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Priority Registration for Student-Athletes at Western Oregon University

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Western Oregon University

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Priority Registration for Student-Athletes at Western Oregon University

By
Antoinette Gowen

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation from the Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Emily Vala-Haynes
Thesis Advisor

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Honors Program Director

June, 2019
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I will cherish the education I received from Western Oregon University and look back fondly on the memories made and lessons learned. I am incredibly grateful for the people of WOU who have taught me so much, inspired, supported, and guided me—shaping who I am today.

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I dedicate this thesis in memory of Dr. H.
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Abstract

This thesis attempts to gain understanding of the unique position of student-athletes. Student-athletes across the country are often academically and athletically successful while facing unparalleled challenges. The goal is to inspire institutional change in the form of enacting priority registration for eligible student-athletes. Priority registration can be a way to limit some of the challenges and facilitate student-athlete success. After analyzing academic literature on college student-athlete challenges and options for support, there are clear gaps in literature on the effects of priority registration for student-athletes. WOU student-athletes, faculty, and staff provided feedback regarding their thoughts and opinions on priority registration for student-athletes. A proposal for implementing priority registration for WOU student-athletes before the Faculty Senate resulted in an endorsement from the committee and approval from the university president. Universities can facilitate student-athlete achievement through educating and raising awareness of student-athlete challenges, providing resources, and implementing strategies such as priority registration to help student-athletes.
Introduction

NCAA student-athletes are in the unique position of working toward success in collegiate athletics while pursuing their academic degree of choice. This thesis attempts to gain understanding of student-athletes, highlight the success of Western Oregon University's (WOU) student-athletes, and inspire institutional change in the form of enacting priority registration for eligible student-athletes.

Priority registration refers to certain groups having an earlier time to register for courses than they normally would have, and often before certain other groups. Many campuses offer this to veterans, honors program members, students with certain majors, and in many cases, to student-athletes. Whether student-athletes should be given priority registration is not a widely agreed upon topic. There are different opinions about the nature of priority registration and if it is truly necessary. Arguments in favor of providing this for student-athletes are mainly based on evidence of demanding schedules for student-athletes specifically, and the lack of flexibility in choosing when and what courses to take. Those that oppose student-athlete priority registration view it as a special privilege and argue that other students struggle with busy schedules too.

This project consists of research into the topic of priority registration for student-athletes. It provides an overview of the lives of student-athletes, including challenges and barriers they face. The main challenges for student-athletes have to do with time commitments and scheduling, but there are also other variables such as social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Student-athletes at Western
Oregon University face these challenges and do not always have the support that they need. This project aims to create institutional change in hopes of benefiting all WOU student-athletes and also many staff members.
Literature Review

The goal in NCAA Division II is to achieve a “life in balance”, encouraging athletes to put their best foot forward not only on the field, but also in the classroom. This balance is extremely difficult to achieve but is ultimately the key to accomplishing academic and athletic goals (Greer & Robinson, 2006). Student-athletes are not all that different than their peers. All college students are planning for what comes after college and making progress toward the applicable degree while also working on themselves mentally and socially. All college students, whether they are athletes or not, face “developmental challenges” emotionally, socially, and in planning for the future (Greer & Robinson, 2006, p. 51). While some are more driven and motivated than others, and while the amount of energy devoted to academics and athletics varies by the individual, every college student has a common goal of coming out at the end of their time with a degree. Student-athletes across the country are often academically and athletically successful while facing unparalleled challenges. Priority registration can be a way to limit some of these challenges and facilitate student-athlete success.

Student-Athlete Strengths and Contributions to Campus

Division II operates on a “partial-scholarship model”, meaning that only a fraction of student-athletes are fully funded, some receive some funding, and many receive none (“Division II”, 2019). Although there can be financial incentives and
external pressures, the majority of student-athletes—especially those at the Division II level—decide to participate in intercollegiate athletics because they have a true passion and love for the sport. Especially in situations below Division I where students are on partial scholarship or none at all, it is evident that the students are not playing sports in college for the glory and the perks (Watt & Moore, 2002). Many athletes have both athletic and academic scholarships, further encouraging them to work equally hard in both their schoolwork and their athletics.

There is also a correlation between athletic participation and success in academics (Watt & Moore, 2002). Many characteristics that make an athlete successful such as drive, motivation, work ethic, and more, carry over into their academics. Looking at student-athlete graduation rates in comparison to those of the general student population, involvement in athletics can potentially encourage graduation (Watt & Moore, 2002). In fact, the graduation rates of NCAA Division II student-athletes are often higher than the general student population, which is true for Western Oregon University. (“Division II”, 2019). On a national level, in 2011, 49% of college students graduated within 6 years compared to 56% of student-athletes (“Division II”, 2019). At Western Oregon University, student-athletes graduate at a 19% higher rate as of 2018.

Student-athletes are assets to their universities with their positive contributions both on and off campus (Tucker et al., 2016). Athletics often connects to people from the surrounding areas, creates positive attention that highlights and represents the school, encourages companies and donors to contribute financially, and can aid in recruiting. (Broughton, 2001). Tucker and colleagues surveyed
college students finding that nearly 90% felt that “[student-athletes] are important to a school’s public image and appeal” (2016).

Challenges and Barriers

Student-athletes face many challenges, some in common with their peers, but many that are unique. Among the challenges are adjusting to the intensity of the college level both in the classroom and in their sport, balancing the demands of sports and school, holding up to NCAA standards, additionally balancing a social life outside of school and athletics, taking care of their mind and body, and forming and managing new and old relationships (Broughton, 2001; Greer & Robinson, 2006; Nite, 2012; Stokowski, Rode & Hardin, 2016; Watt & Moore, 2002; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008; Tucker et al., 2016; Baucom & Lantz, 2001). Intercollegiate teams are made up of athletes from all over the country, and sometimes the world, and no matter where those athletes come from, they are adjusting to something new. This newness often includes stricter schedules and rules, as well as higher expectations physically and otherwise.

Schedule Demands

The time restraints on a student-athlete create a rigorous and rigid schedule with very busy days where practically every minute must be planned (Watt & Moore, 2002). On any given day, a student-athlete not only attends classes and scheduled practices, but also may be required to attend weight lifting sessions, team
meetings, injury treatment, and team study halls. This can be overwhelming looking at what needs to fit into the limited time of a day (Greer & Robinson, 2006).

Student-athletes across the country must adhere to restrictions on Countable Athletically Related Activities, “CARA”. These activities are included in the official NCAA time restrictions and must not exceed 20 hours total in a week, 4 hours per day, and 6 days of activity while in season (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). However, CARA has many exclusions, which results in most athletes spending far more than 20 hours per week on their athletics (see Table 2). NCAA research indicated that Division II athletes spent an average of 35.5 hours per week on academics in season in 2015 (“Goals”, 2015). In addition to their academic time commitments, these athletes also spent 32 hours per week on athletics (“Goals”, 2015). Student-athlete schedules are similar to students who have jobs, which can create a demanding and difficult schedule and in turn, impact their success in school (Greer & Robinson, 2006). Some student-athletes even have jobs in addition to their academics and athletics. In 2015, over a quarter of Division II student-athletes were working 8-10 hours per week (“Goals”, 2015). With their commitments filling up over 67 hours per week, their responsibilities are daunting.

