Influential Factors in a Division III Student-Athlete’s College Decision

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Abstract
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Influential Factors in a Division III Student-Athlete’s College Decision

Matthew S. Taylor

SPST 499: Sport Management Seminar

St. John Fisher College
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

Abstract

The college athletics landscape is one that is vastly different across the three main divisions of the NCAA. Previous literature has examined a mixture of a number of different factors influencing the student-athletes college decision. This study has uncovered what are the most influential factors in a Division III student-athlete’s college decision. A cross-sectional survey consisting of a number of different types of questions including rank order questions, validation options, and open ended questions helped to gather the most accurate and appropriate data for this study. This survey was administered to all students on the St. John Fisher College campus, targeting only student-athletes in hopes to maximize responses and consistent data. It was found that academics were the most important individual factor; whereas institutional factors were found to be the most influential factor group. These findings are important to all Division III athletic departments as well as coaches, student-athletes, and administrators to help gain greater focus on specific recruiting for student-athletes.
Influential Factors in a Student-Athletes College Decision

Division III college athletics makes up the largest division of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, where the student athletes pride themselves on succeeding on and off the playing field (NCAA, 2015). According to the NCAA, Division III athletic programs “seek to establish and maintain an environment in which a student-athlete’s athletics activities are conducted as an integral part of the student-athlete’s educational experience, and an environment that values cultural diversity and gender equity among their student-athletes and athletics staff (NCAA, 2015, para. 1).” There are over 180,000 Division III student-athletes around the United States at over 450 different institutions (NCAA, 2015). The philosophy of Division III athletics focuses around putting the student-athlete first and providing an experience that allows them to compete at their best year-round in athletics and academics (NCAA, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to discuss the main factors behind a Division III student-athletes college decision. Generally, the recruitment segment of the college athletics industry, is what mainly attracts student-athletes their certain college athletic programs and universities (Judson, 2004). Recruiting of student-athletes not just on the basis of athletic factors, but institutional and personal factors as well will provide a broader outlook at the number of factors influencing each individual student athlete. Many Division III institutions are small, private colleges and universities that are very dependent on tuition, therefore have specific admission requirements which make the decision for student-athletes different than in Division I athletics because of the particular focus on academics (NCAA, 2015). Division III athletics can play an important role in the marketing to and recruiting of prospective students in that they offer a prospective student an opportunity that many do not get the chance to do, play a college sport at a high level. With over 420,000 NCAA student-athletes around the country and over 1,000
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

NCAA member institutions, each program and individual athlete have their own criteria they are looking for to make a perfect match between recruit and institution (NCAA, 2015).

This study can be deemed important to many individuals including but are not limited to student-athletes, coaches, recruiting coordinators, parents, athletic administrators, as well as institutional administrators. This study is important to these groups of individuals because it provides scholarly information about past and present college decision models that has been proven to be popular across the board with student athletes in all NCAA divisions, specifically Division III. This study summarizes what specific factors attract student-athletes to Division III institutions by ranking certain factors by their importance to student athletes through the use of scholarly literature, data, and first-hand data on behalf of a variety of Division III student-athletes.

**Literature Review**

**What is Recruiting and Its Rules**

In college athletics, recruiting is the term used for the process where college coaches add prospective student athletes to their roster each off-season (NCAA 2014). Recruiting is a key activity across all divisions of the NCAA (Klenosky, 2001). Teams need to rebuild their roster every season depending on many factors including graduation of seniors, injuries, and the loss of any current player for any number of reasons. Recruiting prospective student-athletes is the lifeblood of every intercollegiate athletics program and is a differentiator between programs that thrive and those that do not succeed year in and year out (McCaw, 2014). In Division III athletics, there are no athletic scholarships given to student-athletes, meaning no full or partial scholarships as seen in Division I college athletics are allowed to be given to student-athletes. According to the NCAA, recruiting guidelines include off-campus contacts are not permitted...
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

until the conclusion of the student-athletes junior year of high school, each student-athlete is allowed one official on-campus visit per institution and the visit is allowed to be financed by the certain institution (UAA, 2013). Although, there is no restrictions on the amount of text messages, phone calls, or emails that can be sent out to the prospective student-athlete from the coaching staff, are periods of time within the recruitment season where the coaching staff are not allowed by NCAA law to contact recruits (UAA, 2013). All in all, Division III recruitment is very dependent on the relationship between the student-athlete and the coaching staff and most importantly the level of interest of the student-athlete in attending the institution.

