

RECRUITMENT PROFILE OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

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**A Recruitment Profile of Student-athletes at a Division III Institution in the Old Dominion  
Athletic Conference**

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### **Abstract**

The primary mission of Division III colleges and universities revolves around prioritizing the quality of students' educational experiences. Within this context, athletics holds great significance for student-athletes, representing an integral part of their overall development (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022). Division III institutions rely heavily on tuition and enrollment as crucial sources of funding. The objective of this nonexperimental quantitative study was to comprehensively explore the factors influencing university choice among student-athletes in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference through digital administration of the Interscholastic Student-athlete Recruiting Questionnaire to student-athletes at Averett University. The aim was to create a detailed recruiting profile for male and female student by identifying key university choice factors. Doing so would allow coaches and recruiters to refine their recruiting strategies and effectively attract commitments from prospective athletes. Family sport culture had low–moderate associations with most university choice factors. Coaching was the category ranked most important, with coach personality and relationships established during recruiting not only ranking highly as factors but also positively associated with all other factors. Female student-athletes were more susceptible to influence than their male counterparts with regard to the categories of academics, communication tactics, coaching, and location. The implications of the study for those recruiting student-athletes pertain to the significance of various factors influencing the university selection processes of student-athletes. Comprehension of these factors will allow focused tailoring of recruitment strategies to secure greater commitments from prospective student-athletes and improvement in overall enrollment rates.

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**List of Abbreviations**

IRB .....Institutional Review Board

ISARQ.....Interscholastic Student-athlete Recruiting Questionnaire

NCAA .....National Collegiate Athletic Association

ODAC .....Old Dominion Athletic Conference

PE Fit .....Person-environment Fit



## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Enrollment in higher education has decreased by 5.1% over the past two years, representing 938,000 students (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCR], Jan 2022). Demographic indicators suggest that in the years 2025 to 2029, there will be an expected 15% reduction in college-age students, creating an impending enrollment cliff (Copley & Douthett, 2020). As enrollment rates continue to decline across the country, university athletic departments need to be creative to attract student-athletes to their schools. While this is important to all schools, 27% of students enrolled in Division III colleges and universities are athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2022), and 36% of all students enrolled in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference (ODAC) schools are athletes (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2022). Therefore, if athletic departments fail to recruit enough athletes, enrollment will drop, causing universities to struggle financially.

### **Background**

Athletics often plays a significant role in student enrollment. Thus, the impact of athletics on Division III universities could be the difference between remaining open and closing (Beaver, 2014). In Division III, private institutions account for 80% of active members. Private institutions commonly have higher acceptance and tuition rates than state schools (NCAA, 2022). Most Division III schools have modest endowments and are tuition driven (Ferrall, 2011).

Studies suggest that at private Division III universities student-athletes comprise a lot of the traditional student body, and without the student-athletes, these universities may not exist (Beaver, 2014). Therefore, small private universities have adopted new strategies to increase enrollment by creating more athletic teams, increasing student-athlete recruitment efforts, and

offering more significant tuition discounts and academic scholarships (Beaver, 2014). These new strategies are designed to create more opportunities for student-athletes and increase enrollment in Division III universities (Beaver, 2014). Currently, 195,000 student-athletes play at Division III universities, representing 27% of student enrollment (NCAA, 2022), making athlete recruitment a high priority (Beaver, 2014).

One approach to student-athlete recruitment is the provision of scholarships. However, there are millions of high school athletes, and only 2% will receive an athletic scholarship (Westfall, 2011). Division III schools can provide student-athletes with a different experience, allowing them to continue playing competitive athletics as part of the university experience without athletic scholarships (NCAA, 2022). This also allows universities to enroll students who may never have otherwise considered that school (Beaver, 2014).

### **Factors Influencing Recruitment of Division III Student-athletes**

Attaining student-athlete commitments and creating winning programs is a goal for Division III schools (Covell et al., 2013). Although there are differences in the divisions, there are many similarities. All divisions hire professional coaches, personalize recruitment strategies and tactics, have lengthy sports schedules, play end-of-season playoffs and national championships, build high-quality athletic facilities, and lower academic standards for student-athletes to help them attain their commitment (Smith & Smith, 2011).

There are other factors that affect student athletes' decision of which university to attend. The most common factors influencing students are academics, campus environment, relationships with coaches, and family and friends (Covell et al., 2013; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). However, no studies have been identified that look at the recruitment factors of male, female, and non-binary students in the ODAC.

## **Problem Statement**

Division III private universities have only two sources of revenues monies raised from gracious benefactors, alumni and friends/foundations, and student enrollment. Private universities do not receive direct state or federal government funding for operations. Without athletics to help increase enrollment, universities in the ODAC struggle to function when enrollment numbers are low (T. Franks, personal communication, November 14, 2022). An understanding of the recruitment profile for student-athletes might aid in recruiting these students.

## **Purpose**

The aim of this study was to create a recruiting profile for male, female, and nonbinary student-athletes for the purpose of identifying important university choice factors that impacted student-athletes. The results of this study would allow those in athletics departments to focus more efficiently on recruitment strategies to obtain student-athlete commitments, allowing Division III colleges and universities in the ODAC to increase student enrollment.

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The objectives of this proposed study are to investigate the following research questions by testing the associated hypotheses.

RQ1: How is parental sport influence as a child related to the factors concerning university choice for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

*H<sub>1a</sub>*: Parental sport influence is related to one or more of the other factors of university choice.

*H<sub>10</sub>*: Family sport influence as a child is not related to one or more of the other factors of university choice.

RQ2: What is the relative importance of the coach as an influential factor for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

*H2<sub>a</sub>*: The coach significantly affects university choice factors.

*H2<sub>0</sub>*: The coach does not significantly affect university choice.

RQ3: How does gender identity change the relative importance of university choice factors for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

*H3<sub>a</sub>*: Gender identity significantly changes the relative importance of university choice factors.

*H3<sub>0</sub>*: Gender identity significantly changes the relative importance of university choice factors.

### **Study Population**

At the time of the study, 316 student-athletes were present on the rosters at Averett University, and the researcher recruited as many available individuals as possible. Employing the sample size calculator of G\*Power, the researcher determined that 87 surveys were required to attain a power of .80, taking into account the hypothesized correlation of .30 for RQ1 and RQ2. G\*Power yielded a significantly smaller minimum sample size: approximately 20 for RQ3.

### **Methodology**

The study had a nonexperimental quantitative design and involved investigating university choice factors of student-athletes at institutions in the ODAC. The Interscholastic Student-athlete Recruiting Questionnaire (ISARQ), designed by Nixon et al. (2021), was used to investigate factors that influenced university choice among student-athletes (William L. Nixon granted permission to use the ISARQ; see Appendix A). With the permission of the athletic director at Averett University, the researcher administered the ISARQ to student-athletes by providing them with a quick response (QR) code that directed them to the questionnaire. The third chapter describes in detail the methods used to collect data.

### **Data Analysis**

As described in the third chapter, the researcher uploaded data collected with the ISARQ directly to Microsoft Forms. The researcher downloaded data from there as a Microsoft Excel file and transferred it to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27) for analysis. Descriptive statistics (standard deviations and means) were computed for each ISARQ factor and factor category. The researcher then conducted a statistical analysis to determine whether the independent variables relating to coaching and family sport culture correlated with the dependent variables, the ISARQ university choice factors, and whether the dependent variables differed based on the independent variable of gender identity.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Three theoretical frameworks underlie the proposed study: family systems theory, person–environment fit theory, and relationship marketing theory.

#### ***Family Systems Theory***

Family systems theory is a theoretical approach to the workings of family system roles, structures, and communication within a family unit and how the family unit corresponds with outside entities (Rothbaum et al., 2002). The theory can be used to examine family sport culture, how family members interact with each other with respect to competitive sports, and the influence family has on choice of university. Choosing a university can be complex for athletes and their families; this decision impacts the future of a student and their family (Ryan et al., 2007). Family systems theory will form a foundation for examination of how the family unit affects the university choice process for a Division III student-athlete (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015).

### ***Person–Environment Fit Theory***

Person–environment fit is the “compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched” (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 281). Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) split the concept of person–environment fit into four domains: person–organization, person–group, person–job, and person–supervisor. The application of person–environment fit theory in intercollegiate athletics is rooted in the four different relationships between a student-athlete and their university, team, sport, and coach (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

### ***Relationship Marketing Theory***

Relationship marketing became mainstream in the 1990s as a new perspective for researchers (Ballantyne et al., 2003). As interest grew in relationship marketing, so did research. Since then, many inconsistencies have arisen regarding what relationship marketing represents, and these have led to a multitude of different types of research and definitions of relationship marketing (Abeza et al., 2020). Although many definitions of relationship marketing have emerged, some overarching themes underly all existing research (Abeza et al., 2019). Abeza et al. (2020) examined seven commonly reoccurring themes in the research on relationship marketing: “creation (attracting, establishing, and getting); development (enhancing and strengthening); maintenance (sustaining and keeping); interactive (exchange, mutually, and cooperative); long term (lasting, permanent, and retaining); emotional content (commitment, trust, promises); and output (profitable; reward, and efficiency)” (p. 598). Sheth and Pavatiyar (2000) explained that there are fundamental features common to all relationship marketing definitions: process, purpose, and parties.

The student-athlete is not only a customer and consumer of a university but also a supplier of services to the university (Judson et al., 2004). A student-athlete receives an education—and, in some situations, housing, meals, and books—but they also supply services through athletic performance, entertainment, and enrollment (Beaver, 2014; Judson et al., 2004). Relationship marketing is essential for a university to develop mutually beneficial relationships (De Wulf et al., 2001).

### **Implications of Research**

The findings of this study hold great value for Averett University's admissions and athletics departments. Athletics have played a pivotal role in driving enrollment at the university, and the data obtained shed light on the crucial factors that influenced student-athletes to join Averett University. This information proved immensely valuable for the recruiting processes of both the admissions and athletics departments, enabling them to fine-tune their marketing and recruiting strategies to effectively cater to those of each gender identity.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter introduced the topic of factors impacting the university-choice of student-athletes. The second chapter reviews the literature covering the history of recruitment, the theoretical approaches, and the significant factors influencing student-athletes' university-choice. The third chapter is about the research methodology and the data analysis. The fourth chapter examines the results of the three research questions. The final chapter will discuss the results.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

This review of the literature explores what factors influence student-athletes when they decide which university to attend. First, the history of student athlete recruitment will be summarized. Three different theoretical approaches to student athlete recruitment will be explored next: Family Systems Theory, Person-Environmental Fit Theory, and Relationship Marketing Theory. The review will then focus on several significant factors that influence college choice, such as gender identity, family, coach relationships, and academics. Lastly, this review will explore six factors of the Interscholastic Student-Athlete Recruiting Questionnaire: athletics, academics, communication tactics, coaching, significant people, and location.

#### **History of Recruitment**

In the late 1800s, some universities offered athletes financial aid packages (Beaver, 2014). Such a package was not in the form of money from the university but came from alumni who provided athletes with employment, free lodging, and meals to offset their costs (Beaver, 2014). In the early days of college sports, student groups controlled the events, which led to a lack of formal institutional athletic support (Smith, 1988). As sports rivalries began to grow, so did athletic financial incentives because the desire to win games became important (Beaver, 2014). In the early 1900s, university administrators realized that athletics could generate publicity and revenue for their universities. These administrators began to hire full-time coaches to create winning programs, and recruiting high-level athletes became an essential part of a coach's job. Those coaches who could offer financial assistance enticed more athletes than coaches who could not (Beaver, 2014).



In 1900, The Pennsylvania State University became the first school to offer athletic financial aid. University of Chicago coach Amos Alonzo Stagg followed suit in 1906, providing needy athletes with financial aid from the J. D. Rockefeller Fund (Smith, 1988). Also in 1906, the newly formed National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) created the first recommendation regarding financial aid for student-athletes (Smith, 1988). The recommendation was to avoid any attempt to lure student-athletes to campuses with financial aid. The NCAA's leaders hoped universities would police themselves because the NCAA had no means to enforce this recommendation (Fleisher et al., 1992). The following years were chaotic (Estler, 2013), with some universities continuing to award athletic scholarships while others based financial aid on academics or need (Beaver, 2014).

In 1948, the officials of the NCAA and various universities attempted to create some level of control when they introduced what came to be known as the "Sanity Code": a set of restrictions on financial aid for athletes (Beaver, 2014). The code stated that athletes could still receive financial aid, but the aid could not be based on athletics. The code was ineffective because there was no punishment for breaking it (Fleisher et al., 1992). With so many schools continuing to offer athletic scholarships, in 1964, the NCAA's leaders finally decided to give in, permitting schools to award athletic scholarships (Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

Awarding of 4-year athletic scholarships began in 1956 before the NCAA approved athletic scholarships (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Schools faced very few limitations regarding how many scholarships they could award (Beaver, 2014). The Ivy League schools decided to go in a different direction, only awarding need-based scholarships focused on academic accomplishment. When the NCAA approved athletic scholarships, the number of scholarships awarded grew fast in all sports—not just major sports, such as football and basketball, but also

smaller low-revenue sports, such as swimming, track and field, and wrestling (Beaver, 2014).

The introduction of Title IX in 1972 brought more female sports to universities and increased the number of athletes receiving full and partial scholarships. In the model that became dominant in universities, an athlete was a specialist performing a service for their university (Beaver, 2014).

The strategy of this athletic model is to increase enrollment by generating publicity and attracting students to apply; this practice has occurred at larger Division I universities since 1906, when the NCAA was developed and university football teams were introduced (Chu, 1982; Perez, 2012). Some Division III universities have needed a different strategy for increasing enrollment (Beaver, 2014).

The tripartite classification of schools into Divisions I–III began in 1973 based on school mission and size; this affected the financial aid that athletes could receive (Beaver, 2014).

Division I and II schools could continue to award athletic scholarships. However, Division III schools had to follow the Ivy League philosophy of awarding scholarships based on academic accomplishment, with little emphasis on sports (Beaver, 2014).

### **Division III Athletics: A New Model**

As of 2022, there were 443 Division III schools, and 80% were private (NCAA, 2022). Division III schools have not been highly selective; as an example, the acceptance rate in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference (ODAC) in 2022 was 74% (College Raptor, 2022). The tuition price at a Division III school could be two to three times higher than at a public state school, making student recruitment a challenge (Beaver, 2014; Kerr & Wood, 2022). These schools have tended to have endowments smaller than those of other schools and have thus been driven by tuition money, creating more challenges. These challenges became evident between 1960 and

1990, when the number of traditional-age college students decreased, causing 167 Division III universities to close (Ferrall, 2011).

Division III schools have had to adapt, and their leaders have tried to intensify recruitment tactics and offer tuition discounts while increasing the number of athletes on campus, providing opportunities to athletes who in the past would have ended their playing careers at high school (Beaver, 2014). In any given year there are millions of high school athletes, and only 2% receive an athletic scholarship (Westfall, 2022). Division III schools can provide student-athletes with a unique experience, allowing them to continue competitive athletics as part of the college experience without athletic scholarships (NCAA, 2022). This feature can allow a Division III school to enroll students who may otherwise never have considered that school (Beaver, 2014).

### **Theoretical Approaches to University Choice**

Researchers studying university choice have generally taken one of three theoretical approaches: economic, psychological, or sociological (Paulsen, 1990). These approaches are not mutually exclusive, however, because university choice is complex (Zvosec et al., 2021). The economic approach involves treating university as an investment and determining how students decide which university offers the greatest return on investment (Menon, 2004). A student will want to examine which university offers the greatest earning capacity after graduation (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2013). Researchers using the economic approach examine tuition costs, travel costs, financial aid, and the cost of living (Zvosec et al., 2021).

Researchers using the psychological approach investigate individual and institutional factors (Palmer et al., 2012). In this approach, university choice depends on future enjoyment and the university experience (Perna, 2006). The focus of the psychological approach is whether

students and institutions are good fits for each other (Palmer et al., 2012; Ryder & Mitchell, 2013). The constructs in the psychological approach are perceptions, attitudes, level of satisfaction, and behaviors (Ryder & Mitchell, 2013).

Researchers using the sociological approach focus on social class, sociocultural factors, and social characteristics of individuals (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2013). Such researchers investigate social connections students make with their universities, such as relationships and social networks (Griffen et al., 2012). Parental education and influence may factor into the sociological approach (Kim & Schneider, 2005). The theoretical foundation of this study consists of family systems theory, person-environment fit theory, and relationship marketing, which coincide with existing research using economic, psychological, and sociological theories.

### ***Family Systems Theory***

Family systems theory emerged from the general systems theory in response to the need for a theory more specific to the family system (Dore, 2008). Family systems theory is a theoretical approach to the roles, structures, and communication within a family system as well as how the family unit interacts with external entities (Rothbaum et al., 2002). Family systems theory originally appeared in the context of family therapy, but has found applications in the analysis of families in nonclinical disciplines (Broderick, 1993).

The main principles of family systems theory fall into five elements: nonsummativity, interrelation connections, circular causality, communication, family rules and boundaries, and homeostasis (Ferrari et al., 1998, p. 363). Ferrari et al. (1998) defined nonsummativity as a family being more significant than the sum of its parts and more than just the behaviors and characteristics of the individuals that make it up. Family members rely on each other to make decisions (Collins et al., 2012). Ferrari et al. (1998) emphasized interrelation connections and

that the building of relationships over generations ties family members to one another. Circular causality means that every action has some reaction within a family unit (Ferrari et al., 1998). A family also has a set of unwritten rules that its members follow, which provide guidelines for each member (Collins et al., 2012). Within family systems theory, Ferrari et al. (1998) suggested that each family unit has a communication style that others can use to define the relationships among the individuals in a family. Each family unit also needs homeostasis, and each member takes part in maintaining a stable environment; this often causes resistance to change (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015).

Choosing a university can be a complex issue for an athlete and their family members; this decision impacts their future (Ryan et al., 2007). Family systems theory can be a foundation for examination of how a would-be Division III student-athlete's family unit affects their university choice process (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015).

### ***Person-environment Fit Theory (PE Fit)***

Person-environment fit is the “compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched” (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 281). Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) split the concept of person-environment fit into four domains: person–organization, person–group, person–job, and person–supervisor. Although this theory was developed to examine work relationships, it can also be applied to college choice.

