (Tinto, 1993; 2006). Although formal learning occurs in the classroom, the social construction and personal interaction that comes through this process is just as important, as it helps students to connect and build meaningful relationships. Specifically, when dealing with student-athletes, the structure provided from the scholastic environment is less important because the athletes often have structure and direction provided from their sport and coaching staffs. Coaches often remind their student-athletes of important events and dates on campus, such as the last day to add or drop a class. Coaches also often ensure that the student-athletes within their program comply with the expected norms on campus, such as dressing appropriately and acting in accordance with the student code of conduct. Therefore, while the
formal classroom setting is still important for scholastic learning, the classroom environment probably means less to a student-athlete who is being held accountable through their sport.

**Social Integration**

Tinto’s (1993) theory of departure recognized the merits of social integration as well. A deeper social engagement with the campus and community can help the student in identifying social norms and values, which in turn assists in preventing a premature departure (Tinto, 1993; 2006). Just as the academic integration was specifically examined in the previous section, there were several questions in the data associated with the study that thoroughly investigated the social integration of men’s basketball student-athletes as well. The graphs below demonstrate the data results from the survey questions that were related to former men’s basketball student-athletes and how they perceived their social integration at their initial institution.

**Figure 20**

*Happiness as a Member of the Basketball Team*

3.2) I was happy as a member of the basketball program at my initial college/university.

31 responses
Figure 21

*Perceived Integration into the Community*

3.7) At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the community.

31 responses

- 1 (6.5%): strongly disagree
- 2 (6.5%): disagree
- 3 (12.9%): slightly disagree
- 4 (32.3%): slightly agree
- 5 (19.4%): agree
- 6 (22.6%): strongly agree

Figure 22

*Perceived Integration into the Basketball Program*

3.8) At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the basketball program.

31 responses

- 1 (3.2%): strongly disagree
- 2 (9.7%): disagree
- 3 (3.2%): slightly disagree
- 4 (9.7%): slightly agree
- 5 (25.8%): agree
- 6 (48.4%): strongly agree
The three graphs above strongly demonstrate that the participants were happy as members of the basketball team, and also that they felt strongly integrated in the community and basketball program. This theme of strong social connections was further demonstrated through other lines of questioning as well.

**Figure 23**

*Relationships with Non-Athletes*

3.11) At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with non-athlete students.

The responses from Figure 23 showed that participants generally agreed that they had strong relationships with their non-athlete peers. And Figures 24 and 25, shown on the following page, were specific to how participants felt about their relationships with their teammates and coaches, which again appeared to be healthy and positive, with the occasional outlier.
Figure 24

Relationships with Teammates

3.12) At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with my teammates.
31 responses

Figure 25

Relationships with Coaches

3.13) At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with the basketball coaches.
31 responses
The data collected in the survey shows an interesting situation. It appears that the participants who completed the survey felt strongly socially integrated in the campus and community through their sport and beyond. But again, 87% of the participants involved in this survey still departed their initial institution prematurely. This data calls into question how accurate Tinto’s theory of departure (2006) relates specifically to the nature of high-profile college athletics and the influence that sport-specific factors have on a collegiate men’s basketball student-athlete to persist or depart an institution. While social integration is important, in the individual journeys of male basketball student-athletes there are additional factors that are playing a role in their decision to persist or depart.

**Further Discussion**

The fact that the former men’s basketball student-athletes affiliated with this study appeared to be successfully integrated both academically and socially to their initial institution, yet overwhelming prematurely departed from their initial institution, likely shows that there is a gap in Tinto’s (2006) theory of departure that does not adequately understand the intricacies specific to high profile student-athletes. Based on the theory of departure, students like those surveyed likely would have persisted at their institution because they were healthily integrated both academically and socially in the campus and the community; however, that is clearly not the case. Unfortunately, this is the concern with this issue of high attrition rates consuming collegiate men’s basketball.

During the focus group, one coach accurately accessed the overarching importance of basketball when he said “student-athletes connect through basketball first and foremost.” The influence of basketball appears to be a major factor. Again, the data demonstrated throughout this chapter shows that basketball-specific reasoning plays a major factor in a male
basketball student-athlete’s decision to initially attend and then either persist or depart from their initial institution. But even basketball-specific factors fail to completely explain the situation.

**Figure 26**

*Self-Perceived Success as a Basketball Player*

The data in Figure 26, shown above, demonstrates that the majority of former men’s basketball student-athletes who were surveyed believed that they were successful as basketball players at their initial institution, but an overwhelming majority of these students went on to transfer prematurely from their initial institution. If perceived basketball success was the primary factor, this level of basketball success would have assisted in the persistence of these student-athletes. As the literature review for this dissertation was put together, it was suggested by some in the industry that the success of the program plays a stronger role than the need for individual success (Chung, 2013; Eggers et al., 2019; Favor, 2017). This notion also came up in the focus group, when Coach Carroll said, “The more established your program is and you’re winning, kids are more likely to want to be a part of it and hang around.” This influence of the basketball programs’ sport-specific success was also examined. The data, shown below in Figure 27, shows
that the former male basketball student-athletes surveyed overwhelmingly agreed that the basketball program was successful at their initial institution.

**Figure 27**

*Self-Perceived Success of the Basketball Program*

However, despite the perceived individual success and the apparent success of the team, male basketball student-athletes are continuing to prematurely depart at an alarming rate.

The concerns of high attrition rates among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes were examined at a single specific institution for the purpose of this study; however, this is an issue that is not isolated at a single institution, and instead the high attrition rates are impacting the sport universally. It was assumed that Tinto’s theory of departure (2006) would correlate more directly to the early departures of male basketball student-athletes, but after collecting the data and thoroughly examining the issue, it appears that the issue is more complicated than previously thought. As March of 2021 concluded, the number of NCAA Division I men’s basketball student-athletes who decided to transfer had already reached a new annual high (Branham, 2021). This is especially concerning because generally the number of transfers
continues to increase drastically throughout the summer months. At the time this was written, each NCAA Division I men’s basketball program had, on average, three players prematurely departing from their team this year—and again, those numbers are expected to climb higher as the summer months arrive. Because of the drastic increase in the number of transfers this spring, the issue concerning the high attrition rates among the sport is growing in attention and publicity.

One recent newspaper article suggested that the recent pandemic is to blame, because it might have prevented the athletes, as recruits, from completely comprehending what the program and campus were like without experiencing a campus visit (Teel, 2021). However, many student-athletes were recruited well before their senior year of high school, and as a result would have experienced a campus visit before the Covid shutdowns occurred. Furthermore, this does not explain the high number of upper classmen departing from institutions, either.

