

THE COUNSELLING NEEDS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA STUDENT-ATHLETES: A
PRELIMINARY STUDY

By

GREG DONALD LAWLEY

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Greg Donald Lawley
Name of Author (please print)

30/08/2004
Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

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Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC Canada

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore some of the counselling needs of British Columbian post-secondary student athletes and discover what services are being provided for them.

Student athletes at one British Columbia institution-- The University-College of the Fraser Valley (U.C.F.V.) were interviewed. Data was collected by interviewing 12 male and female student athletes, in their 1st to 4th year of eligibility.

U.C.F.V. student athletes expressed the need for counselling services relating to the challenges they face in regards to Academics; Personal, social, and leisure demands; Health and injury; Retirement and transition; Career development.

According to the results of the study, U.C.F.V. 1st and 2nd year student athletes were not aware of available counselling services or where to find them. U.C.F.V. 3rd and 4th year student athletes were only slightly more aware. As a group U.C.F.V. student athletes felt that counselling services were not promoted or provided to them as either students or athletes.

Student athletes suggested various methods of increasing athletes' awareness of and comfort using counselling services, including having an individual responsible for coordinating services for student athletes. Counselling services could be provided in group or individualized formats depending on the nature of the service.

The results suggest that B.C. post-secondary institutions should recognize the unique counselling needs of their student athletes and make an effort to investigate ways to provide and promote services to address these needs.

Areas of future research include expanding the study to see what other colleges/universities in B.C. and Canada are providing for student athletes.

A comprehensive counselling program should be designed and implemented, then researched for effectiveness, at a B.C. post-secondary school. The effectiveness of the program could then be measured by academic progress, attrition rates, graduation rates, drug and alcohol use, and the use of coping mechanisms by student athletes.

Research needs to be undertaken that measures the rate of attrition and reasons for attrition at B.C. universities for student athletes before they graduate with a certificate, diploma, or degree. It would be useful to compare the daily life of a student athlete with that of a non-athlete.

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I first envisioned the journey to this document in the Spring of 1996. As I kept my mind on the final destination the journey involved sacrifices by my wife Lisa and my children Alyssa and Katrina. Thank-you to them and other family and friends who encouraged and helped me along the way.

This train
Carries saints and sinners
This train
Carries losers and winners
This Train
Carries fools and kings
This Train
Dreams will not be thwarted
This Train
Carries sweet souls departed
This Train
Faith will be rewarded
This Train
People get Ready
There's a train coming
You don't need no ticket
Just get on board.

Bruce Springsteen.

Introduction

Most college athletes do not become professional athletes and thus become retired college athletes. I am one of them. During my playing career and my subsequent involvement with the athletic program at another British Columbia university, I did not see a determination to help student-athletes address the difficulties they were having with personal, academic, athletic, health and injury, career development or retirement and transition issues.

Some of the problems I saw firsthand over this time period were: Athletes became ineligible due to failing courses, they retired before completing their eligibility due to not feeling they were in the right place socially or academically; athletes became involved with alcohol and drugs; one athlete committed suicide; athletic performance suffered due to the inability to deal with relationship problems; athletes were forced to quit their studies due to a lack of money; athletes were unaware of their academic and career choices; athletes were unaware of the counselling services the academic institutions provided; coaches were unaware until athletes became ineligible or quit their sports and or education that they were having problems.

Student athletes face challenges similar to those of non-athletes in post-secondary institutions, however, they also encounter challenges unique to their experience as student-athletes. Student-athletes have been found to have lower grade point averages, higher attrition rates and lower chances of graduating (Murray, 1997). When an athlete loses their eligibility due to poor academic performance they may not return to complete their studies. Their loss of athletic

eligibility means the loss of their primary support group (Fitch & Robinson, 1998).

While they may not be asked to leave school for academic reasons many still choose to quit. One student I knew attended another academic institution to pursue his education after losing his athletic eligibility while another quit university altogether.

Time management has been described as the most important skill for student-athletes to learn (Murray, 1997). The demands placed on student athletes include: academic classes, studying, athletic conditioning, film sessions, travel as well as regular practices and games. They can spend 3 to 6 hours per day in athletic commitments (Fitch & Robinson, 1998). The required balancing act was especially difficult for some of my teammates. Often there was not enough time left in a day after sport commitments and regular classes for athletes to study and get enough rest to be prepared for the next day.

Student-athletes face “complex internal and external stressors that seem to make them more vulnerable than most college students to encounter greater frequencies and higher levels of personal-social forms of distress” (Ferrante, Etzel & Lantz, 1996). A student-athlete acquaintance of mine committed suicide due to stress surrounding her dealing with her sexuality. Others were not able to separate athletics from other facets of their lives, or they did not have any other parts of their life developed. A bad performance for these individuals could lead to anxiety, loss of confidence and/or depressed mood.

Athletes can find themselves socially isolated from other students due to the amount of time they spend in their sport. These hours are spent with a small group

of people and student-athletes can have difficulty joining other extracurricular groups (Richard & Aries, 1999).

Athletes want to succeed and they can place considerable pressure on themselves to do so. If they have athletic failures they do not want them to be carried over into other parts of their lives (Parhm, 1993). A teammate of mine quit basketball midway through his second year of eligibility as he was receiving less playing time, he felt as if he was a failure, sport was not enjoyable for him anymore, and his relationships and academics were suffering as a result.

Injuries can also cause stress in athletes that affects all facets of their lives. They do not want to feel as if they have let their teammates down (Parhm, 1993). When a teammate suffered a career threatening knee injury before his last year of eligibility he was unable to replace the positive feelings sport provided for him with other activities that maintained his self-esteem.

All athletes retire from college sport eventually due to injury, loss of their roster spot, graduations, and the end of their eligibility. However, many athletes do not prepare for this inevitable exit from college sport. When they are forced to leave they may feel a loss of self-identity, and loneliness as they are being separated from teammates and coaches who have been their primary support system. They also may be afraid of what the future holds (Petipas, Champagne, Danish, Murphy, 1998). Retirement forces the athlete to adjust to a lifestyle that does not rely on sport to provide satisfaction. With an enormous amount of free time now available they can find it difficult to fill their lives with meaningful activities.

Athletes have been found to have lower levels of career development and career maturity compared to non-athletes (Kennedy & Dimmick, 1987; Martens & Cox, 2000; Smallman & Sowa, 1996). This may be due to the time not being available for student-athletes to initiate career exploration or counselling. Athletes may avoid career development as it creates uncertainty when they need to feel confident to be successful as athletes. Athletes may also feel that they will be taken care of due to their status as athletes or be confident that things will somehow work out for them. A majority of athletes I knew graduated or left school without a career plan or an idea of what they were going to do with the rest of their lives. Some stayed in school hoping to find a career path by themselves while others took menial jobs to meet expenses. Most found themselves on the outside looking in; wishing they could have a second chance.

The purpose of this study is to explore some of the counselling needs of British Columbian post-secondary student-athletes. Student athletes were interviewed at one British Columbia institution-- The University-College of the Fraser Valley. These interviews were done to help outline some of the basic issues and hopefully lead to a broader exploration of the needs of Canadian student-athletes.

The research questions for my study are: What are the counselling needs of British Columbia post-secondary student-athletes and what programs are currently being provided for them?

Literature Review

There has been an increasing amount of literature related to the experience of student-athletes during and after their college experience. These studies point out the unique experiences and challenges of the student-athlete and their unique counselling needs. However, this literature, and the description of programs for student-athletes, is based on student athletes in the United States. Student-athletes in Canada, and specifically in British Columbia, have not been interviewed as to what they feel their specific and unique needs are. There is also a lack of literature describing what services Canadian post-secondary institutions are providing and/or should be providing for their student-athletes to enable them to be successful.

This study is an attempt to illuminate the needs and concerns of student-athletes in British Columbia. The literature recognizes that student-athletes are unique. Student-athletes encounter specific challenges and require counselling interventions and/or programs that take their unique needs into consideration.

Uniqueness of the Student Athlete

Student athletes are recognized in the literature to be a unique population. They face the same transition challenges as other college students. These similar challenges include developing new relationships, adjusting to campus life, as well as making career and life decisions (Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 1996). Being in a new environment, and balancing sport and academic demands, can make being a first year athlete particularly challenging (Ortez, 1997 as cited in Giacobbi et al, 2004). While some of their needs are similar to those of non-athletes these needs

are magnified by their being athletes (Lanning & Toye, 1993). They have stressful lives that are influenced by the unique demands and the developmental challenges of being college-aged people (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1996), as well as other challenges unique to their experiences as student-athletes. Student-athletes are especially vulnerable to a variety of stressors that exceed average student experiences (Davies & West, 1991). Ferrante, Etzel & Lantz point out that "student-athletes face complex internal and external stressors that seem to make them more vulnerable than most college students to encounter greater frequencies and higher levels of personal-social forms of distress" (1996, p. 9).

Challenges Encountered by Student-Athletes

A recent review of the literature (Figler & Figler, 1991; Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips & Waters, 1981) by Murray (1997) described the personal/social problems that student-athletes bring to college counselling centers as including "anxiety, stress, time management, identity conflict, social isolation, injury and termination of an athletic career, poor athletic performance, and career/vocational problems" (p. 27). Student-athletes "encounter atypical demands and pressures that often challenge the course of their personal development and well being" (Etzel, Ferrante & Pinkney, 1996, p. 1).

National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA] student athletes in the United States are "required to devote upwards of 25 hours per week when their sport is in season, miss numerous classes for university sanctioned athletic competition, and deal with fatigue and injuries as a result of their athletic participation" (1999, p. 151). Figler and Figler identified five potential problem areas that can interfere with a

student athlete's adjustment: eligibility, finance, personal pressures, academic progress and career selection (1991). Murray (1997) contends that there are specific issues that cause student-athletes "to seek counseling or psychotherapy includ[ing] psychological burnout, eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia), alcohol and drug abuse" (p. 30). These problems can be exacerbated by athletes being susceptible to viewing crises or problems as not having solutions and they therefore need someone to help them realize they have choices (Strambulova, 2000). The challenges of student athletes can be classified as Academic, Personal-Social and Leisure, Pressure to Succeed, Health and Injury, Retirement and Transition, or Career Developmental in nature.

Academic challenges.