The competition between similar institutions at the Division III level, is just as demanding to bring in the best athletes as well as the best students (Rooney, 1980). New NCAA rules are intended to protect the student-athletes from overeager coaches who might push the limits with intrusive telephone calls and visits to campus (Sander, 2008). Different sports warrant different levels of communication between the coaches and the student-athlete. Sports such as football, basketball, and lacrosse may tend to have more frequent phone call conversations and unofficial visits to campus than those of track and tennis, as examples. For example, basketball programs may warrant more communication between coaches and recruit based on the small number of players on a team, compared to the numbers of a football roster. Larger roster will warrant more calls due to their larger number of required roster sports each season (Sander, 2008). However, smaller rosters will warrant more engagement due to the smaller number of roster spots each season. Large rosters will tend to stay in contact more at the surface level rather than have a large amount of engagement throughout the recruitment season. Therefore, smaller rosters will require a more frequent and in-depth engagement with recruits to maintain a close contact. Contact hours a dependent on season and year of the student athlete. Coaches can not
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

directly contact student-athletes for an official visit until their senior year of high school (NCAA, 2015). Rules made and enforced by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, are to provide all divisions of competition a fair level of play for all competitions (NCAA, 2015). Need a transition here before you move on to your next section.

**Student-Athlete Decision Factors**

Choosing which college to attend is a highly complex decision based on many factors of varying importance and includes both broad criteria and whimsical emotions (Johnson, 2009). Although student-athletes may experience role conflicts in terms of facing difficulty balancing academic and athletic identities/role, the relationship between the coaches, school, and the student should fit for the best possible decision to be made (Harrison, 2014). There are many factors that go into making a college decision. There are three primary factors of higher education for student-athletes to focus on when choosing a school that are between state, private, and for-profit institutions (Gross, 2006). Also depending on the sport that is being played, gender, level of participation, and overall commitment of the athlete all come into play when choosing the right program for a certain individual. To go along with that student athletes that best fit the institutional profile and that will succeed in their campus environment; each university must carefully define its target market to succeed in student (athlete) recruitment (Johnson, 2009). Each individual student-athlete as their own personal wants that will affect what schools recruit them. These factors can be broken down into three different groups when an athlete is looking at different institutions: athletic factors, institutional factors, and personal factors.

Athletic factors can include relationship with coaching staff, teammates, opportunity to play, facilities, and athletic program as a whole (Goss, 2006). The role of the head coach and the
coaching staff on the student-athletes college decision relies heavily on the relationship built between the two. If a student-athlete feels comfortable and confident in the coaching staff, he/she will want to work harder and perform at their highest level for them (Gross, 2006). Along with the relationship, other factors revolving around the head coach include the coach’s style as well as his/her reputation (Magunsen, 2014). Any athlete can attest that playing time and opportunity to play is very important in any sport. Especially in deciding where to dedicate four playing years, Magunsen reiterates “opportunity to play, and several studies reported it as a top influencer among college basketball players” (Magnusen, 2014, p. 1273). Facilities are also an important factor for student-athletes in their decision making process. Facilities can be used as a positive in the recruiting process and can also be a negative for the student-athlete (Schneider, 2011). Depending if facilities are out dated and aren’t new and modern, the school may be seen by student-athletes as not as focused on athletics as other priorities on campus. Such as academics, the arts, or other extra-curricular activities (Magnusen, 2014). Different institutions have different values and points of concern. So may focus more on the athletic side of the institution (Gross, 2006).

Institutional factors can include individual’s academic major interest, school credibility, academic facilities, internship/networking opportunities and cost of tuition (Judson, 2004). This is seen as a major difference between Division I and Division III athletics in that, student-athletes at the Division III level take athletic reputation and programs a lot more seriously when deciding a school than at the Division I level (Goss, 2006).

Personal factors include, the individual’s financial aid package/situation, location friends/relationships, and overall comfort of the individual on school’s campus. Location of the college’s campus, meaning the location proximity between the school and a student-athlete’s
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

home-town (Magnusen, 2014). College students, not just student-athletes want to go to a school that they feel comfortable at and that they can see themselves living at, for a four year period. Personal relationships between friends that also will be attending a certain institutions is always an influential factor for many student-athletes (Pauline, 2010). These can affect a student-athletes decision in many ways. Each student-athlete has different value and priorities when they are entering college (Johnson, 2004).