Another notable factor is that NCAA recently changed its policy and now allows any athlete to transfer one time without sitting out a season (Hosick, 2020). Certainly, under the old policy, the penalty of having to sit out a year to be eligible to play might have deterred a large number of student-athletes from pursuing transfer options; however, any attempt to understand this transfer epidemic as a new issue is incorrect. The uptick in the number of premature departures in collegiate men’s basketball has been well-documented over the last decade, and in some instances the trend could be identified even further back through a historical approach (Associated Press, 2017; Barnett, 2019; Boettger, n.d.; Cleveland, 2017; Gerace, 2019; Gleddie et al., 2019; Greene, 2018; Hamilton, 2005; Levitt, 2019; Lossiah, 2018; Martin, 2019; Norlander, 2015; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). Without a doubt, factors such as the pandemic and the NCAA’s change in policy have acted as a catalyst to increase the number of premature
departures in collegiate men’s basketball; however, this is not a new issue, as the number of transfers was already vigorously growing year after year.

Based on the data collected, the primary reasons for departure were basketball-specific factors such as playing time, or style of play, or the opportunity to “be the man” on the basketball court; however, this data also showed that any attempt to resolve the high attrition rates with a singular approach will likely fail, as there are often multiple aspects to consider. Factors such as distance from home, out-of-pocket cost, and interest level by the university have all been previously demonstrated to have an impact on a student-athlete’s college decision (Barden et al., 2013; Davies & Burakowski, 2015; Johnson et al., 2013; Klenosky et al., 2001; Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014; Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2014; Sander, 2008). This study examined a wide number of varying qualities, but outside of the basketball-specific factors, there were no strong themes. For example, with regard to the institution’s distance from the student’s hometown, the responses widely varied. For every student who valued attending a school because it was close to home, there was a student from the opposite end of the spectrum who said they wanted a change of scenery. An example of the latter was participant Lawson, who in the individual interview mentioned that he specifically chose a school far from home because he wanted to branch out. With regard to location, there was no significant theme from this research that led men’s basketball students to persist. Some student-athletes wanted to use the adventure of college basketball to tour the world, while others preferred the comfort of a more local institution. With that being said, previous research has shown that students who attend a school closer to their hometown often are more likely to persist (Barden et al., 2013).

Another factor that was referenced often was finances, but there was no common theme in regard to finances. Some respondents blamed the cost of school and the large amount that they
were paying out-of-pocket as a main factor in their decision to prematurely depart, but several others noted having little to no financial expenses to attend their initial institution, yet they departed anyway. A financial burden can be a legitimate factor in student retention, but it must be noted that finances are not the main issue with regard to the transfer rates in the sport. The reason financial concerns, and how they relate to the premature departures in men’s basketball, can be downplayed to some extent is that at the NCAA Division I level, basketball programs can offer up to 13 full-ride athletic scholarships, meaning that 13 student-athletes within the program have their entire cost of college covered, yet those athletes are still prematurely departing at high rates as well. The issue of financial burdens and high out-of-pocket costs are more of an issue affiliated with small college athletics where basketball programs are less likely to offer full-ride athletic scholarships, such as NAIA or NCAA Division II and III. Within small college athletics, because there is less athletic scholarship money for programs to reward to the students, student-athletes are more likely to have to pay out-of-pocket for some of the cost of their tuition. Sometimes student-athletes are convinced to pay for college expenses out-of-pocket initially because of the simple opportunity to play collegiate basketball; however, once they realize that their basketball career is not as promising as expected, they sober up from unrealistic basketball dreams and decide to attend an institution that will cost them less financially.

Another factor was that recruits want to feel wanted throughout the recruiting process, and even once they arrive on campus, student-athletes want to continue to feel valued. Student-athletes are drawn to the positive attention and friendliness of being recruited, and the coaches doing the recruiting often speak positively about the potential they see in the individual recruit they are pursuing; however, once the newness and fondness wears away, student-athletes begin
to question if they would be wanted and valued more in a different program with different coaches. The importance of value was examined in the survey.

**Figure 28**

*Perceived Self-Value at the Institution*

The survey results in Figure 27 demonstrate a large majority of men’s basketball participants felt valued at their initial institution. The idea of value and pride was present in the focus group as well, where Coach Holland was the most vocal on how student-athletes want to feel wanted. Yet despite the awareness from the coach’s side and the participants overwhelmingly feeling valued, the attrition rate in men’s basketball continues to grow.

It was quickly apparent that this issue of high attrition rates in collegiate men’s basketball is much more complex than initially thought, and it can be hard to understand the issue from a broad spectrum. Certainly, there are a multitude of factors that play an important role in a student’s decision to persist or depart from an institution, and many of these factors cannot ever be prevented or adequately addressed by the coaching staff or the institution. In one individual interview, a participant referenced health issues of a family member that he felt forced him to
transfer. Another interview participant mentioned how he was dismissed from the team for breaking team rules, and that once he was dismissed from the team there was no need for reason for him to stay at the institution.

**Figure 29**

*Decision to Depart Based on Personal Factors*

Perhaps the graph above demonstrates the wide variety of miscellaneous factors that can contribute to a student-athlete’s decision to depart. Fifty-five percent of former men’s basketball student-athletes said they prematurely departed because of personal reasons. Obviously, personal reasons can encompass a large range of issues. While the institution and coaching staff can be prepared to address some concerns, if the large majority of male basketball student-athletes are departing for miscellaneous reasons, it can be hard for the institution to adequately implement a solution to the issue.

**Basketball Influence**

While the data showed a multitude of factors that play a role in men’s basketball student-athletes’ decision to persist or depart the institution, it should be emphasized that a major theme
was the importance of basketball-specific factors, such as playing time, and its powerful influence. Concerningly, it appears that men’s basketball student-athletes are generally more focused on and place more importance on their individual basketball success instead of the team’s success. This was demonstrated in the survey data that revealed most of the participants perceived their college basketball programs to be successful and were happy in the program, but still felt generally unsatisfied with their amount of playing time and consequently prematurely departed. It could reasonably be theorized that individual basketball opportunities and individual basketball success, such as the chance to play more minutes and score more points, plays an important factor in retention. In a recent *USA Today* article, an unnamed NCAA Division I assistant coach said, “If you tell a kid they’re not a pro, they’re leaving. 17,000 kids think they’re a pro. There’s only 35 a year that make it. It’s really abnormal times” (Zemek, 2011). This quote reinforces the data collected for this survey, which is that many men’s basketball student-athletes overestimate their basketball ability and make their college decisions based on where their basketball ability has the best chance to improve. However, this does not exclude many successful collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes who attempt to use their successful season as an attempt to transfer up to a higher level. This idea of transferring up was also demonstrated in the survey, where 16% of participants prematurely departed from their initial institution to move to a higher level of college athletics.

