NCAA Innovations in Research & Practice Grant Final Report

Using Peer Podcasts to Develop and Strengthen Resilience in Student-Athletes

1. **Project Brief**

College athletes are vulnerable due to cumulative stresses related to competitive sport and academics (Papanikolaou, Nikolaidis, Patsiaouras, & Alexopoulos, 2003). These challenges include transitioning into college level curriculum and athletics, coping with injuries, redshirting, deselection, the evolving athlete identity and moving into a career beyond sport. The NCAA highlighted mental health concerns of student-athletes as an area requiring attention citing an increase in the type, percentage, and severity of depression in young adults (Neal, Diamond, & Goldman, 2013). Sacramento State's 5-Year Strategic Plan 2013-2018, states: "the impact of a successful athletics program extends beyond the playing field to include supporting the well-being and success of student athletes, both on and off the playing field".

Although the pressure-producing experiences of college athletics challenge the student-athletes psychological, emotional and physical systems, bringing forth stress and anxiety, they can also bring forth resilience and growth (Mikal-Flynn, 2012; 2018; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Improving one's response to those challenges may be a matter of shifting one's mindset (Crum, Salovey, & Achor, 2013). To encourage a positive shift, increase resilience, support student athlete's mental health, and well-being, an innovative program proposed development and use of podcasts created by and for current and former student-athletes. Utilizing peer education, a widespread mode of health education on college campuses, (Boyle, Mattern, Lassiter, & Ritzler, 2011) and the popularity of podcasts provided a convenient and beneficial

means to share former competitor's experiences and insights to support wellbeing, encourage

resilience and growth during college and guide in the student-athletes transition out of sport.

2. **Title Page**

Using Peer Podcasts to Develop and Strengthen Resilience in Student-Athletes

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3. Problem Statement

Collegiate student-athletes are expected to perform at the highest levels despite academic, athletic and life stresses that can impact their physical, emotional and mental health. As noted earlier, examples of these stresses and challenges include; transitioning into college level academics and athletics, transferring to another institution, coping with an injury, redshirting and or deselection, the evolving athletic identity and moving forward to a professional career beyond sport. Whether these stressors are brought forth by academic or sport-related expectations or the trials of maturing and life in general, there is minimal creative programming to navigate these stressors using peer-to-peer and readily accessible programming. It has been noted that peer education is a popular and efficient method of health education on college campuses, as students' natural tendency is to rely on peers for information (Boyle, Mattern, Lassiter, & Rizler, 2011). Sacramento State's Student Affairs Department has adopted peer-to-peer learning in the form of Orientation Leaders and Peer Mentor programs. In congruence with these successful institutional programs, it is suggested that use of peer-to-peer support would also be helpful for student-athletes. It is further suggested that due to significant commitments of current and former student-athlete, an efficient and time saving method of providing such support is necessary, therefore, podcasts, a popular and efficient method of content delivery was chosen. They allow for accessibility and flexibility in delivery, as well as being convenient for the student-athletes' demanding schedule. Furthermore, student generated podcasts have a special place in research as they highly engage students in learning, including promoting deep learning and reflection (Chan, Lee, & McLoughlin, 2006).

4. Literature Review

Trauma, Life Challenges and Posttraumatic Growth

Challenging and traumatic events cause emotional as well as physical pain due to personal, social, professional, and economic disruptions (Seville et al., 2003). Being excluded from or losing the ability to participate in former activities is a painful human experience (Eisenberger, 2012), triggering anxiety, depression and grief over social lives and relationships that were once familiar and now altered or completely missing. Research by Eisenberger and Lieberman (2004) revealed that physical and social pain overlap in their underlying neural circuitry and substrates, inducing the same stressful physiological response for people who have survived trauma (Eisenberger, 2012). These life interruptions can leave an individual feeling alone, cut-off, and at times sensing rejection from their prior social life and activities.

Over the last decade, research has documented that growth can and does occur in the aftermath of challenging and traumatic events calling for a more productive and strategic approach that includes supporting resilience and addressing the affirmative aspects of survival and recovery (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Jackson, 2007). Critically challenging events expressly bring forth the discovery of personal control, resilience, strength, and wisdom. Such experiences allow individuals the opportunity to understand who they are, but more importantly, who they can be (Maslow, 1976; Park & Ai, 2006). Creative approaches to such experiences that prompt and support this potential are needed.

