2017

International student-athlete adjustment experience at community colleges in the Midwest

Jennifer Sabourin

Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd

Part of the Community College Leadership Commons, and the Secondary Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation

Sabourin, Jennifer, "International student-athlete adjustment experience at community colleges in the Midwest" (2017). Graduate Theses and Dissertations. 15614.
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/15614

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
International student-athlete adjustment experience at community colleges in the Midwest

by

Jennifer J. Sabourin

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
Lorenzo Baber, Major Professor
Mary Darrow
Larry Ebbers
Janice Friedel
W. Wade Miller

The student author and the program of study committee are solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

2017

Copyright © Jennifer J. Sabourin, 2017. All rights reserved.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother,
Tana Jean
Who has inspired, supported, and loved me every step of the way

My brothers,
Jeremiah and Joshua
Who made growing up together an experience I wouldn’t trade for the world

My loved ones who have passed,
My dad, Richard, and my grandparents
Who believed in me and graciously shared their wisdom and life experiences with me.

My classmates and friends,
Jerome, Lyn, Kip, Bianca, Chrystal, Barb, Tracy, Tom, John, Tom, Mark, Ryan, Wanda,
Freddy, Matt, and Amanda
Who continually supported, pushed, and challenged me to move forward.

To the good Lord,
Thank you for my strength.

I owe this accomplishment to all of you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. vi

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1
  Background ............................................................................................................................... 1
  Statement of the Problem ......................................................................................................... 5
  Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................... 6
  Research Questions ................................................................................................................. 6
  Significance ............................................................................................................................. 7
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................................ 8
  Dissertation Overview ............................................................................................................ 12
  Definitions of Terms .............................................................................................................. 13

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................................. 15
  Background ............................................................................................................................. 15
  International Student Adjustment ............................................................................................ 17
  Community Colleges ............................................................................................................. 22
  International Students at Community Colleges ...................................................................... 24
  Athletics .................................................................................................................................. 29
  Athletics and Community Colleges .......................................................................................... 31
  Athlete Adjustment .................................................................................................................. 33
  International Student-Athletes ................................................................................................. 36
  International Student-Athletes at Community Colleges .......................................................... 39
  Ridinger and Pastore Adjustment Model .................................................................................. 40

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY ...................................................................................................... 43
  Qualitative Approach .............................................................................................................. 43
  Philosophical Framework ....................................................................................................... 45
  Case Study Research ................................................................................................................ 46
    Definition and Description ................................................................................................... 46
    Relevance of Case Studies ................................................................................................... 47
    Characteristics of Case Studies ........................................................................................... 48
    Components of Case Study Design ..................................................................................... 48
    Theory of Case Study Research ......................................................................................... 51
  Research Sites ....................................................................................................................... 52
    Categorization of Community Colleges .............................................................................. 54
  Participants ............................................................................................................................. 55
    Purposeful Sampling ............................................................................................................. 55
    Suburban Community Colleges ............................................................................................ 56
    City Community Colleges ..................................................................................................... 57
    Town Community Colleges .................................................................................................. 57
  Participant Details ................................................................................................................... 58
### CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background of Participants</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Factors Influencing College-Bound International Student-Athletes</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Transition to Finding Their Place on Campus</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>59</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Review</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness and Trustworthiness</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Positionality</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS</th>
<th>69</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background of Participants</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>87</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Factors Influencing College-Bound International Student-Athletes</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Transition to Finding Their Place on Campus</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>107</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Research Question 1: Why do international student-athletes choose community colleges to continue their education and athletic careers?... | 110 |
| Research Question 2: How do community college international student-athletes transition socially and academically to a community college? | 112 |
| Research Question 3: What are the unique experiences of international student-athletes attending community colleges? | 116 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations for Practice</th>
<th>117</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for International Student-Athletes</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Coaches</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for College Administration</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations for Future Research</th>
<th>126</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL .......................... 135
APPENDIX B. LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS ....................... 136
APPENDIX C. DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE ........................................ 137
APPENDIX D. INFORMED CONSENT .................................................. 138
APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ............................................... 142
REFERENCES .................................................................................. 151
ABSTRACT

Each academic year, the number of international students attending colleges and universities in the United States increases. Of the nearly 1 million international students coming to the United States for education, just under 10% enroll at community colleges; international student-athletes are among that total. In addition to the cultural and academic adjustments that all international students face, international student-athletes have the added pressures of athletics to adjust to when attending their community college. In the past, limited research focusing on the international student-athlete adjustment experience at 4-year universities has been conducted.

In this study, I emulated previous research, focusing more on the adjustment experiences of international student-athletes attending community colleges in the Midwest. In the semistructured interviews conducted for this qualitative case study, I focused on the adjustments of international student-athletes in the areas of academic, social, and athletic experiences. A total of 12 international student-athletes, attending six different institutions located in the Midwest, volunteered to participate and met the defined criteria. Through the analysis of coded data collected during the semi-structured interviews, the findings indicated two major themes that reflected the adjustment experience of international student-athletes at community colleges, with multiple patterns supporting each theme. The emergent themes in this study were (a) factors influencing college-bound international student-athletes and (b) the transition to finding a place on campus. Reinforcing patterns that supported the themes that emerged included the participants’ focus on education, athletic skills, and scholarship as influencing factors, whereas language barriers, homesickness, and
the impact of teammates surfaced for a sense of belonging. Recommendations for future international student-athletes, coaching staff, and college administrators are included.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

The international student population attending colleges in the United States has increased in recent years. The Institute of International Education ([IIE], 2016a) reported that 1,043,839 international students attended academic institutions throughout the United States in 2015–2016; community colleges enrolled 95,376 of the gross total (Institute of International Education, 2016b). The Houston Community College System led associate’s degree-granting institutions with an enrollment of 5,649 international students. Included in these numbers of international students attending U.S. institutions are international student-athletes who compete in intercollegiate athletics while receiving a college education. International student-athletes travel to the United States for a multitude of reasons including expanded career opportunities, participation in sports, and educational pursuits. These athletes attend institutions representing all levels of athletic competition, including community colleges. IIE ranked the top 40 institutions with the highest international student enrollment. Of the states where the top 40 schools are located, only one—Arizona—does not border ocean or gulf waters, reflecting the potential lack of desire of international students to attend community colleges in the Midwest (IIE, 2016a).

For international student-athletes to be successful at their institution of choice, how they experience their adjustment to the college culture and their involvement on campus are key (Newell, 2015). Academics, social interactions, athletics, and language barriers all pose challenges for international student-athletes in their adjustment to college campuses. These barriers may cause international student-athletes to struggle in the classroom or on the field. Adjustment challenges may ultimately cause international students to leave the institution.
without finishing academic coursework or an athletic season. There are currently 2,085 community colleges throughout the United States (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2016). Because the number of international students attending community colleges continues to increase, it is important to examine these students’ adjustment experiences so that assistance can be provided, to both athletes and nonathletes, to enhance their success in college.

As part of the community college experience, students can become engaged in a variety of activities, both academic and recreational. Athletics provides opportunities for student-athletes to compete at the junior college or community college level and receive an education and can also open possibilities for these individuals to continue to participate in sports at a higher level. Three junior college athletic associations encompass community colleges across the United States. The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) has 526 college members and offers 28 different sports (NJCAA, 2017). The California Community College Athletic Association (2016) comprises 2-year colleges within the state of California with approximately 27,000 student-athletes competing at the community college level. The states of Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and the province of British Columbia combined to create the Northwest Athletic Conference (NWAC), which governs 36 community college athletic programs (Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges, 2016).

Prior to the formation of the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges in 1983, several program sports competed in the NJCAA. Today, NWAC has four member schools with wrestling programs that are still members of the NJCAA for that individual sport. Moreover, NWAC does not govern swimming as a sport, so one northwestern institution competes through the NJCAA. The institutions with wrestling and swimming are
granted dual membership in NWAC and NJCAA. Tracy Swisher, Sports Information Director for the NWAC, reported that, based on their eligibility database, 4,463 domestic student-athletes and 68 international student-athletes competed as part of NWAC in 2015–2016 (personal communication, July 18, 2016).

Each governing athletic association establishes regulations for member colleges to follow for athletes to participate. Regulations such as age, academics, and nationality determine which athletes are eligible to step onto the field of play. Academically, all student-athletes on the team roster must be enrolled full time during the term of participation. NJCAA teams are allowed to have one quarter of their team roster consist of international student-athletes, which are defined as students who are residents of countries outside of the United States and its territories (NJCAA, 2011). A total of 57,472 student-athletes participated in athletics at the community college level during the 2015–2016 academic year, of which approximately 700 were international student-athletes, according to Michael Teague of the Media Relations department at the NJCAA national office (personal communication, July 8, 2016).

The experiences of international student-athletes at NCAA Division I institutions have been examined. Ridinger (1998) examined student-athletes and further studied international student-athletes in the areas of migration, adjustment, and experiences. As a result of his research, Ridinger developed a framework called the student-athlete acculturation model, which focuses on the international student-athlete antecedents, adjustments, and outcomes of their experiences. Popp, Pierce, and Hums (2011) utilized Ridinger’s framework, along with a push–pull model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), to compare domestic student-athletes with international student-athletes in their college selection process
of American universities at the NCAA Division I level. Despite this research, and that of several other researchers who examined college selection among student-athletes, little information can be found on international student-athletes attending community colleges.

The adjustment experiences that international student-athletes face at community colleges can lead to multiple outcomes in a wide range of areas for both the student and the institution. It is important to give a voice to international students at all college levels so they can express their experiences and adjustment processes. For example, the first-semester experience shared by Devneesh, an international student from Bombay, negatively affected his mental health and nearly forced him to return to his home country (Garrod & Davis, 1999). It is vital for community colleges to be included in the understanding of the international student adjustment experience. By including students from these institutions in studies about student-athletes, we can provide future students an improved adjustment experience and globalize culture across community college campuses.

Focusing on the adjustment process for international student-athletes can reveal both positive and negative experiences from which practitioner-scholars can learn, thereby easing future adjustment experiences of students and allowing institutions to provide optimal adjustment opportunities. Identifying ways in which current international student-athletes adjust can reveal successes and failures, which may lead to the persistence and retention of future international student-athletes. The perseverance of such students will benefit individuals through degree completion and personal success, will benefit institutions through increased cultural diversity and improved completion rates, and will improve society as a whole by gaining individuals who have overcome adversity. Research conducted by Trendafilova, Hardin, and Kim (2010) supported the importance of knowing the experiences
and satisfaction of this student demographic, showing that it can have a positive impact on future recruiting and can lead to an increase in retention and graduation rates.

**Statement of the Problem**

The number of international students attending community colleges is growing year after year. The diversity and globalization that international students bring to American college campuses makes it important to understand the cultural differences that these students experience as they adjust to various aspects of college (Bale, 1991; Ridinger & Pastore, 2001; Stidwell, 1984). As Bale (1991) indicated, international student-athletes often choose an institution to pursue the development of communication skills and expand their opportunities for education. International student-athletes are no different from domestic student-athletes in that aspect; Bevis and Lucas (2007) referenced Singh’s research, who stated that most international students attend U.S. institutions to excel academically (p. 171). A positive adjustment experience for all classifications of students can increase the likelihood of their retention and ultimately lead to graduation (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994).

A gap exists in literature about international student-athletes in general and international student-athletes at community colleges in particular. There is a lack of research regarding international student-athletes and even fewer studies with a focus on international student-athletes at community colleges. This study was aimed to provide beneficial information on how to assist community colleges in determining what international student-athletes feel is important to have a positive adjustment experience. Conversely, international student-athletes bring culture and a greater world perspective to community colleges, especially rural area colleges, where diverse cultures may be imperceptible.
Purpose of the Study

The international student-athletes roster quota limit was lifted by the NJCAA at the beginning of the 2015–2016 academic year, and now coaches are allowed to recruit an unlimited number of international student-athletes to meet their athletic roster limit. It is important for community college coaches, student life administrators, faculty, and staff to better understand the international student-athletes as they transition to a 2-year college while preparing to transfer to a 4-year institution following their community college experience. The purpose of this case study was to gain knowledge of why international student-athletes choose to attend community colleges, how they transition to a 2-year college campus, and how they experience life on campus. It was determined that a qualitative research method design would allow the utmost opportunity to uncover the personal perceptions of the international student-athlete experience.

Research Questions

The following research questions were the central focus in this dissertation case study:

1. Why do international student-athletes choose community colleges to continue their education and athletic careers?
2. How do community college international student-athletes transition socially and academically to a community college?
3. What are the unique experiences of international student-athletes attending community colleges?
Significance

As the number of international student-athletes participating in community college athletics increases due to the lifting of restrictions on athletic rosters, it is important to understand the current and past experiences of international student-athletes so that institutions as a whole can provide the best adjustment experience possible. With the removal of the athletic roster restrictions, international student-athletes will continue to fill community college athletic rosters, as was apparent in the 2015 NJCAA Volleyball season. When looking at the teams that competed in the NJCAA Division I Volleyball Tournament, 14 of the 16 teams had at least one international student-athlete on their roster (one team did not have a roster available; NJCAA, 2015). Nearly one quarter of the athletes who participated in the tournament were listed as international students on their respective rosters. Eight teams exceeded the previous limit of three international student-athletes. One team’s roster included eight international student-athletes out of a total of 14 athletes. Of the 55 international student-athletes who participated in the 2015 NJCAA National Tournament, 21 listed Brazil as their home country; Serbia and Germany were the next most prevalent home countries, represented by six and five international student-athletes, respectively. Of the 24 student-athletes who achieved first team or second team All-American status at the NJCAA Division I level, 13 (one unknown) were international student-athletes (NJCAA, 2015). This information supports the fact that, for teams to compete at the national level and have the opportunity to win a national championship, international student-athletes will make up a good part community college athletic rosters.

International student-athletes are attracted to community colleges because they can participate in athletics and learn or improve English skills at a lower cost of attendance than
at traditional 4-year universities. The smaller class sizes and often smaller communities where the colleges are located can be less daunting for international students. Athletically, community colleges can offer increased playing time and immediate competition experience for both international and domestic student-athletes.

For international student-athletes to be successful both on and off the playing field, institutions need to be aware of the needs of their international student-athletes, possibly more so than is necessary for the average domestic student attending the institution. Until now, researchers have focused on international student-athletes at 4-year universities. Additional research has examined international students at 2- and 4-year institutions. The lack of research focusing on the adjustment experience of international student-athletes competing at 2-year colleges makes this study vital to the research community and to community colleges.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this qualitative research I sought to understand how the participants experience adjustment to academic, athletic, personal, and social issues in the community college environment. Data were collected through personal interviews with international student-athletes who had participated in at least one NJCAA-sanctioned athletic season. Collected data were analyzed through an ethnographic lens to determine the findings of this international student-athlete research study.

Expanding previous college adjustment research for both domestic and international students, Ridinger (1998) developed a model theorizing student-athlete acculturation. The model focuses on factors that influence college student experiences. Subcategories beneath antecedents and adjustment emerged as relevant factors affecting satisfaction and
performance outcomes. Ridinger and Pastore (2000) expanded Ridinger’s original model by modifying the focus toward international student-athletes. The subcategories in the Ridinger and Pastore (2000) adjustment model under antecedents are personal, interpersonal, perceptual, and cultural distance, and the adjustment subcategories are academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal–emotional adjustment, institutional adjustment, and athletic adjustment. The Ridinger and Pastore (2000) adjustment model served as the foundation for this research in providing an understanding of what elements are involved in shaping the adjustment experience for international student-athletes at community colleges.


This study replicated the research conducted by Popp et al. (2010); however, I focused on the adjustment experiences of international student-athletes attending community colleges in the Midwest. It is important for an international student-athlete to understand how to overcome challenges that he or she will face when attending college as a student-athlete outside of the borders of his or her home country. Using the Ridinger (1998) and Ridinger and Pastore (2000) adjustment models, along with the modified adjustments from Popp et al. (2010), I investigated the adjustment themes of academic, social, institutional, personal–emotional, and athletics adjustment. I examined the antecedents with which international student-athletes arrived and continued with how their upbringing influenced
their adjustment experiences, ultimately discovering how both affected the outcomes of satisfaction and performance (see Figure 1).

The central research questions for this study addressed each category of the adjustment model. Many factors influence how international student-athletes select the type or size, geographic location, and athletic program of the institution they attend. These factors stem from an international student-athlete’s home country, family home, culture, and upbringing. The first research question—why do international student-athletes choose community colleges to continue their education and athletic careers?—reflected the need to understand why international student-athletes want to continue their academic and athletic careers at community colleges in the Midwest region of the United States. I asked questions related to personal background to build a foundation based on the reasons the participants had for selecting the direction that they had chosen. The second central research question—how do community college international student-athletes transition socially and academically to a community college?—reflected a focus on items in the adjustment category of the model, specifically the social and academic aspects of transition. These adjustment-based questions elicited from participants what needs and feelings emerged upon their arrival and in the following weeks and months on campus. Some examples of questions asked during the interview included who on campus played a significant role in the adjustment process and courses with which the participant had difficulties. The final research question—what are the unique experiences of international student-athletes attending community colleges?—was derived from the third category of the adjustment model, which centers on outcomes apparent through satisfaction and performance. Through these outcome-focused questions, I probed
Figure 1. Modified model of adjustment for international student-athletes (adapted from Popp et al., 2010).
for unique experiences had by the participants and searched for outcomes related to selecting community colleges in the Midwest.

In this study, I also looked for additional emerging themes from international student-athletes at community colleges compared to those attending 4-year universities. A positive adjustment experience leads to successful college experience (Popp et al., 2010). These adjustment experiences influence international student-athletes to remain on campus throughout their first year, return for a second year, and ultimately complete their associate’s degree.

**Dissertation Overview**

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and overview of the research. Chapter 2 includes an examination of the literature focusing on the experiences of international students at U.S. colleges, international student-athletes at 2- and 4-year institutions, and the adjustment experiences of international student-athletes. The international student literature examined comprises the history, customs, and adjustment issues of international students studying in the United States. The literature on international student-athletes illustrates their experiences at 4-year universities and encounters that affect their academic, social, and athletic adjustment experiences. The limited literature on international student-athletes at community colleges further demonstrates the need for additional research in this important area that has yet to be addressed in higher education research.

The methodology of this dissertation is described in Chapter 3. The framework used to structure the study, the methodology and methods used to conduct the study, the goodness and trustworthiness of the research, and the positionality of the researcher are presented in
Chapter 3. Chapter 4 contains the research findings, including thick, rich descriptions in the participants’ own words. The final chapter of the dissertation includes a description of the experiences of the international student-athlete themes that emerged throughout the data analysis process as well as a description of the themes that emerged during the analysis of the international student-athlete adjustment experiences. This chapter also provides a discussion of the findings, recommendations for future research, and reflections based upon the concluded study.

**Definitions of Terms**

*Adjustment*: A necessary change related to academics, social, personal, and linguistics to improve or excel in a new environment or new situation.

*Adjustment experience to college*: Adapting to personal, social, extracurricular, and academic experiences at college.

*Domestic student-athlete*: a student-athlete who is a resident of the United States.

*International student-athlete*: a student-athlete who is not a U.S. citizen or a permanent U.S. resident (NJCAA, 2011).

*International student*: a student who is attending college in the United States on student visa approved through the Student Exchange and Visitor Program and is not a U.S. citizen or a permanent U.S. resident.

*Non-student-athlete*: a student who is enrolled in approved college courses and is not a member of a college athletic team.

*Personal culture*: “the integration of an individual’s traits, skills and personality formed within the context of his or her ethnic, racial, familial and educational environments” (Gardenswartz, Rowe, Digh, & Bennett, 2003, p. 65).
Research participant: a current or former student participating in this study who had participated in a minimum of one sport season as recognized by the NJCAA with the completion of eligibility requirements through the NJCAA.

Student-athlete: a student participating in a nationally organized sanctioned sport, who is enrolled full-time at his or her given institution and is making satisfactory progress within an approved college program or course listed in the college catalog.

Team culture: psychosocial leadership within the team, team motives, team identity, team sport, and collective efficacy (Marterns, 1987).
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, a review of the literature related to the international student-athlete adjustment experience is provided. The background of international student adjustment and international students at community colleges are examined in the literature. Furthermore, additional literature reviewed focuses on the role of athletics at 2- and 4-year institutions as well as athlete adjustment, looking specifically at the areas of academics, social, and athletics. The final section of the review centers on the international student-athlete adjustment experience at both the university and community college levels.

Background

Research focusing on international student migration originated in the 1960s. Oberg (1960) concentrated his research on the mental health effects on migrating students and cultural learning. Focusing on cultural differences, value differences, and the necessary social support systems, Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2005) examined the negative aspects of being exposed to new cultures. The lack of preparation and orientation when immersing oneself in a new culture can have negative psychological effects. Research theories were framed through clinical and social psychology origins.

In the 1980s, international student research shifted focus from looking at mental health to examining learning experiences. The “culture shock” of a new environment can be positively or negatively affected by the foundational experiences one has prior to arriving in a new culture (Anderson, 1994; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). International students with backgrounds in home cultures similar to the culture where the institution is located are more likely to have fewer issues with adjustment when arriving at their institution. In contrast, international students from a less similar
culture experience greater difficulties; religion, language, and climate are often the most important facets of cultural differences that separate international students from their new culture and cause greater struggles (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Anderson (1994) stated that “it is the individual who chooses how to respond, and in doing so creates his or her own adjustment” (p. 293). It is ultimately up to the student how he or she approaches the adjustment experience. Cross-cultural experiences provide opportunities for personal growth and development. It has been found that, although the familiarities of home may be distant at first, over time these distances narrow and become opportunities for students to better prepare for future transcultural experiences (Adler, 1987). Personal strength can prevail when one is challenged with cultural obstacles; persistence and perseverance reflect a more positive experience compared to the negative mental health effects of the international student adjustment experience reflected in many research studies.

On the reverse side, it is under debate whether colleges and universities are using international students as “cash cows” to boost enrollment and gain revenue. Cantwell (2015), Kwon (2009), Fitzer (2007), and Evelyn (2005) all found that many institutions gain revenue by increasing their international student population. Leong (2015) validated Cantwell’s theory and added that the presence of international students aid in local and national economies as well. International students have a global impact on college campuses, and in addition to economic reasons, the benefits of global relations are widespread. Studying abroad enhances individuals’ global relations, and Kwon suggested that the importance of “studying abroad has become highly recommended for any student who hopes to study and work with various kinds of people all over the world” (para. 66). Global experiences can provide gains for both the student and his or her home country if the
student returns home to work; Johnston Baker, and Creedy (1997) described this global experience as “profitability” for the home country (p. 45).