Numerous studies discuss the college selection process being broken down in stages. The first stage for most student-athletes who are in high school and have the grades and skill to compete at the collegiate level, start receiving large amounts of information about a number of institutions from interested schools and programs (Sevier, 2000). The second stage being student-athletes start to narrow down their prospective college list and request more specific information about those institutions (Johnson, 2009). Lastly, the third stage consists of student-athletes applying to specific schools based on a number of factors including financial aid, fit on campus, and overall confidence in the school (Sevier, 2000). Another study suggested that more specific factors that a prospective student athlete considers before deciding are coach, campus, athletics, friends, and academics (Judson, 2004). All are very important factors in the decision making process. However, the rankings of importance will vary by the student-athlete. Although not under the complete control of the student-athlete, the importance of the official visit at a school is extremely critical in the decision making process (Magnusen, 2014).

As stated before, each student-athlete is allowed one official visit per institution (UAA, 2015). This is the first on campus experience that the student-athlete will have. Therefore it is important that the coaches and staff tailor the visit to the specific needs of the individual to make them feel as comfortable and welcomed as possible. Since college coaches are seeking to
create positive perceptions as well as gather commitments from recruits, it is crucial for student-athletes to take full advantage of the official visit. Taking full advantage could mean different things for different recruits. A high level recruit could stay for an overnight visit, watch a practice, and watch a game all in one visit. A lower-end recruit could take a campus tour and have lunch with the coaching staff. Taking full advantage of a recruitment visit, is strictly individualized to the specific student-athlete. However, under NCAA Division III rule a student-athlete may visit an institution at his or her own expense an unlimited number of times (UAA, 2015). Many students take multiple visit to their top college choices to insure that they are comfortable there and it is really a place they can see themselves competing at and learning at.

The official visit for a prospective student can be the deciding factor in the college decision making process. It is sometimes the first impression, but also it is sometimes the lasting impression for a student-athlete. Student-athletes may choose or be pressured to engage in many risky behaviors while on their official visits (Lawrence, 2008). Drinking, attending on-campus and off-campus parties, going to bars, and not focusing on making the right decision when visiting a school can impact a recruit in a negative way. This also, ties into the relationship that the student-athlete has with the team even before he/she commits to attending that certain school. These types of actions on official visits can cause problems for both the prospective student-athlete, but as well as the athletic program hosting the visit (Lawrence, 2008).

The number of college decision models ranges from the normal student to the student-athlete. As previously established, the number of factors, time and effort that goes into making the right college choice can be stressful on anyone. Looking at the differences between how male student-athletes rank in importance their college choice factors and how females do, will provide
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

a basic understanding if male and females generally look for the same things in a prospective college, or if they are totally different.

**Method**

The desired subjects of this study included all student-athletes from the St. John Fisher College community. The reason behind this is the access that is had through webmail and on-campus survey instruments. Looking at all of the student-athletes on St. John Fisher College campus allows for a number of comparisons, as well as allows for the greatest chance to in the end to gain enough responses to make valuable and accurate comparisons. The comparisons made from sport to all factor groups and gender to all factor groups will provide the best-rounded sense of the data. Examples being sport played compared to athletic factors, institutional factors, and personal factors. There a number of newer sports at St. John Fisher College including men’s/woman’s rowing, woman’s track and field, field hockey, and woman’s golf. These newer sports will have been taken into consideration when comparing them to similar sports, based on the little amount of recruiting that may have been to start up the program, as well as gain new student-athletes year in and year out. Therefore, the data collected was grouped together by sport and gender. Specific comparisons have been made with factor groups to see if there is a trend to the student-athletes decision factors in choosing St. John Fisher College.