Sports Transition – Trauma and Challenge for the Athlete

Trauma, life crisis, and other disruptions to a person's, rather in this case, the student athlete's equilibrium and status quo, such as playing time, injury, transfer, and transition out of sport, ushers in a chain of reaction and behaviors needed for successful adaptation to a new way

of life including self-concept, individual identity and purpose (Crum, Salovey & Achor, 2013). Such disturbing statements as well as research findings reveal the necessity of developing and implementing approaches to forewarn and support those facing the distressing and negative consequences of challenging life events including college athletics. Additionally, it is necessary to provide a more balanced view to these life situations, recognizing these events as opportunities for growth and placing more emphasis on the one's strengths and resilience (Mikal-Flynn, 2012, 2018). Redirecting the focus toward strengths, assets, and potential for posttraumatic growth is essential to the well-being of individuals (Jackson, 2007; Mikal-Flynn, 2012, 2017; Park & Ai, 2006). To successfully manage stressful events and life thereafter by using an approach that informs, guides and focuses attention on resources and assets available to promote adaptation, resilience and eventual personal growth is required (Crum, Salovey & Achor, 2013; Mikal-Flynn, Gonzales, Sackett, 2018).

Student-Athletes

When a student-athlete completes their collegiate athletic career, they leave behind an era. Anecdotal evidence revealed throughout athletic careers reveal competitors encounter a variety of changes potentially interfering with their existing "athletic status quo" (Samuel & Tenebaum, 2010) including the lessening of an identity they have had for years, and creating a new image of self. This is exemplified by a quote from *George Best: Hall of Fame Football Inductee.*

"*It went wrong with the thing I loved most of all, my football, and from there the rest of my life unraveled. When the football was great and I was playing well, I couldn't wait to get up in the morning and that was the foundation of my life. When the game wasn't worth getting up for, then I saw no point in getting up at all.*" (Best, 2001).

Furthermore, athletes exist on teams establishing strong bonds, and when these connections are disrupted due to injury, illness or retirement a corresponding sense of distress and pain results (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004). These issues can impact the psyche leading to potential mental health issues, which is why addressing exiting college and leaving behind an identity comes at a critical phase in a college athlete's life and this transition must be eased by preparation (Stambulova, 2010; Cockerill, 2005).

The NCAA highlighted mental health concerns of student-athletes as an area requiring attention citing an increase in the type, percentage, and severity of depression in young adults (Neal, Diamond, & Goldman, 2013). They recognized college athletes as a vulnerable group because of cumulative stresses related to competitive sport (Ryan, Gayles, & Bell, 2018; Papanikolaou, Nikolaidis, Patsiaouras & Alexopoulos, 2003). Four of the most common mental health issues facing college athletes are depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance abuse (Thompson & Sherman, 2007). Student-athletes may also be more susceptible to mental health issues including substance abuse, depression, and eating disorders due to the demands of athletic participation (Smith, Scott, & Wiese, 1990; Sundgot-Borgen & Torstveit, 2004). Moreover, evidence supports that all college students, including student-athletes, underutilize mental health resources on campus due the negative stigma associated with these services including a perceived weakness or inability to handle stress (Wahto, Swift, & Whipple, 2016; Watson, 2005). They may simply attribute mental health symptoms to over training and busy schedules, due to a lack of awareness and knowledge in recognizing when emotions and behaviors are unhealthy (Gulliver et al., 2012).

Additionally, there appears to be a missing link in regards to education and support for the identity shift that accompanies athletics retirement. (Martin, Fogarty, & Albion, 2014; &

Cawthra, 2019). Even with advanced preparation, leaving the athlete identity for an evolving professional career identity can ignite strong emotions, disrupt social support, as well as challenge self-esteem and self-worth (Stoltenburg, Kamphoff, & Lindstrom Bremer, 2011; & Cawthra, 2019).

