

**Black Males in the College Classroom:
A Quantitative Analysis of Student Athlete-Faculty Interactions**

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Abstract

Few scholars have examined the social and academic environmental influence on college student-athletes. This study explored the relationship between Black male student-athletes and faculty and the impact of specific forms of student athlete-faculty interaction on academic achievement. Data are drawn from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's 2000 Freshman Survey and 2004 Follow-Up Survey. The sample includes 739 Black football and basketball players attending predominantly White institutions. The findings provided evidence that the impact of the contact is to some extent contingent upon the specific nature of the interaction for Black male student-athletes. For example, faculty who provided encouragement for graduate school had a significant influence on Black student-athletes' college GPA whereas all other faculty interaction measures were not significant in this study. The implications of these findings are discussed among faculty, student affairs leaders, and others who are committed to improving male Black male student athlete-faculty communication, as well as enrich their overall college experience.

Black Males in the College Classroom

The gap between intercollegiate athletics and the mission and philosophy of higher education has widened significantly over the past decade (Eitzen 2003). An article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (2001) reports that college sports are drifting from their fundamental mission. Instead of enhancing the academic environment, college athletics are clearly limiting student-athletes in revenue generating sports, men's basketball, and football, of a valuable education. College athletics have become more commercialized with a greater urgency to produce winning seasons and secure corporate sponsors at the expense of the student-athlete's academic future (Duderstadt 2000; Eitzen 2003; Jayakumar & Comeaux 2006). Toward this end, universities are challenged with addressing the increasing lack of academic productivity in certain team sports. This issue, compounded by the recent National College Athletics Association (NCAA) Academic Reform Movement, requires new strategies and forms of academic engagement to be explored that challenge student affairs

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leaders to apply student-athletes' competitive spirit beyond the game and into the classroom.

Over the years, several studies have been conducted in an effort to determine significant predictor variables such as demographic and educational criteria that influence academic achievement for college student-athletes (Lang, Dunham, & Alpert 1988; Pacarella 1995; Ryan 1989; Sellers 1992; Simons, Van Rheenen & Covington 1999). Few investigators, however, have examined environmental influences, both social and academic, on student-athletes' educational outcomes (Comeaux 2005; Comeaux & Harrison 2006; Edwards 1984; Sellers 1992). The college environment encompasses all that happens to student-athletes during the course of their educational programs that may affect and influence the desired outcome-- to graduate (Astin 1993a). One potentially important aspect of the environmental experience involves student athletes' interactions with faculty, which too often influences their educational outcomes in negative ways (Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen 1995; Sailes 1993). In this sense, it has been well documented that male student-athletes generally and Black male student-athletes specifically experience some of the most detrimental stereotypes and negative labels on campus by faculty and others within the college community (Baucom & Lantz 2001; Edwards 1984; Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen 1995; Harrison 1998; Johnson, Hallinan, & Westerfield 1999; Smith 1988; Thelin 1996). According to Davis, "stereotypes also represent barriers to complete integration of this group [student athletes]" within the college environment (1995: 644). In short, the dual role of a student and athlete becomes more and more difficult to balance with the negative labels and perceptions toward this nontraditional student group.

Drawing from a larger project that explores racial differences in student-athletes' academic integration patterns on college campuses, this work ascertains the effect of specific forms of student athlete-faculty interaction on academic achievement. The author chose to limit the sample to Black student-athletes in the revenue-producing sports of men's basketball and football. Preliminary analysis of data revealed that revenue-generating student-athletes differed from non-revenue student-athletes in graduation rates, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) infractions, and overall visibility in American culture (Coakley 2003; Eitzen 2003). Furthermore, the existing literature regarding Black student-athletes suggests that members of this nontraditional group are victims of negative stereotypes and myths, primarily about their academic abilities (Edwards 1984; Sailes 1993). They are burdened with the insidiously racist implications of the "innate black athletic superiority" myth, and the more blatantly racist stereotypes of the "dumb jock" construct linked to

intellectual inferiority (Edwards 1984). Given the degree and magnitude of these stereotypes, Black student-athletes are faced with educational challenges, which in turn can have profound effects on their access to opportunities to learn, social support as well as complete integration into the college environment (Davis 1995).

Methods and Data of Study

The data in this study are from two surveys within the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP): the 2000 Student Information Form (SIF) and 2004 College Student Survey (CSS). The CIRP is sponsored by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles and the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Although the reliability of the instrument has not been formally measured during the past 30 years the CIRP has generated an array of normative, substantive, and methodological research about a wide range of issues in American higher education (Sax, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney 1996).

The 2000 SIF was administered to first-time college freshmen during orientation programs. Responses were received from 251,232 students at 494 institutions. The CSS was administered to fourth-year students in the spring of 2004, resulting in 38,964 responses from 161 institutions. Of the total students, 14,975 students filled out both the SIF in 2000 and the CSS in 2004.