A negative relationship between athletic participation and academic performance seems to exist in the literature pertaining to the academic challenges of the student athlete. Murray (1997) found that most studies conclude athletes are "unprepared for and uninterested in academics [and] they come to college to advance their athletic careers; therefore, they have lower GPA's, higher attrition rates, and lower chances of graduating than other students" (p.14). Due to their sport demands they have less time available for academics, and student athletes who are academically unprepared when they enter college have less chance of graduating (Harris, Altekruze & Engels, 2003). Adler & Adler (1991) point out that student athletes can let their athletic pursuits overtake their lives at the expense of their academics.

Many student-athletes have difficulty effectively co-managing their academic and sport demands (Parhm, 1993). The competing demands placed on them can force student-athletes to decide how much time to give academics and sport. If there is a conflict between academics and athletic demands student-athletes often choose athletics (Adler & Adler, 1991; Miller & Kerr, 2002). Failure in the classroom can lead to eligibility being jeopardized which in turn can cause stress and problems with an athlete's psychological well being (Ferrante & Etzel, 1991). There may also be an expectation by student-athletes that they will be taken care of academically. For example, they may expect good grades for average work and preferential treatment for course registration and assignment deadlines (Wooten & Ray, 1994). To add to their academic concerns athletes have more difficulty being taken seriously by professors than their non-athlete peers (Richards & Aries, 1999). Faculty members may perceive student athletes academically less positively than those of other students. If student athletes earned an A grade in class faculty members also felt more feelings of skepticism and surprise compared to other students receiving an A grade (Engstrom, Sedlacek & McEwan, 1995 as cited in Harris, Altekruise, & Engels, 2003). Losing academic eligibility can result in the loss of their social support group and a major source of their self-identity (Fitch & Robinson, 1998).

Personal, social and leisure demands.

Street (1999) notes that "first year student-athletes, regardless of their academic background and skill level, are often thoroughly overwhelmed by the demands that are placed on them" (22). They require support for dealing with their

transition to college; information regarding institutional regulations, and coping skills for balancing the increased demands of the athletic and academic environments (Street, 1999). Major sources of stress for athletes, and first year female athletes in particular, include training intensity, high performance expectations, and interpersonal relationships (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Scanlan, Stein, and Ravazzak (1991) identified five sources of stress athletes encounter: negative aspects of competition, relationships, demands or costs, personal problems, and traumatic experiences. Responses to stress by student athletes cause consequences including a negative impact on their mental/emotional and physical health, academic performance and athletic performance (Humphrey, Yow & Bowden, 2000).

Time management is described by Murray (1997) to be the most important skill for student-athletes to learn. Student-athletes spend twice as much time as non-athletes in extracurricular activities (Richards & Aries, 1999). Athletes can spend three to six hours a day in sport-related commitments (Fitch & Robinson, 1998). Murray describes the "exceptional demands of the athletic life-style conflict[ing] with other important aspects of student life, i.e., academics, career development, social living" (1997, p. 31). Athletes must find time for conditioning, training, film sessions, as well as traveling to and from competitions (Ferrante & Etzel, 1991). Students are forced to balance their schedule between athletic and academic demands and this balance is often precarious. It can quickly become unsettled if the student-athlete encounters traumatic and stressful life events. These crises can impose high levels of stress on the student-athlete and affect their athletic and academic performance.

Student athletes are engaged in a greater amount and frequency of alcohol consumption, more frequent binge drinking, and engage more frequently in alcohol related risk behaviors (Hildebrand, Johnson, & Bogle, 2001). More frequent alcohol related risk behaviors included riding in motor vehicles and engaging in sexual intercourse while under the influence of alcohol (Hildebrand, Johnson, & Bogle, 2001). The increased use of alcohol by student athletes as compared to non-athletes is seen in high school and actually increases throughout the athlete's time at university (Hildebrand, Johnson, & Bogle, 2001).

Student-athletes do not have enough time available to have a job that could lessen financial difficulties. If they do not have enough money athletes may feel frustrated, trapped and even exploited (Parhm, 1993).

Student-athletes often report feeling estranged and discriminated against by non-athletes. Student-athletes have difficulty joining other extracurricular groups, making friends outside the team, and often spend less time with people outside of their athletic group (Richards & Aries, 1999). This can also mean that non-athletes regard athletes as "dumb jocks" or "prima donnas" (Parhm, 1993). Lanning (1982) described self-image development as being the area of greatest difficulty for student athletes. He described them as developing their self-worth as a function of their athletic achievement. Thus, when these athletes encounter problems in performance they are often unable to readjust and reestablish their self-concept based on other personal strengths (Lanning, 1982).

Pressure for student-athletes to maintain performance comes from their coaches, teammates, home communities, and the media. Poor academic or

physical performance can bring anger from coaches and teammates, and lead to them losing their position on the team (Fitch & Robinson, 1998). Athletes want to avoid self-doubt and self-criticism and may feel pressure to obtain success that has eluded them so far. Pressure can mount if the athlete feels they are not being given a chance to demonstrate their talent/worth. Many student-athletes are overwhelmed by the prospect of student athletics being their "last chance" to be successful. They do not want their lack of success athletically to carry over into other parts of their lives (Parhm, 1993).

Health and injury challenges.

Athletes spend a lot of their time trying to prevent injury. There is evidence that 50% of Division I NCAA athletes have experienced injury (Etzel, & Ferrante, 1993). Having an injury can force athletes to realize that the way they have determined their self-worth – athletic achievement—is no longer there. They may even feel pressure to return too soon to competition after being injured, as they do not want to let their teammates down by being hurt (Parhm, 1993). Emotions can include feelings of loss, frustration, anger and decreased self-esteem (Tracey, 2003). Injuries can also force athletes to retire before they want to or are prepared for.

Retirement and transition.

All student-athletes must retire from college athletics eventually due to either graduation or finishing their athletic eligibility. A transition occurs "if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Transitional events for the student-athlete include being susceptible to

team selection, injury and retirement. Non-events may occur when they do not make the starting team or if they are not receiving very much playing time (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). Athletes may also be forced to leave the sport by not making the team roster (Blinde & Stratta, 1992), or due to losing their eligibility due to poor academic performance, team problems, or transferring to another academic institution (Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 1996). These can be classified as “unexpected exits” from their sports and can be much more “traumatic and disruptive than that typically associated with the retirement experiences of student athletes in the literature” (Blinde & Stratta, 1992, p. 10 of 12).

The termination of their athletic careers forces many student-athletes to confront how connected they have been to athletics (Parhm, 1993). Not knowing of an alternative source to replace the emotional satisfaction sport provides can lead to increased stress for student-athletes. Factors that contribute to this stress can include the degree of emotional attachment and investment to the sport, the degree of exclusivity of athletics in the athlete’s life, and the degree of success the athlete experienced in sport (Parhm, 1993). Retirement for the student athlete can be the:

First time in the athlete’s life when he is deprived of the satisfaction which sport has always given him. It is in his adjustment to a lifestyle in which he cannot rely upon sport to provide these satisfactions that the athlete experiences difficulties in retiring gracefully.

(Hill & Lowe, 1974, p. 6)

Athletic retirement is different than non-sport retirement with possible stressful implications because of the student-athlete’s age, lifestyle, and unusual

development (Hill & Lowe, 1974). Petitpas, Champagne, Chartrand, Danish &

Murphy (1997) describe the ten most common reasons for retiring from sport as:

- a. Achievement of sport goals
- b. Physical – injuries, pain, declining skills
- c. Lifestyle – tired of the travel, media lack of privacy
- d. Family and friends- needing more time to build relationships
- e. Feeling it is time to grow up
- f. Wanting to go out while on top
- g. Politics of sport- tired of dealing with management or the sport governing body
- h. Financial concerns
- i. Having other interests outside of sports
- j. Bored – tired of playing, not fun anymore.

(p. 23-25).

They also describe (1997) the common reactions to retirement from sport as:

- a. Sadness
- b. Loss of Self-Identity
- c. Anger at Circumstances
- d. Loneliness from separating from Teammates and coaches
- e. Fear of an uncertain future
- f. Loss of confidence toward life
- g. Frustration over no longer having a special status in life
- h. Fear of being behind everyone in the career world
- i. Frustration over losing a sense of entitlement
- j. Concerns about managing money.

(p. 29-33)

Career development.

As all student-athletes retire from sport eventually it is important for them to make plans for their life after their athletic careers are finished. However, lower levels of career development and career maturity have been found in student-athletes compared to non-athletes (Kennedy & Dimmick, 1987; Martens & Cox, 2000; Smallman & Sowa, 1996). Athletes also score lower on measures of vocational maturity (Sowa and Gressand, 1983 as cited in Martens & Cox, 2000)

and the formulation of mature educational and career plans (Blann, 1985 as cited in Martens and Cox, 2000).

There are many factors that may contribute to this. Student-athletes may make a commitment to the athletic component of their life and not consider other options (Nelson, 1983). They may see their future as restricted to their sport or a similar position within it, for example, and want to become a coach or a trainer (Chartrand & Lent, 1987). Athletes may not have enough time due to academic and athletic commitments to pursue career interests (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988). Athletic identity may develop to the point that students perceive their life roles as that of an athlete and do not want to give this up (Grove, Lavalley & Gordon, 1997).

The structure set for athletes may also promote conformity and discourage exploratory behavior. For example, the coach may make a schedule for the student-athlete's free time, meals, courses and study time (Martens & Lee, 1998). Student-athletes also may fail to explore alternative roles, increase their hours of sport participation, and believe their career choices/results are unaffected by their actions. This can lead to decreased self-efficacy for career decision-making tasks (Brown, Glastetter-Fender & Shelton, 2000).

History of Interventions With Student-Athletes

Provision of services.

Services that athletes can access are described in the literature as being limited to academic advising, psychological sport performance enhancement skills, and counselling for the person in trouble (Brooks, Etzel, & Ostrow, 1987; Chartrand & Lent, 1987). Athletic directors support counselling services directed toward career

development as a good idea but they recognize that these services are not available specifically for student-athletes (Sweet, 1990). Many athletic department staff do not "pay attention to the personal-social, developmental or academic needs of student-athletes unless they are somehow negatively influencing the quality of play or eligibility of their athletes" (Etzel, Pinkney & Hinkle, 1995). A low percentage of respondents in a study by Etzel, Weaver & Ostrow (1985) said their institutions provide personal/social or vocational counselling services for student-athletes.

