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The Retention and Success of Alternatively Admitted Student Athletes: A Case Study of the UNLV Athletic Department

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RETENTION AND SUCCESS OF ALTERNATIVELY ADMITTED STUDENT
ATHLETES: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA,
LAS VEGAS ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership

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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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Abstract

The Retention and Success of Alternatively Admitted Student Athletes: A Case Study of the UNLV Athletic Department

by

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The aim of this exploratory study is to determine why student athletes admitted under University of Nevada, Las Vegas's (UNLV) alternative-admissions policy are successful, specifically by looking at the UNLV Athletic Department's institutional practices. Alternatively admitted athletes are the recipients of these practices. The results of this study may provide university administrators and policymakers with best practices that could be implemented to increase the retention and graduation rates for other students groups admitted under alternate criteria.

Although there is some research on the predictors of success for college-student athletes, the literature on alternatively admitted student-athlete success is negligible. This appears to be a specialty subgroup of students, and the institutional practices that contribute to their success should be identified and explored.

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively investigate and analyze whether the UNLV Athletic Department's institutional policies, practices, and programs contribute to the success of this population based on interviews with alternatively admitted athletes and athletic professionals in the department. Athletes were asked which institutional practices they believed worked for their success or lack of success, and which policies, practices, and programs they believe are most important. Professionals gave opinions on which

policies, practices, and programs they thought were most beneficial to this particular group of students.

Qualitative methodology was used to determine the answers to the research questions for this study. Document and content analysis of the interview data provided a framework with a structured approach to the qualitative data-analysis process. This framework also assisted in identifying themes and extrapolating information by producing a detailed mapping of the themes in and across respondents through charts and tables.

The major findings from this study show that individual advising is the one practice that one hundred percent of the student athlete and professional participants from the UNLV Athletic Department agree is an effective practice that contributes to the success of alternatively admitted student athletes. The other practices and programs that show alignment in opinions from both groups of participants include tutoring and study skills. The professionals identified the lack of resources within the department and the policies of the NCAA as external influences to providing effective services to alternatively admitted student athletes.

Results are compared to Kuh et al.'s theoretical framework of student engagement and analyzed for concordance, disagreement, and overlap; and contribute to the literature by taking empirical evidence and providing a coherent framework that institutions of higher education may implement for other special subgroups of students.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Each college and university in the United States has different standards and admission criteria. At the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), the processes and standards for admissions have changed over the years. The Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), Board policy Title 4, Chapter 16, Sections 2, 3, and 7 provided updated grade-point average (GPA) admission criteria for students seeking admission to the two NSHE universities that began in 2006 (NSHE, 2007b). Prior to 2006, student applicants were required to have a 2.5 overall high school GPA to get accepted to the university. In the fall of 2006, students were required to have a 2.75 GPA in 13 required core courses: 4 units of English and 3 units each of mathematics, natural science, and social science. “This new GPA in the specific 13 courses was a significant increase in admission standards designed to ensure academic preparedness for students pursuing University-level study” (NSHE, 2007b, p. 1). In the fall of 2008, NSHE instituted another increase in the standards, requiring applicants to have an overall high school GPA of 3.0 in the 13 core courses.

When student applicants are denied admission at UNLV, they have an option to appeal that decision. Should they decide to appeal, instructions on that process include writing a personal statement to address personal barriers that led to a poor high school GPA, as well as why the potential student believes he or she can be a successful student at UNLV. Applicants are also required to get two letters of recommendation from professional personnel describing their ability to succeed as a student. If the appeal is successful, the student is admitted to the university by *alternative criteria*. This means

that students are admitted under probationary status and have to enroll in a minimum of six credits and receive a GPA of 2.0 or better for the first semester; otherwise they will be separated from the University (NSH, 2007a).

Many times, student athletes are admitted under the alternative admission criteria at UNLV. Their first-year retention rates are higher than their alternatively admitted peers at this institution (UNLV, 2011a). The aim of this exploratory study is to determine why student athletes admitted under UNLV's alternative admissions policy are successful, specifically by looking at the UNLV Athletic Department's institutional practices. Alternatively admitted athletes are the recipients of these practices. The results of this study may provide university administrators and policymakers with best practices that could be implemented to increase the retention and graduation rates for other students groups who are admitted under alternate criteria.

Problem Statement

Although there is some research on predictors of success for college-student athletes, the literature on alternatively admitted student-athlete success is negligible. This appears to be a specialty subgroup of students, and the institutional practices that contribute to their success should be identified and explored.

Background for the Study

The retention and success of college students has been a constant concern for many institutions of higher education, especially in the era of "open" access. According to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (2001) report and subsequent report on Public Universities Reform (2006) 5 years later, one of the main areas needing improvement in higher education was student

access. Key higher education issues that were identified include “the need to improve in three areas related to student access: the policies and procedures by which students were admitted to institutions; diversity on campuses; and the success of students once admitted” (W. K. Kellogg Commission, 2006, p. 5). The commission acknowledged that “access to success” in the university was just as important as admission to the institution. In 1999, the commission called on universities and colleges to develop and provide programs to meet the needs of traditional and nontraditional students, collaborate with secondary schools, authenticate admissions requirements, and improve support services to guarantee that all students achieve their educational objectives (W. K. Kellogg Commission, 2006).

Retention continues to be viewed as an important area of attention for administrators at all levels of higher education settings. If students do not have the ability to perform adequately academically, they will not be able to remain at the institution (Tinto, 1987). The freshman year for students is particularly important in predicting success; research has shown that 75% of students who drop out of college will leave during their first 2 years (Tinto, 1987). According to Tinto (2006), knowing why a student leaves an institution does not tell us why others may stay. It does not tell institutions directly what exactly they can do to help students stay and succeed, but this research can provide some of that information, at least for alternatively admitted student athletes.

Studies by McGrath and Braunstein (1997), Murtaugh, Burns, and Schuster (1999), and Deberard, Spielmans, and Julka (2004) found that first-semester GPA was a significant predictor of retention for individual students. The Deberard et al. study found

that students who were retained had higher mean GPAs than those who were not retained. Freshman who experience academic success in their first year will feel an increased level of confidence, interest, and motivation in continuing with their college career (Deberard et al., 2004).

The UNLV alternative admissions policy has been in effect for more than 20 years, which has greatly assisted with student access, but there appears to be little documentation on the success of these students or whether it has been helpful with retention. Although the Kellogg Commission encouraged enhancement of support services (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2006), UNLV does not provide support services to all students, nor are services designed to meet the needs of alternatively admitted students. The Center for Academic Enrichment and Outreach provides many federally funded programs to students; however, they need to meet certain criteria, based on financial need or first-generation status to participate. There are first-generation students who are admitted under the alternative admissions policy that can participate in Center for Academic Enrichment and Outreach services, but not all students who are admitted under this policy qualify for “extra” support services from UNLV. Historically, there have been no programs or curricula to encourage alternatively admitted student success except in the Athletic Department for student athletes admitted under this policy.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) reform initiatives focus on student-athlete graduation rates, and retention has become a major interest. As researchers (Astin, 1999; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Tinto, 1993) suggest, students are more likely to persist when they feel like they have a sense of support and are part of an accepted community. Athletic departments are especially able

to provide this type of structure, inherent in team membership, group dynamics, and coach/athlete mentoring.

Significance of the Study

Because alternatively admitted student athletes are more successful than other alternatively admitted students, there may be benefit in examining whether the experiences of those athletes might inform how institutions structure experiences for other at-risk student groups. Explored extensively in the literature, more detail will be provided in Chapter 2.

Purpose of Study

This study aims to focus on which institutional practices of the UNLV Athletic Department contribute to the retention and success of alternatively admitted student athletes. Institutional records report that there were 25 alternatively admitted student athletes who entered UNLV in 2010. Table 1 shows the retention rates of alternatively admitted student athletes and nonathletes for that year:

Table 1

Fall 2010 Cohort of Alternatively Admitted Students

	Total	Retained to fall 2011	% Retained
Athletes	25	19	76
Nonathletes	544	361	66

Note. Adapted from *UNLV Institutional Analysis and Planning: Retention for Athletes Admitted as First-Time Freshman Under Alternative Criteria: Fall 10 Cohort*, by University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2012b, Las Vegas, Author.

In seeking to study alternative admissions and student success, several issues arise: admissions processes; diversity concerns; affirmative action; remedial education; availability of student services and support for this student population; and the success, motivation, and retention of alternatively admitted students. The national student-athlete

graduation rate for the 2001 cohort of students was 58% and was 53% for the 2002 cohort (NCAA, 2008, 2009). Student athletes are required to be involved in student learning: they are assigned academic advisors, mandated to attend study groups and a “missed class” policy is in effect for all athletes. According to the UNLV *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2008a), Study Hall is required for all incoming student athletes, including those who are alternatively admitted, and for student athletes who have a GPA below 3.0. In addition, the office of Student-Athlete Academic Services (SAAS) provides free tutoring services for student athletes. Advisors hold weekly meetings with new student athletes, verify students’ grades three times each semester, and assign a tutor if necessary.

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively investigate and analyze whether the UNLV Athletic Department’s institutional policies, practices, and programs contribute to the success of this particular population, based on interviews with alternatively admitted athletes and the athletic professionals in the Department. In interviewing these two subgroups, athletes were asked which institutional practices they believe work for their success or lack of success and which policies, practices, and programs they believe are most important. Professionals gave their opinions on which policies, practices, and programs they thought were most beneficial to this particular group of students. The results were analyzed for concordance, disagreement, and overlap and contribute to the literature by using the empirical evidence to provide a coherent framework that institutions of higher education may implement for other special subgroups of students.

Theoretical Framework

There are several theories based in education and psychology that provide explanation and clarification about the reasons for success or lack of success of alternatively admitted students in a higher education setting. Some are focused on individual attributes and motivation of the student (Astin, 1999; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; R. Ryan & Deci, 2000), whereas others have a larger focus. Kuh et al. (2005) evaluated purposeful educational activities of student engagement and student success. The theory of student engagement by Kuh et al. (2005) is applicable to alternatively admitted students, as these students enter college with a disadvantage academically and likely will require institutional support to be successful.

Institutions and the students themselves are the two key factors of student engagement that contribute most to college-student success. How much effort and time students devote to their studies and other actions leads to the nonacademic experiences that contribute to student success? For institutions, what resources are allocated and organized to provide learning opportunities and services to induce students to take advantage of programs found to promote student success (Kuh et al., 2005)? Kuh et al. (2005) believed that university practices have a direct influence on student engagement and student success. For instance, “if faculty and administrators use principles of good practice to arrange the curriculum and other aspects of the college experience, students would ostensibly put forth more effort” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 9). The researchers found that students would actually try harder in school by writing more papers, reading more books, meeting with faculty members and peers more frequently, and using technology more appropriately. These efforts by students are thought to increase aptitude in areas of

problem solving, effective-communication skills, critical thinking, and responsible citizenship (Kuh et al., 2005).

Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007) espoused that external or institutional practices and programs that increase educationally purposeful activities and enhance student engagement are as follows:

- New student adjustment: including Orientation, First-Year Seminars, and Early-Warning Systems
- Academic advising
- Campus residences
- Learning Communities
- Student-Success Initiatives
- Student-Support Services
- Teaching and learning approaches, including educational philosophy, pedagogical approaches, active and collaborative learning, feedback, and instructional technology
- Student-centered campus cultures
- Partnerships to Support Learning
- Designing for diversity
- Institutional ethic of improvement

Not all effective educational practices will be applicable to the case study. The following education practices, although broad, will serve as a starting point to investigate the research questions and guide the interview questions: new-student adjustment (including Orientation, First-Year Seminars, and Early-Warning Systems); academic

advising; Learning Communities; Student-Success Initiatives; Student-Support Services and Partnerships to Support Learning.

These institutional effective educational practices were taken by Kuh in 2008 and revised into “high impact educational practices” that were found to have positive impacts on college-student engagement, retention, and success. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) stated,

when they are done well, high-impact education practices have six student behaviors in common: students invest time and effort; they interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters; they experience diversity; they respond to more frequent feedback; they reflect and integrate learning; and they discover relevance of learning through real-world applications (pp. 14–17).

This theoretical framework guided the present study as Athletic Department policies and practices were evaluated, analyzed using Kuh’s extensive research on institutional practices, student engagement, and success (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2008; Kuh et al., 2007; Kuh et al., 2005). The interviews of the alternatively admitted athletes gave a student perspective about their experiences and opinions on the effectiveness of departmental institutional policies and practices relating to success.

Research Questions

1. What policies are in place to promote the success of alternatively admitted student athletes in *the UNLV Athletic Department*?
2. What practices and programs do the UNLV Athletic Department *professionals believe are effective* in helping alternatively admitted student athletes to be successful in college?

3. How have policies, practices, and programs evolved over time?
4. What programs offered by the UNLV Athletic department *do student athletes who are alternatively admitted* believe are most effective in helping them be successful?
5. Do student and administrative perceptions align?
6. Are UNLV Athletic Department policies, practices, and programs congruent with the theoretical framework of student engagement by Kuh et al. (2007), based on perceptions of professionals and students?

Need for the Study

There has been minimal research on the success of alternatively admitted students at 4-year public institutions. In 1987, a student in higher education leadership from Northern Arizona University completed a dissertation on the problems in academic achievement of freshmen who were admitted under alternative criteria at UNLV. In the study, the author found that many students were not succeeding, and recommended the institution take steps to assist these students with matriculation and graduation (Kitchen, 1987). Additionally, there is no research on the success of alternatively admitted student athletes and the institutional practices that contribute to success or lack of success. This research sought to investigate the validity of 2010 alternatively admitted student-athlete-cohort retention data. It contributes to the understanding of alternatively admitted student-athlete retention and success; the results of this study contribute to the literature by taking the empirical evidence and providing a coherent framework that institutions of higher education may be able to apply and implement for other special subgroups of students.

UNLV has a low graduation rate for all students (UNLV, 2008b): the 6-year graduation rate was 38.8% for the 2001 cohort and 41% for the 2002 cohort; however, the student-athlete graduation rate was well above the general-population graduation rate. In addition, the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs reported that UNLV is 15th in a graduation rate ranking of 16 peer institutions. The average graduation rate of all 16 institutions is 55%. Only New Mexico State University has a lower graduation rate than UNLV, at 37%. Of the retention rates of first-year students at the 16 peer institutions, UNLV comes in last, with 70% retention. The average retention rate is 80% (UNLV, 2007a). Even more alarming, the 6-year graduation rate of first-time, full-time freshman have decreased over the past decade. In 1998, the graduation rate was up to 42%. The 4-graduation rate has remained steady at about 12% (UNLV, 2007b). The 6-year graduation rate for all alternatively admitted students is also fairly poor for those same years, although higher than that of the regular student population. For the 2001 and 2002 cohorts, the graduation rate of all alternatively admitted students was 42% (UNLV, 2011c).

Prior to the fall of 2009, UNLV did not offer programs or policies to assist alternatively admitted students, except those who were student athletes. Student-athlete graduation rates were higher than the regular student body at 54% versus 41% for students entering UNLV in 1999 (UNLV, 2006b). The university has opened the Academic Success Center and has required all students, including those who have been admitted by alternative criteria, to receive academic advising. Additionally, a new program called Academic Success Coaching was implemented in the fall of 2011

whereby all alternatively admitted students at UNLV are required to attend mentoring/advising sessions with “coaches” who are graduate assistants.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study are identified using the following definitions:

Alternative-admissions criteria. Criteria that evaluate students’ noncognitive skills and additional criteria that attempt to determine students’ ability to succeed in college. These include a combination of test scores and GPAs that indicate potential for success; special talents and/or abilities that may contribute to success; or overcoming adversity or special hardship and other special circumstances (UNLV, 2000)

Alternatively admitted student athletes. Students admitted to UNLV in the 2010 academic year under alternative-admission criteria and are registered athletes with the UNLV Athletic Department program.

Alternatively admitted students. Nonathlete students admitted to UNLV under alternative criteria in 2010.

Athletic Department professionals. Administrators, employees, and/or advisors who work with student athletes in the UNLV Athletic Department.

College-student retention. The ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation; retention measures how a student persists from their first to second year of study in higher education (A. Seidman, 2005, p. 14).

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The core purpose is to “govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount” (NCAA, 2011a, para. 1).

NCAA definition of “retention.” A student athlete will be considered “retained” who returns to the member institution for the next regular academic term and is enrolled full time as of the 5th week of classes or the official census date of the institution, whichever is earlier (NCAA, 2011b, p. 13).

NCAA definition of “student athlete.” “A participant in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the educational institution in which he or she is enrolled” (NCAA, 2011a para. 1).

Policies of the UNLV Athletic Department. The collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of the services provided to the student athletes.

Practices in the UNLV Athletic Department. Customary operations whose purpose is to provide academic and emotional support to student athletes such as athletic academic advising, Class Checks, grade updates, Objective-based Learning advising, Study Hall, Learning Communities, First-Year Experience, and orientation programs.

Programs in the UNLV Athletic Department. a system of projects or services intended to meet the needs of student athletes such as tutoring, study-skills classes, and life skills and mentoring programs.

Student engagement. The time and energy students put toward educational activities inside and outside the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to encourage students to take part in these activities (Kuh, 2003; Kuh et al., 2005).

Student success. Student are retained from one year to the following academic year and are NCAA eligible, which means they have a cumulative GPA of at least a 2.0.

UNLV Athletic Department. Any practice, program, or employee that works with or is designed to assist student athletes as a component of the UNLV intercollegiate Athletic Department.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to data collected from interviews of professionals from the Athletic Department and alternatively admitted student athletes. A potential limitation may be that the student athletes that presented themselves for the interviews may be more motivated than the ones that did not show up. The department is part of a public, 4-year institution of higher education. This limitation reduces the opportunity for generalization and transferability of the study's findings and conclusions to other university's athletic departments and students.

Delimitations of the Study

This study did not use the coaches or coaching staff as participants from whom to gather data; therefore, variables that they may feel are important to alternatively admitted student-athlete retention were not addressed specifically. In addition, NCAA rules not related to the practices and programs currently in place in the Athletic Department were not addressed. This study did not seek to study how NCAA policies are enforced or implemented at UNLV.

Remaining Chapters

Following this first chapter, Chapter 2 will be an in-depth review of the literature related to university admissions, alternative-admissions policies, college-student success, and success of college-student athletes. Chapter 3 will provide the methodology for this study; Chapter 4 presents the practices and programs of the UNLV Athletic Department,

as well as the demographics and narratives of student athletes' and professionals' experiences in practices and programs of the department. The data analysis is presented in Chapter 5, using the content and matrix analysis described in Chapter 3, and Chapter 6 will provide a discussion, implications, and recommendations.

Chapter 2

Introduction

This section of the dissertation will review the literature that is relevant and pertinent to this study. The first major section will review research on college=student admissions and the different criteria universities use in making admission decisions. The second section focuses on the variety of alternative-admission policies at universities in the United States. The third section is an overview of college-student success and the various factors that contribute to success; the fourth section reviews the literature on success of alternatively admitted students and student athletes. The final section takes an in-depth look at the retention issues and the alternative-admissions policy at UNLV.

Higher Education Admissions

Admissions models and processes for admitting students into institutions of higher education are extremely varied, evolving, and multifaceted. When studying admissions in higher education, issues surrounding diversity, affirmative action, remedial education, and discrimination are intertwined. A report by Rigol (2003), published by the College Board, examined how institutions in the United States make admission decisions. Rigol collected data from interviews, site visits and examination of internal and published information about selection processes from over 100 institutions of all selectivity levels, including public and private 4-year colleges (Rigol, 2003).

According to Rigol (2003), colleges and universities have wide-ranging philosophies about who should be offered admission. One approach is the “open access” or entitlement philosophy that is often used by public universities with a heavy state directive to educate all students in the region. A second philosophy selects students who

are likely to be successful, usually based on SAT or ACT scores and GPAs in high school. Rigol stated that the problem with this philosophy is the multiple definitions of success and the difficulty of measuring them. A third approach is when universities determine, usually according to directives from the president or academic deans, who should be admitted based on blueprints of the characteristics for the upcoming class. Also, faculty are sometimes allowed to submit characteristics they value in students (Breland, Maxey, Gernand, Cumming, & Trapani, 2002; Rigol, 2003).

Multiple factors will determine a college or university's enrollment management philosophy, which is directly related to admission strategies and processes. Enrollment management refers to an institution's tactics and strategies used to shape the student body that will meet set goals. According to the early work of Hossler (1991), an agreed-on definition of the term enrollment management is "an organizational concept and a systematic set of activities designed to enable educational institutions to exert more influence of their enrollments" (Hossler, 1991, p. 52). The concept also encompasses institutional planning and research that focuses on student behaviors such as college choice, transition, retention, and student outcomes (Hossler, 1991). The usual goals of enrollment management include increasing applicant pools, increasing student enrollment, increasing net revenues, increasing diversity rates, and improving student retention (Hossler, 2005).

Institutional admission policies are as diverse as institutions themselves. The admission model will depend on the overall enrollment management and admission philosophy of each university. Some colleges have practices that have been in place for many years whereas others change frequently. The following issues affect admission

decisions: legal, social, changing demographics and technology, economics, and political and legal concerns (Rigol, 2003). Open-access institutions will accept any student that meets the minimum criteria, such as a high school GPA or SAT score. At times, scholarships and incentives are used to attain academic excellence, diversity, and other desirable student traits that the institution hopes will characterize the student body. More selective institutions wish to structure their student bodies by their admission decisions, and the reasons particular students are chosen is a reflection of the institution's priorities. "For many institutions, finding the best balance of students with different academic interests, different talents and skills, and different background characteristics is the ultimate aim of the admissions process" (Rigol, 2003, p. 7). The philosophy of the institution will underlay their admission decisions.

Higher education admissions criteria. Rigol (2003) and Breland et al. (2002) found that many institutions use two primary approaches in selecting their students: formulas, comprised only of numbers, and judgments, in which prospective-student data is subjected to a more holistic review process. The formula model will review high school GPAs and/or rank and test scores. The judgment approach comprises a review of the student's entire file, including the application, recommendations, and written statements, along with the GPA and test scores. Interestingly, Rigol found that the formula-model schools also review entire applications for special considerations, such as in UNLV's alternative-admission process, for special programs and/or for financial-aid opportunities. In contrast, judgment-model schools may use numbers by assigning ratings to a student's application (Breland et al., 2002; Rigol, 2003).

Admissions officers need to consider supply and demand when it comes to filling student spaces at their university. If the supply matches the demand, then Rigol (2003) suggested schools will have an easier process because they cannot afford to be as selective. When the number of applicants far exceeds the spaces, usually more difficult and multistep admissions processes are implemented in which both formulas and judgments are necessary. Rigol dispelled the misconception that smaller, private universities and colleges use the judgmental approach and larger, public institutions always use formulas. Although it seems counterintuitive, open-access institutions can also carefully review entire student files to make a determination as to whether the student will be a good match. “The only safe generalization that can be made is that the process tends to be more complex if the number of applicants is considerably higher than the number of available spaces” (Rigol, 2003, p. 11). In recent years, the concept of “yield” has become prevalent in admissions, mostly due to this being a factor in college rankings and an indicator of its desirability. Yield refers to the percentage of accepted students who enroll in the institution. Some institutions actually use the level of interest of particular students as a part of the acceptance criteria (Rigol, 2003).

How admission applications are processed is extremely different depending on the admission model and philosophy of the institution. Most colleges weight GPAs or recalculate them based on core requirements. Some also calculate an academic index, which is based on research about predicted college GPAs. Rigol found that almost all universities read some part of the student application. Some read all of them, some read nearly all, and other schools read only a small portion (Rigol, 2003). Some institutions may also require or encourage interviews of potential students. These may occur on

campus or with an alumnus, to gain more information about the student that is not written on paper. According to Rigol, some competitive programs, such as nursing or architecture, require interviews with faculty members. A few institutions may require interviews with borderline students. Most universities, however, do not have the time or resources to use this method of evaluation (Rigol, 2003).

Cognitive and noncognitive variables in admissions. Although the use of noncognitive variables, such as letters of recommendation, personal statements, and extracurricular activities, in the selection process varies greatly, the most often-used admission criteria are the cognitive variables and prior grades (Moll, 1979; Willingham & Breland, 1982). According to Rigol (2003), the processing of the applications is not nearly as important as the factors that are considered when the applications are reviewed. Although not all factors that are considered can be detailed, Rigol found that there were common groupings of factors that institutions used in the decision-making process. The two major categories are “Academic Achievement, Quality and Potential” and “Nonacademic Characteristics and Attributes” (Rigol, 2003, p. 19). These are also seen as cognitive and noncognitive variables. Cognitive variables include direct measures, caliber of high school, and evaluative measures. Some examples of direct measures are honors courses, class rank, core-curriculum courses, GPA, and test scores. The caliber of high school shows a particular school’s overall measure of the average SAT or ACT scores, the competitiveness of the grading system and of the class, the strength of the curriculum, and the percentage of students attending a 4-year college. Evaluative measures include artistic talent, academic awards, evidence of academic passion, grasp of world events, and writing quality (Rigol, 2003).