Another interesting point that emerged through the data collected with this research, albeit limitedly, was that coaches need to ensure that they are recruiting the people they want in their program as people first, and as athletes second. Coaches must do a better job of recruiting the right kids into their program, and this includes examining their intrinsic characteristics and non-basketball skills. In the focus group, one coach touched on this by saying, “Coaches need to
recruit the right kids. Kids can’t be entitled babies. We’re becoming more aware of generational differences, and today’s kids aren’t as mentally tough.” This coach’s concerns were generally more about how today’s youth often struggle to stay committed to the process when adversity hits, arguing instead that the current college-aged generation is more likely to seek a better opportunity elsewhere instead of trying to fix the problems within their current situation. As mentioned several times throughout this paper, there is an expectation for coaches to assemble the best team possible, and because of this pressure, coaches overlook deficiencies in off-court proficiencies and attitudes if the individual being recruited is highly touted. If coaches were to do a better job of recruiting the traits they want in their program, especially those traits exhibited beyond the basketball court, there would probably be more student-athletes establishing deeper connections at their institutions instead of always looking for the next best opportunities. Furthermore, in recruiting the right players to the program, it would likely be easier for student-athletes to focus on finding the right fit, which again sets up the program for more stability from within by having less roster turnover.

Lastly, it was interesting to see the notable influence that teammates have on one another. This first appeared in the focus group when Coach Green said:

A teammate becomes more influential than a parent because they’re who you go into battle with. You see them every day. You practice with them every day. They’re in the trenches with you. If a player wants to transfer out of a program but his teammates encourage him to stay it reals them back in more than a parent could.

This statement powerfully displayed the importance of locker room camaraderie. Another example occurred in the individual interviews where participant Lawson appeared to be well-connected and thriving both academically and socially at his initial institution, yet commented
that his relationships with his teammates were “kind of rocky, filled with ups and downs” before he prematurely departed. Again, this appears to exhibit the strong influence that connections with teammates have on retention. Based on the data collected in the survey, 71% of participants agreed that several of their peers prematurely departed from their initial college/university. Perhaps these individuals are hampering each other by convincing each other that better opportunities lie elsewhere, which could explain why premature departures among the sport of collegiate men’s basketball appear to be announced in groups (Conner, 2021; Decock, 2021).

**Figure 30**

*Departure of Peers at Initial Institution*

![Graph showing departure of peers at initial institution](image)

However, if this notion is correct, perhaps the programs that share a team-first mentality and high levels of persistence will be more likely to retain larger portions of their collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes. Yes, the majority of the participants that were involved with the research for this study appeared to be socially and academically connected, but that did not prevent the majority of them from prematurely departing their initial institution. By creating a
better positive atmosphere and team culture, coaches can establish an environment more conducive to player stability.

**Summary**

The purpose of this applied study was to examine the issue of high attrition rates among collegiate male basketball student-athletes to gain a better understanding of the issue so high attrition rates among the sport could be better addressed. This chapter thoroughly examined and evaluated the data collected from the individual interviews, a focus group, and a quantitative survey, and the researcher analyzed the findings. Several notions emerged based on the data collected with this research. The primary ideas from the individual interviews were the strong influence of basketball, the importance of balance for the student-athlete, and the weak influence of academic factors. The primary ideas from the focus group were the strong influence of basketball-specific factors, the importance of student-athletes connecting with campus beyond their sport, the small amount of influence that academic factors have on the student-athlete, the impact that harmful outside influences can have, and financial concerns. The primary ideas that emerged from the survey were the strong influence of basketball on student-athletes, that academic factors have very limited influence, and that many men’s basketball participants have unrealistic basketball expectations. Overall, the two most emphasized themes were the importance of basketball on the decision of a men’s basketball student-athlete to make their college decision and persist at that institution, and the little amount of influence that men’s basketball student-athletes placed on academics in their decision to attend or persist at an institution. The findings from this data collection helped in better understanding the issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States. The following chapter will
present proposed solutions that institutions and coaching staffs can utilize and implement to assist in addressing the high number of premature departures among the sport.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this applied study was to gain a better understanding of the high attrition rates currently plaguing collegiate men’s basketball. The study utilized three unique data collection methods to gain insight into the issue of attrition at an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States; however, the concerning phenomenon extends well beyond a singular institution. It was the intention of this researcher to gain practical comprehension into the issue and solutions that institutions and coaching staffs could take to create an environment more conducive to persistence among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. This chapter includes a restatement of the problem. From there, a proposed solution to solve the central research question will be introduced, which includes information on the necessary resources and funds needed to solve the problem, roles and responsibilities, a timeline, solution implications, and an evaluation plan to determine the effectiveness of the proposed solution.

Restatement of the Problem

The problem identified throughout this research study is that there is an abnormally high attrition rate among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes across the country, but a thorough examination of an institution of higher education located in the southwestern region of the United States provided a better understanding of the issue and provided a solution to address the problem. The prevalence of the number of transfer students in collegiate athletics has trended upwards at an increasing rate in recent years, and this is especially true for participants of men’s basketball (Barnhill et al., 2013; Gerace, 2019; Keshtidar & Behzadnia, 2017). As if the previous data did not warrant concern on its own, as of March 2021, the time of this study being written, the number of annual transfers affiliated with men’s basketball has exponentially grown from the previous year (Branham, 2021). In recent weeks, as the issue of premature departures in the sport...
has shifted to a position of attention on the national stage, this present study has never been more relevant and important. Premature departures among male collegiate basketball student-athletes are rampant, and the topic must be addressed.