**Person–Organization Fit.** Person–organization fit corresponds to the relationship a person feels they have with an entire organization (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Tom (1971) suggested that people succeed most when they belong to an organization with a similar focus or beliefs to their own. Following this suggestion, value-based research and value congruence gained wide acceptance as primary factors in person–organization fit (Kristof, 1996). Value

congruence has a significant influence on how student-athletes perceive organizational fit (Nixon, 2020).

**Person–Group Fit.** The focus of person–group fit is the relationship between a new person and an existing group (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). Person–group fit derives from the idea that an employed person must interact with others (Werbel & Gilliland, 1999). The majority of those researching person–group fit have examined how person–group fit affects the performance of team and personality traits (Barsade et al., 2000; Hobman et al., 2003; Kristof-Brown & Stevens, 2001; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Seong et al., 2015; Slocombe & Bluedorn, 1999).

**Person–Job Fit.** Person–job fit includes two concepts defined by Edwards (1991). The first concept is demand–abilities, which characterize the relationship between an employee’s skills, abilities, and knowledge and job requirements (Edwards, 1991). The second concept is the phenomenon of a job meeting an employee’s aspirations (Edwards, 1991). Recruits’ perceptions of jobs directly correlate with person–job fit (Chapman et al., 2005).

**Person–Supervisor Fit.** Person–supervisor fit corresponds to the relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate; personality traits and goal similarities allow measurement of this relationship (Colbert, 2004; Krishnan, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). A recruit’s compatibility perception can depend on race, age, communication skills, physical appearance, and personal relationships (Graves & Powell, 1995). When recruits develop opinions about an organization, they have little knowledge of the organization. Their insight depends on their relationship with a recruiter and comparisons made with other recruiters (Chapman et al., 2005).

### ***Relationship Marketing***

Relationship marketing became mainstream in the 1990s as a new perspective for researchers (Ballantyne et al., 2003). As interest grew in relationship marketing, so did research. Since then, many inconsistencies have arisen regarding what relationship marketing represents, and these have led to a multitude of different types of research and definitions of relationship marketing (Abeza et al., 2020). Although many definitions of relationship marketing have emerged, some overarching themes underly all existing research (Abeza et al., 2019). Abeza et al. (2020) examined seven commonly reoccurring themes in the research on relationship marketing: “creation (attracting, establishing, and getting); development (enhancing and strengthening); maintenance (sustaining and keeping); interactive (exchange, mutually, and co-operative); long term (lasting, permanent, and retaining); emotional content (commitment, trust, promises); and output (profitable; reward, and efficiency)” (p. 598). Sheth and Pavatiyar (2000) explained that there are fundamental features common to all relationship marketing definitions: process, purpose, and parties. The process is creation and maintenance of a relationship; the purpose is to produce mutual benefits for both parties. Relationship marketing involves multiple parties having relational exchanges (Sheth & Pavatiyar, 2000).

Developing and caring for relationships have become prime concerns within businesses and other organizations (Day, 2000). Nonprofit organizations have started using relationship marketing to develop and maintain strong ties with customers and donors (Gruen et al., 2000). Maintaining strong ties with customers and donors is also important when marketing higher education (Judson et al., 2004). When people participate in activities while at a university, they strengthen their bonds with the institution (Mael & Ashforth, 1992); as a result, when

universities employ a relationship marketing strategy, the return is longer and stronger relationships (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Harrison et al., 1995).

The focus of intercollegiate athletics is on recruiting, retaining, and developing student-athletes while working within financial constraints, making marketing within university athletic programs essential (Judson et al., 2004). A Division III athletics department has a responsibility to bring more money to the university by increasing enrollment (Beaver, 2014), which creates opportunities for the university to create relationships with prospective athletes (Judson et al., 2004).

Gwinner et al. (1998) found that consumers engaged in relationships to gain different benefits: social benefits, like the feeling of connectiveness with the team and university (Buzuvis, 2016); special treatment benefits, which may consist of scholarships, academic support services, medical care, and healthy living (NCAA 2022); and confidence benefits from athletic experiences, as the ability to be a part of a team helps better prepare individuals for life after graduation (NCAA, 2022). A student-athlete has a coproducing relationship with their university (De Wulf et al., 2001). The student-athlete is not only a customer and consumer of a university but also a supplier of services to the university (Judson et al., 2004). A student-athlete receives an education—and, in some situations, housing, meals, and books—but they also supply services through athletic performance, entertainment, and enrollment (Beaver, 2014; Judson et al., 2004). Relationship marketing is essential for a university to develop mutually beneficial relationships (De Wulf et al., 2001).

It is essential for coaches to develop their relationships with students-athletes to secure commitments to join their team and grow enrollment for the university (Nixon, 2020). Coaches can gain an advantage over the other programs by knowing which factors influence each gender



and taking them into account (Andrew et al., 2016) as they grow their relationship with prospective student-athletes (De Wulf et al., 2001).

### **Significance of Gender in University Choice**

Is there a need to focus on gender separately when creating a recruiting profile for student-athletes? According to Andrew et al. (2016) and Doyle and Gaeth (1990), it may be unnecessary. Andrew et al. examined 200 freshman Division I student-athletes, and their results suggested that men's and women's top two university choice factors were academic reputation and head coach relationship. There were subtle differences in lower-ranked factors that coaches and universities should pay attention to during recruitment (Letawsky et al., 2003). Male student-athletes' third- to fifth-ranked factors were athletic facilities, athletic traditions, and assistant-coach relationships (Andrew et al., 2016; Letawsky et al., 2003). Female student-athletes' third- to fifth-ranked factors were school size, location, and athletic traditions (Andrew et al., 2016; Letawsky et al., 2003).

### ***Factors for Male Athletes***

Mathes and Gurney (1985) found that for full-scholarship male athletes, the two most important factors of university choice were academics and coach relationships. These factors were consistent across all incoming 1<sup>st</sup>-year students. Letawsky et al. (2005) examined factors influencing incoming Division I football players at big-time college sports schools; the top five factors were degree options, academic support services, head coach relationships, sports tradition, and university community. Division I athletes are the most visible, but they do not represent the largest division of athletes. In 2022, Division I had 170,000 student-athletes, and Division III (the largest division) had 195,000 student-athletes, none of whom would receive an athletic scholarship (NCAA, 2022). Pauline (2010) examined lacrosse players in all three

divisions of college sports and found that Division I athletes' top influencing factors were degree options and coaching staff; for Division II they were financial aid (scholarships) and degree options; and for Division III they were degree options and coaching staff. Degree options made up the top factor for male student-athletes in all three divisions.

### ***Factors for Female Athletes***

Factors affecting female student-athletes require examination at all levels of athletics: In 2022, the 223,000 female student-athletes made up 46% of all student-athletes on college campuses (NCAA, 2022). The factors influencing female student-athletes were very similar to those influencing male student-athletes. The top two factors influencing female scholarship athletes were academics and coach relationships (Andrew et al., 2016). Letawsky et al. (2005) found that the top five factors influencing female athletes across all levels were degree programs, academic support services, head coach relationships, campus social life, and university community. Reynaud (1998) found that female student-athletes would also prefer to stay close to home or go to schools with which they connected at a young age. Division I female student-athletes' top factors were degree options (academic) and social atmosphere. The top factors for Division II female student-athletes were financial aid (scholarships) and degree programs. For Division III female student-athletes, the top factors were degree programs and social atmosphere.

### **Significance of Family Influence in University Choice**

#### ***Family Sport Culture***

A family with a “family sport culture is a family with a strong affinity for sports and its relationship to youths’ participation in organized sport” (Strandbu et al., 2020, p. 931). Family culture plays a considerable role in the choice of a youth to play sports (Birchwood, 2008). Young athletes who grow up in a family with a sport culture tend to develop an ingrained

propensity to use sports to socialize within their family (Birchwood, 2008). Although sports participation may vary throughout life, participation in general may depend on the type of family culture a person grew up with (Wheeler, 2008).

Parents use indirect, direct, unintentional, and intentional practices and strategies to influence their children (T. Wheeler, 2008). T. Wheeler (2008) found that parental goals played a vital role in parents' strategies and practices. T. Wheeler (2008) identified three goals: outcomes gained in sports, generative parenting, and culture. Practices and strategies operated in synchrony with parental goals. The five parenting strategies identified by T. Wheeler (2008) are introducing a child to sports, allowing the child to try many sports, persuading the child to commit to a specific sport, keeping the sport voluntary, and ensuring that the child does not do too much. These strategies correspond to how a parent influences a child to participate in sports (T. Wheeler, 2008).

The most common strategy among parents is the introduction of sports to their children; most researchers have found that parents are responsible for their children's first sports participation experiences (Baxter-Jones & Muffulli, 2003; Carlson, 1988; Dixon et al., 2008). Researchers investigating the development of elite sportspeople have thoroughly documented the introduction of children to a sampling of sports, so allowing a child to play multiple sports to gain skills and experience in more sports is another way parents try to achieve social, affective and cognitive goals for their children (Baker et al., 2005; Côté, 1999; Wall & Côté, 2007). Sampling sports allows a child to make friends, create a more extensive social network, and improve their self-esteem (Côté et al., 2009). T. Wheeler (2008) reported that parents admitted to not being pushy and wanted to make sure that their children played sport voluntarily. Voluntariness is essential for children playing sports because it allows children to play for love

of the game, which carries through their lives (Dixon et al., 2008). Parents also want to make sure their children are not overloaded because doing too much can lead them to quit or burn out (Cox, 1998). Parents in families with a sports culture value sports for their children for many different reasons, from its health benefits to its potential to allow their children to become elite athletes. These parents invest time and money in their children's sporting activities (S. Wheeler, 2012). As the evidence indicates, parents invest in their children's sporting futures by influencing their children's decision-making processes; as these same children decide where to play sports in college, parents can use the same strategies and tactics to influence the university choices of their student-athlete children (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015).

### ***Family Structure***

Family structure in the United States has drastically changed since the 2000s. While the predominant family structure used to include two biological parents (An & Sorrensen, 2017), it has become much more complicated in the past 20 years; for example, in 2022, the rate of marriages ending in divorce was approximately 44% (Amato, 2010; An & Sorrensen, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The relationship between educational outcomes, sports participation, and family structure is important because the lack of parent involvement in sports could lead to the lack of family influence on university choice (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012; McMillan et al., 2016).

Periods of insecurity, stress, and reduction in family resources are linked to changes in family structure (An & Sorrensen, 2017). A youth in a situation where their family structure has changed—living with one parent, in shared custody, or with new stepparents—are less likely to participate in sports than children being raised in a home with two biological parents (McMillan et al., 2016). Tillman (2007) and Quarmby and Dagkas (2010) examined sport participation after a change in family structure, and in both single-family homes and shared-custody arrangements,

participation dropped. Tillman also hypothesized that stepparents would be less engaged with their stepchildren, which would reduce the sport participation of their stepchildren.

### ***University Choice***

Schaeperkoetter et al. (2015) examined family influence on university choice for student-athletes who attended Division III universities by interviewing 69 student-athletes across 11 Division III campuses. Schaeperkoetter et al. (2015) reported that “four themes were related to Family Systems Theory: family members were interdependent, family members behaved according to rules, family members interacted in patterns, and family systems had semi-porous boundaries” (p. 267). Student-athletes felt that their families were part of the process; their parents would take time to listen to them and help them eliminate schools they together felt were not good fits, and their parents would also allow for discussions about personal opinions (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). Although parents had a variety of levels of participation, all the participants made it clear that their parents were supportive (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). The university choice of a would-be Division III student-athlete is very similar to that of a nonathlete because the sport is just part of the college experience, not the entire experience. The results of investigation of family involvement in the university choices of student-athletes mirror those of Palmer et al. (2004), who found strong parental involvement in the decisions of college-age students.

### ***Family Structure Change***

An and Sorrensen (2017) examined how changing family structure during high school affected high students' university selections. They found that when a structural change occurred during high school, it affected educational expectations, parental involvement, and the types of

classes students took; this affected students' university resumes and possibly the types of universities to which they applied (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012; Wu et al., 2015).

### *Family Systems*

Family systems theory emphasizes rules and how they work within family structures and with outside entities (Palmer et al., 2012; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). The rules for student-athletes were unwritten, but discussion took place within families about the cost of attendance (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). Cost was not always the deciding factor student-athletes communicated with their parents about (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015).

Schaeperkoetter et al. (2015) also reviewed the patterns student-athletes followed and how they compared with those of their families. If a student-athlete had a parent or sibling who played sports in college, they followed the pattern of that family member (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015).

The two most important factors were interdependence of family members and semiporous family systems (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). The university selection process is about dealing with an external entity and leaving for college. This changes the entire family system (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). When a child makes the decision to leave the house to go to a university, that is an adaptation of the family system; how it will change is an indication of the semiporous nature of the family system (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). Family members had to decide where the child should extend their home to compete athletically, grow academically, and create new friends socially (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015).

## **Significance of Coach Relationship in University Choice**

### ***Empirical Evidence***

Many researchers have studied and identified what influences a student-athlete to choose a specific university (Gabert et al., 1999; Groves, 2007; Johnson et al., 2009; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Vermillion & Spears, 2012). Johnson et al. (2009) examined 247 first-time student-athletes at small private universities using the Student-athlete College Choice Profile. Johnson et al. uncovered six factors in the top quartile of all independent variables tested. The top two factors were coach relationship and opportunity to play. Johnson et al.'s findings focused on management of the recruiting process and how a coach can create the best rapport with an athlete to gain commitments.

Vermillion and Spears (2012) examined factors that influenced Division I athletes at an urban university. The sample consisted of 101 student-athletes from 12 minor sports, excluding football. The student-athletes reported that many factors influenced which university to select, but the top factor was the coach relationship (Vermillion & Spears, 2012).

Nixon (2020) examined the influence of choice factors, comparing parents of student-athletes with student-athletes themselves. The results revealed another aspect of recruiting: a coach recruits not only a student-athlete but also the parent of the student-athlete (Nixon, 2020). Nixon examined scholarship, partial scholarship, and non-scholarship athletes and their parents. Many factors emerged about all groups, but the top factor for all scholarship athletes and their parents was coaching (Nixon, 2020). Nixon et al. (2021) used the Interscholastic Student-athlete Recruiting Questionnaire to examine the factors influencing Division I–III football players. The questionnaire's six factors may influence student-athletes. Nixon et al. (2021) found that coaching was the most significant factor for all three levels combined. Their data revealed that

coaching was the top factor for Divisions I and II and was the second most important factor for Division III, right behind academics (Nixon et al., 2021). Nixon et al. (2021) also examined coaches' communication tactics (in contrast, the focus of most early studies was on on-campus visits; Goss et al., 2006). In the prevailing culture, there were many ways coaches communicated with student-athletes: telephone calls were the most significant, followed by text messages; all three divisions of student-athletes found communication tactics to be a vital factor influencing university choice (Nixon et al., 2021).

### ***Conceptual Model of Recruiting***

The focus of the conceptual model of recruiting is how coaches use social effectiveness characteristics to help themselves identify, categorize, and implement strategies and tactics to gain commitments to their university (Magnusen et al., 2014). Social effectiveness characteristics are a way to explain why specific individuals are better at influencing the behavior of others (Ferris et al., 2002). Magnusen et al. (2014) examined the literature on social effectiveness characteristics in sports and formed two themes: the relevance of the task performed by sports recruiters and the relevance of the outcomes for the sports recruiters. In connection with these themes, two characteristics were critical to recruiters: political skill and social skills (Magnusen et al., 2014). Political skill is the ability to understand others and use the information gained to influence them to commit to an organization (Ferris et al., 2005). Social skills constitute the ability to deal with diverse individuals in social situations (Riggio & Carney, 1989).

Political and social skill tactics and strategies, if used correctly, positively affect person-organization fit, meaning that a recruit will see coach, school, and team as family and envision themselves at the school for the next four years of their life (Magnusen et al., 2014). Alignment of positive-fit perceptions improves recruiting outcomes. These outcomes include recruits having



good attitudes about the university, recruits verbally committing, and recruits officially committing to the university (Chapman et al., 2005; Heider, 1958).

Ferris et al. (2002, 2005) and Treadway et al. (2007) examined existing research and concluded that political and social skills should improve the effectiveness of recruiters' social effectiveness characteristics, although little research existed. Figure 1 illustrates recruiters' social effectiveness characteristics, their approach to different situations, and effective tactics and strategies recruiters should use (Magnusen et al., 2014).

### **Significance of Academics in University Choice**

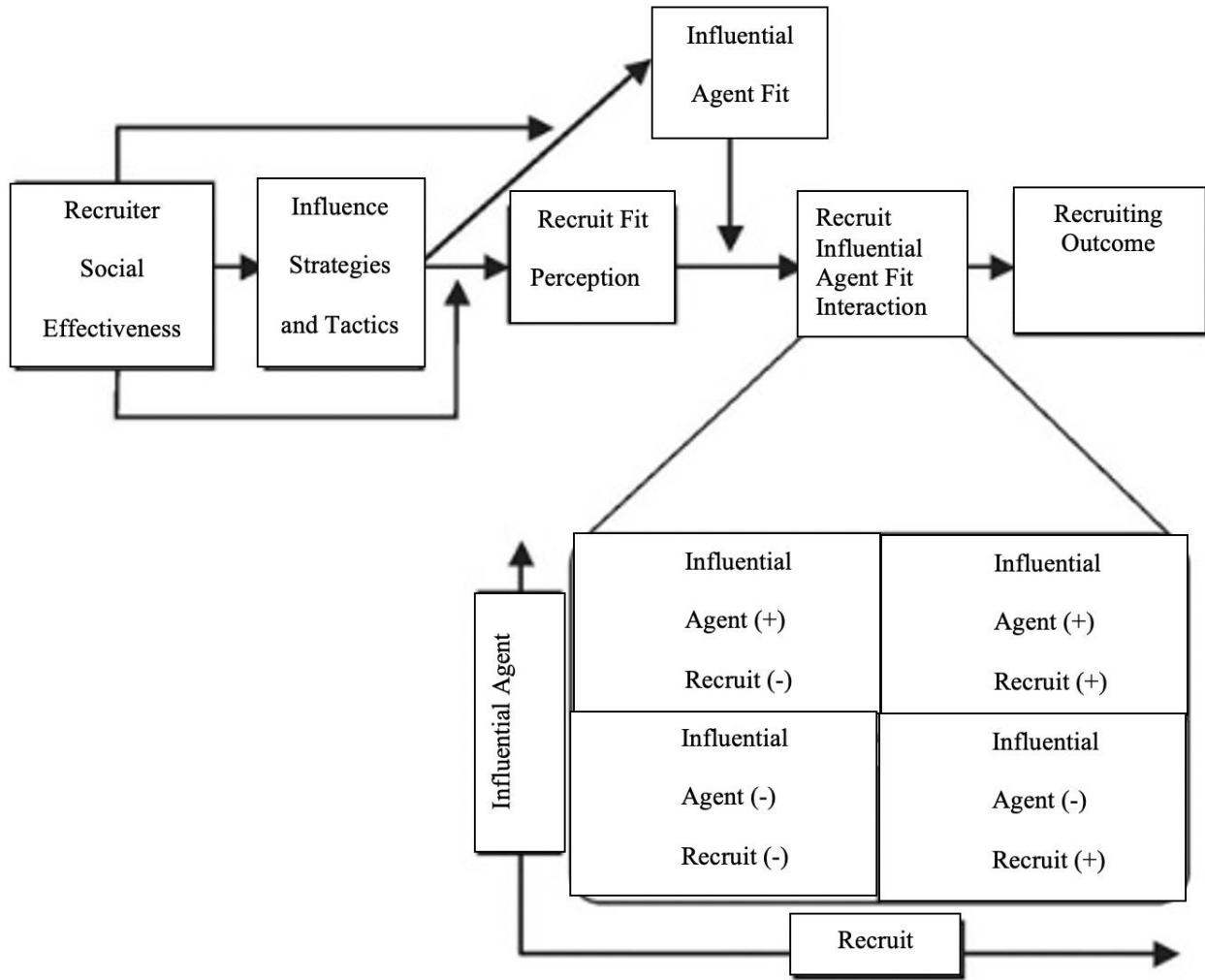
A coach's ability to recruit gifted student-athletes makes a substantial contribution to the success of their athletics department (Klenosky et al., 2001). The desired gifts may depend on their university's goals (Katz et al., 2015). Some universities seek athletic ability, and others concentrate on students' community service and academic achievement (Katz et al., 2015). When focusing on the recruitment of an athlete, coaches and others working in athletics departments need to keep in mind which factors are essential for university goals (Katz et al., 2015).