Noncognitive variables include categories such as geographic location (rural or inner-city), personal background, extracurricular activities and leadership, personal attributes, and extenuating circumstances. Noncognitive variables are used by admissions officers to evaluate potential students in spite of their advantages or disadvantages, such as family responsibilities or health issues. Geiser (2009) has performed extensive research on the admission criteria at the University of California system of higher education. Geiser discerned that the most critical job of admissions officers is to appropriately apply institutional selection criteria—special talents and abilities, leadership and community service, students with low socioeconomic status, motivation to learn, and possibly ethnicity—to build a diverse class of students who seek to replicate the values and obligations of their institutions (Geiser, 2009). In addition, many institutions currently set aside a percentage of their incoming class for the students who may not meet the traditional criteria but may have unique talents or personal situations (Geiser, 2009; Rigol, 2003; Sedlacek, 2004). The use of cognitive and noncognitive variables in higher education admissions is quite varied.

Admission variables that predict success. Two contrasting variables predict student success in admissions. Some researchers favor studying traditional predictors such as GPA and standardized tests (Baird, 1984; Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Kobrin, Patterson, Shaw, Mattern, & Barbuti, 2008; Nisbet, Ruble, & Schurr, 1982; Noble & McNabb, 1989; N. D. Rice & Darke, 2000) and others believe that noncognitive variables will more accurately predict success in college students (Duran, 1983; Sedlacek, 2004; Ting, 2003; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984). According to Thomas, Kuncel, and Crede (2007), conventional predictors of college performance have been well documented with many

studies by Bridgeman, McCamley-Jenkins, and Ervin (2000), Kuncel, Thoms, and Crede (2005) and Noble, 1991. Even in the group of researchers who concur that cognitive variables are most likely to predict success, there is disagreement about whether standardized tests or GPA is more useful. Research by Geiser and Santelices (2007) showed that students' GPA in high school was a better predictor of student success than their SAT score. In their first round of research, the researchers analyzed almost 80,000 students who entered the University of California system from 1996 to 1999 and evaluated them during their freshman year to determine how their grades were related to their high school GPA and their SAT scores. The same sample of students was used to evaluate college-graduation rates and college GPAs (Geiser & Santelices, 2007). The results showed that high school GPAs are as least as strong predictors of students' cumulative college GPA as their first-year college grades (Geiser & Santelices, 2007). The authors stated that SAT scores do contribute a "small but statistically significant improvement in predicting long-term college outcomes" (Geiser & Santelices, 2007, p. 25). However, the authors believed that standardized test scores are so entwined with students' socioeconomic status and offer such minimal predictive value that they should have little weight in admission decisions. Geiser and Santelices believed that evaluating high school grades is more meaningful, unbiased, and just when making admission decisions (Geiser & Santelices, 2007).

According to Gilroy (2007), increasing numbers of colleges are choosing to forego the SAT as a requirement for admission and are pulling from a more diverse and larger pool of potential applicants. The National Center for Fair & Open Testing has posted a list of 740 institutions that are making the SAT optional. The list includes some

highly revered liberal arts colleges as well as the California State University and University of Texas systems (Gilroy, 2007). The movement toward making the SAT optional started in 1984 when Bates College in Maine dropped it as an admissions requirement. It appears that a slow but solid movement in liberal arts colleges, especially, has been building toward deemphasizing the SAT (Gilroy, 2007). Many colleges that have been a part of this movement have noticed that applicant pools have grown by as much as 25%, which positively influences student diversity as well (Gilroy, 2007).

More research has been done in the area of cognitive predictors of college-student success than on noncognitive variables as predictors. Issues of diversity arise when admission decisions are made. This is one reason many colleges and researchers advocate the use of noncognitive variables when making admission decisions. According to Thomas et al. (2007), three objectives have led to increased awareness in these types of predictors: the need for increased minority enrollment in higher education, the need to improve prediction of student outcomes, and the need to increase retention of all college students. Thomas et al. opined that all three objectives are important to higher education, yet Wilds and Wilson (1998) have found that reduced admission rates of minority students may be due to traditional predictive variables used in admission decisions (Thomas et al., 2007).

Researchers in this area believe that noncognitive variables can be as important a predictor of student success as cognitive variables and can add significant validity to traditionally used predictors. Recently, different types of evaluations have been developed because of this belief. The Student Readiness Inventory by Le, Casillas, Robbins and Langley (2005) was designed to assess psychological and academic abilities

such as study skills and problem-solving skills. The authors found these abilities to be predictive of college success, as measured by GPA and persistence (Thomas et al., 2007). Institutional administrators who implement alternative admissions policies clearly agree with the notion that noncognitive variables can be an important predictor of success, as these policies are based solely on these types of variables.

The Rainbow Project, developed by Sternberg, a psychologist at Yale University, is an admissions assessment that evaluates analytical intelligence (similar to the SAT) as well as creative and practical aptitude. Sternberg's study found that the Rainbow assessments were twice as effective at predicting college grades as SAT scores individually. The assessment also illustrated a smaller gap in scores by race than the SAT. Sternberg would like to have this test used alongside the SAT, not in place of it (Gose, 2005).

The Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) was developed in 1984 by Tracey and Sedlacek to address the perceived racial gap in the university-admission process. The authors recommended that the tool be used as an alternative admissions device as well as for advising students and for researching the relationship between noncognitive variables and student success (Sedlacek, 2004). Currently, the NCQ is used as an admission's predictor at Muhlenberg College, Louisiana State University Medical School, and North Carolina State University. Also, the University of Maryland uses the tool in the student-counseling center for advising, student development, and teaching (Sedlacek, 2004).

The NCQ is based on the theoretical work of Tinto (1993), MacKinnon-Slaney (1994), and Bean (1985) and is supported by empirical research in the areas of psychosocial and motivational influences on student persistence and success (Sedlacek,

2004). The questionnaire, which asks students how they think and feel about certain personal and social situations, consists of eight dimensions and definitions that include positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, understanding and ability to deal with racism, preference for long-term goals, availability of a strong support person, leadership, community involvement, and knowledge acquired in a field (Sedlacek, 2004).

Sedlacek (2004) also advocated for various ways to access noncognitive information from students, such as portfolios, questionnaires, interviews, and essays. As a graduate-level example, the University of Maryland Medical School used alternative-admission criteria in requiring interviews to assess applicants on various noncognitive variables. Interestingly, in 1998, a potential applicant sued the university questioning the fairness of the interview practice. In *Farmer v. Ramsay*, the University of Maryland School of Medicine was successful in a federal suit brought by a Caucasian candidate who made the claim that the school's race-conscious admissions policies were unconstitutional. The court ruled in favor of allowing the University of Maryland to use noncognitive variables in admitting students to its medical school. That suit, filed in 1998, was decided in 2001—2 years before the Supreme Court's decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (Sedlacek, 2004).

Such types of university-admission evaluations have their opposition. Thomas et al. (2007) believed that because of debate on admissions procedures, it is important to scrutinize mechanisms that are used in making decisions to ensure that the information provided by the instruments are valid. These authors decided to examine the NCQ because of its fairly prevalent use. The objectives of their study were to establish the predictive validity of the scores on the questionnaire and to evaluate the average score

differences between racial and ethnic groups. The study consisted of a meta-analytic review of the validity of scores on the NCQ across 47 independent samples for predicting academic outcomes ($N = 9,321$). If differences were found, this would raise issues of fairness and predictor bias due to race. The researchers believed that the results of their study could have significant repercussions for the use of the NCQ in higher education admissions decisions (Thomas et al., 2007).

In this research, it was determined that the NCQ was not found to be a valid selection tool and should not be used for admissions decisions “assuming colleges and universities are concerned about predicting grades, college persistence, and credits earned” (Thomas et al., 2007, p. 648). The authors found that the scores on the NCQ are not linked to college performance evaluated by credits earned, GPA, and persistence (Thomas et al., 2007). Thomas et al. (2007) discovered that African American students scored higher on the NCQ than their European American counterparts and concluded that the use of this instrument would indeed increase the admissions of minority applicants. “However, students admitted on the basis of NCQ scores are only trivially more likely to succeed than if they had been selected at random” (Thomas et al., 2007, p. 649).

The Bial–Dale Index. A 1999 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* stated that nine colleges were going to try to increase student diversity by trying alternatives to standardized testing (Gose, 1999). These selective colleges and universities agreed to admit a total of 100 students for the 2000–2001 academic year. The test that involved Lego blocks and in-depth interviews is called the Bial–Dale College Adaptability Index. Developed by Bial and Dale because the future of affirmative action was unclear at the time, the test was designed to provide a “validated option for choosing

students on the basis of a different dimension of talent not so strongly connected to race and socio-economic status” (Bial, 2006, p. 3). The tool was made to identify leadership, involvement and persistence traits in students that could possibly predict their success in college (Bial, 2006).

Nine colleges involved in the 2000–2001 study on admissions and student diversity included the public institutions of Pennsylvania State University, Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey, the University of Delaware, and the University of Michigan; the liberal arts colleges included Beloit, Carleton, Colorado, Grinnell, and Macalester. The associate provost of admissions of the University of Delaware was excited to be part of a program that would help ensure diversity at the institution. The associate provost also had a strong belief that nontraditional measures were better at predicting success than GPAs and SAT scores (Gose, 1999). The research was funded by a 3-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for \$1.9 million. Approximately 800 New York City public school students were chosen and most were African American or Latino (Bial, 2006). Currently, the organization, The Posse Foundation, has 28 university partners that have given \$175 million in scholarships to 1,850 students. Once students are chosen using the Bial–Dale Adaptability Index, they participate in an 8-month precollege training in the senior year of high school, meet with Posse staff throughout 4 years of college, and have access to internships and counseling services. Bial stated that participants have a 90% college graduation rate (L. Rice, 2008).

In opposition to this type of evaluation, Pell, a lawyer at the Washington-based nonprofit law group, the Center for Individual Rights, believed this assessment aimed at trying to increase diversity is actually more discriminatory. Pell stated that universities

are free to assess potential students by any methods they choose, as long as the measures are applied to members of all ethnic groups. Pell suspected that this index would be used mostly to evaluate African American and Hispanic students but that leadership abilities could be evident in Caucasian and Asian students as well. Pell warned that schools that “gerrymander” admissions’ structures may face legal sanctions (Gose, 1999).

Alternative-Admission Policies

When universities or colleges use primarily noncognitive variables and predictors as a separate part of their regular-admission process, it is often formalized as an alternative-admissions policy. After an extensive search of such policies in academic settings, there are few formalized guidelines. However, several types of institutions offer alternative admissions to their students. Some are collegewide and others offer it for individual programs in the institution. In the review of policies on higher education alternative-admission criteria, it seems that more competitive schools do not offer such choices for student admissions. In Ivy League institutions, it was found that Yale (student.questions@yale.edu, personal correspondence, May 11, 2009), Harvard (M. McGrath, personal correspondence, May 11, 2009), Princeton (J. Goodbinder, personal correspondence, December 10, 2010) and Brown (E. Hunter, personal correspondence, May 20, 2009) have not instituted such policies. According to an article in the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers transcript, it was reported that the Ivy League colleges had record-low admission rates for the fall 2009 semester. Harvard’s admission rate was 7%, the lowest in the 373-year history of the school, spurred by the economy and more students seeking financial aid. Yale admitted 7.5% of applicants, and Brown admitted 10.8% (Cormier, 2009).

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. In 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board published a study on alternative admissions criteria.

The decrease in African-Americans and Hispanic students at selective public higher education institutions in Texas after the Hopwood decision in 1996 prompted the higher education community to search for alternative admission criteria that would identify students whose test scores might not reflect their full academic ability. (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000, p. 1)

Texas institutions of higher education implemented their alternative-admission policy, House Bill 588, codified as the Texas Education Code, by allowing the top 10% of each high school's graduating class to have guaranteed admission, regardless of their scores on standardized tests. The Code also allows for 18 alternative-admission criteria in selection of college students for admission (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000).

A major finding of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2000) study showed that high school curriculum taken by a student, indicated by type of diploma, was a criterion that predicted college-student success. Students who graduated from high school with the advanced diploma with honors were more likely to attend a 4-year college, obtain a higher college GPA, and have higher retention and persistence rates in college (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000). In conclusion, the authors wrote that use of alternative-admissions criteria will increase the admissions pool and will also include some students whose standardized test scores would have left them out.

Identifying and implementing reliable alternative admissions criteria moves the higher education community closer to embracing the reality of multiple measure to assess students, and challenges the notion that a single, one-shot standardized

test score is the sole predictor of whether or not a student will be successful in collegiate study. (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000, p. 12)

This study did not address support services for any students while enrolled in their institutions of higher education.

Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board. In 1998, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (2001) for Washington State adopted an alternative-admissions policy for each of its six public universities because of the belief that some students can succeed despite failing to achieve the minimal standards. The policy allows for up to 15% of incoming freshman and 10% of graduate or professional students to be admitted under the alternative standards. To qualify, freshman applicants have to be 25 years of age or older and meet standards suitable for their personal experiences and age, including evidence of success outside of academics and motivation to succeed in college (Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2001).

Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania. At Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, a particular program, teacher education, has its own alternative-admissions policy, instituted to recruit a diverse pool of students. “The purpose of the Alternative Admissions Policy is to provide educational opportunities to economically disadvantaged students, students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and students with disabilities in teacher preparation programs” (Lock Haven University Alternative Admissions Policy, 2008, p. 1). At Lock Haven University, the policy permits cases to be assessed individually, and 10% of the overall admissions can be reserved for these students. Those who want to teach in high-need areas such as special education, mathematics, and science, are given preference. This seems to be an effective recruiting

tool for those who do not qualify under typical admission standards and is also beneficial to these students as the university provides student-support services to each student.

University of California Higher Education System. The University of California system's alternative-admissions policy, titled Admission by Exception, was updated in 2005 and approved by its governing body, the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools. The policy is guided by the same principles as those of other institutions, whereby it is recognized that although some students do not meet the strict numerical eligibility requirements, they may still have potential for academic success and possess leadership abilities (University of California, 2005). The University of California system policy allows for a total of 6% of the newly enrolled students to be admitted under alternative criteria. Up to 4% of students can be admitted because of disadvantaged circumstances, including those who are low-income, first-generation, or from low-Academic Performance Index schools (high schools with low levels of performance according to a California ranking system). The other 2% include students who have overcome personal challenges that have somehow affected their ability to meet the requirements, such as those with sudden adversity, disability, veterans, adults, refugees, or students who have lived in foster care. The "other" 2% of alternative admissions are students who demonstrate talent in academics such as language, science, mathematics, or writing; demonstrate extraordinary talent in athletics, performing arts, leadership, or community involvement; or those applicants who would enable the campuses to establish new programs or majors (University of California, 2005). This policy addresses access for potential students but does not address retention, as support services or other activities to ensure success to students admitted by exception are not mentioned.

The examples above give an overview of different types of institutions using various alternative-admissions criteria. Alternative admissions is not a uniform practice across universities and colleges, nor are the motivations for implementing such practices.

College-Student Success

College-student success is a complex concept, and there has been abundant research by many authors on the subject, covering the spectrum from characteristics internal to the student to those external to the institution. According to Adelman (2004) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005), academic preparation, student motivation, and engagement are the best predictors of whether a student will graduate (Kuh et al., 2005).

Numerous studies are based on internal attributes of individual students and have contributed to empirical findings and recommendations. Some researchers have delved more deeply into what contributes to a student's motivation and academic preparedness. For example, McDonough, Antonio, and Trent (1997) studied variables such as gender, ethnicity, and at-risk variables such as socioeconomic status and emotional maturity that can have a major affect on student retention and academic success. Other personal attributes of students range from technological aptitude (Twale & Schaller, 2003) to degrees of writing and communication apprehension (Miller & Edmunds, 1995) or experiences and feelings toward education (Spitzer, 2000).

Student influences. In 1997, McGrath and Braunstein researched which academic and nonacademic factors led to retention in college. They found that students' initial impressions of other students and first semester GPA were major contributors to student retention.

Consistent with Adelman (2004) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005), the overall belief in the field of college-student success is that the better academically prepared students are in high school, the more likely they will succeed in higher education (Kuo, Hagie, & Miller, 2004). The problem for many professionals who are employed to assist with student success is that students that come to college without the necessary basic skills for academic success and are never afforded the opportunity to develop and/or expand on those skills (Borland, 2004). At many institutions, academic support systems are developed to provide assistance to undergraduate students. However, Pope and Miller (2003) studied nearly 50 support and academic services that institutions offered to help student athletes, but found that these same services were not always offered to the general population of undergraduate students. This is similar to student services, or its lack, for “regular” and alternatively admitted students at UNLV. Borland (2004) noted that student-focused enrollment-management programs should include such services as tutoring, study-skill improvement classes, student counseling, and student advising, which are directly related to student retention (Borland, 2004). Another area that has been shown to be equally important to student success is student ability to socially integrate into the campus community (Belch, Gebel, & Maas, 2001). How students choose to integrate into the campus community can either assist them when they are struggling academically or can hinder any needed support (Manns, 2002). A newer area of study is the kind and amount of technological support available on a campus. Some researchers found that a campus that has a strong technology focus can negatively affect the social structures that are needed for continued student success (Hidalgo & Miller, 2000; Twale & Schaller, 2003).

Research on college-student development has shown that what students do while they are attending is actually more predictive of whether they will persist than “who they are” coming into college (Kuh et al., 2005). Astin (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) found that the single greatest predictor of student learning and personal development is the time and energy students dedicate to educationally focused activities and just how engaged they are in university life. According to Braxton (2006), many studies concentrate on retention and degree attainment as the main indicator of student success, but eight areas deserve attention: academic accomplishment, attainment of general education, development of cognitive skills and intellectual outlook, occupational accomplishments, preparation for adulthood and citizenship, and personal development and accomplishments.

In their review of the literature conducted for the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, Kuh et al. (2007) proposed that student success be defined broadly to include academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance. (Kuh et al., 2008, p. 1)

According to research by Kuh et al. in 2007, the quantity of time and effort the student devotes to the learning process is the key component to enhancing their engagement in educational processes. The main student-based factors include motivation, satisfaction with the institution, peer involvement, study habits, time on task, interaction with faculty, experiences with diversity, and participation in cocurricular activities and motivation (Kuh et al., 2007).

Merwin (2002) researched disengaged students and what faculty can do to help engage them to contribute to their success in college. Merwin believed there is great importance in building interpersonal relationships to engage disinterested students and that these students want to be connected to professors and the university instead of being treated as objects. Merwin stated that the solution for instructors is to respect the students as a “whole” person and to engage them in advanced classroom participation. Using informal writing in class, using empathy and humor, and through interpersonal demonstrations student engagement can follow (Merwin, 2002).

African American students. Allen (1992) found, between 1965 and 1975, that although African Americans made great strides in accessing higher education, student success was minimal for this group of students, especially at predominately White colleges. The factors that Allen found needing to be addressed included financial-aid resources, academic preparation in secondary education, and the racial discrimination found in society that translated to all aspects of higher education, also noted by Blackwell (1985) and Farley and Allen (1989). Allen stated that “Universities must also become more proactive and deliberate in the actions taken to address barriers to African-American success in their institutions” (Allen, 1992, p. 42).

Research completed in 2002 on African American men at a historically Black college found that high school GPA and noncognitive variables such as academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment to the college were significantly related to predicting academic achievement and retention (Schwartz & Washington, 2002).

In 2007, the online *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* published their feature stories on the college graduation rates of African American students, based on NCAA data. Data showed that the Black-student graduation rate was 43% compared to the White-student graduation rate, which was 63%. The journal expressed that even though this rate was low, it was four percentage points higher than it was in the previous 3 years (“Black Student College Graduation Rates Inch Higher,” 2007). The journal also gave possible reasons for the low graduation rates of this group of students: the racial climate at some colleges and universities is not as conducive to African American students; although others, such as Brown University, have been very supportive of Black students. The University of California, Berkeley has had a more difficult time; the presence or absence of Black student organizations can affect the rates of graduation; and the availability of financial aid for Black students, who often cite a lack of resources as a reason for leaving college (“Black Student College Graduation Rates Inch Higher”, 2007).

Hispanic students. Research on Hispanic college students published by the American Enterprise Institute shows that 51% of Hispanic students complete a bachelor’s degree in 6 years compared to 59% of White students at the average college or university. After accounting for the type of students institutions admit, Hispanic students graduate at lower rates than their White peers at all levels of admissions selectivity. Among colleges in the “competitive” category, defined by Barron’s *Profiles of American Colleges*, the 10 highest-performing colleges graduate more than three times as many of their Hispanic students than the 10 lowest-performing schools (as cited in Carey, Kelly, & Schneider,

2010). The researchers investigated why some types of institutions are more successful at graduating Hispanic students than others and came to the following conclusions:

- Focusing on and committing to high levels of retention and completion for all students was a critical qualification for preserving and improving the percentage of Hispanic students who graduated with a baccalaureate degree (Carey et al., 2010).
- Many Hispanic students were “undermatched,” meaning that these students enrolled at schools that were less selective than their qualifications would have permitted. These undermatched students were more likely to leave college than if they were attending more selective universities. The authors believe that information needs to be disseminated to Hispanic families regarding higher education culture, financial aid, the true costs of college, and which schools work better with this population of students (Carey et al., 2010).
- The authors stated that federal aid to colleges and universities should be tied to whether schools meet significant performance guidelines. For example, the criterion that designates a college or university as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) should be consistently evaluated. This criterion makes universities eligible to compete for federal Title V funding and identifies the institution as a leader in Hispanic higher education. However, the HSI description is not associated with outcomes, such as whether an institution has made strides on issues such as labor-market success, student retention, and graduation rates. Currently, becoming an HSI is solely a function of

enrollment; therefore, there is encouragement to enroll more Hispanic students but little incentive to ensure that those students are successful. The authors believe that the HSI designation should be closely tied to performance and that those who are successful should be given extra benefits for serving these underrepresented and at-risk students (Carey et al., 2010).

Kuo et al. (2004) surveyed students, using a convenience sample in undergraduate courses at an urban research university in the western part of the United States to better understand college-student success. The survey consisted of demographic questions, questions related to study skills, questions about challenges of being a college student, and questions on how the students felt they cope with the challenges (Kuo et al., 2004). The findings demonstrated that although college students in the sample said they liked to work in groups and collaboratively, they actually chose to leave campus and study by themselves. In addition, students reported they infrequently used the writing center and reported a lack of interest in the campus library. Other student concerns brought to light from the research included the ability to pay for their education and the ability to balance their personal and professional lives. The researchers concluded that because there was such a strong concern about balancing college and personal life, students are most likely older and not immersed in the traditional “college life.” This creates problems for administrators who are seeking to develop programs and provide a diversity of services to encompass all undergraduates in a university, with a goal of encouraging student success (Kuo et al., 2004). The impact of these results can affect institutional approaches of service learning and academic-support services for students.

First-generation students. In 2005, Chen published research on first-generation college students for the U.S. Department of Education. The findings corroborated previous studies that showed that first-generation students were at a major disadvantage in gaining access to higher education and that those who overcame the barriers and did actually enroll had difficulty persisting and actually attaining a degree (Chen, 2005; Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez 2001).

Chen (2005) also investigated the academic experiences of first-generation students such as their declared majors, GPAs and coursework practices in contrast to students whose parents went to college. Chen used data from the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. The results indicated that first-generation students consistently underperformed in college when compared to their peers: they took a small number of courses, produced lower grades, completed fewer credits, took fewer academic courses, needed more remedial support, and were more likely to repeat or withdraw from courses they attempted to take (Chen, 2005). In addition, first-generation students were less likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree, even those who entered a 4-year institution with the intention of earning a undergraduate degree. Chen reported that these findings remained reliable even after taking into account the variables related to student background characteristics, credits completed, performance, and high school preparation (Chen, 2005).

Institutional influences. From a macroperspective, institutions can have a significant external influence on student success. Student retention has been researched to a great extent in the field of higher education. Tinto and Astin are among the most prolific and productive in this subject area in the past decades. Tinto's initial model of

student retention, published in 1975, stated that all students entered college with intrinsic family and individual commitments toward remaining in college and completion of a degree. Students enter with their commitments into an academic system consisting of grades and performance, and simultaneously, into a social system, comprised of peer and faculty interactions. The assimilation of both systems will influence students' continuing higher education goals and institutional allegiance, as well as their decision to leave or stay in college (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's 1993 model took into account research findings that outside environmental factors and students' intentions are major factors that predict student retention (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto followed up on earlier work in a 2006 article on the research and practice of student retention. According to Tinto (2006), student retention has been one of the most studied issues in higher education. Forty years ago, when student retention was researched, it was viewed as a student's problem, based on the student's individual attributes, degree of motivation, and skills. "Students failed, not institutions. That is what we now refer to as blaming the victim" (Tinto, 2006, p. 2). Tinto's book, *Leaving College* (1975, 1987) was the first to describe a longitudinal model that made detailed connections between the environment, which consisted of the social and academic systems of the university, the individuals who worked in those systems and the rate of student retention over various periods of time (Tinto, 2006).

Central to this model was the concept of integration and the patterns of interaction between the student and other members of the institution especially during the critical first year of college and the stages of transition that marked that year" (Tinto, 2006, p. 3).

Tinto defined the later research on retention as the “age of involvement” which was based on work by Astin and Pascarella and Terenzini. This work reinforced the significance of student involvement in relation to student outcomes, which included retention and graduation. The most noteworthy finding was that the level of involvement is important, especially during the first year of college. Throughout the many years of research on student retention, one point is paramount: “involvement, or what is increasingly being referred to as engagement, matters and it matters most during the critical first year of college” (Tinto, 2006, p. 3). The issues that remain less clear are how to make involvement matter to both students and institutions and how to apply it to different settings for different types of students (low income, nontraditional, nonresidential, etc.) in ways that augment retention and improve graduation rates (Tinto, 2001; Tinto, 2006; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

Student-involvement theory. Astin (1999) performed extensive research and found that the more involved students are in all that an institution has to offer, the more likely they will be to meet their educational goals. In longitudinal research on college dropouts in 1975, Astin identified components that contribute to student persistence. Every noteworthy outcome could be thought of as a sort of student “involvement”; the positive components were likely to increase undergraduate-student involvement and the negative components would likely cause involvement to decrease. “In other words, the factors that contributed to the student’s remaining in college suggested involvement whereas those that contributed to the student’s dropping out implied lack of involvement” (Astin, 1999, p. 523).