A survey of Athletic Directors and Senior Student Affairs Officers at 106 NCAA Division I institutions (Pope & Miller, 1999) during the 1995-96 academic year revealed that these two groups felt that tutorial services, academic advising and teaching of study skills were the most important services to provide for student-athletes. Retirement planning, money management and encouraging involvement in other campus activities were rated to be the least important services for student-athletes (Pope & Miller, 1999).

Biases against student-athletes, for example being characterized as "dumb jocks", have hindered the provision of comprehensive services to student-athletes (Ferrante & Etzel, 1996). There has not been an appreciation of their unique challenges and needs, nor has there been a recognition of attending to their developmental and more holistic human needs (Ferrante & Etzel, 1996). Murray (1997) contends that there has not been a theoretic rationale behind personal counselling in athletics, as there is no evidence of counsellors working with athletes in areas such as personal challenges, stress, and time management. There needs to be a collaboration between existing assistance programs for athletes and those

already available for non-athletes. Advisors need to allow student-athletes to make their own decisions and be held accountable for these decisions (Fields, 1999).

Underutilization of services.

There is ample evidence that athletes have underutilized counselling and mental health services as compared to non-athletes (Bergandi & Wittig, 1984) even though they experience as much or more psychological distress as non-athletes. Athletes do not have, or do not perceive to have, professional counselling available and if they do realize it is available they do not utilize those resources and services (Vaughn & Emener, 1994). While 25% of student-athletes want help for their problems, only 5% seek help from an external source (Hinkle, 1993). Murray (1999) reports that over 50% of athletes indicated they wanted help for problems; in the same study she revealed that 12% of student-athletes are afraid to seek help. Hinkle reports that 10% of American student athletes have difficulties that should be addressed through counselling interventions (1995). Ferrante, Etzel and Lantz (1996) describe the barriers that make it "difficult or inconceivable for many student-athletes to use or be inclined to use such services" as including: high visibility on campus, lack of time, the myth that they are being taken care of by others, being in a closed environment, the personal attributes of athletes, and the fear of loss of status from teammates or coaches for seeking help (10). Other reasons for student-athletes to underutilize services include the lack of services at appropriate times, denial, and reliance on social supports (Martinelli, 2000). Martinelli notes that course work and athletic preparation or competitions take place during the times that university counselling centers are open. This makes it difficult for athletes to use the

services they provide. Pinkerton, Hinz & Barrow (1989) feel that contributing factors to the underutilization of services include the denial of emotional problems and reliance on other support services and team members. Athletes may feel pressure to maintain the public's perception that they "are better, stronger, and healthier than the average student" (Murray, 1999).

Athletes spend much of their time in an environment that controls them and views them as objects rather than individuals with needs and feelings (Murray, 1999). Murray further proposes that athletic culture is protective and rewarding of student-athletes who let themselves be sheltered and supported by the athletic system. When student-athletes do seek assistance with their problems they utilize teammates, family members, coaches and friends instead of professional counsellors (Murray, 1999). Athletes benefit from having a social support system as a coping strategy for "academic, non-academic, emotional, and athletic related stress" (Giacobbi et al, 2004). However, their interactions with others can become limited to teammates and other athletes (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Based on her review of the literature Murray (1997) suggests three factors that may contribute to the underutilization problem: denial of emotional difficulties, counter-dependence, and maintenance of social support. In a 1986 study it was observed that athletes only seek professional help when the problem becomes acute and a serious psychological problem occurs (Brown, 1986). Athletes in a 1968 study by Carmen, Zerman & Blain also suggested that athletes underutilized counselling services as they denied they needed help and did not want to appear weak (as cited by Murray, 1997). Counter-dependence is described as athletes

developing dependence on services like advisors and tutors but not using any other services. Pierce (1969) describes "Maintenance of Social Support" as a team being a group that does not value counselling and help seeking, and while they receive support/friendship from their team they also may get a false sense of security (as cited in Murray, 1997). Student athletes perceived the role and qualities of sport psychologists and coaches to be distinct. Athletes are therefore more likely to consult their coaches for academic and athletic difficulties and the sport psychologist for emotional problems (Stark, 1995).

Academic interventions.

Academic support programs to assist student-athletes have historically consisted of the standard study table (Murray, 1997). Study table interventions are based on the feeling that better academic results will occur if student-athletes have a prearranged and structured study time. However, Harney, Brigham and Sanders (1986) pointed out that there is not systematic evidence that this intervention is effective. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has attempted, in the last twenty years, to put policies in place that force athletes to balance their time wisely between academics and athletics.

In 1981 the NCAA 's Division I and II universities began to require student-athletes to maintain "academic progress" in order to be athletically eligible. The 1981 NCAA Manual stated that athletes must maintain a grade-point average that kept them in good academic standing and at an equivalent level of progress toward a degree. In 1984 the NCAA enacted a requirement that student-athletes must specify a plan for their studies that leads to a degree. In 1991 the NCAA also

instituted a policy requiring student-athletes to meet 25%-50%-70% of their degree requirements by the beginning of their third, fourth, and fifth years of study respectively (as cited in Murray, 1997). Soon after their study comprehensive support programs for student athletes began to be developed and described in the literature.

Comprehensive interventions.

Effective support programs utilize: qualified personnel, trust based counselor-student relationships, responsive environments, and structured activities that facilitate “personal, interpersonal, academic, and occupational self-efficacy”(Sweet, 1990). A variety of counselling programs have been described for student-athletes in the literature, however, these programs were being done at a select few universities and until 1994 there was a lack of knowledge regarding holistic programs in existence for student-athletes. The Challenging Athletes Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS) / Life Skills program began development in 1991, and was enacted by the NCAA in 1994. Murray (1997) recognizes it as a “program that could impact the overall well-being of many student-athletes” in the United States (p. 49). The objectives of the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills program (2001) are to:

- Support efforts of every student-athlete toward intellectual development and graduation.
- Use athletics as preparation for success in life.
- Meet the changing needs of student-athletes.
- Promote respect for diversity among student-athletes.
- Enhance interpersonal relationships in the lives of student-athletes.
- Assist student-athletes in building positive self-esteem.
- Enable student-athletes to make meaningful contributions to their communities.
- Promote ownership by the student-athletes of their academic, athletic, personal and social responsibilities.

- Enhance partnerships between the NCAA, member institutions and their communities for the purpose of education.
- Encourage the development of leadership skills

(NCAA website).

The program recognizes that student-athletes have difficulty accessing student-activities, programs and experiences and strives to provide resources to athletic departments that will enable them to help student-athletes engage in a well-rounded collegiate experience (NCAA, 1998; Robinson, 1999). The CHAMPS / Life Skills program has added 50 new schools to its membership each year and as of February 2003 included 424 institutions (NCAA website). There have been no studies in the literature describing counselling programs or interventions available for student-athletes in Canada.

Method

Qualitative inquiry has been described as being interested in the “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things” (Berg, 1998, p. 3). The seeking of answers to questions by examining social settings and the people who are in these settings can help qualitative researchers understand how people experience their world (Berg, 1998). As this study seeks to have student-athletes describe what their counselling needs are, and their experience and understanding of the counselling programs available to them, the methodology and paradigm seem to complement each other. Originally focus groups were to be conducted with all athletes. Student athletes were given an introductory speech at the U.C.F.V. Athletic Orientation during the 1st week of the semester by the researcher. U.C.F.V. practices were then attended by the researcher and athletes were asked to voluntarily sign up for the appropriate session according to their year of eligibility and their gender. Athletes were reminded that participation was voluntary. The researcher then contacted each athlete to remind them about the focus group session the day before the session was to take place. Despite these efforts attendance was disappointing for these focus group sessions. Only 2 male 1st and 2nd year student athletes came to the scheduled session out of 5 who signed up. The group of female 1st and 2nd year students had 1 student athlete out of 4 attend. The group of male 3rd and 4th year students had 0 of 4 athletes attend. The group of female 3rd and 4th year student athletes had 2 out of 5 athletes attend. It was decided after some consultation to proceed with using

semi-structured interviews to gather the remaining data. The result was 4 athletes participating in focus groups and 8 completing semi-structured interviews.

Focus Groups

The focus group is an interview in which the researcher “acts as both moderator and interviewer for groups of respondents who articulate and discuss their views” (Palys, 1997. p. 144). The goal is to allow a group of people to use each other to more fully describe and explore the problem than they could have individually (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Social scientists began using focus groups in the 1930’s instead of individual interviews (Gray-Vickrey, 1993). Focus groups were used by social scientists during World War II as a means of non-directive interviewing (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus group practices that have become accepted as common practice were described in The Focused Interview by Merton, Fiske & Kendall in 1956. They were also the first to be credited with using the term focus group (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Morgan (1988) feels focus groups give researchers the opportunity to see discussion on the topic in a short period of time. By having opinions expressed in front of others, the participants can discuss their positions, explain their rationale, and expand their views (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups are also dynamic as they enable participants to react to comments made by others and therefore brainstorm with others in the group (Berg, 1998).

There are limitations or complications that may occur in focus group research. The social characteristics of the group can be limitations, as people may not fully express their opinions as they are concerned about their images, or they may be

reluctant or shy in social situations (Palys, 1997). The utilization of a pre-group questionnaire to be completed by all group members helped to alleviate this concern. Group members were given time to consider their own responses to the same questions to be used in the focus group and hopefully were more likely to express their opinion. The moderator read the questionnaire responses before the asking the questions orally and was able incorporate this material into the group as well. Even, for example, asking participants about a specific response they gave on the questionnaire if it was not forthcoming during the interview.

Focus group findings cannot be generalized to a whole population due to the sample sizes used (Gray-Vickery, 1993), however, due to the diversity in group participants and the initial inquiry nature of the study, this limitation can be relieved at least somewhat. The limited number of questions that can be asked and adequately answered during a focus group interview is a limitation (Gray-Vickery, 1993). In this study however, group members were asked 11 open-ended questions and were able to elaborate on their own answers. This enabled a rich description of their experiences. This study is also an initial step in the exploration of the counselling needs of student-athletes and does not purport to be an exhaustive study of student athletes experiences.

