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### Impact of Playing a Collegiate Sport on Satisfaction on Overall Experience in College

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*Impact of Playing a Collegiate Sport on Satisfaction on Overall Experience in College*

Education is the foundation of our civilization; without it society, as we know it, would no longer exist. Because of this, the amount of research conducted on all aspects of the educational realm is abundant. Sports, and other extracurricular activities, have persistently been explored for their effects on students (of any age) and their academic work. This paper examines how playing a college sport may impact retention rates and satisfaction of the overall college experience. This is significant to educational studies because it brings two aspects of schooling—athletics and attendance—together. The data that will be reviewed will help to show how athletics promote, hinder, or do not effect attending a college, and students' overall experience at college. It may answer broader questions of whether being part of a team enhances social groups, or takes time away from excelling in academics. For these reasons, this research is vital and will help to develop educational research. The data gathered in this study has shown that playing sports at Trinity College has given athletes a very positive and satisfying outlook on Trinity, and the more a team or individual wins, the more this perception of Trinity's campus is enhanced. To be able to use this data and relate it to the real world, it is imperative to know what studies have already been conducted and what data has already been analyzed. Previous literature guides current research and will therefore be explored in this paper.

***Literature Review***

Retention rates at colleges are a statistic that every college keeps and are usually used as a measure of success for the school; the higher the retention rate the more assumed success of a school.

There are many factors that affect retention that go beyond athletics. Grade point average (GPA), academic climate, professor relationships, gender, student beliefs, and numerous other variables can be factors that influence retention rates (Johnson 1997). It has been found that there are in fact predictors to whether a certain group will drop or transfer out of school or not. Knowing these factors, schools can make changes and cater to the needs of students who are more likely to drop out. Judith Johnson's article *Commuter College Students: What Factors Determine Who Will Persist and Who Will Drop Out?*, makes claims that gender is a factor that affects retention, and in her study females had higher drop out rates. She states that faculty and staff of colleges should be more careful with their female population and develop closer relationships with them so they are less likely to drop out (Johnson 1997). Other high risk factors have pointed to not just college GPA's but high school GPA's and SAT scores that students bring with them to college as freshmen. Beyond grades, the behaviors that freshman engage in before college can also contribute to how likely a student will be to remain at the same college for the next four years (DeBerard et. al. 2004). Such behaviors included heavy smoking or drinking, coping strategies, academic support from family, and financial support. By looking at past performances of students, it was easier to predict what their outcomes in college would be like. Higher grades, higher levels of academic support, and effective coping strategies all improved a student's chances of remaining at the same school (DeBerard et. al. 2004).

There has been an incredible amount of research done on the impact of sports on academic work at the high school level as well as at community colleges. While the topic of this paper focuses on higher education, it is important to understand all the literature that has been conducted on this topic. The atmosphere found on high school grounds were enriched by sports; athletics provided balance in the students' busy lives and a greater sense of school spirit and pride (Bennet 2007). The impact of athletics was very positive. For those students who may be trying to save money by living at home, feel they are unprepared for a four-year college experience, or feel more comfortable at a smaller school,

there is always an option to attend a two-year community college (Horton 2009). Community colleges face many issues with retention as there are high dropout rates and a number of students transfer out of community colleges to four-year colleges. Community colleges are constantly changing and adapting to research based on retention rates in order to improve their statistics. At the community college level, grades and GPA's are very influential to a student's decision to drop out, transfer, or stay at the school (Hoyt 1999). Those that chose to participate in athletics have seen how playing their sport at a community college raised their level of satisfaction at their school. Athletics gives students an opportunity to become close with a certain group of students, which might not have happened if they didn't play the sport because most community college students live at home rather than in dorms. These students also felt that they built better relationships with professors and their coaches. Time management also plays a key role in the athletes' experience. Since there is so much time dedicated to a sport, the students have to manage their time better and get their work done earlier resulting in better grades at school (Horton 2009 & Wyman 1997).