A student-athlete can perceive the academic choice factors of a university in a number of ways (Nixon et al., 2021): Does the university have a preferred major? What is the academic reputation of the school? What type of academic support services does the school offer? What types of future career opportunities are available through the school's academic programs? All or some of these factors can influence university choice (Chard & Potwarka, 2017; Gabert et al., 1999; Klenosky et al., 2001; Letawsky et al., 2003, 2005).

**Figure 1**

*Social Influence Model of the Recruiting Process in National Collegiate Athletic Association*

*Sports*



*Note.* From “A Critical Review and Synthesis of Student-athlete College Choice Factors: Recruiting Effectiveness in NCAA Sports,” by M. J. Magnusen, Y. Kim, P. L. Perrewé, and G. R. Ferris, 2014, *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 9(6), p 1269 (<https://doi.org/10.1260/1747-9541.9.6.1265>). Copyright 2014 by Multi-Science Publishing Co Ltd. Reprinted with permission from M. J. Magnusen.

Gabert et al. (1999) conducted one of the first studies on student-athlete choice factors. Although academics were not at the top of the factors identified, degree programs and academic support services were in the top five factors for Division I, Division II, and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics universities. At Division I universities, the top factor was academic services, and the third most important factor was degree programs; at Division II universities, the fifth most important factor was degree programs; and at National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics schools, the third most important factor was degree programs and the fourth most important was academic services (Gabert et al., 1999).

The results of the studies by Chard and Potwarka (2017) and Letawsky et al. (2003) mirror those of Gabert et al. (1999), with some slight differences. Letawsky et al. compared factors of student-athletes and nonathletes while Letawsky et al. examined male and female Division I student-athletes; the findings of both studies indicated that degree programs offered constituted the top factor influencing student-athletes, followed closely by academic support services. Chard and Potwarka (2017) pointed out that athletics departments had no direct control over two of the main factors important to student-athletes. The top factor they identified was whether a school offered a student-athlete's desired major (Chard & Potwarka, 2017). This factor aligns with those identified by Goss et al. (2006), who studied small universities and student-athletes' choice factors. The second most important influence identified by Chard and Potwarka was university reputation. This factor has to do a university's brand, which has implications across all parts of the university, both academically and athletically (Chard & Potwarka, 2017; Pauline, 2010; Popp et al., 2011).

### **Student-athlete University Choice Factors**

Identifying factors that influence a student-athlete to choose a university is essential when building a sports team, an athletics department, and university enrollment (Beaver, 2014; Nixon, 2020). To maximize recruitment efforts at the collegiate level, extensive research is needed with each new class of recruits; because influences may change (and to gain an advantage), a coach needs to know what to focus on to obtain commitments (Johnson et al., 2009). Coaches must use their social effectiveness and political skill to create comfortable relationships with recruits to present the perception of fit (Goss et al., 2006; Judson et al., 2004; Magnusen et al., 2014). The following section explores six factors that influence student-athlete university choice: athletics (Gabert et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2009; Judson et al., 2004), academics (Goss et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2009; Nichols et al., 2020; Nixon, 2020; Zvosec et al., 2021), coaching (Johnson et al., 2009; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Zvosec et al., 2021), location (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015; Zvosec et al., 2021), significant people (Croft, 2008; Magnusen et al., 2014), and communication tactics (Litten, 1982; Nixon et al., 2021).

### **Factors Influencing University Choice**

Several researchers have focused on understanding the factors influencing a student-athlete's university choice (Chard & Potwarka, 2017). They have conducted studies in many different contexts ranging over different athletics divisions, from Division I to III; different school sizes, from small private universities to large athletic colleges; and different sports (Covell et al., 2013; Goss et al., 2006; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline, 2010; Reynaud, 1998; Vermillion & Spears, 2012; Zvosec et al., 2021). Although no one single factor has stood out as the top factor in every situation, major themes have emerged across all studies (Chard & Potwarka, 2017). Some of these major themes are academics, athletics, school reputation,

financial aid, coaches' athletic influence, and ability to recruit (Goss et al., 2006; Magnusen et al., 2011; Popp et al., 2011; Vermillion & Spears, 2012).

***Factor 1: Athletics***

The characteristics of an athletics department and its sports teams have a significant influence on student-athletes (Nixon, 2020). Specific factors relating to athletics include athletics traditions (Pauline, 2007), athletic facilities (Schneider & Messenger, 2012), athletic apparel and team equipment (Nixon et al., 2021), athletic team support (Huffman & Cooper, 2012), and the strength of the team an athlete would join (Goss et al., 2006).

A university's tradition of athletics consists of the history, success, and culture that surrounds the university; this can be a significant factor in the recruiting process (Goss et al., 2006). Researchers have found that athletic tradition ranks in the top five factors influencing student-athletes to choose a specific university (Andrew et al., 2016; Gabert et al., 1999; Letawsky et al., 2003; Nixon et al., 2021). Zvosec et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study of Division III student-athletes; the interviewed student-athletes stated that universities' athletic traditions and reputations significantly influenced their university choices.

A student-athlete may want to participate in a winning program, so the win/loss record of a sports program is a factor that may influence student-athlete choice (Bouldin et al., 2004; Chard & Potwarka, 2017; Goss et al., 2006). Pauline et al. (2007) examined Division I baseball players for whom win/loss record was the most significant factor influencing university choice. Zvosec et al.'s (2021) results regarding Division III student-athletes also suggest that schools' past records significantly influence athletes' decisions.

The facilities a student-athlete would use while on campus are a significant selling point during recruitment (Chard & Potwarka, 2017; Gionta, 2022; Magnusen et al., 2014; Nixon et al.,

2020; Zvosec et al., 2021). Many researchers have found that the type of facilities a university can offer a student-athlete is a significant factor (Klenosky et al., 2001; Schneider and Messenger, 2012). Zvosec et al. (2021) interviewed athletes who said that a commitment to athletics was an influential factor. Andrew et al. (2016), Pauline et al. (2007), and Goss et al. (2006) found that athletic facilities ranked in the top five factors influencing university choice. Schneider and Messenger (2012) examined Division I hockey players; for them, the weight room and locker room ranked higher in importance than the arena. Athletic facilities contribute to the success of all programs in a department and directly affect student-athletes and significantly impact their university choices (Klenosky et al., 2001). Nixon et al. (2021) found that equipment and apparel significantly influenced university choice. The apparel package and team equipment can be a selling point to create separation from other universities (Smart & Wolfe, 2000).

Playing in front of big crowds is always a notable aspect of being an athlete; this does affect all types of athletes, and any level of participation can be a factor that influences university choice (Letawsky et al., 2003). Nixon et al. (2021) found that Division I football players ranked fan support in the top ten factors influencing university choice; few other researchers have investigated this subject.

### ***Factor 2: Academics***

Academics consistently rank among the top factors influencing student-athlete university choice (Goss et al., 2006; Pauline, 2010). Several specific factors make up academics: future career opportunities (Klenosky et al., 2001; Nichols et al., 2020; Zvosec et al., 2021), preferred major (Gionta, 2022; Judson et al., 2004; Nichols et al., 2020; Zvosec et al., 2021), educational value (Huffman & Cooper, 2012), academic reputation and support services (Gabert et al., 1999; Nichols et al., 2020; Pauline, 2010), and reputation of major (Judson et al., 2004; Nichols et al.,

2020). Academics play an influential role for every athletic level, gender, socioeconomic status, revenue sport, and nonrevenue sport (Goss et al., 2006; Pauline, 2010).

Academics significantly influence a student-athlete's university choice because their university will help them reach their goals (Zvosec et al., 2021). One of the top goals for student-athletes is future employment, because less than 2% of student-athletes end up playing professional sports (Agnatovech, 2021), and most student-athletes go professional in something other than sports, making academics a high priority (Klenosky et al., 2001). Researchers have shown that future career opportunities significantly influence university choice (Huffman & Cooper, 2012; Nichols et al., 2020; Pauline, 2010). Zvosec et al. (2021) found that Division III athletes wanted to combine great athletics with great academics. Nichols et al. (2020) examined Division III basketball players and found that career opportunities were the highest ranking factors influencing university choice.

Several researchers have identified academic major as a significant influence; it was the top factor in Covell et al.'s (2013) study of first-year student-athletes at Division III universities. Goss et al. (2006) examined first-year student-athletes at small universities, who ranked academic major as the top factor, and Zvosec et al. (2021) interviewed student-athletes who also emphasized the importance of academic major. Student-athletes, like other students, seek to gain educational experiences while attending university, making academic major a significant factor in the choice of university (Letawsky et al., 2003).

Nixon (2020) said, "The academic value of the university refers to the perceived value of and education from the institution" (p. 25). Cost, location, reputation, and opportunities create this value and factor into the university choices of student-athletes (Sevier, 1994; Zvosec et al.,

2021). Huffman and Cooper (2012) examined factors influencing college football players at a southeastern university; the researchers found that academic value had a significant influence.

Larsen (2003) said, “These higher education leaders generally defined academic reputation as the overall impression of excellence or quality created by several factors” (p. 159). These factors were faculty quality, credible rankings, resources, research strength, student quality, leadership strength, general perceptions, and program quality (Larsen, 2003). Academic reputation and image are the same thing (Sevier, 1994) and rank in the top 10 factors influencing student-athletes (Huffman & Cooper, 2012; Magnusen et al., 2018; Nichols et al., 2020). These factors indicate that a student-athlete is concerned about academics and graduating from a university that will help prepare them for a future outside of athletics (Magnusen et al., 2014).

The reputation of the major a student would pursue at a university is a significant factor (Zvosec et al., 2021) influencing university choice of student-athletes (Nichols et al., 2020; Nixon, 2020). Nixon et al. (2021) found that reputation of academic major was a more significant influence than university reputation for Division II football players and also ranked highly for both Division I and Division III players. Nichols et al. (2020) found that major reputation was the third most important factor among Division III basketball players.

### ***Factor 3: Communication Tactics***

Communication tactics allow coaches and recruiters to reach prospective student-athletes through many different platforms; these tactics form part of an overall recruiting plan (Litten, 1982). Few researchers have investigated how coaches and recruiters communicate with potential student-athletes, even though it is a significant part of the recruiting process (Croft; 2008).



Communicating via a variety of platforms can facilitate relationship marketing, allowing as university to build its brand (Blaszka et al., 2018) and inform student-athletes about the university's offerings (Goss et al., 2006; Sevier, 1994). Electronic communications from coaches can include text messages, emails, phone calls, and social media posts (Blaszka et al., 2018). At the same time, in-person communication is available in the form of official campus visits, unofficial campus visits, coach home and school visits, and game visits (Andrew et al., 2016; Blaszka et al., 2018; Croft, 2008; Han, 2014; Nixon et al., 2021; Sevier, 1994).

Researchers have identified telephone calls as a top factor during the recruitment process; coaches employ this tactic to open communication with prospective athletes and their families (Croft, 2008; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021). Nixon et al. (2021) also examined the use of text messaging and found that it had a significant influence on the university choice of student-athletes.

In-person visits can include official visits, unofficial visits, and coaches visiting athletes at home, school, or a game (Croft, 2008; Nixon, 2020). Each student has been limited to five official visits to a campus, but because the student incurs the price for unofficial visits, they are unlimited (Nixon, 2020). All in-person visits have a significant influence on university choice (Andrew et al., 2016; Croft, 2008; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021).

#### ***Factor 4: Coaching***

The characteristics of the coaching staff has consistently been among the most significant factors influencing student-athlete university choice, often exceeding the importance of academic and external factors (Johnson et al., 2009; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline, 2010; Zvosec et al., 2021). In early studies, researchers combined coaching and athletic factors (Mathes & Gurney, 1985). Mathes and Gurney (1985) conducted one of the first

studies of coaching factors separate from athletic factors. Coaching factors that affect student-athlete university choice include player development (Nixon et al., 2021), coach relationship (Croft, 2008; Johnson et al., 2009; Nixon, 2020; Zvosec et al., 2021), coach personality (Pauline, 2008), style of play (Nixon, 2020; Pauline, 2010; Zvosec et al., 2021), and reputation of the head coach (Croft, 2008; Nixon, 2020).

According to Nixon (2020), “player development refers to the academic, athletic, and personal development of a student-athlete” (p. 30). Because so few student-athletes can play professional sports, they may have elevated interest in academic and personal development, which can help them with life after college (Mathes & Gurney, 1985). Zvosec et al. (2021) suggested that student-athletes’ perceptions of whether coaches will develop and take care of them influence university choice. Nixon et al. (2021) found that player development ranked in the top two factors among Division I–III football players.

The head coach relationship develops during the student-athlete recruitment process; this is how the coach makes a personal connection with each athlete, and it can significantly affect university choice (Nixon et al., 2021). A coach’s social effectiveness and political skill will aid in the development of this relationship and sway athletes to commit to their university (Magnusen et al., 2014). Many researchers identified coach relationship as a top factor in university choice (Andrew et al., 2016; Croft, 2008; Johnson et al., 2009), with Zvosec et al.’s (2021) examination of Division III student-athletes finding that a good coach relationship positively affected a student-athlete’s university choice. In contrast, a bad experience with a coach can lead a student-athlete to reject the coach’s university (Magnusen et al., 2014).

Coach personality significantly influences a potential recruit’s university choice at all athletic levels (Nichols et al., 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline et al., 2007, 2008, 2010). A

coach's personality influences students' perceptions of fit (Pauline, 2008), and a coach should make student-athletes feel comfortable during the recruitment process (Nixon et al., 2021).

A coach's playing style significantly influences the choice of university for student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991). Croft (2008) and Nichols et al. (2020) found this factor significantly influenced Division I and III male basketball players. Coaches must spend time recruiting athletes who fit their style of play, because the perception of fit is vital to student-athletes across all athletic divisions (Pauline, 2010).

Magnusen et al. (2018) suggested that head coaches take time to enhance their reputations, because this will help with the recruitment efforts of their programs. While each program and coach may describe winning differently, obtaining student-athletes' commitments and creating a winning atmosphere is a common goal (Covell et al., 2013). Winning remains a big part of reputation, and a coach's reputation is a significant influence on university choice (Adler & Adler, 1991; Chard & Potwarka, 2017; Nichols et al., 2020).

#### ***Factor 5: Significant People***

The recruiting process is complex and competitive and requires a coach to develop relationships with student-athletes and identify and create relationships with influential people in the athletes' lives (Nixon et al., 2021). These people are parents, guardians, siblings, coaches, and friends of the athletes. Schaeperkoetter et al. (2015) examined family influence on university choice for student-athletes who attended Division III universities and found that family was a significant part of the decision-making process. Student-athletes receive guidance from all the important individuals in their lives, who help them with their perception of fit at each possible university (Magnusen et al., 2014). Croft (2008) and Nixon et al. (2021) found that coaches and parents of athletes impacted athletes' decision-making processes. The significant people in a

student-athlete's life directly influence their perceptions of fit. College coaches must effectively recruit all important people in a potential recruit's life (Magnusen et al., 2014).

### ***Factor 6: Location***

A university's location can represent different things to different recruits (Andrew et al., 2016). It can represent how close the university is to family (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015), the city or community where the campus is located (Letawsky et al., 2003), and how far the university is from home (Pauline, 2010). All of these factors can have a significant influence on university choice (Nixon, 2020).

Several researchers found that university location or university distance from home ranked among the top five factors influencing student-athletes' university choices (Andrew et al., 2016; Gabert et al., 1999; Nixon, 2020; Schneider & Messenger, 2012). Nixon (2020) found that location influenced athletes and parents significantly. Andrew et al. (2016) and Letawsky et al. (2003) found that university location was a significant factor for female student-athletes.

