



# Perceptions of College Faculty Toward Student-Athletes at Small, Liberal Arts Institutions

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# Small, Liberal Arts Institutions

- <1,000 Students
- Declining enrollments
- Low donor base
- Rural towns with less than 20,000 residents
- Tuition dependent

# Athletic Driven Enrollment Model Overview

- Athletic program expansion instead of academic program expansion takes precedence as a primary strategy to recruit new students
- Increase coaching staff, resources, and facilities
- Recruit students on partial scholarships
- Typically high roster volumes along with junior varsity expansion

# Study Sample and Population

- Phenomenological Study: A qualitative method that focuses on exploring a shared phenomenon by a specific group of individuals
- Interviewed 15 faculty across three different institutions
  - Face to face and phone interviews
  - Average Interview Time: 38:47
  - Word-for-Word Transcription
- Rural, private, faith-based liberal arts colleges with enrollments less 1000
  - Towns with less than 20,000 residents
  - Geographic focus was Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, and Mississippi
  - National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)

# Data Analysis Process

- Horizontalization: Highlight significant statements or quotes throughout interviews (743 key statements)
- Clusters of Meaning: Significant statements are grouped together and developed into themes (78 Keywords identified from key statements)
- Textural Description: Based on clusters of meaning the researcher writes an in-depth description of what the participant experiences
- Structural Description: The researcher writes about the context or setting phenomenon was experienced along with personal experience

# Key Themes

1. Faculty Awareness
2. How Faculty Define Their Role
3. Impact of Athletic Strategy on the Learning Environment
4. Perceptions Toward Institution

# 1. Faculty Awareness

- Awareness of the Enrollment Strategy
- Aware of Challenges for Small Colleges
- Impact of Previous Experience with Athletics

## 2. How Faculty Define Their Role

- Accepting Role
- Sense of Purpose
- Expectation vs. Reality in Teaching
- Personal Impact of Athletes



# 3. Impact of Strategy on Learning Environment

- Missing Classes
- Accommodating
- Academic Quality
- Sport-Specific Problems
- Impacting Classroom and Campus

# 4. Perceptions Toward Institution

- Lack of Transparency and Communication
- Role of Coaches
- Mission and Vision Conflicts
- Resources

# Essence of a Faculty Member

- Aware of athletic enrollment strategy
- Cares deeply about institution and viability
- Athletic enrollment strategy has an impact on classroom experience
- Previous experience with athletics does play a role in understanding student-athlete experience

# Conclusions

- Important for small colleges to take into account the faculty experience when implementing new enrollment initiatives
- The athletic enrollment-driven model impacts all areas of the campus
- With the margin of error being so slim at small institutions, it is vital that the administration increase levels of transparency, communication, and dedicated resources for faculty

# Strategies

- Get faculty involved in the conversation!
- Pay close attention to academic and athletic scheduling
- Leverage faculty with athletic backgrounds/experiences to help faculty who may not have an athletic background

# Thank You

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