With the pressure of everything that a student-athlete must do in a single day, time management can become a significant challenge, which can cause academics to suffer (Greer & Robinson, 2006). Time management becomes a key component to succeeding in both worlds. In fact, planning their days has been shown to produce students that are more ready for their next chapters of life (Watt & Moore, 2002). When planning in broader terms than the day-to-day, students
must create class schedules that work with their athletics. Due to training and events taking up much of the room in their schedules, student-athletes face incredible challenges when attempting to register for courses to both keep them in compliance with NCAA standards as well as work towards their degree (Stokowski et al., 2016). When courses needed are unavailable, students often do not reach a full-time credit-load (Kurlaender, Jackson, Howell & Grodsky, 2014). Unfortunately, for student-athletes this is not an option as the NCAA requires a minimum of 12 credit hours per term—a full-time student course-load—in order to remain eligible for their sport. Student-athletes may then be forced to miss practices and classes to accommodate conflicts.

*Perceptions and Judgements*

Student-athletes report being placed in a spotlight that causes them to be judged on how they act at all times, and not just when they are out on the field (Tucker et al., 2016). Their peers often view student-athletes in a negative way. Many are unaware of the rigors of student-athlete life and the intensity of NCAA rules; in turn, they may view any accommodations as a special advantage (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Without a comprehensive understanding of what is expected of student-athletes, it is difficult to understand why accommodations are made. Judgement can come from fellow students who are non-athletes or even from professors. Commonly, anything that is not available to everyone but is provided for student-athletes is seen as unfair (Greer & Robinson, 2006). Although institutions must recognize NCAA events as excused absences, other students and faculty
members sometimes react negatively to student-athletes asking to be excused for their sporting events or to reschedule labs and tests; however, in a study on this topic, student-athletes overwhelmingly reported that they were not given any academic “special treatment” (Tucker et al., 2016, p. 29). In fact, a majority had run into quite negative situations with faculty and other students when they required necessary “accommodations” (Tucker et al., 2016, p. 29). Faculty members often express negativity towards student-athletes out of resentment towards what they perceive as special treatment given in regards to admissions and academic support (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Tucker et al., 2016). Research has indicated that student-athletes tend to have some “negative and unsatisfactory relationships” with faculty and staff (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005, p. 2).

**Health and Wellbeing**

Student-athletes must adjust to more than the general student body with new coaching, teammates, practices, schedules as well as new psychological, emotional, and social strains and challenges (Greer & Robinson, 2006). These obstacles can significantly impact their health and wellbeing. College students often struggle with mental and physical health. Student-athletes have the added pressures of athletics on top of the already existing collegiate pressures (Broughton, 2001; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). There are “several factors that contribute to personal and psychological problems of college student athletes. These problem issues included identity conflict, fear
of success/failure, social isolation, poor athletic performance, academic problems, drug/alcohol problems, career-related concerns, interpersonal relationships, and athletic injuries” (Broughton, 2001, p. 6).

The issues that students face as they enter into college are even more challenging for student-athletes and often are more stressful (Pinkerton, Hinz & Barrow, 2010). Student-athletes, like all college students, are struggling to figure out who they are and who they will become once they are on their own, while establishing their beliefs and morals and contemplating significant life and career decisions (Pinkerton, Hinz & Barrow, 2010). The schedule of athletics can define limited and dividing identities (Pinkerton et al., 2010). While on their path to discovery, student-athletes face, “false, unfounded, and unrealistic expectations by non-athletes of student-athletes” which “have the potential to manufacture divisions between the two” (Tucker et al., 2016, p. 32). These challenges are intertwined and related in complex ways.

Mental Health

Studies have found that student-athletes experience more stress with distinct causes while trying to balance sports and school (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005; Davoren and Hwang, 2014). Student-athletes’ sources of stress include social, emotional, financial, time-related pressures (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009; Nite, 2012; Pinkerton et al., 2010; Taylor, 2014; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).
A study of college students, Wilson and Pritchard (2005) found that higher levels of stress are directly correlated with mental and emotional issues. Athletes have specifically reported that “pressure to win, excessive anxiety, frustration, conflict, irritation and fear” experienced in athletics “significantly affected their mental or emotional health” (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005, p. 2). When athletes receive even small amounts of athletic scholarships, they may feel encouraged to prioritize athletics. This pressure can lead to an utter fear of failure (Nite, 2012). Anxiety and depression are common in college students with 30% of adults struggling with mental health issues nationwide. An American College Health Association survey of a one-year period found that 24.5% of student-athletes experienced depression and 39.4% experienced anxiety (Davoren & Hwang, 2014). Stress was one of the most significant factors related to anxiety and depression (Davoren & Hwang, 2014). Armstrong and Oomen-Early found little research on depression in college student-athletes even though studies have indicated more significant risk (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009, p. 521).

Student-athletes have reported feeling as though they do not have adequate time to be successful students and athletes (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). Time demands from sports can prevent opportunities for social life and activities outside of athletics that contribute to their emotional well-being (Kroshus, 2014). Due to the previously mentioned social life challenges, student-athletes’ mental health can decline. In fact, Armstrong and Oomen-Early found that a decline in “social connectedness” leads to “more psychological distress, including depression and low self-esteem...” (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009, p. 524).
While coping with day-to-day stress, many athletes struggle enormously when their athletic careers end and they must transition to what is next, many not having planned enough for what comes after college (Taylor, 2014). After many years of tying sports to who they are, losing this can be traumatic, as athletes have to find a new identity in something other than being a competitive athlete (Pinkerton et al., 2010).

**Physical Health**

There are many other stressors that can impact a student-athletes’ mental health, but injury and other physical hardships can be especially negative (Putukian, 2014). Declining mental health can cause physical health to deteriorate, and highly stressed student-athletes have a greater tendency to engage in unhealthy habits (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

“On US college campuses, collegiate athletes are considered a high-risk subculture for a variety of health behaviors, including alcohol use and abuse, disordered eating, coping with the stressors of injuries and academic performance, overtraining, lack of sleep, and feelings of exhaustion” (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009, p. 521).

Injuries are an unfortunate and common issue in college athletics. In some cases, the “psychological response to injury can trigger or unmask serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, disordered eating, and substance use or abuse” (Putukian, 2014, p. 61). Concussions are often an injury that have a higher risk of causing depression because the trauma to the brain can actually cause the
depressive symptoms on its own (Coppel, 2014; Putukian, 2014). In addition to depression, concussions often cause anxiety and can inhibit attention and concentration (Coppel, 2014).