The features of a focus group are people who have certain characteristics, and who can provide qualitative data, in a focused discussion format, in order to understand the topic of interest (Krueger, 2000). The ideal size of a focus group is six to eight participants (Krueger, 2000). Groups interviews typically will last from 1.5 to 2 hours in length, however, they can be shorter or longer depending on the topic,

group composition and the number of participants (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Most studies utilizing focus groups will include four to six groups (Morgan & Scannell, 1998). This study attempted to recruit six to eight participants in four groups, for 1.5 hour interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The goal of qualitative interviews is to “develop an understanding of the social and psychological processes that have occurred in a particular setting, or among people who have had particular sets of experiences . . . by interviewing people who have been in the setting of interest, or who have had the experiences you want to focus on” (Jones, 1996, p. 140). Interviews can “yield rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings” (May, 2003). Questions can be asked and the interviewer can seek clarification and elaboration to record qualitative information (May, 2003, p. 123).

Semi-structured interviewing allows for answers more on participants own terms than in a standardized interview, but provides more structure than focus group interviewing (May, 2003). Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to conduct the interviews themselves as they require the interviewer to understand the “context and content of the interviews” (May, 2003, p.123-124). Using semi-structured interviews enables the interviewer and interviewee to “probe beyond the answers” and “seek both clarification and elaboration” on the answers given while providing greater structure than a focus group interview. (May, 2003, p. 123).

Formulation of Questions

The primary questions for this study are: What are the counselling needs and concerns of British Columbia post-secondary student-athletes?; What programs are currently being provided for student-athletes? The full list of questions (Appendix D) was followed by the moderator who is also the researcher. The initial questions were formulated to allow group members to become comfortable in the group setting. For example, the first two questions are concerned with the academic and career concerns of student-athletes while questions regarding personal and social concerns are asked later.

Participants

Krueger describes the desire for participants to be homogenous, however, there also needs to be a "sufficient variation among[st] participants to allow for contrasting opinions" (2000, p. 71). They should have something in common that the researcher is interested in, namely their experiences as college student athletes. Homogeneity allows participants to be comfortable with sharing information and lets the researcher analyze differences and similarities (Krueger, 2000). Participants in this study were 5 male and 7 female student athletes at the University-College of the Fraser Valley (U.C.F.V.) in their 1st to 4th year of eligibility.

Recruitment of participants

Participants were recruited initially by the researcher handing out information sheets and conducting a short information session at the U.C.F.V. Student Athlete orientation meeting in September of 2003. All U.C.F.V. student athletes were required to attend. The researcher then attended the start of U.C.F.V. team practices a few weeks later to give another short information session and offered

student athletes an opportunity to sign up for an appropriate time relating to their year of study and gender. Student athletes were given an information sheet stating where and when the focus group would occur. Contact names and numbers were also provided on the sheet for the student athlete to cancel their participation. Each group had athletes from different sport backgrounds signed up to attend.

Prospective participants were given a copy of the pre-group questionnaire and consent form to complete and return before or at their focus group meeting. The researcher confirmed each student athlete's participation in the groups the day before each meeting.

Data Collection

Data collection needs to be done systematically (Krueger, 1998). The data was obtained from two focus groups and 8 semi-structured interviews with University-College of the Fraser Valley student athletes. Originally four focus groups were scheduled and confirmed with student athletes to be held at U.C.F.V. and be completed in 2 weeks with 2 groups per week. Due to poor participation in the focus groups the researcher, after some consultation, decided to carry out the remaining data collection using individual semi-structured interviews. These interviews did not take place within the 2 weeks originally scheduled as it was difficult to contact student athletes and have them commit to a time that was mutually agreeable to the student athlete and the researcher.

Light refreshments were served during each session to help engage participants. Each session started with participants signing a letter of consent (Appendix B) and completing questionnaire (Appendix C). The questionnaire was

used to collect demographic information and have participants focus on the topic before being asked questions orally. Each session was 1 to 1.5 hours in duration.

The researcher conducted each interview session and each session was audio taped. The researcher clarified the participant responses during the sessions when necessary to ensure clarity and accuracy of responses. During each session, the researcher kept notes on verbal and nonverbal responses to key issues (Vaughn et al, 1998). At the end of each session, the researcher orally summarized the main points raised in response to the questions and asked participants if these were accurate summaries. Participants were asked to clarify and supplement these summaries. The questionnaires were given back and participants were offered the opportunity to modify their answers in a different color of ink if they wanted or needed to. At the conclusion of each session participants were given a gift certificate to a local movie theatre.

Analysis of Data

The researcher must ensure that the research problem guides the analysis of the data gathered (Krueger, 1988). The goal is to be able to state what was found and support it with the evidence gathered (Krueger, 1988). The researcher needs to “identify those opinions, ideas, or feelings that repeat even though they are expressed in different words and styles” (Krueger, 1998, p. 7). While some ideas or opinions presented may be interesting they should not be used as the summary of opinions shared (Krueger, 1998).

Analysis needs to be “systematic, sequential, verifiable, and continuous” (Krueger, 2000, p. 128). There were 3 levels of analysis with the data that resulted

from asking the questions. The data collection process generated responses to 11 questions in each of the 2 focus groups and in the 8 individual interviews.

Participants' responses to focus group questions, semi-structured interview questions and questionnaires were combined into four sections of data: 1st and 2nd year women, 1st and 2nd year men, 3rd and 4th year women, 3rd and 4th year men. This resulted in 44 sections of responses to be analyzed. The researcher paid attention to the: words, context, frequency, extensiveness, intensity and specificity of comments (Krueger, 2000) as he analyzed each of the responses to each question and constructed themes for each question by each group. To provide rigor to the analysis process the combined responses were electronically mailed to each participant to allow them to respond if they saw discrepancies between what they had said and/or felt were their responses to the questions and what I had summarized.

These results were then analyzed further and generalized into two groups not defined by gender- 1st and 2nd year student-athletes in one summary and 3rd and 4th year student athletes in the other. Overall themes generated in the second layer of analysis were then related to the research question guiding the study. This resulted in a comprehensive overview of the overall themes generated and how they address the research questions.

Results

Athletes were asked 11 questions relating to their experience as an athlete at U.C.F.V.. The questions were related to seven topics concerning the counselling needs and services promoted and provided to student athletes:

- 1) Academics
- 2) Career Development
- 3) Health and Injury
- 4) Personal-Social and Leisure Demands
- 5) Retirement/Transition
- 6) Program Promotion and Availability
- 7) Use of Programs

1st and 2nd year Student Athletes

The concerns of first and second year student-athletes at the University-College of the Fraser Valley (U.C.F.V.) are varied and significant. However, after interviewing 5 athletes, both male and female, their concerns began to form themes in response to the 11 questions.

Academics.

To the first question "How do you feel you have been prepared for the Academic Demands placed on you at U.C.F.V.?" athletes responded that they do not feel that U.C.F.V. had a role in making them academically successful or preventing them from being unsuccessful. They felt "treated like any other student

... no help". They prepared for academic demands by themselves and felt tutoring and study sessions were not promoted to them or available for them. One athlete noticed the hours provided for tutoring by student services conflicted with her practice times.

First and second year student athletes found they had difficulty getting academic work done due to the demands their sport placed on them. Depending on their team affiliation, athletes who were having difficulty with academics had their coaches checking their grades to see how they were doing academically. Athletes reported their coaches trying to help them academically by acting as tutors on team trips. Athletes feel that their poor grades have resulted due to a lack of preparation for university and the perceived lack of help available while at U.C.F.V. when they are struggling.

Academic counselling and advising was not viewed as available by 1st and 2nd year student athletes. While they were able to register for classes before non-athletes, student athletes were unaware of the availability of academic advisors to help plan course schedules and make degree plans. Athletes turned to their coach for help with course planning, or their course schedules were self-planned.

Three or four courses taken per semester is the common course load for 1st and 2nd year athletes. One of five student athletes reported being focused on academics and trying to obtain a certificate, diploma, or degree while at U.C.F.V. However, the four others indicated they are at U.C.F.V. to play their sport and academics are made to fit around their sport commitments.

The time spent per week studying by student athletes ranges between two and approximately fourteen hours per week. Academic weeks including study time and class sessions can be 40 hours long. Two athletes admitted to almost failing courses in their first semester of their first year at U.C.F.V.. All student athletes expressed the realization that they needed to study more and the desire to do so was evident.

Career Development.

When asked "How have you developed a career plan while at U.C.F.V.?" 1st and 2nd year student athletes explained a minimal range of planning being done from none to a vague exploration of possibilities. Three of five have started taking courses in a variety of disciplines to see what they may like. Athletes feel that their career development is delayed, as it takes longer to get through an academic course load due to their sport commitments. Athletes expressed concern at not knowing what is available in terms of programs and degrees at U.C.F.V.. Four out of five 1st and 2nd year athletes had not decided on a career choice, however, they were interested in a range of careers for example: drafting, nursing, law enforcement, biology, criminology, and teaching. Athletes had "assumed [they were] coming to U.C.F.V." due to their desire to play a sport, and had not necessarily thought about an academic program before committing to attend. Their career exploration involved talking to family and social contacts without seeking information from outside sources. Student athletes commonly did not know who else to talk to regarding career concerns or have any career development strategies.

Health and Injury.

The third question "How do you deal with health and injury issues?" revealed that all 1st and 2nd year athletes questioned have a fear of being injured, however, none of the athletes interviewed had injury problems requiring treatment or surgery. Athletes are supported with health and injury issues by the U.C.F.V. Athletic Department through a relationship with a local Chiropractic and Physiotherapy clinic that allows student-athletes to bypass waiting lists and see them immediately for minor injuries. It was reported that some teams at U.C.F.V. have a trainer while others do not. Athletes felt that they were largely self-monitored for health and injury issues. Some coaches were giving nutritional information to student athletes while others were not. Athletes typically turned to teammates for help with health and injury concerns.

Personal, social and leisure demands.

The fourth question asked "What do you feel are the personal, social, and leisure demands placed on you?" A concern for athletes is their not being able to see their family and friends, who are not teammates, as often as they would like due to their sport and school concerns. Their teams become their primary social group and without a break from this tight group athletes find themselves feeling burnt out and socially isolated. Athletes feel that they are now responsible for all facets of their lives and this is a huge change for them as they feel "no one is tracking me and no one cares". Missing classes due to sport travel creates personal and academic pressures as they must find a way to catch up on the material missed. This is done by sacrificing personal needs. First and second year athletes feel that their lives

during the school year consist of their sport, academic classes, study time and personal needs in that order of importance.