Physical campus location (Letawsky et al., 2003) and social life on campus (Zvosec et al., 2021) have been some of the most influential factors affecting student-athletes' university choices. Zvosec et al. (2021) found that student-athletes enjoyed opportunities to engage in different activities outside athletics; having social and extracurricular opportunities significantly influenced their university choices. Andrew et al. (2016) found that what the surrounding area had to offer influenced both male and female athletes; whether the surrounding area provides a vast assortment of entertainment opportunities significantly influences university choice.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

Recruitment of athletes has progressed since the first school offered athletic financial aid in 1900 (Smith, 1988). Recruitment of athletes began as a way to build better athletics teams and

grew into a way to improve student enrollment at universities (Beaver, 2014). Recruitment of student-athletes and selection of universities involve complex and important decisions for all involved (Zvosec et al., 2021). Research on the subject has been growing and has become segmented in many ways. Prominent ways to segment research have included by division (Gabert et al., 1999; Nichols et al., 2020; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline et al., 2007; Zvosec et al., 2021), by sport (Magnusen et al., 2018; Nichols et al., 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline, 2010; Pauline et al., 2007), by gender (Andrew et al., 2016; Judson et al., 2004; Zvosec et al., 2021), and by ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Huffman & Cooper, 2012). Researchers have identified six primary factors that influence student-athlete university choice during recruitment: academics (Goss et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2009; Nichols et al., 2020; Nixon, 2020; Zvosec et al., 2021), athletics (Gabert et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2009; Judson et al., 2004), coaching (Johnson et al., 2009; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Zvosec et al., 2021), location (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015; Zvosec et al., 2021), significant people (Croft, 2008; Magnusen et al., 2014), and communication tactics (Litten, 1982; Nixon et al., 2021). Although researchers have examined all these factors, a need has emerged for investigation of the recruitment process, and each university may need to commission research of what works best for its situation.

### **Gaps in the Research**

Why do student-athletes choose different schools? Choosing which university to attend is one of the most important decisions in a young adult's life. Researchers have not thoroughly investigated how a student-athlete makes that decision at the Division III level in the ODAC. At a Division III university, scholarships are unavailable (NCAA, 2022), so what is the driving force behind university choice among student-athletes who attend these universities? What is the major influence on the student-athletes who chose to attend a Division III university in the

ODAC? Is gender identity a factor influencing university choice? Does a family with a sport culture have influence over university choice? This study will involve gaining a practical understanding of the recruiting process at a Division III university in the ODAC to obtain a scholarly understanding of university choice. The methodology of the study will be described in the next chapter.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Methodology**

This study had a nonexperimental quantitative design and involved investigation of university choice factors of student-athletes at institutions in the ODAC. First, the researcher obtained approval from the institutional review board (IRB) of Averett University to administer the ISARQ (Appendix A) designed by Nixon et al. (2021). The researcher provided all required documents to Ann Marie Lee at Radford University's IRB for approval. The researcher excluded selected demographic items to better fit the study's aim of creating a recruiting profile for male, female, and nonbinary student-athletes by identifying important university choice factors that impacted student-athletes. The researcher sought to have all student-athletes at Averett University complete the ISARQ and used the provided responses to test the study's hypotheses.

The researcher contacted the athletic director at Averett University, asked them to participate, and made a 10-min presentation to all coaches on April 6, 2023. The researcher sought permission from each coach to administer the ISARQ at one of their team meetings or practices. During the presentation, the researcher explained that a one-time QR code would be available when student-athletes came to team meetings or practices. Student-athletes would scan it using their electronic devices, which would direct them to the ISARQ. The researcher provided every coach with a hard copy of the ISARQ; this document indicated the voluntary nature of the study, explained its purpose, addressed confidentiality concerns, and included an appreciation letter. Consent was linked to the ISARQ.

The ISARQ was reimaged into a digital format using Microsoft Forms, which could create a one-time secure QR code linked to the ISARQ digital survey. The survey data were stored on a secure website that only the researcher could access. After each team meeting, the

survey was closed, and a new QR code was created for the next meeting to prevent surveys from being taken more than once. Collection of data with the ISARQ was completely anonymous. After the proposal for this project was approved, the researcher emailed (Appendix B) all coaches to set up times to meet with their teams and distribute the questionnaire to student-athletes; the researcher made it clear to student-athletes that they had the option of not participating in the study and faced no disciplinary action for not completing the questionnaire. Each student-athlete had to consent to participation in the study, as explained in the directions (Appendix A). Student-athletes submitted information regarding school recruitment, sports participation, gender, residency, academic standing, parents' education level, ethnicity, and influences on sports participation. After administration of the ISARQ, a thank-you email was sent to each coach (Appendix B). All currently rostered student-athletes were included in a raffle for a chance to win prizes worth a total of \$500. The researcher funded this initiative and utilized the \$500 to acquire \$20 gift cards from local establishments in Danville, Virginia. Each student-athlete was assigned a number based on the rosters available online. Subsequently, a random number generator (<http://www.calculator.net>) was employed to conduct the raffle and determine the recipients of the gift cards. The coaches were entrusted with the responsibility of distributing the gift cards to the winning student-athletes. Given that all rostered athletes participated in the raffle and the information was sourced from a public website, the data's anonymity remained intact.

The data were automatically uploaded to the Microsoft Forms database for storage; the data were encrypted in transfer and storage for security. The data were stored on a password-protected computer that was either on the researcher's person or in the researcher's locked office.



The researcher used the collected data to create student-athlete school choice profiles, excluding blank answers and corrupted files.

### **Study Population and Sample**

A total of 316 student-athletes were present on the rosters at Averett University, and the researcher utilized as many available individuals as possible to establish the most extensive sample size feasible. Employing the sample size calculator from G\*Power, the researcher determined that 87 surveys were required to attain a power of 0.80, taking into account the hypothesized correlation of 0.30 concerning Research Questions 1 and 2. For Research Question 3, G\*Power yielded significantly smaller sample sizes, approximately 20 each.

### ***Research Questions and Hypotheses***

RQ1: How is parental sport influence as a child related to the factors concerning university choice for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

*H1<sub>a</sub>*: Parental sport influence is related to one or more of the other factors of university choice.

*H1<sub>0</sub>*: Family sport influence as a child is not related to one or more of the other factors of university choice.

By assessing the relationship between family sports culture during childhood and university choice factors, the researcher intended to determine whether the presence of a sports culture significantly influenced the university choice factors of student-athletes. This information had the potential to give coaches and recruiters better knowledge about recruiting student-athletes and their families, helping them gain more official commitments.

RQ2: What is the relative importance of the coach as an influential factor for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

*H2<sub>a</sub>*: The coach significantly affects university choice factors.

*H2<sub>0</sub>*: The coach does not significantly affect university choice.

By analyzing the coaching factors influencing university choice, the researcher intended to gain valuable information about the most influential coaching factors and how they correlate with the other ISARQ factors, allowing coaches and recruiters to focus on those factors to gain more official commitments.

RQ3: How does gender identity change the relative importance of university choice factors for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

*H3<sub>a</sub>*: Gender identity significantly changes the relative importance of university choice factors.

*H3<sub>0</sub>*: Gender identity significantly changes the relative importance of university choice factors.

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

All student-athletes at Averett University who attended the team meeting and are above the age of 18 were eligible to participate in the proposed study. For this study, a student-athlete was defined as any student who plays an approved NCAA sport or a nonapproved NCAA sport. The nonapproved sports at Averett University are cheerleading, dance, and esports.

### ***Exclusion Criteria***

Each student-athlete was allowed to take the survey only once. If a student-athlete played multiple sports, they were excluded from the survey at team meetings subsequent to the first meeting at which they took the survey. Any student who did not play a sport but was part of the team (e.g., managers, graduate assistants, statisticians, and bookkeepers) were excluded. Any student-athlete who did not fill out the survey or show up to any meetings where the survey was presented was excluded. Any student-athlete under the age of 18 years was excluded.

### Survey Instrument

The researcher used the ISARQ (Appendix A) created by Nixon et al. (2021) for data collection. William L. Nixon, the lead author of the ISARQ, granted permission to use the ISARQ through email correspondence (Appendix C). Nixon et al. (2021) developed the ISARQ to study factors influencing the college selections of football players in Divisions I–III. The ISARQ contains 40 questions: 1 consent to participate question, 10 multiple-choice demographic questions, each of which is designed to elicit a single answer, and 29 questions that used a 5-point Likert scale. The ISARQ survey was digital, and the respondents were only able to select one answer for each question. Items directly correlating to the specific college used by Nixon et al., scholarships awarded, and religious affiliation were excluded, and parent sport influence was included to better fit the current study. The researcher added three items to the ISARQ to meet the needs of this study. Under the significant persons factor, the researcher included “high school coach” to gain a better understanding of whether the high school coach had a significant influence on university choice. Under the location factor, the researcher added both campus social life and surrounding community to the survey, to ascertain whether either of those had a significant influence on university choice of a student-athletes.

Table 1 summarizes the categorizations and codes used in the ISARQ. Table 2 explains the codes used for demographic items.

**Table 1**

*Interscholastic Student-Athlete Recruiting Questionnaire: Categorization and Codes*

Category and factor	Code
Athletic	
Tradition of athletics	TRAD
Athletic facilities	ATHFAC
Equipment and apparel	EQPAPP

Category and factor	Code
Athletic event attendance	EVATT
Win/loss record	WINLOSS
Academics	
Future career opportunities	FUTCAR
Preferred major/minor	MAJMIN
Academic value	ACAVAL
Academic reputation	ACAREP
Reputation of major	REPMAJ
Communication tactics	
Telephone calls	TELCAL
Text messages	TEXMES
Campus recruiting visit	CAMVIS
Letters/emails from coaches	LETEMA
Visit from coaches	VISCOA
Coaching	
Ability to develop players	ABDVPL
Reputation of head coach	REPHCO
Head coach's personality	HCPERS
Relationship with head coach	RECHCO
Head coach style of play	H COSTY
Significant persons	
Mother	MOM
Father	DAD
Siblings	SIBL
High school coaches	HSCH
Other relatives	OTH
Location	
Proximity to family	PROXFM
Location of university	LOCUNI
Campus social life	CAMSLOL
Surrounding community	SURCOM

**Table 2***Demographic Questions: Codes and Values*

Question and response	Response code	
	Symbolic	Numeric
Which sport(s) will you be competing in at your institution?		
Football	FB	1
Basketball	BB	2
Baseball	BASE	3

Question and response	Response code	
	Symbolic	Numeric
Softball	SB	4
Volleyball	VB	5
Soccer	SOC	6
Tennis	TEN	7
Golf	GLF	8
Cross country	XC	9
Wrestling	WRT	10
Track and field	TF	11
Cheer	CHE	12
Dance	DNC	13
Esports	ESP	14
No answer	NAN	99
Please indicate how you identify.		
Male	Male	1
Female	Female	2
Nonbinary	NB	3
Wish not to say or no answer	NAN	99
Which of the following best describe your academic standing?		
1 <sup>st</sup> year	1STY	1
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	2NDY	2
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	3RDY	3
4 <sup>th</sup> year	4THY	4
≥5 <sup>th</sup> year	5THY	5
No answer	NAN	99
How would you classify your ethnicity?		
Caucasian	CAUC	1
African American	AFAMER	2
Other	OTH	3
No answer	NAN	99
Select the number of varsity sports you played in high school?		
0	OSPO	0

Question and response	Response code	
	Symbolic	Numeric
1	1SPO	1
2	2SPO	2
3	3SPO	3
≥4	4+SPO	4
No answer	NAN	99
How many different universities/colleges did you officially visit during the recruiting process?		
0	0OV	0
1	1OV	1
2	2OV	2
3	3OV	3
4	4OV	4
≥5	5+OV	5
No answer	NAN	99
How many different universities/colleges did you unofficially visit during the recruiting process?		
0	0UOV	0
1	1UOV	1
2	2UOV	2
3	3UOV	3
4	4UOV	4
≥5	5+UOV	5
No answer	NAN	99
Which of the following best describes the education experience of your mother?		
Did not finish HS	NOGRAD	0
Graduated HS/GED	GHS	1
Some college	SCOL	2
Associate's degree	AAD	3
Graduated college	BA	4
Graduate degree	Grad	5
Postgrad degree	PostG	6

Question and response	Response code	
	Symbolic	Numeric
No answer	NAN	99
Which of the following best describes the education experience of your father?		
Did not finish HS	NOGRAD	0
Graduated HS/GED	GHS	1
Some college	SCOL	2
Associate's degree	AAD	3
Graduated college	BA	4
Graduate degree	Grad	5
Postgrad degree	PostG	6
No answer	NAN	99
Did your parents influence your sport participation as a child?		
Highly influential		5
Somewhat influential		4
Neutral		3
Somewhat noninfluential		2
Noninfluential		1

*Note.* HS = high school; GED = general equivalency diploma.

### Data Analysis

The researcher collected quantitative data with the ISARQ, then uploaded all data from the surveys directly to Microsoft Forms. The researcher collected the data from the data analytics section, downloaded it as a Microsoft Excel file, and transferred it to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27) for analysis. Descriptive statistics (standard deviations and means) were computed for each factor category on the ISARQ. The factors were ranked to create profiles for male and female student-athletes recruited to Averett University (Appendix D). All completed profiles were provided, ranking Factors 1–29. The researcher then conducted a statistical analysis to

determine whether the independent variables relating to coach and family sport culture correlated with the dependent variable, the ISARQ university choice factors, and whether the independent variable of gender identity affected the dependent variable ISARQ factor categories.

There were three different analyses run on the ISARQ data. First, the researcher ran a Pearson's Correlation Test to determine whether there was a correlation between family sport culture and the university choice factors on the ISARQ. Second, the researcher ran a Pearson's Correlation Test to determine the relationships between the coach factors on the ISARQ and the remaining university choice factors on the ISARQ. Third, the researcher ran an Independent Sample t-test comparing males' and females' university choice factors. The researcher collected all data and compiled all mean scores for each of the 29 factors on the ISARQ to create student-athlete profiles for male and female student-athletes' recruiting factors (Appendix D). Table 3 summarized the proposed data analysis.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of the proposed study was that all student-athletes came from one university. Although sampling from other ODAC-member universities would have increased the sample size and improved the significance of the findings, convenience, time constraints, and potential difficulty obtaining replies from other athletic directors limited the researcher's ability to do so. Another limitation was that student-athletes among 3rd-, 4th-, and 5th-year students were far removed from the recruiting process and may not have had clear recollections of recruitment.



**Table 3***Summary of Statistical Analyses*

Research question	Hypothesis	Variables		Test
		Independent	Dependent	
1. How is parental sport influence as a child related to the factors concerning university choice for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?	Parental influence is related to one or more of the other factors of university choice.	PSI	ISARQ <sup>b</sup> categories	Pearson's Correlation
2. What is the relative importance of the coach as an influential factor for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?	The coach significantly affects university choice factors for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC.	Coach	ISARQ <sup>b</sup> categories	Pearson's Correlation
3. What is the effect of gender identity on university choice factors for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?	There is a significant difference in university choice factors for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC based on gender identity.	Gender <sup>a</sup>	ISARQ <sup>b</sup> categories	Independent Sample T Test

*Note.* PSI= Parental Sport influence; Coach=Coaching factors on ISARQ; ODAC = Old Dominion Athletic Conference; ISARQ = Interscholastic Student-athlete Recruiting Questionnaire; ANOVA = analysis of variance.

<sup>a</sup> Male, female, or nonbinary. <sup>b</sup> Academics, athletics, communication tactics, coaching, significant people, and location.

**Delimitations**

The study was delimited to all student-athletes enrolled at Averett University who were actively participating in NCAA-sanctioned or non-NCAA-sanctioned sports. Student-athletes of all ages, genders, ethnicities, and seniorities were eligible to participate.

**Summary**

The study had a nonexperimental quantitative design and involved investigation of university choice factors of student-athletes at institutions in the ODAC. By comparing the average scores for the athletic, academic, coaching, communication tactics, location, and family influence factor categories for student-athletes identifying as male and female, the researcher determined the extent to which each factor depended on gender identity and therefore should be accounted for in recruiting strategies, allowing coaches and recruiters to gain more official commitments.

The researcher gained permission from the athletic director to give the ISARQ to all current NCAA approved and nonapproved student-athletes. Each student-athlete had the opportunity to answer the questions on the ISARQ at a team meeting or practice with the researcher under no pressure from any athletic personnel. If any student-athlete was on multiple teams at the university, they only took the ISARQ one time. It did not matter which team meeting the student-athlete attended, as the ISARQ will account for all sports played.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

The aim of this study was to create a recruiting profile for male, female, and nonbinary student-athletes by identifying important university choice factors that impact student-athletes. The organization of this chapter follows the three research questions posed in the first chapter. This chapter reports whether childhood family sports influence related to factors affecting university choice. The chapter then reports how coaching factors related to university choice factors and, finally, reports on differences in university choice factors based on gender identity.

#### **Description of the Population and Sample**

##### ***Population***

The population consisted of student-athletes enrolled at Averett University at the end of the 2023 spring semester. At the time of the study, 316 student-athletes were listed on all the rosters at Averett University. The coaches were asked at a meeting to allow the researcher to meet with their teams at practices or team meetings to administer the ISARQ in a digital format.

##### ***Sample***

Overall, 258 of the 316 student-athletes completed the survey, providing a response rate of 81.6%. Participants included student-athletes from all sports except for tennis, equestrian, track and field, cross country, e-sports, and golf; the coaches for those sports chose not to participate. However, some athletes from track and field, cross country, and e-sports did take part in the study because they also played sports for which the coaches agreed to participate (Appendix E).

Table 4 displays the frequencies and percentages for the demographic categorical study variables. Of the 258 participating student-athletes, 64% were male, and 58.1% were Caucasian.

With regard to the education of respondents' parents, the largest groups consisted of those whose fathers (33.7%) or mothers (22.9%) had completed high school or received general equivalency diplomas. With regard to academic standing, the largest group consisted of 1<sup>st</sup>-year student-athletes (33.8%). The respondents represented 13 sports and 17 sports programs at Averett University: The top three sports represented were football (23.6%), lacrosse (14.7%), and baseball (12%). Student-athletes reported playing a mean of 1.92 varsity sports ( $SD = 1.01$ ) during high school, and during the recruiting process they officially visited a mean of 2.32 universities ( $SD = 2.01$ ) and unofficially visited a mean of 2.75 universities ( $SD = 2.84$ ).

### **Descriptive Analysis**

Descriptive analysis (Table 5) was employed to determine which of the variables from among parents' influence on childhood sports participation and the 29 university choice factors were important to student-athletes. For each factor category, the mean of the factors in the category was computed. On average, participants reported every factor category as moderately important to the decision of which university to attend. Table 5 reports the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for the variables. The coaching category had the highest mean ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ). Also, as seen in Table 5, a Parents' factor category was created and consisted of the mother and father factors in the significant persons category; the parents category, if part of the original ISARQ, would have had the third highest mean ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ). The top five university choice factor means were for head coach relationship ( $M = 3.85$ ), preferred major/minor ( $M = 3.80$ ), ability to develop players ( $M = 3.77$ ), relationship with head coach ( $M = 3.76$ ), and future career opportunities ( $M = 3.73$ ).