This study utilized Tinto’s (1993; 2006) theory of departure as the framework for how to address the issue. Simply put, the theory of departure believes that students who are adequately integrated in their institution socially and academically are more likely to persist at that institution. Consequently, the findings from this research, which are explained in detail in Chapter Four, demonstrate that many men’s basketball student-athletes do feel properly integrated socially and academically; however, this sub-population is prematurely departing anyway. Instead, the notion that the data reinforced is that collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes overwhelmingly depend on basketball-specific factors when they make their decision to initially attend, as well as persist at, their institutions. While a wide variety of miscellaneous other factors play a role, the biggest takeaway theme was the importance of basketball-specific opportunities to men’s basketball student-athletes. From this juncture, coaching staffs and institutions will have to accept that the landscape of men’s basketball has likely been permanently altered—premature departures, as well as transfer arrivals, will likely play a sought-after option in immediately assembling the most competitive basketball team. However, there is still something to be said about building a program in which student-athletes want to persist. This research sought to find solutions that the coaching staffs and institutions could implement to persuade more of their men’s basketball student-athletes to persist until the completion of their degree. After all, stability can be a major factor in organizations that are consistently successful and viable (Greene, 2018; Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013).
Specific to basketball, stability within the program can be a sign of an optimistic season, as teams that return more of their roster, especially among individuals that were major contributors, and have higher age and experience are more likely to experience on-court success in the future (Barreira et al., 2019; Siler, 2019). Not only does persistence among the team members assist in creating a greater perceived level of stability, but programs that demonstrate a smaller amount of roster turnover have been shown to increase overall fan interest as well as boost ticket sales (Kahane & Shmanske, 1997; Morse et al., 2008). Stability among the individuals affiliated with the program allows the team to spend more time focusing on growing and improving both individually and as a group, because less time is spent training new members to buy into the culture and understand the standards. Retention of highly-valued individuals is important for any organization to continue to grow and develop (Gottschalk, 2019). The following section will discuss a solution to the high attrition rate in men’s basketball.

**Proposed Solution**

Because the issue of high attrition in the sport of collegiate men’s basketball has so many influential components, it is hard to come up with a single solution to address the matter. There are many factors that can impact a student’s decision to persist at the initial institution or prematurely depart. Some elements of the student’s decision to prematurely depart are uncontrollable and unavoidable, such as finances or personal reasons. Some factors that could be improved are beyond the institution’s control. Lastly, there are actions that the institutions and coaching staffs can take to increase the number of student-athletes in their programs that persist. This segment of the chapter will examine potential solutions to the issue.

*External Solutions*
There are many factors that could assist in addressing the issue, but they sit beyond the control of a coaching staff or institution of higher learning. For example, one often referenced issue is that the NBA has a minimum-age requirement of 19. While this policy only directly affects a small group of elite athletes, it indirectly affects many more. When an NBA-caliber player chooses to attend college for a year because they are ineligible to immediately join the professional ranks of the NBA, in all likelihood, this individual athlete is not seriously concerned with academics. This high-caliber player ends up taking a coveted roster spot and scholarship opportunity away from someone who might be planning on attending the college or university for four years and obtaining their degree. What this age-requirement does is indirectly force all elite recruits to attend college for a year in basketball purgatory as they wait to become old enough to participate in the NBA (Maese, 2019; McCann, 2019; O’Connor, 2019; Phillips, 2019).

Next month, many of the world’s top 19-year-old basketball players will gather in New York for an NBA draft that will change their lives and their credit limits. The top 18-year-olds, meanwhile, are preparing for high school graduation and soon will report to college for, in most cases, a single season of basketball. (Maese, 2019, para. 1) If the NBA were to change their age requirement, it could have a positive impact on retention rates at the college basketball level. If the League were to increase their age requirement to a higher age, it would eliminate the “one-and-done” premature departures that are detrimentally disruptive to the sport and college basketball rosters would naturally stabilize depending on what the minimum age was raised to. Furthermore, although in actuality there is only a very small number of student-athletes who are skilled and talented enough to go directly to the NBA at age 19, the fact that elite basketball players often take this route of premature departure makes the
option of departing early appear more desirable to other student-athletes. Alternatively, if the NBA were to reduce the age requirement to 18, it would eliminate the need for elite athletes who are completely uninterested in attending college from having to do so for a year. A change in the age requirement either way would be better for retaining collegiate student-athletes.

Another detrimental policy to the retention rate in collegiate men’s basketball was the NCAA’s recent change in procedure that overturned the traditionally required sitting out of a season for athletes transferring prematurely from one institution to another (Forde & Dellenger, 2020; Hosick, 2020). Under the previous standards, student-athletes who prematurely transferred from one institution to another would have to sit out a season of competition before being able to compete again. By requiring student-athletes to sit out a season, it made student-athletes put serious thought into the decision to prematurely transfer to another institution. The penalty of sitting out a season was likely stern enough to prevent many student-athletes from transferring prematurely in situations where they were hesitant or undecisive, and might have convinced many to ultimately persist at their current school. Consequently, the old policy also provided balance because it enabled student-athletes who truly believed they would be better off transferring prematurely to a new basketball program or institution the option to do so, with the ability to return to competition only a year away. Instead, the NCAA’s new policy has granted all student-athletes an opportunity to prematurely transfer and be immediately eligible, which significantly contributed to the already high attrition rates. Another possible partial solution to the exponential uptick in attrition rates in men’s basketball would be for the NCAA to reverse their stance and return to the long-standing policy that allowed students-athletes to transfer but required them to sit out a season of competition, which in doing so made student-athletes
reevaluate their circumstances and avoid prematurely transferring at the slightest issue. But again, this particular solution lies beyond the control of institutions and coaching staffs.

**Internal Solutions**

So far, this section has explored policy changes in external organizations that would assist in creating more persistence among collegiate men’s basketball participants. While the above notions are valid, the ability to affect those policies is fundamentally beyond the influence of the institutions. As the data was collected for this study and the corresponding research was conducted, the notion that it is imperative for potential student-athletes to find the right fit when making a college decision was strongly reinforced. It is important for potential student-athletes to find a good fit—socially, academically, and athletically—and this begins early in the recruiting process. Recruits can do a better job of asking appropriate questions to understand more about each unique institution. It is important that the recruits find a place that prioritizes their needs, especially off the court. Far too often, situations occur where a student-athlete has a desire to pursue a specific degree, but that specific degree is not offered at the school that is recruiting them the hardest for basketball, and instead of staying true to their academic desires the student-athlete changes their academic endeavors simply to attend a certain school for basketball-specific reasons. This example is the exact opposite of a potential student-athlete finding the right fit, and in this situation the student-athlete likely will not persist long-term at the institution. Much of the student/institution compatibility can be better assessed during the recruiting process. Below are a list of appropriate questions and factors for recruits to consider during the recruiting process:

1) Location – Where do you want to go to school? Close to home? Far from home? In a big city? On a rural campus?
2) School Size – Do you want the big state-school feel? Or a smaller university community? Are you comfortable with classes in large auditoriums or small class sizes?