Because of the pressures and attention placed on them, student-athletes will often hide their injuries from coaches and training staff to avoid needing to sit out or to avoid appearing weak (Putukian, 2014). A bad injury could mean sacrificing participation in both practice and competition, and in some rare cases, have negative future implications (Putukian, 2014). Concussions, “a brain injury involving a complex pathophysiological process affecting the brain, induced by mechanical forces” (p. 65), can also directly affect an individual’s ability to do schoolwork and attend classes (Coppel, 2014). Injuries of all kinds can lead student-athletes to unhealthy behavior (Putukian, 2014).

Student-athletes can develop eating disorders in response to injury due to the fact that they are not burning as many calories as they typically do when engaging in full activity (Putukian, 2014). With a stigma of thinner figures being somehow better, eating disorders are especially common in females, specifically those that participate in sports. Student-athletes are often in environments where they feel pressure to look a certain way or be at a certain weight, so they will often turn to unhealthy ways to achieve this. The addition of the clothing required for practices and competitions can influence a student-athlete’s self-consciousness and can also contribute to eating disorders (Thompson, 2014).

In comparison to non-athletes, student-athletes were more likely to binge drink (Hainline, Bell, & Wilfert, 2014). Many student-athletes use stimulants for
non-medical purposes (Stull, 2014). An NCAA study found that eight percent of student athletes admitted to using stimulants without medical reason (“NCAA National”, 2018). Narcotics are also an issue, the same study finding that two percent of student athletes abuse narcotics intended for pain (“NCAA National”, 2018).

Student-athletes often suffer from a lack of sleep. Research conducted by the NCAA research found that one-third of student-athletes are getting less than seven hours of sleep per night (Grandner, 2014). In 2015, the NCAA Goals study found that student-athletes are only sleeping just over six hours per night on average (“Goals”, 2015). A study comparing non-athletes with student-athletes found that more students-athletes felt that they were not getting enough sleep (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

Social

Involvement in athletics while trying to academically succeed causes internal conflicts and can make fitting in challenging for student-athletes (Broughton, 2001). According to Tucker and colleagues (2016), student-athletes end up socially grouped, judged as one body, and consequently isolated from other peers. Ferrante and colleagues described these negative views of athletes, writing that “American culture generally adores the athlete icon, there is a widespread opinion that college student-athletes are overprivileged, pampered, lazy and out-of-control, and whose primary motivation to attend school is to participate in sports” (as cited in Greer et al., 2006, p. 53; Ferrante et al., 1996).
Social life barriers can be partially blamed on stereotypes that drive separation of student-athletes (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008, p. 106). The “dumb-jock” stereotype degrades student-athlete reputations and lowers expectations of them (Stokowski et al., 2016, pp. 68-69; Tucker et al, 2016, p. 28). Athletes are often initially judged as being less intelligent, and this can cloud the judgement of those who interact with them, which can result in an isolation of student-athletes and hinder their motivation in school (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

Faculty members lacking a grasp on the pressures tend to perceive student-athletes as being not as smart, driven, and bright as their peers (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008; Stokowski et al., 2016). Advisors can also view athletes negatively and judge them as well. When an academic advisor is not in full support of the student, that can also hinder the student’s ability to succeed academically. One study found unfavorable perceptions of the athletes and the athletic department in the eyes of the advisors (Stokowski et al., 2016). Advisors can be a key component to any student’s ability to take the right courses and stay on track for graduation. If a negative relationship exists between advisors and students, that can detract from academic objectives.

A study conducted by the American College Health Association as well as a study by Wilson and Pritchard (2005) found that student-athletes reported having a hard time with relationships (Davoren and Hwang, 2014). The NCAA Goals Study found that the vast majority of student-athletes in both Division I and II would prefer to have more time to spend with friends and family (“Goals”, 2015). Over half
of male student-athletes and over two-thirds of female student-athletes reported that they wish they had more time for socializing ("Goals", 2015).

**Support and Recommendations**

Reducing the stigma surrounding student-athletes starts at the center—within the athletic department. Stokowski recommends doing this through raising awareness of NCAA rules and expectations as well as promoting a general increase in connections, especially those between faculty and the department (Stokowski et al., 2016). Raising awareness of requirements and demonstrating the expectation that student-athletes work just as hard as their peers could diminish negative views of student-athletes (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). In fact, studies have shown that the more connected faculty are with the student-athletes and the athletic department as a whole, the better their views are of student-athletes (Stokowski et al., 2016). In order for anything to be beneficial and effective, every person involved must be on the same page regarding the goals and vision for the student-athletes (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). The athletic department and the entire school need to be aware of the treatment of student-athletes compared to their peers in terms of attention, accommodations, and incorporations (Tucker, 2016).

Advisor support is crucial to success in both the classroom and athletic facility. In order to create change in the dynamics between athletes and non-athletes, both the student and the advisors should work together to make the groups more equal, recognize their shared goals, mutually give effort, and support
one another (Stokowski, et al. 2016). Advisors must recognize their own biases and feelings towards athletes in order to better address the needs of student-athletes (Stokowski, et al. 2016).

Effective advising paired with counseling is instrumental to student-athlete wellness emotionally, academically, and in planning for life after college (Greer & Robinson, 2006). Improving and increasing human resources that can assist students for mental health support and academic support is something that athletic departments should focus on (Broughton, 2001). Since sports have a strong psychological component in addition to physical, sports psychology counseling can be very beneficial (Broughton, 2001). Many studies have suggested that athletes will perform better physically if they are psychologically healthy (Broughton, 2001). Athletic department staff should be aware of what the campus has to offer to encourage student-athletes to seek that help. They should also consider collaboration with pre-existing mental health resources to help student-athletes (Putukian, 2014). All student-athletes and athletic department staff should know about mental health resources, what is available, and how to use them. In addition, athletic departments should communicate with the staff in charge of mental health services. More awareness will likely help student-athletes to get the help they need and encourage others to do the same (Klenck, 2014).

Priority Registration
Unfortunately, there is very little academic peer-reviewed literature available about priority registration for student athletes, which universities have it for their student-athletes, and whether or not it is effective. Priority registration discussions most commonly appear in newspapers from universities. These articles include student perspectives as well as valuable feedback from people across campuses. This topic is a controversial one. Questions of fairness are typically countered with arguments that promote priority registration not as a reward or privilege, but as a way to facilitate student-athlete success. The demands of other various student schedules are frequently compared with student-athlete schedules. Many articles include valid points unveiling more about the challenges facing student-athletes and revealing ways that athletic schedules can be more demanding.

As previously discussed, student-athletes are not always viewed in the best light. A student-athlete at Villanova discussed being “used to the ridicule about her priority status from her non-athlete peers” (Verderosa, 2010, para. 13). A student writer at the University of California—San Diego (UCSD) discussed similar allegations. She wrote that “...early registration times are misconstrued as ‘preferential treatment’ — but athletes need this because of the difficulties of balancing collegiate training with the intensity of UCSD’s academics” (Bales, 2012, para. 1). At Villanova, arguments against student-athlete priority registration often compare athletes’ schedules to those of engineering and nursing students (Blake, 2016, para. 10). However, the NCAA has lofty and strict requirements, causing student-athletes to be “the only group on campus that’s looked at to that level of detail and rigor” (Blake, 2016, para. 10). Verderosa’s article brought up the lack of
full understanding of the time commitment and challenges facing student-athletes” (Verderosa, 2010, para. 14). She also argued that “…student-athletes have much more intricate and inflexible regulations regarding academic progress than does the general student population.” (Verderosa, 2010, para. 19). A baseball player wrote in the Boston College paper about his personal experiences, discussing his missed classes, scheduling conflicts, and rigidity of student-athlete schedules (Nelson, 2019).