**International Student Adjustment**

International students might hale from as close as just across the U.S. borders or might travel across great geographical distances to step onto U.S. college campuses. No matter how far they have traveled, all are exposed to a new environment and often have concerns about each adjustment aspect they face. Concerns related to academics, social and financial support, and personal issues are prevalent among the challenges faced by international students (Arthur, 2004).

Among many international students, the underlying concern behind the many issues they face is language. Fletcher and Stren (1989) and Abadzi (1984), along with Senyshyn, Warford, and Zhan (2000) and Leong (2015), found parallels between language proficiency and adjustment experiences for college students. In the classroom, instructors have agreed that one of the most difficult factors in international students’ academic adjustment is language challenges. These language barriers can also affect the relationship between students and instructors. International students often have reservations about their expectations of their relationship with instructors, in addition to their concerns about coursework and communicating with their peers in the classroom (Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009). Unlike their domestic counterparts, international students experience added stress with their need to adjust to unfamiliar teaching styles and expectations in the classroom as well as learning new means of communication. Without guidance and support, international students may fall behind or even withdraw from the institution (Ryan & Ogilvie, 2001). Like an athletic coach, faculty can serve as mentors to international students. They can provide a
support system to assist international students through the adjustment process. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) observed that, in addition to the impact faculty have on them, international students who connect with domestic students in a social atmosphere often improve language proficiency at a higher rate.

The physical, emotional, and psychological health of international students can become a major factor in their experience of adjusting to college. Stress, coping, and adjustment build on each other as international students face a new culture and weigh the necessary components of adjustment. Stress factors, such as academic and financial concerns, communication issues, discrimination, and support systems, all influence the health of international students (Arthur, 2004; Kwon, 2009; McLachlan & Justice, 2009). Kwon’s (2009) research revealed that financial concerns were by far the most commonly conveyed fear shared by international students; the second most common fear was being academically unsuccessful. Due to visa regulations, most international students are allowed to work only on campus, which can be challenging depending on how the institution’s wage funds are allocated. International students are not eligible to receive federal financial aid awarded from the U.S. government. Thus, with the stress of their financial burden, many students are forced to seek funding from on-campus work and/or through scholarships.

Sources for scholarship funding can stem from an array of areas. Johnston et al. (1997) explained that countries of origin may offer sponsorships to fund international students, expecting that the student will return home to work within their country or a specific field of study. Some international students who are sponsored by their government or private company are required to return to their country to work and repay that investment. Other international student may receive scholarships from their institution; these can range
from academic achievement scholarships to international student scholarships for which they qualify (McMahon, 1992). Finally, international students may receive financial assistance in the form of athletic scholarships. Athletic scholarships can be offered and accepted in a range of amounts from partial to full scholarships. The coaching staff or athletic department has the discretion to determine the amount that is offered to each player, international or domestic.

International students seek new experiences and opportunities, thus many can be curious, naïve, vulnerable, or eager. Eagerness to be accepted can result in experiencing difficulties with communication, academics, and social relationships, which can cause personal issues that lead to psychological stresses and becoming withdrawn from the campus environment (Bonazzo & Wong, 2007; Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). Within the first few weeks of arrival, international students must be informed about counseling services available on campus. International students need a support system to transition to a new culture, and counselors can play a positive role in the stability of international college students’ mental health. However, some students may not be able to take advantage of counseling, as some cultures look at mental health problems as taboo or counselors may not be available (Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Moreover, students will often seek advice from family and friends, not counselors, to whom they disclose personal feelings and issues that are taking place during their cultural transition (Ang & Laimputtong, 2008; Baloglu, 2000; Zhai, 2002).

Researchers have repeatedly found that addressing mental health issues on college campuses by providing counseling services confirms that college’s commitment to aiding in student success. Providing information on services available to international students when
they arrive on campus is the first step. Counseling offices need to take it a step further and provide a welcoming and comfortable environment to serve these students. Yeh and Inose (2003) shared that various counseling delivery methods, such as presentations about awareness and services, group sessions, and informal settings, allow international students to feel more welcome and more open to sharing their concerns with their adjustment experiences.

Academically, the pressure of excelling in the classroom is similar to being an international student-athlete. McLachlan and Justice (2009) found that failing academically in the United States is often not accepted in a student’s home country. International students may not be used to the college rigor of the cramped timeline of syllabi and the time demands of completing course projects. The physical and psychological anxieties caused by such demands can take its toll on an international student who may also be experiencing homesickness and challenges with the food and weather compared to the comforts of their home country. International students in McLahlan and Justice’s study conveyed that they received medical treatment for having developed negative reactions to emotional stressors such as depression and anxiety caused by pressures to perform in the classroom. Similar to international student-athletes, many international nonathlete students receive scholarships from their institutions. Most scholarships require a minimum grade point average (GPA) to retain the scholarship. The overwhelming expectations of the academic course load and the pressures to perform cause international students to become isolated as they try to achieve success in the classroom, thus distancing them from adjusting socially with other students in a timely manner.
Personalities and maturity of students across the board, domestic and international students alike, play a major role in their experience of adjusting to college. Emotional and physical components of adjustment to college can be affected in a positive or negative manor depending on the personality of the student (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Even students with the most outgoing personality may have their doubts when it comes to fitting in socially. Students who achieved the highest possible marks academically in high school still have pressures to perform; their openness to seek tutors and locations necessary to study and focus on their academics can put them a step ahead of those students who are timid and unsure. International students are not so different from domestic students in this case. International students who have extroverted personalities are more likely to pursue relationships with other students, faculty, and staff in a more immediate timeframe once stepping onto campus, maybe even sooner through use of phone or the Internet. However, international students who are introverts may find it more difficult to adjust during the first 6–12 months. Therefore, it is important to make international students cognizant of available resources, such as those pertaining to academics and health, from day one or possibly even prior to arrival on campus (McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

In their qualitative study, Moores and Popadiuk (2011) found that even adjusting to everyday needs can be challenging. International students are most often without transportation when they arrive, and essentials such as a going to the grocery store and the bank are necessary within the first few days of arrival. Even though student needs may vary based on previous experiences and the home country of the international student, initial support in locating these necessities is vital for an international student’s adjustment.
Community Colleges

Community colleges, sometimes referred to as junior colleges, are regional academic institutions that provide educational opportunities for members of their communities. These colleges typically offer career and vocational education, adult education, diploma or certificate programs that can be completed within two years, and college parallel programs for students who intend to continue their education at 4-year institutions. In the fall of 2014, enrollment at 1,108 community colleges across the United States totaled 12.3 million people (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). Community colleges provide accessibility to and opportunities for higher education to populations who would more than likely not seek a 4-year education due to financial or demanding life circumstances. Cohen and Brawer (2003) illustrated that, although some students choose community colleges over 4-year institutions for the aforementioned reasons, some students choose community colleges because choosing “nothing” is not an option.

Frusch (1996) stated that at community colleges, with their “open door” admissions criteria and flexibility of course and time offerings, people can attain a degree while working at off-campus jobs and supporting a family. The majority of students on campuses are White in race/ethnicity and female in gender, both comprising 59% of the community college population. Over half of those enrolled at community colleges are nontraditional-age students (Provasnik & Planty, 2008, p. 40). Women attending community colleges face multiple challenges and display perseverance and determination while working to attain their degree, as they balance personal and academic demands in the pursuit of degree attainment (Goldsmith & Archambault, 1997).
Many community colleges are open-enrollment institutions; these criteria enhance the campus population with nontraditional students who have life experiences. Nontraditional students bring their life experiences into the classroom, altering the culture of the class. The outside priorities and responsibilities of students within a classroom can range from single parents with a full-time job and three children at home to teenagers who have just left their parent’s home and have never needed to have a job. The dynamics of community college classrooms offer an atmosphere for all members of the class to gain personal experiences through interaction beyond what is learned from a textbook (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009). This classroom dynamic is known as multiculturalism, and “multicultural excellence is based on demographic acceptance of both the commonalities and differences of all groups on campus” (Bensimon & Tierney, 1993, p. 68).

Tinto, Russo, and Kadel (1994) believed that academic and social integration in the classroom go hand in hand. The level of engagement by students can impact their experiences, leading to retention and successful completion. Community college personnel are challenged with building a connection with nontraditional students, commuter students, and traditional Millennials. Maxwell (2000) added that commuter students are less likely to engage themselves through attendance at campus-sponsored events or involvement in campus organizations. Becoming involved in extracurricular activities on campus has been shown to increase retention among students (Astin, 1991). College personnel are continually searching for ways to engage students from all demographics groups with each other to create a positive campus culture as well as to increase academic success.

Students who attend community colleges are often looking for an affordable means of receiving an education (Poyrazali & Grahame, 2007). They are seeking an educational path
to a better future. Along the way, “life situations” may cause them to stumble and step away from college; the mentors and support they receive from the smaller class sizes and support programs that community colleges offer encourages them to persist academically when faced with a personal challenge. Adult learners, whether enrolling in college courses for the first time or returning after several years of absence, may need developmental courses to learn or become reacquainted with the necessary skills needed to be successful in the classroom (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009).

Community colleges serve their communities in a variety of ways. College leaders meet with advisory boards and industry leaders to discuss the demands and current trends in the workforce so they can determine ways to improve current programs or what programs to add based on those demands. Such programs allow students to enter the workforce immediately following completion of their education. College parallel programs, often chosen by athletes whose intentions are to transfer to 4-year colleges to continue their athletic careers, provide educational opportunities without the large class size or financial burden of 4-year institutions.

**International Students at Community Colleges**

Bevis and Lucas (2007) stated that international students began attending community colleges during the 1960s and 1970s for the purpose of saving money versus the cost of attending a 4-year university. Early international students were from developing countries, more often were unmarried males, and academically, studied in the areas of business or engineering. The *Open Doors 1971* publication first reported on the attendance of international students at community colleges (IIE, 1971). In this account, IIE’s first publication containing data on the number of international student numbers, 459 community
colleges reported having a total of 15,363 international students enrolled. The dominant regions where the majority of international students called home were Latin America, the Near and Middle East, and the Far East. The report also confirmed that 47% of international students were seeking a degree in business administration or engineering (IIE, 1971).

In the 1970s, as more research began to be conducted on international students attending community college, it was discovered through two studies that took place in Florida and Texas that the main reasons for international students choosing community colleges were financial costs, English proficiency, admissions, and advising (Breuder, 1972). These same concerns are still seen 45 years later as reasons for which international student select community colleges. In addition to the above-mentioned four reasons, other concerns for international students were in the area of student life, such as student activities, living, dining, and religious programs (Gautam, Lowery, Mays, & Durant, 2016). Anayah and Kuk (2015) contributed that transfer opportunities and geographical preferences vary among students. International students in the 21st century also see safety as a big concern when selecting a community college. Moreover, the type of community where the college is located may allow international students to blend in, as with an urban environment, or feel a more welcoming atmosphere, as with a smaller, rural environment (Duncan, 2009). Anayah and Kuk also found that international students select community colleges because of their easier admission requirements and ease of transferability into 4-year institutions. Moreover, the smaller class sizes provide a greater opportunity for one-on-one interactions with faculty.

Research by Fass-Holmes and Vaughn (2014, 2015) supported the need for international students to utilize community colleges to improve English skills. These researchers also found that some 4-year institutions require its international students who
lack English proficiencies to take English composition and English as a second language courses at local community colleges to raise their scores.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, community colleges began to recognize the need to more directly assist their international students. Rockland Community College and Bevard College were the first to act by developing curricula and creating offices specifically for international students (Hess, 1982). The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges recognized the need to form the Office of International Programs, followed by the Consortium of International Education (CIE), which ultimately led to the formation of the Community Colleges for International Development (CCID), thus, providing a joint effort for community colleges to recruit international students (CCID, 2017). CCID worked to strengthen ties to countries from which a large number of international students came. With an increase in the number of international students on community college campuses, the demand for such serves increased (King & Breuder, 1979). Although these programs were developed to increase the number of international students coming to study in the United States, not everyone in academia agreed that community college enrollment should be increased through the enrollment of international students. Were community colleges capable of properly serving international students? Were faculty and staff at community colleges capable of meeting the language and student services needs of international students? Could community colleges offer expanded cultural exposure on their campuses without the increase of international students? These are questions that Martorana (1978) asked as programs such as CIE and CCID were being created.

Community colleges have not slowed down in the admission of international students. Lee and Rice (2007) stated that adjusting to college in America can be extremely difficult.
International students often feel unwanted and alone after finding themselves in a new unfamiliar environment. In this era of increased international populations at community colleges, it is has become a growing trend for community colleges to have an international student services office or international affairs office. Such designated offices are instrumental in the initial admissions process, and with the increase of international students, these offices are vital to the success of these students. Tasks such as maintaining Student Exchange and Visitor Program documents; orientations; student activities; on-campus work; cultural obstacles; and assisting with relationships between international students and housing, faculty, and athletics are a full-time job for staff in these offices (Duncan, 2009; Jackson & Heggins, 2003; Kwon, 2009).

International orientations play a key role in the success of international students. Kwon’s (2009) research findings on factors affecting international students’ transition suggest that international orientations should provide international students with a better explanation of the unfamiliar culture in which they have chosen to expand their global experiences. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) and McLachlan and Justice (2009) concurred with Kwon’s views on the value of orientation for international students, as it adds transitional social, academic, and cultural balance. Orientations also provide new international students with the opportunity to meet peers who also are new and have traveled a great distance to study abroad (McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

In contrast, not everyone believes that community colleges should be focusing on increasing its international student population. The community college mission of serving local communities may be in jeopardy, as the increase in international student enrollment may take opportunities away from domestic students. Some believe that, with community
college funding constantly dwindling, dollars should be devoted to domestic students (Evelyn, 2005; Raby & Valeau, 2007). Raby and Valeau (2007) added that, in order to follow the mission statements of most community colleges, these colleges should prioritize serving their community with programs that are in demand, not funding international student recruitment and programs. However, according to Anayah and Kuk (2015), community colleges are looking at expanding their international population through a different lens; community colleges feel that welcoming international students and expanding their student demographic make their community and college more global.

Evelyn (2005) shared that, more recently, community college mission statements are being changed to include international education. Raby and Valeau (2007) explained that international education includes the understanding of “recognizing similarities” and “respecting and protecting differences among multicountry diversities” (p. 6). International students bring diversity to campuses where the contact that domestic student have with international peers are otherwise minimal. The cross-cultural exposure of the different cultures and ethnicities of different groups benefit everyone by helping to break down stereotypes and gain understanding of differences and perspectives (Rice, 2006). Kusek (2015) found that communities and international students often feel disconnected from each other, and a greater understanding could be formed. Institutions need to work to integrate their international student populations within the communities outside of the college to expose community members and international students to a greater cultural awareness. Society overall gains the most from international students attending community colleges. Knowledge, tolerance, empathy, and cultural understanding are qualities that are gleaned from interacting with fellow students as students work with others who come from outside of
their own culture. In turn, as students enter the workplace and society, a framework has been established for students to work in a “multicultural society” (Raby & Valeau, 2007, p. 9). If community colleges were to restrict the enrollment of international students on campus, their students would fall behind in global exposure. Students who attend 4-year universities would have an advantage in the workplace based on their experiences with international students at their institutions.

**Athletics**

Related to Astin’s (1991) theory of student involvement, which states that involvement in extracurricular activities increases retention, college athletics is a prime example of activities in which students may become involved on campus. Collegiate athletics officially emerged in 1905, when the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was formed as the governing body for competitive intercollegiate sports at U.S. universities. Since the birth of athletics on college campuses, institutions have been influenced by all that it entails. From enrollment to student life, revenue to publicity, institutions that sanction intercollegiate athletics are susceptible to the highs and lows that stem from being in the public view.

College athletics impact enrollment at institutions. Nonathlete students sometimes select a college based on its athletic programs, such as nonathlete students who select a college because their friend or relative is going to participate on an athletic team at the college. College selection is not based solely upon the academic programs the institution offers; more likely, the selection also considers the extracurricular activities offered through student life.
Athletics are also seen as exploiting student-athletes because of the profit gained by many institutions through these students’ efforts. Beamon (2008) researched the exploitation of African American males by NCAA Division I universities. Those interviewed felt as if they were “used goods,” and they struggled with their adjustment to the institution and college athletics. These difficulties ultimately hindered their academic success and career preparedness. It has long been debated whether or not college athletes should be paid for their participation in athletics. The amount of money involved in athletics college athletics can be startling. In 2001, at a closed hearing of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics held at the Willard Hotel, Sonny Vaccarro said, “You sold your souls, and you’re going to continue selling them” (as cited in Branch, 2011, para. 4). Vaccarro’s statement held true, as for example, through sales and marketing, the Southeastern Conference generated over $1 billion in earnings in 2010 (Branch, 2011).

Millions of dollars are garnered by colleges and universities each year from collegiate athletics. Athletics provide entertainment and engagement events for students and sports enthusiasts. College students begin to celebrate hours or days in advance in anticipation of an upcoming event between their beloved team and their major rival. In contrast, however, opportunities for student-athletes to experience college life by meeting new people outside of the team and attending nonathletic events can be overshadowed by the pressures of meeting requirements in the classroom as well as performing well on the field of play. Student-athletes should be allowed opportunities and be encouraged to attend campus events outside of their sport and athletics in general. Such social integrations would enhance their overall student-athlete experience (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).
Being in the public eye, athletic teams and athletes, more so than any other division or students at a given institution, are constantly scrutinized for mishaps or illegal actions that may occur. Academic ineligibility is no different in that GPAs and completion rates of student-athletes are under a microscope, and annually, institutions are being placed on probation for academic eligibility violations. Data collected by the NCAA unveiled that student-athletes who transfer from a 2-year to a 4-year institution often falter academically. Therefore, the NCAA Board increased the minimal transfer GPA from 2.0 to 2.5 for transfer student-athletes. In addition, restrictions that limit of number of hours per week an athlete can have contact with the coaching staff for training have been put in place by the NCAA and NJCAA governing bodies. These organizations also have regulations in place that require all athletes to maintain minimum academic standards and require institutions to provide academic support for its athletes (Brutlag Hosick, 2011; Gaston Gayles & Hu, 2009).

College athletics provide a plethora of opportunities to student-athletes. Opportunities such as more guidance in obtaining a degree, enhanced personal growth and relationships, and a clearer professional career path scratch just the surface of advantages student-athletes have as being a part of a collegiate athletic program. Each division and level of competition in athletics has its advantages and disadvantages. It is up to the student-athletes to determine what is important to them and to pursue competing in intercollegiate athletics at a level that best aligns with their successful adjustment experience and ultimate success.

**Athletics and Community Colleges**

Words such as “academic excellence,” “integrity,” “tradition,” and “innovation” are found in the mission statements of many community colleges throughout the country. It is
and has been debated by both college stakeholders and members of their communities if athletics should be a part of community colleges based on their mission statements. The perceptions of athletics by community college presidents were studied by Williams and Pennington (2006). Their research showed that presidents who participated in the study agreed that athletics at community colleges helped connect the college with its community by instilling a sense of pride for the athletic programs. In contrast, the presidents did not agree with the fact that the true mission of community colleges did not support athletics as part of the institution.

Community college athletics have attributes similar to university athletic programs, though on a smaller scale. Many community colleges generate revenue from intercollegiate athletics on campus. Athletics bring increased enrollment, fund-raising opportunities, alumni and community relations, a diverse population, and enhanced student life to colleges (Toma & Cross, 1998). Support from and interaction with the community can support the sustainability of smaller scale athletic programs, such as those at community colleges.

There is a lack of research that has focused on community college athletics. William Rainey Harper first began to capitalize on athletics at community colleges in 1891. Harper was a leader in using athletics as a means of recruiting students and marketing community college athletics throughout the country (Slaughter, 1989). These founding tactics are still present today in community college athletics. Though it can be viewed that athletics can expand the diversity of community college populations, it may also attract students who bring “pre-problem baggage” with them. Diversity is intended to enhance the culture on college campuses; however, it can also bring unwanted issues that emerge from a student’s home environment. Some athletes attend community colleges as a pathway to better
opportunities, though they cannot always leave behind a troubled past or issues that may become more problematic during their attendance at the institution.

Williams and Pennington (2006) found that athletic programs can cause financial strains at community colleges. Unlike their 4-year counterparts, community colleges rely on tuition dollars and fundraising to support their programs. Corporate sponsorships and network television contracts are few and far between at the community college athletics level. Community colleges are restricted to a division of competition based on the funding dollars available for athletic program scholarships. Based on funding sources and institutional budgets, it is not always best for community colleges to offer athletics (Williams & Pennington, 2006, p. 100).

**Athlete Adjustment**

Someone “knows my name” is the most common response given by students as to why they return to college (Arnsparger, 2012). In this respect, recruited athletes are at a greater advantage than their nonathlete counterparts, as student-athletes have the benefit of someone knowing their name before they step foot onto campus. Student-athletes have initial contact with a coach, and this first connection can make or break the student-athlete experience. Many students, both foreign and domestic, are dropped off at the curb of their new college and left to fend for themselves. Coaches often greet their athletes and walk them around campus, showing them necessary campus resources. In addition, athletes’ roommates are often teammates, and they assist each other during the acclimation process with basic necessary information to familiarize them with campus. Having an instant relationship is the first “hook” into a student becoming connected to campus (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009).
Coaches can serve in a variety of roles for a student-athlete. For example, coaches can serve as a parent figure, which is a role that often becomes vacant when a student leaves home. The daily guidance that may have been present at home is now open to be filled with impressions from the first person to fill this void. Student-athletes and parents put their trust in coaches who have provided the opportunity of education by way of athletics and have taken the students away from home, often farther away than any distance the students have traveled before.

As college coaches are aware of the resources available for students, they can offer a great support system for their student-athletes (Druma, Ladda, Geary, & Fitzpatrick, 2014). The success of student-athletes rests heavily on the relationship between the coach and the student-athlete. A support system for students while attending college can positively or negatively influence the adjustment experience all students face. If the coach does not play a supportive role, the adjustment experience may become more negative, thus affecting the retention of the student-athlete.