Although stress can be perceived as a negative, it actually can heighten sport performance. Being able to compete with additional stresses brought forth by academic and sport performance expectations, can serve as an asset when transferring said skills to the workforce. "Our research suggests that improving one's response to stress may be a matter of shifting one's mindset" (Crum, Salovey, Achor, 2013). When faced with challenges such as life changes or crisis, individuals have the ability to generate new thoughts, ideas and turn them into superior ways of being (Bauwens & Tosone, 2014, Tedeshi, & Calhoun 2004, Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006). With our psychological, emotional and physical systems, challenges and disruptions can also bring about a series of responses allowing for survival but additionally, and more importantly, growth (Mikal-Flynn, 2012, Bostock, Sheikh, & Barton, 2009, Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006).

The pressure-producing experiences of college athletics challenge the student-athletes psychological, emotional and physical systems, bringing forth stress and anxiety, they can also bring forth resilience and growth (Mikal-Flynn, 2012; 2018; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Improving one's response to those challenges may be a matter of awareness to a pre-existing ability as well as shifting one to a strength-based, growth mindset (Crum, Salovey, & Achor, 2013). To encourage a positive shift, increase resilience, support student athlete's mental health, and well-being, an innovative program proposed development and use of podcasts created by and for current and former student-athletes. Utilizing peer education, a widespread mode of health

education on college campuses, (Boyle, Mattern, Lassiter, & Ritzler, 2011) and the popularity of podcasts provided a convenient and beneficial means to share former competitor's experiences and insights to support wellbeing, encourage resilience and growth and guide the student-athletes transition out of sport (Cawthra, 2019).

5. Conceptual Framework

Creating, producing and using peer-podcasts to *Develop and Strengthen Resilience in Student-Athletes (DSR)* is an innovative program that utilized interviews of current and former Sacramento State student-athletes. Podcasts were chosen as a content delivery method for several reasons: 1) college students are technology-capable consumers; 2) they find listening to podcasts accessible, enjoyable, and entertaining; and 3) frequently share them with their peers (Swanson, 2012). Currently, students use podcasts to address a variety of issues and topics associated with college (Hausmann, 2016). Additionally, due to the availability of media support on most campuses, along with the encouragement of athletics directors, athletics trainers and sports psychologists, the opportunity and feasibility to replicate this program on other campuses is highly probable.

The proposed podcasts were used to provide support and enhance the well-being of all collegiate athletes during participation as well as after graduation. This innovative 6-podcast series specifically focuses on well researched problems and issues associated with college athletics (Neal, Diamond & Goldman, 2013). In addition, it addressed the challenging issues student-athletes experience throughout their careers and after graduation to help students recognize potentially troubling issues early on (Stambulova, 2009, 2010). Finally, it offered ideas on how to cope while revealing and encouraging a student-athlete's pre-existing resilience, strengths and capacity for growth as they face interference in playing time, injuries and identity

crisis with the eventual retirement from college sport (Wylleman, 2010, Kaier, Cromer, Johnson, et.al., 2015). The podcasts addressed six themes: 1) transitioning into collegiate athletics; 2) transitioning into college level academics; 3) transferring to another institution; 4) the athlete identity; 5) coping with injury, redshirting, and deselection; and 6) transitioning out of athletics (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Falls & Wilson, 2013).

The Sacramento State Communication Studies Department provided the studio to tape the podcasts. Current and former student athletes identified by athletics department staff (coaches, athletic trainers, academic advisors, sport psychologists) were asked to participate, including genders, sport variety, timing of competition, as well as the athlete's insights, expertise and experience to address the specific topic or theme. Prior to the podcast, each interviewee was contacted to review the theme/content and provided the structure to be followed by each podcast. Each podcast taping session lasted 45-50-minutes. The podcast producer and the PI edited the podcasts to keep them an average of 30-35 minutes. The entire series was taped, edited and produced prior to podcast series release.

This project had three goals:

1. Creation of 6 podcasts, 20-25 minutes in length (college students prefer podcasts of ≥ 15 minutes; Swanson, 2012), using current and former student-athletes, addressing the aforementioned 6-themes to provide guidance and insight on navigating challenges. Additionally, podcasts would address and include:

    a. multiple sports and genders to support an array of student-athletes.

    b. the unique and challenging issues associated with college sports with an intended focus on the athlete's strengths, resilience, and opportunity for growth resulting from the stress and adversity associated with college athletics; and in completion

c. revealing how these attributes and characteristics positively influence their marketability (Tyrance, Harris & Post, 2013, Smith, 2015).