To address the issue of scheduling, “…[student-athletes] have priority so they can create the most efficient class and practice schedules possible” (Eicher, 2012, para. 2). Midwestern University also used logic similar to this; priority registration would facilitate making schedules that do not conflict with one another (Smith, 2017, para. 5). One writer argued that “priority registration would reduce [missed classes] because student athletes will be able to register with their schedules in mind and schedule around their future absences” (Smith, 2017, para. 3). Similarly, a coach at California State University—Stanislaus (CSUS) argued that “there will be less times where faculty have student athletes missing class for travel or for games…” arguing that this means “…less work for the faculty when it comes to trying to accommodate student athletes in having them make up assignments because there will be less assignments that have to be made up” (Brewer, 2018, para. 12).

Student-athletes face many challenges that can affect their ability to plan and register for classes, attend and succeed in those courses, and participate and achieve at their highest level in athletic activities. With strict NCAA guidelines to adhere to, pressure to do well in athletics and academics, and social stigma, the wellbeing of
athletes can be compromised. This project aims to dive deeper into the topics discussed and advocate for a potential solution to many of the obstacles student-athletes face: providing priority registration for the student-athletes at WOU.
Methods

Western Oregon University, located in Monmouth Oregon, has a student body of 5,185 students (“About”, 2019). 325 of those enrolled students are student-athletes (Director of Compliance). WOU is an NCAA Division II institution and a member of the Great Northwest Athletic Conference (GNAC). The GNAC also includes University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Central Washington University, Concordia University, Montana State University Billings, Northwest Nazarene University, Saint Martin’s University, Seattle Pacific University, Simon Fraser University, and Western Washington University. A map of the GNAC is included in Tables and Figures (Figure 1).

This project includes feedback collection and action aimed at implementing a new program for Western Oregon University registration. In order to discover more about the unique circumstances of student-athletes, I conducted interviews with people across WOU’s campus. Feedback collected from people on the Western Oregon University campus includes nearly 20 student-athletes. Representatives from baseball, football, men’s basketball, softball, track & field, volleyball, and women’s basketball provided input. Four total faculty members, two faculty athletic representatives, and one coach were also consulted. Refer to Table 1 of Tables and Figures for how respondents are coded. Topics covered include the challenges that student-athletes face participating in athletics while attending university full-time, but also addresses their successes. Additionally, I sought to uncover the external views and opinions of student-athletes. I also communicated with the directors of
compliance at each of the universities in the GNAC to discover whether each university provides priority registration for their student-athletes.

In order to implement priority registration at WOU, I requested a time slot at one of the university’s bi-monthly Faculty Senate meetings. The senate is comprised of 30 total members of the faculty. The university president and provost attend each faculty senate meeting on behalf of the administration. At the April 23rd, 2019 meeting, I was given a time slot of 10 total minutes to present and answer any questions. The handout provided to each faculty member (Figure 2) and the accompanying presentation slides (Figure 3) can be found in the Tables and Figures section.
**Results**

Interviews with student-athletes, coaches, and staff members brought to light multiple challenges and barriers faced by student-athletes. These included schedule demands and conflicts, course barriers, and the resulting consequences. These challenges were included in my presentation to WOU Faculty Senate on April 23rd, 2019.

**Challenges and Barriers**

*Schedule Demands*

When academic courses and athletics must fit together, athletes often face difficulties. One student-athlete, a basketball player, spoke about how challenging it is to select classes, especially when there are specific classes she needs to graduate, and she has to work those in around her athletics schedule (WB). A football player explained how rigid the athletics schedule is, leaving very little room for choice (FB). A basketball player similarly commented that student-athletes have no control over schedule limitations and rigidness (MB). He described how he has multiple-hour time blocks in his schedule just from athletics (MB).

The schedule of a student athlete contains far more than practices and competitions. There are regular practices but there are also meetings, injury care, and weights, as multiple student-athletes explained (FB; VB). Even though the NCAA enforces a 20-hour limit with CARA, this is often not an accurate look at how many
hours are really dedicated to the sport (WB). The faculty athletic representative said that “conservatively most student-athletes, if you don’t include any study sessions, they’re probably training 30 hours a week depending on their sport” (FAR). With this schedule, balancing the demands is challenging (TF). Multiple athletes consider it to be a balancing act with a “heavy pressure to keep the balance” (TF). Additionally, student-athletes “don’t have the luxury to take classes whenever we want during the day” (SB). Even though each sport is not always in-season, many sports stretch into two terms, as a basketball player said about her own team (WB). To make an already challenging situation more difficult, the limited resources can also cause schedule conflicts when facility spaces are shared by many different groups (VB; WB; TF).

Schedule Conflicts

Schedule conflicts are abundant for student-athletes. A football player shared that “conflicts which I cannot control punish me as a student and prohibit me from being my best” (FB). Athletes from three different teams spoke about the difficulty of fitting classes around their sport (RR, FB; VB; WB). A volleyball athlete added that there are middle of the day classes and middle of the day practices, so the schedules overlap (VB). Several athletes discussed classes being offered at conflicting times (TF; VB; WB). The track athletes added that courses often conflict not just with practices and competitions, but also travel days (TF; TF). Even if there are classes offered at non-practice times, those sometimes conflict with other classes that student-athletes plan to take, which was a struggle a basketball player faced (WB).
Further complicating this, “classes during the time frames they need fill up and they are unable to get the class” (Coach). Some coaches are then forced to have inconsistent practice times to accommodate as many athletes as possible (Coach). A student-athlete with priority registration through the Honors program, as well as a student-athlete without, both felt that conflicts could be minimized with priority registration (WB; TF). Student-athletes could “better coordinate [their] classes and practice times” (WB).