**Participant Characteristics**

For this study, it is most convenient to look at student athletes at St. John Fisher College. St. John Fisher College is a private liberal arts college who participate at the Division III NCAA athletic level. There are 21 NCAA sponsored athletic teams, 10 for males and 11 for females (SJFC, 2015). Looking at both male and female student athletes from all 21 school sponsored sports will allow me to gain responses that can be compared gender to gender and sport to sport.
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

The fact that the college’s football team has almost 150 student-athletes on the roster, as well as taking into consideration the amount of student-athletes on each team, it can be assumed that each has their own specific decision factors. For example, there are 5 starters on the basketball teams and each team generally keeps between 13-16 student-athletes on the rosters per year. However, with the baseball team, there are 9 starters and the team usually keeps between 30 and 40 per year (SJFC, 2015). This is important to consider because having a larger number of players on a team means more opportunity to play. Or on the other hand for smaller rosters, more individual attention from coaches. Both are equally important however may cause different student-athletes to answer differently on why they chose Fisher based on the size of their team.

Sample

The main goal of this study is to examine what attracts Division III student-athletes to their certain institutions. Asking the student-athletes, certain questions will be able to be asked that can directly answer the specific research question. The pros and cons of this include being able to gain personal answers directly from the student-athlete about the college decision methods and past experiences. The cons are that unfortunately I do not know how many response I will get in the end. As well as the honesty of the participants because of the survey method that is being used. Also unfortunately the anticipated problems of recalling for individuals, especially for upperclassmen. Mainly with the seniors this problem of recall will be an issue, whether they do not accurately remember their recruitment process, or will not be as honest as they would have been four or so years ago. The decision to look at all 21 sponsored athletic teams on the St. John Fisher College campus gives this study between 750 and 800 possible participants. In order to gain a well-rounded outlook and set of data for this study, between a 10% and 15% response rate should allow for a thorough data analysis. Those percentages will give between 100 and 120
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

responses which then can be categorized and analyzed by the comparable sports, gender, and eventual ranking system.

**Sample Size**

The sample size of this method relies on the accessibility and overall response rate from the student-athletes at St. John Fisher College. From the 120 completed surveys that were completed fully, along with an estimated 800 student-athletes on the St. John Fisher campus (St. John Fisher College, 2015), this survey had a participation rate of about 15%. Respondents also consisted of 34 freshman, 28 sophomore, 28 juniors, and 27 seniors (See Appendix C). The intent of this survey is to use the entire student-athlete community rather than random sampling; because it will give the greatest chance of student athletes amongst certain sports and both genders to either show similarities or differences between to two. Being able to have access to all the student-athletes via email will be the main focuses in obtaining a high response rate.

**Measures and Variables**

The independent variables for this study include the gender/sport separation and variety. The dependent variables include differences in individuals’ decision making factors, different types of questions, and the differences in experiences between the different levels of playing and recruitment. The difference of individual decision making factors depends on the values of the individual that could include parental involvement, independence, and overall readiness to take the next big step in his/her life into college life. All 21 sports on campus have their own specific levels of commitment and recruitment. Some sports such as football, basketball, and lacrosse have a more competitive recruiting culture than that of individual sports such as golf, tennis, and track & field (Magunsen, 2014). This will be taken into consideration in comparing certain sports to each other. The ranking system, or scale will allow the student-athletes to show what
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

factors are most important to them. And will also allow for a more accurate analysis of the personal decision factors.

**Data Collection Instrument**

The overall data collection method strategy used was a cross-sectional survey asking a variety of different questions in order to gather the most accurate responses (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Electronic surveys were distributed to all student-athletes on campus for the survey portion of the study. The things that were taken into consideration when designing what type of research that was the best for this study was the access to the certain student-athletes, amount of time that the survey will be emailed out to the student-athletes and then in turn be able to be answered in a timely fashion. The survey consisted of questions ranging from ranking question, as well as open ended questions in order to receive responses that can specific to individuals and can be broken down to see what was most important to them in choosing St. John Fisher College. Also, asking if this school was their first choice, or in other words, what other schools were being looked at by these student-athletes and how does their athletic culture compare to the one at St. John Fisher College (See Appendix A).

The survey will ultimately reach over 3500 students on campus and in turn produce the data needed to make accurate data comparisons. However, there are just over 800 student-athletes on campus that the survey was directed too. The survey will have one main type of question, which will be rank order question. This will allow the participants to answer the questions and rank from low to high what factors are most important to them in their college decision (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The questions will allow for the respondent to rank their top factors in the main three categories from most important to least important. Validation options will include a force response where they will have to rank all options before moving onto the
next question. This will ensure all surveys are answered the same and will help in analyzing all answers the same way.