For an institution as a whole, it is important for administrators and counselors to have an understanding of the needs of its student-athletes as well as its entire international student population. Having an awareness of student-athletes’ adjustment needs allows colleges to increase the success of the student-athletes, who may experience more pressure compared to their nonathlete counterparts. Although Eiche, Sedlacek, and Adam-Gaston (1997) found that student-athletes adjust more easily to college when entering from high school, their findings also reflected that student-athletes felt less prepared for college in comparison to nonathletes exiting high school. Eiche et al.’s research could be taken to mean that student-
athletes are focused on college as a larger picture, with athletics as a means to reach the professional level being the sole purpose of attending college.

Petitpas, Brewer, and Van Raalte (2009) mentioned Gonzaga University and California State University–Long Beach as examples of the many institutions across the country that have created specific programs that focus on positive transitions for student-athletes. This kind of developmental intervention focuses on enhancement, support, and counseling throughout the transition process; such interventions encourage personal and psychosocial growth. This intervention, known as Life Development Intervention (LDI), identifies and teaches how to utilize transferable skills. LDI helps individuals develop networks, stress-coping skills, and recognition of coping resources to effectively achieve a successful transition (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1992, 1993). The NCAA designed the CHAMPS/Life Skills program in 1991 using the LDI model as its foundation. The CHAMPS/Life Skills program addresses academics, community service, career planning, and personal development, in addition to athletics, as a framework for supporting student-athlete development. In 2016, the NCAA changed its program to the Total Person Project, a model designed by Dr. Homer Rice. This new life skills core encourages student-athletes to develop balance in “academic achievement, athletic success and personal wellbeing” (NCAA, 2016, para. 2).

Student-athletes face stressors similar to the transition challenges that international students face. Stressors such as performing in the classroom, roommate compatibility, time management, text anxiety, relationships, and family issues are added on top of the pressures coming from the athletic field (Etzel, 2003; Levine & Cureton, 1998). In addition, governing athletic bodies have a minimum GPA and other academic requirements that must be achieved
by student-athletes to participate in athletics. Some may view student-athletes as being handed everything, including a scholarship. Others may perceive student-athletes who receive scholarships as getting paid to play a sport. That “payment,” however, is not a “no strings attached” agreement. As with most scholarships, predetermined stipulations must be met to maintain the scholarship. Requirements that must be met include such factors as a minimum GPA, class attendance, athletic performance, and morals clauses, which prohibit student-athletes from conducting themselves or behaving in a manner that negatively impacts the program or institution. The amount of the scholarship awarded can serve as a motivating factor for some athletes. Medic, Mack, Wilson, and Starkes (2007) reported that athletes who receive a full scholarship versus those receiving a partial or no scholarship may perform with different levels of motivation. The amount of a scholarship can affect athletes’ level of commitment to the program and may also affect their overall experience as a student-athlete.

In many ways, college student-athletes must continually reaffirm their athletic abilities under a larger microscope, often on a national stage. Each year, billions of dollars are spent by institutions and corporations on marketing and sponsorships. The pressures placed upon student-athletes add to the necessity of these students to experience a healthy transition to the institution and to perform to set academic standards. With the investment that institutions make in their athletic programs, it is only fitting to insure the success of their student-athletes by means of utilizing developmental intervention programs to assist its student-athletes in initial adjustment to graduation and beyond (Pinkney & Tebbe, 2009).

**International Student-Athletes**

Some coaches believe that adding international athletes to their roster will cause friction with the U.S. athletes because the international players’ cultures and background
differ from that of most of their U.S. teammates. Other coaches believe that to compete athletically at the national level, international team members are a must-have. Patrick (1996) argued that international athletes can have a significant impact on a team that is performing at only a mediocre level; a team can become a “contender overnight” (para. 2). Furthermore, Bale (1991) noted that coaches often are pressured to have successful programs, thus leading them to recruit “instant help” to compete (p. 98). It is up to coaches to determine what type of culture their team has. Coaches assess the facts to determine whether international athletes are necessary to compete at the level of play they desire for their team (Bale, 1991; Hosick, 2010). Bale (1991) interviewed multiple international student-athletes from NCAA institutions to learn about their experiences while attending college in the United States. He found that the greatest motivation for international student-athletes to compete in the United States was driven by their desire to receive an education, followed by the opportunity to compete with an athletic scholarship.

Ten years later, Popp et al. (2011) contradicted Bale’s (1991) findings with their findings that the two top reasons for international student-athletes to compete in the United States were athletic scholarships and the personality of the head coach. Additional factors cited that influenced international student-athletes to compete in the United States were obtaining a degree resulting in a good job, the level of competition, and the academic reputation of the institution.

Participating in college sports provides an avenue for international student-athletes to connect with other student-athletes on common ground. On campus, college athletes create a subculture that continues to expand the multicultural environments that have developed due to the increased number of international student-athletes in the United States (Allen, Drane,
Byon, & Mohn, 2010). Trendafilova et al. (2010) found that coaching staffs play a critical role in the adjustment experience of international student-athletes, as it is key for staff members to recognize cultural differences. Coaches should be cognizant of such differences and determine if their campus and team culture provide “an environment that is most favorable to athletes’ learning and performance” (p. 361). The environments that are created through participating in sports and attending college soundly influence the international student-athlete’s experience. Positive or negative satisfaction and adjustment experiences can cause a ripple effect that can influence both on- and off-field performances of international student-athletes (Saha, 1978; Zhang, DeMichele, & Connaughton, 2004).

Athletic team members can serve as peer mentors, similar to the peer support suggested by Shigaki and Smith (1997), Zhai (2002), Lin (2012), and Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) as a favorable method for international students to improve their English skills and lessen transitional shock. Once international student-athletes arrive on campus, they often seek social transition assistance from peers (Kwon, 2009). An athletic team provides an international student-athlete with 10–20 college students that’s they can get to know and use as resources when they arrive on campus. The common language of sport is the foundation of a team’s communication; however, for the team to be successful, effective verbal communication is necessary. Domestic teammates can serve as a life preserver for international student-athletes who are treading water in a sea of transitional confusion. The strains of adjusting to a new culture and attempting to blend in socially can be softened by teammates who answer questions, work together to communicate, and create an instant association in a social setting. Learning acceptable skills from teammates who are readily
accessible from the first team meeting forward gives international student-athletes an advantage over many of the nonathlete international students.

If coaches choose to have international student-athletes on their athletic roster, being aware of the satisfaction of their athletes can greatly benefit the experiences of international student-athletes, the team chemistry, and the overall success of the team. A student-athlete’s motivation can be driven in multiple ways, coaching style being one. For example, athletes may not respond well to a coach who constantly yells at them, which could lead to negative results. On the other hand, if international student-athletes are used to a coach who continually yells and is in their face, having a coach who is passive may affect their adjustment experience and their motivation may decline. The style of play that international student-athletes are accustomed to playing in their home country can also have an impact of their transition experience. If the level or speed of play of the team or competition is slower than how they have competed previously, motivation can become deflated. A coach who listens and accepts feedback from their athletes will find less resistance and potentially more success on and off the field, and this adjustment can also lead to a positive response from their athletes as well (Trendafilova et al, 2010).

**International Student-Athletes at Community Colleges**

International student-athletes bring a greater diversity to community college campuses, which in turn offers domestic students opportunities to interact with those from other cultures from around the world. Horton (2009) stated that community colleges provide athletes an avenue of learning through participation in athletics. Athletes also are exposed to the vast types of student cultures found throughout college campuses, which add to the college experience as well. Some research has been conducted with international student-
athletes at NCAA institutions, and comparisons often have been between them and domestic student-athletes. Areas of migration, adjustment, and experiences are topics that have been examined. However, limited research data on international student-athletes at community colleges are available. The experiences that international student-athletes have at community colleges can have multiple outcomes for both the student and the institution in a wide range of areas, for example, retention, completion (degree attainment), recruiting, and fiscal issues. To provide these students with their desired experience and to globalize culture community college campuses, it is important to give these students a voice.

**Ridinger and Pastore Adjustment Model**

Ridinger (1998) designed the student-athlete acculturation model, which he developed from acculturation literature by Hawes and Kealey (1981), Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), and Parker and McEnvoy (1993). This model is used to survey antecedents and adjustment experiences in search of outcomes encountered by international student-athletes. The foundations of this model come from the four antecedent dimensions—personal, perceptual, cultural distance, and interpersonal dimensions—and their subcategories. The personal dimension addresses self-efficacy and technical competencies in relation to athletics, academics, and English proficiency. The athlete’s expectations of the institution, athletic program, and social support fall within the perceptual dimension. The cultural distance dimension includes the gap between home culture and the culture found at a student-athlete’s new institution, community, and geographical region. Connections with teammates, coaches, administration, and faculty and staff encompass the interpersonal dimension (Popp et al., 2010; Ridinger, 1998; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).
Baker and Siryk (1989) created a quantitative questionnaire, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, that serves to measure an individual’s adjustment to college. This questionnaire is administered to determine the academic, personal–emotional, institutional, and social adjustment of first-year college students. For this study, these areas of measurement provided the dimensions under the adjustment category of the model. Ridinger (1998) conducted a comparative analysis of the adjustment experiences faced by domestic and international student-athletes, and data from domestic and international students attending the same university were utilized in the foundational framework of this model. Ridinger and Pastore (2000) analyzed cross-cultural adjustment literature coming from the subject areas of business, education, and sport to further develop the adjustment model framework.

The acculturation model originally developed by Ridinger was enhanced by Ridinger and Pastore (2000) to include athletics as a subcategory dimension. This addition was based on athletic participation and college adjustment research conducted by Adler and Adler (1991), Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001), Jackson and Krane (1993), and Killeya-Jones (2005) as well as international student-athlete adjustment research conducted by Popp, Hums, and Greenwell (2009). As a whole, the adjustment model that Ridinger and Pastore proposed was theoretical when it was developed (Popp et al., 2010). While utilizing the Ridinger and Pastore model of adjustment for international student-athletes to study international student-athletes at 4-year institutions, Popp et al. (2010) discovered new subcategories, which prompted them to modify the model of adjustment for international student-athletes. Based on their findings, travel experience and adventure were inserted into the personal dimension and family influence was added to the perceptual dimension.
Outcomes can derive directly from antecedents or from antecedents to adjustment. The outcome variables help determine the satisfaction of international student-athletes’ overall experience as well as their personal views on their performance, both academically and athletically.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Approach

Much like artists and their creations, qualitative research allows for variations in interpretation (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Schwandt, 2007). Vincent van Gogh and Pablo Picasso created world-renowned works of art that may be viewed through different lenses of interpretation. Similar to observing works of art, researchers can interpret data differently, leading to different conclusions. With qualitative research, one seeks to understand the life experiences of a study’s participants. International student-athletes on community college campuses are an underreported phenomenon. In this study, the participants brought to light their personal interpretations of similar reported experiences and shared their personal accounts of what had taken place along their journey, beginning with their decision to attend a community college in the United States. It was up to me to analyze the collection of shared experiences and report the qualitative findings to the world of academia.

Each international student-athlete participant in this case study had a different, personal depiction of how they experienced life as an international student-athlete at a community college. Participants’ viewpoints of their encounters, from the coaches to the classroom, varied. Therefore, the use of qualitative methodology was ideal for this research study on the adjustment experiences of international student-athletes at community colleges. Stake (2010) asserted that researchers seek to understand phenomena; qualitative research is an account of what is “personally discovered” by a participant (p. 56). The various experiences of the international student-athletes in this study, from the recruiting process to arriving on campus to receiving support services, all played a role in their adjustment process.
and ultimately determined whether or not they had a positive or negative adjustment experience.

Stake (2010) described qualitative research as being interpretive, experience based, situational, and “personalistic” (p. 31). Qualitative research results are derived mostly from experiential understanding, which is the attainment of personal knowledge, and it is continually changing based on personal accounts. Creswell (2009) noted that the characteristics of qualitative research include a natural setting for data collection to take place. Qualitative data analysis consists of organizing and categorizing, which reveals themes and patterns. The researcher serves as the instrument for data collection and is continually learning the meanings of the participant’s experiences. Therefore, the design of a qualitative study emerges continuously during the qualitative research process. Qualitative research is interpretive to the researcher, the reader, and the participants and provides a holistic account of the problem statement of the study. Finally, based on the theoretical lens selected by the researcher, the organization of the study may vary depending on the context of the study (Creswell, 2009).

This qualitative study utilized the characteristics described by Stake (2010) and Creswell (2009). Through the selected philosophical framework, methodology, and analytical methods of this study, the reader gains a greater understanding of emergent themes for an enhanced interpretation of the cases studied. Merriam (2002a) described qualitative research as providing rich descriptive meaning to its findings. The findings from this research on international student-athletes on community college campuses in the Midwest provide robust new knowledge and understanding of the extremely neglected topic of international student-athletes’ adjustment experiences.
Philosophical Framework

The philosophical framework that best informed the research conducted and described herein is constructionism. Participants constructed their own knowledge and meaning from experiences they encountered (Crotty, 2010). The research participants, described in Chapter 4, experienced adjustment to 2-year institutions individually and, therefore, each had his or her own adjustment experiences to share.

Crotty (2010) stated that meaning is constructed from the interpretation with which an individual views the world (p. 43). International student-athletes arrive at community college campuses from all over the world; therefore, their lens for experiencing adjustment can vary each step of the way. Crotty added that “social constructionism emphasizes the hold our culture has on us: it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way we in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world” (p. 58). Experiences such as academic, social, and athletic adjustment may all differ from person to person based on familial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

This study examined the adjustment experiences international student-athletes underwent while attending their college. As they interacted with various individuals throughout their time on campus, each international student-athlete may have taken away a different experience based on their interactions or their personal history and cultural upbringing. Based on the idea that culture shapes one’s views and the questions presented in this research, I selected constructionism as the philosophical framework to follow for the case study presented.
Case Study Research

A qualitative case study research design was selected as the methodology for this dissertation. Insight into the framework of case study research through its definitions and descriptions, relevance, characteristics, and components, as well as a description of the theories behind case study research, are offered next.

Definition and Description

A case study was defined by Creswell (2013) as a case with parameters or one that is bounded. A bounded system focuses on time, space, and a specific number of participants involved in the case. Case studies are unique in nature, as they are detailed, real-life descriptions of what was encountered by the participants (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2002a; Stake, 1995). This study meets Creswell’s (2009) definition of a case study, as its parameters included the examination of the adjustment experience of international student-athletes competing in at least one season of competition at community colleges located in the Midwest. The community college locations were purposefully selected to include a range of adjustment experiences.

Yin (2009) described five major reasons for selecting a single case-study research design. These reasons provide the researcher guidance to avoid a potentially vulnerable outcome if the investigation of the case were not be conducted carefully. The five factors that may lead a researcher to select single case study research are as follows:

1. Critical: a test of an existing theory;
2. Extreme or unique: uncommon or rare circumstance or situation;
3. Representative or typical: average or typical in comparison to everyday situations;
4. Revelatory: the ability to analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to social science inquiry; and

5. Longitudinal: a single case conducted at two or more different times.

The adjustment experience of international student-athletes at the community college level was critical, single case study research chosen to expand upon Ridinger and Pastore’s (2000) research of international student-athletes at 4-year institutions. As a collective study, the research set forth in this dissertation focused on participants with common characteristic criteria located at different community colleges in the Midwest.

**Relevance of Case Studies**

Experiences and stories unfold through case study research. The individuals being studied have an opportunity to share their lived experiences for others to make use of, if needed. The researcher reaches a level of trust with each participant and can bring the reader closer to the participant’s learnings (Merriam, 2002a). Stake (2000) noted that the readers have the ability to “shape” the conclusion to be “personally useful” for themselves. Based on what the researcher chooses to report, the in-depth narrative description provided in a case study offers the reader the ability to “transfer knowledge” as he or she chooses to do so. This case study allows the reader to view the study through a holistic lens by providing the reader with an opportunity to further examine the inherent upbringing and most recent environment of the participants (Fetterman, 2010, Flyvbjerg, 2011). Case studies allow the researcher to delve deeper into the experience by working one on one with participants (Stake, 1995). Flyvbjerg (2011) stated that, in addition to the depth that case study research provides, it also affords a greater understanding of the “what,” “how,” and “why” of the rationale behind phenomena.
Exploring the adjustment experiences of international student-athletes at community colleges in the Midwest using a qualitative approach provided personal insight to gain a general understanding of the thoughts and feelings experienced throughout the student-athletes’ adjustment processes. Although researchers, such as Ridinger and Pastore (2000) and Popp et al. (2010), have conducted similar international student-athlete studies at 4-year universities, there is still a need to examine international student-athletes at 2-year institutions to ensure the success of the increasing number of international student-athletes at those institutions.

**Characteristics of Case Studies**

During the research process, this case study focused on a specific phenomenon, which is one of the specific characteristics of case studies. Merriam (1988) asserted that focusing on a phenomenon stems from case studies being descriptive, heuristic, inductive, and particularistic. Case study research is descriptive from the viewpoint that it offers an in-depth understanding of the learned participant experience. By revealing insight into the international student-athlete phenomenon, as well as potential discoveries, this case study provides a heuristic meaning to the reader. At the culmination of a qualitative case study, one can create new hypothesis from the research findings (Flyvbjerg, 2011). This research study is particularistic in that the phenomenon on which it was focused was the adjustment experience of international student-athletes who had participated in at least one college athletic season.

**Components of Case Study Design**

Yin (2009) identified five components that form case study research design: research questions, propositions, units of analysis, logic of connecting data to propositions, and
criteria for interpreting findings. Yin broke down each component, starting with the research questions. “Why” and “how” are the common roots of the questions found in qualitative research. These foundational questions are often what lead to a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied, in this case the adjustment experience of international student-athletes at community colleges. Creswell (2009) explained that qualitative research questions are led by one or two broad, central questions that overarch the topic being studied. The broad base of questions is then narrowed down to five to seven subquestions that allow the interviewer to delve deeper into the research topic. As the interview progresses, the questions provide a conclusion to the research topic or give birth to new questions to be explored in future studies (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Propositions, the second component of case study research design that Yin identified, is the study’s purpose. The purpose in this case study was to understand the adjustment experience of international student-athletes at community colleges, specifically in the Midwest region of the United States. The outline that Creswell (2009) provided can assist qualitative researchers in determining the methodology, participants, and research site(s), all of which guide the research proposition. However Yin (2009) stated that some studies are exploratory and, therefore, do not have proposition statements.

The third component of case study research design, unit of analysis, begins with the interpretation of data. Each person may analyze data differently based on previous experiences. Common skills that Yin (2009) described as being essential to a researcher who is conducting case study research include being unbiased, a good listener, and adaptive and flexible. Stake (1995) shared that case study research uses two methods of analysis to find meaning: categorical aggregation and direct interpretation (p. 74). Research questions and
the nature of the study guide the researcher to choosing appropriate method of analysis. Once data are collected, some response patterns can be extremely obvious, whereas other patterns may be more difficult to distinguish and may take time to emerge using categorical aggregation. Direct interpretation can cause the researcher to look for meaning in single instances instead of categorizing. However, the direct interpretation approach also allows the data to be dissected and examined for individualized meaning relevant to the study. Establishing patterns among the collected data, either through categorical aggregation or direct interpretation, can allow themes to emerge during analysis (Stake, 1995, p. 78). The units of analysis in this case study were the international student-athletes’ participation in athletics at community colleges in the Midwest.

The logic of connecting data to propositions is the fourth component of case study design. As themes emerge from the analyzed data, it is important for the researcher to connect the data to the study. I linked the data to the theoretical propositions through the emerging patterns and themes. I then compared the research questions with the collected data to determine if the findings answered the questions presented in this case study (Yin, 2009).

The final component of case study design is the criteria for interpreting findings. Through examination of the collected data, the findings reveal the connections to the case study being conducted as well set forth potential research opportunities in the future. However, the researcher must be cognizant of focusing on completing the current study before starting on future hypotheses.
Theory of Case Study Research

For many years, a number of researchers have viewed case study research as lacking or having weak credibility. It has been noted that case studies can serve only as a precursor to future, larger, and/or more significant research studies (Gerring, 2004). Case studies, however, can be centered on a specified unit and can be intensively focused on examining “developmental factors in relation to environment” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2009, para. 1). Flyvbjerg (2006) strengthened the misconceptions of the way case studies are viewed by explaining five misunderstandings often scrutinized with regard to case study research; these misunderstandings are shown in Table 1.

To further explain, misunderstanding #1 focuses on context-independent knowledge versus context-dependent knowledge. One must learn beyond what is written in a text book through lived experiences to gain knowledge and become an expert. The second

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misunderstanding number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General, theoretical knowledge is more valuable than concrete case knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>One cannot generalize based on an individual case; the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, while other methods are more suitable for hypothesis testing and theory building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from Flyvbjerg (2006).
misunderstanding reflects that one can gain knowledge through generalization of a single case study, which therefore, can be fundamental to scientific development. Misunderstanding #3, strategic selection of sampling, can be valuable in hypothesis testing and theory development. Falsifications are the fourth misunderstanding and have been known to emerge as researchers bring forth their preconceived views and revise their original hypotheses. It is human nature to have biases; however, case study research has been viewed as demonstrating the utmost neutrality in comparison to other methods. The final misunderstanding can clarify the fact that, although it may be difficult to summarize outcomes, case studies should be narratives of the research findings and that narratives, in turn, can give understanding to the researched phenomenon and cultivate new hypotheses and research questions.

**Research Sites**

The Department of Education recognizes 15 community college regions in the state of Iowa, of which 12 regions have athletic teams recognized by the NJCAA. Participants in this study attended colleges in suburban areas, cities, and towns throughout the state of Iowa. The race/ethnicity of enrolled students at community colleges in Iowa is predominately White, a demographic exceeding 70% of student body populations (Iowa Department of Education, 2016). The enrollment race/ethnicity ratio seen on community college campuses within Iowa provides limited cultural dynamics, thus creating a unique experience for each international student-athlete who steps onto campus.

In this study, all the participants’ experiences were different based on their background and home country as well as the demographics that existed within the community college that they were attending. The population of a college and/or city can play
a crucial role in an international student-athlete’s adjustment experience. For students whose home city is one of the largest in their country, moving to a town that is less populated than a single square mile near their home can lead these students to question their decision. For example, when a student is accustomed to public transportation for travel, but there are no taxi or bus services within city where the community college is located, traveling to stores to purchase necessary supplies can be stressful.

In 2016, the state of Iowa’s population was 3.1 million (State Data Center, n.d.). Iowa is known as an agricultural state, ranking among the top 10 states for the number of farms and acres of farmland within the state (National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2014). The fact that farmland surrounds the vast majority of cities and towns where the community college research sites were located may have affected the adjustment of international student-athletes because of the unavailability of amenities to which they may have been accustomed.