**Course Barriers**

Academic course selection creates certain barriers for student-athletes. There are many ways that registration issues affect the students. A basketball player wrote that registration has made succeeding in school difficult (WB). Courses have high demand as it is, especially those that are part of the core curriculum (FB). Classes are often offered at limited times throughout the year and term (FB; WB). One athlete specifically mentioned classes she needs have low availability (TF). This was also a point made by a coach, saying that “there are a lot of classes at WOU that have prerequisites and must be taken in sequence”. She added that “with few sections available, often those classes are deferred until spring term, thus backing up graduation” (Coach). With low availability of courses, an athlete felt as though she is competing with other students for spots in classes and often they get the spots in the classes before she can. (VB). One student had a unique point that priority registration is necessary due to the small size of our campus, creating less course offerings than bigger schools (TF).
One of the biggest issues with registration is course shut out. Many athletes from more than one team often experience that classes are full once they register or they are offered at a time that conflicts with another class or with an athletic schedule (FB; WB; TF). One track athlete even commented in her junior year that there is a core class she has yet to take due to course shut out and conflicts (TF). Another athlete from softball said that she is “unable to get into some of the classes that I need as prerequisites for my major” (SB). Even a senior from the basketball team found difficulty “registering for my classes going into my senior year and didn’t get the classes I needed that worked with my athletics schedule” (MB). Multiple student-athletes in their first early years had to wait until a different term or even school year for a class due to course shut-out (FB; BB; WB; TF). Even though this may seem insignificant, deferring a course to a later term often means taking it during season and therefore missing more class, as one track athlete discussed (TF). A basketball player had to defer at least one class each term when making her schedule (WB). A faculty member also mentioned that it is not ideal for student-athletes to take classes in non-preferential terms and out of sequence (FAR). A baseball player “was personally affected when the biology lecture that didn’t interfere with baseball was full, but the one that did interfere was open. It was a tough decision but I ended up having to change my course plan and delayed taking the class until a later term, in hope of it not conflicting in the future” (BB). In registration, “when the classes that fit with their sports schedules are full, they are left with no choice but to sacrifice being in class or at their practice/event” (BB).
Consequences

Athletic activity attendance is often diminished by problems with class scheduling. One coach has had many athletes commonly having to miss practice (Coach). A basketball player spoke about her teammates having to miss practices or weight-lifting sessions, and in her own experience, having to cut her practice time short (WB). She added that when athletic attendance decreases, so does team camaraderie. A track athlete talked about how he was practicing alone a few days a week due to a class during practice that could have potentially been avoided if he had an earlier registration time slot (TF).

Not only do student-athletes miss athletic related activities, but registration issues can more commonly lead to missed classes. Multiple athletes recalled missing many classes that they would not have missed if they had been able to obtain a spot in another section (TF; WB). Specifically, a track athlete discussed her poor attendance of a math class that met on Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays of winter term, indoor track season. With Friday being a common travel day for track, she missed “at least four classes”. She had originally planned to take the class during an out-of-season term to avoid missing class but was unable to because the course was full.

Registration issues interfere with term by term schedules but can also impact the ability to make progress towards degree and graduate on time. A coach mentioned that class conflicts cause athletes to take longer to graduate (Coach). A basketball player explained that registration issues throughout her years have “trickle-down-affected every single class I have taken” (WB). This becomes
especially challenging on juniors and seniors. With only a certain number of courses left to take, the student-athletes have to get into those classes (MB). The faculty athletic rep added that athletes must be “making sure that they’re truly progressing toward their degree which is an NCAA requirement” (FAR). Due to NCAA requirements, wait-listing is not as much of an option for athletes since they have to be enrolled in at least 12 credits (VB; TF). A volleyball player spoke of when she had to be on a waitlist for a class and was ineligible to play volleyball until she got into the class (VB). Some student-athletes do not even consider wait-listing an option they can rely on. A football player felt that wait-listing is technically an option but places the stress of not getting into the course and being ineligible on student-athletes (MB).

**Health and Wellbeing**

There are also negative impacts on student-athletes from registration problems outside of athletics and academics. Psychologically, multiple student-athletes talked about commonly experiencing stress related to scheduling issues (TF; VB). A track athlete commented that registration conflicts caused “unneeded stress for my professors and myself” (TF). A basketball player talked about the stress she experienced with planning for her classes, but then also throughout the term as she has to rush from class to practice and vice-versa, due to unfortunate schedule layouts (WB). One athlete talked about how his registration problems caused issues between him and his coach, resulting in a great deal of stress (TF). A
few athletes from different teams added that there is a financial stress component as well, when there is pressure from athletic scholarships to be at their required activities, but also academic scholarships pressuring them to prioritize their classes (TF; BB). The well-being of student-athletes can also decrease when their physical health is at stake. An athlete, a coach, and a faculty athletic rep brought up that student-athletes lose sleep with practice times at 5am that are scheduled due to other conflicts for later in the day (WB; Coach; FAR). Proper hydration and nutrition can also be compromised due to unfortunate schedules. One track runner discussed how he was unable to “register for the other section so now I’m either late or I don’t have time to go home to shower and eat after practice because I couldn’t get into the other section” (TF).

Support and Recommendations

According the FAR, WOU student-athletes are not getting the support they need. Student-athlete support has to do with resources and personnel available for student-athletes. Unfortunately, the amount of investment in academic success of student-athletes by their coaches is highly varied with some coaches providing almost no support to their team members (FAR). Additionally, WOU lacks athletic-specific advising that many other universities have according to faculty and staff members. Faculty members also voiced concerns of how student-athletes or the treatment of them is often negatively perceived by some faculty members and their peers.
Priority Registration

Several student-athletes already have priority registration either due to being in the Honors program or being registered with the campus Office of Disability Services. They all mentioned being able to enroll in needed courses while also being able to attend practices and be with their teammates.

A track athlete gave a specific example; she was able to opt for a section of the same class that meets on days that do not conflict with competition, otherwise she would have missed about a quarter of the term’s sessions (TF). Another athlete talked about how priority registration has helped her succeed; “...I can work around when my practice time(s) are and am able to accommodate for those. Academically, I am able to...only take the classes I need to succeed and graduate on time. Athletically, I am able to practice with teammates...” (TF). A student-athlete who already has priority registration will be able to graduate on time without scheduling conflicts (TF). Labs were also a key point brought up; one athlete said she has been able to get into lab sections earlier on in the week, so she does not have to miss labs that are more challenging to make up (TF). A student-athlete with priority registration said in general that she “almost never [had] to worry” (TF).

With priority registration, several student-athletes mentioned that they would select different classes to eliminate conflicts (TF). Without scheduling conflicts, they could better plan ahead (TF; WB). A faculty athletic rep advocated for priority registration “so that they can get the class in the right term so that they don’t miss class” (FAR). Student-athletes sometimes end up in classes that they do
not need (TF; BB; Coach). One athlete argued that with priority registration, “athletes may even be more inclined to attend class and/or succeed because it is at a desired time and it is a desired course of their choosing” (TF). Multiple athletes felt that class selection could improve class attendance and drive to succeed. Another track athlete anticipated that “having priority registration will give advancement in athletic and academic performance” (TF). This athlete provided a personal anecdote that registration difficulties caused conflict for him while traveling for a National Championship event. A coach thought that eliminating some of the issues could help student-athlete “be even more successful in the classroom and in their sport” (Coach). With priority registration, a track athlete “would be able to register for class sections that don’t conflict with [his] practice schedule, and could be on time to class and practice, and be far less stressed in general” (TF).

Eight of the eleven GNAC schools have some form of early registration for their student-athletes. The only GNAC schools, besides WOU, that do not currently have priority registration are Northwest Nazarene University and Concordia University (CU). However, the CU Associate Athletic Director for Compliance and Academic Support shared that “[their] setup... is unique in that [they] only register once a year for continuing students and the university academic advisors work with all students” (Jessica Harbison, CU). She also wanted to highlight that they provide extra support in this process; they “offer the ability to have an academic advisor present with teams when they register”.