Student-involvement theory is important to administrators in higher education because a students' time is a valuable resource. How successful students are in achieving educational goals is related to the amount of time and effort they put forth (Astin, 1999). Astin believed that administrators should be acutely aware of how policies and practices affect the way students spend their time, such as class schedules, faculty office hours, advising, orientations and even location of buildings, on-campus employment opportunities, residency requirements, type and availability of extracurricular activities, financial aid policies, and parking guidelines (Astin, 1999).

All institutional policies and practices ... can be evaluated in terms of the degree to which they increase or reduce student involvement. Similarly, all college personnel ... including administrators, can assess their own activities in terms of their success in encouraging students to become more involved in the college experience. (Astin, 1999, p. 528)

Student-engagement theory. Kuh and colleagues have done years of research on the macroissues surrounding student engagement, based on Astin's theory of student involvement (Kuh et al., 2005). Certain institutional practices are more successful at engaging students than others (Kuh et al., 2005), and the most well-known group of student-engagement indicators was developed by Chickering and Gamson (1987) called "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education." These tenets include cooperation between students, active learning, faculty–student conduct, time on task, timely feedback, elevated expectations, and respect for different ways of student learning and talents (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Institutional environments that are perceived by students as being inclusive and affirming and where expectations are set reasonably

high and are clearly communicated will also positively affect student learning (Education Commission of the States, 1995; Kuh et al., 2001). As multiple studies have shown, these factors and practices have been found to be positively related to student satisfaction, persistence, learning, and development on many levels (Astin, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Goodsell, Maher, Tinto, Smith, & MacGregor, 1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Therefore, what the Education Commission of the States (1995) found was that the most effective institutions of higher education add value by directing students toward suitable learning activities and by keeping them highly engaged in these specific activities (Kuh et al., 2005).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the students themselves and the institution are two major factors of student engagement that contribute the most to college student success. The experts in student engagement and success believe that many institutions claim to provide learning environments for their students, such as honors programs, leadership programs, and the availability of participation in faculty research. Kuh et al. (2005) argued that many of these programs are used by students who are motivated initially, but universities need to develop and implement programs, policies, and practices that encourage all students to be a part of educationally focused activities that increase student engagement (Kuh et al., 2005). This research team did an extensive project, Documenting Effective Educational Practice, which reviewed policies, practices and procedures at over 700 institutions of higher education. Twenty were identified that had higher than predicted levels of student engagement, based on scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and higher than predicted 6-year graduation rates based on institutional size, selectivity, and location.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) obtains, on an annual basis, information from hundreds of four-year colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.

Survey items on The National Survey of Student Engagement represent empirically confirmed “good practices” in undergraduate education. That is, they reflect behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes of college. (NSSE, 2009)

Clusters of effective education practice. NSSE has identified five Clusters of Effective Education Practice that pertain to both students and the institution: the level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interactions with faculty, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment (Kuh et al., 2005). The 20 colleges in the Kuh et al. (2005) study that performed better than expected in student engagement and graduation rates vary greatly. Nine are public and 11 are private; some are liberal arts and some are research intensive; some are residential and some are commuter-based; two are historically Black colleges; two are Hispanic-serving; one is men only, and two are women’s colleges. Although the authors were not able to provide a blueprint for success from the research to give to institutions to implement, they strongly affirmed that each university was able to execute programs and policies in thoughtful and strategic ways for each individual setting (Kuh et al., 2005). Some exceptional and innovative institutional examples include using the curriculum as the central place to promote student success; using out-of-class activities to connect students

in productive ways to their academic studies and to the university, and some increased engagement due to changing accreditation policies and the desire to improve student learning; others had strong and imaginative leaders, and a few had a prevailing campus culture and mission that were the basis for student success (Kuh et al., 2005). “At all [Documenting Effective Educational Practice] schools, a unique combination of external and internal factors worked together to crystallize and support an institution-wide focus on student success” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 21).

In research by Kuh et al. (2007), the main institutional factors found that support academics included curriculum, resources, student-support services, organization, first-year experience, academic support, campus environment, peer support, and teaching and learning approaches. In addition, Kuh et al. (2008) found that evidence from multiple studies over the past few decades indicated that effective educational practices based on student engagement assists all types of students to varying degrees. The research also shows that student engagement is correlated with affirmative outcomes such as retention, satisfaction, and better grades. Kuh et al. (2008) also found that certain groups of students such as first-generation, males, transfer students, and those who do not live on campus are less engaged; however, practices that promote engagement may provide positive effects for minority, first-generation, and low-income students. Additionally, many researchers have found that those students who are least prepared academically will benefit more from engagement than those who are most prepared, in effects on grades and persistence (Kuh et al., 2008; NSSE, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The results show that finding ways to guide these students toward educationally effective

activities would be judicious, especially for those who enter higher education with two or more risk factors (Kuh et al., 2008).

Success of college-student athletes. As far as college-student-athlete success in higher education, the NCAA reported in November, 2009 that 79% of all Division I athletes who entered college from 1999 to 2002 graduated within 6 years of enrolling. This rate is a 1% increase from 2008 and six percentage points higher than the graduation rate released in 2001, when the NCAA first started collecting such data. The NCAA also stated that student athletes in larger college-sports programs persist to graduate at rates higher than those of their nonathlete student peers (Sander, 2009). However, the NCAA calculates its graduation rates of athletes differently from the U.S. Department of Education as “the NCAA statistics, unlike the federal ones, do not penalize institutions when athletes transfer to other colleges, as long as they depart in good academic standing” (Sander, 2009, para. 1). For athletes who entered college in the 2002–2003 academic year, the graduation rate was also 79%. In contrast, the U.S. Department of Education rate for that same group was 64%, whereas the federal rate for the entire student body was 62% (Sander, 2009).

Although there is scholarly research on predictors of student-athlete success, institutional and individual challenges facing student athletes and various “how to” materials for universities, there is limited recent research on the reasons for retention and success of student athletes, especially those admitted under alternative criteria. Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston (1992) evaluated the predictors of academic success of student athletes but did not consider whether they were successful past the first semester of their college careers. Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston found that noncognitive variables were

better predictors of first-semester grades than the SAT. Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston believed that SAT scores should not be used to select student athletes but that university personnel should focus on issues such as confidence, motivation, and engagement to assist in their success.

According to the NCAA, the data for 2008 show that the graduation success rate for all Division I players was 79% for students who started college in 2001 and that the rate is increasing (NCAA, 2011a; Sander, 2009). According to Marklein (2009), athletic programs in institutions of higher education are having a positive impact on particular student athletes as well as on college education, because the average 6-year graduation rate for the entire student body is just 53% (Marklein, 2009).

An article published in 2010 in the *Journal of Physical Education and Sports Management* by Simiyu discussed institutional and individual challenges that student athletes face on college campuses. The article is based on Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement as well as institutional involvement factors studied comprehensively by Kuh et al. (2003), Kuh et al. (2001), Kuh et al. (2007), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991). Simiyu found that the literature on college-student-athlete success and academic performance is contradictory. In 2003, Bowen and Levin stated that athletic programs were a distraction in higher education because athletes receiving preferential treatment, lower grades, and having their own subculture that flourishes and isolates them from the rest of the university is counterproductive to their academic pursuits (Bowen & Levin, 2003). Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, and Banaji (2004) agreed, stating that this isolationist behavior may lead to more detrimental behaviors such as heavy drinking. The Aries et al. (2004) study did not find any indication that student athletes are less ambitious or less

grade conscious than nonathletes. They also did not spend less time studying than their nonathlete counterparts (Aries et al., 2004). Other researchers have found the opposite to be true. Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) and Kuh et al. (2007) found that student athletes spend time engaging in effective educational practices at the same level or even more than the nonathletes. Additional findings showed that student athletes at Division I universities are more content with the quality of their academic advising than their nonathlete peers; compared to other seniors, student athletes are more likely to participate in senior experiences, community-service projects, and foreign-language classes. The NSSE report (2009) found that senior women athletes at Division I universities report seeing the campus as more supportive of their educational and social needs, participate in more inspiring educational activities, and report gaining more in cultural competence when interacting with people different than themselves.

In a study published in 2009 (Gaston Gales & Hu, 2009), researchers found that for college-student athletes, student engagement has a positive impact on college outcomes, although none of the variables were retention or graduation rates. They defined the outcomes as (a) cultural attitudes, (b) personal self-concept, (c) gains in learning, and (d) communication skills. Students who participated in lower profile sports reported greater gains in learning and communication than the higher profile athletes. The results showed that engagement activities need to be configured to fit the profile of the student athlete. In addition, it confirms the importance of student engagement in promoting advantageous outcomes with student athletes (Gaston Gales & Hu, 2009).

A 2006 Melendez study comparing regular college students and college-student athletes on “adjustment to college” found that the student athletes reported higher scores

on academic and institutional attachment than their nonathlete peers. This study concluded that the student athletes were “more academically successful” than their counterparts, however, the measure used was a self-report questionnaire (Melendez, 2006).

Other researchers have determined that there are certain practices and programs that assist the college-student athlete: academic monitoring, personal counseling, career guidance, life-skills training, peer mentoring, assigning compatible academic advisors, teaching study skills, implementing an intensified study hall, and providing tutoring services (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 1996; Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003; Le Crom, Warren, Clark, Marolla, & Gerber, 2009). These results indicate that the environment of the university, including the practices and programs, is paramount in influencing students’ progress toward graduation (Astin, 1999; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Hyatt, 2003).

Success of Alternatively Admitted Students

Little research has addressed the success of alternatively admitted college students, especially in the past 10 years; however, there is a considerable amount of research on university-admission policies, procedures, and processes, as well as predictors and causes of college-student success (Astin, 1993; Baird, 1984; Hossler, 2005; Kuh et. al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Rigol, 2003; Sedlacek, 2004). The factors of success vary drastically, from theories of student motivation and engagement to university-wide programs that seek to encourage individual achievement. There is little research, however, on university admission policies that seeks to support students who may not qualify for admission based on traditional indicators. Few

institutions have alternative-admissions criteria, and those that do, do not have specific supportive services for this population of students. Some student-life programs provide extra academic support for disabled, low-income, and academically challenged students or those wanting to study the sciences, but they do not exist for academically challenged students without special needs. At UNLV, student athletes who are admitted under alternative criteria are provided supportive academic services such as tutoring, mentoring, and academic advisors.

In 1999 (Laden, Matranga, & Peltier), a study was published on the persistence and graduation rates of students admitted to the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) under special-admissions criteria in 1987. Laden et al. (1999) found that the graduation rate of this cohort was 23.4% and the only precollege predictor of success was students who completed 2 years of a foreign language in high school. They were 2.15 times more likely to graduate from UNR. The suspension rate for this cohort was 30.3% and there was no comparison information provided by the researchers (Laden et al., 1999).

A dissertation published in 1987 described the problems of academic achievement for college freshmen admitted under alternative criteria at UNLV. Kitchen (1987) reviewed data on 300 students who were admitted to UNLV between 1981 and 1984 under alternative criteria and found that students' high school GPA, sex, and ethnicity were not predictors for academic success, but there was a close association among ACT scores, college GPA, semesters completed, and credits earned. The author did note that it was not possible to determine the cause for the differences between GPA and ACT and SAT scores but hypothesized that a student's environment and self-image are correlated with educational achievement (Kitchen, 1987). Other results indicated that male students

had higher GPAs than female students; there were no significant differences found between ethnicity or sex and ACT scores; the researcher identified a need for the university to provide remedial programs for these students. The writer also provided several recommendations for further research in this area: a comparison between alternatively admitted students who took the SAT with regularly admitted students who took the SAT to determine if there are differences in academic success, additional investigation into whether academic advising for alternatively admitted students should continue, exploration of factors of student motivation and academic success, and a duplication of the study that would be applied to the entire student body.

Success of at-risk freshmen. Mattson (2007) researched issues in higher education that focused on understanding the success of at-risk freshmen at a 4-year college. The sample consisted of 591 diverse, nonathlete students, who were considered, at the time of admission, to be an at-risk population. These students arrived at college with an average high-school GPA of 3.36 and SAT scores of 1,076. Although these scores would be considered extremely high at some institutions, at this particular private college they were considered fairly low. Both the retention and success of the sample of students were high: 96% retention rate and 2.81 first-year GPA. The author found that the indicators of success were sex, high school GPA, and leadership experience. Women, those with higher high school GPAs and those who were involved in activities with leadership roles were more successful (Mattson, 2007). Mattson believed college preparation should start in high school for all students, so they will have the skills and abilities necessary to succeed in college.

In a study conducted in 2006 at a public 4-year university, cognitive and noncognitive factors were evaluated to determine what affect they had on academic performance and retention of 147 conditionally admitted freshmen. Sixty-one percent of the sample were women and 78% were White. Eleven percent of the students were African American. The average high school GPA was 2.16. The cognitive variables that were evaluated were first-semester GPA, high school rank, composite ACT scores, and high school GPA. The noncognitive variables were evaluated using Sedlacek's 1991 NCQ. This study had many implications for university-student service personnel: conditionally admitted students were 13–15% less likely to return to college in the spring semester in the three cohorts that were reviewed and 65% of the students earned a 2.0 college GPA or better; that indicates that 35% were suspended from college after their first semester (Adebayo, 2008). Adebayo suggested that, based on the findings, not all cognitive variables will predict academic success of conditionally-admitted students. Only the students' high school GPA was found to be a significant predictor of first-semester college GPA (Adebayo, 2008). Two noncognitive variables from the NCQ were also found to be predictive of first-semester success: realistic self-appraisal and coping with racism. Adebayo implied that students' self-awareness and their ability to comprehend and deal with racism will influence their academic success during their first semester in college.

Successful alternatively admitted student athletes. The scholarly research on the academic success of alternatively admitted or “special admit” athletes is quite limited. This is especially true when the definition of “success” means retention or graduating from their university or college within 6 years. In many institutions, such as UNLV, some

student athletes are admitted under alternative criteria because they do not qualify for admission under the set university criteria. Having athletic skills can be considered a “special” talent and students can then qualify for admission in universities such as UNLV and the University of California system (University and Community College System of Nevada Board of Regents, 2002; University of California, 2005).

The NCAA allows universities and colleges to use alternative admission policies for athletes. NCAA Bylaw 14.1.5.1.1 states

A student-athlete may be admitted under a special exception to the institution’s normal entrance requirements if the discretionary authority of the president or chancellor (or designated admissions officer or committee) to grant such exceptions is set forth in an official document published by the university (e.g., official catalog) that describes the institutions admissions requirements. (as cited in Teague, 2010, p. 1)

Much information is available on individual sports-program procedures for alternative admissions including articles and opinion pieces on special admissions in college sports. An article in *The Battalion* newspaper at Texas A&M University described the special-admissions process for athletes at this school and at other Division I schools. The success illustrated was athletic success, not student academic success. “A correlation between the number of special admits and athletic success is apparent. The 2010 [Bowl Championship Series] Championship Game featured two programs that have liberally used special admissions” (Teague, 2010, p. 2).

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Student retention issues at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. UNLV has been addressing issues relating to student access and retention for many years. In 1995, then President Harter came to UNLV and created a new mission statement and goals for the university, some of which focused specifically on students (UNLV, 1996). In the document approved by the Board of Regents in 1996, the following objectives were created with the intention to improve student retention and success:

Welcoming students to a learning community through meaningful orientation activities; educating the university community about student centeredness and about the responsibilities inherent in this concept for students, faculty and staff; providing learning opportunities, both curricular and co-curricular (including athletics), appropriate for and focused on students; setting high expectations for students in order to foster student success; using technology and innovative approaches to enhance student learning; using technological resources to expand instructional strategies and to deliver UNLV education to unable or unwilling to travel to campus for traditional classes, services, and cultural opportunities; developing leadership skills and service orientation among students; improving retention efforts by assessing and addressing student needs and providing a comprehensive, effective advisement program; providing student services that emphasize student centeredness; assessing and responding to health needs of students; exhibiting flexibility in scheduling in classes and services; and providing students with access to services and resources they need in order to meet their goals for success. (UNLV, 1996, pp. 9–10)

To address issues surrounding access, the admissions process and diversity of students at the university, the Nevada Board of Regents has, since 2002, allowed the university to admit a number of underqualified students equal to 10% of the previous year's *enrolled* freshman class, on probation. These alternatively admitted students are considered to have the ability to succeed in college but do not meet the university's minimum admission requirements. Applications for Alternative Admission Criteria are reviewed by the Faculty Senate Admissions Committee. For the 2000 school year, the required high school GPA was 2.50 and the requirements for alternative admissions were as follows:

Students who do not meet admission requirements to the university may apply for special consideration under the alternative admission program. The applicant for Alternative Admission is also required to submit the following documents: all official transcripts indicating completion of all work in progress; standardized test scores (SAT or ACT) or other documented evidence of the necessary capability, readiness, achievement, and motivation to be successful in university-level study; a personal explanation of the circumstances of previous academic performance and two letters of recommendation from an employer, educator or responsible official. (UNLV, 2000, p. 23)

Students admitted to UNLV on Alternative Admissions Criteria are placed on academic probation and must achieve a 2.0 GPA and complete at least six undergraduate-level credits by the end of their first semester; otherwise their admission will be cancelled (UNLV, 2000). In the 2006–2008 undergraduate catalog, the alternative admissions policy has the following language:

The criteria for admission are: a combination of test scores and grade point average that indicate potential for success; special talents and/or abilities such as, but not limited to, the visual or performing arts or athletic abilities; other evidence of potential for success; improvement in the high school record; overcoming adversity or special hardship and other special circumstances (UNLV, 2006a, p. 21)

Alternative-admissions process at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. UNLV uses the initiative called the Alternative Admissions Process (NSHE, 2007a), which sets aside a percentage of its incoming class for applicants who may not meet the traditional criteria but may have unique talents or personal situations. The policy states that the following noncognitive factors may be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Faculty Senate Admissions Committee and that only students whose petition is approved by the committee may be admitted (NSHE, 2007b):

- A combination of test scores and GPA that indicate potential for success,
- Special talents and/or abilities such as the visual or performing arts or athletic abilities,
- Other evidence of potential for success,
- Improvement in the high school record,
- Overcoming adversity or special hardship, or
- Other special circumstances (NSHE, 2007b).

One purpose for this admission policy is to attempt to make allowances for potential students who have not performed well in high school according to traditional measures (high school GPA and standardized test scores). The second purpose of this

type of policy is to attempt to increase diversity in the student body. The alternative-admissions process also encompasses student issues such as first-generation status, socioeconomic status, military experience, children of faculty or alumni, community service, and work experience.

In 1993, the Alternative Admissions Process was first enacted and titled “The UNLV Special Admission Program: Admission by Alternative Criteria (AAC)” (University and Community College System of Nevada Board of Regents, 1993, Rev. 132). The specifications of the program, although much more general than in more recent versions, were as follows:

- Documented evidence of the necessary capability (test scores), readiness, achievement, and motivation to be successful in university-level study;
- A submitted personal statement of educational goals;
- Two submitted letters of reference from an employer, educator, or responsible official;
- Approval by the University’s Admissions Committee to be accepted and would be admitted under probationary status only;
- The maximum number of applicants who may be admitted each year could not exceed 6% of the total freshmen enrollment at UNLV for the previous fall semester (University and Community College System of Nevada Board of Regents, 1993).

The Alternative Admissions Process policy did not change again until January, 2002, and is currently in place for alternatively admitted students at UNLV. The revised policy (Rev. 195) stated the process for student admission more explicitly:

Students who are denied admission to the university may petition, in writing, to the assistant vice president for enrollment management/dean of admission within 10 days of receipt of their denial letter. The Alternative Admissions Committee will review the petition and make a determination of admissibility. (University and Community College System of Nevada Board of Regents, 1993, Rev. 132, p. 34)

The policy allowed for the maximum number of applicants to gain acceptance under this program to not exceed 10% of the total freshmen enrollment for the previous fall semester, starting in the fall semester of 2006 (University and Community College System of Nevada Board of Regents, 2002, Rev. 132).

The universities in the Nevada State Higher Education system have been unique in admissions policy over the past few years. Prior to the fall of 2006, the required high school GPA for students seeking admission was 2.50. In the fall of 2006, the GPA requirement was raised to 2.75 and then to a 3.0 for the fall of 2008 (NSHE, 2007b). “Increasing admission standards was intended to support the NSHE Master Plan emphasis on providing clear pathways for all students to be successful who seek a baccalaureate degree” (NSHE, 2007b, p. 1). According to NSHE data, students with a high school GPA between 2.5 and 2.75 were not likely to succeed in the state universities but could be successful if they first attended a community college or Nevada State College and then transferred (NSHE, 2007). “These admission standards were designed to support a student-focused system where all students have the opportunity to participate and succeed at every level of higher education, recognizing the unique educational needs of a highly diverse and non-traditional population” (NSHE, 2007b, p. 1).

In an attempt to tackle the issues of poor retention and graduation rates, among other issues, UNLV President Ashley started a comprehensive planning process for the university on September 25, 2007 with a day-long event entitled “Focus: 50 to 100.” The goal of the event was to provide an institutional overview and discuss such topics such as identity and values, education, research, and infrastructure. Following this event, town hall meetings occurred in the fall of 2007 to get feedback from university stakeholders. A planning document was to go to various steering committees and stakeholders to condense. In March 2008, feedback was to be solicited from the faculty and deans and the resulting text was to be returned to the president and the cabinet for final review (UNLV, 2007c).

At this planning event, The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs provided reasons for the poor retention rate and proposed solutions for improvement. The reasons students did not stay at UNLV include lack of financial aid, poor preparation and skill gaps, lack of support or services, lost interest in classes, and students were not able to register for needed classes. The proposed solutions consist of increasing financial aid and scholarship support; providing diagnostics, developmental advising, and foundation classes; developing study and tutoring clinics and early support; creating a First Year and Transfer Center (Academic Success Center), which was implemented in the fall of 2009; providing engaged learning environments and first-year Learning Communities; and improving the campus life and identity for freshmen students. The Office of Academic Affairs stated they were currently revising general education, developing academic-advising initiatives, creating student-learning outcomes and assessment, and aggressively managing enrollments. Also mentioned was that the university needed to focus on the

quality, not the quantity of academic programs and on the quality of students' experiences at UNLV (2007c).

Enrollment reports showed that first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshman declined at both UNR and UNLV from the fall of 2005 to the fall of 2006, most likely as a result of higher admission standards. At UNLV there was a 14.4% decrease and at UNR there was a 2.6% decrease in student enrollments (NSHE Admissions Report, 2007b). Although the authors of the NSHE report did not want to make generalizations based on one years' worth of data, they did make some observations about the impacts of raising the GPA standards. At UNLV, the enrollment of all ethnic groups, except for White students, showed a decrease, especially in the Hispanic, Native American, and African American groups. This trend is not a positive one for the student body and opportunities for learning at UNLV. To address budget constraints and these enrollment issues, for the 2008 academic year the Provost said that the Faculty Senate Alternative Admissions Committee could admit 15% of the previous years' *admitted* freshmen class under alternative criteria. In addition, students who did not meet UNLV admission criteria could be admitted directly by the Admissions office on the following five criteria without having to go before the Faculty Senate Admissions Committee: (a) students who have high standardized test scores (SAT 1040 or 22 ACT) but did not meet the 2.5 GPA, (b) students who have at least a 2.5 GPA and at least a 17 on the English section of the ACT or 400 or the verbal section of the SAT, (c) TRIO students with at least a 2.5 GPA, (d) students that have the required high school GPA but with not enough college credits to be a transfer student, and (e) transfer students with a 2.5 GPA in college credits (NSHE

Board of Regents, 2008). As a result, for the fall 2008 semester, 808 students were admitted by alternative criteria.

Summary

This study sought to determine the reasons for retention and success of alternatively admitted student athletes and used the theoretical framework of student engagement by Kuh et al. (2007; Kuh et al., 2005) to explore the institutional factors that led to success or lack of success. The findings should be important to administrators in the arena of higher education because if this small subgroup of students are successful and a coherent framework based on student engagement is explicated, this model can be used to assist other subgroups of disadvantaged college students.

Overview

Chapter 2 provided a review of literature for this study. Chapter 3 will provide the methodology for this study; Chapter 4 presents the practices and programs of the UNLV Athletic Department as well as the demographics and narratives of the student athletes and professionals' experiences in the Athletics Department, as it pertains to practices and programs of the department. The data analysis is presented in Chapter 5, using content and matrix analysis described in Chapter 3, and Chapter 6 will provide the discussion, implications, and recommendations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the research methods and procedures used in this study. To explore the reasons for success of alternatively admitted student athletes, a qualitative case study of the policies, practices, and programs of the Athletic Department was conducted. Alternatively admitted athletes and professionals in the Athletic Department were interviewed in an attempt to explore the phenomenon of success for this subgroup of students. In-depth interviews with students and professionals, as well as documentation analysis were used (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The research questions will be restated and the application and selection of a qualitative case study will be assessed. The data-collection procedures and data analysis will be reviewed. The qualitative software program, Atlas.ti, was used to code and assist in the analysis of the data.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What policies are in place to promote the success of alternatively admitted student athletes in *the UNLV Athletic Department*?
2. What practices and programs do the UNLV Athletic Department *professionals believe are effective* in helping alternatively admitted student athletes to be successful in college?
3. How have policies, practices, and programs evolved over time?