Students who attend a particular community college often choose to do so either because of its location or because of its athletics and academics. Students living near a community college may select that particular college to remain close to their home, to continue working, or to be near family. Students whose home is not close to the community college’s locale often select a particular college for academic or athletic reasons. International student-athletes fall into the latter category. When students who live near a college make the decision to attend that college, the town or city in which the college is located or the enrollment count of the institution may be insignificant to them. However, the size of the institution can attract an international student-athlete who is choosing a community college for its smaller class size (Thompson & Thompson, 1996) and the
opportunity to receive more direct instruction to improve English skills (Breuder, 1972; Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014, 2015).

**Categorization of Community Colleges**

For the purposes of this study, community colleges that the participants were attending were categorized as suburban community colleges, city community colleges, and town community colleges. Suburban community colleges were those located in larger metropolitan areas and tended to be larger community colleges that served their communities through multiple campus locations. The college enrollment for these colleges numbered more than 4,500 students for the 2015–2016 academic year. Suburban community colleges offered students numerous NJCAA athletic programs in which to compete at the national level.

City community colleges comprised multiple-campus districts to greater serve their population. The main college campuses were located within cities of just over 25,000 residents. The student enrollment for these types of colleges for the 2015–2016 academic year was greater than 2,000 but did not exceed 4,499 students. Students had the opportunity to compete in multiple NJCAA athletic programs at city community colleges.

Town community colleges were situated in rural Midwestern locations. These communities were surrounded by several similar towns of a similar size, all of which were surrounded by thousands of acres of farmland. Town community colleges offered both male and female NJCAA intercollegiate sports in which their students could compete. Course enrollment at town community colleges during the 2015–2016 academic year did not exceed 1,999 students.
Participants

Purposeful Sampling

In qualitative research, a variety of methods can be used for data collection. Purposeful sampling was the selected method for this dissertation research. Patton (1990) described purposeful sampling as seeking “information-rich cases” that are connected to the research questions (p. 169). I identified potential participants based on their student classification, experiences, and participation, which potentially eliminated participants who had no perspectives relevant to the study. Purposeful or selective sampling should contain a balance and variety of participants to best answer the research hypothesis (Creswell, 2009; Silverman, 2001; Stake, 1995). Therefore, it was important that I select participants based on controlled sampling. Participants were selected based on their home country, the sport in which they competed, and their gender.

I sought participants at various research sites so that I could sample a multitude of experiences from international student-athletes. Iowa State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the original criteria to seek sophomore or second-year international student-athletes attending a community college in the Midwest and competing in a NJCAA-sanctioned sport. These criteria yielded only one participant, thus forcing modifications to the IRB form to expand the requirements for participation in the study to students having attended a community college for at least one academic term and having competed in at least one NJCAA athletic season. Following the modification’s approval by the university IRB office (Appendix A), I worked with athletic directors and coaching staff at the respective community colleges to locate willing participants to share their adjustment experiences.
Once potential students were identified they were sent an invitation letter (see Appendix B) to acquaint them with the study.

**Suburban Community Colleges**

I began communication with suburban community colleges by sharing the purpose of my research and details about the interview process with the athletic directors. The athletic directors assisted me by reaching out to all the coaches on their staff with details about participation requirements. Coaches with athletes who met the qualifications contacted me to find out further details of the interview process and to share my contact information with their athletes. Potential participants were asked to make the initial contact with me for the interview process to begin. Obtaining participants from larger suburban community colleges proved to be difficult; of the suburban community colleges contacted, only two international student-athletes responded who were willing to participate if the coaches deemed it appropriate. A factor that may have affected the ability or willingness of student-athletes to participate may have been the timing of the proposal to the athletic department staff at the conclusion of the fall athletic season, at which time some athletes may have already left the institution to return home or to transfer to other institutions, which may have left the teams with no qualifying participants.

One example of how institution size played a role in the adjustment experience was explained in the experience of one participant who was attending a suburban community college. The participant spoke at length about the adjustment experience while attending a larger community college, comparing this new life to that in the home country. Additionally, the participant provided details as to why studying abroad was important, how the decision
was made to attend this community college, and the purpose of attending a community college instead of a 4-year institution.

**City Community Colleges**

Athletic departments at the city community colleges were contacted, and coaching staff were more than willing to ask their qualifying team members if they were willing to participate. Coaches at the city community colleges were open to the research topic and believed that the information gathered would assist them in helping better serve the international student-athlete population at their institutions. Additionally, a provost at one of the city community colleges was very willing to assist in finding participants, stating that the research could benefit many institutions and requesting that the results be shared. The findings from that provost’s institution do not identify any participant in any way.

More international student-athletes from city community colleges participated than from the other community college categories. These participants spoke openly and honestly in their responses to the interview questions. They shared both positive and negative experiences, including incidents they personally regretted and encounters that made lasting, positive impacts.

**Town Community Colleges**

Athletic staff at town community colleges identified potential students who met the necessary criteria for the study. A smaller number of participants was derived from the town community college population than from the city community college category. I identified several factors that may have contributed to the small number of participants in this category. First, fewer community colleges fell into the category of town community college than into the other two categories, which led to less opportunity to interest potential participants. In
addition, lack of response from potential participants may have occurred because the size of the student population of town community college could have offered fewer participants compared to the other community college categories, as fewer students attending town community colleges met the criteria for this study. Moreover, there was a general lack of response from athletic staff and potential participants from town community colleges. Lack of response from potential participants may have occurred because fewer students attending town community colleges met the criteria for this study, which may have been caused by the lack of funding to support international student-athletes or the athletic program as a whole at these colleges.

Town community college participants came from various home backgrounds but had a common goal in mind: to further their athletic opportunities through education. The participants in this category varied in their socioeconomic backgrounds, family support, and living situations. The parents of one participant were doctors with the ability to financially support the participant, whereas the other participant came from a home with multiple extended family members and without financial stability.

Participant Details

Relevant information for each of the participants interviewed for this study, including the names of the participants, the regions where they grew up, the category of community colleges they attended, and the sport in which they competed is provided in Table 2. Detailed summaries for each participant are included in Chapter 4. To ensure the privacy of the participants, all participants were assigned pseudonyms, as shown in Table 2. The home regions listed in this table were identified through NAFSA: International Association of Universities (Green, 2014).
Table 2

Participant Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Home Region</th>
<th>Institution Location</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>Men’s Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Men’s Golf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Women’s Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Women’s Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Men’s Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Women’s Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>Softball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>Softball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Men’s Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Data collection methods for qualitative research, as shared by Merriam (2002b), consist of three major sources: observations, interviews, and documents. Creswell (2009) and Silverman (2006) agreed with Merriam but added audio-visual materials to the list of major collection sources. Yin (2009), however, built upon the previous methods to identify six sources for collection: documentation, interviews, direct observations, archival records, physical artifacts, and participant observation. No one source is more dominant or important than another with regard to best practice. Although not all stated sources may be used in every research study, the use of multiple sources provides the opportunity to triangulate the collected findings. Triangulation strengthens the study by setting the foundation for
goodness and trustworthiness as well as validity of the data (Merriam, 2002b). The principal source of data collection for this research study was multiple, in-depth interviews. The interview timeline can be viewed in Appendix C.

**Interviews**

Seidman (2013) stated that “the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). Qualitative researchers find the lived stories of their participants in each phenomenon and share that with the readers. With interviews, researchers can reach into the emotional realm of the participants for a better understanding of the lived experience. In-depth interviews offer a means to get powerful insights into understanding how one is influenced by a given experience. In a given situation, each person involved can take away a different experience. Both qualitative and quantitative researchers can utilize in-depth interviews as a data collection method. Qualitative research interviews are typically semistructured and often include open-ended questions that allow the participants to tell their story (Stake, 2010).

One method used to conduct in-depth interviews is the three-interview model. With this model, the first interview should establish rapport with the participant. Collecting general life history information based on the questions asked allows for a foundation to be laid that can help the researcher begin to explain how the participant’s experience came to be. In the second interview the researcher delves into the details of the experience being studied or “go[es] for the gusto,” as De Munck (2009, p. 143) phrased it. During the second interview, the researcher probes further into responses by asking for stories or examples that begin to answer the research questions. Reflection and meaning of the experience are sought
during the third interview. Questions asked during the third interview are meant to expose the connections made, both intellectually and emotionally, during the experience and what the participant took away from the experience. De Munck (2009) and Seidman (2013) noted that the structure of the three-interview approach strengthens the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. It is essential for this relationship to develop and to allow the necessary time for the interviewees to tell their story regarding their lived experience.

For this research study, I used a modified version of Seidman’s (2013) and De Munck’s (2009) three-interview approach. I chose to conduct two interviews instead of three to maintain the attention of the participants and to accommodate their schedules. The three-interview approach was consolidated into the two interviews conducted with each participant. The structure of the process, the number of interviews, and the topics of the questions were explained to the participant before the interviews started. After the participant completed the informed consent form (see Appendix D), interview times were agreed upon by me and the participant. Each interview session was audio recorded for review purposes and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Two interview guides were used to serve as basic guidelines for the interviews (see interview protocols in Appendix E). However, questions that emerged during the interviews elicited responses that offered further insight into the experience in question. I had the opportunity to ask questions that expanded on responses given by the interviewee (Seidman, 2013). The protocol for the first interview was designed to collect data regarding background, initial adjustment to college experiences, and initial adjustment feelings. The second interview guide included an outline with questions focusing on first-year social adjustment experiences, first-year adjustments to athletics, and first-year adjustment feelings.
The first interview allowed the participants to share background information and initial adjustment experiences to college. At the end of the first interview, a second interview was arranged to take place 1 to 2 weeks following the initial interview. Prior to the start of the second interview, the participants were given the opportunity to add comments to their initial interview if they believed that it was necessary to further explain a story. During the second interview, I delved deeper into the adjustment experience by initially focusing on social and athletic adjustments followed by seeking reflection of the participants’ feelings during their first-year experience. All the participants were given their interview transcripts to review and were provided the opportunity to make additions or corrections where they saw fit.

Interviews were administered both over Skype and in face-to-face settings. Skype, an Internet form of communication that uses video and/or phone, was used if meeting face to face was not possible due to time schedules, the availability of the participant, or the distance between me and participant. Four of the participant interviews were conducted face to face, and the remaining eight participant interviews were administered through Skype. Both the participant and I were in closed-door locations to maintain privacy and remain undisturbed. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, which was placed next to the speaker of the computer to record the interviews. The interviews were then uploaded to a secure computer file for storage and later transcribed.

**Document Review**

The documents reviewed for this study were the final interview transcripts created following the member-checking process. The content of each document was reviewed with the mindset of extracting recurring themes and categories. The narrative structure helped to
identify the individuals who the participants believed helped form their adjustment experience (Silverman, 2001). Because open-ended questions were utilized during the interview process, the narratives allowed me to interpret the findings based my knowledge and the reviewed literature. The documents were available to be reviewed, were cross-referenced repeatedly, and were organized in a manner so as to be readily available to me (Yin, 2009). The form of data collection utilized provided me with the adjustment experiences gained by the international student-athlete participants while attending a community college in the Midwest.

**Data Analysis**

At the start of data analysis, when the researcher begins to analyze the collected data, impressions and observations are being made and pulled apart. “Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (Stake, 1995, p. 71). The analysis procedures are selected by the individual researcher; I chose to follow Creswell’s (2009) six steps of data analysis for qualitative research, which he outlined in a linear fashion with six steps. First, after the raw data have been collected, the data should be organized and prepared. Next, the researcher should read through all the data to gain a “general sense” of the content and begin to formulate meaning. The third step is the coding process, which comprises categorizing, labeling, and connecting data. Step four is to use the coding process to formulate themes or categories. When the research method is a case study, the discovered themes often follow “detailed descriptions of the settings or individuals” (Creswell, 2009, p. 184). Interrelating themes and descriptions by adhering to the principles of case study research is the fifth step. The sixth and final step of data analysis is to interpret
the meanings of the themes and descriptions that were created. It is in this final step that “lessons” are learned, which often may provoke further research questions to be asked.

Throughout the interviews that were conducted, I proceeded through Creswell’s (2009) first and second steps by organizing and examining the collected content. Coding and categorizing also began to take place as I listened and mentally processed the interviews, but steps three and four weren’t fully underway until both interviews for each participant were complete. Based on Yin’s (2009) statement that patterns are discovered through “pattern matching,” my study maintained strength in its validity through the discovery of matching patterns among the analyzed data.

**Goodness and Trustworthiness**

Goodness and trustworthiness are often challenged in qualitative research due to its perceived lack of validity, rigor, and ethics (Merriam, 2002b). For this research study, I utilized the standards of qualitative research by focusing on validation through triangulation by means of member checking, document review, and transferability.

Member checking, also known as respondent validation, provides quality and accuracy to the collected data. Interviewees review their interview transcripts and the tentative themes discovered by the researcher to provide feedback about whether the collected data are correct. In doing so, member checking strengthens the credibility of the study by adding to its goodness and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2001; Stake, 2010).

Yin (2009) provided a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of document review as evidence in case study research. Strengths include stability, unobtrusiveness, exact references, and details as well providing broad coverage of happenings. The weaknesses Yin
mentioned were the difficulty of retrievability, biased selectivity during collection, reporting bias by the researcher, and deliberately withholding access by the researcher (p. 102). I kept Yin’s list of strengths and weaknesses in mind while I reviewed the interview transcripts of international student-athletes who were asked about their adjustment experiences. The reviewed data revealed that multiple references were made to the same common tendencies, which strengthened the triangulation of the data.

Transferability of this international student-athlete research study was attempted through efforts to reach the maximum variation of research participants through the use of multiple research sites and a diversity of participants in the sample (Merriam, 2002b, p. 29). The participants in this study participated in several different sports and were from various countries around the world. They varied in their backgrounds, sport, gender, age, and home country. Through the use of multiple sites—town, city, and suburban—the transferability in this case study reinforced its external validity.

**Researcher Positionality**

Altheide and Johnson (2011) explained the role of the researcher in sharing the narratives of the participants:

Our task is not to refine and squeeze the novelty and richness out of the experience in favor of some bygone notion of rigor and efficiency, nor is it to make sure that creative problem solving and discovery are compromised in order to dot the i’s and cross the t’s. We want to see more dots flourish and evolve into creative insights. Our task is to continue pushing the line in new directions to illuminate our humanity and communicative words. (p. 593)
Lincoln and Guba (2000) further defined the researcher’s positionality or *reflexivity* as being a “human instrument” when the stories are told. Therefore, to fully understand how the findings were interpreted within the study, it is important for the readers to understand the position of the researcher.

I am a White female, socially classified as middle class, and I currently serve as an administrator at a city community college in Iowa. My interest in the international student-athlete experience stems from my background in coaching college athletics at both the 2- and 4-year college competitive levels. As a coach, I have had the opportunity to work with domestic and international athletes. At the 4-year college level, I found that, in some sports, international athletes are not entirely necessary for teams to compete at the national level. However, at the 2-year college level, international student-athletes can often make a critical difference in a team that competes at the national level.

As an administrator, I also work in student services. In this role, I interact with international student-athletes on a regular basis. Serving in an administrative role has allowed me to witness and assist in the social and academic adjustments of international student-athletes. These types of interactions are imperative to the success of these students during their first and second years of attending college. I chose to research international student-athletes’ adjustment experiences at community colleges in the Midwest for several reasons. In my position, I have worked with over 200 international student-athletes, and I have seen many struggle to adjust both off and on the field. Several of them have attended for a year and then have returned home for reasons including the inability to afford the cost of the institution, homesickness, academic struggles due to a language barrier, displeasure of their own playing time, and dissatisfaction of the coach with the performance of the athlete.
Unfortunately, any of these issues can negatively affect the international student-athlete emotionally and physically.

Through this research study, I sought to find ways to provide future international student-athletes, coaches, and administrators with information about positive adjustment experiences that may benefit international student-athletes, as well as teams, institutions, and the community as a whole. All key stakeholders involved in an international student-athlete’s adjustment experience play a critical role in creating an environment that focuses on success for all involved. There is a lack of current research on international student-athletes in the community college setting to help guide these stakeholders.

**Limitations**

In an effort to increase the interest of potential participants, compensation was first offered to those who met participant criteria. I later discovered that compensation could not be offered to the international student-athlete participants because this study was restricted to only international student-athletes and not open to domestic student-athletes. The ruling to prohibit compensation was determined by the NJCAA Compliance Office (Michael Teague, personal communication, March 5, 2015).

In this study, only individuals who were nondomestic student-athletes were sampled. Student-athletes who were U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the United States were not asked to participate in the study because they did not meet the selection criteria. Therefore, it is unknown if similar adjustment experiences are had by domestic student-athletes. This research also was limited to international students who were participating in collegiate athletics. Perspectives from international students who did not participate in collegiate athletics were not collected to compare to those of international student-athletes.
Eligible participants were required to have participated in a minimum of one season of competition through the NJCAA. Some participants may have competed in one athletic season whereas others may have participated in two seasons. Therefore, participants may have experienced different degrees of adjustment based on the time the participant had attended the institution.

The size and location of the institution, division of play within the NJCAA, and team’s winning percentage history are factors that may have affected the adjustment experience of the study’s participants. These factors may have influenced the likelihood of participants to contribute to this study or the adjustment experience of those who chose to participate.

To date, little research has been published related specifically to international student-athletes at community colleges. Therefore, supporting data directly related to this topic were scarce.

**Delimitations**

This study was purposefully limited to international athletes at community colleges. I specifically sought out international student-athletes, which limited the availability of participants, so that I could fully explore their lived experiences at the community colleges they were attending. The participants in this study were asked to share their experience about the institution they were attending during the time of the interviews, which served as another delimitation of this study. This case study was also delimited by using only community colleges whose administrators responded to the request for participation of its international student-athletes.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Through the interview process and data analysis of this case study, themes emerged that provide in-depth understanding of the adjustment experiences faced by international student-athletes. In-depth interviews were the source of data collection for this study. In addition to face-to-face interviews, Skype, an online communication software application, was also used to conduct the 24 interviews. Through the coding process, common words and phrases emerged, and microsearching resulted in recoding of the data when a cross-section of words or phrases became apparent (Stake, 2010). Utilizing the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3, themes brought forth by the student-athletes’ unique experiences were discovered through the antecedents and adjustment lenses.

Interviews with the 12 participants revealed two common themes along their journey from decision to transition experience: (a) factors influencing college-bound international student-athletes and (b) the transition to finding their place on campus. The first theme reflects that prior life experiences of the college-bound international student-athletes prompted their decisions to attend a community college in the Midwest. The second theme illustrates the challenges faced by the participants during the adjustment process on a new campus. The interviews garnered patterns such as the influence of education, athletic skills, and scholarship and revealed that language, homesickness, and teammates served to reinforce the emergent themes.

Guided by the conceptual framework highlighted in Chapter 2, these themes reflect the goals, fears, and challenges international student-athletes experienced and conquered as they left home and traveled abroad to begin a new life. This chapter includes a description of the background of each participant as well as a detailed examination and discussion of the
themes that emerged from the personal adjustment experiences shared by the international student-athlete participants during this case study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the participants’ adjustment experiences at their new institution.

**Background of Participants**

The international student-athletes who participated in this qualitative research study originated from various backgrounds, home regions, and sports. All participants had to meet the following criteria: be an international student-athlete, have competed in at least of NJCAA-sanctioned season, and be attending a community college located in the Midwest.

The voluntary participants of this qualitative adjustment experience study were 12 international student-athletes who met the criteria and agreed to participate in the study. Pseudonyms (Katie, Jason, Sarah, Olivia, Thomas, Eric, Sam, Jacob, Tammy, April, John, and Rebecca) were used for each athlete, and home regions (Latin America/Caribbean, Asia/Pacific, North America, and Europe) were used in place of home countries to ensure anonymity. Four participants were from the Latin America/Caribbean region, three participants each were from the Europe and Asia/Pacific regions, and two participants were from the North American region. Participants included six female and six male student-athletes participating in seven different NJCAA sports: baseball, men’s basketball, men’s golf, softball, women’s basketball, women’s soccer, and volleyball. The majority of the participants were attending city community colleges (n = 8), and two participants each were attending town community colleges and suburban community colleges.

During their interviews, all the participants offered insight into their upbringing. The educational background of their parents, family support system, athletic aspirations, and financial status were factors that drove their decision-making process and influenced their
adjustment transition. Below is a description of the beginning of participants’ journey to continue their dreams of competing in their sport in the United States. The variety of participant backgrounds strengthened the validity of this study by providing diverse precollege experiences that influenced their adjustment experience at community colleges in the Midwest.

April

April came to the United States from the Latin America/Caribbean region. Prior to arriving in the United States, she knew very little of the English language. April described her family as a close-knit, supportive Latino family. She had hardworking, blue-collar parents who were working as a driver and a small business clothing store owner, respectively. April defined her family as “nice middle class” due to her mother owning her own clothing store and her father taking more jobs as a driver since their children had left home. April shared that her home city, with a population for approximately 20,000, was similar to the city in which she was currently attending community college. The two cities were also similar in the fact that farmland covered the surrounding area.

April’s parents had different levels of education. April’s father had not continued his education beyond graduating from high school. On the other hand, her mother had completed college and had a degree in accounting. They both encouraged their children to continue on to college. April had a brother who was a professional soccer player. Choosing to play professionally took him out of the country prior to graduating from high school. April described that the distance and choice to suspend his education was stressful on the family. He had wanted to continue to play, but her parents had said, “No, you are going to
go to college.” Her brother recently had returned home to graduate from high school and continue on to college.

There was one public high school within April’s home city, and she did not consider the size of the school to be overly large. Many people attended college in her home city. People had opportunities to receive educational scholarships if they worked in the community. April stated that only about 5% of her classmates left the area; however, it was more for travel purposes. She estimated that less than 3% left the city to continue their education.

Athletics in this Latin American/Caribbean region city were comparable to many high schools in the United States in the fact that their teams competed against those in neighboring cities. April stated, however, that for athletes to compete at the regional or national level, they had to join a club sport team. Club sports are extremely popular throughout Latin America. Participating in a club sport generates opportunities to play a sport abroad or play professionally. Many volleyball clubs also support their club members through scholarships to participate on their team. Depending on the club and funding, some athletes are fortunate to not pay any money to play for a club.