**Table 4***Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Categorical Study Variables*

Characteristic	<i>f</i>	%
First sport participation in current institution		
Baseball	31	12.00
Basketball	20	7.80
Cheer	11	4.30
Cross country	2	0.80
Dance	7	2.70
Esports	2	0.80
Football	61	23.60
Lacrosse	38	14.70
Soccer	29	11.20
Softball	18	7.00
Track and field	1	0.40
Volleyball	13	5.00
Wrestling	24	9.30
Second sport participation in current institution		
Basketball	1	0.40
Esports	1	0.40
Football	2	0.80
Lacrosse	1	0.40
Soccer	2	0.80
Track and field	8	3.10
Wrestling	2	0.80
Gender identity		
Male	165	64.00
Female	91	35.30
Nonbinary	1	0.40
Academic standing (year)		
1 <sup>st</sup>	99	38.40
2 <sup>nd</sup>	60	23.30

Characteristic	<i>f</i>	%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	58	22.50
4 <sup>th</sup>	32	12.40
≥5 <sup>th</sup>	8	3.10
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	150	58.10
African American	77	29.80
Other	31	12.00
Mother's education experience		
Did not finish high school	7	2.70
Graduated high school/general equivalency diploma	59	22.90
Some college	47	18.20
Associate's degree	28	10.90
Graduated college	51	19.80
Graduate degree	41	15.90
Postgrad degree	25	9.70
Father's education experience		
Did not finish high school	20	7.80
Graduated high school/general equivalency diploma	92	35.70
Some college	40	15.50
Associate's degree	19	7.40
Graduated college	44	17.10
Graduate degree	30	11.60
Postgrad degree	11	4.30

## RQ1

RQ1 was as follows: How is parental sport influence as a child related to the factors concerning university choice for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC? *H1<sub>a</sub>* states that parental sport influence as a child is related to one or more of the factors of university choice. Pearson's correlations were computed to evaluate the strength and direction of the relationships between parental sports influence during childhood and the university choice factor categories.

Table 5 was employed to determine which of the variables from among parents' influence on childhood sports participation and the 29 university choice factors were important to student-athletes.

**Table 5***Descriptive Statistics of Continuous Study Variables*

Variable	n	M	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Athletics category	254	3.33	1.03	-0.27	0.15	-0.59	0.30
Tradition of athletics	258	3.38	1.24	-0.34	0.15	-0.76	0.30
Athletic facilities	255	3.59	1.21	-0.44	0.15	-0.70	0.30
Equipment and apparel	257	3.45	1.24	-0.31	0.15	-0.88	0.30
Athletic event attendance	258	3.14	1.26	0.00	0.15	-0.94	0.30
Win/loss record	258	3.15	1.30	-0.07	0.15	-1.05	0.30
Academics category	251	3.64	1.17	-0.63	0.15	-0.53	0.31
Future career opportunities	258	3.73	1.26	-0.66	0.15	-0.55	0.30
Preferred major/minor	257	3.80	1.28	-0.72	0.15	-0.58	0.30
Academic value	255	3.59	1.24	-0.51	0.15	-0.69	0.30
Academic reputation	255	3.48	1.28	-0.40	0.15	-0.86	0.30
Reputation of major	258	3.47	1.27	-0.36	0.15	-0.83	0.30
Communication tactics category	253	3.30	1.02	-0.34	0.15	-0.56	0.31
Telephone calls	258	3.14	1.17	-0.13	0.15	-0.75	0.30
Text messages	257	3.31	1.16	-0.23	0.15	-0.70	0.30
Campus recruiting visit	256	3.46	1.27	-0.42	0.15	-0.78	0.30
Letters/emails from coaches	258	3.31	1.26	-0.22	0.15	-0.90	0.30
Visit from coaches	256	3.33	1.36	-0.33	0.15	-1.04	0.30
Coaching category	252	3.77	1.15	-0.69	0.15	-0.50	0.31
Ability to develop players	258	3.77	1.25	-0.67	0.15	-0.57	0.30
Reputation of head coach	257	3.85	1.27	-0.83	0.15	-0.34	0.30
Head coach's personality	257	3.70	1.25	-0.51	0.15	-0.77	0.30
Relationship with head coach	255	3.76	1.31	-0.68	0.15	-0.66	0.30
Head coach style of play	257	3.69	1.23	-0.51	0.15	-0.70	0.30
Significant persons category	223	3.07	1.04	-0.09	0.16	-0.50	0.32
Mother	256	3.71	1.38	-0.67	0.15	-0.74	0.30
Father	256	3.53	1.47	-0.52	0.15	-1.07	0.30
Siblings	254	3.11	1.49	-0.13	0.15	-1.32	0.30
High school coaches	257	2.66	1.31	0.29	0.15	-0.92	0.30
Other relatives	228	2.51	1.36	0.42	0.16	-0.91	0.32
Location category	256	3.20	1.11	-0.14	0.15	-0.78	0.30
Proximity to family	258	3.08	1.39	-0.04	0.15	-1.20	0.30
Location of university	257	3.16	1.26	-0.05	0.15	-0.91	0.30

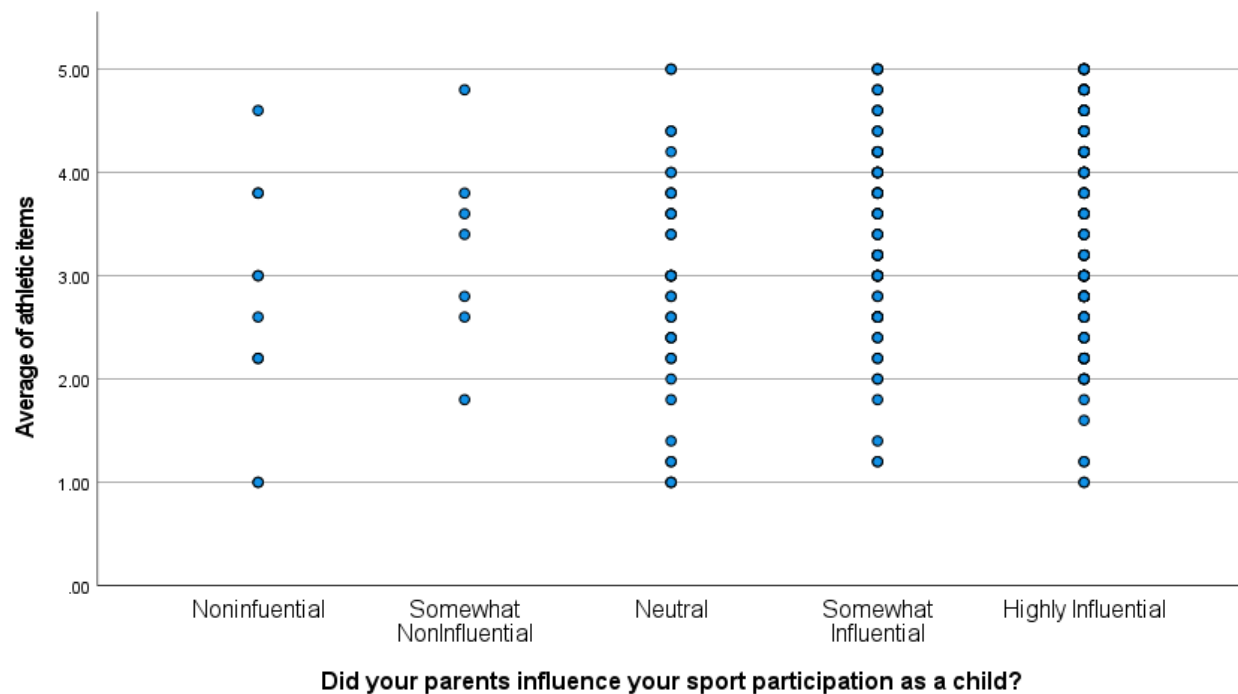
Variable	n	M	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Campus social life	257	3.34	1.28	-0.26	0.15	-0.96	0.30
Surrounding community	258	3.21	1.27	-0.21	0.15	-0.87	0.30
Parents category	255	3.62	1.30	-0.50	0.15	-0.84	0.30
Parents' childhood influence	258	4.19	1.05	-1.35	0.15	1.39	0.30

Note. Each variable ranged from 1 to 5. The parents category has the mother and father factors.

The ISARQ variables and parental influence on childhood sports variable were each measured with a Likert-type scale, and participants provided responses for all variables. The use of Pearson’s correlations relies on the assumption that the variables are linearly related. This assumption was tested using scatterplots (Figures 2–8) of the relationships between parental childhood sport influence and the factor categories of athletics, academics, communication tactics, coaching, location, significant persons, and parents (within the significant persons factor category).

**Figure 2**

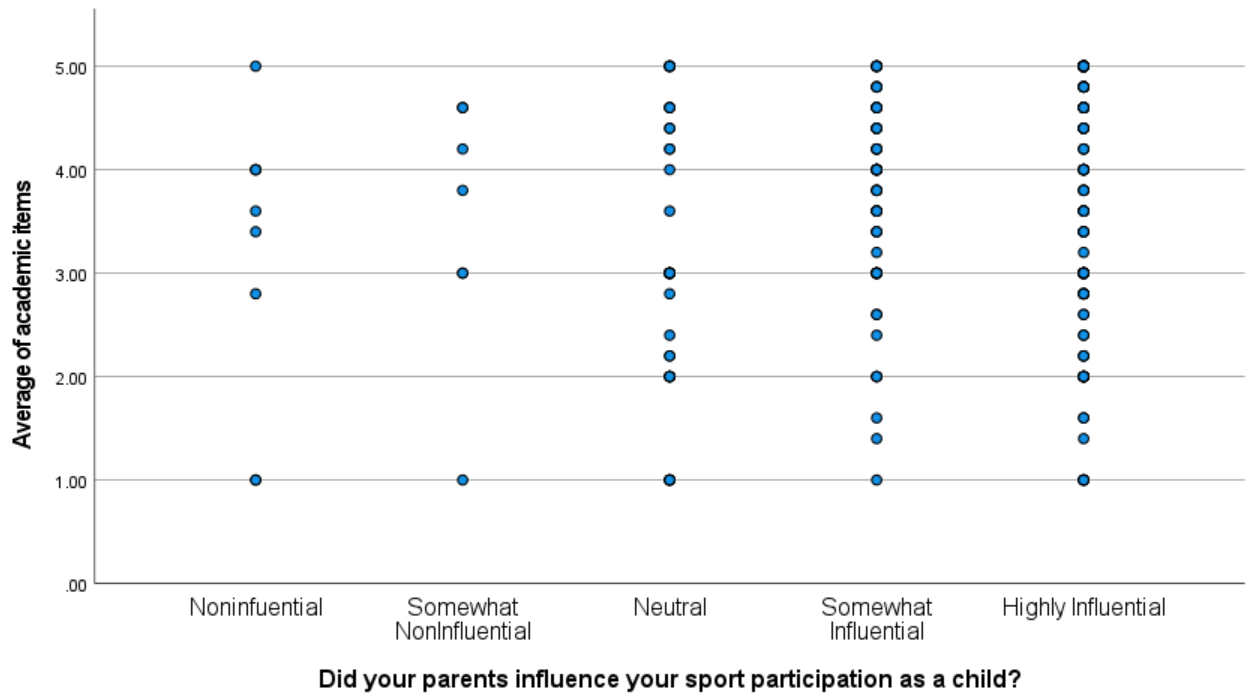
*Scatterplot for Athletics and Parental Childhood Sport Influence*