4. What programs offered by the UNLV Athletic department *do student athletes who are alternatively admitted* believe are most effective in helping them be successful?
5. Do student and administrative perceptions align?
6. Are UNLV Athletic Department policies, practices, and programs congruent with the theoretical framework of student engagement by Kuh et al. (2007), based on perceptions of professionals and students?

Research Design

The qualitative method was used to answer questions about the nature of certain occurrences, with the purpose of describing and understanding the trends and incidents from the participants' point of view (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative methodology is appropriate for this research because, according to Merriam (2001), it explores "how parts work together to form a whole while simultaneously conveying processes" (p. 6). In addition, qualitative analysis can provide information on participants' thoughts, perspectives and worldviews, which can prove to be imperative for understanding their experiences (Creswell, 1998).

Student athletes were asked which institutional policies, practices, and programs they believe work for their success and which policies, practices, and programs they believe are most important. The professionals gave their opinions on which policies, practices, and programs they believe are most beneficial to this particular group of students. The results were compared to the theoretical framework of student engagement by Kuh et al. (2007), and analyzed for concordance, disagreement, and overlap, and contribute to the literature by taking the empirical evidence and providing a coherent

framework that institutions of higher education may be able to apply and implement for other special subgroups of students. The emergent framework adds depth or nuance to Kuh's work.

Case-study design. Yin's (2009) case-study methodology informed the design of the study. Case studies allow for investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life and bounded context (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009;). The present case studied the UNLV Athletic Department. I explored which UNLV Athletic Department policies, practices, and programs helped to contribute to the retention and success of alternatively admitted student athletes. The perceptions from both professionals and students were explored and analyzed. The case-study design was selected because it aids in examining a closed system with detail and in depth, and contributes to the literature on alternatively admitted student athletes.

According to Yin (2009), the application of a framework is essential and suitable in using a case-study design, and applying various elements of analysis to existing frameworks as a way to expand the knowledge base and assess the future viability of frameworks (Yin, 2009). In this research, the student-engagement framework developed by Kuh et al. (2007) was applied to this case study. This study used a single, case-study design. Yin (2009) stated that the use of a single case study in research can be deemed appropriate by its revelation or uniqueness. A revelatory case study is one where the issue being examined is significant but has not been the subject of much research. A case study is unique when the rareness of the case makes it worthy of investigation (Yin, 2009). In this case, research and current literature addressing the success of alternatively admitted

students and alternatively admitted student athletes is negligible, making this study both unique and revelatory.

The primary unit of analysis in this case study are the policies, practices, and programs implemented by the UNLV Athletic Department. Yin (2009) guided that there may be more than one unit of analysis “when, within a single case, attention is also give to a subunit or subunits” (Yin, 2009, p. 50). In this case, the units of observation were the professionals and students in the Athletic Department at UNLV, and their perceptions were analyzed.

Participant selection. For this study, the purposeful-sampling technique was used to select all participants. This technique, according to Maxwell (2005), is used when people, settings, or activities are chosen to provide data that could not be obtained in other ways. Creswell (2002) described four goals in using purposeful sampling:

- To realize representativeness of the context, which included the activities, individuals and the setting;
- To appropriately describe the heterogeneity of the participants or settings being studied;
- To “deliberately examine cases that are critical for the theories that you began the study with, or that you have subsequently developed” (p. 90); and
- To ascertain specific comparisons to clarify the reasons for the differences between the individuals or settings.

One of the drawbacks of this type of sampling technique is that the researcher cannot generalize the opinions and views of the purposefully selected individuals to those of the entire group from which they come. According to Maxwell (2005), even though

the data may seem valid, there is no guarantee that the participants' views are representative.

When conducting qualitative research, the issue of gatekeepers can arise. Gatekeepers are those who control access to information or sites but are not the actual participants (Maxwell, 2005). The practice of negotiating research relationships is essential and knowing who the gatekeepers are at the site is especially important. For this study, an example of a gatekeeper is the Director of SAAS, who gave the contact information for student participants as well as contact information for other professionals in the Athletic Department.

There are two subunits of observation in this case study: alternatively admitted student athletes and professionals in the Athletic Department. During the proposal stage, the original plan was that the student athlete participants would include alternatively admitted student athletes who enrolled at UNLV from each of the two cohort years 2009 and 2010. However, during the data-gathering stage, it became apparent that finding the names of the student athletes who entered in 2009 was difficult because it was after that academic year that the University moved to the PeopleSoft data-management system. My contact in the Athletic Department was only able to access eight alternatively admitted student athletes who enrolled in 2010.

For the professionals from the Athletic Department, the Director of the SAAS and two advisors, who are divided according to sport, were interviewed. There are only two advisors currently, due to others recently resigning; however, I contacted two previous athletic academic advisors who spent many years advising student athletes. The departmental graduate assistant, who teaches life skills and learning support workshops to

these student athletes, was also interviewed. Also, to gather additional information, the Director's supervisors, the Dean of the Academic Success Center and the Senior Associate Athletic Director for NCAA Compliance were to be interviewed, but the Dean of the Academic Success Center was unable to participate, leaving seven professionals. Table 2 shows the student-athlete participants and Athletic Department professionals, as well as their sport affiliation, each of whom were selected to be interviewed.

Data Collection

The primary data-collection techniques used in this study consisted of in-depth interviews with successful alternatively admitted student athletes; interviews with different levels of professionals (directors, advisors, and administrators) working in the UNLV SAAS department; and two types of document analysis (student grades and written materials provided by the Athletic Department, including the Official Athletic website). These techniques were used to triangulate the data and provided multiple sources of evidence for this study (Yin, 2009). According to Maxwell (1992), "generating an interpretation of someone's perspective is inherently a matter of inference from descriptions of that person's behavior (including verbal behavior), whether the data are derived from observations, interviews, or some other source such as written documents" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 94). Table 3 provides information on the data-collection techniques, definitions of the techniques, and sources of data for the research study.

Table 2

Participant Selection and Sport Affiliation

Type	Participants	Sport Affiliation
Student (1)	Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete entering in 2010	Baseball
Student (2)	Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete entering in 2010	Football
Student (3)	Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete entering in 2010	Men's Soccer
Student (4)	Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete entering in 2010	Women's Soccer
Student (5)	Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete entering in 2010	Volleyball
Student (6)	Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete entering in 2010	Golf
Student (7)	Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete entering in 2010	Volleyball
Student (8)	Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete entering in 2010	Softball
Professional (1)	Director, Student-Athlete Academic Services	Men's and Women's Basketball, Baseball and part of Football
Professional (2)	Assistant Director, Student-Athlete Academic Services	Football and Men's Golf
Professional (3)	Graduate Assistant	Facilitates Life Skills and Learning Support Workshops; Women's Golf and Cheer/Dance Teams
Professional (4)	Previous Athletic Academic Advisor	Football, Women's Soccer, Tennis, and Swimming
Professional (5)	Athletic Academic Advisor	Football, Men's and Women's Soccer, Volleyball, Softball, and Swimming
Professional (6)	Athletic Academic Advisor	Football, Women's Basketball, and Women's Golf
Professional (7)	Senior Associate Athletic Director for NCAA Compliance	All Sports

Note. NCAA = National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Table 3

Data Collection Techniques, Sources, and Definitions

Data-collection technique	Source of data	Definition
Interviews	–8 alternatively admitted student athletes from 2010 cohort –7 professionals from the UNLV Student-Athlete Academic Services Department	The main purpose of the interview is to gain a detailed and complete description from a subject of the experience being researched. Potter (1996) defined interviewing as a “technique of gathering data from humans by asking them questions and getting them to react verbally” (p. 96).
Document Review (1)	–semester/year grades of the 8 alternatively admitted student athletes	Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 57) defined a document as “any written or recorded material not prepared at the request of the inquirer.”
Document Review (2)	–procedure manuals –website/handbook material	Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 57) defined a document as “any written or recorded material not prepared at the request of the inquirer.”

Note. UNLV = University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

In-depth interviews (see Tables 4 and 5 for Research and Interview Question Protocol). When using interviews as a data-collection tool, the assumption is that the participants’ collected thoughts and ideas are knowable, meaningful, and precise. An interview, in contrast to a survey, is chosen when interpersonal contact is significant and when opportunities for follow up on remarkable comments is desired (I. Seidman, 2006). In addition, according to Maxwell (1992), “interviews can provide additional information that was missed in observation, and can be used to check the accuracy of the observations” (p. 94). This is a valid type of data collection in qualitative research and there are three types of interviews used: structured, unstructured, and semistructured. In structured interviews, a controlled and inflexible questionnaire is given to the subject with emphasis on obtaining answers to the specifically formulated questions. In the unstructured interviews, the researcher has more freedom to ask follow-up questions; these are often referred to as in-depth interviews (Maxwell, 1992). The goal is to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participants and their perceived value of those

particular experiences (I. Seidman, 2006). Semistructured interviews are a balance between the structured and unstructured interviews. The questions are open-ended so as not to limit the participant's choice of answers (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; McCracken, 1988). The goal is to create an atmosphere where the interviewer and participant can discuss the topic in detail. The interviewer can use prompts and cues to help direct the participant into the research topic area and thereby gather more in-depth and detailed information (Creswell, 2003; McCracken, 1988; Patton, 2002).

In-depth interviews are often characterized by using open-ended questions and probing with participants. Usually, the interviewer prepares a list of questions as an interview guide that addresses the issues being explored. This guide tends to assist the interviewer to pace the interview and to ensure that all participants are asked the same questions. The guide also makes the interviewing more comprehensive and systematic (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). For these in-depth interviews, I used a semistructured format. Table 4 is an interview guide used with Athletic Department professionals and Table 5 is in the guide for student athletes. Tables 4 and 5 also show which interview questions correspond to the research questions.

Table 4

Interview Protocol Guide with Athletic Department Professionals (P)

RQ1(P): What policies are in place to promote the success of alternatively admitted student athletes within the *UNLV Athletic Department*?

IQ1–How many alternatively admitted student athletes are you responsible for?

IQ2–What is your position and which sports are you assigned to cover?

IQ3–Please describe any policies that have been implemented to contribute to the success of alternatively admitted student athletes specifically?

IQ4–If so, how were you informed about the policies?

RQ2(P): What practices and programs do the *UNLV Athletic Department* professionals believe are effective in helping alternatively admitted student athletes to be successful in college?

IQ5–Please list and then describe any practices and programs that have been implemented to assist alternatively admitted student athletes. These can include: Orientation, First-Year Seminars, Advising, Mentoring, Student-Success Initiatives, other Student-Support Services and Partnerships to Support Learning.

IQ5–Do the practices and programs differ by sport played by student?

IQ6–In your opinion, which practices and programs do you find the most effective in promoting success of alternatively admitted students and why?

IQ7–In your opinion, are any practices or programs more important or more effective than others?

RQ 3(P): How have policies, practices and programs evolved over time?

IQ 7–How long have you worked at the UNLV Athletic Department?

IQ8–Have you seen an improvement in the retention and success of alternatively admitted student athletes? Please describe in detail, give examples.

IQ9–In your opinion, which practices and programs have been most effective over time?

IQ10–How and why have they changed?

IQ11–Are there external variables that affect practices or programs?

Table 5

Interview Protocol Guide with Alternatively Admitted Student Athletes (S)

RQ 4 (S): Which programs offered by the UNLV Athletic department do student athletes who are alternatively admitted believe are most effective in helping them be successful?

IQ1–Demographics of student: age, gender, ethnicity, major, GPA, living on campus, sport played?

IQ2–Please describe any type of new student orientation that you attended your first semester. Was it held online or in person? Was it sponsored by UNLV, the Athletic Department or another entity? What did you learn from this program?

IQ3–Please describe any meetings with an athletic advisor prior to the start of your first semester. Where were the meetings held? What did you talk about? What was the purpose of these meetings?

IQ4–Explain any participation in a structured experience for new students (sometimes called “Freshman Seminar” or “First-Year Experience”). Was it within the Athletic Department? What did you learn from this program? What do you believe the purpose was?

IQ5–During your first semester, tell me about any enrollment in an organized “learning community” (two or more classes taken with a group of students). Where they within the Athletic Department? How were they helpful to you as a student?

IQ6–During your first semester, describe your participation in a student success course (student development, extended orientation, study skills, student life or college success). Was it held within the Athletic Department? What did you learn from this program? How was it helpful?

IQ7–Please list and describe any other programs (tutoring, mentoring programs, group study) that assisted you with your academics or social/emotional growth. Were they within the Athletic Department? How were they helpful? What did you learn from them?

IQ8–Were they group or individual programs? How many hours per week did you participate in each of the above programs?

IQ9–In your opinion, which practice or program(s) that you participated in has had the most influence on your success as a student athlete, and why?

IQ10–Is there anything else (a service or something not yet mentioned) that you received from the UNLV Athletic Department that has helped your academic success at UNLV? Please explain.

Document review. The review of existing records can provide insight into a setting or group of people that cannot be observed or reviewed in other ways (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined a document as “any written or recorded material not prepared at the request of the inquirer” (p. 57). According to Lincoln and Guba, documents can be divided into two major categories: public records and personal documents. Public records can be composed from outside (external) or inside (internal) the setting in which the research is taking place. “Public records are materials created and

kept for the purpose of attesting to an event or providing an accounting” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 277). Examples of internal public records in a higher education setting include institutional mission statements, policy manuals, annual reports, regulations, demographic material, internal memoranda, student transcripts, budget information, minutes of meetings, institutional histories, university/college catalogs, official correspondence, faculty and student handbooks, and student records and grade reports (Fetterman, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Examples of external documents include county-office records, newspaper archives, local-business records, and census and vital-statistics reports (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Patton (1990), the evaluation of educational settings and programs by using internal records is particularly useful in unfolding institutional distinctiveness such as backgrounds and academic qualities of students, as well as identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses (Patton, 1990). In this study, internal documents that were reviewed consisted of Athletic Department procedure manuals, website/handbook materials, and alternatively admitted student-athlete grades by semester. This offered additional sources of data to review and analyze. The documents also provided additional understanding of the context of the UNLV Athletic Department.

Approvals and access. Prior to engaging in data collection, formal approval was obtained from the UNLV Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB approval ensures that human participants from this study are protected and that the research is conducted in an ethical manner. I completed all institutional required training on the protection of human participants. I also attained approval to interview student athletes and professionals from the UNLV Athletic Department, as the results of this study will have a direct benefit for

the program and students in the future. Confidentiality and consent forms were prepared and presented to all interview participants to sign; they were given a copy as well.

Data Analysis

Experts in qualitative research have recommended that thinking about data analysis should begin early in the research process. Miles and Huberman (1994) asserted that the analysis of data should be an initial consideration in the data-collection process to assist the researcher in reflecting on the interview questions and data-collection methods, thereby allowing for improvements as the study progresses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Yin (2003) recommended that, prior to collection of the data, the researcher determine an analytical strategy as well as an analytical technique.

Content analysis. I used document and content analysis from the interviews to provide a framework that has a structured approach to the qualitative data-analysis process (Yin, 2003). This framework was designed to assist me in identifying themes and extrapolating information by producing a detailed mapping of the themes in and across respondents using charts and tables (Barkham, Hardy, & Mellor-Clark, 2010). Content analysis has been defined by many researchers; Weber (1990) defined it as “a research methodology that utilizes a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (p. 9). Patton (2002) referred to content analysis as quantitative data reduction that attempts to make sense of qualitative data. This includes finding core meanings through patterns and tabulating responses (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003; Patton, 2002). According to Babbie (2007), content analysis is a structured procedure for the objective examination and quantification of qualitative data, such as oral or written messages. It uses the classification of and evaluation of terms, themes, and ideas, and can measure the

frequency, order, or concentration of occurrence of the words, phrases, or sentences in communication to help establish the meaning or effect (Babbie, 2007).

Content analysis has been used for decades and the major definitions have not changed; according to Berelson (1952), content analysis can be used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, or sentences in texts to quantify this presence in an objective manner. The actual texts can be defined generally as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, or any occurrence of communicative language (Berelson, 1952). To conduct a content analysis on text, it is coded into categories on a variety of levels—word, word sense, phrase, sentence, or themes. It is then examined using one of the basic methods of content analysis: conceptual analysis or relational analysis (Berelson, 1952). The results are then used to make deductions about the messages in the texts. Table 6 shows the advantages and disadvantages of content analysis, based on Berelson.

I used Atlas.ti software to assist in sorting and coding of the data. The main benefit of using a computer program is to help alleviate the cutting, pasting, and retrieval of the interview transcripts and documents (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The coded data were sorted also using the content-analysis framework named by Ritchie and Spencer (1994), comprised of five stages: familiarization, identifying the thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation (Hurwitz, 2005; Kelleher, 2011). The five stages involve a systematic process of sifting, charting, and sorting materials according to relevant issues and themes (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). These analytical

stages rely on the theoretical and creative ability of the researcher to determine salience, meaning, and connections to the subject matter (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

Table 6

Advantages and Disadvantages of Content Analysis

Advantages	Disadvantages
Looks directly at communication via texts or transcripts, and hence gets at the central aspect of social interaction.	Can be extremely time consuming.
Can allow for both quantitative and qualitative operations.	Is subject to increased error, particularly when relational analysis is used to attain a higher level of interpretation.
Allows a closeness to text that can alternate between specific categories and relationships and also statistically analyzes the coded form of the text.	Is often devoid of theoretical base, or attempts too liberally to draw meaningful inferences about the relationships and impacts implied in a study.
Can be used to interpret texts for purposes such as the development of expert systems (since knowledge and rules can both be coded in explicit statements about the relationships among concepts).	Is inherently reductive, particularly when dealing with complex texts.
Is an unobtrusive means of analyzing interactions.	Often disregards the context that produced the text, as well as the state of things after the text is produced.
Provides insight into complex models of human thought and language use.	Can be difficult to automate or computerize.

Note. From *Content Analysis in Communication Research*, by B. Berelson, 1952, New York, NY, The Free Press.

Familiarization. Within 1 week of the interviews, I listened to the interview tapes, and transcription analysis started within 2 weeks. Two weeks after the interviews, I reexamined the interview data and documents to gain familiarity with the data. I then continued to review information and make notes of themes and key data (Yin, 2003) by rereading the interview data and using the Atlas.ti software. In particular, the “Word Cruncher” tool was used to identify key words and helped develop themes from the data.

Identifying a thematic framework. The second stage of the framework approach to data analysis is identifying a thematic framework (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). To

achieve this, the researcher should use the notes taken during the familiarization stage. The major issues, concepts, and themes that have been expressed by the participants form the basis of a thematic framework that can be used to filter and classify the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Ritchie and Spencer (1994) recommended that, even though a researcher may have a set of priority issues, it is important to maintain an open mind and not force the data to fit those preconceived issues. Ritchie and Spencer stressed that the thematic framework is only tentative and there are additional chances to refine it at later stages.

I organized the interview questions using the research questions as a guide. The initial coding used the student engagement theoretical framework of Kuh et al. (2007) as a starting point. A thematic framework surfaced that was similar to a revised version of Kuh's theory of student engagement.

Indexing. Indexing is the third stage of this framework approach and the value is to develop a system to categorize the study's findings (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Indexing means the researcher identifies portions or sections of the data that correspond to a particular theme. This process is applied to all the textual data that has been gathered (i.e., transcripts of interviews). Ritchie and Spencer (1994) recommended that a numerical system be used to index references, annotated in the margin beside the text (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). During this stage, I reviewed each interview transcript, added descriptive headings, and started to note any emerging themes surrounding the thematic framework by recording these in the margin of the transcripts. The indexing assisted me in building a picture of the data as a whole to aid in the next step of the process.

Charting. The fourth stage is charting and this process helps to determine the types of information needed for data analysis, either thematically or on a case-by-case basis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The data is lifted from its original textual context and placed in charts that consist of the headings and subheadings that were drawn during the thematic framework (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The authors recommended that although the pieces of data are lifted from their context, the sources of the data are still clearly identified (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

I used charting to analyze each case to better answer the research questions guiding this study. The Atlas.ti software assisted in the charting process by organizing the data in a more structured way. I was able to extract the data from the interview transcripts and entered the information into an appropriate chart designed around the research questions, using a page-referencing system from the software program. Charting also enabled me to compare and contrast the opinions given by the participants.

Mapping and interpretation. Mapping and interpretation is the fifth and final stage of the framework approach and involves the analysis of the key characteristics laid out in charts. This analysis should be able to provide a schematic diagram of the event/phenomenon being studied (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). According to Ritchie and Spencer (1994), it is at this point that the researcher is aware of the objectives of qualitative analysis: “defining concepts, mapping range and nature of phenomena, creating typologies, finding associations, providing explanations, and developing strategies” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 186). The emerging concepts, technologies, and associations are reflective of the participants; therefore, any strategy or recommendations

made by the researcher should match the true attitudes, beliefs, and values of the participants (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

I used the mapping and interpretation process to further analyze the data and identify themes and issues. This process was guided by the research questions and augmented with the Atlas.ti software program. The software assisted in focusing on mapping and interpretation of the data, specifically with the comparison of data from the units of observation: students and professionals.

Validation of Study

The issues of reliability and validity are important aspects of every research project and are important in determining and representing the quality of the research (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) described four tests that need to be considered when designing a study: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2009).

Construct validity. According to Yin (2009), construct validity is “identifying the correct operational measures for the concepts that are being studied” (p. 40). In this research study, it is important to ensure that the items being studied, specified in the research and interview questions, are those that will actually be reviewed. To address this important concept, I triangulated the data received from different sources (interviews with students and professionals and document analysis). With data originating from more than one source, themes and relationships emerged in the analysis from all sources. Another tactic that was used to ensure construct validity is member checking. Member checking is the review of a case report by participants in the study to confirm that results are accurate from their perspective (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006). Lastly, I was able to

keep an ongoing journal regarding the data-collection process; this helped to note internal biases and perceptions and assist with subjectivity and reflexivity during the process (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006).

Internal validity. According to Yin (2009), internal validity is most appropriate in explanatory research; Yin's definition was "seeking to establish a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are believed to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships" (p. 40). In qualitative studies, researchers have developed other terms to describe the "trustworthiness" of their work such as credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2007) has developed particular "validation" strategies to document the accuracy of qualitative work, some of which include prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field to build trust with participants to learn the culture and check for misinformation as methods of triangulating the data (Creswell, 2007; Lewis, 2009). I spent an extended amount of time with the UNLV Athletic Department participants, meeting, interviewing, and interacting with student athletes and professionals while conducting this research project.

External validity. According to Yin (2009), external validity is "defining the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized" (p. 40). As stated in Chapter 1, one of the limitations of a single case study is that the results cannot be generalized beyond the defined boundaries of the case.

Reliability. Reliability is defined as "demonstrating that the operations of a study, such as the data-collection procedures, can be repeated with the same results (Yin, 2009, p. 40). In qualitative research, where studies are not usually replicated, the most

appropriate method to ensure reliability is by operationalizing the research process (Babbie, 2007; Yin, 2009). I followed the research design as planned but was flexible, to ensure the richness of the data collected.

Ethical Considerations

There may be some minimal ethical considerations that involve the participants in the case study. Interviews of student athletes and professionals in the Athletic Department were conducted regarding their opinions of policies and practices that are implemented to assist alternatively admitted student athletes. Because participants gave their opinions of which policies and practices they believe help or hinder this subgroup of athletes, they may have been concerned about confidentiality. Thus, I was committed to ensuring the data collection was conducted in as confidential a manner as possible.

Every participant was required to sign a form, consistent with IRB requirements, acknowledging that they were participating in the study at their own discretion. The form disclosed potential risks, including possible emotional distress and harm to reputation. Participants did not receive any direct benefit from participating in the study, but indirect benefits, such as this study's contribution to higher education literature, may be recognized. Another benefit of this study is its ability to inform future university and athletic administrators regarding the success of alternatively admitted student athletes.

Summary

This chapter has detailed the methodological design used to guide this study of the policies, programs, and practices of the UNLV Athletic Department that may have contributed to the retention and success of alternatively admitted student athletes. The decision criterion of the exploratory case study was discussed as well as the procedures

that guided the data collection and analysis of the research. This chapter concluded with a discussion of the validity and ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter 4

A Case Study: The UNLV Athletic Department

Introduction

The following two chapters will present the results of this study. Chapter 4 presents the practices and programs of the UNLV Athletic Department as well as the demographics and narratives of the student athletes and professionals' experiences, as it pertains to practices and programs of the department. . The data analysis is presented in Chapter 5, using the content and matrix analysis described in Chapter 3. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to this process as “making sense” of the field data.

Chapter Organization

The primary data-collection technique used in this study consisted of in-depth interviews with eight successful alternatively admitted student athletes and seven professionals in the UNLV Athletic Department. All 15 interviews were conducted using a semistructured format and were audio recorded. The participants did not exhibit any signs of intimidation from the use of the audio recorder. In-depth interviews are often characterized by open-ended questions and probes during the interview process. In addition, a description of the practices and programs of the Athletic Department through a document-review process served to triangulate the data provided by the informants and will be described in this chapter.

Student Athlete Demographics

- Student Athlete 1 is a Caucasian man, 20 years old, who completed his sophomore year at UNLV. He lived off campus his first and second years, his GPA was 3.7, he is majoring in Nursing, and he plays baseball.