There have been various case studies that look at individual student athletes and how they have excelled both academically and athletically (Roach 1999 & Pierce 2007). These studies include students of different backgrounds, races, majors, age, and sports. They have demonstrated how there is a direct link between doing well in college and playing a collegiate sport. Whether looking at a female soccer player at University of Wisconsin who won an All-American award and has a 4.0 GPA or looking at engineering students at a Division I school who play various sports and excel in rigorous learning environments, athletics and academics are shown as complementing each other. Being able to keep a balance between these two aspects of a college career has not placed a burden on these students, but has enriched their daily lives (Roach 1999 & Pierce 2007).

It's clear that playing sports take up an enormous amount of time in an athlete's career in college. While the athletes feel they may be missing out on some aspects of college, both socially and academically, they feel that the trade-offs are well worth it. This has been seen for all different sports, gender, races, and ages. The positive response to sports that these athletes have translate to very satisfying experiences as they go through college (Potuto, 2007). To make up for missing out on some college experiences, there are a number of athletes that participate in social and academic clubs and organizations around campus. It has been shown that more involvement in college activities, besides playing sports, keep students more engaged around campus and enhances their experience in college (Gayles & Hu, 2009). This satisfaction the athlete's receive is directly related to the fact that they are part of a team on campus. Without these experiences, the students would not have enjoyed their time at college as much.

While there seems to be plenty of positive links between athletics and academics, it is important to understand that the negative effects of athletics in college can pose very serious consequences. Joseph Despres, Frank Brady, and Scott McGowans's article *Understanding the Culture of the Student: Athlete: Implications for College Counselors* states that student athletes endure an intensive sport schedule that devotes vast amounts of time to playing that sport. This time requirement puts a lot of physical, emotional, and social stress on athletes that not all students have to face. The athletes face physical wear and tear on a daily basis, deal with team relationships that can go up and down, interpret personal performance as successes or failures, and neglect other non-athlete social groups, all while having to keep up high enough GPA's to stay on the team (Despres et al 2008). These emotions and physical abuse take a toll on a person and can negatively affect a student's college experience and ultimately can drive a student to drop out or transfer colleges.

Meeting new people and having an instant group of friends is a likely reason for enjoying being on a sports team, especially at the college level when students have left home and are entering a totally new world. However, there have been studies that show there is no relationship between social integration and academic success or progress (Mangold et. al., 2003). In fact, these studies showed that athletics tended to hinder academic success in schools because of the huge time commitment that comes with playing a sport. Not only can individual student's grades suffer, but the relationships between student and professor can be affected as well. In a study of 538 collegiate athletes, 61.9% said that they were refused or given a hard time when they asked for extra time, extra help, or other accommodations on work (Simmons et. al, 2007). These sorts of experiences can make a college career very stressful and frustrating for any student, especially when they have to play a sport as well. In fact, there are a lot of colleges, especially at the Division I level, that have very low graduation rates of collegiate athletes. While the DI athletes may have enjoyed their time being part of team and may have even excelled athletically, graduating from college relies on getting good grades, and the academic pressure was too much, forcing the student to have to leave the school voluntarily (DeBrock & Wallace, 1996). The balancing act between academics and athletics has been debated for so long because of the amount of research on both sides of the argument is vast.

Narrowing down the research and finding data relating most closely to the topic of this paper was done with ease because of the amount of literature that has been conducted thoroughly on this topic. The New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) is a conference of schools that stresses the importance of schooling and also athletics. Sports play a big role in the NESCAC, as a high percentage of students at each school participate in athletics. These schools, however, are very tough academically and strive for excellence. Trinity College, the subject school of this paper, is one member of the eleven NESCAC colleges. The NESCAC, along with Ivy League schools, is concerned that students are missing out on the broader experience of college by putting in most of their time playing their sport.

Therefore, these schools put more restrictive rules on their sports than other colleges that they play (Jacobson 2002). For example, the NESCAC schools play, on average, fewer games during the regular season, for each sport, than most other schools at the Division III level. However, while the school administrators find this to be a good idea, student athletes are not as thrilled. The students may not recognize some of the negative effects discussed earlier, and their passion for the game persists (Jacobson 2002). This phenomenon would imply that students' perspective of the athletic experience is quite different than that of administrators.