3) Academic Profile – What academic profile fits you? What are your academic interests? Which schools have good programs in those areas?

4) Financial Considerations – What resources are available to you? How much are you prepared to invest in your experience? Are there schools offering you full-scholarships? Most people don’t realize the vast array of academic scholarships that are available, which are far more available than the athletic scholarships that receive the attention.

5) Social Life – What type of social life are you interested in experiencing during college? Are you looking for a faith-based university community? Are you interested in being in a city and experiencing what that has to offer? Would you prefer an opportunity to build relationships in clubs, Greek life, etc.? These dynamics greatly impact the type of experience students have, and should all be considered.

6) Athletic Considerations – In which level of college sports can you succeed? What type of experience will you enjoy? Would you rather sit the bench at a big school or play more at a smaller school? Do you have better relationships with some coaches and programs than others? How much do athletics play into your overall happiness as a college student? How successful is the program? During the recruiting process, ask the coaches about the role they see for you within the program (Logie, 2016, para. 6).

Before the recruiting process even begins, recruits should give some thought to each of these areas and have an understanding of which factors are of a higher priority for their individual preference. After all, if a recruit does not know what they are looking for it is more challenging to find the right college fit.
Coaching staffs must also focus on finding the right fit. Often, it is easy for a coach to identify the right fit based on sport-specific roster needs. If a team needs a big man who is good on defense, they know they are looking for a big man who is good on defense. But it is important that the coaching staffs also focus on finding the right fit beyond basketball. The coaches should consider the fit of the institution and the community for the student-athlete as well. What happens often is coaches recruit a highly talented student-athlete because of an innate ability to play, but they fail to take other compatibility factors into consideration. If the student-athlete is not compatible with the institution academically, socially, financially, or in any other way, it is likely going to be a doomed partnership that ends prematurely. Unfortunately, a coach’s success is most directly and publicly defined in wins and losses; however, there are many other factors that should also be taken into consideration when determining the success-level of a coach.

Building a healthy program that student-athletes persist in should be a focus point from the coaching staffs. Schools affiliated with NCAA Division I are required to maintain a standard academic progress rate (APR) which tracks student-athletes’ eligibility and retention (Dellenger, 2020; LSU Compliance, 2021). While this APR criteria can be useful in motivating coaching staffs to retain their scholarshipped student-athletes, the rating is a flawed metric that systematically favors schools with more resources and hurts smaller institutions that have methodically been turned into feeder programs for larger schools (Ositelu, 2019). With that being said, institutions themselves can do a better job or incentivizing coaches to recruit student-athletes that fit the school better and will persist at the institution long-term. Certainly, there will be uncontrollable, unexpected events that force the occasional student-athlete to prematurely depart; however, student-athletes and coaching staffs can greatly assist in addressing the high
attrition rates in collegiate men’s basketball by ensuring that student-athletes find a healthy match—academically, socially, and athletically—during the recruiting process.

For many collegiate men’s basketball coaches, recruiting student-athletes to campus is easy. Retaining student-athletes can be far more challenging. Obviously, during the recruiting process the student-athlete felt comfortable enough with the coaching staff and the institution to commit to attend that school. However, it is also clear that during the recruiting process coaches often tell recruits what they want to hear in an attempt to lure them to campus and the basketball program. Where exactly does the process go wrong? Based on the literature and what was reinforced through the data collected with this study, basketball opportunities play a major role in a collegiate male basketball student-athlete’s decision to persist or prematurely depart an institution. When adversity hits, today’s male basketball student-athletes are more likely to seek out better opportunities elsewhere instead of fixing the issue at their initial institution. Once a student-athlete is attending a school and is a member of a basketball program, coaches could greatly assist in retention rates by keeping open the lines of communication, as well as by actively building authentic relationships with student-athletes off the court. Former college basketball coach and current ESPN analyst Fran Fraschilla wrote, “If retention of players by slowing the rate of transfers is the goal of the NCAA and its member institutions, access to the players as much as possible, both on the court and away from the court, seems to be a no-brainer” (2017, para 29). With everything taken into consideration, the chief proposed solution of this study, to retain more collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes, is for the coaches to spend a minimum of 15 minutes a week with each student-athlete individually, away from basketball. This could be talking in the office, eating a meal together, taking a walk across campus, or attending an extracurricular event. It is important for student-athletes to have a deep relationship
that, even if basketball-centered, extends well-beyond the basketball court. A strong relationship can assist in the coach and student-athlete having the same shared vision. Perhaps the student-athlete is frustrated with their current amount of playing time, but because of a deeper, more authentic relationship, they understand that the coach has big plans for them in the program down the road if they continue to work hard. And even more importantly, this set-aside amount of time would assist in assuring that student-athletes get the attention and focus they received during the recruiting process, and that they continue to feel wanted in the program and at the school. A similar proposal of setting aside a weekly amount of time to meet with each student-athlete individually was openly suggested in the focus group, and one participant immediately pointed out that many coaches would struggle to achieve this solution as they simply do not have the time to devote to each individual men’s basketball student-athlete. The lack of adequate caveats of time was also brought up in previous studies (Davis & Jowett, 2014). This lack of time to connect individually with student-athletes shows a major issue with college-athletics, and how business-like and sport-focused the industry has become. The average men’s basketball roster is around 15 student-athletes. If a coach were to set aside 15 minutes for each student-athlete and had a roster of 15, that would add up to less than four hours a week. These individual meetings would help to ensure the needs and concerns of each student-athlete are being met, as well as build deeper, more authentic relationships that are more likely to hold firm when adversity ensues (McCabe et al., 2014; Forlenza et al., 2018). Davis and Jowett (2014) stated “Coaches may have to deliberately create situations that provide opportunities to connect with the athlete and create an environment that is genuinely and constantly nurturing, supportive, and caring” (p. 1460). By intentionally carving out time to connect with student-athletes personally and outside of basketball, coaches can directly assist in helping student-athletes to feel more
comfortable and build a better rapport, which can later on influence the student-athletes’ decision to persist or prematurely depart (Fifer et al., 2008).