The primary purpose of the CIRP is to provide baseline data on entering college freshmen so that they may be followed up over time in order to assess how college contributes to student learning and development. The CIRP data set offers an extensive set of longitudinally collected variables with which to answer a variety of questions pertaining to student success and retention patterns in higher education. In addition, a known strength of CIRP is its abundance of student input (demographic and other variables assessed prior to college entry) and environmental variables.

The specific sample used for this study includes Black, male revenue-generating student-athletes attending predominantly White institutions. Because the study limits the sample to those in the revenue generating sports of men's basketball and football, the results should only be generalized to such individuals on college teams recognized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as Division I-A. The final sample includes 739 Black student-athletes attending four-year colleges and universities.

Analytical Approach

This study employs the “Input-Environment-Outcome” (I-E-O) model for studying the impact of college variables on students (Astin 1993a). “Inputs” refer to the students’ entering characteristics. “Environment” is that to which the student is exposed to during college, (e.g., faculty, peers, diverse views, etc.). “Outcomes” are the students’ characteristics after interacting with the environment (Astin 1993a). The power of the I-E-O model is its ability to allow researchers to measure student change during college by measuring outcomes while controlling for input characteristics.

The study used blocked stepwise regression analyses. Each block of independent variables was included in the sequence in which it may have an effect on student outcome. Within each block, variables (significant at $p < .001$) enter the regression equation in a stepwise fashion. The value of using a stepwise procedures design is that it allows for an examination of how regression coefficients change as each variable enters the equation (Astin 1993a).

Variables

The outcome variable in this study is students’ self reported college grade point average, a quantitative measure of academic achievement. College grades were obtained from students’ self-reported grade-point average (GPA). GPA is scored on a six-point scale (A, A-, B, B-, C, and C – or less). The pretest for this outcome is students’ high school GPA (scored on an eight-point scale, from “A or A+” to “D”). The author recognizes that academic achievement encompasses much more than GPA, however given the variables within the dataset, college GPA was the most appropriate measure of academic achievement, coupled with the fact that college GPA is the most common outcome when investigating student achievement in higher education (Astin 1993a; 1993b).

Independent variables are blocked in the following sequence: (1) students’ past achievement, family background, and high school environmental characteristics (inputs); (2) institutional type and control (environment); and (3) college environmental characteristics (environment). Because the primary focus of this study is the impact of specific forms of student-athlete-faculty interaction on academic achievement, independent variables are not limited to those expected to predict a given outcome. Rather, many variables are included because they may shed light on the relation between Black student-athletes and faculty. Independent variables can be classified into the following two categories (some variables may qualify for more than one category):

1. Those that previous research has identified as predictive of any of the outcome measures used in this study.
2. Those included on an exploratory basis because they may mediate the effects of the student-athlete-faculty interaction.

Input Measures

Student background characteristics (Block 1) include measures of past school achievement, family background, and high school environmental characteristics. The coding scheme for these variables is listed in Appendix A. Past achievement measures consist of students' self-reported high school GPA. The importance of high school GPA as a control variable when examining college GPA is well documented (Astin 1993a; 1993b; Sellers 1992).

Family background measures include socioeconomic status (defined as a composite of mother's and father's educational attainment, as well as students' estimate of their parents' income). It was expected that these family characteristics would influence students' expectations about college, as well as their likelihood of interacting in certain college environments (Sellers 1992).

Finally, high school environmental characteristics consist of student-athlete and teacher relationship measures (See Appendix A). The significance of incorporating these measures was to eliminate self-selecting students thereby decreasing the chance of a Type I error (finding a relationship between the environment and the outcome measure when a relationship does not exist). It was impossible to eliminate all possible biasing input variables. However, the goal was to minimize the probability of a Type I error.

Environmental Measures

Measures of the college environment consist of institutional type and control (Block 2) and interaction with faculty (Block 3). Institutional type is defined as university or four-year college while institutional control is defined as public or private. Institution level variables are included to determine whether student-athletes are more likely to interact with faculty in universities or four-year state schools and public or private institutions.

The final block contains the student-athlete-faculty interaction variables. These five measures asked students to respond to the following statement: Faculty provided encouragement for graduate school, faculty provided emotional support and encouragement, faculty provided assistance with study skills, faculty provided negative feedback about academic work, and faculty provided help in achieving professional goals. The importance of

student-faculty relationship is well documented as a valuable aspect of the college experience (Astin 1993a; Milem & Berger 1997; Pascarella, Daby, Terenzini, & Iverson 1983).

Results

This study sought to understand selected faculty interaction measures on academic achievement among Black student-athletes in revenue-producing sports. The results discussed here focus on the relationship between various environmental measures (i.e. student athlete-faculty interactions) and the outcome. The effects of precollege variables on the outcome are presented and discussed only when they appear to influence the outcome.