The amount of research regarding academics and athletics is so vast because of the implications this topic has for future generations; getting a good education is the key to improving our society. It seems as though there is much literature that asserts that sports positively impact a student's academics and in fact helps to raise GPA scores and retention rates. The better a student does academically and athletically, the more likely they will be to stay at the same school for all four years. However, this does not mean that there is not research that contradicts this statement. It has been shown that athletics are grueling and gruesome and can take a lot out of an athlete, sometimes enough so that the student may drop out or transfer. The relationship between athletics and retention rates at colleges will continue to be explored from all aspects. Risk factors will continue to be pointed out as well as interventions needed to make sure these students do not feel like they must drop out of college. It is a changing environment with immense importance to our society so the research must follow. Moreover, those that choose to participate in college athletics are steadily growing in numbers.

### ***Methods***

The research for this study was conducted through an electronic survey consisting of 14 multiple-choice and write-in questions and six open-ended questions. The Associate Athletic Director, Robin Sheppard, sent out the survey to all athletes at Trinity College (around 600 athletes). The thought behind this was that seeing her name on the email would entice more athletes to respond. There were

229 respondents but only 139 answers were rendered useful because freshman athletes were excluded from the survey, as some of them have yet to complete a full season in their sport. This response rate, roughly 23%, was not huge, but was still able to produce sufficient results in order to come to specific conclusions. Only athletes were chosen for this study because a comparison between non-athletes and athletes would have posed too big of a scope for a one semester research project and it was felt unnecessary for the topic of this research.

The questions in the survey ranged from demographic information including major, sport/s played, and sex, to general questions about Trinity, such as: did the participant study abroad; what other organizations on campus was the participant involved in; and was the participant recruited to play a sport at Trinity. Then the survey asked more sport specific questions regarding time spent with teammates and non-teammates off the field and rating player/coach relationships and overall athletic experience on Likert Scales, to open-ended questions about best and worst athletic experiences at Trinity, and how playing a sport has impacted the participant's time at Trinity. At the end of the survey, participants were given room to add additional comments regarding the survey or playing a sport at Trinity College.

The participants were given a week and a half to complete the survey from the initial email that was sent out, with a reminder email sent one week later. After this time period, the data was gathered and analyzed in the program PAWS Statistics 18. This program cross references two variables, one dependent and one independent, in order to see the significance with each other. Once significance was established, a thesis was finally created with supporting evidence. The three main dependent variables were *overall experience at Trinity*, *best athletic experience*, and *how playing a sport has impacted a participant's experience at Trinity*. Multiple independent variables were cross referenced against these dependent variables to create the results stated in the data and analysis section.



Open-ended questions such as *best athletic experience* and *how playing a sport at Trinity has impacted a participant's experience*, were recoded into variables to make it easier to create tables with other independent variables. They were recoded into different themes that were consistently present in the answers given. For results to be clearer, the answers for *best athletic experience* were recoded into themes such as "winning a NESCAC game", "a memorable individual moment" (scoring a winning goal, pitching a great game, beating a record time, etc.), "a memorable victory", "meeting new people", etc. *The impact of playing a sport at Trinity* was another open-ended response question that was recoded into various themes based on the answers provided by participants ("better time management", "meeting new people", "positive experience", "negative experience", etc.). The recoded variables were based on the researcher's best attempt to combine answers into just a few categories or themes. This is one small bias that can be seen in the study. Another bias found in this study is the involvement of the researcher in the research. As an athlete at Trinity, the researcher has preconceived notions, expected outcomes, and a level of involvement that may have had an impact on the questions of the survey or the participants. The researcher is also a Trinity College student and the researcher's name was sent in the email containing the survey, which could have also influenced whether or not a participant answered a question a certain way or if a participant answered the survey at all. These are all things to take into consideration when viewing the results of the study.

As the results for the survey were gathered and analyzed, it was apparent that the data did not exactly answer the original research question of how does playing a collegiate sport affect a student's chance to remain at the same college for all four years? It seemed to answer a different question that dealt more with an athlete's satisfaction at college based on the fact that they play a sport. Therefore, a new thesis was created: Playing sports at Trinity College has given the athletes a very positive and satisfying outlook on Trinity, additionally the more a team or individual wins, the more the perception of Trinity's campus is enhanced. This is not much different from the first thesis; however, this new thesis

does not deal with retention at Trinity. One of the biggest reasons why the data did not talk to retention rates is because participants who took the survey were all enrolled at Trinity College and there was not a comparison done between students who had dropped or transferred out of Trinity. This study focuses more on a student's perception of how playing sports impacted their overall experience at Trinity.