**Resources Needed**

The only resource needed for this proposed solution is the proper time commitment from coaches. Coaches have several responsibilities and can find themselves pressed for time, especially during the middle of a demanding season. Studying the game and devising strategies to optimize team performance highlights the public perception of the coach’s duties. With that being said, coaches also have an inherent responsibility to mentor and foster a positive relationship with the student-athletes in their programs. While most coaches would agree with this fundamental obligation of connecting with the students in their program, many might find it extremely challenging to find an additional four hours a week to meet individually with their student-athletes. Nevertheless, coaches must intentionally carve out time to build and foster these relationships. The current status quo clearly is not working. As the number of premature departures in collegiate men’s basketball continues to increase, coaches must attempt to do more to ensure the needs of their students are being met and that each student-athlete is being properly mentored and guided along their journey. By spending a minimum of 15 minutes a week individually with each student-athlete, coaches can build deeper trust and stronger influence that can be valuable in keeping the student-athlete focused and foundationally grounded, and will likely assist in increasing the retention rates of the student-athletes within the men’s basketball program.

**Funds Needed**

This proposal requires no allotment of funds. It simply requires a time commitment from coaches and student-athletes.
Roles and Responsibilities

This proposal is simply a maximization of the current system, and as a result it does not require outlandish resources or additional funding. One role that will change is the role of the coach. Coaches are the leaders of their programs, and every detail that affects the program runs through them. They are often regarded as the CEOs of the organization, but too infrequently do coaches take on the role of mentor. Yet, the relationship between the athlete and the basketball coach can have a great influence on team cohesiveness and success. “It is this interpersonal bond that causes members to participate readily and remain motivated to accomplish the set goals” (CFI, 2021, para. 1). One study recognized the powerful influence that a coach’s positive feedback and social support can have on the athletes in their program (Lan, 2009). Based on this finding, the primary modification from the current role and responsibilities is that coaches would need to devote more time to mentoring their student-athletes and building individual relationships with them.

Timeline

The timeline for implementing this proposed solution should begin at the start of the school year and continue throughout the entirety of the student-athlete’s persistence in the program. Beginning in August, coaches would devote 15 minutes a week to building a personal relationship with each student-athlete in their program. The coaches would maintain this commitment of setting aside time throughout the entirety of the year, including the offseason, as long as the student-athlete continues to persist. During the school year, it is expected that these individual meetings occur face-to-face, but during breaks from school, the coach and student-athlete can maintain this meeting through a phone call. What is most important is that the individual meetings occur regularly. Over the course of the 52 weeks in a year, this 15-minute
commitment ends up being a simple 13-hour commitment to connect individually with each student-athlete. This time commitment to building deeper, more authentic relationships and sharing each other’s visions will certainly assist in student-athletes feeling more connected to the coaching staff and program.

The timeline for implementing this proposed solution begins in August with the start of the fall term. It is expected that there will still be some turnover at the conclusion of the school year. Once students graduate or prematurely depart, the coach no longer needs to maintain individual meetings with them. At the start of each August, the impact of these individual meetings can be systematically measured by evaluating how many student-athletes persisted within the program. Imagine as an incoming freshman having a weekly opportunity to connect and bond with the coach regularly. As the freshman becomes a sophomore, then a junior, and finally a senior, their expectations and standards will be aligned with those of the coach’s. While this is an annual implementation, it is expected that after two or three years of employing these individual meetings, the retention rates will have improved greatly.

**Solution Implications**

The proposed solution is simple in nature, but requires a serious time commitment from the coaches involved. To solve the high attrition rates plaguing collegiate men’s basketball, coaches are expected to set aside purposeful time to meet with each men’s basketball student-athlete individually for a minimum of 15 minutes weekly. This meeting is an opportunity to build an authentic relationship with the student-athlete on a personal-level, and it is expected to pay dividends, especially regarding future retention rates. The proposed solution requires no additional funding or further resources other than a time commitment. This is important because this specific solution is a viable option for all collegiate men’s basketball programs, as it aims to
simply maximize the current resources in place. The negative side of this proposed solution is that many coaches might struggle, especially initially, to find the time to meet with each student weekly. With that being said, by emphasizing relationships with their student-athletes, coaches are demonstrating that they value the student-athlete beyond the game of basketball. These individual meetings will assist in giving student-athletes an opportunity to voice concerns, share their goals, and become naturally aligned to the coach’s vision of the program. It is expected that these individual meetings will help to assist in curbing the current high attrition rates among collegiate men’s basketball.

**Evaluation Plan**

This proposed solution begins in August with the start of the fall semester, then runs not only though the school year, but indefinitely. The coach will take time to individually meet with each men’s basketball student-athlete weekly throughout the remainder of their time in the program. After the first full year, the implementation of the proposed solution will be evaluated. The measure of success with this proposed solution will be to document the percentage of men’s basketball student-athletes that continued to persist within the program. The goal is to increase the number of men’s basketball student-athletes that persist until the completion of their degree. It is important to note that the years will be measured from August to August. The reason for this is because many student-athletes might persist through May, but then prematurely depart during the late summer. August 2021 to August 2022 will be considered year one. August 2022 to August 2023 will be considered year two. August 2023 to August 2024 will be considered year three. At the end of each year, it is expected that the retention rates will increase among the programs that implement this strategy. The increase might be minor after one year, but it is expected that after two or three years a substantial increase in the retention rates of the men’s
basketball program will become highly noticeable.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study is the relatively small team sizes of men’s basketball rosters. The roster size of a men’s basketball team is made up of 15 individuals on average, and while this number is highly manageable and allows for coaches and players to build a cohesive unit, it can also negatively skew the numbers if one or two student-athletes have uncontrollable circumstances that force them to prematurely depart. For example, if a player has a family member back home who has severe health issues and that individual decides to prematurely depart and transfer to a school closer to home so they can be nearer to family, while that circumstance is unavoidable and unfortunate, it can highly impact and skew the retention rates in the program.

This other most notable limitation with this study is that it specifically examined a single institution of higher learning located in the southwestern region of the United States. This study aimed to gain insight into the issue of high attrition rates at a specific institution, but it is also essential to reemphasize that this issue is much broader than a single institution and is currently impacting all levels of collegiate men’s basketball across the country. It would be beneficial for future research to examine the issue with a broader group of participants.

A recommendation for future studies is that researchers specifically examine the amount of time that basketball coaches individually devote and spend with student-athletes, and how that correlates to the student-athletes’ persistence at the institution. This study was theoretically based on Tinto’s theory of departure (2006), and with that, it heavily examined the relationship between academic and social integration on student persistence. Although there were no substantial findings between the academic and social integration and the student-athletes’
decisions to depart, it would be highly interesting and likely beneficial to more thoroughly examine the effect of the individual relationship between student-athletes and their coaches and how this relationship influences the decision to persist or prematurely depart.