April received help from her city to play for a good club team because her public school was poor competitively. Her travel experience prior to arriving in the United States to play volleyball was choosing to play for a club team that was 3–4 hours away from her home city. April stated, “It is hard sometimes because you wake up in the morning and you just want to see your mother or dad and say ‘hi’ and ‘good morning.’” She added that technology helped keep the much-needed communication lines open and reduce homesickness.
Jacob

It was common in Jacob’s country, within the Asia/Pacific region, to have extended family live within the same household. Growing up, Jacob lived with his mother, father, three sisters, a younger brother, and his grandparents. His family living situation helped him have a very supportive and close-knit family. Jacob described that they were an “average family” when he spoke about his father being the only person in the household who had a job. He added that his elder sister was now working and assisting with the financial needs in the home but would be getting married soon and leaving the home. Jacob noted that he came to college to help support his family when he graduated. “Me and my other siblings have to take care of my mom and dad when they grow old,” he said. He added that it is common for children to take care of their parents in his country. It also was common for residents to leave the country for neighboring countries to find jobs and send money back to their families to provide financial support.

When asked about his parents’ view on education, Jacob responded,

My mom and my dad went to high school, just up until high school. My dad started working, and my mom stayed home and took care of us, the kids. For us, my dad says he’s in a good place right now, and he didn’t even get college, so we have no excuse to go far. That’s why he is forcing us and always encouraging us on the importance of education.

Jacob’s family home was in a suburb of his capital city, a suburb with a population of 30,000 people. The primary school that Jacob and his siblings attended was a coeducational Catholic school. When they went on to high school, the schools were all-boys or all-girls schools. He stated that, in his home, they spoke his country’s native language, but in school
English was spoken, which helped him when he arrived at his community college. Jacob’s classmates had either entered the workforce or gone to a university in his home country. Jacob added that many people stayed in his home country, although it was also common for people to migrate to nearby countries. “People just migrate,” he stated.

Jacob’s high school offered school-sanctioned sports, but participation in club sports was also very popular for athletes. His school teams traveled to neighboring countries to compete in basketball due to the lack of competition opportunities within his country. Jacob played two club sports (basketball and rugby) while in high school. The team covered the expenses to play for a club. Jacob chose to continue to play basketball in college in the United States following high school.

**John**

John, a student-athlete from the South American/Caribbean region, knew that playing golf in college was the safest path to take following high school. His home country was politically hostile, and it could be dangerous for those in his community. Both of his parents wanted him to leave the country to be safe, to continue to play golf, and to receive an education. John spoke only Spanish when he arrived in the United States, making communication with those at his new institution stressful and intimidating.

A child of divorce, John and his sister received greater support from their mother than from their father. His mother was a loan officer at a bank. Although John shared a similar passion in golf with his father, who was a golf pro in his hometown, support from his father was lacking. He shared, “I am really close to my mom. . . . My mom is supportive. My dad is kind of supportive, but not at all. Like he tries to support me, but he never did.” He was close to his extended family, who lived close by.
Neither of John’s parents had a college degree. His sister was the first in his family to
graduate from college, and John would be the second. He described his family as “workers.”
Education hadn’t been a priority for his parents prior to him and his sister going to college.
Over the previous decade, more and more people in John’s community had been choosing to
go to college instead of going straight to work. John noted, “We are all trying to get out of
my country right now. So, we are all trying to leave,” as he explained what many of his
friends from high school chose to do after graduation. He added that having a degree would
help him only if he stayed in the United States; returning to his home country with a degree
would not give him an advantage in getting a job.

There were only four sports offered in high school in John’s home country, and golf
was not one of them. Golf was a club sport. John had been practicing golf since the age of
four. To advance, an athlete had to play in tournaments and pay a federation. Players
continued to advance through tournaments with their club until they qualified for an
international team, John explained. He added, however, that it was relatively inexpensive to
play in tournaments, which he paid for all by himself. Once a player makes an international
team for his or her country, they “can kick you out of their club.” Since the age of 14, John
had been competing on an international team. The majority of John’s teammates had left his
home country and was playing golf in the United States.

Olivia

English was not Olivia’s native language, nor was she able to speak English very well
when she arrived in the Midwest. English is not one of the top two spoken languages in her
home country, which provided a challenge for her when she arrived at her college. Although
Olivia compared her home city in her South American/Caribbean region country to the size
of Chicago, the neighborhood in which she grew up was close knit, where the children all played together and knew each other when they were younger.

Although Olivia’s parents were divorced, which separated her three siblings, she described her family as very close. Her parents lived in different cities, Olivia living with her mother and older sister, and her younger brother and sister living with their father. Olivia noted that her family did not have a lot of money because her parents were divorced. Her mother was working for herself and owned a bar, and her father was a cook.

Olivia knew from an early age that she would be going to college. With her family’s mindset that education was very important, she recalled dreaming about what she was going to be or what she would like to study when she got older. Her parents had completed high school and then went to work. Her sister, however, had recently completed high school and would be attending college in a neighboring country. Many of Olivia’s classmates in her graduating class of approximately 100 students also followed suit, attending college after graduating from high school and then entering the workforce.

Olivia described that, in her country, athletic sports in high school were taught in class: “We learn a little bit of all the sports.” She added that sports within high schools weren’t organized like college or national teams; they were held in physical education classes. Soccer was a popular club sport in her country, although the support for women playing soccer versus the support men had within Olivia’s country was drastically different. Women’s soccer was given very little support compared to men, thus making it difficult for women to play. In addition to having to pay for equipment, uniforms, and travel in some clubs, a player also may have had to “help the coach pay the taxes to play.” Due to an injury, Olivia stayed in her country and practiced with her club team before coming to the United
States. When asked if her teammates went on to college to play soccer, she responded that it was difficult in her country for someone to handle both college and practicing soccer. With the effort it took to study for coursework and pass in college, many had to choose to either attend college or play soccer: “We don’t have the option to do both; it’s pretty hard.”

Katie

When Katie arrived in the Midwest from her South American/Caribbean region country, she could express herself and understand what others were saying, although English was not her native language. Speaking two languages made transitioning to her new institution comfortable for Katie. In addition, having the ability to communicate daily with her close, very supportive family using Skype also eased the transition process.

In the city where Katie lived, which was considered “smaller city,” her family was considered middle class; however, even though her father was building houses, her mother was cleaning houses, and they owned two rental houses, they would be considered lower class if they were living in a larger city. Katie described her parents as hard-working people from a small rural town. Many of her neighbors were family and were very close: “Everybody knows everybody.” Katie approximated that her hometown had a population of around 25,000 residents.

When asked about the importance of education in her family, Katie responded that her parents didn’t study much because it was very poor where she was from. Her father had to work, but he emphasized how important it was to continue to study. “He is very proud of me,” Katie said. When she was in eighth grade, she asked her parents if she could attend a federal school, like a public school, in another city. Studies at the federal school would better prepare her for attending a university. Her parents agreed and she passed the entrance
test. The school offered science and math courses as well as professional or more advanced studies in the areas of agricultural-based calculus and botany. Many of Katie’s friends from the federal school went on to public universities and had since graduated. Her only brother recently graduated from high school and was planning to attend college in her home country. Katie knew she would go to college, but money was a constant concern. Slightly different from in the United States, the public universities were the best institutions in Katie’s country. Within her community, education was extremely important as well; however, only about half of Katie’s classmates from her former school went on to attend a university or college—the rest chose to work.

With regard to athletics, Katie commented, “I was born playing soccer in the streets, but women’s soccer is more difficult. My entire life, I [have played] futsal because it is more accessible.” In Katie’s city, a vast majority of females played futsal, which she explained was indoor soccer. She continued by saying that it was hard for women to excel in outdoor soccer because there were not many teams on which to play in smaller towns. She also believed that it was because there were not enough men who wanted to train women to play soccer, and women do not train women. There were no club teams where Katie was from, and she said that she played “just for fun.” After graduating from high school, Katie continued to play futsal on a university team for fun. They traveled and competed against other universities; it was because of this that she was discovered and recruited to play soccer in the United States. Because she had little outdoor soccer experience, Katie chose to play on an outdoor club team for 5 months to gain skills before she left for college in the United States.
Sam

Sam, who considered himself a White European, arrived in the United States with limited English skills. He was an only child and came from a very close and supportive family; he added that his parents were “like friends.” His parents were hard-working, middle class people, his mother a counselor and his father working for a neon lighting company. Coming from a city of approximately 150,000 people, Sam said that the community in which he grew up in was not close knit. He described his neighbors as living for themselves.

The importance of education could be found in their household, as Sam’s parents always insisted that he study first and then focus on basketball. Both parents had completed a degree after high school; his mother had a college degree and his father had a technical degree. Sam’s focus from the start was on basketball. The school he attended was a special school for athletes with 30 people in his class. Although the school centered on sports, many of Sam’s classmates did not play beyond high school. Five of Sam’s friends continued to play their sport, but the remaining students in his class continued to focus solely on their academics.

Sam shared that, in Europe, club sports were more popular as opposed to in the United States, where high school sports were more popular. Sam took advantage of his basketball talents by participating in his country’s 16, 18, and 19 and under national basketball teams. He believed that these opportunities played a valuable role in his athletic journey thus far.

Rebecca

Rebecca, a White, European, female basketball player whose second language was English, was a student-athlete who was recruited by a 4-year university but was placed at a
community college to improve her academic scores as a student-athlete. Because she knew only a few sentences in English when she arrived, the adjustment to college in the United States was a challenge at first but by the end of her community college career, she didn’t regret it.

Rebecca was an only child to parents who first owned a pub in her home country. As the success of the pub started to fail due to high taxes, her parents sold it and began working together in the truffle business. Their closeness carried over into the support of their daughter. Rebecca noted that her parents were “basically why I came here.” After completing the eighth grade, both of Rebecca’s parents attended trade schools. Her parents wanted her to have fun and, although they wanted her to stay close to home, they knew that her education was very important and encouraged her to study in the United States. They taught her how to be strong and how to support herself in the things that she wanted. Rebecca’s gifts for Christmas and birthdays consisted of money, which she saved to purchase things she needed and paid for herself. She explained, “They supported me by helping to teach me how to be able to support myself.”

Rebecca shared the financial cycle of struggles her family faced depending on the season of the year. There were daily struggles of not knowing where money was going to come from, especially from February through May, which were “dead months.” She shared the importance of saving money during the year to get through those spring months. Her mother would leave her home country to work several countries away to provide an income for their family.

The closest city to Rebecca’s small village of 600 people had approximately 100,000 residents. Her school comprised 1,000 students with all grades under one roof. Rebecca
explained that once students completed the eighth grade they could continue right into high school; if they were into sports, they could take a sport class and stay with the same athletes throughout the day and take classes together. Several of her athlete friends chose to play at universities in the United States, whereas other classmates took advantage of opportunities to study abroad in other European countries.

When younger, Rebecca participated in track along with basketball until the eighth grade. She explained that most athletes who played sports in school were told to participate in track as well due to their athleticism. Rebecca chose to give up track and focus on basketball because of its future professional opportunities. It was at this young age that she knew that she wanted to commit to the sport of basketball and play for her city’s team. She described the lack of competitiveness in high school basketball, which was why she chose to play for a club team. Rebecca added that the cost of participating may not sound like much in the United States, but in her country, it was considered quite expensive.

**Sarah**

International students from the North American region, though being closest to home in distance, can still face the challenges of adjusting to the Midwest. Sarah, who classified herself as Caucasian and a native English speaker, said that coming from a close, supportive family made it difficult to attend college so far from home. Because she grew up as an only child and with her grandparents living close by, there were times when she first arrived that she second guessed her decision to come to a community college in the United States, but it helped greatly that her family were all very supportive of her decision to be a student-athlete abroad.
Sarah’s father attended college in the United States and returned home to serve as a firefighter. Her mother, who was once a waitress, went back to school to become a 911 operator. Having grown up in a well-off middle class family, Sarah noted that her parents emphasized the importance of education by wanting her to further her education and graduate with a college degree. Sarah attended two high schools as a teen: first, a public school with 500 students in her class followed by a private Christian school where the class sizes were much smaller. She described that many of her classmates went on to 4-year institutions but also that a large number went into the workforce. The ethnically diverse community in which Sarah grew up was quite large, so large that she did not know many of her neighbors well.

Although Sarah’s sport of choice was softball, it was not the most popular sport for student-athletes in her area to play. She noted that “sports weren’t as big back home as they are in the States.” She added that there were a lot of sports outside of school from which to choose and, depending on which sport and club team one chose to play, they could be quite expensive. Just as Sarah did, many of her teammates went on to become student-athletes in their respective sport at different schools following high school.

**Thomas**

Thomas was a baseball player who came to the United States from the Asia/Pacific region. His extremely limited English skills made the transition to competing in the United States very difficult. He was the oldest of four boys in his family, which he described as not being close knit. An upper-middleclass family in a city of 3 million people, Thomas’s family owned a small business that his mother helped his father run.
Thomas remembered that his parents emphasized the importance of education. His father had graduated with his high school diploma, whereas his mother had gone on to graduate from college. Thomas noted that, although many in his community went on to college and that it was important for them to finish, it was not important to him. He added that it was common for others who graduated from high school to then enter the industry workforce.

School sports were offered at Thomas’s school, but he chose to play only baseball. He also participated in the high school drama program while in school. Several of the athletes with whom Thomas played went on to play in his home country.

**Tammy**

Tammy expressed that she became a student-athlete in the United States because, despite resistance from her mother: “I wanted to be away from home. I wanted to be on my own.” Choosing to come to the United States from her home in the North American region changed the relationship between her and her mother. Tammy said that, even though her father and younger brother were supportive of her pursuit of to play college softball in the United States, her mother believed that it was a waste of money and would delay her education. Tammy shared, “I think our bond was better before I was offered the scholarship to the United States. We had a good relationship, and then I saw her reaction after I was offered a scholarship; I really didn’t like her as much anymore.” She added that she was trying to avoid conversations with her mother that were related to school and what she wanted to do.

Tammy considered her family middle class. Her father was a mechanic, and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. Her father had a trade school degree, whereas her mother
did not go on to college after finishing high school. Although her parents said that education important, they believed that having connections was more important for getting a job. Many people “get a degree and then don’t do anything with it,” in Tammy’s parents’ opinion. She shared that it is “more popular” for people in her community to receive a degree beyond high school versus not.

Tammy graduated in a class of nearly 300 students from a public school that offered soccer, basketball, and track and field for athletic programs. Her high school did not offer baseball or softball; those were considered club sports, which were expensive in which to participate. Many of Tammy’s classmates went to college, and several of her softball teammates went to community colleges in the United States to compete in softball as well. Tammy’s experience traveling for softball and being on her own, her independence, and English being her native language aided in her adjustment to her community college in the Midwest.

Eric

Eric was a basketball player from the European region. His native language was not English, but he arrived being able to speak English and a little bit of German. When describing his family, Eric explained that his parents and sister were extremely supportive. Financially, with his family considered upper middle class in his home country, Eric described, “We can do good for ourselves.” His mother was an accountant, and his father was a specialist doctor.

Education within Eric’s family was the number one priority. His mother graduated from an economic institution, his father completed his medical degree, and his sister was attending medical school. Eric stated that, within his home city of nearly 2 million residents,
his high school was ranked and quite large. Although it was called a grammar school, he
described it as being similar to an American high school. Many the students who graduated
from the high school Eric attended continued their education and received college degrees;
however, not many left the country to study abroad.

Eric began playing basketball at the age of 12. He described the basketball system in
his home country as being different from that in the United States: there were high school–
amateur and professional clubs. Some clubs would support athletes so there was no cost to
belong, but Eric added, “As a player, you cannot get paid as a high school-amateur. It is not
until you become a professional that you receive [a] commission.” The basketball system
was not designed for athletes to play beyond high school unless they were good enough to
compete as a professional. Many of Eric’s teammates stopped playing basketball after high
school due to the high basketball standards in his home country. Basketball became a hobby
as his teammates shifted their focus to their academics while attending college.

**Jason**

When one’s native language is English, transition can be somewhat easier; however,
the 8,500 miles between the Asia/Pacific region where Jason grew up and the Midwest didn’t
lessen his feelings of missing family. Jason shared his feelings when describing the
closeness and supportiveness when speaking about his parents and younger brother: “They
were happy for me that I was obviously applying to school and doing what I wanted to do.
But at the same time, they wanted me to stay. It was a bit of a two-way thing.”

Jason described his family as a middle class family; his dad was a civil engineer, and
his mom was a receptionist at a local hospital. Education was important to Jason’s parents,
who were the ones who persuaded Jason to continue his education. The degree itself did not
matter to them as long as he finished with a degree. His mother had finished high school but
did not continue on for additional education. His father, however, attended a university for
his degree in civil engineering. Attending college after high school was very common for
those in Jason’s community. “As soon as you graduate, pretty much everyone goes straight
to college,” he said.

Jason lived just under an hour away from the capital of his state, which had
approximately 4 million people. He attended a private, Christian school that housed grades 1
to 12 and comprised nearly 1,500 students. Jason attended this school his entire life and
graduated with a class of 100, “not too big, but not too small.” Growing up on an acreage,
Jason did not live extremely close to neighbors, but they did have Christmas parties and other
friendly neighbor gatherings with those who lived close by.

When asked what athletic opportunities he had while in school, Jason explained that
he represented his school in baseball three times and qualified for state on eight different
occasions. He stated that school sports were a lot different in his home region compared to
the Midwest:

I’ve noticed because I went to watch the local high school team; you’d play after
school. If we’re going to play in a school sport, like play against other schools, we
actually play during school time. During lunch on a Wednesday afternoon, the whole
grade 10, 11, and 12 will travel on a Wednesday during lunch to go to other schools.
Then, they’ll play for the last couple of hours of school and head back. Then once
school is out, we go home or something. When we go to our school sports, there’s no
one really attending. It’s just teachers refereeing and seeing the plays. It’s different
compared to here.”
Jason added that, in his home country, they played against both public and private schools, which was called “interschool sport.” Representing one’s school in baseball did have a cost; according to Jason, it cost a player around $500 per season to cover insurance and different fees, and the expenses could add up.

The universities in his home region did not have competitive sports. Jason explained that there were usually two choices after high school for baseball players: sign to play professionally or go to college and quit playing baseball. Jason noted that he played with a lot of players who had signed professionally. He added that his country had a professional baseball league, but it usually comprised older players who had returned from playing in other professional leagues overseas.

Themes

Theme 1: Factors Influencing College-Bound International Student-Athletes

Prior life experiences were found to impact the decisions and objectives of the participants. Patterns made up of goals to obtain an education, improve athletic skills, and secure an athletic scholarship emerged to support the theme of influential precollege experience factors. All participants aimed to begin their education in the United States to meet their goal of excelling beyond the educational level of many of their parents. Second, many of the participants conveyed that they had been competing in their sport most of their lives. They believed that utilizing their given abilities to get to the United States, followed by honing their athletic skills to advance them from the community college level to the 4-year university level, were their ultimate academic and athletic goals. The third and final pattern that supports this theme was the importance of being granted a scholarship to attend an institution of higher education in the United States. Each participant selected a
community college or, as one participant described it, “a stepping stone to get to a 4-year,” based on the best scholarship and overall package the college offered.

**Pattern 1: Education—the driving force to achieve dreams.** All participants except one expressed that receiving an education was important within their family. This dominant response reflected the lack of college degrees held by parents of the participants. Nine of the participants had at least one parent who did not have education higher than a high school diploma. Participants consistently divulged that, due to the limited education level attained within their household, their parents instilled the importance of education in their children. For example, Jacob said that his father, who had completed high school, was “forcing us and always encouraging us on the importance of education.” Katie explained that her parents’ fourth grade education and the reasoning behind the importance of education in her family “were very important. My mom and my dad didn’t study much because [they were] very poor and he [had] to work. He always tell[s] me how important [it is]; [he] want[s] me to continue to study, and he’s very proud of me.” John stated his parents’ feelings toward education were as follows:

> We are . . . workers. My dad just came [from] high school and just started to work, and my mom was the same. . . . They push right now, because . . . obviously they know that if you have a good degree that is going to help you a lot.

Athletes often are stereotyped as “dumb jocks” or they are seen as caring only about playing the sport they play. College athletes, however, are required to maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA at the NJCAA level and a 2.5 GPA at the NCAA level to compete. College athletes often have a higher graduation rate compared to their nonathlete counterparts due to the standards they are required to maintain (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). All the international student-
athletes in this case study had degree completion as one of their goals. Four participants had aspirations to continue in college to receive their master’s degree, in the areas of accounting, physiotherapy, sports science, and a Ph.D. in higher education, respectively. The significance of the academic standards was more important to Eric than was the amount of scholarship dollars and would continue as he transferred to a 4-year university. He conveyed, “Even now when I consider whether to transfer, even though I’ll maybe have a full scholarship somewhere, if their academic program is not up to standards, I’ll probably . . . refuse it. I’ll say I’ll probably go for the academic stuff.” The importance of academic programs at transfer institutions was reiterated by other participants as they discussed their educational plans in pursuit of their 4-year degree.

The expectations of a higher level of competition were echoed by four participants. However, Eric realized that the competition at the community college level was more aggressive than he had anticipated. Jacob stated, “It exceeded my expectations, I really loved it.” Thomas said that he had “made a good choice” and improved both his athletic and English skills. His goal was to compete at a higher level than the competition in his home country, and he believed that playing for his program in the United States accomplished that. John praised his coaches as being “high caliber and exactly what I wanted.” “It turned out the way that I wanted to,” he said when speaking of his program and college choice.

**Pattern 2: Improving their “art”—honoring athletic ability.** With many participants having played their sport since before they were 10 years old, each of these multisport athletes brought nearly a decade of experience of competing from the city level to the international level. Olivia played soccer against men because there were not many women’s teams in her city. “It was really hard. I was told many times I couldn’t play because I was a
girl,” she noted. Jacob, Sam, and John all represented their countries while playing for their national team, thus broadening their experiences in travel, exposure, and levels of competition. Having the opportunity to improve their athletic skills in their chosen sport was one of the reasons they chose to attend a college in the United States, closely followed by attaining a “good education.”

The athletic goals of the participants did not waiver much after their arrival. Improving skills remained at the top of many of their lists, as did earning a scholarship to a 4-year institution. Several crossed off the initial goals they had accomplished and added new goals, both athletic and academic, to reach for in upcoming years.