**Data Collection Plan**

The survey will be emailed to all students at St. John Fisher College, purely for the accessibility. The main way of access to these participants is that the college allows emails to be sent out to anyone on campus through the webmail service. Therefore the first question of the survey reads “Are you a current student-athlete at St. John Fisher College?” ensuring that results were not skewed (See Appendix A). The survey was ultimately sent out to every student at St. John Fisher College who was currently enrolled as of October 2015. However, the first questions in the survey specifically asked for only student-athletes to complete the survey. Therefore, any student-athlete who was either on a varsity or junior varsity roster was encouraged to complete the survey (See Appendix B). An expiration date will also be set in order to allow for time for analyzing the results. Along with that, each student-athlete will only be allowed to take the survey once to prevent a skew in the results. Following the survey will be a thank you page, and well as contact information in cases that the student-athlete has specific questions about the survey or study (Gratton, 2010).

The data collection procedure started with figuring out who were the best suitable participants for this study. After figuring out that Division III student-athletes at St. John Fisher College, developing what type data collection method was the most appropriate and would be most successful. A cross-sectional survey was the best fit for this study, specific questions need to be devolved in order to ensure that the most accurate results are gathered. Developing parameters for the survey is a very an important step. Making sure that the survey is sent and offered to both genders in all of the sports that have been discussed. As well as ensuring honest
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

results and confidentiality of answers of the student-athletes. One of the main focuses of this study, is to create questions that focus on providing a ranking system for the personal decision factors of every athlete surveyed. All of this, is for the main goal of developing an end conclusion of what are the most important factors in a Division III student-athletes’ college decision.

Data Analysis Plan

In order to understand the data that will be collected, a ranking system from 1 to 5, 1 representing least important and 5 representing most important to the certain individual (See Appendix A). Other analysis will come through a ranking system that will rank the individual decision making factors in the three main categories of personal, institutional, and athletic. The ranking systems will be useable throughout the three different subcategories of factors mentioned previously. Athletic, institutional, and personal factors will all have questions ranging from 1-5 and in the end, will have certain scores to see what factors are most important within these three categories. A nonparametric test is the best way to make sense of the data. A nonparametric test allows the means to be compared between categories in order to uncover significances across categories. The test will show if there is significance between genders or the sport being played compared to each athletic factor group. Using .05 as the significant level, once the test are ran across gender and sport, evaluations will be able to be made to see what specific factors across all three factor groups are deemed significant. This will help show if student-athletes answered differently by playing a different sport or by their gender. This type of data collection is the most appropriate for this type of study and, in the end will lead to the most reliable and accurate representation of Division III student-athlete college decision factors.
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

The data analysis plan began with retrieving all results from the Qualtrics survey and grouped together results. First by sport, and then followed by gender depending if the specific sport is played by both genders. Further analysis began after the survey was closed by gathering all data from the survey and removing any results that were unfinished. This would have skewed the results and would have created a gap in the final results. Next, sorting the data by sport played, as well as grouping the questions in sections; personal factors, athletic factors, institutional factors, over-night visit, and demographics. This will make it easier to understand and further analyze with tests using SPSS statistics. The main questions from the survey that will be used to develop a final conclusion on the most important factors include the ranking style (questions 4-6) and question 11 (See Appendix A). Also, the results from all three nonparametric tests across all factor groups (See Appendix E). These will provide the best insight on each student-athlete who took the survey to see what was most important to them in deciding to come to St. John Fisher College.

Results

Description of Sample

Having a sample of all sports, genders, and levels allowed for the greatest opportunity for responses and a wide range of results to be further analyzed. The final number of responses was 172, however all of them were not fully completed (See Appendix 4, Table 7). After going through and removing all unfinished surveys, the total number of completed responses was 120. With an estimated 800 student-athletes on the St. John Fisher campus (St. John Fisher College, 2015), this survey had a participation rate of about 15%. As mentioned before, the gender diversification was 53% male and 47% female (See Appendix C, Table 2). The 10 sports mentioned in the survey were all accounted for. The respondents played the following; 15
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

football, 6 basketball, 13 baseball, 9 softball, 11 lacrosse, 9 soccer, 3 volleyball, 15 track & field, 8 field hockey, 4 golf, and 27 other (See Appendix C, Table 1). The respondents were also in the following years of their NCAA eligibility; 34 first year, 29 second year, 26 third year, 24 fourth year, and 3 other (See Appendix C, Table 3).