**Summary**

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of the issue of high attrition rates among male collegiate basketball student-athletes, and possible solutions to the problem. The issue can be tough to navigate because there are a wide array of factors that impact the student-athlete’s decision to persist or prematurely depart. Some of these factors are uncontrollable or beyond the influence of the institution or coaching staff. The biggest takeaway from this study is that basketball-specific factors have an overwhelming influence on a male basketball student-athlete’s decision to initially attend an institution, as well as to persist or prematurely depart from that institution. It was the intention of this researcher to gain practical comprehension into the issue, and identify a potential solution that institutions and coaching staffs could act on to create an environment more conducive to persistence among male collegiate basketball student-athletes. Based on the literature and the data specific to this study, it was recommended that coaches carve out time regularly to connect on a personal-level with their student-athletes, and a large portion of this needs to include building relationships away from the basketball court. This solution could potentially help student-athletes stay connected and feel less of a need to find better opportunities elsewhere, as well as to understand that they have value beyond their basketball contributions. The proposed solution will open up lines of communication and assist with coaches and student-athletes rectifying situations before the student-athlete feels their only choice is to prematurely depart.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information and Consent

Based on your identification as a former collegiate male basketball student-athlete or coach/administrator, you have been selected to participate in a research study aimed at understanding the decision to transfer in male collegiate basketball student-athletes. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Your insight can help researchers and educators to gain further understanding of the high attrition rates in men’s basketball as well as formulate a possible solution.

Research Procedures

If you chose to participate, you may be asked to take part in one of three data collection methods. You might be asked to contribute in a semi-structured phone interview, which will take approximately one hour to finish, however there is no time limit. You might be asked to contribute in a focus group, which will take approximately one hour to complete, however there is no time limit. You might be asked to take part in a survey, which will take approximately 30 minutes to complete, however there is no time limit. Each of the data collection methods will gather information about your experience with collegiate men’s basketball to better understand the high attrition rates among the sport. When your assistance is no longer requested, you will be notified of the conclusion of your participation in this research.

Risks

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Pseudonyms will be given to all participants and institutions to protect their identity.

Benefits

Potential benefits from participation in this study is that researchers, educators, coaches, athletic departments, and institutions of higher learning can better serve the population of collegiate male basketball student-athletes, and increase retention among this population.

Confidentiality

This research may be published to share insight gained on the issue of attrition in the population of male collegiate basketball student-athletes, however no identifiable information or responses will be revealed in the completed study.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you can choose to stop participation at any time.
Additional Information

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact Landon Hughey at lhughey@liberty.edu or 555-555-5555.

Consent

I have read and understood the information above and agree to participate in this study to help researchers gain insight into the issue of attrition of male collegiate basketball student-athletes.

________________________________________  ______________________________________
Participant’s Signature                      Date

________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant
Appendix B: IRB Exemption

March 8, 2021

Landon Hughey
Amy Jones

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-449 UNDERSTANDING THE HIGH ATTRACTION RATES OF MALE COLLEGIATE BASKETBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

Dear Landon Hughey, Amy Jones:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.
Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
Appendix C: Permission Request Letter and Permissions

April 10, 2020

Redacted Institution
Redacted Title
Redacted Company
Redacted Address
Redacted Address
Redacted Address

Dear Redacted Name:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is “Understanding the High Attrition Rates of Male Collegiate Basketball Student-Athletes” and the purpose of my research is to examine the problem of high attrition rates among collegiate male basketball student-athletes for institutions of higher learning and their athletic departments in order to gain a better understanding of the issue and to formulate a solution to address the problem.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in REDACTED SCHOOL and utilize your membership list to recruit participants for my research.

Participants may be asked to take part in one or multiple data collection methods. They might be asked to contribute in a semi-structured phone interview, a focus group, or an online survey. Each of the data collection methods will gather information about their experience with collegiate men’s basketball to better understand the high attrition rates among the sport. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to lhughey@liberty.edu. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Landon Hughey
Doctoral Candidate
April 10, 2020

Dear Landon Hughey:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled “Understanding the High Attrition Rates of Male Collegiate Basketball Student-Athletes”, we have decided to grant you permission to access our membership list and conduct your study in REDACTED SCHOOL.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☐ The identifying information and contact information of former men’s basketball student-athletes over the previous five years will be provided to the researcher.

☐ The identifying information and contact information of current and former men’s basketball coaches over the previous five years will be provided to the researcher.

☐ The identifying information and contact information of current and former athletic administrators over the previous five years will be provided to the researcher.

☐ We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

REDACTED NAME
REDACTED TITLE
REDACTED COMPANY
Appendix D: Interview Questions

The following questions are the foundation for the semi-structured phone interviews.

Questions 1-11 deal with the college decision process, and how the student-athlete ended attending a particular institution.

1. What factors led you to attend your initial college/university initially?
2. How important was the opportunity to join the basketball program at your initial college/university in making your college decision?
3. Describe your interest in your initial college/university beyond the opportunity to participate in collegiate basketball.
4. What role did your parents/guardians/mentors have in your decision to attend the initial college/university?
5. Describe any initial hesitations about the initial college/university beyond basketball.
6. Describe any initial hesitations about the initial basketball program at college/university.
7. How far was the initial college/university from your hometown, and what role did that play in your decision to attend?
8. Approximately how much were you paying financially out of pocket to attend your initial college/university?
9. Describe your home life when you made the decision to commit and attend the initial college/university.
10. Describe the recruiting process by the basketball staff at the initial college/university.
11. Describe the recruiting process by the admissions office at the initial college/university.

Questions 12-23 are tailored to the student and the factors that led to their premature departure.

12. Describe the relationships you had at your initial college/university—this can include faculty, staff, coaches, classmates, peers, the community.
13. What factors led you to a premature departure from your initial college/university?
14. When did the thought of departure from your initial college/university enter your mind?

15. What role did your parents/guardians/mentors have in your decision to prematurely depart?

16. What role did basketball have in your decision to depart?

17. What would have prevented you from prematurely departing your initial college/university?

18. How many of your teammates/peers also chose to depart from your initial college/university? What factor did their decision have on your decision to leave?

19. How successful were you as an athlete at your initial college/university? How successful was the team?

20. How did you feel about the amount of playing time you received at your initial institution?

21. How successful were you academically at your initial college/university?

22. How connected were you to your initial college/university academically?

23. How connected were you to your initial college/university socially?

Final Questions

The participant will be given ample time to answer the previous questions and talk freely. As the conversation nears conclusion, the final structured questions are below.

