DOES PARTICIPATION IN ATHLETICS AFFECT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE?

By

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In everyday life society is faced with obstacles, and choices that inevitability need to be made. Those obstacles/choices could affect their future, as society grows and parts of life are reprioritized. Society needs to stop and ask this question; is this choice going to help me be more successful in life. Students are asking themselves everyday; will being actively involved in athletics effect my academic success? These are intriguing questions and research has been done trying to figure out whether or not participating in athletics effects athletes’ academic success. There has been a significant association between athletics and educational outcomes that has lead to increased academic achievement (Videon, 2002; Bucknavage, & Worrell, 2005). Being active in athletics creates positive attitudes and improved self-esteem (Hanson, & Kraus, 1998). But may also cause distractions and added stress to student athletes. Throughout this paper many aspects will be discussed such as the positive outcomes, negative outcomes, and student athlete’s responsibilities and possible gains that are associated with athletic participation.

On the positive side, participation in athletics can lead to increased grade point averages. Research has shown that students who are involved in a structured school based extracurricular activity such as athletics are more likely to have a higher academic performance and attainment (Feldman, & Matjasko, 2005). Extracurricular activities are a cheap way of enhancing student’s academic performance (Barden, 2002). An outcome of athletic participation is students are more likely to have higher GPA’s and move on to college after completing high school (Owings, Carlson, Scott, Planty, & Thompson, 2005). Being active in high exercise groups is related to an increase in neurotransmitters, such as serotonin which decreases the feelings of depression and boosts the feelings of happiness in the body (Field, Diego, & Sanders, 2001). The benefits of
extracurricular participation compared to those that do not participate include lower rates of discipline referrals, a higher mean grade point average, less skipping class, lower rates of people dropping out of school, gaining valuable social and leadership qualities, and it leads to a higher aspiration of going on with school (Barden, 2002). Student athletes were more likely to move on to college and earn a bachelor’s degree than non-athletes (Owings et al., 2005). Students involved in athletics are more likely to see high school as preparation for furthering their academic development and less likely to see sports as a viable way of making it through life (Guest, & Schneider, 2003). Being active in athletics significantly increases social ties between the athletes and their parents, and increases how often athletes talk to their parents about issues associated with school (Broh, 2002).

Although positive effects have been found so have the negative effects of participating in athletics. One of which is distraction; many student athletes are not focused on education. A commitment to athletics is negatively correlated with athletes GPA’s, which meant individuals with a higher commitment to athletics had lower GPA’s (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Student athletes are valuing their high school athletic accomplishments more than their academic progress (Miller, & Kerr, 2002). Athletes are focused on the prospects of one day making it into the professional sports field (Davis, 1990). Data has shown that athletes have significantly higher GPA’s in-season than out-of-season and the attendance during the in-season was a lot better (Silliker, & Quirk, 1997). Student athletes need to keep there eligibility regardless of whether or not it is in season or not, attendance should be key throughout the entire year. Reasons that may
be associated with attendance in the off season maybe factors such as fatigue, lack of role experimentation, and a delayed identity development that plays such a significant role between athletic participation and academic performance while in-season (Miller, & Kerr, 2002). Another stressor that student athletes are being confronted with is many parents are pushing their athletes into sports clubs, traveling teams, and have hiring trainers to train their athletes (Davis, 1990). In parents eyes athletics are the only ticket that their child has for a better life (Beem, 1990). It adds more to a developing student’s plate than what needs to be there (Beem, 1990). There is a lot of pressure that goes along with being a student athlete and to put out the results that are expected of him/her. That is the reason that students, especially girls, do not get involved in sporting activities. They do not feel competent enough to take part, there’s negative reactions from some peers over there skill level and choice of activities, feeling of conflicting interests, a self-conscious feeling over the way she may look, parental constraints, time/ facilities and an dislike of highly structured activities or those that are organized by adults (Rees et al., 2006). Student athletes also have a more difficult time joining other extracurricular groups, attending both on and off campus events, and making new and different friends outside of the group (Richards, & Aries, 1999).

Students have responsibilities to their school, teammates, and family to fulfill everything to the best of there ability, and most of the time that takes sacrifices. Sports and extracurricular activities offer their own supplementary educational benefits, but academics should always come first (Beem, 2006). At the same time if students become involved in athletics it is commitment to the team that everyone stays eligible to play, and that is why elder athletes need to take the
leadership role that is given to them through athletics and encourage other students/athletes to be better students (Dobisz & Beaty, 1999). Activities other than academics such as vocational activities for example have lower academic standards, which makes participation less demanding on the students (McNeal, 1998). That makes it more important for athletes to take the skill that they learned in the athletic domain and transfer it over to the academic domain. It can have a huge impact on how student athletes approach academics as a whole (Gaston-Gayles, 2004).

There are many requirements for student athletes such as GPA, attendance, etc.; studies have shown that athletes miss fewer classes than non-athletes because of the commitment to their team. Missing a class means athletes are not allowed to play or practice with the team that day (Zaugg, 1998). A new program called PASS states that many students involved in athletics have seen improvements in grades and attendance. This is why programs like PASS have been created so that many student athletes can meet the requirements they need in order to be eligible to play. The parents of the student athletes involved in programs like PASS or the after school programs offered through local schools have noticed a greater sense of confidence, personal initiative, and self-discipline in their children (Griffin, 1992). The PASS program helps student athletes manage their time in order to get everything done that needs to be done. This contributes to athletes spending more time studying, in a personal importance to themselves of earning a college degree or graduating from high school (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Balance is key in any activity, being active in sports is positively associated with an increased number of academically oriented friends, increased social ties between athletes and their parents, and increased benefits from peer groups (Broh, 2002; Beem, 2006). Students who participate in extracurricular activities are also
more likely to participate in other school activities such as academic clubs, student council, and drama (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). A skill that can not be learned in a classroom is socialization which is learned through participation in athletics or team sports (Beem, 2006).

Women who play sports will perceive themselves as having advantages in areas such as moral development, leadership, socialization, and health and fitness (Kelinske, Mayer, & Chen, 2001). It is also indicated that 18% of scholar athletes were saving money for college as compared to 16% of students that are purely scholars and 8% and 4% of the just pure athletes or non-scholar/non-athlete (Synder, & Spreitzer, 1992). Athletes are preparing themselves for the future; student athletes are prioritizing their lives. Student athletes understand the changes that need to be surpassed in order to make it to the next achievable level in life/sports/school.

In conclusion, being active in athletics has its negative and positive side effects. Athletics provides opportunities that are not available in other aspects of life. Becoming active in physical activity can shift a shy/quiet individual into a multidimensional individual with self-confidence, “The quietest people suddenly do really great things” (Brooks, & Magnusson, 2006). Although the positive aspects seem intriguing being a member of an athletic team poses many difficulties. Athletes have less time to spend on homework, a difficult time meeting people outside of their athletic teams, difficulties attending on or off campus events, and a difficult time being taken seriously by professors (Richards, & Aries, 1999). In the end it is a difficult decision for all students’ not just athletes, but if a choice must be made between students concentrating on academics or on pursuing athletics, the main focus should be on academics because in the end it will take students the farthest (Synder, & Spreitzer, 1992).
Reference List