The student-athletes at Saint Martin’s University (SMU) are given early registration in terms of their credit standing; all student-athletes have one year
higher (Chris Gregor, SMU). This means that a sophomore would have junior standing for registration, for example. Western Washington University (WWU) provides priority registration automatically for two-thirds of the academic year but offers the option to petition for the remainder. Butch Kamena of WWU explained that this “informally means nearly all our student-athletes end up receiving it for the full year”. Montana State University Billings (MSUB) allows student-athletes “to register on Monday (first day of registration) along with seniors and grad students.” (Rebekah Gasner, MSUB). Seattle Pacific University (SPU) student-athletes also register on the first day of registration (Shelby Stueve, SPU). At Simon Fraser University (SFU), “student-athletes get to select courses before the general student population” (Kelly Weber, SFU). Similarly, University of Alaska Fairbanks (AFU) student-athletes have “priority registration opened 72 hours before general registration”, which is also offered to their “Honors students and Veterans” (Molly Parker, AFU).

Dede Allen, University of Alaska Anchorage’s Associate Director of Athletics for Compliance and Academics, added that “[they] justified it with the following issues: student-athletes have stricter NCAA progress towards degree requirements that most other students do not and to minimize missed class time due to travel.” The Associate Director of Athletics for Compliance and Academics for WWU also included in his response that “[they] have a two-fold justification for [student-athlete priority registration]” first, “the time constraints placed on student-athletes because of practice schedules and travel” and second, “the progress-toward-degree requirements of the NCAA” (Butch Kamena). He added that “simply parking in any
available class may not help the student-athlete meet [progress-toward-degree] standards”.

WOU faculty and staff members had many opinions and ideas about the implementation of priority registration. Priority registration would allow student-athletes to take classes in a certain sequence and at certain times, during certain terms, to eliminate conflict (FAR). Multiple faculty members felt that providing priority registration could help student-athletes get into the sections they need. However, if this is done, it “needs to be done right” (FAR). Communication will be the most significant component of successfully implementing priority registration for student-athletes. Coordination of many personnel and offices will be required. Something will need to be done to ensure that coaches are advocating for proactive behavior from the students on their teams (FAR).

**WOU Faculty Senate: Presentation and Discussion**

On May 14th, faculty senate held a discussion on the topic of priority registration for student-athletes. One senator voiced concerns of privilege of student-athletes and prioritizing them over non-traditional students. However, WOU imposes schedules on student-athletes for practices and games so another senator argued that the two are not comparable. An additional senator felt that we should not be comparing student groups and putting them against each other, adding that student-athletes are often some of the best most disciplined students. There was a question of how many student-athletes attend WOU and concern of
them taking away registration opportunity from students of the WOU Office of Disability Services (ODS). With 325 student-athletes, it is possible that they could out-number students with disabilities, however, student-athletes would not begin registration until the week following ODS registration. After another comment in support of the issue, arguing that this would be a tool for student success, there was a motion to endorse. The motion was followed by twenty-two voted in favor and only one opposed to endorse priority registration for WOU student-athletes. President Fuller, the final decision-maker, plans to implement this as soon as possible, likely beginning in the next academic year.
Discussion

Student-Athlete Strengths and Contributions to Campus

Student-athletes can be highly valuable to a college campus (Broughton, 2001) and certainly are to WOU. Student-athletes are thought of as some of the best and brightest students according to a few faculty members. Student-athletes represent Western Oregon University by participating in athletics, but also in their efforts in academics. Athletics enriches and brings life to our campus. A FAR referred to student-athletes as assets to our school, who represent the institution in many positive ways. Student-athletes are just as invested in their academics and aware of academic performance as non-athletes (Greer, et al. 2006). The coach and faculty athletic reps discussed impressive GPAs among WOU student-athletes. Additionally, the NCAA has found that graduation rates of student-athletes are two percent higher than non-athletes (Hosick, 2018). The student-athlete graduation rate at WOU is higher than the general student body rate as well, but by 19% (DC). Their success in their sports and classes reflects positively on the university, increases performance statistics, and brings in awards. Many student-athletes take great pride in viewing their positions on athletic teams as means of being representatives of the university (TF; FAR). A basketball player mentioned her involvement in the Athletic Auction, encouraging donor dollars put towards the university. She also served as a representative for WOU student-athletes going before the Oregon State Legislature Education Subcommittee advocating for
student-athlete opportunity and support on behalf of the athletic department (WB). While student-athletes like this basketball player bring a lot to the university, they face many challenges while trying to balance and integrate athletics and academics.

**Challenges and Barriers**

The schedule of a student-athlete is not only full, but also “inflexible and demanding” (Watt, et al. 2001). When academic courses and athletics must fit together, they run into difficulties. In addition to a full-time course load, the schedule of a student-athlete contains far more than practices and competitions (Stokowski, et al. 2016). Student-athletes, faculty, and staff members shared the feeling that CARA is not an accurate depiction of the time commitment and demands of collegiate athletics. In fact, in 2015, student-athletes reported spending over 30 hours per week in sports and over 35 hours on school (GOALS). Unsurprisingly, student-athletes are sometimes compared to full time employees, leaving little room for academics (Greer, et al. 2006). A faculty member even said that student-athletes are essentially “trying to do two full time jobs at once”.

The results published from the 2015 Goals Study showed that 45 percent of student-athletes surveyed were prevented from taking desired courses due to their participation in sports (GOALS). Not only are student-athletes commonly unable to register for courses they had planned to take, but they have the additional pressure of enrolling in the right classes, the proper number of courses, and in the correct sequences in order to stay in compliance (MB; SB; TF; VB; WB). The NCAA requires
that athletes must be advancing toward their degree and includes certain credit-load and course-selection requirements, leaving little room for flexibility when registration does not go as planned (Stokowski, et al. 2016).

With frequent schedule conflicts, student-athletes miss more classes than they would if they had the ability to register for a different section or class (WB, TF, WB, BB). Student-athletes in season reported that missing an average of 1.5 days of class each week (GOALS, 2015). This can be incredibly detrimental especially in such short academic terms, such as WOU’s 10 week terms. For example, the track athlete who missed at least 4 of her math classes missed over 13% of the course.

There are unfortunately limited resources for athletic departments to help student-athletes navigate these demanding schedules, specifically at the division II level (Nite. 2012). Similarly, the FAR felt that small campuses such as WOU have more limited resources. Compared to other, larger universities, WOU lacks athletic-specific advising and counseling that other universities are able to provide to better support for student-athletes.

**Health and Wellbeing**

Studies have found student-athletes to have “elevated stress, inadequate sleep, and an inability to participate in other extracurricular or leisure activities that promote overall well-being” (Kroshus, 2014). Overall, collegiate student-athletes are commonly at a higher risk of certain mental health issues, often experience certain
physical health problems, and frequently engage in unhealthy behavior (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009).