24. In your opinion, why is the attrition rate among men’s basketball student-athletes so high at the collegiate level?

25. How can the issue of high attrition among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes be solved?
Appendix E: Focus Group Questions

The following questions are the foundation for the semi-structured focus group with coaches and athletic department representatives.

1. What characteristics do you look for when you recruit to your basketball program?

2. What are the primary factors that you believe potential student-athletes are looking for when they make their college decision?

3. What is your process for building a relationship with a potential recruit?

4. What is your process for building a relationship with a potential recruit’s parents/guardians/mentors?

5. How do you balance the needs and interests of a potential student-athlete who might be better served at a different institution with the desire to have them in your program?

6. Once a student-athlete is in your program how do you continue to build that relationship with them?

7. What do you do to help your student-athletes connect with the campus academically?

8. What do you do to help your student-athletes connect with the campus socially?

9. What do you do to help your student-athletes connect with the community?

10. Describe how you understand and address the needs of your student-athletes.

11. How do you measure success and satisfaction as a coach? Would you consider your program successful?

12. How do you perceive that your student-athletes measure success and satisfaction? Would your student-athletes consider your program successful?

13. Describe the culture of your program.

14. How often do you lose student-athletes due to their decision to prematurely depart your program?

15. How often do you benefit from student-athletes who chose to prematurely depart or transfer from a different institution and join your program?

16. What perceived factors lead student-athletes to transfer or persist at an institution?
17. What role do you believe that parents/guardians/mentors/peers have in a student-athlete’s decision to transfer or persist at your institution?

18. How often are you surprised or caught off guard to hear that a student-athlete wants to prematurely depart from your program?

19. How often do you "run off" a student-athlete so that you can free up a roster spot within your program? Or so that they can find a better fit?

Final Questions

*The focus group will be given ample time to answer the previous questions and talk freely.*

*As the conversation nears conclusion, the final structured questions are below*

20. Based on your knowledge and first-hand experience, why is the attrition rate among men’s basketball student-athletes so high at the collegiate level?

21. How can the issue of high attrition rates among collegiate men’s basketball student-athletes be solved?
Appendix F: Survey Questions

Section 1 – Background Information

1.1 Did you prematurely depart from a college or university before completing your degree there? Y / N

1.2 Did you transfer to a different college or university after completing your degree at your institution? Y / N

1.3 Were you a graduate transfer? Y / N

1.4 Please list all colleges and universities you attended below:

Institution 1 ________________________________________.
Did you complete your degree at this institution? Y / N

Institution 2 ________________________________________.
Did you complete your degree at this institution? Y / N

Institution 3 ________________________________________.
Did you complete your degree at this institution? Y / N

Institution 4 ________________________________________.
Did you complete your degree at this institution? Y / N

1.5 Levels of collegiate athletics you participated in:
NCAA DI    NCAA DII    NCAA DIII    NAIA    NJCAA    OTHER
Section 2 – Recruiting Process

The following questions will utilize the 6-point Likert scale for responses.

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2.1 My initial college/university was close to my hometown.

2.2 I was paying a large financial amount out-of-pocket to attend my initial college/university.

2.3 I received a large amount of scholarship to attend my initial college/university.

2.4 I had parents/guardians/mentors that helped me make the decision to attend my initial college/university.

2.5 Academics were the primary reason I attended my initial college/university.

2.6 Basketball was the primary reason I attended my initial college/university.

2.7 I was heavily recruited by an admissions department or an academic department to attend my initial college/university.

2.8 I was heavily recruited by the basketball staff to attend my initial college/university.

2.9 I expected to complete my degree at my initial college/university when I enrolled there.

2.10 I expected to play an important role in the basketball program at my initial college/university when I enrolled there.

2.11 Academically and socially, my initial college/university was perceived as the best fit for me.

2.12 The basketball program at my initial college/university was perceived as the best fit for me.

2.13 I would have attended my initial institution even if I did not participate in college athletics.

2.14 I had friends that already attended or were planning to attend my initial college/university.

2.15 I believed I had the potential to play professional basketball.
Section 3 – College Experience at Initial Institution

The following questions will utilize the 6-point Likert scale for responses.

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3.1 I was happy as a student at my initial college/university.

3.2 I was happy as a member of the basketball program at my initial college/university.

3.3 I was a successful student at my initial college/university.

3.4 I was successful as a basketball player at my initial college/university.

3.5 Our basketball program was successful at my initial college/university.

3.6 At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the college/university.

3.7 At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the community.

3.8 At my initial college/university, I felt integrated into the basketball program.

3.9 At my initial college/university, I felt valued.

3.10 At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with the academic faculty.

3.11 At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with non-athlete students.

3.12 At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with my teammates.

3.13 At my initial college/university, I had a good relationship with the basketball coaches.

3.14 I was proud to attend my initial college/university.

3.15 I was proud to be a member of the basketball program at my initial college/university.

3.16 Several of my peers prematurely departed from my initial college/university.

3.17 There was a head-coaching change made during my time affiliated with my initial institution.  Y / N
Section 4 – The Decision to Depart

This section will only be made available to student-athlete who prematurely departed or transferred from an institution. The following questions will utilize the 6-point Likert scale for responses.

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4.1 My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on academic reasons.

4.2 My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on basketball reasons.

4.3 My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on financial reasons.

4.4 My decision to depart from my initial institution was based on personal reasons.

4.5 I was on track to graduate when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.6 I was on pace to play a larger role in the basketball program when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.7 I was homesick when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.8 I was performing well academically when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.9 I was performing well as a basketball player when I made the decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.

4.10 I was satisfied with the academic experience at my initial institution when I made the decision to prematurely depart.

4.11 I was satisfied with the basketball experience at my initial institution when I made the decision to prematurely depart.

4.12 I was satisfied with the amount of game minutes I played at my initial institution.

4.13 I was "run off" by the coaching staff at my initial institution.

4.14 My parents/guardians/mentors supported my decision to prematurely depart from my initial institution.
4.15 After departing from my initial institution, I _____________. (drop-down options)

- dropped out of school, pursued other options
- pursued professional basketball opportunities
- transferred, but quit participation in college athletics
- transferred, and moved to a lower level of college athletics
- transferred, and moved to a similar level of college athletics
- transferred, and moved to a higher level of college athletics
Section 5 – Open-Ended Questions

5.1 If you prematurely departed from an institution, what would have prevented you from leaving?

5.2 Any other thoughts you'd like to share on the recruiting process?

5.3 Any other thoughts you'd like to share on your college experience?

5.4 Any other thoughts you'd like to share on your decision to persist or depart an institution?