2. To assess use of DSR podcast program effectiveness in;

 a. invoking a growth mindset and

 b. enhancing resilience through participation in college athletics.

3. After completion of project, to provide the research data and podcasts to other interested NCAA member institutions as well as providing the precise blueprint of how they were created, produced and delivered.

Procedure

Due to an enhanced and refined collaboration with the CSUS IRB director and the research expert and statistician, Dr. Michelle Dang, it was decided to provide the peer-podcast to all student athletes in addition to all surveys in an effort to cover all sports, genders and academic backgrounds. Over 500 athletes received access to all 6-podcasts and asked to complete a pre and post survey (see attachment), the Stress Mindset Measure [SMM] and the 10–item Connor-Davidson Resiliency Scale [CDRISC]. The podcasts were released at two times, in groups of three. At four weeks into the semester and at the end of the semester. Each participant continued in their academic, sport, and training schedules. Participants were protected per Sacramento State's research and IRB protocol and were directed to appropriate resources if triggered emotionally by the covered material and provided appropriate care according to standard treatment procedure and counseling practices. All athletes were provided six (6) podcasts and subjected to all assessments at the same time points throughout the study.

This semester (4-month) longitudinal investigation reviewed athlete stress perception but had two specific research goals: 1) to explore relatively stable individual differences potentially

influencing the efficacy of peer-to-peer features of the podcast program; and 2) to assess whether the intervention is effective in positively influencing stress mindsets (stress-is-enhancing) scores and resilience as evidenced by both within-group and between-group analyses.

Specifically, it was hypothesized that participants would demonstrate improvements in targeted assessments of each domain across time. Data collection occurred at three points over the course of approximately four months (September-December 2019).

Time point	Name and Measures administered	Elapsed Time Since Start	Assessment Delivery
T1	Baseline Assessment *(Pre-Survey, SMM, CDRISC)*	--	e-mail
T2	Follow-Up Assessment 1 *(SMM, CDRISC)*	4-6 weeks	e-mail, text
T3	Follow-Up Assessment 2 *(Post-Survey, SMM, CDRISC)*	4 months	e-mail, text

Measures

Three research instruments provided feedback and measure effectiveness of *DSR* program. Pre and post surveys included demographics (age, gender, ethnic background, academic year, sport: see appendix), insights into podcast delivery, use and relevancy of content/themes. Additionally, the 8-item Stress Mindset Measure [SMM] (Crum, et. al., 2013) and the 10–item *Connor-Davidson Resiliency Scale* [CDRISC] measured 'stress-is-enhancing mindset' and resilience. As noted, the SMM and CDRISC are highly reliable and valid. They are

opportune and efficient involving little time and effort thus avoiding fatigue and ensuring completion by participants.

Methodology and Data Collection

- IRB was submitted, adjusted and a final acceptance prior to release of podcasts

- The three surveys were administered through Qualtrics

- The data was analyzed using SSPS

- Communications to student-athletes were sent via email using ARMS

- Text communications to student-athletes were sent via ARMS

6. **Deliverables and Findings**

Deliverables

This proposal identified 3 specific deliverables, all completed and available to share with NCAA membership institutions to facilitate adoption and adaptation of these resources.

1. A podcast series: *Athletes Interrupted* ©. Six (6), 25-30 minute podcasts, based on relevant and well researched themes, using current and former CSUS athletes, addressed, provided guidance, support and encouraged the mental health for student-athletes. This podcast series is made available for all NCAA member institutions:

   http://soundcloud.com/athletesinterrupted

2. Research of the DSR podcast (*Athletes Interrupted*) programming specifically measuring two behaviors that can positively influence student-athlete mental health: resilience and growth mindset was completed (see *Findings*).

3. Creation of a guide that provides a detailed blueprint, including themes, content, podcast structure, method, etc. for other NCAA member institutions to replicate the DSR program

(see appendix). The Athletes Interrupted © guidebook provides program structure including how to create, develop content and podcast production.