- Student Athlete 2 is an African-American man, 20 years old, who completed his sophomore year at UNLV. He lived off campus his first and second years, his GPA was 2.12, he is majoring in Communications, and he plays football (although because of his poor GPA, his scholarship was in jeopardy at the time of the interview).
- Student Athlete 3 is a Hispanic man, 20 years old, who completed his sophomore year at UNLV. He lived at home his first 2 years, his GPA was 2.4, he is majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies/Sociology, and he plays soccer.
- Student Athlete 4 is a Caucasian woman, 18 years old, who completed her sophomore year at UNLV. She lived on campus her freshman and sophomore years, her GPA was 4.0, she is majoring in Mathematics and Secondary Education, and she plays soccer.
- Student Athlete 5 is a Tongan woman, 20 years old, who completed her sophomore year at UNLV. She lived off campus her first 2 years, her GPA was 2.9, she is a Communications major, and she plays volleyball.
- Student Athlete 6 is an Asian American man, 21 years old, who completed his sophomore year at UNLV, as he transferred in from Purdue University after his freshman year. He lived off campus, his GPA was 3.3, he is majoring in Political Science, and he plays golf.
- Student Athlete 7 is a Caucasian woman, 19 years old, who completed her sophomore year at UNLV. She lived off campus her freshman and sophomore years, her GPA was 3.0, she is majoring in Communications, and she plays volleyball.

- Student Athlete 8 is a Hawaiian/Filipino woman, 19 years old, who completed her sophomore year at UNLV. She lived on campus her freshman year but off campus her sophomore year, her GPA was 2.5, she is majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies, and she plays softball.

UNLV Athletic Department Professionals' Demographics

- Professional 1 is the Director of the UNLV SAAS. He has been employed by the UNLV Athletic Department for 9 years and has served as the Director for 1 academic year. Prior to working at UNLV, he worked in Athletics at Texas Tech University for 2 years. Professional 1 is currently in charge of administrative functions for the SAAS and is the advisor for the Men's and Women's Basketball teams, Baseball, and part of the Football team. He reports that he is responsible for advising 6–10 alternatively admitted student athletes each year.
- Professional 2 is the Assistant Director of the UNLV SAAS and had been employed by UNLV for 1½ months. Prior to that, she was employed in Athletics at Florida State University for 3½ years. Professional 2 is currently the advisor for the majority of the football team and for Men's golf; she reported that she is responsible for 7–10 alternatively admitted student athletes.
- Professional 3 is the Graduate Assistant for the UNLV SAAS and has been in this position for 1 year. She is the Life Skills Coordinator and the advisor for Women's golf and the Cheer and Dance teams; she reported that she is responsible for less than 5 alternatively admitted student athletes.

- Professional 4 was an Athletic Academic Advisor for the UNLV SAAS for 4½ years, but resigned in November of 2011. When he first started in his position, he was responsible for advising the entire football team, but over time, he advised the defense of Football, Women's Soccer, Tennis, and Swimming teams. Professional 4 reported that he was responsible for advising 8–12 alternatively admitted student athletes each year.
- Professional 5 is an Athletic Academic Advisor for the UNLV SAAS and was in the position for almost 1 year. He is currently the advisor for part of the Football team, Women's Soccer, Volleyball, Men's Soccer, Softball, and Men's and Women's Swimming. He reported that he is responsible for advising 15–20 alternately admitted student athletes.
- Professional 6 was an Athletic Academic Advisor for the UNLV SAAS for 3 years. She was the advisor for part of the Football team, Women's Basketball, and Women's Golf. She did not recall how many alternatively admitted student athletes she was responsible for during her time in the Athletic Department.
- Professional 7 is the Senior Associate Athletic Director in charge of NCAA Compliance and has been working at UNLV for 16 years. He is the sport administrator for Baseball, Softball, Cheer, and Dance and he also supervises all 17 programs for NCAA and academic compliance. He was interviewed because the SAAS unit falls under his purview in the Athletic Department.

UNLV Student-Athlete Academic Services Practices and Programs

The practices and programs in the UNLV SAAS serve as the unit of analysis for this study. The in-depth descriptions of the practices and programs come from both the professionals in the Department and the document-review process. An inventory and brief description of these practices and programs is provided below:

- Academic Success Coaches is a program started in fall 2011, not noted in the *Student-Athlete Handbook*, where student-peers provide one-on-one support and academic “coaching” to assist students with study skills, time management and organizational skills, examination preparation, and resource use. This program is not only available for student athletes but all students at UNLV. All students who are admitted under alternative criteria are required to participate in this program (interviews, 2012; UNLV, 2012a).
- Athletic Academic Advising has advisors providing weekly advising to student athletes. Freshmen, transfer students, and those students considered “at-risk” are required to participate. The definition of “at-risk” is defined by each teams’ coach. For example, Volleyball considers “at-risk” as students with a GPA below 3.0 and Football’s definition is a GPA below a 2.5. This advising practice also includes assistance in registering for classes (interviews, 2012; UNLV, 2012c).
- Class Checks includes athletic academic advisors checking that students are physically in the classrooms for which they registered (interviews, 2012; UNLV, 2012c).

- First Year Experience, starting in fall 2012, is a course (COLA 100E) required of all incoming freshman of every major. It will focus on study skills, time and organizational management, civic engagement, critical thinking, and basic writing skills (interview, 2012; UNLV, 2012c).
- Grade Updates is a practice not mentioned in the *Student-Athlete Handbook*, whereby athletic academic advisors will contact student athletes' professors for updates on their academic progress (interview, 2012).
- The Life-Skills Programming Coordinator from SAAS is responsible for providing four programs per year for all student athletes. The programs provide information on substance-abuse prevention, financial skills, smart-social-networking and career-oriented workshops. Two of the programs (social networking and substance abuse) were mandatory (interviews, 2012; UNLV, 2012c).
- The Mentoring Program is new, started in the fall of 2011, not mentioned in the *Student-Athlete Handbook*, where students identified by their coaches as being in need or at-risk academically or socially will be matched with mentors in the Athletic Department. The mentors are professionals in the Department who volunteer their time to provide assistance to those athletes in need (interview, 2012).
- Objective-Based Learning Advising is an advising practice piloted in the spring of 2012 whereby the advisors used a quantitative, goal-based structure to deliver their advising. Each week, the advisors, using Web Campus and the students' syllabi, determine exactly which assignments each student has due

and the progress made on each goal. These goals are documented using Google docs so that advisors, coaches, tutors, and students have access to it. Table 7 offers an example that was given during an interview with a professional from the Athletic Department (interviews, 2012): April 24 – Nick seems to be doing well. He is ahead in most of his classes and is slowly preparing for upcoming final examinations. Nick is registered for summer and fall.

Table 7

Example of Status of Student Assignment

Course:	Assignment:	Due date:	Date completed:	Grade:
CRJ 104	Exam 2	5/8/12		A/B
	Twitter Assign. #12	4/24/12	4/23/12 5/5 points	
	Twitter Assign. #13	4/29/12		

Note. CRJ =Criminal Justice.

- Student-Athlete Orientation, according to the *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c), is an ongoing practice requiring student athletes to attend a mandatory orientation at the beginning of each fall and spring semester. The stated purpose is to provide an educational forum for student athletes to complete the necessary paperwork required to practice and compete in intercollegiate athletics. An additional purpose is to afford each student athlete the opportunity to ask questions to various athletic department and campus representatives regarding services, policies, procedures, and programs. “All student athletes must complete this orientation prior to being permitted to

participate in intercollegiate athletics” (interviews, 2012; UNLV, 2012c, p. 17).

- Study Hall is an ongoing practice that requires a minimum of 8 hours of Study Hall each week for all first-semester student athletes and also for those athletes considered to be at-risk academically by their coaches (interviews, 2012; UNLV, 2012c).
- Study Skills, not noted in the *Student-Athlete Handbook*, was mentioned by one of the athletic academic advisors as a tool used with assigned teams to teach effective studying, time management, and organizational skills for academic work (interview, 2012).
- Tutoring Sessions in SAAS provides tutors who work specifically with student athletes to assist in all subject matters (interviews, 2012; UNLV, 2012c).

This section provided a compilation of the practices and programs offered to alternatively admitted student athletes at UNLV. The data come from several sources: from interviews with alternatively admitted student athletes, interviews with professionals in the SAAS unit, and from document review of the Academic Success Center website and the *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c). The next section will focus on the themes garnered from student athletes regarding the practices and programs in the Athletic Department at UNLV.

Themes from Student Athletes’ Interview Data on Practices and Programs

The following section provides themes about Athletic Department practices and programs from the perspectives of the student athletes interviewed. The practices and

programs explored have also been confirmed through document review and through interviews with professionals in the Athletic Department. Direct quotes from participants will be used to assist the reader to gain a better understanding of the practices and programs, not for the purpose of documenting their “lived experience,” as that is not the focus of this macrobased research study.

Advising. All eight of the student athletes expressed that their athletic academic advisors were helpful to them when it came to both their academics and their overall well-being. There was some variety in which particular practices were most helpful. For instance, Student Athlete 2 reported that “even though it was required, it turned out to be helpful to me, especially when they used the new [Objective-based Learning] way of advising; they also helped me with getting the classes I needed.” This particular student did not do well academically (2.12 GPA) and his advisor expressed the lack of resources as the reason he “fell through the cracks.” Student Athlete 1, who has a 3.7 GPA, stated that he “probably went to see my advisor 10–20 times my freshman year; to help with scheduling and to just say hi.” Student Athlete 7, who has a 3.0 GPA, reported that the weekly meetings with the advisors that focused on the class work that was due each week was most helpful: “our academic advisors given to us from the athletic department play a huge role in our academic success.”

Orientation. Five of the eight student athletes reported attending a mandatory team-based orientation at the beginning of their freshman year. One student athlete went to a UNLV orientation. Only one student athlete could recall the importance of the orientation—Student Athlete 1—who reported “that’s when they told us the rules and had us sign paperwork; we talked to our advisors too.” Student Athlete 2 reported attending

“an athletic orientation with the team” but could not recall what the purpose was or how it actually helped him. Student Athlete 8 reported, “I attended an in-person orientation my freshman year but I am not sure what they talked about; I think I was with my softball team.” None of the student athletes reported having another orientation since they have been at UNLV.

Study Hall. Seven of the eight student athletes reported that Study Hall was a very effective program that contributed to their academic success. According to the interviews with professionals and student athletes, and the document review, Study Hall is a primary program in athletics (although the athletic academic advisors are in favor of discontinuing its use). All first-semester freshmen, transfer-student athletes, and at-risk student athletes have to attend Study Hall for a minimum of 8 hours per week. This is when the student athletes go to a lecture hall and sit for their assigned time each week. At times, tutors are available if needed but the general consensus was that “you can do what you want.” Student Athlete 2 reported that he went to Study Hall for 8 hours per week for his entire freshman and sophomore years (at the time of the interview, he had a 2.12 GPA). He reported, “I had to be there so I tried to get things done but it was up to me to figure it out.” Student Athlete 1 was required to go to Study Hall for the first semester of his freshman year and reported, “It was kind of stupid, we just sat there; it was loud and no one was doing work. I would rather work by myself in a quiet space like the library.” However, Student Athlete 6, who has a 3.3 GPA, reported “Study Hall was very helpful since I had to be there anyways.”

Tutoring. Although a total of five student athletes mentioned tutoring as being beneficial to their academic success, three of them thought team tutoring and group study were most effective. Student Athlete 7, who has a 3.0 GPA, stated

Tutoring and group study had the most influence [on my academic success].

Tutoring was awesome for a one-on-one understanding of the information and group study was a great way of learning a ton of information in a short period of time.

It is important to note that one student; Student Athlete 4, used tutoring programs outside the Athletic Department and found them very useful. “The free tutoring in the Library and the Math Department tutoring program were the most helpful to me for my classes.” Student Athlete 4 also took advantage of the graduate assistant tutoring in her mathematics class. Student Athlete 3 stated that the UNLV Writing Center (available to all UNLV students) was one of the most helpful programs that he used for his academic work. Student Athlete 8 reported that she used Athletic Department tutors and went to Study Hall, but her team practices “helped me figure out who I was; nothing else really helped me.”

Themes from Professionals’ Interview Data on Practices, Programs, and External Influences

This section of the chapter focuses on extrapolated themes from the professionals’ interview data on practices, programs, and external influences on the SAAS department.

Academic-Success Coaches. Five of the seven professionals interviewed mentioned that the Academic-Success Coach program is helpful to student athletes, especially those who were admitted under alternative-admissions criteria (who were

required to participate). None of the student athletes mentioned this program, but that could be because this program was fully implemented in fall 2011 and this cohort of students started at UNLV in the fall of 2010. Professional 3 noted, “I think that the Academic Success Coaches are under-utilized. I learned about the program from a student athlete, which is strange since the program is right down the hall.” It was clear from the interviews with the professionals that this was not a program implemented by the Athletic Department and, although it was mentioned as being a “new, good” program, it did not appear that there was a major goal of referring student athletes to it. Professional 1 stated “The Academic Success Coaching program is a good one that all alternatively admitted students have to participate in; so that is really out of our control.”

Advising. Every professional interviewed felt that one-on-one advising is one of the most effective practices they use. The professionals that have been there a year or longer (and are still there) felt that the Objective-based Learning model is even more effective. According to Professional 3,

this is for many reasons: 1) it focuses on setting and achieving goals and being proactive, not reactive; 2) it holds students accountable; 3) all professionals, including coaches and tutors can log on to [the] system to see progress; 4) [it] allows for more documentation, more awareness and is more effective, especially with less personnel.

Professional 1 agreed:

We have lost a total of 5 full-time positions within the last few years and Objective-based Learning encourages us to be more organized with less people.

We wanted to talk about achieving goals instead of what happened and we wanted

to be actively involved. Our advising was too informal before and we did not have concrete things to show them like we do now.

Professional 2 reported that the Objective-based Learning model has shown “major, major advances and gives one on one attention. It leaves little room for student athletes to lie and makes them take responsibility for their work.” Professional 7 reported that “advising using Objective-based Learning creates a specialized program for each student athlete, which focuses directly on their personal academic needs.”

There are some examples where teams do things differently. For instance, Professional 6 reported

In the first year I was here, the football advisors started a program that required struggling students (not just new freshmen but from all classifications) to come at 7:00 AM for 45 minutes to an hour once a week to go over study skills and strategies.”

Nonathletic programs. Although some student athletes reported that UNLV resources that are available to all students were helpful, one of the professionals mentioned tutoring from the Library.

Orientation. Even though the orientation was discussed as being mandatory for all student athletes every semester in the UNLV *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c), only two professionals mentioned this program as contributing to student-athlete academic success. Professional 5 stated “orientations could be better; we are working with the UNLV NCAA Compliance professionals to combine our programming for the fall 2012 orientation. The student athletes do not need to sit through redundant material; it is not helpful.”

Study Hall. Every professional reported that Study Hall is the least effective program the department offers. They stated that no one ensures that student athletes are working on academics, but that they just have to report to the lecture hall for their assigned times each week. Professional 4 cited lack of resources for the ineffectiveness of the study-hall program. “Study Hall is not effective, we don’t have the facilities; it is in the auditorium and it is uncomfortable.” “It is rare for an athletic program not to have an academic building for tutoring rooms, computer labs, and study space just for student athletes.” Professional 7 stated “alternatively admitted student athletes do not do well in traditional study-hall settings. Most need face to face contact and need individual connections.” Professional 2 reported “we can’t monitor 45–50 students to ensure that they are doing their work; it’s good that we know where they are but we are not sure if they are making progress unless student is motivated to do so.” Professional 5 agreed, stating “at least we know where the students are for that time frame and because of this, the football team will continue to use Study Hall no matter what.”

The following section is going to describe the major external influences that the professionals believe affects their ability to provide effective practices and programs to alternatively admitted student athletes in the Athletic Department. Three major themes emerged: the NCAA, a lack of resources in the SAAS department and underprepared student athletes.

NCAA. Six of the seven professionals interviewed believed the NCAA is a key external influence on SAAS. According to Professional 1, a major academic package was passed in 2003 and completion rates increased, which meant that student athletes were forced to make more progress toward graduation if they wanted to be in compliance. Five

professionals noted the academic-progress rate (APR), which measures retention and eligibility for the NCAA. According to Professional 1, the current APR rate started at UNLV in 2004 and coaches are now penalized for not retaining students. Teams will be kept out of postseason play if they do not meet the minimum APR score of 925.

Professional 2 agreed, stating,

925 is where you want to be for an overall score but it's moving to 930 in the near future. Our multiyear score is 960, which is above but you don't want a single-year score to get out, it will hurt you in media and recruiting, etc.

Professional 7 stated that the new Objective-based Learning advising program is based on the APR and that "this program is APR driven; it focuses on those student athletes who are at-risk of losing APR points. If we earn the respective APR points, they will have met all eligibility standards, which is the ultimate goal."

Lack of resources. Five of the seven professionals believed that the lack of resources was a major problem for the SAAS. There are currently two vacant positions for advisors and they have lost five positions over the last year or two; this means that now each advisor is responsible for 60–100 students. According to a professional, "maybe 5–10 students were not successful this year because of poor academics due to lack of resources. This is more than we lost in the previous years." When asked about which practices and programs this professional thought were most effective for alternatively admitted student-athlete success, Professional 7 responded by saying "it is hard to tell because we lack resources (staff) to issue assessments tools and collect data from APR and Grad dates."

Three of the professionals talked about other athletic programs' use of learning specialists, which, according to one professional, is "the fastest growing job in athletics."

Professional 6 reported,

Many of my colleagues who are learning specialists work with as few as 7 students in their caseload and up to around 21. If students get such one-on-one attention from an expert with resources, they will tend to have more success in academics.

These positions, of which there are none at UNLV, are people who are trained in working with students with learning disabilities, testing and assessing learning capabilities, and writing and mathematics deficiencies. Professional 4 concurred, stating "money is not going towards academics in sports' programs here. At Ohio State and other schools like Florida State University, they employ learning specialists that are trained to know about learning disabilities, special education and adult learner populations, etc."

Underprepared student athletes. Every professional reported that student athletes coming to UNLV underprepared were an external variable in hindering academic success. Professional 2 explained that there could be a plethora of services offered but students must be motivated to use them. "If the student is unprepared for college and if he is not taking advantage of the services offered, he may have to leave and there is not much we can do." Professional 4 agreed, citing a lack of student responsibility and the fact that "parents and coaches blame the advisors for everything."

Professional 6 tied together thoughts about external influences, underprepared students, and the potential consequences of a lack of resources:

As the NCAA continues to change standards for initial and continuing eligibility, athletic departments must hire more staff to manage students and the rules at the same time. The standards have been consistently lower than most institution's admissions requirements, and while open enrollment and low-criteria institutions accept these students anyway, other schools take students below standards to field competitive athletic teams at this elite level. This, in turn, creates a need for learning specialists to work with students who are underprepared for college-level work and who may need remediation.

Overview of Narrative Findings

A number of findings surfaced from the demographic and thematic narratives from the interviews of student athletes and professionals in the Athletic Department, as well as what was garnered from the document-review process. This section will describe the significant conclusions.

For the most part, athletic academic advisors in the SAAS did not readily know which student athlete advisees on their "caseload" were admitted under alternative criteria. The advisors had to consult the UNLV PeopleSoft database and review each student athlete's admission criteria. Professional 1 stated "We don't feel the need to label them separately because [alternatively admitted student athletes] come in with so much support; we are not losing them so there has not been a need to do extra for them." In addition, Professional 1 added "we treat all in-coming athletes the same, the individual advisor will know and may be give extra attention but they are not treated differently." Professional 4 had a different assessment, stating, "I would definitely know who the alternative-admits student athletes were because they could be denied as recruits." This

means that during the recruitment phase, advisors would be made aware of which potential student athletes would need to be presented to the Faculty Senate Admissions Committee and would be asked to assist the student athlete with that process.

The majority of student athletes did not know that they were admitted under alternative criteria. One professional explained, “Yes, they have no idea; they are just told that they have to do X, Y and Z and then they will be accepted to the University; people hold their hands.”

Alternative admissions does not necessarily mean that the potential student had low SAT or ACT scores or a subpar high school GPA; it could mean that the student did not have the correct amount of the 13 core high school requirements (three units of mathematics, four units of English, three units of Social Science, and three natural science credits). According to data from both professionals and students, there are differences in practices and programs according to sport played. For instance, football has 105 total players, with 80 on scholarships. This means that the students’ room, board, books, and equipment (t-shirts, shoes, etc.) are paid for. It seems that the football team has a culture of its own. This is the one team that currently requires all student athletes to participate in Study Hall every night of the week, although all professionals interviewed believed it was the least effective practice or program that was offered.

As noted earlier in Chapter 4, different teams have different definitions of when a student is considered academically at-risk. At-risk is defined by each teams’ coach. For example, the volleyball coach considers at-risk as below a 3.0 GPA and the football coach’s definition is a GPA below a 2.5.

Although the *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012) reports that orientations are mandatory for all student athletes prior to the start of every semester, none of the professionals reported there being an orientation each semester, only a team-based orientation at the beginning of each year. In addition, only five of the eight student athletes remember an athletic-based orientation; those five reported that there was only one, at the beginning of their freshmen year with their individual teams.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a description of the informants' demographics, a high level description and narrative of the practices and programs used by the UNLV Athletic Department and the SAAS specifically, the major themes found in the data from the student-athlete interviews, the major themes found in the data from professionals' interviews, and some items that stood out from the content analysis. The next chapter, Chapter 5, will provide the reader with a more systematic analysis of the data. Chapter 6 concludes the study with the interpretation of the results, discussion of the findings, and implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Findings of Practices and Programs in the UNLV

Athletic Department

This chapter will describe the data-analysis procedures used in this dissertation to interpret the data using the content-analysis framework developed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994). The data were initially coded and then sorted using this content-analysis framework. The Atlas.ti software was used to support the coding process. This allowed me to code the data and retrieve text based on keywords; it then gave me the ability to rename or merge existing codes without disturbing the rest of the codes in the system. The software also allows visualization of the emerging codes and their relationships to one another. Atlas.ti maintains records of coding changes, which makes it possible to track the evolution of the analysis.

The content-analysis framework includes familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpreting (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), as described in Chapter 3. These analytical stages rely on the theoretical and creative ability of the researcher to determine salience, meaning, and connections regarding the subject matter (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). In addition, “Making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175–176).

Familiarization

Analysis for this project began during the data-collection process. Many methodologists recommended the use of the early incorporation of analysis to focus and guide the data collection and ease the transition into the full data-analysis step (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994;

Saldaña, 2009;). Following their recommendations, I took notes and reflections during and following the interviews, logging congruencies, dissimilarities, and observations. Interview questions were fine-tuned throughout sequential interviews as I learned where clarifications were required or which terminology was more readily understood by participants. For instance, one question asked the student athletes, “Please describe any type of new student orientation that you attended your first semester. Was it held online or in person?” Initially, student athletes were not clear on the meaning of this question because they needed clarification regarding whether it was the UNLV orientation or an Athletic Department/team orientation. I made adjustments and expanded on this question to make it more specific, which was clearer to subsequent interviewees. Also, during the first two interviews with the student athletes, it became apparent that they were not aware that they were admitted to UNLV under alternative-admissions criteria. After consultation with my chair, we decided that even though “alternative admissions” was noted on the informed-consent forms they signed and took with them, I did not need to point that out specifically to them. When explaining the study, I told them it was about the success of student athletes at UNLV who entered in the fall of 2010.

To stay familiar with the data, within one week of the interviews, I listened to the tapes and transcribed them within 2 weeks. I then reexamined the interview data and documents to gain familiarity with each subject and made notes of themes and key data using Atlas.ti software from the initial codes.

I began by looking at what common themes or patterns emerged from the coding of the interview data regarding the practices and programs in the SAAS. The data revealed many practices and programs that were deemed helpful to alternatively admitted

student athletes. The included terms were either direct comments from respondents or documents, or a meaningful compilation of two or more similar responses. For example, one student-athlete respondent said that the “UNLV Writing Center” was a very important practice that contributed to her academic success, therefore, using in vivo coding, the actual terminology is used in the analysis. In another instance, several student-athlete respondents referred to “one-on-one advising” or “individual advising,” which was then combined as “advising” in the analysis. In both situations, I attempted to incorporate included terms that had a clear relationship to the particular theme but were distinct enough to stand independently as a separate theme in each category of analysis.

Oftentimes, the frequency of a word or a phrase in a given data set was an effective place to start in identifying repeated ideas in a large body of text (G. Ryan & Bernard, 2000), indicating the prevalence of thematic responses across participants. Simple keyword searches or word counts in a data set can allowed a swift comparison of the words used by different subpopulations in the study. Word counts can also be useful in developing the codes. According to G. Ryan and Bernard (2000), a code-frequency report can help identify which themes or ideas were widespread and which seldom occurred. The number of times a code is applied can be used as an indication of the salience of a theme or the need to eliminate or redefine the code.