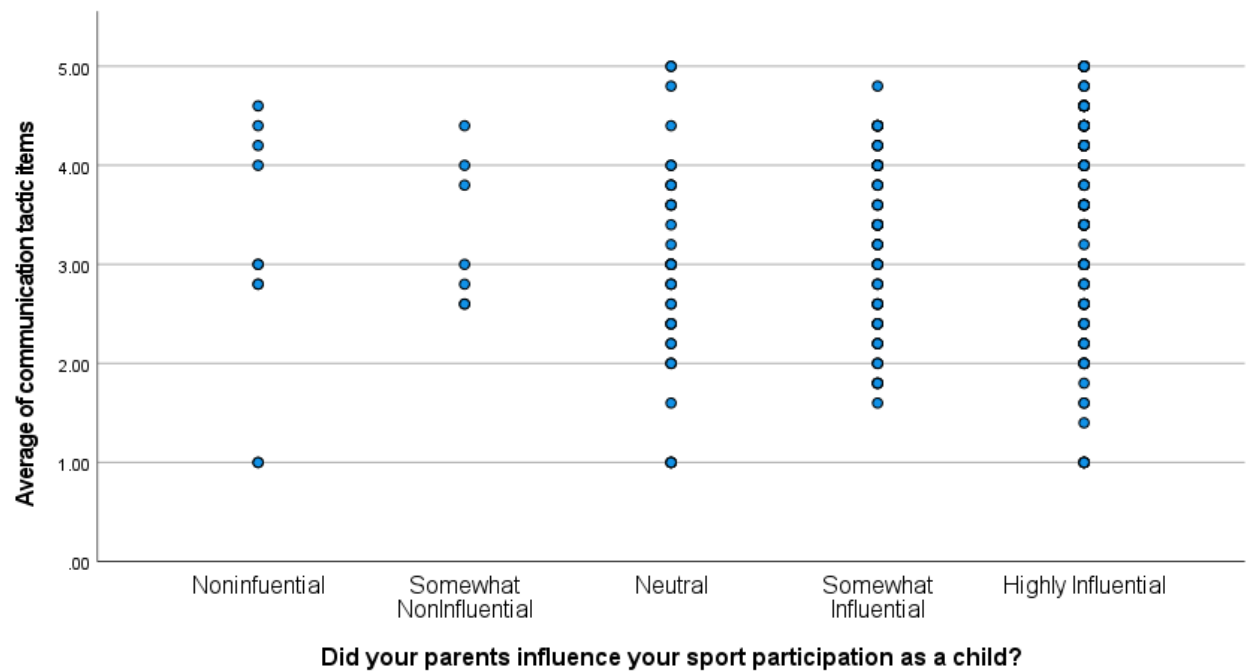
**Figure 3**

*Scatterplot for Academics and Parental Childhood Sport Influence*



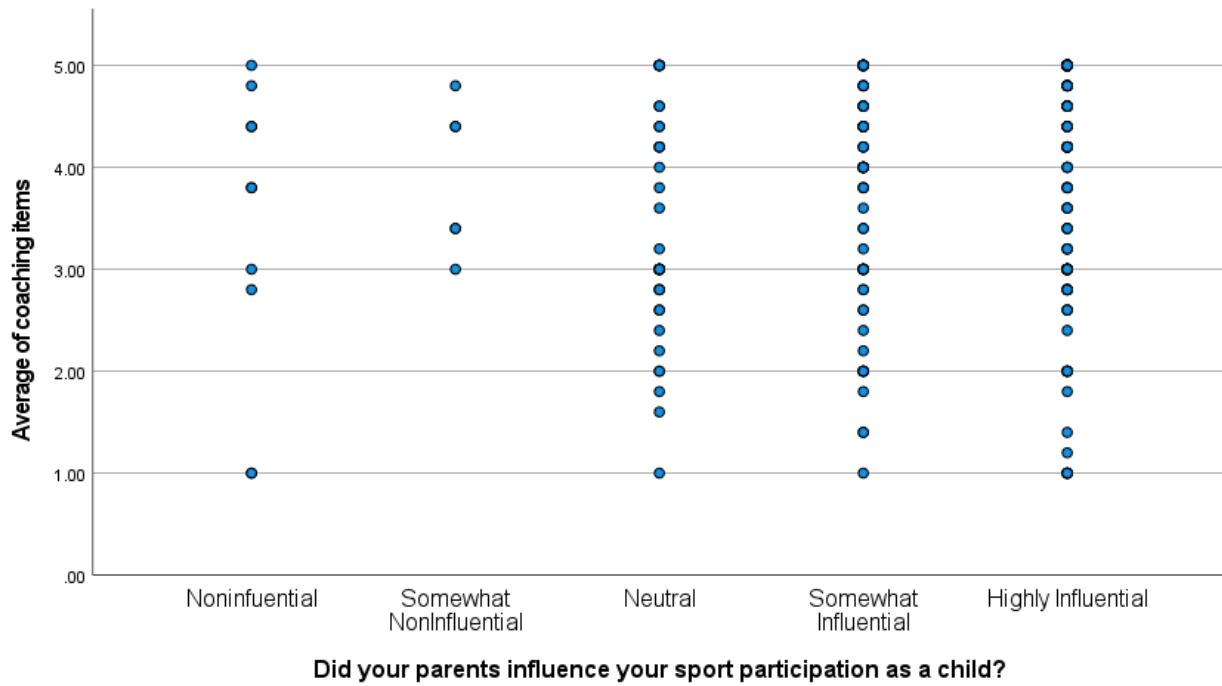
**Figure 4**

*Scatterplot for Communication Tactics and Parental Childhood Sport Influence*



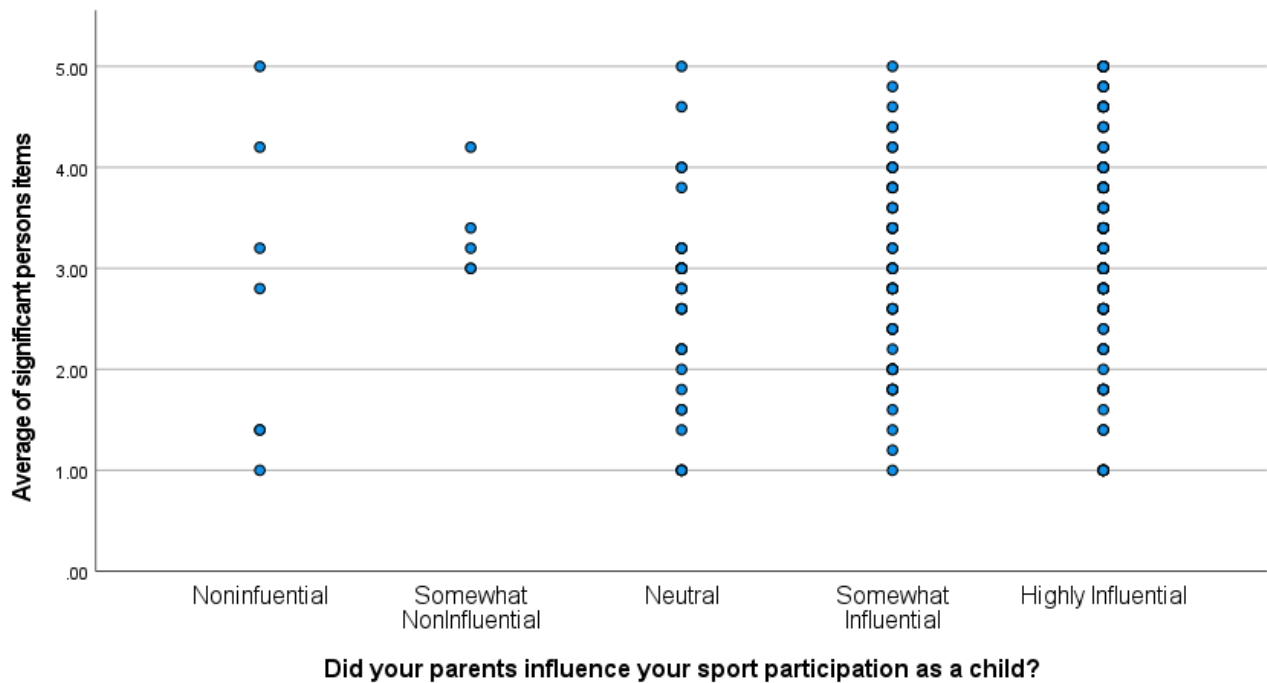
**Figure 5**

*Scatterplot for Coaching and Parental Childhood Sport Influence*



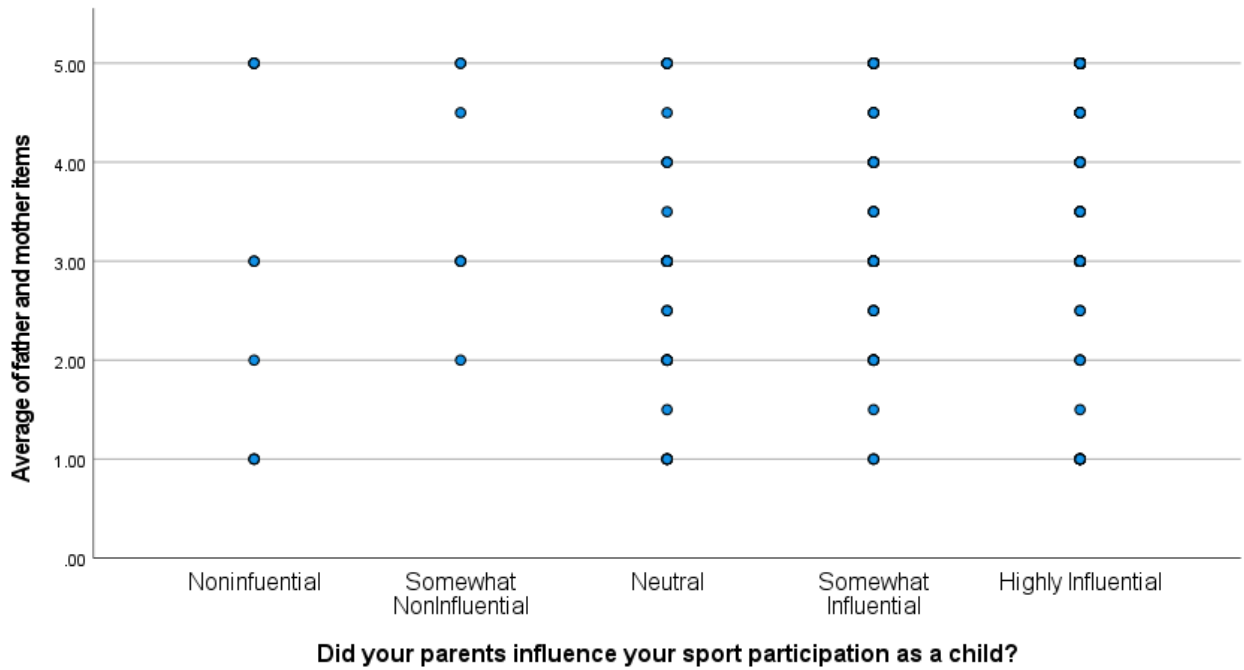
**Figure 6**

*Scatterplot for Significant Persons and Parental Childhood Sport Influence*



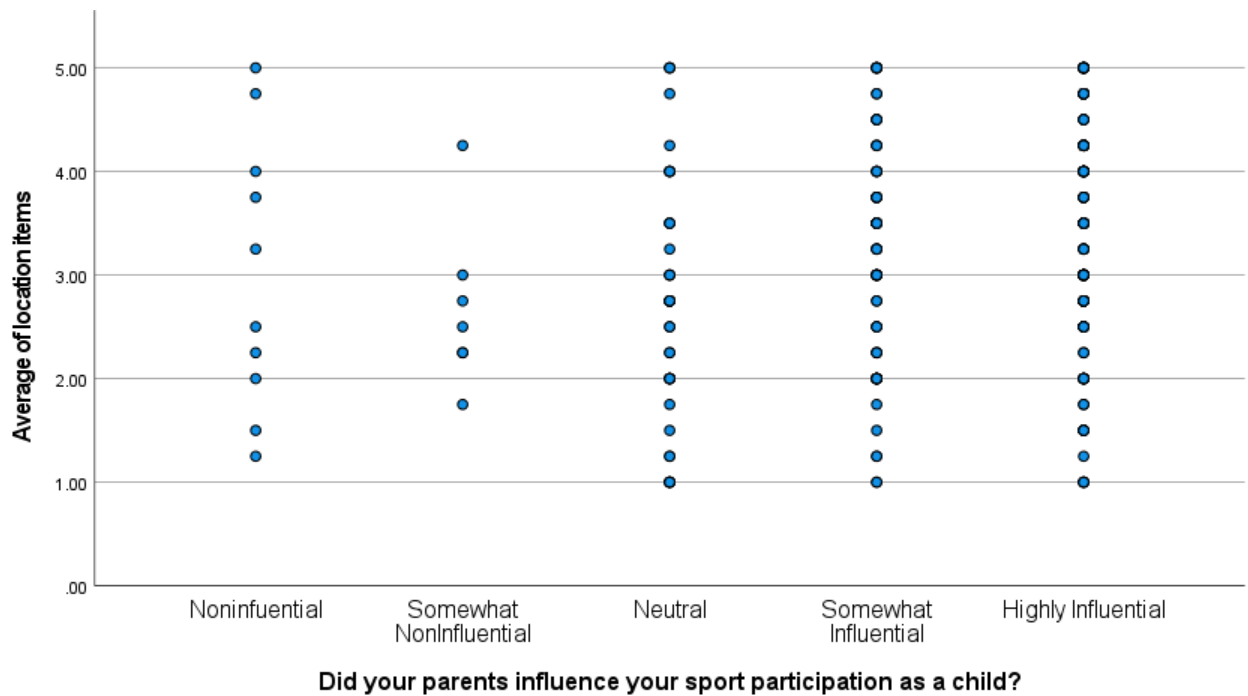
**Figure 7**

*Scatterplot for Parents and Parental Childhood Sport Influence*



**Figure 8**

*Scatterplot for Location and Parental Childhood Sport Influence*



Shapiro-Wilk tests for bivariate normality of the variables were also conducted (see Table 6). No variables were normally distributed, indicated by the obtained  $p$ -values for the Shapiro-Wilk statistic being less than .05. The assumption of normally distributed variables was violated for all study variables. Although the assumption was violated, a negative skew was expected because all the ISARQ factors would be significant, and very few scores below the median would occur; the researcher chose to compute Pearson's correlations because this test tends to be robust to normality violations.

For most of the ISARQ university choice factors and all of the choice factor categories, there was a significant, linear, positive, and small–moderate relationship between each factor or category and parental influence on childhood sports (Table 7). These exceptions were letters/emails from coaches, ability to develop players, reputation of the head coach, high school coaches, other relatives, and relative proximity to family. Based on the Pearson's correlations, hypothesis  $H1_0$  was rejected, suggesting that parental influence on childhood sports is related to one or more university choice factors.

## **RQ2**

RQ2 was as follows: What is the relative importance of the coach as an influential factor for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?  $H2_a$  states that coaching factors are significantly related to other university choice factors. Pearson's correlations were computed to evaluate strength and direction of the relationships between the coaching factors and the remaining university choice factors.

**Table 6***Shapiro-Wilk Tests for Normality*

Variable	<i>W</i>	<i>p</i>
Athletics category	0.97	<.001
Tradition of athletics	0.90	<.001
Athletic facilities	0.88	<.001
Equipment and apparel	0.89	<.001
Athletic event attendance	0.91	<.001
Win/loss record	0.91	<.001
Academics category	0.91	<.001
Future career opportunities	0.84	<.001
Preferred major/minor	0.81	<.001
Academic value	0.87	<.001
Academic reputation	0.88	<.001
Reputation of major	0.87	<.001
Communication tactics category	0.97	<.001
Telephone calls	0.91	<.001
Text messages	0.91	<.001
Campus recruiting visit	0.88	<.001
Letters/emails from coaches	0.90	<.001
Visit from coaches	0.88	<.001
Coaching category	0.89	<.001
Ability to develop players	0.84	<.001
Reputation of head coach	0.80	<.001
Head coach's personality	0.84	<.001
Relationship with head coach	0.82	<.001
Head coach style of play	0.85	<.001
Significant persons category	0.98	.001
Mother	0.80	<.001
Father	0.82	<.001
Siblings	0.85	<.001
High school coaches	0.89	<.001
Other relatives	0.85	<.001
Location category	0.96	<.001
Proximity to family	0.88	<.001
Location of university	0.90	<.001
Campus social life	0.90	<.001
Surrounding community	0.90	<.001
Parents category	0.86	<.001
Parents' influence on childhood sport participation	0.74	<.001

*Note.* For every variable,  $df = 205$ . The parents category consists of the mother and father factors.

**Table 7***Correlations for Research Question 1*

Variable	<i>R</i>
Parents' influence on childhood sport participation	—
Athletics category	.20**
Tradition of athletics	.18**
Athletic facilities	.17**
Equipment and apparel	.19**
Athletic event attendance	.16**
Win/loss record	.14*
Academics category	.17**
Future career opportunities	.13*
Preferred major/minor	.15*
Academic value	.14*
Academic reputation	.18**
Reputation of major	.21**
Communication tactics category	.17**
Telephone calls	.16*
Text messages	.15*
Campus recruiting visit	.15*
Letters/emails from coaches	.08
Visit from coaches	.13*
Coaching category	.15*
Ability to develop players	.12
Reputation of head coach	.09
Head coach's personality	.14*
Relationship with head coach	.16*
Head coach style of play	.15*
Significant persons category	.19**
Mother	.17**
Father	.24**
Siblings	.14*
High school coaches	.02
Other relatives	-.05
Location category	.18**
Proximity to family	.07
Location of university	.18**
Campus social life	.18**
Surrounding community	.17**
Parents category	.23**

*Note.* The parents category consists of the mother and father factors.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

As discussed in connection with RQ1, the results of Shapiro-Wilk tests for bivariate normality (Table 6) indicated no variable was normally distributed; the researcher chose to compute the Pearson's correlations regardless because this test tends to be robust to normality violations.

The Pearson's correlations indicated that there was a significant, linear, positive, and moderate–strong relationship between each of the coaching factors and each of the other ISARQ factors (Table 8). These results indicate that as coaching influence increased, so did each of the ISARQ factors. Based on the Pearson's correlations, hypothesis  $H2_0$  was rejected, suggesting that coach ISARQ factors are significantly related to the other ISARQ factors.

### **RQ3**

RQ3 was as follows: How does gender identity change the relative importance of university choice factors for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC? The researcher examined whether choice factor category scores differed based on gender identity. The original plan was to compare male, female, and nonbinary gender identities; however, insufficient student-athletes identified as nonbinary to permit this comparison; the researcher therefore compared the male and female gender identities.  $H3_a$  states that the relative importance of university choice factors depends on gender identity. Independent samples  $t$  tests were used to identify significant differences between the means of the two groups. The assumption of normality is key to  $t$  tests, but  $t$  tests are rather robust against minor violations of this assumption. Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality (Table 9) were conducted to evaluate normality. The test indicated that scores were not normally distributed for either male or female gender identity (except the significant persons category for female identity), indicating that this assumption was not met for most categories.

**Table 8***Correlations for Research Question 2*

Variable	Coaching variable					
	Coaching	Ability to	Head coach	Head	Relationship	Head
		develop	reputation	coach	with head	coach style
		players		personality	coach	of play
Athletics category	.76	.71	.67	.72	.69	.73
Tradition of athletics	.69	.66	.62	.64	.62	.67
Athletic facilities	.76	.71	.72	.70	.72	.69
Equipment and apparel	.65	.61	.61	.62	.58	.59
Athletic event attendance	.48	.45	.41	.45	.44	.50
Win/loss record	.57	.53	.49	.57	.51	.56
Academics category	.80	.77	.75	.75	.72	.72
Future career opportunities	.76	.75	.71	.68	.68	.67
Preferred major/minor	.77	.74	.72	.71	.70	.70
Academic value	.76	.73	.70	.72	.67	.71
Academic reputation	.72	.68	.66	.70	.64	.66
Reputation of major	.72	.68	.68	.66	.66	.64
Communication tactics category	.83	.80	.77	.76	.78	.74
Telephone calls	.56	.56	.54	.48	.50	.53
Text messages	.63	.62	.62	.56	.56	.59
Campus recruiting visit	.77	.74	.69	.68	.76	.71
Letters/emails from coaches	.67	.64	.64	.63	.65	.55
Visit from coaches	.72	.68	.64	.70	.68	.61
Significant persons category	.57	.54	.46	.51	.57	.55
Mother	.62	.60	.54	.57	.60	.59
Father	.49	.47	.42	.45	.49	.47
Siblings	.46	.44	.36	.44	.45	.44
High school coaches	.27	.31	.20	.25	.29	.25
Other relatives	.28	.28	.28	.22	.32	.25
Location category	.70	.65	.65	.65	.65	.68
Proximity to family	.50	.48	.44	.45	.47	.49
Location of university	.57	.52	.52	.54	.52	.54
Campus social life	.69	.62	.65	.64	.64	.66
Surrounding community	.66	.61	.61	.61	.61	.63
Parents category	.60	.57	.52	.55	.60	.57

*Note.* For every correlation,  $p < .01$ . The parents category consists of the mother and father factors.



**Table 9***Shapiro-Wilk Normality Tests for Comparison of Means With Independent Samples*

Category and gender	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>
Athletics		
Male	0.97	.004
Female	0.94	.002
Academics		
Male	0.94	<.001
Female	0.84	<.001
Communication tactics		
Male	0.97	.003
Female	0.96	.013
Coaching		
Male	0.92	<.001
Female	0.82	<.001
Significant persons		
Male	0.97	.003
Female	0.98	.388
Parents		
Male	0.85	<.001
Female	0.87	<.001
Location		
Male	0.97	.004
Female	0.95	.003

*Note.* For those identifying as male,  $df = 129$ . For those identifying as female,  $df = 76$ .

Levene's test for equality of variances was used to determine whether variances were equal between the two groups. There were no violations in any of the outcomes: athletics,  $F(1, 250) = 1.00, p = .319$ ; academics,  $F(1, 249) = 0.25, p = .616$ ; communication tactics,  $F(1, 249) = 2.89, p = .091$ ; coaching,  $F(1, 248) = 0.01, p = .945$ ; significant persons,

$F(1, 219) = 3.74$ ;  $p = .055$ ; parents,  $F(1, 251) = 1.72$ ,  $p = .192$ ; and location,  $F(1, 253) = 0.91$ ,  $p = .763$ .

Interpretation of the results of the independent samples  $t$  tests (Table 10 and Figure 9) indicated that there were significant differences between those identifying as male and those identifying as female for the categories of academics, communication tactics, coaching, and location. The student-athletes identifying as female found that the categories of academics, communication tactics, coaching, and location more significant than their male counterparts as seen in Figure 9. The interpretation indicated there were no significant differences for the categories of athletics, significant persons, and parents. Results of the independent samples  $t$  tests led to rejection of hypothesis  $H3_0$ , suggesting that the relative importance of university choice factors significantly depends on gender identity.