### ***Data and Analysis***

Fortunately, the results of the survey showed there was a fairly even distribution among the athletes in terms of class year, sex, and sport. 36.7% were sophomores, 35.3% were juniors, and 28.1% were seniors (freshmen were not included in the survey as indicated above). Of these percentages, 42.4% were males and 57.6% were females. While the first sport played by each participant may not have an equal number of respondents, each Trinity College varsity sport was represented at least once. These sorts of figures were able to produce rich, well-rounded data that answered questions to the overarching research question. The information and data gathered asserts that playing sports at Trinity College has given the athletes a very positive outlook on Trinity that makes them want to stay here; additionally the more a team or individual wins, the more this perception of Trinity's campus is enhanced. "I can't imagine my experience at Trinity without [sports]...it really adds so much to my overall collegiate experience and I'd feel imbalanced if I didn't" (Participant). This thesis is directly reflected in the data gathered from the surveys through statistical cross references of dependent and independent variables that were available.

### **Overall Experience**

#### **Recruits**

To gain an understanding of each participant's general view of being an athlete at Trinity College, they were asked to rate their overall experience at Trinity on a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 to 5 (1 being "horrible experience" and 5 being "excellent experience"). This question did not specifically pertain to playing sports, but reveals a lot about the individual answering the question and his/her overall

experience at Trinity. In order to find out what exactly impacts a participant's overall experience at Trinity, there were a few independent variables that were cross referenced against the answers, one of which included being recruited to play a sport versus walking on. This was an important question because being recruited to play a collegiate sport can mean a lot to an athlete and weigh heavily on an athlete's decision to enroll in a certain college or university. Whereas, someone who walks onto a sports team in college may have chosen that college for other academic reasons, or wasn't really sure that he/she wanted to continue with playing sports until they got to college and wanted to be a part of something. Those that participated in the survey and were recruited, on average, chose a 4.11 for their overall experience while those participants that walked on, on average, chose a 3.64. While both categories rated their overall experience fairly high, those that were recruited to play a sport were slightly higher. These statistically significant figures ( $p=.01$ ) propose that those athletes that were recruited to play a sport at Trinity chose to go here because of this opportunity, are continuing to do something they are very passionate about, and have had a positive experience at Trinity, more so than those athletes who walked onto their teams. This has been seen in previous studies conducted on athletes at various schools (Bennett, 2010 & Horton, 2010). This directly links back to and supports the hypothesis of this paper in that those who came here because they were recruited by Trinity to play a sport, have a very positive outlook on their experience at Trinity.

### **Best Athletic Experience**

Another question that was used to measure the participant's general view of Trinity, more specifically looking at sports, involved their best athletic experience at Trinity. This part of the survey was open ended and left room for the athletes to express themselves. Not surprisingly, the recoded themes that had to do with winning received higher scores when rating their overall experience at Trinity. 26.7% of those participants that rated their overall experience a 5 said that their best experience was "making it to the NCAA tournament"; 15.6% who rated it a 5 said "winning a NESCAC game"; 28.1%

who rated it a 4 said “a memorable individual moment”; 15.8% of those who rated their experience a 4 also said “a memorable victory” was their best experiences. These percentages were the highest for each rating, and each theme represented here had a minimum frequency of 18 respondents. These statistically significant numbers clearly indicate that winning on a personal level or as a team is very valuable and impacts an athlete’s overall experience positively at Trinity. “My best athletic experience at Trinity is when we win, our team is great and everything feels awesome. The team has a lot of fun together, more so this year than past years” (Participant).

### **Player-Coach Relationship**

There are other factors that are more specific to an individual that can affect an athlete’s overall experience at Trinity. Table 1 depicts how a participant rated his/her player-coach relationship from the last season (1 being “bad communication” and 5 being “lots of communication”) against the participant’s overall experience at Trinity. It is shown clearly, through statistically significant data ( $p=.05$ ), Trinity athletes have strong communicative relationships with their coaches, which reflects positively on their overall experience. Conversely, for the group of participants that rated their player-coach relationship 3 or below, they tended to also rate their overall experience more negatively. Therefore, the more positive an impact a coach has, the more positive an impact the overall sport has on the athlete’s experience at Trinity.

### **Marginally Significant Data**

Other factors can impact an athlete’s overall experience that is on a more social level, which include hanging out with teammates off the field and studying abroad. Both influence many college students’ perception of a college during their four years of study, however these factors were only found to be marginally significant ( $p=$  slightly greater than .1). In general, most athletes tended to spend 6+ hours a week with teammates off the field. Of these athletes, most rated their overall experience a 4 or higher. However, it seems as though hanging out with teammates outside of practice and games does

not determine a good or bad experience as those participants that chose less than 6 hours a week, had a majority (53.8%) rating of 4 for their overall experience. Whereas, studying abroad seemed to show a slight increase in ratings. Those participants that did not study abroad answered, on mean, a 3.99 for overall experience while those that did study abroad answered, on mean, a 4.12 for overall experience. In both cases, the rating was well above a 3, which may imply that studying abroad does not have a negative impact if an individual chooses not to study abroad, but if she/he chooses to then their experience is only positively impacted. Since Trinity is a Division III school, it gives athletes an off-season and a chance to get involved around campus including studying abroad. This may imply that getting more involved in campus activities enhances an athlete's experience. Although the numbers for studying abroad are only marginally significant ( $p =$  slightly greater than .1), they still provide the field of research with an interesting and broad overview of what might impact an athlete's experience at a certain college like Trinity.

### **Majors**

To gain an understanding of the whole, complex participant, academics must also be included. So far data from athletic and social levels have been included, but when academics are added, specifically majors and major departments, the entire participant is broken down. Table 2 shows the department of majors broken down and how each department rates their perceived overall experience at Trinity. Of all the participants that rated a 5 for overall experience, 66.7% (the majority) were majoring in one of the Social Sciences; of those who rated a 4 for overall experience, 43.9% (the majority) were majoring in one of the Social Sciences. This suggests that majors in the Social Sciences (which include Economics, a supposedly work intensive major) have a better overall experience at Trinity than other majors, at least among athletes. This could be because these majors have a lighter course load so they have more time to spend concentrating on sports or participants of this department may have better time management skills in order to complete all their work and still have time for sports.

Whatever the case may be, athletes with a Social Science major are having the better experience on Trinity's campus. There have been studies (Pierce, 2010) in the past that focus on a specific major and how that impacts academics and athletics. There have been many that also come to similar conclusions found in this study.

### **Insignificant Data**

Many of the cross references against overall experience at Trinity came up as not statistically significant. While most of them were not surprising, as they supported the known thesis, there was a couple that seemed as if they should have been significant. For example, the first sports that participants wrote down that they played were then categorized into either a "winning sport" (squash, baseball, etc.) or a "not-winning sport" (soccer, lacrosse, etc.) according to the teams' records of the previous four years. Based on the findings described earlier, it would seem appropriate that those participants who were part of a winning team would have a higher overall experience rating than those that were part of a not-winning team. However, the data did not show this, and even if it had the numbers were found to be statistically insignificant as the p value was .754. Another interesting data set was cross referencing the sex of the athlete with overall experience at Trinity. The data shows that females were more likely to rate their overall experience higher than males, however this data showed a p value of .348 and therefore were rendered insignificant. These insignificant results most likely result from the small sample size that was used. Overall experience at Trinity was a useful variable to use in order to see how participants view their entire experience at Trinity rather than just focusing on sports. However, there are other dependent variables that should be looked at to see how the participants of this study may differ from other students because they are athletes.