In this study, I used the “Word Cruncher” tool in Atlas.ti, and the results assisted in developing codes and determining the number of times keywords were associated with effective practices and programs in the UNLV Athletic Department. This method also showed the frequency of the terms, which confirmed the significance of a theme using an additional method of analysis. The Word Cruncher tool is effective in ensuring that the

most frequently mentioned words from the interview data were analyzed as themes during mapping and interpretation stages of the content-analysis framework. Table 8 shows the results of terms that were frequently used by the two groups in the study:

Table 8

Word Cruncher Results from Atlas.ti

Term	Professionals word count	Student athletes word count
Advising, advisors, advisor	49	23
NCAA	14	0
Orientation/s	7	8
Study Hall	23	19
Tutoring, tutor/s	17	14

As noted in Table 8, the Word Cruncher results show that the two groups of study mentioned terms relating to advising, tutoring, and Study Hall most frequently. The professionals mentioned the NCAA frequently but it is interesting to note that the student athletes did not refer to the NCAA even one time.

Identifying a Thematic Framework and Indexing

According to Ritchie and Spencer (1994), the second stage of the content-analysis-framework approach is identifying a thematic framework and the third stage is called indexing. Ritchie and Spencer explained that issues, concepts, and themes that have been expressed by the participants can form the basis of a thematic framework that can be used to filter and classify the data. Following familiarization with the observational notes, interviews, and documents collected, I highlighted the thematic framework that was based on the key concepts and themes constructed from the interview transcripts. In this case, I organized the interview questions using the research questions

as a guide. The research questions were based on the student-engagement framework of Kuh et al. (2007). Kuh et al. (2007) established that there are various external or institutional practices and programs that increase educationally purposeful activities and enhance student engagement. These effective educational practices and programs were found to have positive impacts on college-student engagement, retention, and success (Kuh et al., 2008; Kuh et al., 2007). I applied the thematic framework to the interview transcripts using a process called indexing. The purpose of indexing is to develop a system to categorize the findings of the study. The researcher is to identify sections of the data that correspond to a particular theme, and this process is applied to all textual data that has been gathered (in this case, the transcribed interviews). I reviewed each interview transcript, added descriptive headings, and noted emerging themes; this process helped me build a picture of the data as a whole. Table 9 demonstrates how the data from the student athletes and professionals fits into the thematic framework of Kuh et al.'s (2007) student-engagement framework and effective educational practices and programs. Table 9 describes items that match with Kuh et al.'s (2007) effective educational practices (number of student athletes who reported practices as being important to their academics and the number of professionals who reported practices as being effective for alternatively admitted student athletes) for participants who reported in each category.

Table 9

Themes of Effective Practices in the Athletic Department

	Themes of Kuh et al.'s (2007) effective educational practices							
	Orientation	Academic advising	First-Year Seminars	Learning Communities	Student Success Initiatives*	Early-Warning Systems	Student Support Services**	Partnerships to Support Learning
Student athletes	3 (-3)	8	0	1	1	2	12	2
Professionals	2	7	2	0	10	6	10	0

*Student success initiatives include the Academic-Success Coaches program, Life-Skills Program, and the Mentoring Program; **Student-Support Services include Study Hall, Class Checks, study skills, grade updates from professors, and Tutoring.

Some of the effective educational practices listed in Table 9 and in Chapter 2 may need some clarification and inclusion in some subcategories. For this stage of identifying a theoretical framework in content analysis, the Student-Success Initiatives included the Academic Success Coaches program, Life-Skills Programs, and the Mentoring Program; Early-Warning Systems includes objective-based-learning advising (because the advisors meet with at-risk students weekly and know exactly what grades they are earning as they go through the semester); Student-Support Services include Study Hall, Class Checks, study skills, grade updates from professors, and tutoring; and the Partnerships to Support Learning includes other UNLV programs not in Athletics. See Tables 10 and 11 for a more in depth evaluation of effective educational practices and whether student athletes and professionals believed in their effectiveness as part of Student-Success Initiatives and Student-Support Initiatives.

As shown in Table 9, aligned with the framework of Kuh et al. (2007), First-Year Seminars and Learning Communities also were included as effective educational practices found by Kuh et al. (2007) to encourage student success. Only one student athlete reported being part of a learning community and no student athletes recounted being part of a First-Year Experience.

Student-Success Initiatives are a major aspect of what Kuh et al. (2007) believed contributes to academic success of college students. Table 10 displays a breakdown of Student-Success Initiatives based on Kuh et al. (2007) and the specific practices and programs from SAAS that fit into this category:

Table 10

Student Success Initiatives

	Breakdown of Kuh et al.'s effective educational practices student success initiatives		
	Life-skills programs	Mentoring program	Academic-success coaches
Student athletes	0	1	0
Professionals	3	2	5

In this study, professionals also noted the importance of these programs; however, only one student mentioned a program that fell into this category.

Student-Support Services, based on the theoretical framework of Kuh et al. (2007), are noted to have the highest number of responses from the students as being helpful to their academic success. Table 11 displays the different practices and programs offered by SAAS that fit into this category:

Table 11

Student-Support Services

	Breakdown of Kuh et al.'s (2007) Effective Educational Practices Student-Support Services						
	Study Hall	Class checks	Study skills	Tutoring (from Athletic Department)	Tutoring (from UNLV Library)	Team tutoring	Grade updates from professors
Student athletes	6 (-1)	0	1	2	1	3	0
Professionals	-7	3	1	2	1	0	4

The Student-Support Services grouping was also rated highly by professionals as being effective, although all professionals reported Study Hall as being ineffective; whereas student athletes rated Study Hall as being an effective support service for them.

The most effective of these programs, according to professionals were grade updates and Class Checks.

Orientation. Orientation is a program noted by Kuh et al. (2007) that is identified as an effective educational practice that contributes to college-student success, although they note it as a distinct category apart from Student-Support Services. Kuh et al. (2007) reported that orientation programs may have an affirmative effect on a student's persistence in college through its influence on social integration and subsequent commitment to the institution. The purpose of orientation programs is to facilitate students' transition to college and to provide information to assist them in managing the challenges they may encounter. Higher rates of persistence were found to be associated with longer comprehensive orientation programs (Kuh et al., 2007).

In this study, only two professionals mentioned orientation as an important program, whereas six of the eight students stated that they participated in this program at one time. This is an essential finding because during the document-review process, it was found that the orientation in the Athletic Department is mandatory twice per semester.

Academic advising. Academic advising was noted as significant by 100% of the students and professionals interviewed and it is also considered an effective educational practice by Kuh et al. (2007). This is the only practice that was identified by all interviewees as contributing to academic success of student athletes. According to Kuh et al. (2007), high-quality advising has been found to be positively related to student success and the NSSE (2009) found that the quality of academic advising was the strongest predictor of student satisfaction in the campus environment at 4-year institutions.

Partnerships to support learning. The educational practice of Partnerships to Support Learning was not identified by any of the professionals in SAAS, even though two students noted that services outside of the Athletic Department were very helpful to their learning and academic success. An important finding noted, when viewing practices and programs from the theoretical framework of Kuh et al. (2007), is that student athletes and professionals do not always agree on the importance of the practices and programs from SAAS that fit into this framework.

Charting, Mapping, and Interpretation

According to Ritchie and Spencer (1994), the final steps of the content-analysis framework consists of charting and mapping and interpretation. The fourth step is called charting and helps to determine the types of information needed for data analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The data is to be lifted from its original context and placed into charts that consist of headings and subheadings that were drawn on during the thematic-framework process. Ritchie and Spencer recommended keeping in mind the original sources of the data during this process. In this study, I used the charting process to analyze the research questions guiding the research. The Atlas.ti software assisted me during this process to answer the research questions in a more structured manner. I was able to extract the data from the transcripts and enter the information into charts designed around the research questions. The thematic charts were then completed from the data constructed during the thematic framework and indexing processes, based on the study's research questions (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

The fifth and final stage, mapping and interpretation, involves the analysis of the key characteristics laid out in the charts and provides a schematic diagram of the

phenomena being studied (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). It was during this stage that the fact-checking method was employed with both the professionals and student athletes. In this section, the data will be presented systematically and patterns will be noted. Using the data from the indexing and charting stages of the content-analysis framework, I was able to compare and contrast the opinions given by participants, as discussed in the mapping and interpretation stage of analysis. Data are also compared across the units of observation: student athletes and professionals. It is during the final stages of analysis that the researcher makes recommendations and discusses emerging concepts. Impressions and associations are reflective of participants and will match their true attitudes, beliefs, and values (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

Best Practices According to Professionals

When professionals were interviewed about their perceptions of the best practices and programs available to alternatively admitted student athletes for contributing to academic success, there was a wide variety of programs mentioned. The follow-up questions provided more insight into their perceptions of the efficacy of the programs. During the indexing stage of content analysis, themes were identified from the transcript data. The emerging key themes were then arranged into thematic charts during the charting process and further analyzed during the mapping and interpretation phase. Table 12 shows the themes garnered from the indexing and charting stages of the process. It displays the best practices and programs available to alternatively admitted student athletes, as perceived by the professionals interviewed; however, it also clearly shows which programs were not seen as useful, even though the practice is in use and available to students.

Table 12

Athletic Department Professionals' Perceptions of Best Practices Contributing to Alternatively Admitted Student Athlete Success and Retention

	Professionals						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Study Hall	-X	-X	-X	-X	-X	-X	-X
Life-Skills programs	X		X	X			
Class checks	X			X	X		
Grade updates from professors	X	X		X	X		
One-on-one advising	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Using learning specialists		X				X	
First-Year Experience	X		X				
Academic-Success Coaches	X	X	X		X	X	
Advising—Objective-based Learning	X	X			X		X
Orientation				X	X		
Mentoring program			X			X	
Tutoring (athletic)	X				X		
Tutoring library					X		
Study skills class						X	
UNLV writing center							
Math tutoring center							

Below are summaries of the various practices and programs that stood out during the indexing and charting stages of the content analysis. I describe practices and programs that had a multitude of comments from the professionals and that were perceived by participants as being either very helpful, very ineffective, or had intriguing observations related to the research questions.

Study Hall. In the case of Study Hall as a best practice, every professional mentioned that this was a program currently in use but one that was very ineffective. There were various reasons given for the ineffectiveness: Professional 1 stated “students

have to be motivated to use the time to study; we don't know what they are doing in there." Professional 4 reported "even though we know where they are for those hours of time, we have no idea if they are getting their work done." Professional 7 stated that "this program is not effective, especially for alternatively admitted student athletes; they need more guidance and one-on-one attention."

Advising. One hundred percent of the professionals believed that individual advising on a weekly basis was a very important practice that contributed to the success and retention of alternatively admitted student athletes. They gave examples of why they felt it was important. Professional 3 stated,

it is very important for the student athletes to be able to speak with someone one on one. This way, they can ask questions about where to get more specific help, i.e., tutoring or for us to help them with scheduling their classes.

Professional 6 reported "I think the most success comes from the weekly meetings. Students are more inclined to build relationships and share concerns and struggles in a one-on-one setting."

An additional advising program that was implemented as a "pilot" program in the spring of 2012 was called Objective-based Learning. To review, this is when advisors use a quantitative, goal-based structure to deliver their advising. Each week, the advisors, using Web Campus and the students' syllabi, determine exactly which assignments each student had due and the progress made on each goal. These goals would be documented using Google docs so that advisors, coaches, tutors, and students would have access to it. Four of the seven advisors reported that this "new" version of advising was a more effective and smart way to deliver advising interventions.

Learning specialists. This position in athletic academic advising was mentioned by two of the professionals as being “up and coming” and the way athletic advising was moving at universities around the country, especially in the Southwest. A learning specialist is an advisor who is trained to work with students with learning disabilities, testing and assessing learning capabilities, and writing and mathematics deficiencies. They are able to implement specific interventions that assist with teaching and learning. These positions are not used at UNLV due to lack of resources, according to Professional 2.

Class checks and grade updates. Class checks and grade updates consist of “behind the scenes” work that advisors do to ensure student athletes are doing what they need to do. Three of seven advisors believed that Class Checks were an effective practice and four out of seven found grade updates to be important contributions to student success. When used, advisors go to students’ classrooms to ensure they are there, and they contact the students’ professors to request updates on student progress. Student athletes have no awareness of Class Checks and grade updates.

Orientation and athletics tutoring. Even though the practices of orientation and tutoring are mentioned in the *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c) as resources for student athletes, only two professionals mentioned each program as being effective for alternatively admitted student athletes. Orientation, described in the handbook, is “mandatory” for each student athlete, two times per year. Professional 5 reported wanting to ensure that the orientations were more cohesive and structured, stating, “Next year (fall of 2012) it will be a joint effort between the compliance and academic sides of the Athletic Department; we will orient all students during this meeting and it will be more

effective.” Professional 1 noted that the academic athletic advisors had previously been responsible for preparing their own orientations and that was an inconsistent practice that needed to be changed.

Nonathletic department academic resources. There are three academic resources that emerged from the data that are not a part of the UNLV Athletic Department: Library Tutoring, the Writing Center, and the Math Tutoring Center. Only one professional mentioned library tutoring as being an effective practice; the other “outside” programs were not identified at all.

Goals of Advising According to Professionals

Because the practice of advising was deemed important by 100% of the professionals, it was necessary to extrapolate the perceptions of the goals of advising during the mapping and interpretation phase of the content-analysis framework. It is during this final phase that the researcher explores answers to the research questions surrounding which specific practices professionals in the Athletic Department find to be effective for alternatively admitted student athletes. Because advising was found to be an effective practice by 100% of the professionals, it is important to explore their goals of the practice. As would be expected, the seven professionals had different goals of advising alternatively admitted student athletes, although there was congruence with many of the goals. Table 13 shows the themes of advising goals:

Table 13

*Athletic Department Professionals' Goals of Advising Alternatively Admitted Student**Athletes*

Professionals	Themes of advising goals					
	Teaching study skills	Teaching organizational skills	Teaching time management skills	Teaching other learning skills/resources	Checking academic progress	Teaching life skills
1	X	X			X	
2	X	X			X	
3			X	X		X
4	X	X	X		X	X
5	X			X	X	
6	X	X	X	X	X	
7			X		X	

As evidenced by the data, the most identified goal of advising for professionals was checking on academic progress of the alternatively admitted student athletes. This seems accurate, in part, based on the comments of the professionals. Professional 5 stated that “now that we are using Objective-based Learning advising, we are being proactive about the students’ work as well as checking on how they did on all assignments the previous week.” The second-most noted goal of advising was teaching study skills. As Professional 6 reported,

The point of the advisor is to help the student become a better learner, and to gain the tools to study and learn at the college level to be successful. Sometimes the meetings are just to check in and sometimes they are to prepare students for upcoming exams/assignment deadlines (multitasking skills), for example.”

The third most important goals of advising that emerged from the data were teaching organizational and time-management skills. These goals correspond with the new objective-based-learning advising and not only are these skills important for student athletes to be effective but for the advisors. According to Professional 1, “with more documentation and accountability, we can help the students be more organized. We are more aware and monitoring better and even with less personnel, we are more effective.”

Only two professionals noted that the point of advising was teaching and informing about Life-Skills programs, and one of them was the professional staff in the SAAS that actually does the Life-Skills programming. Student athletes are required to attend a Life-Skills program sponsored by SAAS once per semester.

External Influences

During the interviews and analysis of the data, key themes emerged regarding the research question that inquired about external influences affecting the practices and programs in the Athletic Department for alternatively admitted student athletes. Table 14 displays the themes associated with professionals’ opinions of the external influences that affect their practices and programs in SAAS.

Table 14

Athletic Department Professionals' Perceptions of External Influences Affecting Programming for Alternatively Admitted Student Athletes

	Themes of external influences							
	NCAA	UNLV Institutional policies	Coaches	Mountain west policies	Athletic department. administration	Academic success program	Lack of resources	Students not prepared
1	X	X		X		X	X	X
2	X	X					X	X
3			X					X
4	X		X				X	X
5	X	X			X			X
6	X						X	X
7	X						X	

Although the interview data presented eight different external factors affecting professionals' abilities to effectively deliver programs and practices to alternatively admitted student athletes, three major themes emerged: the NCAA, students not prepared for postsecondary education, and the lack of resources for the SAAS department. Only one professional identified coaches as being an external influence; Professional 4 stated, football coaches and their discipline have a huge influence on alternatively admitted kids' performance; they always disciplined the kids (by requiring extra running) and they always got mad at us (the advisors) if the kids were not eligible to play due to academics.

Mountain West and Athletic Department administrators do not seem to have an influence on professionals' ability to do their job with alternatively admitted student athletes.

The NCAA and the APR, which measures retention and eligibility for the NCAA, emerged as a chief external influence on the practices and programs that are afforded to

the alternatively admitted student athletes. Professional 7 stated that the new objective-based-learning advising program is based on the APR and that “this program is APR driven; it focuses on those student athletes who are at-risk of losing APR points. If we earn the respective APR points, they will have met all eligibility standards, which is the ultimate goal.”

The lack of resources and students arriving unprepared are themes throughout the data that professionals perceived inhibit their ability to do their jobs effectively. As described in Chapter 4 on learning specialists, these individuals, who are not employed by UNLV due to lack of resources, are identified as being the ideal position to assist with unprepared students.

Professionals’ Perceptions of Effective Methods of Communicating With Student Athletes

Throughout the fact-checking portion of the data analysis that occurred during indexing and charting processes, a follow-up question was given to all of professionals regarding the method of communication they found most effective when wanting to follow up or talk about academic progress. This was because during the interview process with professionals, advising was identified as being an effective practice that promotes student success and retention. Table 15 provides information on those results as part of the mapping and interpretation stage of the content-analysis framework.

Table 15

Athletic Department Professionals' Methods of Communicating With Students Regarding Academic Issues

Professionals	Themes of methods of communication					
	E-mail	Using Rebelmail	Texting	Calling	Telling coaches	Google docs/calendar
1	X		X		X	X
2	X		X	X		
3	X	X	X	X	X	X
4			X			
5	X		X	X	X	X
6	X				X	
7						X

Most themes that emerged pertaining to modes of communication that professionals used were via texting and computers. The majority of professionals use e-mail and texting to contact student athletes on their caseload. Many of them use multiple forms of communication, such as texting, e-mail, calling, and using the Google calendar. Four of the seven use “telling the coaches,” such that coaches will see student athletes in practice daily and have control over their playing based on academic eligibility.

Student Athletes' Perceptions of Effective Practices

The following section presents the data that emerged from interviews with the alternatively admitted student athletes. Paralleling the content-analysis stages with the professionals' data, during the indexing stage of content analysis, themes were identified from the transcript data. The emerging key themes were then arranged into thematic charts during the charting process and further analyzed during the mapping and

interpretation phase. As described in Chapter 3, the interview questions were derived from the research questions regarding student athletes' perceptions of which practices and programs assisted them with retention and academic success. Table 16 shows the themes garnered from the indexing and charting stages of the process. Table 16 is a matrix displaying the themes of practices and programs that student athletes believed were helpful (or not helpful) to them:

Table 16

Alternatively Admitted Student Athletes Perceptions of Effective Practices and Programs within the Athletic Department

	Student athletes							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Study Hall	-X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Team practice								X
Life-Skills programs								
First-Year Experience								
Learning community								X
Advising/scheduling	X		X			X		
One-on-one advising	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Advising—Objective-based Learning		X				X		
Orientation, athletics	X	-X			-X	X		-X
Orientation, UNLV				X				
Mentoring program					X			
Team tutoring					X		X	X
Tutoring (athletic)			X					X
Tutoring, library				X				
Study-skills class			X					
UNLV writing center			X					
Mathematics tutoring center				X				
Academic-Success Coaches								

Below are summaries of the various practices and programs that stood out during the indexing and charting stages of the content analysis with interview data from the alternatively admitted student athletes. I choose to describe practices and programs that had a multitude of comments from the student athletes, either positive or negative, and were perceived by participants as being either very helpful, very ineffective, or had intriguing observations related to the research questions.

Study Hall. As discussed in Chapter 4, Study Hall was a practice in which seven of eight student athletes participated. Student Athlete 8 should have been required to be a part of the structured Study Hall, since she was an alternatively admitted student; however, it did not leave an impression on her. Student Athlete 1 was not impressed with this practice and said that he was required to attend Study Hall during his freshman year. He reported “It was kind of stupid, we just sat there; it was loud and no one was doing work. I would rather work by myself in a quiet space like the library.” Student Athlete 1 is majoring in Nursing and currently has a 3.7 GPA. In contrast, Student Athlete 6 also had to attend Study Hall in his sophomore year because he was a transfer student, but he felt that “Study Hall was very helpful since I had to be there anyways.” He reported using the time to do his academic work. Student Athlete 6 has a 3.3 GPA and is majoring in Political Science. Student Athlete 2, who had a 2.12 GPA at the time of the interview, attended Study Hall for 8 hours per week for his entire freshman and sophomore years. He said it was helpful, but that “it was up to me to figure it out.”

Orientation. In addition to Study Hall and advising, student athletes reported that orientation was the third most used practice and program offered by SAAS. Five of eight student athletes conveyed participating in the team-based orientation provided to student

athletes. Only one student athlete reported attending the UNLV-based orientation. Student athletes, however, reported mixed results on the question regarding the efficacy of this particular program. Only one student athlete could recall the importance of the orientation: Student Athlete 1 reported “that’s when they told us the rules and had us sign paperwork; we talked to our advisors too.” Student Athlete 8 reported that “I attended an in-person orientation my freshman year but I am not sure what they talked about; I think I was with my softball team.” Student Athlete 2 reported attending “an athletic orientation with the team” but could not recall what the purpose was or how it actually helped him. None of the student athletes reported having another orientation since they have been at UNLV, although the *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c) states that the program is a requirement for all student athletes to attend each semester.

Tutoring. Tutoring was mentioned by five of the eight student athletes as being helpful to their academic success. The most helpful type of tutoring reported was team tutoring. Student Athlete 7, who has a 3.0 GPA, stated,

team tutoring and group study had the most influence [on my academic success].

Tutoring was awesome for a one-on-one understanding of the information, and group study was a great way of learning a ton of information in a short period of time.

Only two student athletes and only two professionals mentioned tutoring from the SAAS, which, according to the *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c), is a valued service provided to student athletes.

Student-Success Initiatives. As described earlier in this chapter, Student-Success Initiatives, based on the student-engagement work of Kuh et al. (2007), includes

programs and practices such as Academic-Success Coaches, Life-Skills Programs, and the Mentoring Program. Other supportive services that fit into this category are Learning Communities and First-Year Experiences. Only one student athlete recounted participating in one of these programs, the Mentoring Program, during the interview process. The other four programs were not mentioned by student athletes.

Advising. Individual advising was the only practice or program that 100% of the student athletes agreed was helpful to their academic success. According to the professionals who were interviewed, the practice of advising is supposed to include scheduling; helping with study skills, organizational skills, and time management; providing a one-on-one venue for student athletes to talk about academic issues; and classwork review and planning. Table 17 demonstrates which advising activities student athletes believed to be most beneficial to them.

Table 17

Alternatively Admitted Student Athletes Perceptions of Most Effective Advising Activities

Student athletes	Themes of most effective advising				
	Scheduling	Mentoring	Study skills	Socializing	Classwork review/planning
1	X			X	
2					X
3			X		
4	X				
5	X				X
6	X		X		
7		X		X	
8	X				

Even though the professionals thought the most important part of advising is to check on academic work and progress, student athletes believed that helping with

scheduling of classes was most beneficial. Only two of the eight student athletes reported that the classwork review and planning was a helpful piece of the advising. Student Athlete 1, who has a 3.7 GPA, reported that socializing with the advisor was accommodating, and stated, “I probably went to see my advisor 10–20 times my freshman year; to help with scheduling and to just say hi.”

Another finding regarding advising is that the majority (four of the seven) of the professionals believed that the new Objective-based Learning advising was the best new intervention they have implemented to best serve student athletes academically. However, only two student athletes reported this practice as being helpful to them.

Student Athletes’ Perceptions of Most Effective Professionals

Even though asking about the student athletes’ ideas on which professionals were most helpful to their academic success was not in the original research and interview questions, this important data emerged during the interviews. It was significant enough during the familiarization and indexing process to analyze in this section (see Table 18).

Table 18

Alternatively Admitted Student Athletes Perceptions of Most Effective Professionals With the Athletic Department, Assisting With Academic Success

Student athletes	Themes of most effective professionals								
	Advisors	Mentors	Coaches	Assistant coaches	Teammates	Tutors	Athletic Department administrators	Professors	Graduate assistant
1	X								
2	X								
3	X					X			
4	X					X			X
5	X					X	X		
6	X							X	
7	X		X		X	X			
8					X	X			

Exploring student athletes' perceptions of which professionals they found to be most effective and influential to their academic success yielded secondary findings. During the fact-checking stage of the data analysis, I went back to some student athletes and asked them which professionals they found most effective because others had mentioned this during the original interviews. Even though all student athletes conveyed that academic advising was one of the most helpful practices provided to them, Student Athlete 8 did not list her advisor as an influential professional; she reported that her teammates and tutors were most significant to her learning. The five student athletes who stated that tutoring was helpful were the same five that reported that the actual tutors were very significant to their success. These tutors came from a variety of sources, as noted earlier in the chapter. A major finding in this section is that only one student athlete believed her coach was important to her academic success. No other student athletes mentioned a coach or assistant coach in regard to this follow-up section of interview questions. It is also noteworthy that Student Athlete 6 found his professors to be influential to his academic success, reporting "the instructors at UNLV are better [than at Purdue]; the one on one I get with the professors here is very helpful; I talk to them a lot, they are very helpful." Student Athlete 4 found the graduate assistant from her mathematics class and the Math Tutoring Center to be helpful. These data show that other professionals in the University could be sought for providing services to student athletes at well.

Most Frequently Referenced Practices and Programs

This section of Chapter 5 will synthesize the data from the interviews with student athletes and professionals on the most referenced practices and programs with the SAAS

department at UNLV, using the fifth and final stage in the content-analysis framework.