**Table 40**

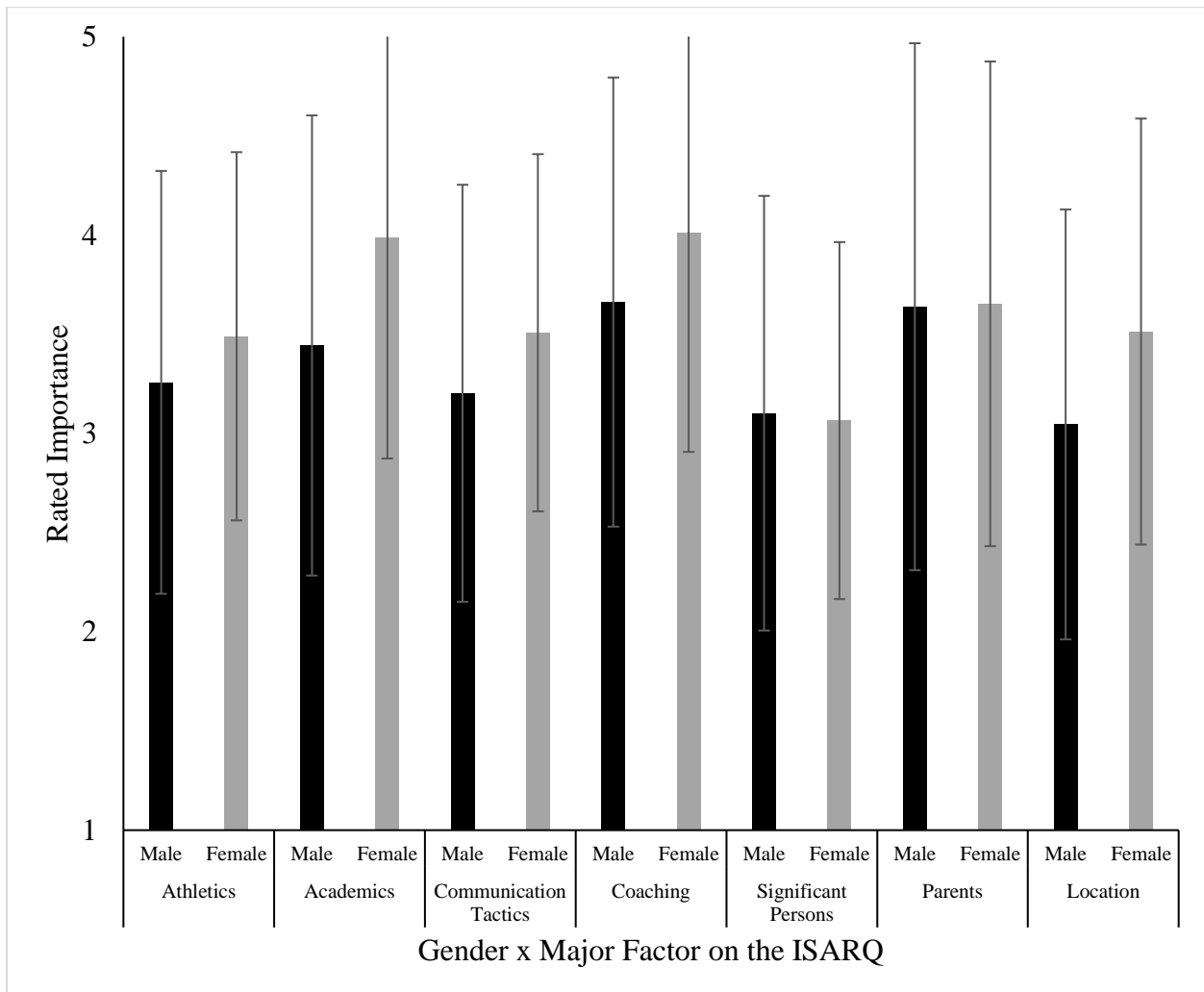
*Comparison of Choice Factor Category Means With Independent Samples*

Category	$t$	$df$	$p$	$SE$	95% CI		$d$
					$LL$	$UL$	
Academics	-3.62	249	<.001	0.15	-0.84	-0.25	-0.48
Athletics	-1.73	250	.090	0.13	-0.50	0.03	-0.23
Coaching	-2.37	248	.020	0.15	-0.64	-0.06	-0.31
Communication tactics	-2.33	249	.020	0.13	-0.56	-0.05	-0.31
Location	-3.31	253	.001	0.14	-0.75	-0.19	-0.43
Parents	-0.09	251	.930	0.17	-0.35	0.32	-0.01
Significant persons	0.26	219	.800	0.14	-0.25	0.32	0.04

*Note.* CI = confidence interval;  $LL$  = lower limit;  $UL$  = upper limit.

**Figure 9**

*Gender Identity Differences for Choice Factor Categories*



*Note.* ISARQ = Interscholastic Student-athlete Recruiting Questionnaire.

**Summary**

In summary, results for RQ1 indicated that parental influence was significantly positively associated with every ISARQ factor except for letters/emails from coaches, ability to develop players, reputation of the head coach, high school coaches, other relatives, and relative proximity to family. Results for RQ2 indicated that coaching factors were significantly positively associated with each of the other ISARQ factors. And results for RQ3 indicated that the relative

importance of some university choice factors depended on gender identity. Discussion of these finding is provided in Chapter V.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to create a recruiting profile for male, female, and nonbinary student-athletes; identify whether there were correlations connecting parental sports influence and coaching with the ISARQ factors that influence student-athlete university choice; and examine differences in ISARQ factor categories based on gender identity. The results indicated that parental influence on childhood sport participation was positively associated with most of the factors that influence university choice, that coaching was positively associated with each of the ISARQ factors, and that there were significant differences in the academics, communication tactics, coaching, and location categories between student-athletes identifying as male and those identifying as female. There were insufficient student-athletes identifying as nonbinary in the sample to assess differences for this group.

Data collection included electronic administration of the ISARQ (Appendix A), designed by Nixon et al. (2021). The ISARQ was offered to all student-athletes whose coaches chose to participate. All sports were represented except for golf, tennis, and equestrian. A total of 258 student-athletes participated.

Nixon et al. (2021) developed the ISARQ to study factors influencing the college selections of football players in Divisions I–III. The ISARQ contains 40 questions: one question seeking consent to participate, 10 multiple-choice demographic questions, and 29 questions that use a 5-point Likert scale. Items directly related to the specific college studied by Nixon et al. (scholarships awarded and religious affiliation) were excluded for this study, and parental sports influence was included for this study. The researcher added three items to the ISARQ to meet the needs of this study by ascertaining whether high school coach, campus social life, and

surrounding community had a significant influence on the university choice of a responding student-athlete.

Three theoretical frameworks guided this study: family systems theory, person-environment fit theory, and relationship marketing theory. Family systems theory has found use as a way to explain how a family system communicates and interacts with external entities (Rothbaum et al., 2002) and how a Division III student-athlete's family unit affects the student-athlete's university choice process (Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). Person-environment fit theory has found use as a way to explain how factors pertaining to a university, team, and coach influence a student-athlete (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Relationship marketing theory has found use as a way to characterize the coach relationship during the recruiting process and the correlation of coaching with all other ISARQ factors (Abeza et al., 2020; Ballantyne et al., 2003).

### **Summary of the Study**

The results of this study will allow those in athletics departments to focus more efficiently on recruitment strategies to obtain student-athlete commitments, allowing Division III universities—Averett University in particular—to increase student enrollment.

Three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How is parental sport influence as a child related to the factors concerning university choice for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

RQ2: What is the relative importance of the coach as an influential factor for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

RQ3: How does gender identity change the relative importance of university choice factors for Division III student-athletes in the ODAC?

RQ1 and RQ2 were answered using Person's correlations along with associated Shapiro-Wilk tests to determine normality, and evaluation of scatterplots indicated that the necessary assumptions were met and that the variables were linearly related.

RQ3 was answered using independent samples *t* tests along with associated Shapiro-Wilk tests to evaluate normality and Levene's tests to determine equality of variances.

### **Summary of Findings and Conclusions**

#### ***RQ1***

Results of this study indicated parental influence on childhood sports was positively associated with most of the ISARQ factors. Although investigators have studied parental influence on sport participation during childhood (Baxter-Jones & Muffulli, 2003; Birchwood, 2008; Carlson, 1988; Dixon et al., 2008; Strandbu et al., 2020; Wheeler, 2008) and family influence on university choice factors (Rothbaum et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2007; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015), the researcher could not find any research comparing the two.

#### ***RQ2***

Results of this study indicated that coaching influence is positively associated with all the other ISARQ factors. Coaching ( $M = 3.77$ ) was the ISARQ category with the highest mean. Reputation of the coach ( $M = 3.85$ ) was the factor with the highest mean, followed by ability to develop players ( $M = 3.77$ ), relationship with the head coach ( $M = 3.76$ ), head coach's personality ( $M = 3.70$ ), and head coach style of play ( $M = 3.69$ ); all the coaching factors were among the eight ISARQ factors with the highest means. Several researchers have found that coaching significantly influences university choice (Johnson et al., 2009; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline, 2010; Zvosec et al., 2020).

***RQ3***

This study's results indicated significant differences in some university choice factors between student-athletes identifying as male and those identifying as female. The categories with significant differences were academics (female  $M = 3.99$ , male  $M = 3.44$ ), communication tactics (female  $M = 3.51$ , male  $M = 3.20$ ), coaching (female  $M = 4.01$ , male  $M = 3.66$ ), and location (female  $M = 3.51$ , male  $M = 3.05$ ). The results of this study differed from those reported by Andrew et al. (2016) and Doyle and Gaeth (1990), who found no significant differences based on gender identity; however, the results of this study were similar to those of Letawsky et al. (2003), who found subtle differences in university choice factors based on gender identity. Like the findings of Letawsky et al. (2005), Mathes and Gurney (1985), and Pauline (2010), the findings of this study indicated that the top two categories for male student-athletes were coaching and academics. The findings were also similar to those of Andrew et al. (2016), Doyle and Gaeth (1990), and Letawsky et al. (2005) in that the top two categories influencing female student-athletes were coaching and academics. University location was more important to female student-athletes than to male student-athletes, a finding similar to that reported by Reynaud (1998).

***Factors Influencing University Choice***

Several researchers have focused on understanding the factors influencing a student-athlete's university choice (Chard & Potwarka, 2017). Researchers have conducted studies in many different contexts ranging over a variety of athletic divisions, school sizes, and sports (Covell et al., 2013; Goss et al., 2006; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline, 2010; Reynaud, 1998; Vermillion & Spears, 2012; Zvosec et al., 2021). This study took place at Averett University, a



small private faith-based university with fewer than 1,500 students. Averett University participated in Division III sports in the ODAC.

Although no single university choice factor has emerged as the most important in every circumstance, major themes have surfaced throughout all investigations (Chard & Potwarka, 2017). Some of these major themes are academics, athletics, school reputation, financial aid, coaches' athletic influence, and ability to recruit (Goss et al., 2006; Magnusen et al., 2011; Popp et al., 2011; Vermillion & Spears, 2012). The major themes, or factor categories, for this study were athletics, academics, communication tactics, coaching, significant persons, and location.

**Athletics.** The influence of athletics on student-athletes has been a significant theme across many studies (Goss et al., 2006; Magnusen et al., 2011; Popp et al., 2011; Vermillion & Spears, 2012). In this study, athletics ranked fourth in importance ( $M = 3.33$ ), comparable to its ranking in third place in Nixon's (2020) study ( $M = 3.01$ ) and fourth place in Pauline et al.'s (2008) study ( $M = 3.12$ ) but higher than its ranking in fifth place in Nixon et al.'s (2021) study ( $M = 2.65$ ). Although overall the category of athletics ranked fourth in importance, athletics facilities ranked as the ninth most influential choice factor for student-athletes ( $M = 3.59$ ), comparable to the mean rating of 3.5 for facilities reported by Schneider and Messenger (2012) and the mean rating of 3.75 reported by Gionta (2022) but more influential than the rating in Nixon et al.'s study ( $M = 2.80$ ).

**Academics.** Academics has consistently ranked as one of the top two factor categories influencing student-athletes across all research studies (Goss et al., 2006; Pauline, 2010). In this study, the category ranked second in importance ( $M = 3.64$ ). This finding was similar to those reported for past studies in which academics was one of the top two categories influencing university choice among student-athletes (Goss et al., 2006; Pauline, 2010). Nixon et al. (2021),

Pauline et al. (2008), and Nixon (2020) all ranked academics first in importance with mean ratings of 2.98, 3.98, and 3.34, respectively. The two most important academic factors in this study were preferred major/minor ( $M = 3.80$ ) and future career opportunities ( $M = 3.73$ ). The findings of this study were also comparable to those of past studies with regard to preferred major/minor and future career opportunities influencing university choice among student-athletes. Pauline et al. (2008) ranked academic major/minor ranked first in importance ( $M = 4.42$ ); Gionta (2022) ranked it second ( $M = 4.86$ ); and Letawsky et al. (2003) ranked it first ( $M = 3.98$ ). Although not ranking academic major/minor among the top two factors, Vermillion (2012) and Nixon et al. ranked it among the top six factors, with means of 4.25 and 2.95, respectively. Researchers have also found career opportunities to be a significant influence of university choice among student-athletes: Nixon et al. reported career opportunities as the most important factor ( $M = 3.10$ ), and Vermillion reported it as ninth most important ( $M = 4.20$ ).

**Communication Tactics.** Communication with student-athletes is an essential part of the recruiting process (Litten, 1982). The researcher examined five communication tactics a coach could use to communicate with student-athletes. Although none of the five factors ranked among the top 10 factors influencing university choice among student-athletes, the campus recruiting visit ( $M = 3.46$ ) was the most important of these factors. Although the findings differed from those of Nixon et al. (2021), who found telephone calls to be the most important communication tactic, Vermillion (2012) reported a comparable mean of 3.64 for the campus recruiting visit.

**Coaching.** The characteristics of coaches and their staff members have always been among the most significant factors influencing university choice among student-athletes (Johnson et al., 2009; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline, 2010; Zvosec et al., 2021). The findings of this study were similar to those of many past studies

(Johnson et al., 2009; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline, 2010; Zvosec et al., 2021). The researcher tested five different factors that made up the coaching category, which was the top category influencing university choice, a finding similar to that reported by other researchers (Johnson et al., 2009; Mathes & Gurney, 1985; Nixon, 2020; Nixon et al., 2021; Pauline, 2010; Zvosec et al., 2021) who found coaching to be important.

In this study, coaching was the most important category ( $M = 3.77$ ), and reputation of the head coach was the top-ranked factor influencing student-athletes ( $M = 3.85$ ). Other researchers have found the head coach to be among the three most important factors influencing student-athlete university choice: Pauline et al. (2008) ranked this factor third ( $M = 3.93$ ), Letawsky et al. (2003) ranked it second ( $M = 3.86$ ), and Nixon (2020) ranked it second ( $M = 3.15$ ). Vermillion (2012) ranked coaching staff as the most important factor ( $M = 4.68$ ).

**Significant Persons.** The recruiting process is competitive and requires coaches and recruiters to develop relationships with more than just student-athletes (Nixon et al., 2021). In this study, the category of significant persons was the least important ( $M = 3.07$ ), a ranking similar to that reported by Vermillion (2012), Nixon et al. (2021), and Nixon (2020), who reported means of 3.29, 2.71, and 2.82, respectively. However, the researcher found that a category consisting of just the factors relating to the mother and father ranked third in importance ( $M = 3.62$ ), just slightly behind academics ( $M = 3.64$ ), a finding similar to that of Vermillion, who reported a mean of 3.76, and Schaeperkoetter et al. (2015), who found that family was an important part of the decision-making process when choosing a university.

**Location.** The location of a university can affect different recruits in different ways (Andrew et al., 2016). The researcher examined four different factors relating to the category of location ( $M = 3.20$ ): proximity to family ( $M = 3.08$ ), location of the university ( $M = 3.16$ ),

campus social life ( $M = 3.34$ ), and surrounding community ( $M = 3.21$ ). Most researchers have studied the location of the university (Andrew et al., 2016; Gabert et al., 1999; Gionta, 2022; Nixon, 2020; Schneider & Messenger, 2012). Their results were all significant, but their findings differed from those of this study: Vermillion (2012) and Gionta (2022) reported means of 3.86 and 4.86, respectively, for location of the university, and found it a more important influence than the researcher found it to be in this study. Nixon et al. (2021) reported a mean of 2.68 and found location of the university to be a much less important influence than the researcher found it to be in this study. Pauline (2012), Nixon (2020), and Schneider and Messenger (2012) reported location of the university to be of an importance similar to that identified in this study, with means of 3.03, 2.94, and 3.37, respectively.

## **Implications**

### ***Recommendation for Practice***

The findings of this study imply that coaches, enrollment managers, and athletic administrators should give significant support to the university choice factors that influence student-athletes. The findings regarding parental influence suggest that influence by family members on sport participation in childhood positively affects the ISARQ factors, and coaches and recruiters can take advantage of these data by recruiting not only student-athletes but also their parents. A coach should create a relationship with each of their recruits, learning each individual's wants and needs to create a positive fit with the coach, team, and university. The findings suggest that the coach is an important influence on university choice factors and positively correlates to other factors on the ISARQ. Recruiters should also consider how influences depend on gender identity and focus their recruiting tactics accordingly. The findings of this study indicated significant differences in the influence of various factors based on gender

identity, and tailoring recruitment strategies to specific genders may lead to more student-athlete commitments.

By understanding the factors influencing student-athletes' decisions when choosing a university, policymakers and university administrators could develop strategies to attract and retain students. Specific strategies for each university should be highlighted to emphasize current strengths, while also capitalizing on broader research to improve weaknesses. This approach would enable policymakers and administrators to make informed decisions that align with their current objectives and mission, ensuring that the policies implemented enhance the university's appeal and gain a competitive edge in attracting student-athletes

### *Specific Implications*

This study was designed to be used by Averett University's athletic department and individual sports coaches to help them focus their recruiting strategies. The creation of a student-athlete recruiting profile (Appendix D) will allow coaches and recruiting managers to analyze the separate mean scores for the entire study sample, each gender, and each participating team. The data will allow coaches and recruiting managers to streamline their recruiting tactics to gain more official student commitments to improve overall student enrollment.

The study can also provide valuable insights into the factors that influence student athletes' university choices. This knowledge would benefit not only Averett University but also other institutions in the ODAC, enabling them to better understand and cater to the preferences of student-athletes. By doing so, these institutions can gain a competitive advantage over other Division III (DIII) institutions and refine their recruitment and retention strategies. They can tailor their messaging, allocate resources effectively, and establish support systems that align with the identified choice factors. This approach will attract and retain student-athletes who are

more likely to excel academically and athletically at Averett University and within the Old Dominion Athletic Conference.

Averett University is conducting ongoing research on strategies to increase female student enrollment. The university has established a committee dedicated to this important objective, with a primary focus on female students that do not play sports. The committee could utilize the academic, communication tactics, significant persons, and location data obtained from this research study to effectively enhance their recruitment efforts.

In addition to academic considerations, the study highlights the significance of location in shaping female students' university choice with campus social life, emerging as the most influential factor in this category. This finding provides valuable insights for Averett University recruiters, enabling them to customize their recruitment visits and align them with the preferences and needs of female students.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study relied on the ISARQ, designed by Nixon et al. (2021) to examine Division I–III football players. Although this study did yield 258 surveys, they were all from the same school in the ODAC. A recommendation for future study is to conduct the same investigation of the entire ODAC—a more diverse study population—to better understand the factors that influence university choice of student-athletes in the conference.

Future researchers could also examine the correlation between family influence on childhood sport participation and family influence on university choice factors for student-athletes at Division I, Division II, and other Division III universities.

Researchers should further investigate gender at all Division I–III institutions to examine whether other factors influence male and female student-athletes.

**Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study was that all the student-athletes studied came from one university. Another limitation was that the study occurred at the end of the school year, and student-athletes who participated in fall and winter sports and were not returning for the next school year were no longer in team meetings or practices. Coaches also acted as a limitation: If a coach did not set up a time for the researcher to meet with their teams, those teams were excluded from the study (tennis, golf, and equestrian were not represented for this reason). A suggestion for overcoming some of the limitations of this study is to enhance the breadth of the study by accessing a greater number of athletics departments in a variety of schools, which would yield a more comprehensive and diverse research endeavor. Moreover, conducting the study during the latter part of the fall semester could facilitate the inclusion of more student-athletes during practices and meetings because sports participation tends to peak at that time.