The first year experience of 1st and 2nd year student athletes revealed their feeling that starting at U.C.F.V. was a huge adjustment from high school and they had difficulty coping. The result was "writeoff" grades and feeling "lost". Four out of five took the minimum number of courses--three --as possible to be eligible.

Student athletes have various ways of supporting themselves financially. Athletes were supported by part-time jobs, teams fundraising, student loans, scholarship money, and living with their parents. Three of five athletes said that they would have been unable to attend U.C.F.V. without scholarship funding. All athletes found it very difficult to have a part-time job where they could earn enough money to meet their needs.

First and second year student athletes felt unable or barely able to cope effectively with the combination of academic and sport demands that go with being a U.C.F.V. student athlete. Athletes feel they have too many obligations, especially during midterm and final exams, to cope effectively. They feel tired and unmotivated due to the high stress levels caused by combined sport and academic pressure. Pressure from their parents to make sure they "don't fail" was voiced by one athlete. Student athletes may switch their focus to academics when they are feeling burnt out on sport, however, they all expressed a desire to get better grades and increase their athletic performance.

The fifth question "How do you cope with the personal, social and leisure demands placed on you?" had athletes concur that being a student athlete is "all

about time management" -- doing as much as you can with the time you have.

Athletes shared their experience of having 12-13 hour days, with 20 hours in their sport each week, 20 hours in academics and possibly another 5-15 hours in part-time jobs. Weekend sport commitments varied in length depending on game and work schedules, however, travel and games could often take most of the day Friday and Saturdays. The amount of travel with their teams to games interferes with other plans and may involve missing classes. Homework and studying are done on an individual basis "whenever [they] can find time". Using a "dayplanner" made a difference for some.

Scholarship funding for individual athletes was decided by coaches and the Athletic director for individual athletes whether it be "book money" or "tuition money". Athletes were unaware of and or unclear about which athletes were receiving funding and the criteria for these selections and decisions. Athletes were unaware of any other financial rewards or how and where to apply for them.

Several teams' coaches set team goals for their season with their athletes. Two of five athletes have also set individual goals for academics, personal accomplishments and sport, but these are done without their coaches' guidance. Athletes describe having to put some of their personal and academic goals on hold due to their sport commitments.

First and second year student athletes report that other student athletes, from all years of eligibility, are using alcohol and marijuana. The use of alcohol and marijuana according to the athletes varies across teams but it is present. This is despite the student-athletes knowledge that there is testing for substances and

testing positive could result in their suspension from their respective teams. Three of five athletes maintain that the use of alcohol and drugs has affected the athletic performance of their teammates.

Retirement and transition.

In response to the sixth question "What has been the process you have undergone in preparing yourself for the end of your athletic career?" 1st and 2nd year student athletes described wanting to complete all four years of eligibility. They are not concerned about the possibility of retirement from sport.

Program promotion and availability.

When asked to respond to "What Counselling services are available to you as student-athletes?" 1st and 2nd year athletes had "no clue" that counselling services were available or where they might be located. Athletes typically talked to older athletes on their team to discuss problems. Talking to their coach and then the athletic director were also viewed as possible solutions. Two of five athletes were aware of student services existing and there being academic and financial aid advisors. The next question "Who promotes counselling services?" revealed that athletes did not feel that counselling services were promoted to them as either athletes or students.

Responding to the eighth question "Should counselling services be for individuals or groups, and should attendance be required of student-athletes?" athletes suggested that groups should be offered to athletes separately than other students on an individual choice or mandatory group basis depending on the topic. First and second year student athletes felt they should be required to attend career

advising and financial aid workshops. They further recommended that study sessions should be required of athletes who were having academic difficulty, with all athletes having to have regular academic progress meetings with a counsellor or coach. Other suggestions for services included a "Rookie orientation" for all 1st year student athletes in a group format.

Use of programs.

The question "Which of the services do you think athletes are comfortable using?" had athletes explain that they were not aware of all the services available and that they would feel more comfortable if the services were specifically provided to athletes. Those counselling services that were not as personal like study skills and tutoring were also viewed as more comfortable for athletes to attend. Four of five feel uncomfortable with meeting counsellors they do not know, therefore they instead go to see people they know who are not counsellors like their coaches and teammates.

Student athletes were finally asked "How can services be better promoted so that student-athletes will use them?" Athletes suggested that a counsellor going to athletes team by team to promote and present services is better than using informative signs. Having a counsellor going to each team at midterms and the start of each semester to remind athletes of their services was also thought to be valuable. Coaches should be aware of the available services so they can promote them to athletes. Athletes would like to have a descriptive sheet with the list of services given and explained to them.

First and second year student athletes feel that having a counsellor identified for the student athletes who is available to deliver services at the times athletes are available, would be a valuable resource. The counsellor should have an office in the Student Activity Centre and be available at night before and after practices. Setting up an athletic information board in the U.C.F.V. Student Activity Centre with a list of services available would also help make athletes aware of the services.

3rd and 4th Year Student Athletes

The concerns of 3rd and 4th year student-athletes at U.C.F.V. are varied and significant. However, after interviewing seven athletes –both male and female- their concerns began to form themes in response to my questions. Athletes answered 11 questions.

Academics.

To the first question “How do you feel you have been prepared for the Academic Demands placed on you at U.C.F.V.?” athletes responded that they did not feel that U.C.F.V. had a significant role in making them academically successful. However, athletes reported that several individual coaches have taken action with study sessions for those having academic difficulty at the end of first semester. These tutoring and study sessions were not attended or provided for athletes on most teams.

U.C.F.V. athletes are students in a variety of faculties and programs. While they are given early registration there is a diverse level of understanding of what classes to take for program requirements and what help is available in terms of course and program advising. They conceded that U.C.F.V. did give them early

registration that helped them take classes that do not conflict with their practice times. However, athletes had difficulty matching courses to athletic schedules even with early registration as sport commitments are so extensive. Three of seven athletes reported having gone to course advising on their own initiative or having been helped by their coach. However, help was often only sought during first year, and since then they have done it by themselves. This includes having to make sure they were academically eligible to play athletics.

Athletes decided on their course of studies through their own experience with courses they had taken and the advice of their high school counsellors, friends, and family. Ensuring they select the schedule of courses that are needed towards their degree or diploma program are done by each individual. This has at times meant athletes have not taken the proper prerequisites to enroll in higher level required courses. This delays program completion as the athlete then has to do them to take higher level courses needed to graduate. Five of seven athletes are unsure of what path to follow and feel they do not have enough time due to sport commitments to explore a number of options and interests.

Academic plans have taken shape as their time at U.C.F.V. has increased.

Student athletes describe taking three or four courses per semester instead of five like other full-time students. Athletes find it difficult to take four or more courses due to the amount of time their sport responsibilities requires. Their academic commitments include 9-15 hours of class per week with 5 to 15 hours per week set aside for studying. Athletes playing in their 3rd and 4th years are trying to be highly successful in their chosen sport while also making plans to graduate which

causes pressure for them to make academics more of a priority. If their athletic eligibility finishes before their academic program, they are willing to stay at U.C.F.V. to finish their academic programs. Third and fourth year student athletes reported initially enrolling at U.C.F.V. to play sports with their academics being a secondary concern. However, this attitude is reported as gradually changing for them the longer they are at U.C.F.V. Athletes felt that their sport was more of a priority in 1st and 2nd year than it is in the 3rd and 4th years.

Third and fourth year athletes had very individualized study schedules with a range of between five and fourteen hours per week. Athletes expressed the desire to study more and felt they had increased the amount of time they studied over their years at U.C.F.V.. All athletes agreed they feel they should study more than they do to be successful. Athletes suggested that they be required to maintain a certain grade point average in order for coaches and the athletic department to recognize their academic needs. Student athletes reported that minimum academic achievement requirements to be eligible athletically are being brought in gradually by the athletic department.

Career development.

Athletes were asked "How have you developed a career plan while at U.C.F.V.?" Third and fourth year student athletes felt that they had not had a career plan in place during their first few years at U.C.F.V. and their current plans were vague and self-developed. They have been looking into career options on their own, and developing a general plan over the years at U.C.F.V.. They have based career choices on personal experience, advice from friends and high school work

experiences. They have found it difficult to explore career options due to concerns about it reducing their study time, as if they do not pass courses they could lose their eligibility. Athletic commitments make having a part-time job difficult since they have practices and games when most students might have time to work. They felt they did not have enough time to hold down a job that could be meaningful enough to give them a career direction. They had difficulty finding career information and finding time to concentrate on what their interests are outside of sport.

Athletes have used little information outside of their own general knowledge and that of teammates and friends to explore career options and develop a career plan. Some volunteer work was done by several athletes in career interest areas. Athletes have found it difficult while at U.C.F.V. to attend some career exploration activities, like Career Fairs, due to conflicts with their sport demands.

Some have thought about leaving U.C.F.V. to attend other universities for programs U.C.F.V. does not offer. For those students who have them, career goals are put on hold and prolonged because of the lack of time available to pursue them while being a student athlete.

Health and injury.

When asked, "How do you deal with health and injury issues?" 3rd and 4th year student athletes reported that injured athletes found that U.C.F.V. was not of assistance other than to say "go get it treated". Student athletes feel they are isolated and are losing the confidence of the coach and their teammates when they are injured. Athletes without injuries feel "lucky to be healthy". Student athletes reported that the U.C.F.V. Athletics Department has a relationship with a local

Chiropractic and Physiotherapy clinic that will prioritize U.C.F.V. athletes for treatment. This can reduce waiting time for treatment of minor injuries. Two of the seven athletes have had a serious injury that required surgery, while two others were treated for chronic injuries due to sport.

One athlete described his experience of being injured as “horrible.....feels like a waste of time....should be out on the court and now are on the sidelines watching.....stressful ...Want to get out there and can't”. One athlete was hurt at his teams practice and to deal with his injury he went to physiotherapy and kept playing. He did not want to miss games or being a part of the team. He was also concerned that he might “lose his spot”. He taped his ankle himself and took pain medications to continue to play. He eventually needed surgery and that is when he stopped playing- the day before surgery. His experience of being injured in his third year of eligibility differed than when he injured his other knee in first year, as then he had quit the team and school.