Guidebook includes best practices for:

  i.   "Create your TEAM"

  ii. Recruiting former or current student-athlete interview guests

  iii. Podcast interview outlines per theme

  iv. Podcast editing resources

  v.   Marketing and delivering podcasts to student-athletes

  vi. Ideas for incorporating podcasts in student-athlete health and well-being programming

Findings

Baseline Survey Results

The following results are findings from the baseline survey conducted prior to participants listening to the podcasts. One hundred twenty-four (124) participants initiated the baseline survey with 101 participants completed most items of the survey.

Demographic Information:

Of the 101 participants who responded to questions regarding gender and ethnicity, the majority identified as female (63.4%) and White (47.5%); 18.8% identified as Black or African-American, 14.9% as Hispanic or Latino, 4% as Asian, 4% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 3% as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 7.9% as Other (see Figure 1). The age of participants ranged from 17 to 23 with an average age of 19.75 years. Eighteen percent of participants (18%) reported that they were the first person in their family to attend college. Most

students were currently not working (79%). Among participants who reported working, the average hours of work per week was 9 hours. Most participants owned their own cars (69%) and commuted an average of 11 minutes to school (range = 0 to 75 minutes).

Figure 1. Ethnicities of participants (n = 101)
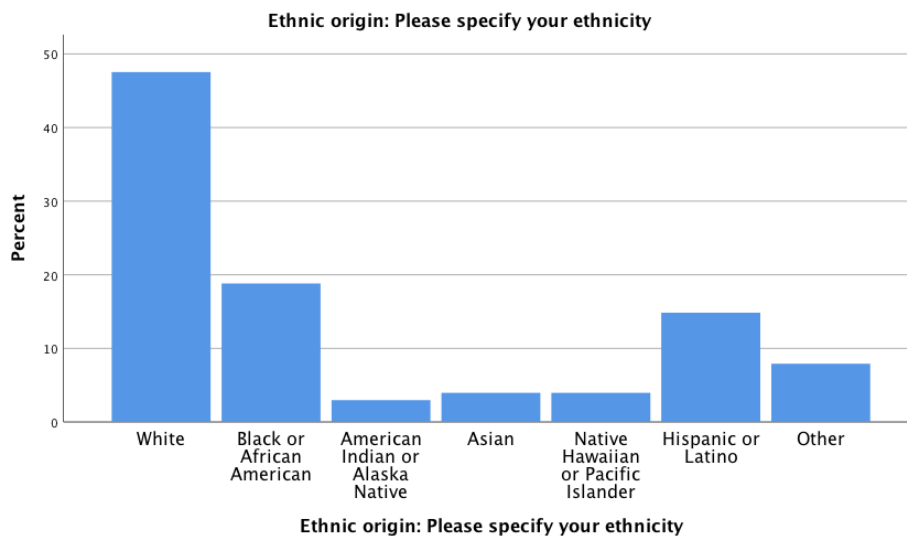
Academics and Sports:

For variables related to academics and sports, participants were spread across academic years at Sacramento State ($n = 101$): 19.8% First Years, 29.7% Sophomores, 28.7% Juniors, and 21.8% Seniors. The vast majority (98.4%) reported attending school full-time (12 units or more) with more than 50% reported taking at least 15 units of coursework per semester. The intended majors varied across 27 disciplines with the highest number of participants reported studying Kinesiology (15.3%) and the second highest being Psychology (5.6%); total $n = 124$. In terms of athletic participation among 12 different sports, the most frequently cited sports among the participants were track (19.8%, women's and men's), rowing (15.8%), football (10.9%), and gymnastics (10.9%) as their sports; total $n = 101$ (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Sport selection among participants (*n* = 101)