Nine of the 12 participants considered the style of play at community colleges in the Midwest as being more competitive and fast paced than in their home country. Eric shared, “I adapted; it’s not really an option. Europe has White players; here, the Black players are really strong, really fast. It’s a different pace than home.”

Although the majority of the participants believed that their coaches helped them in various aspects of conditioning and preparedness to improve as athletes, Rebecca, Thomas, and Sam shared that they believed their respective coaches could have motivated them further. Rebecca’s coach was “too calm,” and Sam’s coach needed to be more of a “boss.” John, Katie, and Jason said that the forceful voices from their coaches encouraged them to become better athletes. “We are definitely challenged here. They push us,” Jason repeated twice.

When asked if adjustments were needed to fit in with their teammates, three participants indicated that they felt pressure to prove that they could compete in and play their sport well. Rebecca faced the fear of rejection in her first semester:
Last year when I came here, people . . . didn’t know me, and one of those international boys start[ed] to play basketball and five on five. . . . On the court, they could see that I could play, and I could show how I could play so, and when I came through, immediately they started to accept me.

Two others shared that their teammates “pushed” or motivated them to work harder. Listening to their teammates and following up by adjusting were important for three participants. Sam, however, was the only participant to feel that he needed to learn or mimic the lifestyle of his teammates. He said that he adjusted by speaking and acting differently to fit in with others. Because of his English language limitations, John repeatedly struggled during the first 6 months with language barrier issues with his teammates.

**Pattern 3: Influential role of athletic scholarships in the decision-making process.** The participants were heavily centered on playing their sport—improving skills and gaining experience—followed by receiving an education. However, they needed a scholarship to come to the United States. The importance of receiving scholarships was prominently stated by these international student-athletes during their interviews. For example, Olivia explained, “I need this . . . scholarship, because I don’t have help; I don’t have a way to pay.” Other voices resonated with similar concerns, such as “[I] must have a full ride,” “[It’s] important to have a full ride,” and “[I] needed close to a full ride, it was the main reason.” “It was a pretty big deal,” “really important issue,” and “had to have” were also stated as the participants spoke about what it took for them to have the opportunity to compete and receive an education in the United States. Jason articulated that the scholarship was pretty big for me, [as] just coming up with the money was going to be tough if I didn’t have a scholarship to back me. Back home, you don’t actually
have to pay for school straight up. . . . And you don’t pay a cent for your tuition when you are starting. And it’s not until you finish school and get a job paying $40,000 that your government will start takin’ money out of that, like your taxes and stuff. So when kids go to university, all they have to pay for is books. So it’s pretty easy back home compared to here, where you’ve got to come up with thousands of dollars straight up.

Tammy was one of two participants who had multiple scholarship offers and selected the best offer. Although obtaining a scholarship “was the number one thing” for Tammy, the choice to accept a scholarship in the United States had changed the relationship between her and her mother in a negative way, as she conveyed that it had placed a strain on their relationship. Even though Tammy had received a scholarship, she and her mother did not talk about softball when they spoke on the phone; it was something Tammy felt best to avoid.

Obtaining an on-campus job was not a necessity for many of the participants. However Katie offered insight into the importance of having an on-campus job while going to school:

Yes, I must have a job. It’s really important to have, because . . . my dad’s [not] going to support me always. [My parents do] not complain about it. They don’t ask me to work. They [are] never going to do that. But I know it’s hard for them to send money when I ask. Because of this, I want to help them.

During her interview, Olivia explained the important of money and needing to work on campus:
It was very important if they can help me with these. I was saving the most that I can.

Now I have 3 months. I’m broke. I have no money. I just start[ed] work last week.

The good thing [is] my roommates; I know everything I need, they support me.

Jacob agreed that it was important to have an on-campus job to relieve the financial strain on his family. He added that it was normal in his country for children to support their parents, such as by sending money home to their families. Jacob struggled with his finances during his first year, which caused him to ask his mother for money to pay for food on the weekends because meal services at his institution were not provided then. He added that having an on-campus job during his second year eased the financial burdens that he had experienced in year one. He became a resident assistant in his residence hall to eliminate the need to ask his parents for financial support. “We are not rich,” Jacob stated in reflecting on the importance of needing a full-ride scholarship and a job on campus. Thomas reinforced the magnitude of receiving a scholarship to assist his parents as “very important. Good for parents . . . expensive.”

When discussing their financial needs, seven of the 12 international student-athlete participants expressed the importance of a scholarship to be able to attend college. These participants shared that at least a half to full scholarship was necessary for them to come to the United States. Scholarships that covered books and room and board expenses were a necessity for most of them as well. Katie shared that she would not have been able to pay for her books without the help of a scholarship. The three native English-speaking participants shared that their parents supported them with funds throughout their time in the United States. They did not mention the importance of needing to receive a scholarship to play in
the United States; however, they previously stated that receiving a scholarship and choosing the "best offer" influenced their decision to attend the school they had selected.

Scholarship offers played a significant role in the Midwest community college selection process. Of the five participants who indicated that scholarship dollars affected their decision, three stated that they would have chosen to go elsewhere if the same scholarship offer had come from a college located in another region of the country. Five participants stated that they chose their college based on the reputation of the program or league in which the college played. Sam added, “Sun is nice, but coach and great play are more important.” Olivia and Thomas chose a community college in the Midwest for reasons beyond the nationally recognized programs they play for.

**Theme 2: Transition to Finding Their Place on Campus**

Feelings of isolation, rejection, loneliness, and feeling like an outcast can all resonate with international student-athletes once they arrive on campus. Depending on prior experiences and skills, when an international student-athlete first arrives, these feelings can often result in a variety of effects ranging from homesickness to mental health issues for students. The language barriers with which international student-athletes arrive comprise one of the three predominant fears revealed by the participants in this qualitative study. Understanding their nonnative language, both verbal and written, served as a challenge for many participants. The distance from home and the absence of their immediate support system was another fear and represents the second pattern associated with this theme. Emotions can range from excitement to nervousness when venturing to a new locale; however, the ability to connect with one’s family and friends through social media channels may reduce this overwhelming fear. Finally, becoming accustomed to a new culture was
aided by those who the international student-athletes first met, their teammates, and their coaches. The fear of fitting into a new academic environment, social life, athletic team, and campus and community culture was reiterated by multiple participants. The role played by teammates for new international student-athletes was a lifeline for survival on the community college campus.

**Pattern 1: English language fears from commitment to graduation.** Overcoming language barrier fears resonated with nine of the 12 participants. John recalled that, although he was excited to play golf, he feared not being accepted by others due to his poor English skills: “It was not good at all for me in the [first 3 months. . . . I was kind of sad about the English, but I was kind of excited about golf.” Olivia, who was one of five participants who admitted being “shy” when they arrived, said this about her biggest fear in coming to the United States:

> The language, because I’m really shy sometimes, so the language was like really hard [for] me because I arrive[d] and I was like, “I don’t understand nothing.” My coach, I didn’t understand him . . . the first month at all . . . I was like “I can’t understand you ever.” So, this was a big fear, and trusting people [who] I don’t know, like how they’re used to do things. I [did] a lot of things they are not used to, and they [were] scared sometimes, and this was my biggest fear.

Three participants enrolled in at least one ESL course during their first semester. Two of them believed that the ESL course did not help them improve their English skills very well. They would have preferred them to be “more intense,” and they noted that “the instructor did not speak my language so it was difficult to understand.” Other international student-athletes who did not have strong English language skills struggled in writing and
grammar. Sam shared that he most likely could have benefited from an ESL course, but he was given a schedule by his coaches who did not ask about his language level prior to registering him for his first semester classes. Some participants expressed that it was beneficial to have teammates in the same class who could answer questions or explain the classroom discussion.

Participants gave credit to the college experience or college success courses, which were very beneficial to the international student-athletes because it allowed them to learn more about the college and several of their basic needs, such as opening a bank account, after arriving on campus. Olivia added that she thought it was helpful that all the students in the class were international students, because they all had a similar background and needs upon arriving.

Those participants who were native or fluent English speakers excelled in the classroom. Subjects such as mathematics, business, writing, and science were strong areas for these participants. Sarah, Jacob, and Jason thought that the courses at their community college were easier than the courses taught in their high school in their home country. Sarah considered some classes as a review.

Seven participants shared concerns with their English skills, whether it was writing and grammar or comprehension in the classroom. Having to use Google Translate, a dictionary, or recording the lectures to translate later, which was a time-consuming process, caused John and Thomas to struggle in the classroom. John commented,

I was . . . on my phone every time looking up things . . . because I didn’t know what happened in the class, so I wanted . . . to understand. I couldn’t say, “Yeah I understand.” The class just starts, so I was . . . completely lost. I couldn’t take notes
or something. I just put on my phone . . . Google translate every time. . . . When the teacher [is] talking I just put my phone and . . . record the whole class and then try to translate after class.

Thomas also had difficulties adjusting to the use of computers because paper was used most often in his home county. Although mathematics is the same around the world, Jacob had issues with using an American calculator, so his mother sent a calculator from home so Jacob could complete his coursework. Katie, Tammy, and Rebecca needed tutors in English writing, and April commented how difficult it was to write a 10-page research paper in a nonnative language.

Several participants found their teachers and coaches helpful during their academic adjustment. However, Olivia spoke of one instructor who did not care if she was an international student or not—speaking during class was not allowed. This made it difficult for Olivia to ask questions of her teammate, who spoke the same language, to translate or explain questions during class. She added that her other instructors were more understanding. John credited his instructors with assistance as well: “They were pretty helpful. I think they cared. . . . they [knew] I didn’t speak the language, so they helped me with that every time.”

Of the participants who were interviewed, John seemed to struggle the most with his language skills. He recalled his initial fears:

I was scared, but I had to do it, because how am I going to learn how to do it. . . . Obviously, I was worried about what they were going to say. They are going to say I am a retard, I do not know how to speak. So yeah, but I had to . . . talk. If I don’t talk, how am I going to learn?
Rebecca’s comments supported John’s concerns:

I was afraid that people weren’t going to accept me because I was international and adjustment made me a bit nervous. So . . . maybe I cannot understand what to say or what if they don’t like my answer or how they’re going to except my answers, you know? Because it’s hard to . . . be international. Sometimes I was unsure of my words because . . . speak[ing] English . . . I know what I said, but with time, in my second year here . . . I’m good.

**Pattern 2: Homesickness—discovering a home away from home.** Homesickness is experienced by the vast majority of international students, and international student-athletes are no different. Most sports have a season in the fall when school begins, along with the start of classes, which offers a diversion from thinking about home when these athletes first arrive. For the participants in this study, the duration of their homesickness ranged from none to 3 months.

With the support of their families and friends, several participants experienced feelings of excitement and happiness, whereas others felt nervous, scared, and anxious about their new college, their sport, meeting new people, and their English skills. Thomas’s initial adjustment feelings were that he felt “everything: happy, excited, and scared. I wanted to leave because I was homesick, but I had a lot of support from home. I am good now.” Jacob was excited about school, but scared about basketball. He said that he feared not knowing what the competition would be like and that he knew it would be tough. Like Jacob, Sam was also nervous about adjusting to the style of play on the basketball court. Sam’s feelings of homesickness came and went with the issues that arose from basketball. Feelings of homesickness rang true for several participants who agreed that they missed their parents,
family pets, and food dishes native to their home country. Rebecca explained her feelings during her first semester:

I know that I talk a lot with my parents, as I miss them, and that I would say that I was homesick because I really enjoyed coming here and seeing new and I see how it works. So I really liked it, but . . . when we started [the] season, it was in November, but I couldn’t start thinking about what it was like back home all the time. Time goes faster [and] I could speak with my parents, because we have a lot of stuff, but . . . there [are] two periods, before the season and after the season; there’s time when [it] move[s] slow and you have time to think about everything like, “Oh my gosh, how to feel . . . about not being home now. And adjustment should start thinking about how you wish you were back home, I wish I could sleep, I could wish [for] some home food . . . I want normal food; which is my biggest issue.

The start of the season couldn’t come soon enough for the majority of the participants. Starting practice served as a means for the athlete’s mind to shift from thoughts of home to focusing on the athletic reasons for coming to the United States. Jason spoke about he would go to the beach every day and how much he enjoyed surfing; ocean views and warm sandy beaches were far from the black soil and mighty rivers of the Midwest. Jason added that training and studying every day accelerated the passing of time, thus diverting his thoughts from those of home.

Opportunities outside of athletics provided additional means of engagement for international student-athletes; however, time constraints reduced the available time athletes had to become involved in such activities. Sarah noted that, between her sport and academics, she had little free time in her schedule, and that when she had free time, she
wanted to do things on her own. Sam added that, after his athletic season began, there was not much time for anything outside of his sport and course work. Tammy stated that there were no activities provided at her institution, so many of the athletes got to know each other on their own. Tammy and Sarah both expressed regrets of not attending activities and being more involved. Sarah discussed that, although it would have made her “put herself out there more,” it also would have helped her open up to others. Jacob chose to become a resident assistant in his dormitory because he needed an on-campus job and that would allow him to meet new people. Although John and Sam articulated that they were at the college solely to play their sport and study, the remaining participants attended events that were offered by the activities staff or by the international department. Several also took advantage of off-campus activities such as movies, bowling, or fishing. Some found it advantageous to participate in these activities with teammates.

Social media channels have become a vital resource for many college students. This holds true for international students as well; having the opportunity to speak with a loved one daily bridged the distance and helped these participants overcome their feelings of being alone in a foreign land. Jacob spoke about his feelings of being homesick:

When I came here, probably the first 2 weeks, I was homesick. As soon as I got into basketball in school and my friends here, I didn’t mind because we get in touch through Skype as well as through Facebook.

Social media also served as a lifeline for April, as an injury sidelined her in the middle of her volleyball season. She recalled,

I twisted my ankle so I could not play. I was here to play [for the whole] season, and athletes don’t want to be sitting on the bench and watching their team. I missed
home. [It helped to] talk with my family and trying to do what I [could] to get better fast and be involved in other stuff or just sitting [at] the practice and not being in my room because I’m hurt.

When asked if anyone knew that she had an increased feeling of homesickness during that time, she said that she “didn’t think so,” and she did not share it with anyone either.

Emotional support for Olivia came from a teammate’s parent, who would bring food to games. Olivia described, “She [paid] attention like I’m important to them. And I feel really, really happy with this.” However, four participants believed that, with the support from their families back home, there was no need for additional support while at school. John commented that “it would have been great to have a host family, but basketball became my support system.” Katie found support from a teammate’s family, whereas Sarah received support from her roommate and boyfriend who attended her games while her parents watched the games online. Sarah offered insight into the impact of her roommate’s role in easing her feelings of missing home,

I like rooming with a sophomore just because she had been through it all so she really helped me a lot, especially . . . adjusting through some things; like there were some days where I was really homesick and she would help me through it. . . . Her parents came down a lot too; they were really nice to me as well. She brought me down to her house, ’cause she lives kind of close. She brought me to her house one night, and I had dinner with her family, so that was really nice.

**Pattern 3: Teammates create a sense of belonging.** Teammates emerged as the predominant influence providing the most assistance to the international student-athlete participants in adjusting to the Midwest, to college, socially, and in the classroom.
Teammates answered questions and showed them things related to the Midwest; coaches and roommates also played a role in adjustment to the Midwest. Teammates and coaches were identified as being the most helpful in adjusting to college. Comments such as “Coach was like our mom” or “Coach is like a dad” were echoed by four participants. Jacob commented, “Coach offered to help with anything I needed. Just caring about me that much gives me a [feeling that] I’m welcome here.” Olivia, Katie, and Tammy agreed that “approachable” was the word that best described their coach. Teammates and coaches answered questions and offered to take them to the store or to places off campus to purchase necessities.

The most common roommate for an international student-athlete is a teammate, who can give a new international student-athlete a first impression that can make or break their experience. The participants in this study conveyed an assortment of experiences with their new teammates. Living with a teammate can serve as a challenge if there is not open communication and an understanding of the diverse cultures within the room.

The participants discussed a plethora of positive experiences with their roommates and potential recommendations. Replicating these experiences and following these recommendations may provide an opportunity to enhance the adjustment experiences of future international student-athletes. Tammy found being assigned to room with a sophomore to be extremely beneficial, as her roommate taught her how to share and work together as roommates. Jacob’s domestic roommate provided him with the opportunity to learn more about American culture and people as he showed Jacob the college and community. Sam was assigned an international teammate as a roommate, and he commented, “Even though we were both international, we spoke Spanish in our room. It was good to room with an international because of the similarities.” April had the opposite
opinion about rooming with another international; she believed that living with someone who spoke a different foreign language would force both students to speak English within their room.

Interactions with teammates led to an enhanced social adjustment experience when the international student-athletes first arrived on campus. Teammates explained to the new student-athletes how things happened within the new culture and encouraged them to get involved in various aspects of college life. Sam and Olivia found that having friends other than their teammates was beneficial because they felt those other friends created a greater social adjustment experience for them. However, Rebecca observed that she felt that people didn’t respect women compared to her country and added that people talked about women in a negative way.

In the classroom, the international student-athletes believed that having teammates in the same classroom provided a sense of comfort. It allowed them to ask questions of teammates if needed. Having teammates in the same class provided opportunities to work together on homework, quizzes, and tests if needed. Rebecca asserted that

being in the classroom with no teammates, [I] really had to get to know people fast. [I] was more comfortable if someone was in the classroom as well, [so I] could ask questions. It’s hard to ask questions in a class of 40 people you don’t know.

On multiple occasions, participants mentioned that the coaches helped create the course schedule for the international student-athlete prior to their arrival on campus. Some thought that their schedule contained good courses, whereas others thought that, based on their English skill level, they were not prepared for the courses they were assigned, although it was extremely helpful to have teammates in the same classes. John noted that his
teammates “helped me with everything basically.” Because his international roommate understood the English language better than he did, he was a tremendous help to John passing his classes. Similar to John, Olivia and Thomas also received help from an international teammate to translate during class and for homework assignments.

One personal necessity that many of the participants conveyed during their interviews was the constant need to rely on others for transportation. This was an adjustment for most because they had come from a large city where public transportation was readily available. Cab companies and bus systems may be found in cities, but smaller towns more than likely lack these public transportation options. Several participants felt that they often were a burden to others because they were constantly having to ask teammates or other students for rides. Sarah was fortunate to have a roommate who allowed her to borrow her car if needed.

Families of teammates played an integral part in the adjustment process for these international student-athletes. Sarah explained,

One of the girls I play with, her parents would always come out, and right off the bat we were friends and her parents pretty much treated me like one of their own. So it was kind of like that; that was nice to have since my parents weren’t here and they couldn’t come and watch me play. So it was kind of nice to have someone out there that pretty much treated me like a second daughter.

Additionally, Sarah felt lonely and homesick at first, but she claimed it was refreshing because it was a new experience. [I] needed to be more open and outgoing. [I’m] kind of shy, [and I] had to put myself out there and just get to know people, and talk to people [and] be in those situations to meet new people and get to know them better.
Participants described a variety of feelings, such as being overwhelmed, good, excited, nervous, scared, comfortable, shy, relieved, and wired, upon meeting their fellow team members for the first time. Katie believed that it was easier to make friends when everyone was new and no one knew each other. She also recalled that she was scared because her teammates didn’t speak the same language as she did. Jacob was both nervous and excited: “I was meeting my competition.” Sam felt as if he had to “show up” to gain respect. He believed he needed to prove to them that he could play because he was a European playing an American sport. Rebecca commented that there were not a lot of Black people in her home country, and several of her teammates were Black, therefore she was shy and waited for others to start the conversation.

The participants’ excitement carried into their first practice for four of the participants, whereas four others considered themselves tired and out of shape. Sarah shared that she was scared and nervous because, although she knew her coach from the recruitment process, she was unsure how her coach would be in practice. The same sentiment held true in her thoughts toward the sophomores on the teams: unsure about how they would treat their teammates. Two participants found their first practice interesting when comparing themselves to their teammates. Thomas had “never played baseball with American people” before.

Not all teammates made a positive impression on their international teammates. There also were teammates who were sophomores and felt entitled to demand the respect and control of their freshman teammates. This was the case for Olivia and her sophomore teammates, as she disclosed,
’Cause when we first came, we didn’t know [anything] about here. And they [were]
really focused in this thing to be like, “I’m a sophomore.” And they [thought] that
they [could] do anything that they want[ed]. . . . We really [had] almost a fight inside
the bus to go to a game ’cause one of them—I had my bag in my seat—and one of
them just [took] my bag and put it in another place ’cause she [wanted] my place.
And I say I’m sophomore. I can do that. In my country, we are used to respect[ing]
people. Our teammates, the sophomores, they’re respected ’cause they deserve, not
’cause they are older—some stuff like that. It’s unnecessary. And almost every day I
had to face this thing. And it was really, really hard [for] me. . . . I told my coach I
[didn’t] want to play with these guys ’cause they [were] pissing me off.

Rebecca and Sarah experienced minimal communication issues with teammates by
getting to know one other and finding everyone approachable. April was worried at first and
used her hands to talk with her teammates. Many of the words in English were difficult to
understand and needed to be explained. John continued to have language issues with his
teammates: “They didn’t care what I said or listen to me.” John shared that, although this
made him feel “bad,” it drove him to learn English as fast as he could. These feelings were
somewhat offset by his teammates asking questions about his home country, which in turn,
made John feel more welcomed. Katie continued to try to improve her relationship with
several of the sophomores on her team by organizing team meetings to discuss the conflicts
taking place within the team. She added that nothing that was agreed upon in the meetings
was ever followed through with on the field. Their coach eventually had to be involved to
handle the situation.
Some domestic teammates had difficulties accepting an international teammate. Olivia described her social adjustment experience to fit in when she first arrived as making her kind of nervous. I was discovering a new world to me; everything was new. I questioned how I was going to do, how my team will do, how we will do together. [I was] nervous and excited to see how the team would do.’ 

She added,  
We like to go to practice and games—happy to play music and talk. And the girls [were] more like they want[ed] to kill us. On the van going to practice, we [were] always making jokes and laughing and kind of . . . like too much happiness between us. Yeah, we had a meeting here in my room. We [apologized to] them ’cause we saw their faces on the van like [they were] not really happy with us. We kind of had to make some adjustment and be [quieter] going to games and going to practice. 