Athletes reported not being as concerned about total rehabilitation of an injury as they should be. Athletes feel they try to keep playing if injured and not worry about the problem. Those who are receiving funding from U.C.F.V. are uncertain if a season ending or career ending injury would result in the loss of their scholarships.

Five of seven student athletes report using weights and individual conditioning programs to prevent injury. Third and fourth year athletes felt they were either minimally or inadequately supported with nutrition and individual workouts in terms of information and advice depending on their team. Student athletes described not being monitored by coaches or trainers during their individual

conditioning programs or during rehabilitation from injury. Athletes felt they generally developed and followed their programs by themselves.

Personal, social and leisure demands.

Student-athletes were asked what they feel are the personal, social and leisure demands placed on them. Athletes described investing large amounts of both time and effort into their respective sports. Two hours of practice per day with most athletes also being involved in their team activities for an hour before and after practice was the norm. Activities that could occupy these additional hours include team meetings, physical conditioning and individual workouts. Due to the lack of campus housing athletes do not live on campus, and therefore, there is travel time before and after practice.

Athletes reported that weekends often turn into sport commitment time as traveling to and from weekend games can also involve going to universities over four hours away from the campus. Athletes described 12 hour days during the week with weekend schedules varying in length depending on games and work schedules.

Athletes find balancing the demands placed on them precarious. They report it being exceedingly difficult to fit academics, athletics and a personal life into a day. Homework and studying are done on an individual basis "whenever [they] can find time". Athletes are so physically and emotionally drained after practice at the end of the day that it is hard for many to study at night or have energy to address personal needs. It is easy to fall behind with academic work and other people in their lives often have difficulty understanding the level of commitment they are making. Time

management is a constant concern as road trips can conflict with classes and evening practices can conflict with courses needed for program completion.

Athletes find having enough money to attend school troublesome, as they do not have time to work. Athletes had a variety of living situations including living at home or on their own with roommates.

The fifth question was "How do you cope with the personal, social and leisure demands placed on you?" Due to the demands on their time student athletes find it difficult to keep in touch with friends and family outside of sport. Student athletes identified their teams as their primary source of social support. Athletes estimated that they spend over 20 hours in their chosen sport every week.

Athletes recalled a wide range of 1st year experiences ranging from "frustrating athletically ...wanting it to be over" to sport taking priority over every other facet of their lives. Athletes felt it was a huge adjustment and they were unable to cope, which for many resulted in poor "write-off" grades and feeling "lost". Others did not find it a huge adjustment from high school. Some found they were just "busy".

The use of goal setting as a coping mechanism varied amongst teams and athletes. Three of seven athletes set individual athletic performance and academic goals but these are done without guidance. Three of four teams represented were setting athletic performance goals. Student athletes described having to put personal goals on hold due to sport commitments.

Athletes supported themselves in various ways financially including part time or summer jobs, team fundraising, student loans, scholarships. Four of seven

athletes claimed they would not be able to attend U.C.F.V. without a scholarship. Athletes had a varied understanding of the amount of money available to them at U.C.F.V. as athletes. Four of seven did not know that there were funds available other than through student loans. They indicated that money given to individual athletes for athletic performance is decided by the coaches and the athletic director whether it be "book money" or "tuition money". This is identified as being a source of conflict amongst student athletes. Athletes indicated that academic grade scholarships were available for student athletes who maintain a high grade point average. Athletes are not aware of any other scholarships or bursaries and are unsure where to find information about them. One athlete indicated that he would not play for U.C.F.V. if tuition were not provided, while others were happy they could play with or without funding. A sample amount of money given to an athlete was \$1300 per year- \$575 for academic performance; \$350 books, AAP Scholarship \$375. However, student athletes reported that many athletes do not receive any funding from athletics. Tuition for a full-time student at U.C.F.V. is in excess of \$4000 for a full-time student.

While at U.C.F.V. 3rd and 4th year student athletes have witnessed teammates quit their sport and academic programs due to academic, sport, financial and personal stress. Athletes have witnessed teammates "failing out" academically and/or quitting their sport after the first semester. A student athlete noted that one athlete who lost playing time and their starting roster spot, as the coach felt new recruits were better players, then lost interest in the sport and quit it and school.

Third and fourth year athletes try to avoid doing too much and be honest with themselves about their capabilities and energy levels. Three of seven athletes felt they had no strategies to cope with the pressures but have gotten used to the stress. Student athletes see sport as a coping mechanism for stress in other parts of their lives. Social support is a coping mechanism with members of their teams being their primary support system.

Even though drug testing has been discussed by the athletic department, 3rd and 4th year student athletes report that alcohol and marijuana are still used by athletes. Athletes contend that alcohol and drug use has affected the athletic performance of their teammates. They reported a varied level of use amongst student athletes with some teams and individuals being more active in the use of alcohol and drugs than others.

Retirement and transition.

Athletes were then asked "What has been the process you have undergone in preparing yourself for the end of your athletic career?" Athletes indicate that they have not actively planned for retirement or transition from athletics; however, they realize it will end eventually. They further understand that they will miss having a large support group in the team, but are also looking forward to leisure time in which they can do things other than sport. All athletes plan to play out their eligibility in their respective sports unless injuries stop them. They recognize that they will probably miss playing collegiate sports, however, they want to stay active in it and other sports when their eligibility is finished. One athlete hopes to stay involved with her team after her eligibility is finished by being an athletic trainer for the team.

Program promotion and availability.

When athletes were asked "What counselling services are available to you as student-athletes?" athletes reported not being aware of or having used counselling and other student services at U.C.F.V.. Others had heard of the writing and math centers, career center and academic advising.

Athletes were asked "Who promotes these services?" and they reported feeling that counseling services were not promoted to them very well as either athletes or students. Signs and a very short presentation at the athlete orientation in September were the only promotions they were aware of. Third and fourth year student athletes did not remember the content of the Student Services presentations at orientation.

Third and fourth year student athletes were asked if counselling "Should be in an individual or group format and should athletes be required to attend?" Athletes suggested that non-mandatory group sessions for each team on topics such as stress management, time management and study skills be offered. They felt this would allow athletes to feel comfortable while learning skills. If they are not mandatory athletes feel that sessions should be highly promoted as they would be worthwhile.

Third and fourth year student athletes suggested that career counselling sessions be mandatory for all 1st and 2nd year student athletes in either an individual or group format so that athletes plan to leave U.C.F.V. with a certificate, diploma or degree. First and second year athletes could be individually referred by coaches for further counselling if needed. Athletes felt that other athletes,

especially those in 1st and 2nd year, "would not know where to go to get help" as there is "not too much being said to athletes to go and get the help they want and need".

Use of programs.

Athletes were asked "Which of the services do you think athletes are comfortable using?" Athletes explained that they are not aware of the counselling services offered at U.C.F.V.. Athletes reported feeling most comfortable talking to teammates and coaches about their problems. They had varying levels of comfort with services once advised what they were. Athletes felt most comfortable with individual services, especially if related to academic concerns rather than those more personal. Athletes reported not being comfortable with counsellors as they are not student-athletes and might not be able to understand an athlete's difficulties. They felt uncomfortable seeing someone from U.C.F.V. and would rather deal with problems by themselves or talk to someone outside of U.C.F.V., like friends, teammates, and coaches. Athletes may be reluctant to seek help for problems they have dealt with by themselves for a long time as others may see them as being weak for seeking help. Athletes perceived group counselling, mandated or not, as problematic as other athletes may not keep confidentiality, and athletes may feel self-conscious about sharing with other student athletes.

Student athletes were finally asked "How can the services be better promoted so that student-athletes will use them?" The athlete orientation with all U.C.F.V. athletes in attendance at the Student Activity Centre was not well received by athletes as they were unable or unwilling to pay attention in such a large group. A

suggestion athletes made was to have a mandatory athletic orientation session to talk about counselling and other student service with athletes on a team by team basis. Having a bulletin board with a list of services for student athletes in the Student Activity Centre was also recommended. Student athletes felt that services should also be geared specifically to the needs of student athletes. By having a counsellor dedicated to athletes that athletes recognize and feel comfortable with and who has an office in the Student Activity Centre on campus, athletes felt they would be more likely to seek help. They suggested reminding student athletes about available services more than once a year. Coaches could be involved in referring athletes to counseling and other student services and the athletic director could be involved in the promotion of services. A Career Fair for athletes, and having 1st year student athletes involved and aware of services from the start of their eligibility, were also suggested.

Discussion

Student athletes devote upwards of 25 hours per week during the season to their athletic pursuits in the N.C.A.A. (Simons, Van Rheenen & Covington, 1999), and student athletes at U.C.F.V. devote a similar amount of time. The literature describes services that athletes can access being limited to academic advising, psychological sport performance enhancement skills, and counselling for the person in trouble (Brooks, Etzel, & Ostrow, 1987; Chartrand & Lent, 1987). While the services at U.C.F.V. include academic advising and personal counselling, many athletes do not know that these services exist or how and where to seek assistance. They also perceive U.C.F.V. counsellors as not being able to understand what it is like to be a student athlete. The services are not comprehensive or structured to enable effective use by student athletes.

Academics

Student athletes in this study supported Murray's (1997) claim that student athletes are unprepared for the academic demands of university. All U.C.F.V. student-athletes agreed that they felt unprepared and overwhelmed by academics and the combination of demands placed on them, particularly in 1st year. However, athletes felt their experiences of being a student athlete over time increased their ability to cope academically.

Student athletes find the competing demands placed on them can force student athletes to decide how much time to give academics and sport. If there is a conflict between academics and athletic demands student-athletes often choose athletics

(Adler & Adler, 1991; Miller & Kerr, 2002). This is shown by athletes in all years of eligibility commonly not taking a full course load each semester. They make a choice for athletics over academics every semester by not taking the five courses a full time student would take.

Student athletes report initially enrolling at U.C.F.V. to play sports with academics being a secondary concern, however, this attitude is reported as gradually changing for them the longer they are at U.C.F.V. Athletes felt that their sport took priority over academics in 1st and 2nd year. The Code of Conduct for Student Athletes developed by the U.C.F.V. Athletic Department states that to be academically eligible to compete student athletes must achieve a grade point average above 1.0 each semester. This very low eligibility requirement will not cause athletes to worry about increasing their grades. Only students who are in danger of failing all of their classes would be frightened by this requirement.