This study was designed to uncover what are the most influential factors in a Division III student-athletes college decision. The noteworthy basic statistics that are shown from these tables include; a well-diversified number of sports that are represented. Also, represented was an almost fifty-fifty split between male and female who participated in the study. As well as, a generally well representation from all 4 years of NCAA athletic eligibility.

Descriptive Statistics

For the purpose of this study, it was important to see what the most important factors were for student-athletes in making their college decision. The three main questions of the survey asked the participant to rank order the six options provided to show the importance of them for personal, athletic, and institutional factors. For personal factors, the two categories that were ranked the most important were for personal financial aid (M=3.33, SD=1.807, N=25) and comfort (M=3.03, SD=1.601, N=34) (See Appendix D, Table 2). M represents the mean, SD represents the standard deviation, and N represents the number of times the category ranked first out of the six options for the ranking order questions in the survey (See Appendix A). The two factors that ranked the highest for athletic factors included coaching staff (M=3.05, SD=1.806, N=31) and opportunity to play (M=3.16, SD=1.770, N=29 (See Appendix D, Table 1). Lastly, the two that factors the highest for institutional factors include major (M=1.87, SD=1.223, N=63) and school credibility (M=2.74, SD=1.269, N=16) (See Appendix D, Table 3). Question 11 of the survey asked “Which of the following choices would you say was the leading factor, in your
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

decision to attend St. John Fisher College?” ranking the frequencies from highest to lowest academics (N=55), athletics (N=40), cost/scholarships (N=15), and other (N=7) (See Appendix C, Table 9).

Further Data Analysis

After the initial analysis of the frequency and descriptive data; further testing was administered to the data in order to find significance between both gender to all three factor groups, as well as sport being played to all three factor groups. The test that best fit this type of data was a nonparametric test, that showed whether there was significance between genders or the sport being played compared to each athletic factor group. See appendix E, .05 is the displayed level of significance. It was found that there was significance when comparing the three factor groups with gender. The factors that were found to have significance include opportunity to play (.025), program reputation (.021), comfort (.049), and location (.011) (See Appendix E, Table 1-3). There was a much larger amount of factors that were found to be significant across sport. These include opportunity to play (.064), program reputation (.002), teammates (.014), facilities (.009), cost (.028), networking opportunities (.005), financial aid (.042), and school size (.071) (See Appendix E, Tables 1-3). There were similar factors that were found to be significant across both gender and sport. These included opportunity to play and program reputation. What can be seen from this data, is that there is a large amount of significance between the sport being played and specific factors throughout all three factor groups. But more specifically, athletic factors. Five out of the six athletic factors were deemed significance across the sport being played. This can be seen as important because it shows that different sports are valuing different factors when selecting an institution to attend.
Question number 11 of the survey (See appendix A) helped to develop results that displayed what is the most important individual factor to student-athletes. The majority answered academics to be their leading factor in their college decision (n=55), followed by athletics (n=40), and lastly cost/scholarships (n=15) (See Appendix C, Table 9). This is encouraging to see both from the academia standpoint, but also the athletic standpoint, in that student-athletes are valuing their academics as well as their athletic futures.

**Discussion**

This studies intent from the beginning was to discover what the most influential factors in a Division III student-athletes college decision are.

This study has uncovered that there were many similarities between the results that came from 120 of St. John Fisher College’s student-athlete population. Of about 15% of the student-athlete population the majority answered similar that major was the most important academic factor (M=1.87) (See Appendix D, Table 5). As well as, academics being the most important factor.

There were a number of comparable studies that are similar to this study. However the majority of those studies are focused more on the Division I student-athlete college decision rather than Division III. Goss, 2006 focused on decision factors at small colleges, however many of those college were smaller Division I colleges. As well as, McCaw, 2014 focused again on Division I and II and only a few Division III institutions.

Although this study found institutional factors to be the most influential factor group and academics/major to be the most individual factor, all factor groups were spread evenly
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

throughout. All factors were accounted for and the means articulated all had importance in the respondent’s college decision.