The mapping and interpretation stage is important as it focuses on finding the similarities and differences in perceptions of student athletes and professionals on best practices and programs in the SAAS department. Table 19 shows a matrix of the findings:

Table 19

Most Frequently Referenced Practices and Programs Contributing to Academic Success

	Most referenced practices and programs					
	Study Hall	Advising	Orientation	Team tutoring	Academic-Success Coaches	Grade updates
Student athletes	6 (-1)	8	3 (-3)	3	0	0
Professionals	-7	7	2	0	5	4

Table 19 provides a clear picture of the incongruity regarding perceptions of the effectiveness of the practice of Study Hall. Seven out of eight of the student athletes reported that they participated in Study Hall, with one stating it was not effective. In addition, 100% of the professionals stated it was an ineffective practice. Professionals agreed that this practice would remain in effect for the football team, as their coaches believe in its efficacy.

The only practice that had 100% agreement in its value contributing to student-athlete academic success was that of individual advising. This is particularly noteworthy because professionals reported they will continue to use this practice, even making improvements to the process (implementing Objective-based Learning) whereas most student athletes found it helpful, if only for scheduling purposes.

As noted in both Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter, orientation was identified by six students as a program in which they participated, although they were unsure of the

purpose. Only two professionals mentioned it as an effectual program. The major question is why is it listed as a mandatory, twice per year program in the *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c)?

Two other practices that received attention from the professionals as being valuable for student athletes were grade checks and the use of Academic-Success Coaches. In contrast, none of the student athletes mentioned these programs. The Academic-Success Coaching program, however, is a program provided through the UNLV Academic-Success Center, not the SAAS department. It is perplexing that none of the student athletes mentioned this because, starting in the fall of 2011, all alternatively admitted students at UNLV were required to participate in this mentoring program.

Internal Student Motivation Versus External Practices

As noted in Chapter 2, there are a variety of factors that contribute to college-student success, ranging from internal to the student to external to the institution. There is a large body of research that explores these factors. According to Kuh et al. (2007), the quantity of time and effort students devote to the learning process is the key component to enhancing their engagement in the educational processes. The main internal student-based factors include motivation, satisfaction with the institution, peer involvement, study habits, time on task, interaction with faculty, experiences with diversity, and participation in cocurricular activities and motivation. The external, institutional factors found by Kuh et al. (2007) to support academics include curriculum, resources, student-support services, organization, first-year experience, academic support, campus environment, peer support, and teaching and learning approaches. These more general categories were a precursor to the “High Impact Educational Practices” found by Kuh et

al. (2008) to have positive impacts on college-student engagement, retention, and success.

In this research, some practices and programs that emerged from the interview data are based on the premise that students need to be internally motivated to be successful. Other practices and programs are external to the institution and/or the Athletic Department and rely on systems or people other than students to be effective. In Table 20, the practices and programs are evaluated on an internal versus external basis and then the numbers of student athletes and professionals who found them effective or ineffective are listed.

Table 20

Internal Student Motivation Versus External to Institution and/or Athletic Department

Practice/Program	Internal	External
Study Hall	(6/-1, -7)	
Team practice		(1, 0)
Orientation		(3/-3, 2)
Advising		(8, 7)
Tutoring (all)	(7, 3)	(7, 3)
Life-Skills programming		(0, 3)
First-Year Experience		(0, 2)
Mentoring Program		(1, 2)
Learning community		(1, 0)
Academic-Success Coaches		(0, 5)
UNLV Writing Center	(1, 0)	(1, 0)
Class checks		(0, 3)
Grade updates		(0, 4)

1st number = number of students who believed this practice/program was helpful; 2nd number = number of professionals who believed this practice/program was effective; Italicized numbers indicate practices and programs that require both student motivation and external instruction.

Table 20 shows that some of the practices and programs require both student motivation and external instruction (see the italicized numbers). Examples of these

include tutoring and the UNLV Writing Center. Tutoring is included in the joint category because students are rarely required to attend tutoring; they have to take the initiative to participate, but there is someone external to them, a tutor, directing the instruction. This is the same for the UNLV Writing Center; at times student athletes may be asked to get assistance from the Writing Center, but they have to take initiative to actually go. However, once they get there, they are taught by someone else.

In Table 20, there is only one category of practices and programs that solely requires student motivation to be successful: Study Hall. Although student athletes are required to attend, they are not required to do anything once they get there. The data from the students, as described in Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter, shows that the individual has to be self-motivated to complete their work while sitting in the lecture hall.

The majority of practices and programs are external to the institution or Athletic Department, because it is the goal of the SAAS to provide services and programs to their student athletes. The other programs that require some internal motivation on the part of the student, tutoring and the Writing Center, were not rated as being highly useful by these participants.

Chapter Summary

The goal of this chapter was to provide the reader with a systematic analysis of the data by using charting and matrices as well as an in-depth presentation of the results. Chapter 6 will conclude the study with the interpretation of the results, discussion of the findings, and implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction and Overview of Study

Retention continues to be viewed as an important area of attention for administrators in all levels of higher education settings. If students do not have the ability to perform adequately academically, they will not be able to remain at the institution. The freshman year is particularly important for predicting success; research has shown that 75% of students who drop out of college will leave during their first 2 years (Tinto, 1987). According to Tinto (2006), knowing why a student leaves the institution does not tell us why others may stay. It does not give explanations of exactly what universities can do to help students stay and succeed. This research provides pertinent information for alternatively admitted student athletes at UNLV.

The purpose of this dissertation was to qualitatively investigate and analyze whether the UNLV Athletic Department's institutional policies, practices, and programs contribute to the success and retention of this population of alternatively admitted student athletes. The data came from two subgroups of participants: (a) professionals in the Athletic Department, who gave their opinions about which policies, practices, and programs they thought were most beneficial to this subgroup of student athletes, and (b) alternatively admitted student athletes, who were asked which institutional practices and programs they believe contributed to their success and which were not effective; they were also asked which practices and programs were perceived to be most important.

This dissertation used the theoretical framework of Kuh et al. (2007, 2005) based on student engagement and student success. This dissertation asked how resources were allocated and organized to provide learning opportunities and services to induce students

to take advantage of programs found to promote student success. Kuh and colleagues (2007, 2005) believed university practices directly influence student engagement and student success. For instance, “if faculty and administrators use principles of good practice to arrange the curriculum and other aspects of the college experience, students would ostensibly put forth more effort” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 9).

The purpose of this chapter is to review the most noteworthy findings, incorporating the existing literature with the analysis of this investigation. This discussion progresses according to the research questions guiding this study. A discussion of the findings is followed by implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1. What policies are in place to promote the success of alternatively admitted student athletes in the UNLV Athletic Department? The data from interviews with professionals and students, as well as the document review showed that there are no policies in the SAAS that specifically address the success of student athletes who are admitted to UNLV under alternative admission status. In this research, success is defined as retention, meaning that students returned after their first year at UNLV and were determined to be NCAA eligible to participate on their team. Being eligible means earning a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above.

One hundred percent of the professionals interviewed reported that there are no policies in place to address the success of alternatively admitted student athletes specifically. The main theme is that alternatively admitted student athletes are not treated any differently than “regularly” admitted student athletes. The professionals who serve in

advising roles reported not knowing (off the top of their head) the alternatively admitted student athletes on their caseload. One professional stated that if they had more resources (i.e., more advisors), special attention could be paid to this subgroup of student athletes, whereas another was comfortable with the SAAS plan of treating all student athletes the same. Because the professionals believe that the retention of alternatively admitted student athletes is steady or rising minimally, it is interesting to think about the value of treating all athletes the same. Would there be more success if this subgroup was identified and treated differently? This dichotomy can be perceived as either a positive or negative function of the SAAS. Perceived positively, not identifying the subgroup of student athletes can reduce labeling or stigma. The negative aspect is that this special subgroup of students may be able to use extra assistance, beyond what other at-risk student athletes receive.

Two professionals reported that there is an important university-wide policy to address the success of all alternatively admitted students at UNLV. The policy was translated into a program called the “Academic Success Coaching” program through the Academic Success Center. All alternatively admitted students at UNLV are required to meet with mentors to learn about study skills, time management, organizational skills, and academic support. The mentors are actually 12–15 graduate assistants who provide mentoring support. One of these professionals believed this program should be used more by alternatively admitted student athletes; however, not one of the students interviewed mentioned this program. It is perplexing that none of the student athletes mentioned this program because, starting in the fall of 2011, all alternatively admitted students at UNLV were required to participate in this coaching program.

One of the most important results of the interviews with the alternatively admitted student athletes was not directly related to the interview questions: student athletes did not know they had been admitted to UNLV under alternative criteria. As discussed in Chapter 4, this information emerged as the researcher was explaining the informed-consent forms prior to the interviews. After this was revealed more than once, my advisor and I agreed not to specifically point this out to student athletes in subsequent interviews.

One of the more interesting results of this research study is that UNLV does not have any formal policies in place to address the retention of alternatively admitted student athletes. There is nothing related to alternative admission processes or policies for the purpose of retaining alternatively admitted student athletes in the 2011–2012 UNLV (2012c) *Student-Athlete Handbook* or on the UNLV official athletic website. In addition, the literature review revealed there is no research on institutional policies to address the success of alternatively admitted or “special admit” student athletes.

In field of student engagement and student success, the terms *policies*, *practices*, and *programs* are very different. As noted above, there is a lack of research on specific institutional policies but a plethora of research on various practices and programs that relate to student engagement and success. Kuh et al. (2007) have used the term *effective educational practices* when discussing the actual practices and programs they found to contribute to engagement and success of the college student. These practices and programs will be discussed later in this chapter under Research Questions 2, 4, and 6.

The fact that there are no policies in place to specifically address the success and retention of alternatively admitted student athletes is reinforced by the results discussed above. Professionals do not know which of their students were admitted under

alternative-admission status; students themselves were not aware they were admitted under alternative status; and the document review does not reveal any SAAS policies that specifically address the success and retention of alternatively admitted student athletes.

Research Question 2. What practices and programs do the UNLV Athletic Department *professionals believe are effective* in helping alternatively admitted student athletes to be successful in college?

Advising. The most effective practice and program described by all of UNLV Athletic Department professionals interviewed for this study was advising. The various goals of advising for professionals included teaching study skills, time management, and organizational skills; although the most mentioned goal was checking on and monitoring students' academic progress. This is most likely due to the importance of academic eligibility and the ability of student athletes to play their sport. A practice that emerged as important for professionals to monitor academic progress is grade updates, whereby advisors contact student athletes' professors to get updates on their grades in each class. None of the student athletes mentioned this program. It could be that grade updates are a practice of which students are not necessarily aware because it consists of advisors communicating with student athletes' professors, requesting progress reports in specific classes.

The piloting of advising using Objective-based Learning was mentioned as being very effective by four of the seven professionals interviewed. The potential reason it was not mentioned by all of the professionals is that one interviewee is a graduate assistant, and the other two did not work for the SAAS at the time of the interviews. It was piloted

in the spring of 2012. This goal-focused practice was so successful for those involved that all advisors were slated to use it with all student athletes starting in the fall of 2012.

The practice of advising is mentioned in the literature by many researchers, including Kuh et al. (2007). Their research indicated that quality advising provided by professional advisors or faculty members seems to be highly correlated with student success. The NSSE (2005) data showed that the quality of academic advising is the greatest predictor of satisfaction in the campus environment for students at 4-year institutions (NSSE, 2005). Of the students interviewed, only 7% indicated their advising experiences as “poor” (NSSE, 2005). Other research on college-student athletes denotes the same; that academic monitoring, personal counseling, career guidance, assignment of compatible academic advisors, and the teaching of effective study skills are necessary institutional programs that contribute to academic success (Ferrante et al., 1996; Fletcher et al., 2003; Le Crom et al., 2009).

Student-Success Initiatives. Student-success initiatives are practices and programs derived from Kuh et al.’s (2007) recommendations of effective educational practices. According to Kuh et al. (2007), these initiatives typically address issues such as getting optimal use of campus support resources, career development, and academic-skill growth such as time management, test taking, and note taking. The adaptive skills cultivated in these types of programs are conditional behaviors that have direct and indirect impact on persistence and graduation (Kuh et al., 2007).

In this study, the following UNLV programs were categorized as Student-Success Initiatives: the Academic-Success Coaches program, Life-Skills Programs, and the Mentoring Program. The remarkable results from this research show that the three

programs were mentioned 10 times by professionals as being effective and helpful to alternatively admitted student athletes. In contrast, the Mentoring and Academic-Success Coaching programs were not noted on the UNLV official athletic website nor in the 2011–2012 *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c).

Orientation and Study Hall. Orientation programs have been identified as being an important, effective educational practice by Kuh et al. (2007). The researchers found that comprehensive orientation programs have been found to have a positive effect on persistence through their influence on social integration and ensuing commitment to the university (Kuh et al., 2007). In this research project, only two professionals mentioned this program as being an effective practice to assist with student-athlete success. This lack of mention raises concerns because in the 2011–2012 *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c), orientation is listed as a program required of all student athletes with mandatory attendance in the fall and spring semesters of each academic year. It may be due to the limited number of advisors in the SAAS department that this program gets pushed to the wayside in light of the individual advising requirements of each advisor.

Study Hall is the one program that was in use during the time of the interviews, in the spring of 2012, that all professional staff interviewed agreed was the least effective practice or program affecting the retention of alternatively admitted student athletes. Kuh et al. (2007) did not discuss this practice or program, but other researchers (Ferrante et al., 1996; Fletcher et al., 2003; Le Crom et al., 2009), who focused their research on college-student athletes, recommended an “intensified study hall” as an important and effective institutional program. The professionals interviewed believed that the Study Hall does not have enough structure or academic support built in and consists of

“students sitting in a lecture hall.” With the advent of the new Objective-based Learning advising, many teams will use this practice instead of Study Hall; however, all of the professionals stated that the football team would continue to use Study Hall, as it is based in their “team culture.” The sense is that the football team has a culture of its own; with 105 players and multiple layers of coaches, the advisors seem to believe they lack of influence over academic-support decisions with this particular sports team.

Programs requiring internal student motivation: A perspective from professionals. As discussed in Chapter 5, although there are some practices and programs that require internal motivation on the part of student athletes, most programs use strategies external to the student (i.e., instruction) and some programs seem to rely both on internal student motivation and external strategies and/or tools to be successful. Interestingly, Study Hall is the one program that requires internal motivation on the part of the student athlete and is also the one program that all of the professionals concurred was least effective. One conclusion that can be made here is that the professionals interviewed do not believe students are internally motivated; this is supported by the fact that six of the seven professionals interviewed believe that students are underprepared or unprepared at the time they enter college.

Research Question 3. How have policies, practices and programs evolved over time? As noted in answering Research Question 1, there is a lack of policies in the UNLV Athletic Department that addresses the retention of alternatively admitted student athletes. However, a university-wide policy implemented in the fall of 2011 in the form of the Academic-Success Coaching program, was put in place to address the success of all alternatively admitted students at UNLV. The research reveals that this was the first

practice or program implemented at UNLV to address the success of any alternatively admitted students, including student athletes.

According to Simiyu (2010), institutions that support student athletes should address not only their athletic strengths and weaknesses but their academic strengths and weaknesses as well. This research supports that this is what the SAAS department is doing at UNLV; they are working with student athletes to not only remain eligible to play their sport, but to be successful in their academic studies as well, with the short-term goal of retention and the long-term goal of graduation. One way SAAS has changed over time is to implement Objective-based Learning advising. The professionals agreed that this new individualized goal-based intervention is more specific, concrete, and geared specifically to each student's learning needs. It holds the advisors and the student athletes more accountable.

According to six of the seven professionals interviewed, the NCAA has played a major role in the way the SAAS interacts with student athletes to help them remain eligible to play their sport and for them to be academically successful enough to return the following year. The NCAA passed a significant academic package in 2003 and completion rates increased, which meant student athletes were forced to make more progress toward graduation if they wanted to be in compliance. Five professionals noted the APR, which measures retention and eligibility for the NCAA. One professional explained that coaches are now penalized by the NCAA for not retaining students, and teams will be kept out of postseason play if they do not meet the minimum APR score of 925, which is moving to 930 in the 2015–2016 academic year. Professional 7 reported that the new Objective-based Learning advising program is based on the APR and that

“this program is APR driven; it focuses on those student athletes who are ‘at-risk’ of losing APR points. If we earn the respective APR points, they will have met all eligibility standards, which is the ultimate goal.” Thus, the Objective-based Learning advising program is a clear example of how a program has evolved, though its evolution was driven by an outside force (NCAA policies).

Another external influence theme that emerged from the data was that of a lack of resources in the SAAS department. At the time of the interviews, the department was missing two athletic academic advisors. This seemed to pose a struggle, as the advisors that were there were spread across too many teams, and were responsible for too many student athletes. One professional expressed that this was the reason he did not know exactly who his alternatively admitted student athletes were and that they probably would have been better off with more attention. The lack of resources was named as a reason the department did not have “up and coming” learning specialists who are starting to be employed in Athletic Departments across the country. These are professionals who are trained to work with students with learning disabilities, testing and assessing learning capabilities, and writing and mathematics deficiencies. So, although using these types of professionals in athletics is an evolving trend, this is not occurring at UNLV due to the lack of resources. In these particular situations, it appears that the program has digressed due to the absence of funding for the SAAS department.

Simiyu (2010) concluded that student athletes should be equipped to take charge of their academic responsibilities if they are to be successful in college. Some of their individual responsibilities include thinking about career goals, time constraints, academic grades, college experiences, and physical and emotional strains. Some external

considerations include coaching demands, institutional policies, racism and gender inequality, the campus learning environment, and student-athlete eligibility demands (Simiyu, 2010).

It is clear that the SAAS is addressing some, but not all of the aspects addressed in the Simiyu (2010) literature. The data show that some of the practices and programs in SAAS have evolved to better fit student athletes' needs, such as Objective-based Learning advising. Alternatively, it appears that over time, the lack of resources for SAAS could be interpreted as being detrimental to addressing the success of alternatively admitted student athletes. This is evidenced by the absence of two advisors in SAAS and the lack of learning specialists discussed above.

Research Question 4. What practices and programs offered by the UNLV Athletic Department *do student athletes who are alternatively admitted* believe are most effective in helping them be successful? Some of the practices and programs described below were found to be effective in helping alternatively admitted student athletes be successful in their academic studies. Other practices and programs listed merit attention as well because they were not mentioned even though the literature indicated that such practices and programs are effective for a general student population. Finally, some of the practices and programs discussed under this research question were thought to be ineffective by the alternatively admitted student athletes interviewed, and thus necessitate further consideration.

Advising. Advising is the only practice considered by 100% of the student athletes to be helpful for their academic endeavors; however, they specified that the most important aspect of the individual advising sessions was receiving help in scheduling

classes. In addition, only two students mentioned the “new” type of advising using learning-based objectives. This could be because it was a pilot program in the spring of 2012 and not all student athletes were part of this new program. These results on the importance of scheduling to student athletes matches those of McCormick (2003), who found that academic advisors are vital to helping students plan their classes appropriately as well as address questions of sequencing and coherence of their educational program. According to McCormick, this will continue to be important as more students attend several institutions for their college degree (McCormick, 2003). Perhaps advising serves the purpose of providing alternatively admitted student athletes the academic roadmap they need to navigate through an institution, which resulted in the unanimous agreement on the value of the scheduling component of advising.

Study Hall. Study Hall was perceived by six of eight student athletes as being effective for their academic success. This is the only program evaluated that requires internal motivation on the part of the student athlete, as Study Hall requires students to be motivated to complete their work while sitting in the lecture hall with no external instruction. There was some variation in the results as one student athlete, who had a GPA of 3.7 said it was an ineffective program. Another student, with a GPA of 3.3 felt it was an effective practice, as did a student with a GPA of 2.12. Researchers who study college-student athletes have recommended an “intensified Study Hall” as an important and effective institutional program (Ferrante et al., 1996; Fletcher et al., 2003; Le Crom et al., 2009), although the term is not clearly described. The fact that this program requires internal motivation to be successful is clearly demonstrated by the student athlete with the 3.3 GPA, as he was most likely motivated to use the time to do his own work.

Even though the student athlete with the 2.12 GPA found Study Hall useful, it is difficult to conclude why he felt this way. He may have been using the Study Hall time to do his school work, but maybe he was doing it incorrectly; or perhaps he found it helpful to have a place to go each evening. Another option could be that he used the time to socialize, as was reported by some of the professionals and the student athlete that found the program ineffective. Perhaps, for the student athlete with the 3.7 GPA, Study Hall may be ineffective because it is an unnecessary program for someone who is already motivated to do their academic work outside of the program.

Orientation. Orientation was rated as the third most utilized practice offered by SAAS, as five of the eight student athletes reported participating in the a team-based orientation. Only one student athlete reported attending the UNLV-based orientation instead. Even though this was the third most used practice, the effectiveness of the program is questionable because only three student athletes reported that it was helpful or somewhat helpful. None of the student athletes reported attending an additional orientation, which is confusing since the 2011–2012 student handbook (UNLV, 2012c) stated that attendance in orientations is required every semester through the UNLV Athletic Department.

Orientation programs have been identified as an important, effective educational practice by Kuh et al. (2007). The researchers report that comprehensive orientation programs have been found to have a positive effect on persistence through its influence on social integration and ensuing commitment to the university (Kuh et al., 2007). In addition, it is necessary for orientation programs to set clear academic expectations from the very beginning, as it has been established that expectations contribute to college-

student success (Kuh et al., 2005). It is clear that the majority of student athletes in this research study were not aware of the purpose of the orientation program; however, there are a few possibilities as to why the data from this study contrasts with the results from the literature. The first possibility is that the study of orientation programs by Kuh et al. (2007) did not focus specifically on college-student athletes; the second possibility may be that orientation programs through UNLV and the SAAS are ineffective; a third possibility is that the orientation programs studied in this research are ineffective for alternatively admitted college student athletes but may be effective for the general college-student population.

Tutoring and writing center. In addition to Study Hall, other practices and programs require internal motivation on the part of the student athlete to be effective. Two such programs include Tutoring and the Writing Center. These two programs also require external instruction from a professional. For example, when the student athlete makes a Tutoring appointment or walks into the Writing Center this requires internal motivation on their part. The external instruction comes from the professional that provides the tutoring or the Writing Center assistance. Interestingly, these two programs were not cited as often by the student athletes interviewed, as only two student athletes mentioned the Tutoring program from the SAAS department and only one mentioned the Writing Center. However, team tutoring was rated as more useful than individual tutoring by three student athletes.

The conclusion is that, besides Study Hall, the programs rated as most effective for the student athletes require some level of external instruction such as Advising, Study Skills, and Tutoring. Three out of the top four mentioned programs believed by student

athletes to contribute to their academic success require teaching and assistance provided by a professional to the student athlete.

Student-Success Initiatives. According to Kuh et al. (2007), Student-Success Initiatives address issues such as getting optimal use of campus-support resources, career development, and academic-skill growth such as time management, and test and note taking. The adaptive skills cultivated in these types of programs are conditional behaviors that have direct and indirect impact on persistence and graduation (Kuh et al., 2007). In this study, the following UNLV practices and programs were categorized as Student-Success Initiatives: the Academic-Success Coaches program, Life-Skills Programs, and the Mentoring Program. The significant results of this study are that only one student athlete mentioned a program that was considered a Student-Success Initiative, which was the Mentoring program. The Mentoring Program was implemented in the fall of 2011 for at-risk student athletes, and two professionals reported it as being an effective program. Student athletes may not have mentioned it because it is a fairly new program or perhaps their advisors were not aware of it. Mentors are professionals in the UNLV Athletic Department who are assigned to student athletes identified to be at risk academically by the coaching staff or advisors. Mentors then assist the student athlete by linking them to available campus-wide resources and teaching them skills such as time management, note taking, and test taking, which correlate directly with the description Kuh et al. (2007) provided for the adaptive skills that have positive influences on persistence and graduation.

First-Year Seminars and Learning Communities. First-Year Seminars (called First-Year Experience at UNLV) and Learning Communities have also been included as

effective educational practices found by Kuh et al. (2007) to encourage student success. Specifically, Carstens (2000) studied the implementation of first-year courses and found that the least academically prepared students earned more credit hours per semester, had higher grades, and were retained at considerably higher rates than their peers that did not take the first-year course (Carstens, 2000). According to Zhao and Kuh (2004) Learning Communities have a high correlation to all five of the NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice, including self-reported gains in personal and social development, practical competence, general education, diversity experiences and overall student satisfaction with the undergraduate college experience.

In this research study, only one student athlete reported being part of a Learning Community and no student athletes recounted being part of a First-Year Experience. Starting in the fall of 2012, the First-Year Experience course (COLA 100) is required for all incoming freshman, which is maybe the reason that none of the student athletes interviewed mentioned this. The UNLV First-Year Experience courses focus on study skills, time and organizational management, civic engagement, critical thinking, and basic writing skills (Academic Success Center, 2012a). Learning Communities have been in place at UNLV since Fall of 2008, implemented by the College of Urban Affairs, although not in collaboration with the Athletic Department. It appears that UNLV makes individual colleges responsible for developing Learning Communities in their colleges; however, if the college administrators were to work closely with the SAAS department, this could provide an extra layer of student engagement for student athletes as well.