First and second year student athletes sacrifice studying for athletic commitments. Third and fourth year athletes agreed that while they had done this in the past, they report now trying to complete all of their academic and athletic commitments, no matter the cost or how tired they are. The fear of failing in either domain could be a possible reason, however, this attitude can lead to feelings of burnout, and decreased academic and athletic performances.

The counselling needs of student athletes include assistance with course planning, registering for courses, making sure they are eligible to play intercollegiate athletics, tutoring, and study sessions. While many student athletes indicate that the counselling services being provided for their academic concerns are academic

advising, the writing centre, and tutoring by team-mates and coaches, the majority of athletes are not aware that these services exist and/or are reluctant to use them if they are aware of them.

Athletes in all years of eligibility responded that they did not feel that U.C.F.V. had a significant role in making them academically successful be it due to inadequate promotion or availability of resources. While some coaches are providing tutoring services to athletes, the use of coaches in this role is varied and inadequate. Student athletes provide a clear message that providing early registration dates for athletes is not enough.

Career Development

Student athletes at U.C.F.V. describe inadequate levels of career planning. Previous research done with student athletes suggests they have lower levels of career development, career maturity, vocational maturity, less pursuing of career interests, and lower formulation of mature educational and career plans as compared to non-athletes (Kennedy & Dimmick, 1987; Martens & Cox, 2000; Smallman & Sowa, 1996; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988; Sowa and Gressand, 1983 as cited in Martens & Cox, 2000; Blann, 1985 as cited in Martens and Cox, 2000). U.C.F.V. student athletes describe having low levels of all of the above, however, whether these levels are lower than that of non-athletes was not determined by this study.

Career plans were not typically shared with others and if they were they are vague. They do not know what is available in terms of programs and degrees at U.C.F.V., and they have not made any career choices. They had difficulty finding

career information and finding time to concentrate on what their interests are outside of sport. Their career exploration involved talking to friends and family without seeking information from outside sources. Plans that were in place were developed without assistance from U.C.F.V. staff. For students who have them, striving for career goals is described as being prolonged and put on hold because of the lack of time available to pursue them while a student athlete.

The career counselling needs of student athletes involve ensuring the identification of a goal and progress towards that goal be it a certificate, diploma or degree. This can be accomplished through the provision of career information and career guidance by a knowledgeable counsellor. Athletes are not aware of career services provided by U.C.F.V. and/or do not use them. Student-athletes need to be supported and engaged in developing a career plan while at U.C.F.V. When enrolling at U.C.F.V. first year student athletes should be confident that their time there will be productive academically unless they choose not to do so. Failing to engage student athletes in career planning tasks ensures that many will have difficulty effectively and efficiently planning their career development while at U.C.F.V..

Health and Injury

Athletes spend a lot of their time trying to prevent injury. While there is evidence that 50% of Division I NCAA athletes have experienced injury, (Etzel & Ferrante, 1993) none of the first and second year student athletes interviewed had injury problems requiring treatment or surgery. However, they were all afraid of being injured. Third and fourth year athletes had either been injured before or seen

others injured seriously during their time at U.C.F.V.. All felt happy to be healthy now. Two 3rd and 4th year athletes described their injury experience. They seemed to understand that it could happen to them. All student athletes at U.C.F.V. are supported with health and injury issues by the U.C.F.V. Athletic Department through a relationship with a local Chiropractic and Physiotherapy clinic that allows student-athletes to bypass waiting lists and see them immediately for minor injuries. However, student athletes at all levels of eligibility still feel that they are largely self-monitored for health and injury issues. They typically turn to teammates for help with health and injury concerns. It is surprising to learn that not all teams have an athletic trainer responsible for designing and monitoring conditioning programs to either prevent or rehabilitate injuries.

Injured athletes need someone they can discuss their feelings about being injured with, who is not connected to their individual team. They do not realize or feel comfortable talking to a counselor about their injury problems and the effect it has on their mental health. The services provided, according to the athletes, seem limited to referrals to a local chiropractor and physiotherapy clinic, with a few teams having physical trainers.

Personal, Social and Leisure Demands

Street (1999) notes that "first year student-athletes, regardless of their academic background and skill level, are often thoroughly overwhelmed by the demands that are placed on them" (22). Athletes must find time for conditioning, training, film sessions, as well as traveling to and from competitions (Ferrante & Etzel, 1996). They require support for dealing with their transition to college;

information regarding institutional regulations, and coping skills for balancing the increased demands of the athletic and academic environments (Street, 1999).

First and second year athletes feel that their lives during the school year consist of their sport, academic classes, study time and personal needs in that order of importance. Personal needs are often sacrificed as they need to use any spare time they have to catch up on academic requirements. Student athletes will not often ask for outside support, however, they need to feel supported and know where to get help if they need it. First and second year student athletes feel comfortable talking with their primary support group of team-mates, friends and coaches about their problems. However, it may better serve the athlete if they are aware of U.C.F.V. resources and where and when they can be accessed. Giacobbi et al feel that while athletes "cognitive appraisals of stress/challenge and coping responses appear to be malleable and open to change . . . their experiences could be enhanced through a systems based intervention"(Giacobbi et al, 2004). To make social support networks, like teams, effective "trusting relationships, individuals with technical expertise and relationship skills (e.g., empathy, listening), and a willingness on the part of athletes to give and receive support messages" needs to be present (Giacobbi et al, 2004).

Financial concerns are present for student athletes at U.C.F.V., and are possibly similar to that of non-athlete students. However, student-athletes do not have enough time available to have a job that could lessen financial difficulties. Athletes feel frustrated at the lack of money they have and it increases their stress. While student athletes have various ways of supporting themselves financially,

athletes at all levels of eligibility seemed unaware of and or unclear about which athletes were receiving funding and the criteria for these selections and decisions. They were also unaware of any other financial rewards or how and where to apply for them.

Scholastic Athletic Awards are funded by the UCFV athletic program. The amount awarded to each individual depends on grade point average (GPA) and the number of courses taken each semester. The money is awarded to students on a sliding scale. Student athletes who take five courses or 15 credits per semester with a 4.33 GPA would receive \$700 per semester. A student athlete taking 3 courses or 9 credits per semester with a minimum 3.00 GPA would receive \$250 per semester.

The British Columbia Athletic Assistance Program (AAP) is funded by the Government of British Columbia with the intent of assisting the best athletes with financial rewards. It is allocated to 'key contributors' to a team. Coaches apply their own discretion to determine which athletes on their team fits this criterion. The maximum amount that can be allocated to any one athlete is \$500 and they must have a minimum 2.00 GPA. Each team nominates a minimum of 4 recipients with the coaches from each qualifying intercollegiate team and the athletic director determining who will receive these awards. In 2003-2004 a minimum of 12 intercollegiate athletes received funding.

Athletic Book Awards are funded by the UCFV Athletic Association. The student athlete must have a minimum grade point average of 2.3 and must also demonstrate: Financial need, dedication to the team, leadership approach toward

team members and activities, and athletic excellence. The 2003-04 school year marks the final year that the Athletic Book Awards will be presented.

Athletic Tuition Waiver Scholarships are funded by the University College of the Fraser Valley. To qualify for a tuition waiver first year UCFV student athletes must have a minimum of a B average in their Grade 12 courses. A returning UCFV student athlete must have attained a 3.0 G.P.A. in 9 credits in the previous semester, or if more than 9 credits are completed, an overall G.P.A. of 2.67 for the semester. They must also be registered for a minimum of 9 credits in the semester. A student receiving a tuition waiver will not be eligible for the UCFV Scholastic Athletic Award Program. The recipient should be an excellent athlete, and receive approval from the UCFV Athletic Department. Fourteen scholarships were awarded in 2003-2004 and 22 will be available for the 2004-2005 school year.

All athletes interviewed indicate that U.C.F.V. student athletes are using marijuana and alcohol. While it is unclear which year of eligibility the athletes using alcohol and drugs are in, it is evident that alcohol and drug use is a concern. Student athletes indicate that the use of alcohol and drugs has at times affected the athletic performance of their teammates. The Canadian College Athletic Associations Anti-Doping Policy includes alcohol and Marijuana on their Restricted category of drugs. If an athlete tests positive for either of these substances they can be forced by the CCAA to be ineligible for 3 months to life, and immediately suspended from all activities of their team, and any and all competition (Code of Conduct for Student Athletes). Due to the nature of the drug policy and the

possibility of drug testing, this is a concern that needs to be dealt with by the Athletic Department.

In order to cope with the personal, social and leisure demands placed on them, Third and fourth year athletes describe a variety of coping methods, such as goal setting for personal needs, their sport and academics. However, these goals are self-developed and it is uncertain as to how effective they are or how wide spread the use of goal setting is amongst college athletes.

Student athletes need tools to be able to cope with stress in all facets of their lives. Athletes who are able to learn time management skills, ways to deal with financial difficulties and the role of drugs and alcohol in their lives will be more successful academically, athletically and personally. However, athletes are unsure of the programs and services available at U.C.F.V. to help them with these needs. They instead typically use their social support network consisting primarily of teammates, to help meet these needs.

Retirement and Transition

Transitional events out of college athletics for the student athlete include being susceptible to team selection, retirement, loss of eligibility, and poor academic performance (Schlossberg, 1981; Danish, Petipas & Hale, 1993; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Petipas, Brewer & Van Raalte, 1996). First and second year student athletes described not being concerned about the possibility of retirement from sport. Third and fourth year athletes indicate that they have not actively planned for retirement or transition from athletics, however, they realize it will inevitably end. They further

understand that they will miss having a large support group in the team, but are also looking forward to leisure time in which they can do things other than sport.

Athletes do not feel the need for counselling regarding retirement and transition. However, the research indicates otherwise, and student athletes need to be helped to prepare for the end of their college athletic careers and enable less stressful transitions to other parts of their lives. Currently there is a lack of programs and services being promoted and provided to student athletes for these concerns.

Application of the Research

This study is an attempt to describe what services Canadian post-secondary institutions are providing and/or should provide for their student-athletes in order to enable them to be successful. Initial generalizations were developed about the counselling needs of post-secondary student-athletes in Canada, and specifically British Columbia by questioning student-athletes at one British Columbia institution-- The University-College of the Fraser Valley. This study serves Counselling Psychology by illuminating the needs and concerns of student-athletes in British Columbia and promoting the development and refinement of counselling services that take into consideration these needs.