Select your Sport:
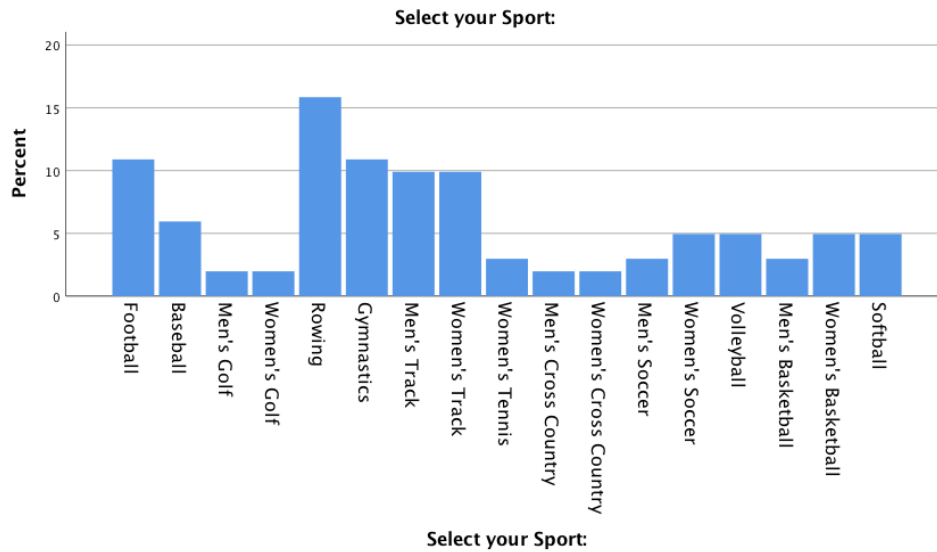
Social Support, Stress Mindset, and Resilience:

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, &

Farley, 1988) was used to measure level of social support as reported by participants. Mean scale

score ranging from 1 to 2.9 is considered low support, 3-5 is moderate support, and 5.1 to 7 is

considered high support. As a group, participants (*n* = 94) reported moderate to high level of

perceived social support (mean = 5.55, SD 1.13) with similar averages across all three subscales

of social support for significant other, family, and friends, means = 5.55, 5.60, and 5.51

respectively. Level of social support was significantly correlated with the number of academic

units in a negative direction (*r* = -.270, *p* = .009); participants who reported taking more semester

units perceived receiving less social support. Level of social support was not significantly

correlated with other variables. Participants tended to perceive stress as being more debilitating

than enhancing in terms of learning, growth, and performance. Based on a 5-point scale of the

Stress Mindset Measure (SMM), a higher mean score on the SMM represented a mindset that

stress is more enhancing than debilitating. The mean score for the SMM in the current was 1.67 (SD = .57). SMM was not significantly correlated with any demographic variable or perception of social support. To assess levels of resilience, participants responded to the 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience scale. Each item has a 5-point response with a higher score indicating a higher level of resilience or the ability to bounce back from stress or adversity. The overall mean score for resilience was 2.87 (SD = .56), reflecting a lower level of resilience among participants (n = 91). An inverse relationship with resilience and the number of academic units taken per semester was noted. Participants who were taking more academic units tended to score lower on the resilience scale (r = -.215, p = .041).

Study Reflections

The findings presented an interesting result in that student-athletes perceived stress as mainly negative and they had a lower perceived resiliency. This notes that student-athletes may not see how stress can actually be a positive. As they stress their bodies in training in order to improve performance and strength, they do not seem to make connection that stressing their minds can also enhance their academic ability and overall performance. This connection that stress can produce a positive outcome may not be a developed global perspective at this point in their developmental staging. Additionally, with athletes scoring fairly low on the Connor-Davidson Resiliency Scale, it is a possibility that athletes regularly place extra pressure and high expectations on themselves. Contributing to this belief is a potential that they are unable to handle "unpleasant feelings", are easily discouraged by failure, and lack in personal confidence to deal with life issues in general (10-item Connor-Davidson Resiliency Scale).

Discussion of findings found interesting insights and deemed this study as exploratory, allowing for future development and assessment on the impacts of hearing from student-athletes.

Due to the short time frame, additional research is suggested to include qualitative research, including a focus group and 'one-on-one' interviews to encompass both student-athletes that completed the study and student-athletes that only partially completed the surveys and podcasts.

Limiting factors that may have had an impact on study participation include:

- Timing – Fall semesters are traditionally busier than Spring semesters. At times the survey requests overlapped with holidays, i.e. Thanksgiving. Due to the podcast production schedule, the final survey was released before finals week and completion of a voluntary survey may not have been a student priority.

- Podcast Length – some feedback from student-athletes revealed even a 25-30 minute podcast was too lengthy.

- Communication via email – Although Bethany Crouch, Student-Athlete Advisor, has access to all student-athlete emails (from our compliance system ARMS), most college students are inundated with emails. They tend to sift through these communications, focusing on what is pertinent and important. Text messaging the information, approved in the IRB, became the best, more preferred method of reaching the athletes. Finally, email especially for incoming student-athletes is not always the ideal form of communication.