Although many of the practices and programs noted in the last two sections did not receive much attention from the student athletes during the interviews, they are

important to discuss for a number of reasons. The first is that even though only one student athlete mentioned the Mentoring Program and one mentioned the Learning Community; the two students that took advantage of these reported them as being helpful. Secondly, professionals believed that the programs that fell under the Student-Success Initiatives are helpful to alternatively admitted student athletes and their academic success. The reason student athletes were not aware of these practices and programs could potentially be because they are fairly new. Perhaps the directors of the individual programs should reach out to the athletic academic advisors to communicate the benefits and enrollment procedures so that the advisors can make recommendations to all student athletes on their caseload. Finally, all of these practices and programs have been found in the literature to contribute to the success and retention of college students, so they probably are notable and most likely hold promise for the future at UNLV.

Research Question 5. Do student and administrative perceptions align? This section defines which practices and programs the student athletes and professionals believe are effective to contribute to the success of alternatively admitted student athletes. Table 21 clearly shows the opinions of participants on the practices and programs in SAAS as they relate to the theory of student engagement and effective educational practices based on Kuh et al. (2007). Participants' opinions of the practices and programs of Orientation, Advising, Student Success Initiatives, Study Hall, and Partnerships to Support Learning are discussed in depth in the chapter, along with an analysis of the congruity and incongruity of participants' beliefs.

Orientation. Table 21 shows that six students reported that they attended an orientation. Five went to an orientation from SAAS and one reported attending a UNLV-

based orientation. The student athletes, however, have reported mixed results when the question regarding the efficacy of this particular practice was asked. Three student athletes found it fairly helpful with one recalling the importance of the orientation; the others could not remember what was talked about during the orientation, whether they were with their team, or whether the orientation helped them. None of the student athletes reported having another orientation since they have been at UNLV, which is interesting since the 2011–2012 *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c) states that the orientation is a requirement for all student athletes to attend each semester. In addition, only two professionals mentioned the practice of orientation as well. This should be a cause for concern for the Athletic Department, as orientation for student athletes is mandatory each semester according to the 2011–2012 *Student-Athlete Handbook* (UNLV, 2012c).

Table 21

Themes of Kuh et al. 's (2007) Effective Educational Practices

	Themes of Kuh et al. 's (2007) effective educational practices							
	Orientation	Academic advising	First-Year Seminars	Learning communities	Student-Success Initiatives*	Early-Warning Systems	Student-Support Services**	Partnerships to Support Learning
Student athletes	3 (-3)	8	0	1	1	2	12	2
Professionals	2	7	2	0	10	6	11	0

*Student success initiatives include the Academic-Success Coaches program, Life-Skills Programs, and the Mentoring Program; **Student support services include Study Hall, Class Checks, study skills, grade updates from professors, and tutoring.

There are some possibilities that may explain why the majority of students are participating, but it was not mentioned as an effective practice by the professionals interviewed. It is possible that the limited number of advisors in the SAAS department means that this practice is diminished in importance in light of the individual advising requirements of each advisor. Another reason may be that SAAS is now revamping the orientation in Athletics, according to Professional 5, and that prior to now, it was not viewed as effective tool to assist student athletes. Perhaps if advisors and professionals believe that they have some commitment to the new version of the orientation and it communicates the information they value, positive feelings will be transferred to the student athletes.

Advising. Advising was one practice that was overwhelmingly agreed by both student athletes and professionals as effective for alternatively admitted student athletes and their success, although the aspects that the two participant groups found useful about the practice of advising differed. Student athletes reported that the scheduling of classes is most useful to them during their advising appointments, whereas the professionals believed that classwork review and planning are the most important goals of advising. The advisors reported that starting in the fall of 2012, they will use the new Objective-based Learning advising method to keep up with student-athlete academic progress, as well as continue to provide class-scheduling assistance. Therefore it is most likely that the practice of advising will continue to remain effective in the eyes of both student athletes and professionals moving forward.

Student-Success Initiatives. Student-Success Initiatives are defined by Kuh et al., (2007) as being important to persistence and graduation by teaching adaptive skills such

as note and test taking and getting optimal use of campus-support resources. In this study, the Life Skills, Mentoring, and Academic-Success Coaching programs are included in this category. Table 22 displays the responses of each subject group on Student-Success Initiatives:

Table 22

Student-Success Initiatives

	Breakdown of Kuh et al.'s effective educational practices Student-Success Initiatives		
	Life-Skills Programs	Mentoring program	Academic-Success Coaches
Student athletes	0	1	0
Professionals	3	2	5

There are glaring differences in opinions between student athletes and professionals about these programs; only one student mentioned the Mentoring program and none mentioned the Life Skills or Academic-Success Coaching programs, whereas the seven professionals mentioned the importance and effectiveness of these three programs 10 times. The lack of student-athlete awareness, recollection of, or participation in these programs creates concern about the Life-Skills Programs and Academic-Success Coaching. This is because the Life-Skills Programs were mandatory to all student athletes for the 2011–2012 academic year and the Academic-Success Coaching program was mandatory for all alternatively admitted students starting in the fall of 2011. In addition, the Mentoring program was implemented in the fall of 2011 and it appears that some student athletes should have been identified as being in need of extra academic support. If the professionals believe these are helpful and effective programs, how can they inform student athletes more successfully? This may again point to an issue of understaffing and

lack of resources whereby the professionals are overwhelmed with the practice of advising that they have no time to talk about peripheral programs, although they believe them to be helpful.

Study Hall. In this analysis, Study Hall was included under Kuh et al.'s (2007) effective educational practice of student-support services, which also included Class Checks, Study Skills, Grade Updates from professors and Tutoring. The reason Study Hall is examined more carefully is because it is the one practice that 100% of professionals stated was actually an ineffective practice, whereas six of the eight student athletes believed it was an effective and helpful program. This brings to light the fact that students and professionals may be defining effectiveness differently. The professionals defined this practice as ineffective because student athletes are required to sit in a lecture hall for the required amount of time each week, but that does not mean that they are working, learning, or using the time wisely. It seems that they have had experiences with student athletes spending time in Study Hall but not seeing the results academically in completed assignments and good test/quiz grades. Professionals also believe that the most effective programs do not require the student athlete to be internally motivated such as Advising using Objective-based Learning, Academic-Success Coaches, and grade updates, because Study Hall is the only program that requires internal motivation on the part of the student athlete. Perhaps student athletes see Study Hall as an effective practice because they are there for the required amount of hours per week and they are not "failing" at anything because there is no one there with the responsibility of directing them to do anything. However, this does not discount the student athletes with internal motivation who use the time to prepare for classes, study, and to do homework.

Interestingly, the professionals agreed that Study Hall would remain in effect for the football team, as the football-team coaches believe in its efficacy. If the stakeholders, in this case the student athletes, professionals, and coaches, agreed on the mission and goals of Study Hall, it might be more effective in the opinions of all groups. Because the professionals are not invested in this program because of its inefficiency, they do not try to promote it and favor eliminating it in favor of advising using Learning-based Objectives.

Partnerships to Support Learning. The effective educational practice called Partnerships to Support Learning is defined by Kuh et al. (2007) as a practice that helps students incorporate and understand their in-class and out-of-class experiences. It promotes contact with student peers and faculty members outside of class and greater participation in campus activities. Universities that have created a feeling of collective responsibility for student success are distinguished by a great degree of collaboration and reverence among campus community members and have made college-student success important to everyone involved (Kuh et al., 2007).

In this study, I defined the UNLV practices and programs outside of the Athletic Department whose purpose is to contribute to college-student success as a Partnership to Support Learning to align with the definition of an effective educational practice by Kuh et al. (2007). These include the UNLV Writing Center, Mathematics Department tutoring, and tutoring in the library. Even though only two student athletes mentioned these programs, one mentioned both Mathematics Department tutoring and the tutoring from the library as being very effective for academic success. However, only one professional mentioned the library tutoring program as one they believed contributed to

alternatively admitted student-athlete success. Perhaps advisors are focused on the practices and programs in the SAAS but do not have awareness of programs outside of their domain that can influence (and perhaps even overlap or interact) with the interventions they are trying to use to help student athletes. A conclusion can be made that if a student athlete believes all of the services offered at UNLV and SAAS, together, are important to their success, then it may be necessary for professionals to recognize that assessment, even though they work in individual areas. This means that perhaps the professionals in the Athletic Department should become more aware of all resources offered by UNLV, outside of athletics, and recognize that other services can be helpful to student-athlete success. As reinforced in the literature, according to Kuh et al. (2007), working in collaboration with the entire academic community will only enhance the efforts to increase success for all college students, which does include alternatively admitted student athletes.

Research Question 6. Are UNLV Athletic Department policies, practices, and programs congruent with the theoretical framework of student engagement by Kuh et al. (2007), based on perceptions of both professionals and students? This results of this research question shows which of the student athletes' and professionals' opinions of the most effective practices and programs with the UNLV Athletic Department overlap or differ with one another and with the student-engagement framework of Kuh et al. (2007). The Venn diagram (see Figure) illustrates the similarities and differences of the two groups' perceptions, also noting that for many programs, they do not overlap.

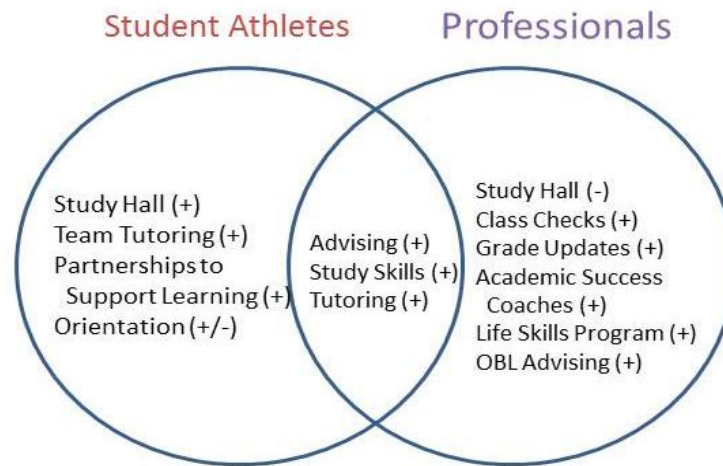


Figure. Venn diagram of similarities and differences of two groups' perceptions.

The three congruent practices and programs (Advising, Study Skills, and Tutoring), shown in the intersection in the Figure, were perceived as effective by both subject groups. The results show that there are many more differences in perceptions of effective practices and programs, with Study Hall showing the greatest discrepancy in opinions. In this study, Study Hall was categorized as a Student-Support Service based on Kuh et al. (2007), although according to the professionals interviewed, the practice does not provide the necessary support and instruction to promote academic persistence or success.

The practice of Orientation was placed in the student-athlete domain because it was mentioned a total of six times by the participants. The (+/-) shows that an equal number of students found orientation helpful as unhelpful. Three student athletes felt it was fairly effective and three did not, however, there was a total of six students who attended an orientation program during their freshman or transfer year. In addition, only two of the professionals mentioned orientation as a helpful practice for alternatively

admitted student athletes, even though attendance is required by the Athletic Department twice per year for all student athletes. This is not congruent with the theory of student engagement based on Kuh et al. (2007), as those researchers found that successful orientation programs have been shown to positively facilitate students' transition to college by providing information to help them manage the challenges they may find in their new environment. Kuh et al. (2007) also found that longer, more comprehensive orientations have been associated with persistence in college.

The practices and programs noted on the Venn diagram that the professionals believe are useful and contribute to the academic success of alternatively admitted student athletes are all congruent with the theoretical framework of student engagement based on Kuh et al. (2007). This includes the Mentoring, Life-Skills, and Academic-Success Coaches programs categorized under Kuh et al.'s (2007) Student-Success Initiatives, that only one student found helpful.

There are some major practices and programs that are considered by Kuh et al., (2007) to be valuable in contributing to student academic success that are offered at UNLV, and even some through the Athletic Department that were either not mentioned or were minimally recognized by the professionals. These include Orientation, First-Year Seminars, Learning Communities, and Partnerships to Support Learning. A potential explanation of this phenomenon could be that the professionals in SAAS only find useful what they know and do every day, which in social psychology is referred to as the mere-exposure effect or the familiarity principle (Zajonc, 1968). For example, the professionals advise individuals every day and are likely to do Class Checks and grade updates on a

weekly basis. They are more apt to find these practices more effective than the Orientation they implement once per year.

Based on the Venn diagram, the students mentioned some practices and programs as more effective and, interestingly, these practices and programs are more “team-oriented” or students experience them as a team, including Study Hall, team tutoring, and Orientation. Except for the practice of Orientation, Study Hall, and team tutoring are not specifically mentioned by Kuh et al. (2007), most likely because their research did not focus on student athletes and those practices may naturally be more “team-oriented” in nature.

These results relate to the literature in that many researchers (Astin, 1999; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Kuh et al., 2007) have reported that student engagement is a function of both individual effort and institutional practices and policies that encourage students to participate in educationally purposeful activities. The results shown in the Venn diagram (the Figure) on the participants’ concurring opinions of the most valuable practices and programs complements the literature precisely as the practices of advising, study skills, and tutoring require internal motivation on the part of the student as well as external instruction/direction on the part of the institution.

Additionally, many researchers have found that those students who are least prepared academically will benefit more from engagement than those who are most prepared, in effects on grades and persistence (Kuh et al., 2008; NSSE, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The existing literature findings directly correlate to the alternatively admitted student athletes in this research study, who are also perceived to be less prepared than other college students and may explain why student athletes with lower

GPA's found the practice of Study Hall more effective than the student athlete with the 3.7 GPA.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study yielded several implications for practice, which are discussed below. These implications include recommendations for practice for serving the alternatively admitted student athlete population and can possibly be transferred to assisting at-risk UNLV students in general. For instance, the practices and programs found to be effective in the UNLV Athletic Department could be put into practice in the Academic Success Center for use by all UNLV at-risk students. These include Advising using Objective-based Learning, grade updates, Class Checks, and study skills. The results of this study can also assist the UNLV Athletic Department with prioritizing current resources for student athletes, and alternatively admitted student athletes in particular, to promote retention and academic success.

Orientation. Based on Kuh et al. (2007), orientations that are considered an effective educational practice have best results when they are longer and more comprehensive, as these sorts of orientations have been found in the literature to promote persistence. Although the UNLV Athletic Department is revamping their orientation practices, it may have a greater impact if they are better organized and have consistent goals and objectives, encouraging all stakeholders, including professionals, coaching staff, and student athletes to be aware of the purpose and rationale for the practice. The expectation in the handbook that all student athletes should attend one orientation per semester should be reviewed as well.

Resources. After completing the interviews with the professionals, it became clear that the issue of the lack of resources was an important factor that limited their ability to provide the most effective services they could to student athletes. It seems that the athletic academic advisors are overwhelmed by the number of student athletes they are responsible for assisting and advising. The administration may want to consider hiring professionals in the new role of the learning specialist, who can provide more comprehensive and specialized interventions to smaller groups of student athletes.

Communication and collaboration. In this same vein, if advisors had more time, they may be more aware of the important academic services outside of their realm that appear to be significant for at least some student athletes. This includes collaboration with the colleges for Learning-Community opportunities for student athletes as well as recommending the use of the UNLV Writing Center and the library tutoring program. Even though a small number of student athletes found these programs useful, they could possibly provide ancillary services to all student athletes. The UNLV Academic-Success Center provides programs for all UNLV students such as the Academic-Success Coaching Program and the First-Year Experience. It is imperative that the athletic academic advisors have consistent communication with the Center to ensure appropriate knowledge of all services they offer, to better inform student athletes on their caseload.

The other two programs that were included under the Student-Success Initiatives of Kuh et al. (2007) are programs in the SAAS of which student athletes had little awareness—the Life Skills and the Mentoring programs—which are mandatory by the Athletic Department and congruent with effective educational practices (Kuh et al., 2007). The professionals were aware of these and find them essential but student athletes

were not familiar with the programs. It would be important to continue the programs that are currently implemented; however, it would be of even greater importance to find ways to ensure student athletes are cognizant of the programs.

Information sharing. Athletic academic advisors should be made aware of which specific student athletes on their “caseload” were admitted under alternative criteria. This way, the advisors can provide additional care and oversight to these at-risk student athletes. The extra information may prove to deliver an extra layer of support to assist with retention and success of alternatively admitted student athletes.

Definitions of effectiveness. The difference of opinions on the practice of Study Hall brings to light the fact that student athletes and professionals may be defining effectiveness differently. A recommendation is that professionals further evaluate what each individual student athlete specifically likes about the practice of Study Hall, and not to conclude that it is ineffective for everyone. It may be a beneficial practice to those student athletes who struggle with academics because at least there is an allotted period of time when they need to be there. In contrast, for student athletes who are already good students, it could be ineffective time because they already have the discipline to complete their work in another venue. In addition, they may find the presence of other student athletes distracting.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several meaningful directions for future research have emerged from this dissertation. First, this study only focused on one cohort of alternatively admitted student athletes; it would be worthwhile to interview nonathlete alternatively admitted students to

gain their perspectives, opinions, and beliefs about what institutional practices and programs were helpful or not helpful to their academic success and retention.

Even though coaches were not interviewed as participants, they were a subject discussed during the interview process with both subgroups of participants. Coaches present a supplementary topic to research when it comes to discovering what contributes to the academic success or challenges of alternatively admitted student athletes. The literature on college-student athletes has shown that coaches have a large influence on student athletes' lives while they are playing a sport in college. According to Fletcher et al. (2003), coaches create busy schedules for students athletes surrounding their athletic commitments, which could therefore counteract faculty efforts to academically influence student athletes effectively (Fletcher et al., 2003). In addition, Simon (2008) wrote that conscious efforts to initiate or enhance student-athlete and faculty interaction are needed in institutions of higher education. Because student engagement is related to positive outcomes such as persistence, better grades, and college satisfaction, administrators should create a learning environment that maximizes student-athlete involvement away from the playing field (Simon, 2008). Simon (2008) recommended that discussions, both formal and informal, are essential to encourage communication and understanding between coaches and other faculty (Simon, 2008).

Given that the alternatively admitted student athletes had a 10% higher retention rate than their nonathlete alternatively admitted student counterparts, it would worthwhile to perform a cost-benefit analysis to look at the allocation of resources. To review how much it would actually cost to provide effective services to all alternatively admitted students would provide necessary information for university administrators.

Given the results of this study, further research should be conducted on how to best shape practices and programs to enhance alternatively admitted student-athlete success based on effective educational practices of the Learning Community by Kuh et al. (2007). A new concept may include student athletes being placed in *athletic learning communities*, based on their team membership and/or majors. This would encourage student athletes to study, learn, engage with peers, coaches, faculty, and advisors, as well as play their sports together. It makes sense to build on the work they are doing as a team on the field and transfer it into the academic arena as well. In addition, it may be interesting to determine which practices and programs are deemed effective for alternatively admitted student athletes divided out by sport as there may prove to be differences in opinions depending on the specific athletic program.

Conclusion

This dissertation used a macro perspective to examine the UNLV Athletic Department; in particular, the policies, practices, and programs that were found to contribute to the retention and success of alternatively admitted student athletes. Student-engagement theory, based on the research of Kuh et al. (2007), was used as a theoretical framework to guide the study. This chapter described the institutional practices and programs that were found to be effective or ineffective by two subgroups of participants: alternatively admitted student athletes and professionals in the UNLV Athletic Department. The results were analyzed for concordance, disagreement, and overlap between the subgroups, as well with the theoretical framework of student engagement based on the work of Kuh et al. (2007). The chapter concludes with recommendations for

practice to potentially serve alternatively admitted student athletes or other groups of at-risk students more effectively, and recommendations for research for further exploration.

Appendix A: IRB Approval Form



Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review

Approval Notice

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation, suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: May 9, 2012

TO: Dr. Mario Martinez, Educational Leadership

FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects

RE: Notification of IRB Action

Protocol Title: The Retention and Success of Alternatively Admitted Student Athletes: A Case Study of the UNLV Athletic Department

Protocol #: 1204-4107

Expiration Date: May 8, 2013

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and approved by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46 and UNLV Human Research Policies and Procedures.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year and expires May 8, 2013. If the above-referenced project has not been completed by this date you must request renewal by submitting a Continuing Review Request form 30 days before the expiration date.

PLEASE NOTE:

Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which contains approval and expiration dates.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through ORI - Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until

modifications have been approved by the IRB. Modified versions of protocol materials must be used upon review and approval. Unanticipated problems, deviations to protocols, and adverse events must be reported to the ORI – HS within 10 days of occurrence.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.

Appendix B: Case-Study Protocol

Week 1. The researcher will gain access to potential participants purposely selected by the researcher by talking to the Director of the UNLV Student Athlete Academic

Advising Services by:

- Placing a phone call, and
- Explaining the researcher's study, and
- Obtaining a preliminary acceptance to participate

Week 2. The researcher will wait until hearing back from the Director before contacting the identified student athletes and academic advisors and then the researcher will be:

- Placing a phone call, and
- Sharing information about the dissertation,
- Discussing the purpose of the study,
- Explaining the time required of the participant,
- Detailing the research methodology,
- Setting the agreed date scheduled for the phone call or in-person meeting for interview purposes
- Sending a follow-up with a confirmation e-mail, and
- Reiterating the above information, and
- Providing an informed consent form for the study

Week 3. Phone interview questions or in-person interviews

- Planned to last no more than 45 minutes,
- Tape recorded for accuracy and obtained a verbal informed consent to participate,
- Allowed for flexibility should the interviewee's responses dictate

Week 4, 5. Document retrieval and review:

Week 6, 7. Transcribe interviews

Week 8 to 10. Analyze data

- Indexing,
- Charting, and
- Mapping
- Follow up questions to interviewees as needed

Week 11 to 13. Interpretation of data

Triangulation of data with interviewees

Week 14 to 16. Contingency timeframe

Appendix C: Letter To Potential Student Athletes

Dear Potential Study Participant/**Student Athlete**:

We are contacting you about a research study exploring the reasons for the retention and success of alternatively admitted student athletes who were admitted to UNLV in 2010. There is little research on which institutional policies, programs and practices make a difference to the success of athletes. This study will attempt to examine your opinions on which UNLV Athletic Department programs and practices contributed to your success.

The study will include one 45 – 50 minute interview. Responses from your interview will be recorded so that readers cannot trace these responses to any specific participant. All communication will be confidential and no information from this study will be collected that identifies you specifically.

I will be conducting interviews in a conference room of the Academic Success Center on the following days and times:

Wednesday, May 16th	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm
Thursday, May 17th	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm
Friday, May 18th	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm
Monday, May 21st	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm

*If you would like to participate, please email me with the date and time that is best for you **by May 7th, 2012** at Adrienne.ekas@unlv.edu to confirm or let me know if another date and time works better for you.*

If you are interested in learning more about this study or have any questions, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at Adrienne.ekas@unlv.edu or via phone at 702-349-7085. Your inquiry does not obligate you to this study, it only indicates your interest in learning more about this study, as you decide to participate or not.

In accordance with the UNLV Institutional Review Board, if you do decide to participate, we will review the informed consent document at the time of the interview. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Adrienne Ekas
Co-Principal Investigator
702-349-7085
Adrienne.ekas@unlv.edu

Mario Martinez, Ph.D.
Professor and Co-Principal Investigator
702-895-2895
Mario.martinez@unlv.edu

Appendix D: Informed Consent



INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: The Retention and Success of Alternately Admitted Student Athletes:
A Case Study of the UNLV Athletic Department

INVESTIGATOR(S): Mario Martinez, Ph.D. and Adrienne Ekas

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: Mario Martinez (702) 895-2895;
Adrienne Ekas (702) 349-7085

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons for the retention and success of alternately admitted student athletes who were admitted to UNLV in 2009 and 2010. There is little research on which institutional policies, programs and practices make a difference to the success of athletes.

Participants

You are asked to participate in this study because you are either a professional within the UNLV Athletic Department or you are a successful alternately admitted student athlete at UNLV.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in one tape-recorded phone or in-person interview about your opinions about the UNLV Athletic Department policies and programs. The interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes. The interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time determine between the researcher and the participant and confirmed via e-mail.

Benefits of Participation

There may be indirect benefits to you as a participant in this study. We hope to learn about particular policies and programs that can help other subgroups of students at institutions of higher education.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks of discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected that are no greater than those encountered in everyday life, deeming this study of minimal risk.

Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1204-4107

Received: 04-27-12 Approved: 05-09-12 Expiration: 05-08-13



INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Educational Leadership

**TITLE OF STUDY: The Retention and Success of Alternately Admitted Student Athletes:
A Case Study of the UNLV Athletic Department**

INVESTIGATOR(S): Mario Martinez, Ph.D. and Adrienne Ekas

**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: Mario Martinez (702) 895-2895;
Adrienne Ekas (702) 349-7085**

Cost /Compensation

There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. Your participation in the study will take no more than 1.5 hours of your time (i.e. 45-60 minutes for the phone interview and a follow-up phone call for 15 – 20 minutes to confirm information). You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Mario Martinez at 702-895-2895. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After storage time the information gathered will be shredded and discarded appropriately.

Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1204-4107

Received: 04-27-12 Approved: 05-09-12 Expiration: 05-08-13

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INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: The Retention and Success of Alternately Admitted Student Athletes:
A Case Study of the UNLV Athletic Department

INVESTIGATOR(S): Mario Martinez, Ph.D. and Adrienne Ekas

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: Mario Martinez (702) 895-2895;
Adrienne Ekas (702) 349-7085

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in the study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

I agree to be audio taped for the purpose of this research study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1204-4107

Received: 04-27-12 Approved: 05-09-12 Expiration: 05-08-13

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