Murray (1997) contends that there has not been a theoretic rationale behind personal counselling in athletics, as there is no evidence of counsellors working with athletes in areas such as personal challenges, stress, and time management. U.C.F.V. 1st and 2nd year athletes confirm this as they had no awareness of counselling services being available or where they might be located. Third and fourth year athletes knew only slightly more about their availability. They all feel that

counselling services are not promoted to them as either athletes or students. The need for effective support programs at U.C.F.V. for student athletes utilizing: qualified personnel, trust based counselor-student relationships, responsive environments, and structured activities that facilitate "personal, interpersonal, academic, and occupational self-efficacy"(Sweet, 1999) seems evident from the current research.

Unlike the National Collegiate Athletic Association (N.C.A.A.) in the United States, there are no requirements by the British Columbia College Athletic Association (B.C.C.A.A.) regulating student athletes to maintain academic progress, specify a plan for their studies or meet 25%-50%-70% of their degree requirements by the beginning of their third, fourth, and fifth years of study respectively (as cited in Murray, 1997; British Columbia Collegiate Athletic Association [BCCAA] website).

Student athletes recognize the need for counselling services for concerns relating to: Academic, Career, Personal, Social and Leisure, Health and Injury; Retirement and Transition. The results of this study provide many suggestions for how to better provide and promote counselling services for student athletes at U.C.F.V..

Provision of Services.

The University College of the Fraser Valley could begin to follow the objectives of the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills program (2001) which are to:

- Support efforts of every student-athlete toward intellectual development and graduation.
- Use athletics as preparation for success in life.
- Meet the changing needs of student-athletes.
- Promote respect for diversity among student-athletes.

- Enhance interpersonal relationships in the lives of student-athletes.
- Assist student-athletes in building positive self-esteem.
- Enable student-athletes to make meaningful contributions to their communities.
- Promote ownership by the student-athletes of their academic, athletic, personal and social responsibilities.
- Enhance partnerships between the NCAA, member institutions and their communities for the purpose of education.
- Encourage the development of leadership skills

(NCAA website).

The program recognizes that student-athletes have difficulty accessing student-activities, programs and experiences and strives to provide resources to athletic departments that will enable them to help student-athletes engage in a well-rounded collegiate experience (NCAA, 1998; Robinson, 1998;). These objectives and the rationale behind them could make U.C.F.V. a pioneer in the provision of services to student athletes in Canada.

Student athletes feel that services need to be geared specifically to the needs of student athletes. Services need to be provided by people athletes feel comfortable with and when athletes are available. Student athletes feel comfortable talking to coaches about academic and athletic difficulties. Previous research indicates student athletes view a sport psychologist as being valuable for dealing with emotional problems (Stark, 1995). While coaches are a valuable resource they are not trained counsellors or psychologists. Athletes in this study were also not aware of how to access a sport psychologist.

The idea suggested by athletes that could have the greatest impact on student athletes' awareness and comfort using counselling services is having an individual responsible for coordinating services for student athletes. This "Sport

Counsellor” could assume the role of helping athletes with all of their concerns. This individual must be recognized by the athletes as someone who can relate to them and help them. This “sports counsellor” should have an office in the Student Activity Centre and be proactive being visible and meeting student athletes to help them feel more comfortable about seeking help. They also must be available to the athletes at the times athletes are available. His or her office should be open into the evening hours so athletes can seek help before or after practice on a drop-in or appointment basis.

Student-athletes need to be supported in their academic development while at U.C.F.V. through the combination of individual and group sessions relating to academic advising, tutoring, study skills instruction. When groups are designed to “promote personal and interpersonal growth among relatively well-functioning individuals with the aim of preventing future conflicts, the psychoeducational group format seem[s] highly appropriate to use” (Association for Specialists in Group Work, 2002 as cited in Harris, Alketruse & Engels, 2003 p. 69). The group format can be good for student athletes as they are used to being a part of a group or team (Harris, Alketruse & Engels, 2003). To make student athlete groups effective group leaders should have college athletic experience or experience working with student athletes, be familiar with literature, and attend a practice to better understand (Harris, Altektruse & Engels, 2003). They must also: a) know sport and sport system, b) balance relationships expectation, c) maintain confidentiality, d) work with coaches and the athletic director, e) maintain an action orientation (Petipas, 1996).

Student athletes need access to a counsellor to help plan their courses before their early registration dates to ensure they are taking the right courses toward their program. All student athletes should have a group academic advising workshop during the first semester of every academic year. Student athletes who feel the need for further assistance can then set up individual academic advising appointments.

Each student athlete in first year should be required to attend a study skills group workshop. This could help students study more efficiently and effectively within the limited time they do have to study. The sports counsellor would be responsible for ensuring each student athlete is meeting a minimum grade point average, and taking enough courses to be eligible to play college sports for U.C.F.V.. Students who are having difficulty with courses would be referred to tutoring, and existing U.C.F.V. Student Success workshops. A variety of topics are already being addressed in Student Success workshops including Reading Skills for College Courses, Memory Strategies that Work, and Study Skills Basics: Seven Tips to Change Your (Studying) Life (U.C.F.V. website).

It is important for athletes to be aware of all of the programs U.C.F.V. offers so they can make informed choices. Athletic directors support counselling services directed toward career development as a good idea but they recognize that these services are not available specifically for student-athletes (Sweet, 1990). Career planning workshops should be required of first and second year student athletes in their first semesters to ensure that they have investigated their options and have a tentative career plan in place that is followed by their choices of courses. These

career plans could then be discussed individually with the sports counsellor. Third and fourth year students should also have a career planning workshop at the start of the year to ensure they are on track to graduate, transfer or find a job after the completion of their eligibility. This could be offered to each team or each sport to keep group sizes desirable.

A trainer, or student trainer, should be assigned to each team at U.C.F.V.. This individual would be required to design athletic conditioning and weight training programs for individual athletes and teams. They would also be involved in the referral of athletes to physiotherapy, massage therapy and chiropractic services. If a student athlete had an injury that was causing them difficulty emotionally trainer could refer the athlete to counselling with the sports counsellor. With injured athletes counsellors need to intervene by: a) building rapport, b) understanding what sport and injury means for the athlete, c) ensuring the athlete understands both the injury and rehabilitation process, d) using goal setting for rehabilitation, e) mobilizing athletes social support networks (Petipas, 1996).

The sports counsellor should also be responsible for ensuring counselling services to meet student athletes time management, goal setting, financial, stress management and alcohol and drug counselling needs. Each of these topics could be covered during student orientation workshops, and supplemented by coach or student athletes' self-referral for individual sessions with the sports counsellor. Psycho-educational groups for 1st year athletes can be provided to effectively relieve stress and help student athletes adjust to the college environment (Harris, Alketruse, Engels, 2003). Topics could include Time management, Study skills,

Stress Management, Social responsibility, Career Exploration and Development (Harris, Alketruse, Engels, 2003).

Coaches, athletic directors, trainers, the sports counsellor and more senior student athletes can model coping processes by sharing their own experiences with student athletes (Giacobbi et al, 2004).

Student athletes entering their fourth year of eligibility should be given an opportunity to investigate their retirement and transition needs. While many student athletes will not feel that this is necessary, providing the information on the affects of retirement and transition on athletes can help them to feel comfortable seeking individual counselling during this process.

Promotion of Services.

Student athletes want to see counselling services promoted specifically to them to ensure they are aware of the services available. A suggestion made by athletes is to have a mandatory athletic orientation session on a team-by-team basis to talk about counselling and other student services available. Setting up a bulletin board with a list of services for student athletes in the Student Activity Centre was also recommended to help make athletes aware of and remind them of the services available. This bulletin board could also be used to remind student athletes about important dates and events. Athletes need to be reminded about available services more than once a year. The sports counsellor could come to each team's practices for a brief reminder during midterms and at the start of final exams as these can be stressful times of the academic year. Coaches could also be involved in referring athletes to counselling.

Limitations of the Research

This study has a limited ability to generalize for all British Columbia student athletes as 12 of 136 (11%) student athletes at one institution were interviewed. The original methodology of using focus group interviews did not work as intended and was switched to the use of semi-structured interviews. A possible reason for the difficulty of using focus groups is trying to have busy people trying to fit volunteer work into their already busy schedules. I had to be available to meet them when it worked for each of them individually.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Therefore the participants were self-selected. The depth of the research was also limited due to the number of questions asked in a certain time period. While athletes answered the questions given, there are many questions that still need to be asked to understand what is happening with BC student athletes.

Suggestions for Further Research

The study could be expanded to see what other colleges/universities are providing for student athletes. A comprehensive counselling program needs to be designed and implemented, then researched for effectiveness, at a B.C. post-secondary school. The effectiveness of the program could be measured by academic progress, attrition rates, graduation rates, drug and alcohol use, and the use of coping mechanisms by student athletes.

Research needs to be undertaken that measures the rate of attrition and reasons for attrition at B.C. universities for student athletes before they graduate,

receive a certificate or diploma. It would be interesting to compare the daily life of a student athlete with that of a non-athlete.

Studies conducted with student athletes at the B.C. universities with a larger sample would be valuable. Athletic directors could also be interviewed to find the level of discrepancy between what is available and what student athletes think is available.

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Appendix C

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Faculty: _____

Year of Eligibility: _____

Sport: _____

What are your plans for future after completing your college studies/eligibility:

What do you feel are the major issues that student-athletes have difficulty with? For example, Career, Academic, Personal? Please be specific.

Career: _____

Academic: _____

Personal: _____

Do you know of any services that student-athletes can access when they are having difficulty with the above issues? What are they?

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Academics

How do you feel you have been prepared for the Academic Demands placed on you at UCFV?

2. Career Development

How have you developed a career plan while at UCFV?

3. Health and Injury

How do you deal with health and injury issues?

4. Personal/Social/Leisure

What do you feel are the personal, social, and leisure demands placed on you?

5. How do you cope with these demands?

6. Retirement/Transition

What has been the process you have undergone in preparing yourself for the end of your athletic career?

Program Promotion & Availability

7. What counselling services are available to you as student-athletes?

8. Who promotes these services?

9. Should they be individual or group, should be required to attend?

Use of Programs

10. Which of the services do you think athletes are comfortable using?

11. How can the services be better promoted so that student-athletes will use them?