An Examination of Campus Engagement and GPA for Latinx College Athletes

Guillermo Ortega, Iowa State University

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Latinx are the fastest growing populations in intercollegiate athletics. Despite the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s focus on improving outcomes among college athletes, research has overlooked Latinx college athletes. The purpose of this study is to examine how Latinx college athletes’ campus engagement is related to grade point average (GPA).

Prior research suggests that Latinx students who are more actively engaged with their campus community are more likely to be academically successful (Nora, 2003). However, we know relatively little about whether campus engagement positively relates to Latinx college athletes’ GPAs. In this quantitative study, the author analyzes the Student Athlete Climate Study (SACS) dataset to examine whether interactions with peers, faculty, administrators, and athletic staff are positively related to GPA among Latinx college athletes. The study is guided by the following research questions: 1. What engagement factors (i.e., Faculty, Student, Athletic) are positively related to Latinx college athletes’ GPA? 2. Are there statistically significant differences in the relationships between engagement factors and GPA among Latinx college athletes?

The author used Nora’s (2003) Model of Student/Institution Engagement Model to examine how interaction with faculty, students, and staff enhances Latinx students’ success to obtain a degree (Nora et al., 2011). Nora’s model proposes six major components for students: (1) Pre-college characteristics, (2) sense of purpose and institutional allegiance, (3) academic and social experiences, (4) cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, (5) goal determination/institutional allegiance, and (6) persistence (Nora et al., 2011).

Based on literature on college athletes, the author modifies Nora’s model to examine GPA for Latinx college athletes by using three components of the model: (1) Pre-college characteristics, (2) academic and social experiences, and (3) athletic interactions. Pre-college characteristics include high school GPA, generation status, gender, and socio-economic status (Nora et al., 2011). Academic and social experiences include interactions with faculty, peers, and advisors (Nora et al., 2011). Lastly, athletic interactions are relevant because unlike other students, athletic demands and participation are unique commitments for college athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

The author used IBM-SPSS version 24 to estimate an Ordinary Least Square (OLS) to examine the relationships between engagement and Latinx college athletes’ GPA. The findings suggest that high school GPA is positively associated with college GPA. However, identifying as first-generation and low-income had a slight negative effect on GPA. Additionally, there is a positive association between class participation and being involved in an academic honor society for Latinx college athletes’ GPA. Moreover, faculty-student interactions had a slight positive association to GPA. It is important to note that Latinx college athletes’ interactions with their teammates and coaches were both significant predictors, but team interactions had a slight negative effect on GPA. Lastly, identifying as a Latina had a positive association on GPA when compared to Latino college athletes.

This research can benefit the NCAA and colleges/universities by providing insight on the academic success for Latinx athletes. As Latinx participation continues to grow in the NCAA, it is important to understand what best practices can increase GPA and ultimately lead to degree attainment.