Diverse Experiences among Collegiate Athletes and Non-athletes

What’s the Score?

Ty M. Cruce and Thomas F. Nelson Laird
Indiana University
Overview

- Context and Purpose
  - NCAA Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI)
  - Measurement of impact of diversity on students
  - Formation of research questions
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
  - Limitations
  - Implications for future research
Creation of the NCAA ODI (2005)

- Mission
  - To “[lead] the Association in the development and implementation of strategies, policies, and programs that promote diversity and inclusion throughout intercollegiate athletics”

- Partnership with Laboratory for Diversity in Sport
  - Recognize institutions with diversity awards
  - Assess and report on exemplary practices
ODI statement on diversity

“Diversity is any way in which people differ…”

“Many discussions of diversity focus on demographic characteristics...however...people can vary in their attitudes and values, religious beliefs, political persuasion, and functional area of expertise—all of which have the potential to influence social interactions and work experiences.”
Line of research supports ODI statement
- Based on concepts from Gurin and associates
  - Structural diversity
  - Curricular diversity
  - Informal interactional diversity
- Addresses antecedents and outcomes of quality interactions in- and outside of the curriculum

Limitation of research
- Conflates quantity-quality of experiences
ODI needs some baseline to assess impact
Extant literature provides little guidance
  - Research on diversity in athletics is scarce
  - Few studies include non-athletes as reference
  - Few studies use multivariate techniques
Relevant research
  - NSSL’s “openness to diversity”
    - Pascarella and colleagues (1996)
    - Whitt and colleagues (2001)
    - Wolniak and colleagues (2001)
Review of the literature (continued)

- **NSSL findings**
  - First year – No difference
  - Second year – No difference
  - Third year – Advantage to athletes
  - Differences may be conditional on sport and gender

- **Limitations of findings**
  - Same 18 four-year institutions across all three studies
  - Data collection ended in mid-1990s
Context and Purpose

- **Purpose**
  - To provide stakeholders with a research base on diversity in athletics that is more extensive and up-to-date

- **Research questions**
  - To what extent does students’ engagement with diverse perspectives differ between athletes and non-athletes?
  - To what extent does the impact of students engagement with diverse perspectives on their reported personal-social gains differ between athletes and non-athletes
Methods

- **Data Source**
  - NSSE 2008
    - First-year and seniors (randomly sampled)
    - 769 institutions in U.S. and Canada

- **Sample**
  - Institution
    - 153 NCAA Division 1 institutions
    - 46% of all NCAA Division 1
  - Student
    - 55,506 full-time seniors
    - Interest in development over collegiate career
Outcomes

- Critical engagement with diverse perspectives
  - Diverse experiences (0.68)
    - Informal interactional diversity
    - Curricular diversity
  - Perspective-taking (0.75)
  - Cronbach’s alpha combined (0.79)
  - Correlation between components (0.52)
Diverse experiences
- Included diverse perspectives in class discussions or writing assignments
- Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity
- Had serious conversations with students who are very different in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- Were encouraged to have contact with students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
Methods

- Perspective taking
  - Made judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions
  - Examined the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic or issue
  - Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective
  - Learned something that changed the way they understand an issue or concept
Methods

- Outcomes
  - Self-reported personal and social development
    - Work effectively with others
    - Vote in local, state, or national elections
    - Learn effectively on their own
    - Understand themselves
    - Understand people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds
    - Develop a personal code of values and ethics
  - Cronbach’s alpha (0.84)
Methods

- Independent Variable
  - Student athlete status
    - Single item with follow-up on specific sport participation
    - Dummy code for athlete/non-athlete
    - Dummy codes for high profile and low profile sports

- Controls
  - Demographic: Sex, race, parents’ education
  - College experiences: Work status, major, GPA
Methods

- Analysis
  - HLM
    - Accounts for nested nature of data
    - Weights by reliability of institutional data
  - Unconditional model to partition variance
  - Conditional level-1 model (group mean-centered)
Methods

- **Analysis**
  - First outcome structural model
    \[
    DIVERSE_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1j} \text{ATHLETE}_{ij} + \sum_{q=1}^{Q} \beta_{qj} X_{qij} + r_{ij}
    \]
  - Second outcome structural model
    \[
    GAINS_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1j} \text{ATHLETE}_{ij} + \beta_{2j} DIVERSE_{2j} + \beta_{3j} \text{ATHLETE} \times DIVERSE_{3j} + \sum_{q=1}^{Q} \beta_{qj} X_{qij} + r_{ij}
    \]
  - Two models
    - Athlete vs. non-athlete
    - High/low profile vs. non-athlete
  - Did not attempt to model random intercepts or slopes
Limitations

- Cross-sectional data with longitudinal process
  - Self-reported gains debate
- Generalizability
  - Institutional self-selection
  - Response rates and non-response
Results

- Critical engagement with diverse perspectives
  - Unconditional model
    - 97% of variance is within institutions
    - Aggregate reliability = 0.89
  - Conditional models
    - Accounted for 8% of within institution variance
    - Athletes had greater engagement than peers
      - Athlete vs. non-athlete (0.07)
      - High profile athlete vs. non-athlete (0.13)
      - Low profile athlete vs. non-athlete (0.06)
Self-reported personal and social development

- Unconditional model
  - 96% of variance is within institutions
  - Aggregate reliability = 0.90

- Conditional models
  - Accounted for 26% of within institution variance
  - Athletes self-reported greater gains than peers
    - Athlete vs. non-athlete (0.06)
    - High profile athlete vs. non-athlete (0.09)
    - Low profile athlete vs. non-athlete (0.06)
Results

- Self-reported personal and social development
  - Conditional models (continued)
    - Critical engagement with diversity positively related to self-reported gains (0.47)
    - No differential impact of diversity on gains by athlete status or high/low profile sport
Possible interpretation of findings

- Athletics fosters positive and meaningful experiences with diverse people and perspectives
  - Allport’s intergroup contact theory
  - Benefits of diversity require that all members of a group:
    - Have equal status
    - Work toward common goals
    - Cooperate to achieve
    - Receive support/approval from authority
  - Some evidence that athletic teams have these qualities
    - Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew (2001)
Discussion

- Competing explanations of findings
  - Recruitment vs. programmatic efforts
    - No baseline measures of outcomes
    - Athletes may have entered with same advantages
    - Future direction: focus on first-year students
  - Structural diversity vs. programmatic efforts
    - A necessary but not sufficient component of diversity
    - Prior research provides evidence of relationships
    - Future direction: obtain measures of structural diversity
Discussion

- Conclusion
  - Evidence is positive albeit limited
  - Does not rule out impact of athletics programs
  - Provides a starting point and justification for further research
Contact Us

- Ty Cruce
  - tcruce@indiana.edu

- Tom Nelson Laird
  - tflaird@indiana.edu

- For a copy of the paper