To appraise the “effect” of selected precollege variables and environmental measures on academic achievement, the standardized regression coefficient (Beta-In) was examined at each step in the regression. The Beta-In (as reported in SPSS-X regression results) is the Beta coefficient a variable would receive if it entered the regression equation at the next step; all variables have a Beta-In irrespective of whether they enter a regression.

Table 1 provides summary tables of simple correlations for the outcome, as well as Beta-In at each step: (1) after controlling for precollege (input) characteristics; and (2) after controlling for measures of the environment. The purpose of this section is to examine the relationship between that environmental measure and the outcome by determining how this relationship changes throughout the regression, without addressing specifically how or why such changes occur (that discussion is saved until the next section)

Relationships Explained by Input and Environmental Effects

While high school grades (input) had a strong positive effect on academic achievement (beta = .31, $p < .001$; see Table 1), adding the college environment to the equation led to generally smaller effects in the relationship between faculty measures and college grades. Of course, the relatively smaller “mediating” power of the environmental block was due in part to the natural correlation between inputs and environments; much of the potential “impact” of the environment had already been accounted for by students’ high school grades. This suggests that high school GPA had the greatest effect on college grades for Black student-athletes. Contrary to past research (Lang et al. 1988), parental status and income, parents’ education had no significant effect on academic achievement.

With respect to environmental factors, only one faculty interaction variable- faculty provided encouragement for graduate school- had a

significant influence on Black student-athletes' college GPA for this study (beta = .20, $p < .001$ (see Table 1). This finding suggests that Black student-athletes who are encouraged to attend graduate school by faculty tend to perform better academically in college. Finally, those attending private schools tend to have higher college GPAs than those attending public institutions (beta= .18).

Table 1: Predicting Academic Achievement (College GPA) among Black Male Student-athletes in Revenue-Generating Sports

		BETA^ AFTER STEP				
STEP	VARIABLE	R	r	1	2	3
<i>Input</i>	Entering	.33	.33	.33	.33	.31
1	High School GPA (pretest)					
	<i>Environment Entering:</i>					
2	Institutional Control	.39	.21	.20	.20	.18
3	Faculty provided encouragement for graduate school	.43	.24	.21	.20	.20
	Not Entering:					
	Father's Education					
	Mother's Education					
	Parental Income					
	Asked teacher for advice					
	Talking w/ teachers outside of class					
	Institutional Type					
	Faculty provided emotional support					
	Faculty provided assistance w/ study skills					
	Faculty provided negative feedback about academic work					
	Faculty provided help in achieving professional goals					

Data Source: 2000 Freshman Survey (CIRP) & 2004 College Student Survey (CSS), Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA

^ The coefficient for any variable not yet in the equation shows the beta that variable would receive if it were entered into the equation at the next step

Discussion of Findings

The present investigation provides evidence to support the effects of selected demographic and environmental variables on academic achievement for Black student-athletes in this study. We can not ignore that consistent with past literature high school GPA was the strongest predictor of college GPA at least for students and is also a predictor of college GPA for Black student-athletes in this study (Astin 1993a). Such a finding is not surprising since student-athletes are a sub sample of college students. Moreover, because Black student-athletes tend to matriculate from high schools and environments with inferior academic resources and preparation as compared to their White counterparts, these results are useful insofar as they have implications for dealing with Black student-athletes who enter institutions of higher education (Sellers 1992).

With respect to environmental findings, Black athletes in the revenue-producing sports of men's basketball and football academic success is to some extent contingent upon the specific nature of their interaction with faculty. For example, faculty members who provided encouragement for graduate school make a strong contribution to Black student-athletes' academic success whereas all other faculty interaction measures were not significant in this study. A previous study by Comeaux (2005) lends support to this finding insofar as the nature and quality of interactions between student athlete and faculty matters.

In light of the aforementioned study, one possible reason that these faculty measures did not enter the regression equation, much less influence Black student-athletes academic success in this study, may stem from the ways in which they perceive and respond to the college environment that might be different from the norms, values, behaviors of their home culture or lived experiences. There is usually considerable social distance and alienation from campus life perceived by Black students on predominantly White campuses (Hurtado 1992; Sedlacek 1987), and they may feel discomfort from their lack of knowledge and experience interacting with students and faculty different from themselves (Allen 1988 1992; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas 1999). Another explanation could be that there is a stigma attached to the Black student-athletes as inferior academically by the college community (Edwards 1984), and as a consequence, stigmatization impedes trust and motivation (Cohen & Steele 2002). In this context, Black student-athletes may feel wary or question whether faculty will view them unfairly, and thus attempt to avoid interactions and communication with these authority figures. For example, an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that Black student-athletes feel that they are marginalized and are not taken seriously by White professors in the classroom and on campus (Perlmutter 2003). The college experiences of Black student-athletes

at predominately White institutions are all too often hindered as a result of feelings of social isolation, racial discrimination, limited support, and lack of integration. In effect, Black student-athletes may choose to spend as little time as possible with White faculty, who comprise approximately 89% of faculty at predominately White institutions, and instead interact and bond with mentors and other support systems off campus where they emphasize feelings of encouragement and acceptance.

