

Navigating Academic Choices: Clustering Among Collegiate Athletes (Case study)

Abstract

Numerous studies have examined how student-athletes select colleges, identifying key factors influencing their decisions. Most studies indicate that degree prospects and academic programs are critical (Calhoun, 2012; Watkins, Slater, & Chang, 2022). This study investigates the program choices of Division I student-athletes at a small university during the 2024-2025 season. Data on 560 student-athletes, provided by the athletic department, includes sport and college information. Gender comparisons were made using Chi-square tests to identify statistical significance. Results suggest academic clustering exists among intercollegiate athletes, varying by gender at the respective institution (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Case et al., 1987).

500 words

Conference Proposal: Examining Academic Clustering Among Division I Student-Athletes

Numerous studies have been conducted evaluating the college selection process of student-athletes. Through these studies, we have learned how student-athletes evaluate universities during these important decisions and what factors influence the college selection process. Most studies suggest that the two most important factors influencing the college selection process are the potential for obtaining a degree that leads to a good job and whether the institution offers an academic program that aligns with the student-athlete's choice (Calhoun, 2012; Watkins, Slater, & Chang, 2022). However, a crucial question remains: Do student-athletes always follow their academic inspiration, or are they often steered into programs that supposedly better fit their athletic careers?

The phenomenon of academic clustering among student-athletes, where they are disproportionately represented in certain academic majors, has been relatively understudied (Rowland, 2014). This under-explored area has significant implications not only for the college experience of student-athletes but also for their professional development after their athletic careers end (McCormick, 2010). Understanding the dynamics behind this clustering is crucial for developing policies and support systems that ensure student-athletes receive a well-rounded education that aligns with their interests and career aspirations.

This study explores the program choices of Division I student-athletes at a small Division I university for the 2024-2025 academic year. The research aims to investigate whether academic clustering exists and to what extent it is influenced by gender. Data was obtained from the university's athletic department, including information on the colleges attended by student-athletes and the sports they participate in. The dataset comprises information on 560 student-athletes and includes details on their chosen academic programs.

To analyze the data, the Chi-square test of independence was employed to examine the statistical significance of clustering by gender. This statistical method is appropriate for determining whether there is a significant association between gender and the distribution of student-athletes across different academic programs. The findings of this study indicate that academic clustering does exist among student-athletes at the studied institution, with significant variations observed when the data is segmented by gender.

The results of this study have important implications for athletic and academic departments within universities. By identifying the existence and patterns of academic clustering, universities can better understand the underlying factors that contribute to this phenomenon (Rowland, 2014). This understanding can lead to the development of more effective advising and support systems tailored to the needs of student-athletes, ensuring they are not unduly steered into specific academic programs but rather encouraged to pursue their genuine academic interests (Case et al., 1987).

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the academic experiences of student-athletes by highlighting the presence of academic clustering and its association with gender. The insights gained from this research can inform policy decisions and interventions aimed at improving the academic and professional outcomes for student-athletes. By addressing the issue of academic clustering, institutions can better support the holistic development of student-athletes, ensuring they are well-prepared for life both during and after their athletic careers.