Another common theme was the stress that student-athletes carry. Many student-athletes talked about frequently experiencing a great deal of stress and/or anxiety, but specifically with scheduling (VB; TF; WB). The topic of stress was brought up in over 50% of the conversations with people on WOU's campus. It has been found that “student-athletes tend to experience greater anxiety and distress” (Kroshus, 2014).

Student-athletes experiencing anxiety disorders—about 30% of student-athletes according to an NCAA report (“Anxiety”, 2018)—can also consequently have difficulty sleeping. This is just one example of psychological factors affecting physical health. Further, student-athletes often get very little sleep due to full schedules and early practice times, which was the case for WOU student-athletes as reported by student-athletes, staff, and faculty.

Support and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this project, better education of the demands placed on student-athletes combined with additional resources to support student-athletes and coaches could drastically improve student-athlete achievement.

Awareness and Education
Being a successful student-athlete is challenging, but not impossible if the university enforces the idea of the balance between the two disciplines (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Not all faculty members truly understand the true demand of being a student-athlete and lack awareness of NCAA requirements (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008; Faculty; Coach). Increasing awareness was suggested by WOU faculty members and also mentioned by Klenck (2014). Further, Klenck and WOU faculty members highly value communication. WOU Faculty members and Stokowski and colleagues (2016) discuss common goals between student-athletes and faculty; faculty members want student-athletes to succeed, do well in their classes, and eventually graduate, which is hopefully what student-athletes are striving for as well.

Support

Similar to the opinions of WOU’s faculty, Broughton (2001) recognized the need for better support for student-athletes. Tucker and colleagues (2016) recommend that colleges pay better attention to “the kind and amount of attention student-athletes receive”. This argument was brought up by a few faculty members who want to make sure that other students at WOU do not view priority registration as a reward or special privilege. The authors as well as faculty members argue that communication amongst everyone involved can help with negative perceptions (Tucker, et al., 2016). Identifying common goals can improve the communication and relationships between student-athletes, faculty, and staff (Stokowski, et al.,
2016). Stokowski and colleagues and the FAR recognize the important role of proper advising (2016).

Advising and counseling combined can be a powerful support for student-athletes (Greer, & Robinson, 2006). For student-athletes, counseling could address “stress-related concerns, including time management, burnout, fear of failure, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues” (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005, p. 2). Unfortunately, even with mental health issues being common and widespread, student-athletes usually use counseling services less often than non-athletes (Pinkerton et al., 2010; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

Many universities have sports psychologists for counseling their student-athletes (Broughton, 2001), but WOU does not have many of the support resources of similar colleges, as pointed out by WOU faculty members. If athletic departments do not have the resources for hiring a specific sport psychologist, athletic departments can make an effort to encourage athletes to use counseling resources available to all students (Klenck, 2014). The university should consider finding ways to educate counselors already on university staff about the student-athlete life so that they can better assist those students (Putukian, 2014).

**Priority Registration**

The literature on student-athlete demands was consistent with newspaper opinion pieces and the feedback from WOU student-athletes. It is a common consensus in literature, opinion pieces (Nelson, 2019), and amongst faculty, staff,
and student-athletes that student-athletes have inflexible and demanding schedules. This was also reflected in questions and discussion at the WOU Faculty Senate meetings. A faculty member that serves as a senator noted that the schedules are created by the school, not the student-athletes. However, priority registration has the potential to significantly lessen schedule conflicts. By providing priority registration, student-athletes can better plan ahead, take courses that fit with their athletic schedule, and miss far fewer classes for athletic travel and practices for conflicting classes (Smith 2017; Faculty; DC; student-athletes). Similar to the argument of a WOU track student-athlete, Brewer (2018) argues that faculty will benefit by eliminating some of the need for accommodations such as make-up assignments and tests. The members of faculty senate argued that priority registration for student-athletes can be a vehicle for improved student success.
Limitations

There are many available academic articles with information on the unique circumstances of being a student-athlete, the challenges they face, and how they are treated and viewed by others at their universities. However, there is very little literature on priority registration for student-athletes. Studies of outcomes of priority registration, statistics from universities that offer student-athlete priority registration, and implementation strategies would have been beneficial for this project. The information available about priority registration can mainly be found in op-eds in college campus newspapers.

Besides the finite resource for the research component of this project, there were also challenges in collecting feedback from people on WOU’s campus. Student-athletes have full schedules. Navigating the process to get in touch with people who were willing to provide responses and further, planning times to meet, was quite a challenge. There were many more people who could have been involved in the feedback portion, but it was not feasible with time constraints.
Conclusion

Student-athletes have many challenges, some of which are shared with the general college student population, and some that are unique to collegiate athletes specifically. With demanding schedules and rigid requirements, student-athletes have difficulties balancing their schoolwork with their sport and maintaining overall health and wellbeing. With proper support from their athletic department staff, and university faculty, student-athletes can be more successful. Universities can facilitate student-athlete achievement through educating and raising awareness of student-athlete challenges, providing resources, and implementing strategies such as priority registration to help student-athletes.
Reflection

I was a member of the Cross Country and Track & Field teams at Western for four years. Being a part of the athletic community has provided me with many things and has made me aware of the success of but also the challenges facing student-athletes.

Student-athletes are competent students, many of whom excel at high levels and are very dedicated to academics as well as athletics. In my own experience, I have always put my schoolwork first, but it has been quite challenging to achieve a proper balance between academics and athletics. In addition to the two sets of responsibilities of being a student-athlete, I have juggled a job, extracurriculars, and social life while trying to preserve my personal health and well-being.

I have loved nearly every minute of my time at WOU. As a student-athlete I have been challenged a great deal to push myself to be the best student, person and athlete I can be. Through my sport participation, I developed my drive and motivation, acquired valuable skills, and learned lessons of leadership and teamwork. I was taught the value of work ethic, working just as hard in the classroom as I have out on the track. The athletic department has provided me with a support system and has expanded my connection to the university and the surrounding community. My professors and advisors have provided me with knowledge, supported me, and guided me throughout my degree.

As a student in the Honors program, I have priority registration already. It is quite challenging to work classes around athletics as it is, but it would be even more
so if I then had to worry about being unable to register for courses that I plan to take. I have been able to get into the classes that I need but also the ones I am passionate about and want to take. With my priority registration, I was able to plan classes far in advance to work around sport conflicts. I communicated with professors—for courses sometimes multiple terms in advance—to discuss any athletic conflicts due to my ability to plan ahead. By planning to take courses that avoid athletic conflicts, I missed far less classes than many of my student-athlete peers. In four years, 12 total seasons of athletics, I was able to register for classes I needed and wanted to take and attended practices with my teammates.

My position on the cross country and track and field teams has allowed me direct insight into the struggle that my teammates face with academic registration problems, as well as the struggles of the athletes on our various sports teams other than my own. It is evident that athletes are torn between athletics and academics. With the work of this project including a presentation to WOU Faculty Senate that resulted in approval of implementation of priority registration for WOU student-athletes, I was content with my outcome and what I was able to achieve. Presenting on behalf of athletics to a group of well-respected and successful faculty members was humbling, requiring a significant step outside of my comfort zone.

My goals for this project are to educate and inspire people and facilitate student-athlete success. With more support, our student-athletes can become more successful in the classroom and on their fields, courts, and tracks, where they represent Western Oregon University.
Tables and Figures

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representative Code</th>
<th>Athletic Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BB</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>Men’s Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>Softball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TF</td>
<td>Track &amp; Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VB</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>Women’s Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAR</td>
<td>Faculty Athletic Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>Director of Compliance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countable Athletically Related Activities</th>
<th>Noncountable Athletically Related Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practices (not more than four hours per day).</td>
<td>Compliance meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics meetings with a coach initiated or required by a coach (e.g., end of season individual meetings).</td>
<td>Meetings with a coach initiated by the student-athlete (as long as no countable activities occur).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition (and associated activities, regardless of their length, count as three hours) [Note: No countable athletically related activities may occur after the competition.]</td>
<td>Drug/alcohol educational meetings or CHAMPS/Life Skills meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field, floor or on-court activity.</td>
<td>Study hall, tutoring or academic meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting up offensive and defensive alignment</td>
<td>Student-athlete advisory committee/Captain’s Council meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-court or on-field activities called by any member of the team and confined primarily to members of that team.</td>
<td>Voluntary weight training not conducted by a coach or staff member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required weight-training and conditioning activities.</td>
<td>Voluntary sport-related activities (e.g., initiated by student-athlete, no attendance taken, no coach present).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required participation in camps/clinics</td>
<td>Traveling to and from the site of competition (as long as no countable activities occur).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting the competition site in the sports of cross country, golf and skiing</td>
<td>Training room activities (e.g., treatment, taping), rehabilitation activities and medical examinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation outside the regular season in individual skill-related instructional activities with a member of the coaching staff.</td>
<td>Recruiting activities (e.g., student host).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion or review of game films.</td>
<td>Training table meals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in a physical activity class for student-athletes only and taught by a member of the athletics staff (e.g., coach).</td>
<td>Attending banquets (e.g., awards or postseason banquets).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fundraising activities or public relations/promotional activities and community service projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Defining countable athletically related activities. (2009). Retrieved from

Figure 1

Great Northwest Athletic Conference

GNAC: Conference Map. (2014). Retrieved from

http://www.gnacsports.com/gnac/map/
Countable Athletically Related Activities (CARA)

- **Includes** competitions, practices, weight-lifting sessions, meetings, film review, and more.
- **Does not include** athletic training (injury care & prevention), travel to and from competitions, team study halls, student-athlete-initiated meetings, educational meetings/trainings, recruiting, team meals, banquets & award ceremonies, and more.


**Sample Student-Athlete Travel Itinerary**

**Wednesday**
- 6:15-7:15 AM—Practice at WOU
  *Attend classes*
- 2:15 PM—Bus ride to PDX
- 6:00PM—Flight to Seattle, WA
- 8:15 PM-11:15 PM—Flight to Fairbanks, AK

**Thursday**
- 10:00 AM—Study Hall
- 11:30 AM-1:00 PM—Shoot
- 4:45 PM—Film review
- 5:00 PM—Drive to game
- 7:00 PM—Game at UAF

**Friday**
- 12:00 PM-1:00 PM—Flight to Anchorage, AK
  *drive straight to practice*
- 3:00-5:00 PM—Practice at UAA

**Saturday**
- 7:50-9:30 AM—Shoot
- 11:45 AM—Drive to game
- 2:00 PM—Game at UAA
- 5:40 PM-10:00 PM—Flight to Seattle, WA
- 11:15 PM-12:05 AM—Flight to Portland, OR
  *Bus ride to Monmouth*
- 2:00 AM (approximately)—arrive back at WOU

Feedback from WOU Student-Athletes: Key Quotations

Challenges & Consequences

• “Having the conflicting times creates a heavy pressure to keep the balance of a student-athlete…” (Track & Field athlete)
• “I was personally affected when the biology lecture that didn’t interfere with baseball was full, but the one that did interfere was open. It was a tough decision but I ended up having to change my course plan and delayed taking the class until a later term, in hope of it not conflicting in the future.” (Baseball player)
• “Even though [wait]-listing is an option, for athletes it sometimes isn’t. Last summer I registered for 4 classes…but since I had to [wait] list for one of the classes I was under 12 credits so that made me ineligible to play.” (Volleyball player)

Priority registration could potentially...

• “...tremendously aid in availability of the appropriate courses that student-athletes need to stay on track to graduate while continuing to represent the school” and “...aid in the opportunity to register for courses that will not have a confliction of travel dates or meets.” (Track & Field athlete)
• “...benefit [student-athletes] greatly by allowing the student athletes to better attend both class and their sport, which many of whom are on scholarship to do at the university.” (Baseball player)

Student-Athletes with priority registration

• “...I can work around when my practice time(s) are and am able to accommodate for those. Academically, I am able to...only take the classes I need to succeed and graduate on time. Athletically, I am able to practice with teammates...” (Track & Field athlete)
• “Next term there is a Wednesday/Friday class but the same one was Tuesday/Thursday and I was able to get into it so I won’t miss for travel days” (Track & Field athlete)
• “Being on a small campus [priority registration for student-athletes] is pretty necessary” at larger universities “there are going to be a bunch more sections, with more students, and more professors. Whereas here, there is sometimes only one, maybe two sections you could get into.” (Track & Field athlete)
Priority Registration
WOU Student-Athletes

Antoinette ("Toni") Gowen
Who am I?

Why am I here?
Student-Athletes at WOU

• 3.09 GPA
  – Team GPAs range up to a 3.5 (women’s basketball)

• Graduation rate 19% higher than student body rate

• Great Northwest Athletic Conference (GNAC)
Countable Athletically Related Activities (CARA)

• 20 hours per week
  - Not including activities such as travel to and from competition or athletic training/treatment

• NCAA study results:
  - 30+ hours of athletics/week
  - 35+ hours of academics/week

Feedback

- Student-Athletes
- Faculty
- Coaching Staff
- Compliance Officers
Student-Athlete Challenges

“Student athletes are only able to schedule classes during certain times of the day, so that they don’t conflict with their participation in their respective sports. When the classes that fit with their sports schedules are full, they are left with no choice but to sacrifice being in class or at their practice/event.”

-Baseball player
Benefits of Priority Registration

• Decreases registration obstacles for student-athletes

• Reduces stress on student-athletes, coaches, and faculty

• Facilitates student-athlete degree progress and graduation

• Aligns WOU with other GNAC schools
Priority Registration

“To make sure I don’t miss practice or to schedule on days where I know I won’t be traveling…I will take the [lab section] on Tuesday. So priority registration is really helpful for lab classes and...classes that fill up fast”

-Track & Field athlete

(has priority registration)
Thank you for your time
References

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