Limitations

There were many changes that were made throughout the process of the study that could have caused some threats to the studies validity and reliability. As indicated, the survey was sent out to the entire student community at St. John Fisher College, therefore some subject error could have occurred where a participant was not a student-athlete (Gratton & Jones, 2014). Even though it is an unlikely occurrence, the event should still be considered. Confounding variables that could be skewing results could be the age of the participant. For a junior or senior taking this survey, it has been three or four years since they were recruiting. Therefore a possibility of inaccurate answers could be a possible subject error. Taking into consideration researcher error, having the option to answer “other” as sport in question three of the survey, could skew the final results. The selection of the sample was based on convenience and access. However, errors could have occurred if a student-athlete doesn’t check their email as often, unsubscribed from Qualtrics emails, was not on the original email list, or neglected to participate in the survey.

Directions for Future Research

Going off of the limitations section, having a larger sample and expanding the sample to other area Division III schools would be a direction for future research on this topic. That will ultimately require access to those participants, but will allow for a wider range of answers that could further be analyzed and compared from either sport to sport or school to school. This would help understand more of the Division III athletic landscape, rather than just one institution. A different method of data collection could be along with a survey, focus groups with
current Division III student-athletes. This would help gain a personal connection to not only get face-to-face answers, but also acknowledge facial expressions depending on the topic. Focus groups would also help ensure that all questions get answer in full. Lastly, looking closer at the results that have already been collected in order to find what sports caused significance between certain factors. Another direction for further research, is to take what this study has found with the significances between sport and gender and figure out what sports were causing the large amount of significant factors. This would help coaches and athletic departments what athletes who play a certain sport are looking for in an institution. As well as, looking at which gender was answering the four significant categories differently than the other.

Conclusions

Recruiting in Division III athletics is much different than any other college level. It is focused on athletics, but is focused just as much on the academics. This study has shown what student-athletes at St. John Fisher College consider the most important factor in deciding where to attend college to be academics. This study has found that student-athlete’s college decision are affected most by institutional factors, followed by athletic factors, and lately by personnel factors. Whereas the most important individual factor to student-athletes was found to be academics, followed by athletics, and Lastly followed by cost/scholarships. An individual’s college decision is one of the most important decision in a person’s life. Many different factors are taken into consideration in order to make the best decision for the specific individual. Personal, athletic, and institutional factors should be equally considered throughout the entire process. These findings can provide an insight to anyone involved with Division III college athletics, to help further see what student-athletes care about in a potential school. All in all,
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

student-athlete decision factors depend on the values of the individual, however connections can be made as seen by the similarities of all three major factors.
References


Rooney, J. F. (1980). The recruiting game. Toward a new system of intercollegiate sports *University of Nebraska Press, 901 North 17th Street, Lincoln, NE 68588*


Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

Appendices

Appendix A) **Survey questions**

College Decision Factors for Division III College Athletes

Q1 Are you a current student-athlete?
   - Yes (1)
   - No (2)
   **If No Is Selected, Then Skip to End of Survey**

Q2 If you choose to participate in this study, please answer all the questions as honestly as possible. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time.
   - Yes, I consent to participate (1)
   - No, I choose not to participate (2)
   **If No, I choose not to participate... Is Selected, Then Skip to End of Survey**

Q3 What sport do you play at St. John Fisher College?
   - Football (1)
   - Basketball (2)
   - Baseball (3)
   - Softball (4)
   - Lacrosse (5)
   - Soccer (6)
   - Volleyball (7)
   - Track & Field (8)
   - Field Hockey (9)
   - Golf (10)
   - Other (11)

Q4 What were the most important personal factors in selecting St. John Fisher College? The following question requires you to drag and drop the statements in ranking order.
   - financial aid package (1)
   - Scholarships (2)
   - Location (3)
   - Friends/Relationships (4)
   - Comfort (5)
   - Size of school (6)
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

Q5 What were the most important athletic factors in selecting St. John Fisher College? The following question requires you to drag and drop the statements in ranking order.

- Coaching Staff (1)
- Teammates (2)
- Opportunity to play (playing time) (3)
- Facilities (4)
- Program reputation (5)
- Post-team success (6)

Q6 What were the most important institutional factors in selecting St. John Fisher College? The following question requires you to drag and drop the statements in ranking order.

- Academic Major (1)
- School Credibility (2)
- Academic Facilities (3)
- Class Size (4)
- Cost of tuition (5)
- Networking/Internship Opportunities (6)

Q7 Did you have an overnight visit prior to enrolling at St. John Fisher College?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Looking back on your decision to atte...