Gift Card Pick-Up Survey Results:

Participants who were contacted after completing all three surveys to retrieve their incentive, a Target gift card. When they came to retrieve the gift card, they were asked to fill out a short three-question survey.

- Do you believe hearing former student-athlete stories of their journey is helpful?
- Was it convenient to listen to the podcasts?
- If we did not use the podcast method, what other platforms would be ideal?

Eleven student-athletes were able to retrieve their gift cards prior to returning home for winter break and provided these answers:

- 90.9 % selected the response, "Yes, hearing former student - athlete stories was helpful". 9.1% selected: "Kind of helpful".
- 63.6% selected "Easy and Convenient" when asked about the accessibility of the podcasts

  36.4% selected "Fairly Convenient"
- 81.8% selected "YouTube" as the ideal platform to share student - athlete stories

  18.2% selected "YouTube" and "Instagram TV/Lives" as ideal platforms to share these stories

    When student-athletes came in to retrieve their cards, a relaxed, candid conversation revealed feedback on how they enjoyed the podcasts and if they found them beneficial. A theme presented itself --- junior and senior student-athletes thoroughly enjoyed the podcast method and found them easy to listen to, especially when multitasking, i.e. walking to class, driving to school, doing chores, etc. Sophomore and first-year athletes did not seem to fully engage in

listening to the podcasts, stating the podcasts were too lengthy. This feedback lends to exploring that in a matter of three to four years, technology platform preferences can change amongst the student-athlete population. For future consideration and development, exploring video interviews and organizing them in categories (dealing with injury, transferring, etc.) could possibly be more attractive to the upcoming generation of student-athletes.

7. Implications for Campus Level Programming

Incoming Student-Athlete Meetings:

Peer athlete podcasts have the opportunity to be implemented into campus-level programming in a variety of methods. If the institution has programs that exist around onboarding first year and transferring student-athletes, these podcast interviews could be provided as a resource, even listening to short segments of the interviews. Providing insights to incoming student-athletes on relevant themes covered in the podcasts would be helpful in informing and supporting their transitions through college itself as well as the collegiate athletics journey.

First-Year and Senior Seminar Courses:

Institutions with first-year seminar courses or senior seminar courses comprised of all student-athletes, could implement the podcasts in their pedagogy, adding them as assignments, avenues to introduce these topics and allow for reflection and incorporation of ideas and behaviors noted. Assignments specifically utilizing the podcasts could provide discussion questions and/or a short reflection papers to identify student resources, experiences and guidance.

Communicating the Program:

It is essential to make available and communicate this resource to all student-athletes by creating QR codes or Bitly quick links to post in the student-athlete study labs, posting on student-athlete development pages on the institution's athletic program websites, sharing links on social media, in addition to placing the links and QR codes in student-athlete planners, all serve as beneficial ways to reach the student-athlete population. Institutional platforms in which all student-athletes could be notified via emailed and or text messaged, provides an additional method of communicating the podcast resource. Also, providing access to these podcasts by other institutions and athletes allows the opportunity for an in-coming student-athlete to hear the experiences of alumni student-athletes, helping to create and support transparency in the recruiting process, while providing first hand insight into the student-athletes collegiate athletics journey, revealing struggles and challenges but also the opportunities for growth experiences.

Student-Athlete Leader Program Ambassadors, SAAC Involvement & Professional Development:

This student resource can provide an opportunity for current student-athletes to gain professional development and should be recommend to student-athlete leaders and members of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee who can serve as ambassadors for the programming. The research associated with the podcasts, presented the potential impact of peers influencing one another, especially in addressing the challenges and struggles of collegiate athletics, it would provide a benefit for student-athlete leaders to share the podcast resource as a supportive practice. Also, it is suggested to enhance student interest, using internal resources for podcast production, by incorporating current student-athletes majoring in Communication Studies or Journalism, to host, create, edit and produce podcasts would be engaging. Providing this

involvement brings a sense of accountability and ownership, in addition to sharing the benefits and building interest with current student-athlete population.

Student-Athlete Alumni Relations & