

# **Student-Athlete Educational Perceptions:**

**A Comparative Study of Div. I  
and Div III Student-Athletes**

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# Research Question

- Do the educational perceptions of student-athletes at Div I and Div III schools differ? If so, how?

# Significance

- Important for student-athletes to get what they expect from their college education.

# Literature

- Examined the relationship between athletic participation and academic performance among athletes involved in “big time” college sports
- Participant-observational study of a men's Division I basketball program in Midwestern U.S. over a four-year period
- Findings: Participant's athletic, social and classroom experiences lead them to become progressively detached from academics
- Concluded that the structure of universities with “big-time” athletic programs and the athletes' patterned experiences within these universities undermine their attainment of the professional goals of the educational system

# Thesis

- **Students who choose to attend Division I institutions have different attitudes about the importance of their education than students who chose to attend Division III institutions.**

# Context

	School A	School B
NCAA Athletic Division	Division I	Division III
Institution Type	Private, non-sectarian, co-educational	Private, non-sectarian, co-educational, Liberal Arts
Undergraduate Enrollment	Approx. 5,700	Approx. 2,400
Entrance Difficulty	Moderately difficult	Most Difficult
Average SAT Scores	M: 537, CR: 525, W: NR	M: 644, CR: 637, W: 655
Cost of Attendance	\$ 43,428	\$ 53,529
Setting	Small city, NE U.S.	Large city, NE U.S.
Athletics	16 Intercollegiate sports (scholarships offered)	27 Intercollegiate sports (No athletic scholarships)

**\*Source: [www.collegedata.com](http://www.collegedata.com)**

# Research Methods

- **16 in-depth interviews with upperclassmen baseball players and coaches**
  - all single sport athletes
  - 7 athletes and 1 coach at Division I institution
  - 7 athletes and 1 coach at Division III institution
- **Asked open-ended questions**

# Findings

- Although both Division I and Division III baseball players expressed that they planned to graduate from their respective colleges, there was a significant difference the level of academic success each intended to achieve.
  - The Division III students viewed their academics as important in itself.
    - “I try to keep my GPA above a 3.0... It’s always been important for me to have good relationships with my professors and do well in school” (School B, 2)
  - Division I students mostly thought about their academics as important to keep them eligible to play baseball
    - “I’ve been eligible for the last four years so I guess I can say that I’m having a good educational experience” (School A).
  - Student-athlete vs. athletic student



# Findings

- The actual time commitment of baseball players at both institutions is largely similar, although their attitudes differed regarding the place of athletics in their lives.
  - Division III participants made time for other activities
    - “We don’t get reprimanded for not making it to an off-season workout. Our coach understands that we have other commitments. He encourages us to get involved and do other things besides baseball” (School B).
  - Division I participants expressed the importance of sport being their main priority
    - “The players and coaches have set pretty high expectations for our program. Our team is real competitive. We know if we miss a workout were hurting ourselves and our team... We know that it is gonna take 100% commitment to reach our goals” (School A)

# Findings

- Given the opportunity, baseball players at both levels of competition would like to play professionally, but Division III players were more realistic in the chances than the Div I players.
  - Division III baseball players comments that suggest that they have made conscious efforts to think about their future without baseball.
    - “Definitely. It would be awesome (to play professionally). I just don’t put all of my expectations there because I know my chances are slim. So getting a good education is my next best option” (School B)
  - Division I baseball players’ did not mention any other career options
    - “Of course playing professional baseball has always been a dream of mine” (School A).

# Findings

- Although players from both institutions believed that they are prepared for life after graduation, there was variation in what experiences they believe will help prepare them for what they have coined the “real world.”
  - Div I because of participation in athletics
    - “Big time, life after college is mostly networking and being able to talk with other people in your field. It really is relationship building and I think sports helps that” (School A).
  - Div III because of participation in athletics, quality of education, and social experience
    - “My education here has been priceless and that’s because of academics and sports. I’ve learned that if I wanna get my work done and learn, then I have to do it. I feel that I am better prepared for the real world now and I have grown a lot from my experiences [in college]” (School B).

# Conclusions

- **Student-athletes' educational perceptions develop prior to college**
- **Institutions and coaches are not influencing student-athletes' educational perceptions.**
- **Division III participants are more balanced and are getting a more well-rounded education**

# Implications

- Potential Division I student-athletes need better perspectives of the role of athletics before they go to college