**Summary**

In this study, the adjustment experience of international student-athletes at community colleges in the Midwest provided many positive academic, social, and athletic experiences. The participants’ precollege experiences revealed the motivating forces behind attending and competing at a community college in the Midwest. Perseverance and resiliency were displayed by these tenacious international student-athletes as they overcame barriers during their adjustment experience. Student-athletes gained knowledge about themselves and a new culture by taking advantage of their athletic skills and studying abroad. Athletic skills were improved upon as each participant worked toward degree attainment. The participants overcame language barriers, homesickness, and pressures to be accepted as
an international student in the Midwest region of the United States. Although multiple participants stated that they would have chosen to attend a 4-year university instead of a community college if given the opportunity, none of the participants expressed regrets for attending the institution chosen.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

For this qualitative case study, I examined international student-athlete adjustment experiences at community colleges in the Midwest. In Chapter 1, I shed light on the importance of studying the adjustment experience of international student-athletes. The second chapter includes a discussion of the literature surrounding this understudied phenomenon and the research related to international student-adjustment, athletics, community college athletics, and international student-athletes at community colleges. Chapter 3 comprises a description and discussion of the methodology used as the framework of this case study. The backgrounds of the study participants are introduced in Chapter 4, followed by the research findings organized according to the themes that emerged from the findings based upon participant responses. In Chapter 5, the findings are related back to the literature through the endorsement or challenging of the prior research related to this international student-athlete study. After the summary of the findings, the final chapter also includes recommendations for future research and my reflections on the international student-athlete adjustment experience.

The purpose of this case study was to ascertain international students-athletes’ reasonings behind their college selection process and illuminate their college–life transition and experiences. The timing of this research study is critical. With the change of the NJCAA regulations, which lifted the roster quota allowance for international student-athletes, it is vital for administrators, coaching staff, and other college personnel to understand the adjustment process for international student-athletes. The foundation of this study was framed around three research questions:
1. Why do international student-athletes choose community colleges to continue their education and athletic careers?

2. How do community college international student-athletes transition socially and academically to a community college?

3. What are the unique experiences of international student-athletes attending community colleges?

Upon final analysis of the data, the themes brought forth during this study fulfilled the foundational questions posed for the research. Although the adjustment experiences faced by several of the international student-athlete participants could be observed as comparable, each experience contained unique qualities.

**Summary of Findings**

**Research Question 1: Why do international student-athletes choose community colleges to continue their education and athletic careers?**

Driven by the opportunity to further their education, international student-athletes utilize their athletic skills to attain degree completion. The athletic skills that they possess allow them to gain attention from college coaches in the United States and receive an athletic scholarship. Without such scholarships, the majority of international student-athletes would not be able to afford to attend college abroad. The low cost of a community college education is as enticing to an international student as it is to a domestic student. Anayah and Kuk (2015) agreed that the affordability, as well as the geographical variety, of community colleges allow international students the opportunity to gain global experience through higher education. The findings of this study revealed that all 12 participants arrived with goals of degree attainment, with five also planning on seeking graduate degrees at the conclusion of their athletic careers.
Community colleges are the first stepping stone for many international student-athletes to improve their athletic skills and advance to a 4-year institution (Anayah & Kuk, 2015). Several of this study’s participants agreed with Anayah and Kuk’s view of community college as a stepping stone. Some participants didn’t know the U.S. college structure and what a community college was. For instance, Jason described his experience as coming in blind to the community college system. The findings of this study suggest that international student athletes seek institutions that offer the best package deal when it comes to the college, program, and scholarship. In fact, many athletes are not concerned with the geographical location of the institution, such as whether it is in the Midwest, but rather are more concerned about the amount of the scholarship or the opportunity to compete immediately. Tammy and Thomas shared that the main factor in their decision to attend a community college was the cost of attendance. Being able to compete immediately allows athletes to improve and advance their skills at a faster pace. Improving their athletic skills and obtaining a scholarship to advance to a 4-year institution were the goals of many of the international student-athlete participants in this study.

Similar to what was discovered by Fass-Holmes and Vaughn (2014, 2015), who focused their studies on international students at community colleges, international student-athletes attend community colleges to improve or develop their English language skills. This study’s findings reflect that many international student-athletes arrive with fears that their English skills are inadequate. Additional fears of being ridiculed or laughed at due to their ineptness at communication haunted these students, often for at least the first 3 months after arrival at their college. The inability to understand and comprehend classroom discussions, along with difficulties communicating with instructors, can be the root of additional stressors
for international student-athletes. Zhou et al. (2008) questioned the relationship of communication and comprehension between instructors and students. International student-athletes’ reliance on teammates being in the same classroom often helped their comprehension of materials during or following the class. Having the coursework explained at a later time allowed international student-athletes to understand the discussion and materials at their own pace. Participants also indicated that they chose a community college due to its smaller class size or institution size, which would allow them to have a more direct approach with others in learning the English language.

**Research Question 2: How do community college international student-athletes transition socially and academically to a community college?**

The transition process for international student-athletes varies based on a multitude of variables. The support and relationship that students have with their family can ultimately affect the transition or adjustment experience they have when attending a new institution. This is supported by theories of the social support system necessary for international students during the cross-cultural adjustment process (Adelman, 1988; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1994, 1999). The home life of a student—their parent’s marital status, financial status, and closeness or support—may present challenges for the international student-athlete. Stressors from home can mean additional continued stress for international student-athletes who leave home to study abroad and may lengthen the adjustment process. The prior experiences of the student-athletes in this study, in relation to travel and their family support and influence, played major roles in their adjustment experience, a finding that concurs with the Ridinger and Pastore’s (2000) adjustment model, which displays the impact of antecedents leading to adjustment progression and final outcomes experienced by international student-athletes.
Homesickness was experienced by all the international student-athlete participants in this study. Missing family and friends, the longing for food from their home country, fears of not fitting in, and language barriers all played an influential role in the homesickness of the participants. McLachlan and Justice (2009) illustrated that international students may endure several months of emotional distress as they make efforts to fully adjust to their new campus environment. The experience of each participant varied in the duration and degree of homesickness and was based on personal comfort levels or skills and absences related to home.

The findings of this study revealed that communicating with family and friends through various social media provided the on-demand, crucial support and comfort that these participants needed to persist as an international student-athlete in the United States. Nine of the 12 participants reached out to family on at least a weekly basis, sometimes multiple times per day, seeking comfort in their insecurities with language and acceptance and support in their athletic performance as well as to ease their feelings of distance from home. Technology allowed several to share their games with their families, providing a continual connection to their athletic pursuits. Parental reinforcement for their decision to travel thousands of miles away from home and constant support when they vented their frustrations and tribulations related to their overall adjustment experience and was common among those who sought comfort through the Internet.

Once international student-athletes arrive on campus, their first connection is with the person(s) responsible from bringing them to campus: their coach(es). Select athletes are sought after by coaches, whereas other athletes have to take the first step by contacting the coach; nevertheless, the athlete-coach relationship, initiated months prior to a student-
athlete’s arrival, builds trust and security with someone they know when starting a new life away from home. Several international student-athletes in this case study considered their coach as a parental figure who provided encouragement and assistance in navigating the academic and athletic disciplines. Similar to research results by Moores and Popaduik (2011), who noted the importance of peer support during cross-cultural transition, teammates also provide an immediate relationship, which aids in the adjustment process. The adjustment dimension of Ridinger and Pastore’s (2001) conceptual framework fits well with the conclusion that the rapport the participants had with coaches and teammates served as the foundation to the adjustment experience once the participants arrived at their institution. Teammates were the predominant driving factor affecting the adjustment experience within all subcategories within the adjustment dimension. Academic adjustment, social adjustment, athletic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment were all impacted by the relationship participants had with their teammates, as these teammates were a consistent resource for answering questions and providing guidance to the new international student-athletes.

Socially, teammates serve as valuable resource for international student-athletes by supplying guidance and answering questions related to coursework, cultural differences, and learning the English language. In this study, teammates were heavily relied upon for transportation, from across campus to across town. They assisted international student-athletes in locating services on campus as well as shops, stores, and restaurants in the area. Many teammates become life-long friends with international student-athletes as a result of the relationships built from the connections acquired on and off the field of play.
Academic adjustment for international student-athletes differed from person to person. Several of the participants communicated that they were competent in the subjects of math and science; their concerns fell into the area of English writing, and comprehension of course assignments and lectures in the classroom were concerns also conveyed during this study’s interviews. To assist with their success in the classroom, international student-athletes in this qualitative study pursued assistance from tutors through academic support centers on campus.

Academically, teammates served as a vital resource for international student-athletes in the classroom. All nonnative English-speaking students in this adjustment experience study repeatedly professed the positive impact of having fellow teammates in their classes. The fact that teammates doubled as classmates gave the international student-athletes the opportunity to ask questions to their teammates regarding lectures during class as well as work together to complete homework assignments. Although feelings of being alone and scared when in a class without teammates were described, this forced the international student-athletes to meet new people and work with nonteammates in the class. In fact, several students viewed this as an opportunity to step outside their comfort zone and interact with nonteammates as they sought assistance with homework and worked on projects with them. This simultaneously opened the door to exposing students who were not on their team to their sport. However, two students felt insecurities when in a classroom without teammates as classmates and struggled to achieve success in the course, which heightened their feelings of homesickness.
Research Question 3: What are the unique experiences of international student-athletes attending community colleges?

More than half of the participants in this research study on international student-athlete adjustment experiences at community colleges in the Midwest concurred with each other that having the opportunity to travel to the home of teammates or other students to visit for a short duration of time offered an invaluable experience during their community college stay. The participants shared that many of the families made them feel as if they were a part of their family. During their visits, the international student-athletes experienced midwestern and American traditions, such as pumpkin carving and Thanksgiving, which allowed them to encounter and experience a new and different culture first hand. The agricultural dynamics of the Midwest were also experienced and appreciated by the participants, as they had the opportunity to obtain a greater understanding of the characteristics of the Midwest through agriculture. Adjustment to the changing climatic seasons proved challenging for those from geographical regions with consistently warmer temperatures.

Traveling to the home of teammates also provided an opportunity for several international student-athletes to leave campus and get a reprieve from being confined to campus due to the lack of transportation. The participants agreed that one of the benefits of living with another international student or with someone from out of state was that they knew at least one person who also did not leave every weekend to go home, thereby reducing the feelings of loneliness on the weekends and increasing the connection with their roommate. The opportunity to travel to other locations in the Midwest, to experience new places, and to meet new people was not one that many of the international student-athletes had taken advantage of. Those who had visited other cities recommended that international students should explore more of the United States while they are here.
The fact that there are fewer people in the academic and social environments of the community college setting offers international student-athletes the opportunity to discover themselves in a new and unfamiliar culture. For example, the feelings associated with sitting in a classroom with 35 students at a community college, compared to sitting in a classroom with 400 students at a 4-year institution, allows international student-athletes to step outside their comfort zone and meet new people. Participants communicated that, in the community college setting, they learned about themselves and their abilities to interact with others. As the participants faced challenges with teammates and roommates, they realized how to resolve situations to which they were not accustomed to prior to competing in the United States. During their interviews, the international student-athletes revealed that, with the support networks back home and at their new institution, they were able to conquer their fears and overcome homesickness to pursue their goals of receiving an education and competing in their sport at the collegiate level in the United States.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The findings of this study provide multiple facets of adjustment that are applicable to international student-athletes, coaching staffs, and college administrators at community colleges in the Midwest. The following are recommendations that, if placed into practice, may provide improved academic, social, and athletic adjustment experiences for international student-athletes attending community colleges in the Midwest.

**Recommendations for International Student-Athletes**

Based on their experiences, the international student-athletes who participated in this study shared recommendations for future sojourners so that they can obtain the optimal adjustment experience. One recommendation was to associate with students who do not
speak their native language. This drives students to develop their English skills, which is one reason that most international student-athletes have chosen to come to the United States. It was also recommended that international student-athletes study English prior to arriving in the United States, which would give them the ability to understand basic English language words and phrases upon arrival. The community college route was recommended to future international student-athletes so that they would have the opportunity to adjust and prepare themselves for their attendance at 4-year institutions. Strong academic support services assisted international students in their preparation for success at a 4-year college (Jenkins, 2006).

Many international student-athletes have issues with the American food served on college campuses. Taste, stomach issues or discomfort, and lack of eating plague the majority of international student-athletes. The participants urged newcomers to understand that, although the food on campus is not like food at home, there are foods they can eat and they need to be open to trying food from a new culture.

Another recommendation for international student-athletes was that it is extremely important to socialize and experience events outside of their sport as well as off campus, and that they should take advantage of events by attending and meeting new people. Doing so helps international student-athletes enhance their connection with campus, thus better orientating student-athletes and raising their comfort level to ask staff and students questions when they arise. It was also suggested that international student-athletes seek guidance, possibly from another international student or someone who has gone through a similar adjustment experience in a previous term, to assist them as they navigate within the new host culture (Moores & Popaduik, 2011). The international student guide selected may be a
fellow international student-athlete, one who has experienced the balance of the combination of academic, social, and athletic experiences, or a noninternational student-athlete, someone who can share experiences and offer engagement opportunities outside of athletics.

Several participants arrived on campus in a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend in their home country. During the interviews, it was emphasized that long-distance relationships negatively affected their experience in the first term of college. The participants felt that they were not allowed to participate in events across campus and ultimately shared regrets of how their first-year experience suffered due to their relationship.

Finally, it was recommended that international student-athletes save money while studying in the United States so they can travel to other regions of the country. Taking advantage of friends or family who live in other areas of the country can allow international students to experience a different culture within the United States. By staying with friends, a student can save on lodging and have help touring the area around the location that is being visited.

**Recommendations for Coaches**

In the interviews with the international student-athletes, they consistently expressed their opinions that the coaches should drive their athletes more. The participants shared that coaches should motivate their athletes in practice by being more vocal during practice and being less “kind” or a less of a “good person,” and more “boss” like. Their previous experiences included coaches who served as more of an authoritative figure, motivating them by way of a strong vocal demeanor. They believed that the pace of the game was slower and less competitive compared to the style of play in their home country.
A second recommendation for coaches was to keep the international student-athletes engaged. Whether engagement stems from practice or team events, emerging oneself in such activities reduces an international student-athlete’s thoughts of home and feelings of homesickness. Acceptance by a team can reduce homesickness as well. It is important for coaches to encourage team bonding off the field of play including by providing opportunities for team members to gain a greater understanding of different cultures that are reflected among them. Many difficulties that interfere with team cohesion emerge from misunderstanding an outside culture. Taking the time to address such issues through communication and structured team activities can lessen negative team chemistry. The recognition and acceptance of diverse cultures within a team can build team unity and integration. Carrying the team integration into the classroom can have a positive effect on academic integration by assisting other students in the campus community understand the international cultures that are present on campus.

Living on-campus provides vast opportunities to enhance engagement and personal growth, both academically and socially (Astin, 1984). Therefore, the on-campus living environment can make or break an international student-athlete’s experience. Having a supportive living environment can offer international student-athletes a connection or sense of belonging within their new home—a smaller environment that provides a safe haven within their campus (Moores & Popaduik, 2011). Coaches often are the ones who help determine their athletes’ room assignment, which can affect homesickness and the language concerns of international student-athletes. One participant believed that rooming with someone from out of state, compared to her in-state, freshman roommate as a sophomore, would have kept someone around on the weekends and prevented loneliness. Another
participant echoed that sentiment, stating that “it would have been better to room with internationals because they don’t go home on the weekends and leave you alone.” Thus, it was recommended that coaches pay close attention to the selection of roommates for international student-athletes. This recommendation also ties in with providing opportunities for teammates to have an open mind with regard to learning about other cultures and making the living environment more welcoming for all residents.

As stated previously, several participants felt they did not have opportunities to participate in activities outside of athletics due to the time constraints and demands of the athletic program. International student-athletes are brought to campus for the purpose of competing athletically for the institution; however, their inclusion in the general campus culture can reduce the division among international student-athletes and domestic students. Allowing time for athletes to become included in campus life outside of athletics can produce multiple benefits for the athlete, team, and nonathletes. Experiences outside of athletics can produce more well-rounded international student-athletes with the friendships and networks gained from campus culture. Additionally, doing away with the perception of student-athletes being arrogant or superior can knock down walls that divide the student body and the perceived views toward athletes, thus offering stronger cohesion among the students on campus.

The final recommendation for coaches was to become familiar with the international student-athlete’s academic and language skill levels. Having an open conversation with the athletes to determine their comfort and knowledge of the English language can have a vital impact on their success in the classroom and on the field. Coaches at some community colleges determine the academic schedule for their athletes. Participants in this study
disclosed that they were not prepared for the classes that they were placed in during their first term. English comprehension during lectures was a concern, as they constantly asked questions about the lectures and homework. One participant stated that she could not understand her coach for the first month of practice due to the language barrier. Often international student-athletes are not placed in the necessary English Language Learning courses because the coach is not aware of the language skill level of their student-athletes. This can delay these students’ English learning process in the classroom as well as socially and athletically.

**Recommendations for College Administration**

Overall, the participants in this study believed that their colleges were providing good experiences for their international student-athletes, and numerous participants conveyed that they had no regrets and would choose their institution again if given the chance. Mirroring the conceptual framework of this study, the satisfaction of the international student-athletes was established based upon their individual adjustment experiences and backgrounds. Acceptance, English proficiencies, relations with coaches and teammates, and academic and athletic success influenced the satisfaction of these international student-athletes.

It is suggested that administrators from student services, residence life, international student services, academic services, and athletics conduct an international student-athlete advisory council. This advisory council would meet with administration and provide recommendations on how to provide a more inclusive environment for the international student-athlete population, thus, gaining more than a presence but, rather, an engaged experience on and off campus. Administrators given the opportunity to listen to first-hand adjustment experiences of international student-athletes would be able to use their influence
to implement change or adjustments where necessary to provide a positive community college experience.

**Student services.** The interviews with the participants revealed that, overall, college services at the institutions the participants attended were adequate and that the staff cared for the students. However, these students suggested that offering more activities outside of athletics for students to participate in would keep them engaged. Smaller towns do not often provide enough entertainment for international student-athletes, who may be accustomed to cities with populations in the millions. Providing internationally focused events that showcase cultures to domestic and international students can be advantageous in the perceptions of diverse populations across campus. Travel excursions providing opportunities to explore beyond the campus grounds allow international student-athletes to learn about regional customs and heritages in the Midwest. One female participant felt that the men’s athletic teams at her institution were supported by the institution more than the women’s athletic teams were. She proposed that the institution be more supportive and promote women’s athletic programs both on and off campus.

**International student office.** International student offices on community college campuses are becoming increasingly important due to the influx of international student-athletes as a result of the removal of the roster constraints by the NJCAA. Several of the institutions in which the participants were enrolled had at least one person dedicated to international students on campus. Although only a few of the participants took advantage of the services provided by the international office, many knew the office existed yet didn’t utilize their services. One participant said his institution did not have an international department to assist international students with services, and therefore he worked with the
admissions office and coaching staff to complete paperwork and become acclimated to campus.

As international student-athletes arrive on campus, purchasing personal toiletries and other living items is essential. Therefore, college-provided rides to purchase basic necessities are necessary within the first day or two of arrival. A tour of the town so that international student-athletes can gain the comfort of knowing the location of various amenities would also be beneficial to these students within the first week of coming to campus. The participants emphasized the feeling of being bothersome to others when depending on rides off campus, which concurs with Moores and Popadiuk’s (2011) statement about the importance of supporting new international students when they enter a new cultural environment, including transportation to local services and necessities as well as explaining the logistics of the new environment. It is recommended that institutions provide rides to the grocery or other stores for international students once or twice a week for students to purchase their needed items. One participant institution provides rides twice a week to the grocery store and the local Wal-Mart for all international students. This service is taken advantage of by numerous students, including international student-athletes.

**Academic services and faculty.** It was also recommended by one participant that academic services, such as the library, should be open hours that best serve the students. The library at this international student-athlete’s institution closed at 7:00 p.m. and was also closed on the weekends, thus making it difficult to utilize the library due to evening games and practice hours.

Administrators should be aware that many of the participants chose to attend a community college to improve their English skills, become acclimated to the community
college student body size, and ease into the academic rigors of college. The smaller population at community colleges was a draw for these participants so they could adjust to college on a smaller scale as opposed to the larger student body of a university. They believed that this would allow for an easier adjustment so they could improve their areas of weakness. However, those who came to the United States with English as their native language stated that they believed the academic standards were lower than their high school standards in their home country. Moores and Popaduik (2011) described the differences in educational systems as having varying focal points: one region may use practical teachings to have their pupils contribute to society, whereas another region may focus on personal development of a well-rounded pupil. The differences viewed by international students could assist administrators in understanding ways to merge the educational philosophies taught half a world away to benefit all students, international and domestic alike.

It is difficult for international student-athletes who do not arrive with English language skills to excel academically without the assistance of teammates, tutors, and faculty. International student-athletes benefit from having other international students or teammates in the same classes. College success courses or similar courses with class rosters reflecting multiple international students allow international students to relate with other students who are having similar experiences while being a distance from home. While in class, international student-athletes will often ask questions to those near them to clarify or translate what is being discussed by the instructor. Communication between student and faculty is important, and the small conversations or questions that take place in the back of the classroom while class is taking place can be better understood by faculty if there is open communication by the student and faculty member.
Finally, it is important to listen to international student-athletes, as their English language skills and abilities may vary. Often, international student-athletes are placed in courses for which they are not prepared so they can stay on track with their credits to graduate on time. English Language Learner courses are developmental courses designed to assist in the learning success of international students. Placing international student-athletes in such courses can reduce their anxieties about the English language as well as difficulties that may arise academically and socially.

**Community relations.** The connections made between community members and international student-athletes can enrich the lives of both parties. Being visible in the community by participating in town festivals or parades, attending church, or giving back by serving meals at a local soup kitchen are examples of engaging in the community and building relationships. Community relations can lead to strengthened community support at athletic events or foster friendships that provide support systems such as host families.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Although in this qualitative study I analyzed the adjustment experiences of international student-athletes at community colleges in the Midwest, potential research related to this topic emerged and should be considered for future research. Initially, to overcome the limitations of this study, the area of participating institutions could be expanded from one state in the Midwest and the number of participants could be increased, potentially providing a more diverse sample population. Comparative studies with international students who are not on an athletic team or domestic student-athletes serving as potential research sample populations could also be conducted.
Similar to other research studies that were focused on international versus domestic students, such as research conducted by Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005), who compared international student and American student engagement, the following are potential areas for future comparative studies examining international versus domestic student-athletes at community colleges. Emerging from this study was the international student-athletes need for scholarship monies to study abroad; thus, my first recommendation would be to conduct a comparative assessment of the socioeconomic backgrounds and financial differences between international and domestic student-athletes. Though not the basis of this study, a comparison of need-based funding for domestic student-athletes could provide further insight into the effects on athletic recruiting, scholarship budgets, team diversity, and campus culture.