## **Best Athletic Experience**

### **Class Year**

One of the variables that was used as an independent variable with overall experience can be used as a dependent variable to gain insight into the participants athletic experience at Trinity. The participants were asked what their best athletic experience was at Trinity. Unfortunately, there were not many independent variables that resulted in statistically significant numbers for their best athletic experience. However, one variable that produced significant values was class year against best athletic experience. For the themes “a memorable individual moment” and “a memorable victory”, sophomores indicated this as their best experience with 41.7% and 57.9%, respectively, as the most responses. Whereas for “making it to NCAA’s”, juniors had the highest response rate of 55.6% and for “winning a NESCAC game” seniors were the majority with 53.8%. This can indicate that as underclassmen, athletes are more focused on themselves or smaller individual games that stand out to them while upperclassmen tend to think of the bigger picture and winning championships for the season. Another reason could be that sophomores have only played for two years while juniors and seniors have been playing longer and therefore have had more chances at winning bigger, championship games.

### **Team Bonding**

One theme for *best athletic experience* that did not have to do with winning or losing was “team bonding”. Sophomores indicated this response the most with 47.6%, implying that underclassmen put a bigger emphasis on bonding with their teammates and making sure the team fits together more than upperclassmen do. In order to relate this data to the thesis that playing sports at Trinity College enhances an athlete’s experience, and even more so when that athlete wins, it is important to look at the themes that were most often chosen as being the best athletic experience: “A memorable victory”, “winning a NESCAC game”, “making it to NCAA’s”. Therefore, when a team or individual wins, they most often consider it the best experience and have a more positive outlook on Trinity.

## **Impact of Playing a Sport on Experience**

### **Sport Played**

The last question of the survey was aiming at a well-rounded response that would sum up the goals of the survey. Participants were asked to explain how playing a sport at Trinity College has impacted their experience here. This variable provided a few statistically significant results. An independent variable used was the participant's first sport he/she participated in. Out of the 17 sports, there were only six that totaled 10 or more responses in the survey. Of those six sports, four of them (crew, football, ice hockey, and lacrosse) had "positive experience" as their most often chosen response to how playing a sport has impacted their experience at Trinity. Soccer had a majority of people saying that having met new people impacted athletes' time the most and volleyball had no clear majority and answered almost under every category. "Positive experience" and "meeting new people" had the most responses overall for how sports have impacted their experience with 60 and 39 responses out of a total of 139, respectively. This reflects that in general, athletes have had a positive experience while playing sports at Trinity and this has impacted their decision to continue to play sports and stay at Trinity. Meeting new people and having a group of friends, while not under the "positive experience" category, is in effect a very positive aspect of playing sports, and again contributes to the retention of athletes at Trinity. As for the specific sports mentioned above, those four that had positive experience as the majority include both male and female sports, winning and losing sports, and therefore represent a multifaceted group of athletes at Trinity. This may indicate that playing a sport, regardless of having a winning or losing season improves the athlete's experience. Yet, athletes on winning teams will have an even better experience. Soccer, which tends to not be a winning sport and includes both males and females, seems to be more attentive to other aspects other than winning or losing (i.e. meeting new people). For volleyball, there may be other factors that contribute to the variety of answers such as being a small team, coach-player relationships, and/or player-player relationships. This is a place where



further research, beyond surveys, could be very helpful to understand the “why” behind the answers provided in the survey. Numbers can only give a small picture into the entire life of a team or individual athlete. Numerous case studies have been done on individual athletes and teams that gain more insight and provide more expanded answers (Roach & Depres et al).

### **Overall Experience**

While there was another statistically significant variable, it may not provide any additional data that has not already been mentioned. Overall experience has been talked about a lot as a dependent variable, however this time it is used as an independent variable with how playing a sport impacts a participant’s experience. However, whether participants rated their overall experience a 2 or a 5, they were most likely to say “meeting new people” or “positive experience” for how playing a sport has impacted them. This means that the impact of playing a sport at Trinity may not change whether you have a horrible or excellent overall experience, implying that sports might not have a negative effect on overall experience but may only enhance an already good experience. These results seem to only partially support the thesis that has been proposed, however the numbers still show that most athletes rated their overall experience a 3 or higher and of those responses, “positive experience” was the most chosen for how playing a sport impacts their experience. While these results have not been as clearly supported as the rest of the results, they still allude to similar findings. And, like the other data, there was surprising data that ended up being insignificant such as player-coach relationship, how much time is spent with teammates outside of practice and games, and if the participant was recruited when cross referenced with how playing a sport impacts their experience. Fortunately, there was significant data that was rendered useful that point to supporting the thesis, whether partially or more definitively.