**Summary**

Demographic indicators suggest that the number of college-age individuals will drop 15% from 2025 to 2029 (Copley & Douthett, 2020). For a Division III private university with only two sources of revenue—fees paid by students and donations from gracious benefactors, alumni, and friends/foundations—enhancing student enrollment is a high priority. Many Division III schools, such as Averett University, have used athletics to increase student enrollment (T. Franks, personal communication, November 14, 2022). Averett University has continued to add sports to increase student enrollment, emphasizing the importance of recruiting student-athletes.

This study provides athletic administrators, coaches, and college recruiters at Division III institutions and Averett University with a recruiting profile for male and female student-athletes, providing new insights into university choice factors. The study also involved breaking down the

data by sport to provide individual sports teams at Averett University information about the university choice factors that influenced their athletes. The study is a significant contribution to the research on university choice factors and will strengthen recruiting processes and tactics.

This study also increases understanding of how family sport culture affects university choice factors, and the findings suggest that parental influence on sports participation as a child is associated with factors that influence college choice. Based on these data, coaches and recruiters must include parents in the recruiting process and create relationships with them. Parental influence was not only a highly ranked factor but also positively associated with all the other factors of university choice.

The two most influential factor categories for both male and female student-athletes were academics and coaching, a finding similar to that reported for other studies. However, the rankings of the lower ranked categories differed based on gender identity, indicating a need for coaches and recruiters to recruit differently based on gender identity because the lower ranking factors might make the difference when trying to gain a commitment.

The researcher also found that the coach was the highest ranked factor category, and the coaching factors were positively associated with all the other factors, which means that coaches are an integral part of the recruiting process and key to increasing enrollment. A coach must be creative, be attentive, use good communication tactics, and use political and social skills to create relationships with student-athletes and their parents to create a positive fit to gain commitments for the team and increase student enrollment.



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**Appendix A**

**ISARQ**

	Not Important				Very Important
<b>Athletics</b>					
Tradition of Athletic	1	2	3	4	5
Athletic Facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Equipment and Apparel	1	2	3	4	5
Athletic Event Attendance	1	2	3	4	5
Win/Loss Record	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Academics</b>					
Future Career Opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Preferred Major/Minor	1	2	3	4	5
Academic Value	1	2	3	4	5
Academic Reputation	1	2	3	4	5
Reputation of Major	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Communication Tactics</b>					
Telephone Calls	1	2	3	4	5
Text Messages	1	2	3	4	5
Campus Recruiting Visit	1	2	3	4	5
Letters from Coaches	1	2	3	4	5
Visit from Head Coach	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Coaching</b>					
Ability to Develop Players	1	2	3	4	5
Head Coach's Personality	1	2	3	4	5
Reputation of Head Coach	1	2	3	4	5
Relationship with H.C.	1	2	3	4	5
Head Coach Style of Play	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Significant Persons</b>					
Mother	1	2	3	4	5
Father	1	2	3	4	5
Siblings	1	2	3	4	5
High School Coach	1	2	3	4	5
Other Relatives	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Location</b>					
Proximity to Family	1	2	3	4	5
Location of University	1	2	3	4	5
Campus and Social Life	1	2	3	4	5
Surrounding Community	1	2	3	4	5

## Demographics

1. Which sport(s) will you be competing in at your institution? (Select all that apply) Baseball, Basketball, Cheerleading, Cross-Country, Dance, Equestrian, Esports, Football, Golf, Lacrosse, Soccer, Softball, Tennis, Track and Field, Volleyball, Wrestling
2. Please indicate how you identify. Female, Male, Non-Binary, Wish not to say or no answer
3. Which of the following bests describe your academic standing? First Year, Second Year, Third Year, Fourth Year, Fifth year or more
4. How would you classify your ethnicity? African American, Caucasian, Other
5. Select the number of varsity sports you played in high school? Enter numbers.
6. How many different universities/colleges did you officially visit during the recruiting process?  
Enter numbers
7. How many different universities/colleges did you unofficially visit during the recruiting process? Enter numbers
8. Which of the following best describes the education experience of your mother? Did not finish high school, High School/GED, Some College, Associates Degree, Graduated College, Graduate Degree, Post-graduate Degree
9. Which of the following best describes the education experience of your father? Did not finish high school, High School/GED, Some College, Associates Degree, Graduated College, Graduate Degree, Post-graduate Degree
10. Did your parents influence your sport participation as a child? Highly Influence, Somewhat influential, Neutral, Somewhat non-influential, and Non-Influential

Adapted from “Student-athlete College Choice: Division I, II, and III Football Players,” by W. L. Nixon, Z. A. Mayo, & W. Koo, 2021, *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 14, p. 162. Copyright 2021 by College Sport Research Institute. Adapted with permission.

### **ISARQ Directions**

#### ISARQ Directions

Thank you for your participation in completing a profile identifying which factors were most important to you in determining which college or university you would attend. The information you provide will help coaches and enrollment managers at (university name) focus their recruiting efforts on the factors the student-athletes are most concerned with. You will be asked to rate 29 university choice factors and their level of importance using a five-point Likert scale and ten multiple-choice demographic questions. To help researchers understand what influenced your decision to attend (insert name) university. All your information will be anonymous and stored electronically, to which only the researcher has access. Consent will be garnered through the response to the first question on the survey, which states “I understand that by completing the survey I am providing consent to participate in the study.” If a student declines to participate the student will answer question one I decline to participate and submit the survey. At this time, please scan the QR code with your phone or electronic device; this will take you to the ISARQ. When using the five-point Likert scale, rank the factors from not important one to very important five. You will also have ten multiple-choice demographic questions; choose the best answer for each question. This survey should take 10-15 minutes, and I thank you again for your participation. By completing the profile, you understand the following:

1. Your participation in this project is voluntary.
2. Your responses will be kept confidential.
3. Your responses are being supplied as part of a research capstone designed to identify university choice factors for student-athletes in the DIII ODAC Conference Averett University.

**Appendix B****Emails for Coaches**

Dear Coaches

Good Afternoon, Coaches

Thank you for your participation in the research study on university choice factors. I am available to meet with your team at your convenience over the next two weeks. At the bottom is a Google sheet in the form of a calendar. Please sign up for a date and time that work with your schedule. Please include where you would like me to meet your team (ex., Team Name Room or Field). I can meet with multiple teams at once, but I would like to confirm with the coach that signed up first to make sure it is ok with them. I will have to let you know the best place to meet for multiple teams. I will follow up with a confirmation email and a reminder email the day before the meeting date. Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,

[Research Name]

**Confirmation Email**

[Researcher Name]

**Reminder Email**

Dear Coach,

Thank you for your participation; I confirm our meeting tomorrow (insert date and time). If this time no longer works, please let me know a better time, and I will reschedule.

Thank you,

[Researcher Name]

**Thank you email.**

Dear Coach,

Thank you for allowing me to administer the ISARQ to your team. It was a great help that you allowed me to take some time during a practice or team meeting to get the data from your team.

Thank you,

[Researcher Name]

## Appendix C

### Email Correspondence

On Feb 5, 2023, at 2:38 PM, Douglas Wohlstein <[dwohlstein@averett.edu](mailto:dwohlstein@averett.edu)> wrote:

Hi Dr. Nixon

I wanted to say thank you for your help with the ISARQ. I am still in the beginning stages for My capstone paper but your dissertation has been a valuable resource to me. While my research will be on a different subjects and my RQ are completely different. I have been somewhat following your format. I have used a lot of different resources along the way. I just wanted to make sure you were aware of the similarities of my set up. If there are any issues please let me know. I have given you credit when ever I use something of yours as your work is referenced a lot.

My very first paper was going to be a comparison of players and parents. I actually wrote it in my methods class before your dissertation was even published. I decided to not go that route for my capstone paper even though it was something I was interested in. I hope you are having a great semester so far.

Thanks

Doug Wohlstein  
Averett University  
Health and Sports Science  
Assistant Track &Field/ XC Coach  
Go Cougars

Doug,

I am flattered and honored to hear my dissertation is benefiting your research. Feel free to use as much as you would like. Would love to see the finish product. No problems or concerns on my part. Let me know if you need anything.

Thanks,

Billy

**From:** Douglas Wohlstein <[dwohlstein@Averett.edu](mailto:dwohlstein@Averett.edu)>  
**Sent:** Friday, March 10, 2023 8:40 AM  
**To:** Magnusen, Mar <[Marshall\\_Magnusen@baylor.edu](mailto:Marshall_Magnusen@baylor.edu)>  
**Subject:** Sports Influence Model Figure

Hi Dr, Magnusen

My Name is Doug Wohlstein and I am currently writing my dissertation and I am wanting to request permission to use a figure from one of your articles. The figure I am wanting to use is the Social Influence Model of the Recruiting Process in National Collegiate Athletic Association Sports in A Critical Review and Synthesis of Student-athlete College Choice Factors: Recruiting Effectiveness in NCAA Sports.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Doug Wohlstein

Hi Doug,

Yes, you may include the figure in your dissertation. Just note you are reprinting it from an existing article and cite it according to APA guidelines. Not a problem at all.

Cheers,

Mar

**Appendix D****ISARQ Recruiting Profile***ISARQ Factors Mean Scores for Male, Female, and Both Athletes: 1-5 Likert Scale*

Variable	Female	Male	Both
Athletics	3.48	3.27	3.30
Tradition of athletics	3.62	3.26	3.38
Athletic facilities	3.82	3.47	3.59
Equipment and apparel	3.67	3.33	3.45
Athletic event attendance	3.23	3.08	3.14
Win/loss record	3.09	3.19	3.15
Academics	3.96	3.43	3.60
Future career opportunities	4.02	3.58	3.73
Preferred major/minor	4.15	3.62	3.80
Academic value	4.00	3.37	3.59
Academic reputation	3.83	3.28	3.48
Reputation of major	3.77	3.31	3.47
Communication tactics	3.47	3.22	3.30
Telephone calls	3.18	3.13	3.14
Text messages	3.41	3.26	3.31
Campus recruiting visit	3.73	3.32	3.46
Letters from coaches	3.42	3.23	3.31
Visit from head coach	3.63	3.14	3.33
Coaching	3.98	3.63	3.30
Ability to develop players	4.01	3.64	3.77
Head coach's personality	4.11	3.71	3.85
Reputation of head coach	3.97	3.56	3.70
Relationship with head coach	3.93	3.67	3.76
Head coach style of play	3.88	3.59	3.69
Significant persons	3.08	3.13	3.10
Mother	3.76	3.69	3.71
Father	3.46	3.57	3.53
Siblings	3.16	3.10	3.11
High school coach	2.60	2.71	2.66
Other relatives	2.40	2.58	2.51
Location	3.49	3.05	3.20
Proximity to family	3.18	3.04	3.08
Location of university	3.47	3.00	3.16
Campus and social life	3.70	3.15	3.34
Surrounding community	3.60	2.99	3.21



**ISARQ Team Sport Recruiting Profile***ISARQ Factors mean scores for individual teams: 1-5 Likert Scale*

Variable	M Lacrosse	W Basketball	M Soccer
Athletics	2.96	3.31	3.07
Tradition of athletics	2.95	3.54	2.93
Athletic facilities	3.38	3.92	3.53
Equipment and apparel	3.12	3.46	3.33
Athletic event attendance	3.05	2.69	2.67
Win/loss record	2.32	2.92	2.87
Academics	3.56	3.98	2.79
Future career opportunities	3.52	4.00	3.00
Preferred major/minor	3.79	4.31	3.20
Academic value	3.56	4.00	2.50
Academic reputation	3.33	3.67	2.53
Reputation of major	3.58	3.92	2.60
Communication tactics	3.33	3.69	2.91
Telephone calls	3.42	3.54	3.13
Text messages	3.31	4.00	3.20
Campus recruiting visit	3.42	3.31	2.46
Letters from coaches	3.37	3.62	3.00
Visit from head coach	3.33	3.69	2.73
Coaching	3.66	4.08	3.59
Ability to develop players	3.74	4.31	3.00
Head coach's personality	4.00	4.15	4.00
Reputation of head coach	3.58	3.85	3.67
Relationship with head coach	3.74	4.00	3.53
Head coach style of play	3.26	4.08	3.73
Significant persons	3.17	3.01	2.35
Mother	3.84	3.92	3.07
Father	3.74	2.85	2.93
Siblings	2.79	2.77	2.27
High school coach	2.89	3.08	1.80
Other relatives	2.60	2.42	1.69
Location	3.14	3.44	2.70
Proximity to family	3.21	3.54	2.26
Location of university	2.84	3.15	2.87
Campus and social life	3.42	3.62	2.87
Surrounding community	3.11	3.46	2.80

**ISARQ Team Sport Recruiting Profile**

Variable	Wrestling	Baseball	Softball
Athletics	2.94	3.58	3.53
Tradition of athletics	3.04	3.57	3.78
Athletic facilities	3.04	4.03	4.06
Equipment and apparel	2.96	3.83	3.61
Athletic event attendance	2.69	3.00	3.06
Win/loss record	3.19	3.47	3.17
Academics	3.31	3.95	4.00
Future career opportunities	3.50	4.13	4.17
Preferred major/minor	3.57	4.00	4.06
Academic value	3.36	3.83	4.00
Academic reputation	3.19	3.87	4.00
Reputation of major	2.92	3.90	3.78
Communication tactics	3.17	3.54	3.59
Telephone calls	3.15	3.23	3.22
Text messages	3.20	3.70	3.39
Campus recruiting visit	3.27	3.93	4.11
Letters from coaches	3.27	3.33	3.33
Visit from head coach	2.96	3.50	3.89
Coaching	3.68	3.97	4.07
Ability to develop players	4.00	3.97	4.17
Head coach's personality	3.65	3.97	4.28
Reputation of head coach	3.62	3.80	4.06
Relationship with head coach	3.68	4.10	4.00
Head coach style of play	3.46	4.00	3.83
Significant persons	3.11	3.51	3.36
Mother	3.60	4.00	4.22
Father	3.48	4.07	4.17
Siblings	2.83	3.73	3.82
High school coach	2.96	3.07	2.33
Other relatives	2.68	2.85	2.24
Location	2.66	3.58	3.67
Proximity to family	2.84	3.70	3.28
Location of university	2.73	3.63	3.83
Campus and social life	2.57	3.43	3.89
Surrounding community	2.50	3.53	3.67

**ISARQ Team Sport Recruiting Profile**

Variable	Cheer/Dance	M Basketball	W Volleyball
Athletics	3.43	3.83	3.98
Tradition of athletics	3.50	3.75	4.17
Athletic facilities	3.39	4.43	4.09
Equipment and apparel	3.76	3.88	4.08
Athletic event attendance	3.67	3.63	4.00
Win/loss record	2.83	3.38	3.58
Academics	3.77	3.95	4.25
Future career opportunities	3.72	4.13	4.33
Preferred major/minor	3.94	4.13	4.42
Academic value	3.94	3.88	4.42
Academic reputation	3.67	3.75	4.08
Reputation of major	3.56	3.88	4.00
Communication tactics	3.03	3.88	3.62
Telephone calls	2.56	3.75	3.33
Text messages	3.06	4.13	3.421
Campus recruiting visit	3.06	4.00	3.83
Letters from coaches	3.22	3.75	3.67
Visit from head coach	3.28	3.75	3.83
Coaching	3.39	4.43	4.41
Ability to develop players	3.44	4.50	4.33
Head coach's personality	3.44	4.38	4.50
Reputation of head coach	3.39	4.50	4.38
Relationship with head coach	3.28	4.38	4.33
Head coach style of play	3.39	4.38	4.50
Significant persons	2.83	3.66	3.07
Mother	3.28	4.00	3.75
Father	3.67	3.88	3.67
Siblings	2.71	4.00	3.58
High school coach	2.39	3.13	2.08
Other relatives	2.11	3.29	2.27
Location	3.52	3.34	3.27
Proximity to family	3.44	3.38	2.92
Location of university	3.67	3.38	3.08
Campus and social life	3.59	3.63	3.50
Surrounding community	3.39	3.00	3.58

**ISARQ Team Sport Recruiting Profile**

Variable	W Lacrosse	W Soccer	Football
Athletics	3.60	3.10	3.25
Tradition of athletics	3.89	2.60	3.32
Athletic facilities	4.05	3.50	3.22
Equipment and apparel	3.89	3.20	3.13
Athletic event attendance	3.21	2.80	3.29
Win/loss record	2.95	3.40	3.32
Academics	4.06	3.86	3.25
Future career opportunities	4.21	3.90	3.38
Preferred major/minor	4.26	4.20	3.40
Academic value	4.05	3.70	3.21
Academic reputation	4.00	3.70	3.11
Reputation of major	3.79	3.80	3.14
Communication tactics	3.78	3.08	3.05
Telephone calls	3.53	2.80	2.86
Text messages	3.63	3.00	2.94
Campus recruiting visit	4.11	3.10	3.18
Letters from coaches	3.89	3.10	3.16
Visit from head coach	3.74	3.40	3.15
Coaching	4.35	3.66	3.34
Ability to develop players	4.42	3.40	3.33
Head coach's personality	4.42	4.00	3.35
Reputation of head coach	4.42	3.70	3.30
Relationship with head coach	4.32	3.70	3.36
Head coach style of play	4.16	3.50	3.35
Significant persons	3.41	2.66	3.03
Mother	3.79	3.60	3.58
Father	3.47	2.80	4.40
Siblings	3.58	2.30	3.03
High school coach	3.00	2.50	2.62
Other relatives	3.20	2.11	2.51
Location	3.49	3.48	2.95
Proximity to family	2.89	2.70	2.92
Location of university	3.26	3.60	2.76
Campus and social life	3.89	3.80	3.16
Surrounding community	3.89	3.80	2.97

**Appendix E****ISARQ Team Participation**

Sports	Team Participation	Athlete Participation with 2 <sup>nd</sup> team
<b>Men's Sports</b>		
Baseball	Participated	
Basketball	Participated	
Cheerleading/Dance	Participated	
Cross Country/Track and Field	Did not Participate	X
Equestrian	Did not Participate	
Esports	Did not Participate	X
Football	Participated	
Golf	Did not Participate	
Soccer	Participated	
Tennis	Did not Participate	
Wrestling	Participated	
<b>Women's Sports</b>		
Basketball	Participated	
Cheerleading/Dance	Participated	
Cross Country/Track and Field	Did not Participate	X
Equestrian	Did not Participate	
Esport	Did not Participate	X
Golf	Did not Participate	
Lacrosse	Participated	
Soccer	Participated	
Softball	Participated	
Tennis		
Volleyball	Participated	