Culture shock and learning about other cultures can affect the psychological adjustment of international students adjusting to a new culture (Ward, Furnham, & Bochner, 2005; Searle & Ward, 1990; Zhou et al., 2008). Among the complexities of learning a new culture, different cultural beliefs are one of the many facets an international student may need to become accustomed to in their host culture. A potential topic for further research is a comparative study of international versus domestic student-athletes’ cultural beliefs and experiences with regard to race and gender. Cultures around the world have varying views on the roles certain genders have within their society. Some global regions are not inhabited by certain races/ethnicities; therefore, the residents from those regions are not accustomed to some other races/ethnicities outside of their own. As both international and domestic students converge onto the same college campus, an understanding of how individuals from different cultures view race and gender may be valuable to college administrators.
Although a comparison of the resiliency of international versus domestic student-athlete in college athletics was not examined for this study, a comparative analysis of the differences in the desire, stakes, and the tolerance that international versus domestic student-athletes have to compete and receive an education in the United States could be conducted. Conquering personal challenges related to the living environment, social acceptance, host culture adjustment, academic balance (Moores & Popaduik, 2011), and athletic demands show perseverance by international students who aspire to achieve the goals they left home to surmount. International student-athletes place a higher value on education as compared to their domestic counterparts (Popp, 2006); therefore, persistence through such challenges serves as motivation to degree completion.

Fass-Holmes and Vaughn (2014) found that, based on their attained grades, non-English-speaking international students showed weak skill levels in English courses. The findings from this study concurred with those of Fass-Holmes and Vaughn, as the nonnative English-speaking students struggled academically in English courses. Academic preparedness and success of international student-athletes was not the focus of this study; however, many international student-athletes are not placed in English Language Learning or English as a Second Language courses. An in-depth study examining the preparedness and success of international student-athletes may reveal challenges that are being faced by the adjusting international student-athlete if underprepared for the assigned courses. Finally, this study did not collect the insights of college faculty who have international student-athletes in their classroom, but examining the apparent challenges international student-athletes experience in the classroom due to language barriers would provide deeper insight into the optimal relationship between instructor and student in the classroom.
Researchers conducting qualitative studies seek to learn about lived experiences through in-depth research. Future research regarding participant criteria for international student-athletes could examine athletes at the completion of their first year. It is possible that researchers could find athletes who plan to not return to their institution for a second year and are willing to share their negative experiences. For this study, I completed two interviews with each participant as opposed to the three-interview model suggested by De Munck (2009) and Seidman (2013). A year-long longitudinal study utilizing the three-interview model could be considered for future research. Initially, background data would be collected from the participants, followed by an initial adjustment experience interview conducted at the end of the participant’s first semester. The final interview, seeking students’ overall adjustment experience and outcomes in relation to satisfaction and performance, as the Ridinger and Pastore (2001) model of adjustment for international student-athletes suggests, would be held at the conclusion of the first year. This approach may expand the findings to reflect those who were less satisfied with outcome of their experiences.

**Reflections**

This research topic was chosen because of the passion I have for athletics at community colleges. The drive to compete at the national level has been something I have been accustomed to since the start of my collegiate career. As a collegiate coach, I found that international student-athletes being able to compete at the national level provided them with the opportunity to contend for a national championship. In 2012, when the NJCAA chose to place a limit on the number of international student-athletes on athletic rosters (NJCAA, 2011), its purpose was to provide a level playing field for all teams. After three
years and much controversy, the NJCAA adjusted the regulations on roster quotas, and teams then began to see an influx of international student-athletes once again.

This research was conducted at a critical time; its findings, based on adjustment experiences of current international student-athletes, are valuable to coaches, college administrators, and future international student-athletes. The participants shared their thoughts in relation to communication barriers with coaches and teammates, the significance of relationships with teammates from the start, and academic adjustment concerns due to language barriers in the classroom. The collection of data for this study took place over the time span of 1 year. Difficulties in locating volunteer participants based on the original criteria required an adjustment from interviewing just second-year international student-athletes to interviewing any international student-athlete who had completed one season of NJCAA competition.

During the interview process, I was intrigued to learn of the diverse backgrounds from which the participants originated. Two participants spoke of the dangerous environments from which they came, whereas others shared their families’ financial struggles and their dependence on scholarships to study overseas. All participants required a scholarship to study abroad; therefore, scholarships were a necessity for the 12 participants to study in the United States. It is important for coaches and administrators to realize that, to compete at a national level, the majority of allotted scholarship funds may have to be directed to recruiting international student-athletes. Not all community colleges are able to financially support athletic programs (William & Pennington, 2006); thus, the scholarship dollars necessary to fund international students may not be possible for all community colleges.
Hearing that obtaining an education was the number one goal of all 12 participants was a surprise to me. Improving their athletic skills and capitalizing on those skills to advance to a 4-year institution accompanied these international student-athletes’ goal of degree attainment; nevertheless, in this study education was given as the main reason for attending college in the United States. I am grateful to the international student-athlete participants in this study; I believe that their responses were genuine and sincere. I also appreciate the assistance the institutions gave me to locate potential participants.

This study contributes to the lack of existent literature focused on international student-athletes at community colleges. This in-depth study provides a glimpse into the adjustment experience of international student-athletes who travel thousands of miles from home to begin a new life, college life, at a U.S. community college. The challenges and accomplishments experienced by the participants provide a greater understanding of the adjustment experiences faced by international student-athletes at community colleges in the United States. It is important for international student-athletes and international students to study at community colleges in the United States, as this population establishes diverse cultures on campuses that create a globalized environment. This enriches the experience for student-athletes who participate with international student-athletes through athletics and also provides college students with opportunities to understand new cultures in the classroom and social settings.

**Conclusion**

With the absence of research directed toward international student-athletes, this study serves to partially fill a void in the literature. In conjunction with previous studies conducted by Ridinger and Pastore (2000) and Popp et al. (2010), this study sought responses to gain a
better understanding of the international student-athlete adjustment process based upon experiences prior to arriving to college. Relationships with family, friends, instructors, coaching staff, and teammates all have an impact on the satisfaction and performance outcomes of each individual. The findings of this study also support international student adjustment research, which has shown that international students face a multitude of challenges related to academics, language barriers (Leong, 2015), homesickness, and acceptance as new students in the United States.

This qualitative study was focused on the barriers faced by international student-athletes and ways to overcome those barriers. As international student-athletes arrive on campus, they may know only one or two people based on the recruiting and admissions process. Seeking a connection and a sense of belonging is the initial step they take to gain the sense that this choice to study abroad was the right one. The longer this phase takes, the longer the duration of the adjustment process may be felt. The navigation through transition phases experienced by international students can affect both academic and social performance (Moores & Popaduik, 2011).

Expanding the knowledge regarding this topic provides the opportunity to form concepts from the findings of this study. College administrators and coaches alike can learn to address issues such as language barriers, homesickness, and fear of nonacceptance so that they can provide the desired support services to future international student-athletes. Many of the participants learned of their institution by word of mouth; therefore, it is important to provide a positive adjustment experience so that the institution and athletic program can continue to have a positive reputation.
Coaches and college administrators can have an impact in shortening the duration of adjustment for international student-athletes. The results of this study revealed that the coaching staff and administrators serve as a support system to these students during their adjustment experience. Coaching staff and administrators are viewed as playing the role of a parent for students whose families are thousands of miles away. Continual interaction with these athletes related to personal, academic, social, and athletic transition can have a significant bearing on a positive adjustment experience. Student services at community colleges are valuable to the success of student-athletes (Storch & Ohlson, 2009), and this held true for the participants in this study who utilized tutors, the college library, and student success centers. Academic success can also be contingent on the open communication necessary between the international student-athlete and faculty. The support of faculty and staff is critical during adjustment (Moores & Popaduik, 2011). Faculty may not feel that they have time to address the struggles of individual students due to language barriers and differences in academic rigor. However, the adjustment fears and challenges of international students need to be realized by faculty for these students to be successful in the classroom. These participants shared their common goal of degree attainment; they wanted to excel academically, and therefore, communication between faculty and student is an obligation for both parties.

The potential for future research may be considered based on a variety of significant themes that spawned from these lived experiences. Although the sample population in this study was limited, the experiences discovered provide valuable insight into 12 international student-athlete participants attending and competing at community colleges in the Midwest. The significance of this study derives from the potential influx of international student-
athletes on community college campuses due to the removal of roster restrictions by the NJCAA. Gaining knowledge of the fears and challenges faced by international student-athletes during their adjustment experience can provide college personnel with the advantage of offering a welcoming atmosphere, which can generate academic, social, and athletic success.
# APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Institutional Review Board**  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202  
Ames, Iowa 50014  
515-294-4566

**Date:**  12/22/2016  
**To:**  Jennifer Sabourin  
525 Grandview Ave  
Ottumwa, IA 52501  
**CC:**  Dr. Lorenzo Baber  
2666D Lago Mar  
**From:**  Office for Responsible Research  
**Title:**  International student-athlete adjustment experience at community colleges in the Midwest  
**IRB ID:**  14-469  
**Approval Date:**  12/22/2016  
**Date for Continuing Review:**  12/9/2018  
**Submission Type:**  Continuing Review / Modification  
**Review Type:**  Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingland, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
APPENDIX B. LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear [Insert Name],

My name is Jennifer Sabourin, and I am currently a PhD student at Iowa State University. My research interests revolve around the international student-athlete experience at the community college level. I am interested in studying your experience as an international student-athlete at _______ Community College. If you are interested in being a participant in my study I would like to speak with you further.

I identified your name from past ________ Community College athletic rosters as someone, a former international student athlete at [college name], who may be willing to participate in a research study. I will be contacting you for an interview using Skype in the near future. The initial survey will last 45-60 minutes. A follow-up interview will be conducted to gather more in-depth information.

Taking part in the study is your decision and you may choose to end your participation or not respond any questions you are not comfortable answering. I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study. Please feel free to contact me at 319-321-0717 or sabourin@iastate.edu, if you have any questions or problems pertaining to this study. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Iowa State University at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu

Please let me know if you are interested. Thank you for considering being part of my study.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Sabourin

Ph.D. student at Iowa State University

319-321-0717

sabourin@iastate.edu
# APPENDIX C. DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2014</td>
<td>Contact made to community colleges in the Midwest in research of qualifying participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2015</td>
<td>Conducted first participant interview- Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td>Modifications to IRB to expand participant criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2015-May 2016</td>
<td>Conducted interviews for participants 2-10- Eric, Jason, Jacob, Sarah, Thomas, Tammy, April, John, Sam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2017</td>
<td>Conducted interviews for participants 11 &amp; 12- Olivia &amp; Katie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D. INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Document – Interview Participants

Title of Study: International Student-Athlete Adjustment Experience at Community Colleges in the Midwest

Investigator: Jennifer Sabourin

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the international student-athlete adjustment while attending your community college. The study is aimed at understanding the academic, athletic and social student-athlete adjustment as told by current, international student-athletes through the collection and analysis of personal narratives told by student participants to the investigator.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you completed one semester at your community college and are competing in a sport as an international student-athlete.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for one semester. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed:

- You will participate in two personal interviews pertaining to questions related to your international student-athlete adjustment experience while attending your community college.
- The interviews will be conducted face-to-face or through the use of Skype, which allows free audio and video communication through the use of the World Wide Web.
- Each interview will last no longer than 90 minutes. You will be asked a series of open ended questions about your student-athlete adjustment experience. You may share as much or as little as you like in the interview.
- You may skip any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. You can leave the study at any point in time.

An interview meeting time will be predetermined between you and me. Once we are either face-to-face or connected through Skype for the interview, I will tell you when the official interview will begin. The interviews will be digitally recorded using an audio recording device for transcription purposes. If Skype is selected the form of communication, it will only be used for audio recording purposes (video recordings will not be used). You may ask at any time during the interview for the recording device to be turned off. Digital recordings files will be stored on a password protected desktop computer during this study and kept in a
locked office. Your name and personal identifiers (your country of origin, sport, etc.) will be coded for confidentiality in the transcription process and will remain confidential in the reporting of the study findings.

Once the interviews have been transcribed from the audio recordings, a copy of the transcripts will be sent to you for your review. If there is any part of the transcript that you would like to amend or redact, you can do so at that time. I ask that your review process take no longer than two weeks to submit any corrections and/or redactions.

Recordings, transcripts, and informed consent documents will be stored in my locked office for a period of three years, when the documents are no longer needed.

**RISKS**

Selecting an institution and returning for a second semester may be an emotional experience for some students and reporting on your experience may be a very personal journey. You may feel discomfort re-visiting negative experiences of the student-athlete adjustment experience (fear, rejection, adjustment issues). You have the option of requesting the recorder to be turned off at any point in the interview to reveal a personal story that you do not want included in the final reports of this study. You can also refuse to answer any question(s) that make you uncomfortable.

**BENEFITS**

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit current and future international student-athletes to maximize their student-athlete adjustment experience while attending community colleges in the Midwest. The reader will gain a better understanding of the academic, athletic, and personal adjustment of its international student-athletes. As an interviewed international student-athlete will be providing valuable first-hand insight into the complete international student-athlete adjustment experience at your institution. Institutions will be able to utilize this information to adapt or adjust their offerings to international student-athletes if needed. The results will also be used to form questions for a future study regarding the international student-athlete adjustment at community colleges throughout the mid-west.

**COSTS AND COMPENSATION**

Participating in this research study is at no cost to you. There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or leave the study early, you will not have any loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.
CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. Your name will not be used, instead will be assigned a unique code name. It will be used on transcripts and research findings reports instead of your name.

2. Your country of origin and sport will not be directly linked to you as an individual, therefore keeping your identity confidential. Country and sport will be associated with participants in general or group descriptions.

3. Digital recordings files will be stored on a password protected desktop computer during this study and kept in a locked office.

4. Recordings, transcripts, and informed consent documents will be stored in my locked office for a period of three years, when the documents are no longer needed.

5. Steps 1 through 4 above are intended to help keep your identity confidential when results of this study are shared. However, you should be aware that complete confidentiality may not be possible -- those familiar with you or your college may be able to figure out who you are.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Jennifer Sabourin at 641-683-5240 or sabourin@iastate.edu. The faculty member supervising this research is Dr. Lorenzo Baber in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at Iowa State University and you may contact him at 515-294-8374 or ldbabers@iastate.edu.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed)

_______________________________________________

(Participant’s Signature) (Date)
APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

First Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date:
Location:
Interviewer: Jennifer Sabourin
Interviewee:

Introduction

“Hello and let me thank you, once again, for participating in this study. I am focusing my central research question on your student-athlete adjustment experiences while attending (Institution) Community College as second-year international student-athlete. In order to explore this topic we will conduct an initial interview to discuss your experiences; after the collected data is analyzed, a follow-up interview may be necessary. Today’s interview will focus on selecting a college, your athletic and academic adjustment experience, and your (Institution) Community College adjustment experience during the past year. The results of my collective findings will complete my dissertation research and be published in order to inform readers of the international student-athlete adjustment experience at community colleges located in the Midwest.

This interview will be recorded using an audio recording device for the purpose of reviewing of data related to this interview. If at any point during this interview you would like me to turn the audio recording off, please let me know and I will do so. Again, thank you, and before I begin, do you have any questions?”

Background Questions

1. What is your home country?

2. How do you identify yourself ethnically/racially?

---

1 As a semistructured interview, other questions may be asked outside this protocol. Participants’ responses may prompt additional questions in an area or on a topic not presented in this protocol.
3. What is your native language(s)?
   a. When you arrived to (Institution), what language(s) did you speak?

4. Describe your family background.
   b. Relationship: close or distant, supportive or non-supportive
   c. Guardian occupation, financial background
   d. Education background of family members
      i. How important is education in your family?
      ii. How important is education in your community?

5. What is your community like where you are from?
   a. Size of city, relationship with neighbors.
   b. School type and size

6. What athletic opportunities do you have in your home community?
   a. School sports, club sports, state or national opportunities
   b. Are there costs to participate?

7. What was common practice for people who finished school/after graduation?
   a. Classmates
   b. Teammates

8. Explain the reason you chose to attend college in the United States.
   a. What was important to you when choosing a college?
   b. Describe if and how scholarship monies were important in your decision making process.

9. What experience do you have traveling with and without family?

10. Why did you choose to attend a community college?
a. Why did you choose to attend (Institution) Community College?
   i. How did you find out about (Institution)?
   ii. Did you visit the institution before-hand?

11. Were you familiar with the geographical region where (Institution) is located?
   a. How was the location of (Institution) factored in you college decision?
   b. What Midwestern characteristics affected you the most after you arrived?
   c. How did you prepare to attend a community college in the Midwest?

12. What were your personal expectations prior to arriving to (Institution)?
   a. Family and friends
   b. College
   c. Community
   d. Athletically

13. What were your goals when leaving home to study in the United States?
   a. Short-term
   b. Long-term

14. What fears did you have coming to the United States?
   a. How did you overcome your fears?
      i. In your first few days
      ii. First month, semester, and year

**Initial Adjustment to College**

15. Describe your needs as an international college student. (Ex. family, equipment, books, tutors, etc.)
   a. Personal
16. How did you meet your needs as an international college student?

17. Describe your personal interest needs when arriving to your new community.
   a. How did you locate these personal interest needs?

18. What cultural challenges did you face with your:
   a. Roommates
      i. How did you adjust to these cultural challenges?
   b. Cafeteria
      i. Can you give me an example?
      ii. How did you adapt if necessary?

19. Were ESL (English as a Second Language) courses necessary for you when you arrived at (Institution)?
   a. If yes, explain why?
      i. What courses did you benefit most from?
   b. If no, what academic courses did you do well in?

20. What communication issues did you face with your:
   a. Roommates
      i. How did you adjust to these issues?
   b. Classmates or other students

**First-year Adjustment Feelings**

21. Describe your feelings you experienced while adjusting to college in your first term of college as an international student-athlete at (Institution).
22. At any point in your first year at (Institution), did you feel that you wanted to leave (Institution) and not return?
   a. Can you tell me what made you feel that way?
   b. Where did you want to go?
   c. Why did you decide to stay?
   d. Why did you return for your second year?

Closing

“This is the conclusion of our interview. I would like to thank you for taking time to meet with me and share your international student-athlete adjustment experience while in your first-year at (Institution). I will analyze the data and return it to you to verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Once again, thank you.”
Second Interview Protocol\textsuperscript{2}

Time of Interview: \\
Date: \\
Location: \\
Interviewer: Jennifer Sabourin \\
Interviewee: \\

Introduction

“Hello and let me thank you, once again, for participating in this study. As you may recall, I am focusing my central research question on your student-athlete adjustment experiences while attending a community college in the Midwest as an international student-athlete. In order to explore this topic more we will continue to discuss your experiences; after the collected data is analyzed, my findings and report will conclude this research study. Today’s interview will focus on your social and athletic adjustment experience while attending your Midwestern community college. The results of my collective findings will complete my dissertation research and be published in order to inform readers of the international student-athlete adjustment experience at community colleges located in the Midwest.

This interview will be recorded using an audio recording device for the purpose of reviewing of data related to this interview. If at any point during this interview you would like me to turn the audio recording off, please let me know and I will do so. Again, thank you, and before I begin, do you have any questions?”

Refresh Questions

23. How have you been doing?

24. Now that there has been some time since our last interview, did you have any additional comments that would like to add from our last discussion?

Initial Social Adjustment Experiences

\textsuperscript{2} As a semi-structured interview, other questions may be asked outside this protocol. Participants’ responses may prompt additional questions in an area or on a topic not presented in this protocol.
25. How did you feel when you first arrived to campus?

26. What adjustments did you feel that you needed to make in order to “fit in” or feel comfortable?
   a. What change was needed, if any, to meet new people?

27. What adjustments were necessary for you in the areas of?
   i. College
   ii. The Midwest
   iii. Academically
   iv. Socially

28. Who helped you the most with adjusting to:
   a. College
   b. The Midwest
   c. In the classroom
   d. Socially

29. Did you have opportunities to get involved in activities and events outside of athletics? If so, what examples can you give me of those activities or events?

30. What academic adjustments did you need during your first semester at college?

31. What was the most difficult area to adjust to at your community college?

32. Please give me two or three examples of your experiences during your freshman year.
   a. Good experiences
   b. Bad experiences

**Initial Adjustment to Athletics**

33. Describe your athletic background.
34. What were your reasons for choosing to play college athletics in the United States?
   a. At a community college
   b. In the Midwest

35. How did you feel when you ____________?
   a. First meet your teammates
   b. Attended your first practice

36. Describe any adjustments you needed to make in order to “fit in” with your team.

37. What adjustments were needed in the areas of practice and/or play:
   a. Coaching style
   b. Style, speed, competition, competitiveness, and game

38. Describe your needs as and international student-athlete.
   a. Financially
   b. Equipment
   c. Support

39. Did your teammates or coaches assist you in adjusting?
   a. College
   b. The Midwest
   c. Athletics

40. What cultural challenges did you face with your:
   a. Teammates
      i. How did you adjust to these cultural challenges?
   b. Coaches
      i. Can you give me an example?
ii. How did you adapt if necessary?

41. What communication issues did you experience?
   a. Teammates
   b. Coaches

**Initial Adjustment Feelings**

42. Was playing at a community college what you though it would be like?
   a. If no, how was it different?
      i. Team, coaches, play, competition

43. What athletic goals did you have when you arrived?
   a. Did your goals changed after your first year?
   b. If so, how did they change?

44. At any point in your first semester or year at (Institution), did you feel that you wanted to leave because of athletics (teammates/coaches) and not return?
   a. Can you tell me what made you feel that way?
   b. Where did you want to go?
   c. Why did you decide to stay?
   d. Why did you return for your second semester/year?

**Closing**

“This is the conclusion of our interview. I would like to thank you for taking time to meet with me and share your international student-athlete adjustment experience while in your at (Institution). I will analyze the data and return it to you to verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Once again, thank you for participating in this study.”
REFERENCES


Breuder, R. L. (1972) A statewide study: Identified problems of international students enrolled in public community/junior colleges in Florida. Tallahassee: Florida State University and University of Florida, Center for State and Regional Leadership. (ERIC No. ED 062977)