Q8 Did you stay with a student-athlete?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q9 Did your overnight have an influence on your decision to attend St. John Fisher College?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q10 Looking back on your decision to attend St. John Fisher College at this point in time; would you say you made the right decision?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q11 Which of the following choices would you say was the leading factor, in your decision to attend St. John Fisher?
- Athletics (1)
- Academics (2)
- Cost/Scholarships (3)
- Other (4)
Q12 In just 2 sentences, why did you choose to attend St. John Fisher College? Please answer honestly and truthfully.

Q13 What is your gender?
- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- I prefer not to answer (3)

Q14 What is your class?
- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)
- Grad Student (5)

Q15 What is your year of NCAA athletic eligibility?
- 1st year (1)
- 2nd Year (2)
- 3rd Year (3)
- 4th Year (4)
- Other (5)

Appendix B.) Consent Letter

Dear Student-Athlete

My name is Matthew Taylor and I am a Senior Sport Management major here at St. John Fisher College. For my final thesis project, I am examining, what the main factors are in a Division III athlete’s college decision. Because you are a student-athlete on campus, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached 12 question survey.

The following survey will require about 10 minutes of your time to fully complete. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, please do not include your name. Copies of this survey and its results, will be shared with my Sport Management professor Dr. Dane-Staples.

If you choose to participate in this study, please answer all the questions as honestly as possible. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time. Thank you in advance for your time and participation. The data collected will provide useful information in order for me to complete my research. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at the number or email listed below.

Sincerely,
Matthew Taylor
(716) 512-0745/ mst04803@sjfc.edu
Emily Dane-Staples Ph.D.
edane-staples@sjfc.edu
Appendix C.) **Data Frequencies**

**Table 1**

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Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

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Appendix D) Descriptives

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31
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

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<tr>
<td>Athletic Factor: Post-team success</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Factor: Major</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Factor: School Credibility</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Factor: Academic facilities</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Factor: Class size</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Factor: Cost of tuition</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influential Factors; Division III-Student Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Factor:</th>
<th>120</th>
<th>4.39</th>
<th>1.509</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix E) Nonparametric Tests

Table 1

- **Null Hypothesis**: The distribution of Athletic Factor, Coaching staff is the same across categories of Gender.
  - Test: Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test
  - Sig.: .862
  - Decision: Retain the null hypothesis.

- **Null Hypothesis**: The distribution of Athletic Factor, Teammates is the same across categories of Gender.
  - Test: Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test
  - Sig.: .830
  - Decision: Retain the null hypothesis.

- **Null Hypothesis**: The distribution of Athletic Factor, Opportunity to play is the same across categories of Gender.
  - Test: Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test
  - Sig.: .025
  - Decision: Reject the null hypothesis.

- **Null Hypothesis**: The distribution of Athletic Factor, Facilities is the same across categories of Gender.
  - Test: Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test
  - Sig.: .396
  - Decision: Retain the null hypothesis.

- **Null Hypothesis**: The distribution of Athletic Factor, Program reputation is the same across categories of Gender.
  - Test: Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test
  - Sig.: .021
  - Decision: Reject the null hypothesis.

- **Null Hypothesis**: The distribution of Athletic Factor, Post-team success is the same across categories of Gender.
  - Test: Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test
  - Sig.: .204
  - Decision: Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis Test Summary</th>
<th>Null Hypothesis</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The distribution of Personal factor Financial aid is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.322</td>
<td>Retain the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The distribution of Personal factor Scholarships is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.441</td>
<td>Retain the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The distribution of Personal factor Location is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>Reject the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The distribution of Personal factor Relationships is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>Retain the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The distribution of Personal factor Comfort is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>Reject the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The distribution of Personal factor School size is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.210</td>
<td>Retain the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis Test Summary</th>
<th>Null Hypothesis</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The distribution of Athletic factor Coaching staff is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.862</td>
<td>Retain the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The distribution of Athletic factor Teammates is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.630</td>
<td>Retain the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The distribution of Athletic factor Opportunity to play is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>Reject the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The distribution of Athletic factor Facilities is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>Retain the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The distribution of Athletic factor Program reputation is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>Reject the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The distribution of Athletic factor Post-team success is the same across categories of Gender.</td>
<td>Independent-Samples Kruskal, Wallis Test</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>Retain the null hypothesis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.