### **Trinity's Retention Rates**

By looking at Trinity's records of retention rates and percent of students that are athletes, there is not a definitive link between the two as both sets of data have not changed tremendously over the past ten years. Table 3 shows retention rates for Trinity, the most recent of which is 2006. The number seems to only differ minimally year to year. This is a theme that can also be seen in Table 4 that depicts percent of male and female athletes at Trinity. The only real trend is that the percent of males is consistently higher than the percent of females. Even with more current data there is also no real significant change or trend in percentages. By comparing the tables with each other, what can be seen is that the dip in retention rate from 2005 to 2006 is similarly shown with a slight decrease of athletes from those same years. This could imply that when there is a higher percentage of athletes at Trinity, retention rates are higher because athletes tend to remain at the same school for all four years. Since the retention rates do not break down the types of students that are remaining at the school, it is hard to decipher if in fact athletes are the students remaining at Trinity. This would be another place where further or expanded research should be done in order to find out the definitive answer to this question.

The research conducted in this study, supported by previous research, has identified that playing a sport at Trinity College positively affects a student's experience and increases satisfaction as a Trinity College student. "[Playing a sport] is the single greatest reason as to why I have enjoyed my time here" (Participant). Through a closer examination of three major dependent variables, overall experience, best athletic experience, and how playing a sport imports their experience, this conclusion was easily identifiable. By looking at general, academic, and social factors, this study was able to touch on a variety of influences that factored into the participant's responses. More specifically it was found that athletes who were recruited rated their overall experience higher than those athletes who were not recruited; regarding best athletic experience, the most chosen themes were ones that included winning; higher player-coach ratings meant higher overall experience as well as poor ratings in both categories

acted directly proportionally; athletes who belong to a major in the Social Sciences rated their experience at Trinity higher than any other major; and class year indicated that underclassmen focus more on the present game at hand whereas upperclassman concentrate on the bigger championships at the end of the year. There are, however, a few shortcomings of surveys and, therefore, more research in this field is advised. Talking to and interviewing individual athletes or teams would be a good start to answer questions of “why” and “how” that a survey can only imply. Nevertheless, the data that was found can be very beneficial to the field of educational research as well as to individual institutions to gain knowledge that may help to raise retention rates and overall satisfaction of their students at their schools. It may inform coaches and administrators to encourage students to continue playing sports through college or it may provide other aspects for colleges and universities of what factors contribute to athletes’ positive experiences and use that to influence the students they cater to. Even with the vast amount of research conducted on this topic, the results presented in this study are significant, especially for Division III athletes at Trinity College. The impact of playing sports at Trinity has been found to be highly positive and makes for an experience that lasts for four years. Sports and academics have always presented the need for a balancing act, but this research suggests that the two can operate successfully side by side.

## Graphs and Charts

## Player-Coach

## Relationship

## Overall Experience

	Horrible Experience	2	3	4	Excellent Experience	Total
Bad Communication	0	1	<b>3</b>	2	1	7
2	0	2	<b>7</b>	5	6	20
3	0	2	10	<b>11</b>	5	28
4	1	1	6	<b>31</b>	13	52
Lots of Communication	0	0	1	8	<b>20</b>	29
Total	1	6	27	57	45	136

Table 1

## Major Department

## Overall Experience

	Horrible Experience	2	3	4	Excellent Experience	Total
Humanities	0	0	3	<b>7</b>	2	12
Art	0	0	2	1	0	3
Natural Sciences	0	2	5	<b>15</b>	12	34
Numeric and Symbolic Reasoning	0	0	2	0	0	2
Social Sciences	0	4	9	25	<b>30</b>	68
Undecided	1	0	6	<b>9</b>	1	17
Total	1	6	27	57	45	136

Table 2

<b>Graduation Rates</b>	<b>Entering Fall Cohorts</b>						
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Four-year	79.6%	79.0%	81.2%	76.8%	77.7%	82.0%	76.6%

Table 3

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Academic Years</b>						
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Inter-collegiate Athlete</b>							
Women	20%	22%	21%	23%	24%	24%	23%
Men	33%	32%	33%	34%	36%	35%	32%

Table 4

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