Conclusions and Ideas for Change

The findings documented here have important implications for designing program and policies to help Black student-athletes enrolled at predominately white institutions improve their academic performance. This study calls for high schools, colleges and universities to encourage and develop a wide range of communication and learning environments that are responsive to the needs of Black student-athletes (Redmond, P. 1990). Rather than employing a one-size-fits-all approach to learning, the challenge, accordingly, is to establish learning environments and socialization patterns that are tailored to norms, values, and behaviors of the student.

When designing such programs, attention should also be given to the structure, objectives, and practices of the specific academic support programs at hand and the extent to which they can potentially affect Black student-athletes in high school or college with differing educational characteristics. Findings from this study indicate that Black student-athletes tend to increase the likelihood of college academic success to the extent that they show academic promise and worth (e.g. high GPAs) while in high school. It is clear that programs in high schools should focus on developing the academic talents of Black student-athlete for competitive college readiness and also formulating critical strategies to overcome or circumvent any impediments. Moreover, since Black male students typically enter predominately white institution with lower GPAs and less prepared than their counterparts, faculty and student affairs leaders must be well advised to appreciate their situation and work closely with these students in identifying factors that may impede or facilitate their academic talent development and/or self-identity.

Finally, it is clear that there is a need for much more research to understand the relationship between Black male student-athletes and faculty. In the meantime, faculty and others who are committed to creating more equitable educational experiences for all students could benefit from learning about the types of conscious and unconscious prejudices and discriminatory attitudes directed toward Black student-athletes. Mandatory training workshops that provide insights into the nuances and

complexities of race, racism, and cultural sensitivity toward certain groups and that are tailored to the special institutional needs of different campus constituencies and different target audiences are imperative. In that sense, we can begin to work toward creating more inclusive environment and perhaps establishing more meaningful, day-to-day interactions and relationships between Black male student-athletes and faculty.

Future Research

While the present study produced useful findings and has implications for institutional practices pertaining to student-athletes, as outlined in previous section, it is not without limitations. The lack of causal direction among the environmental measures and the dependent variable were limitations of this study. That is, do student-athletes who interact with faculty, depending on the form of interaction, receive higher grades; or is it because those with higher grades are more likely to pursue interaction or contact with faculty? Also, using CIRP data, this study was not able to fill completely information gaps related to the interaction patterns between Black male student-athletes and faculty. Future qualitative studies that explore Black student-athletes' experiences with faculty inside and outside the classroom might be successful in answering such uncertainties and filling critical theoretical and analytical gaps. Additionally, the voices of Black student-athletes themselves are critical to addressing this issue at both the theoretical and practical level (Benson 2001).

Lastly, the present study focuses on whether selected faculty measures of academic achievement for Black student-athletes, yet it is not known whether faculty members' race/ethnicity, gender, college affiliation, and/or involvement in intercollegiate athletics play a role in the types and magnitude of interaction between Black student-athletes and faculty in this study. For example, the fact that Black student-athletes feel that they are marginalized by White professors on campus, as discussed earlier, may cause the degree of contact to vary dramatically by race. In future studies, it may be useful to control for faculty characteristics to understand better the impact of specific forms of student athlete-faculty interaction to outcomes of college. This information will be most useful to student affairs leaders and others who are exposed to college athletics culture in American higher education.

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APPENDIX A. Student Background & Involvement Characteristics

Block	Variables	Measures
Block 1 (input)	Background measures Average high school grades (self-report) ^a	
	Socioeconomic status (SES)	Mother's education ^b Father's education ^b Parental income ^c
	Interaction with Faculty (high school)	Asked a teacher for advice after class ^d Talking with teacher outside of class ^e
Block 2 (environment)	Institutional type and control (dichotomous measures) Public Private University 4-Year College	
Block 3 (environment)	Interaction with Faculty (college)	Faculty provided encouragement for graduate school ^d Faculty provided emotional support & encouragement Faculty provided assistance w/ study skills Faculty provided negative feedback about academic work Faculty provided help in achieving professional goals

^a Eight -point scale: 1 = "D" to 8 = "A or A+."

^b Eight-point scale: 1 = "grammar school or less" to 8 = "graduate degree."

^c Fourteen-point scale: "less than \$6,000" to 14 = "\$150,000 or more."

^d Three point scale: 1 = "not at all" to 3 = "frequently."

^e Eight point scale: 1 = "none" to 8 = "over 20."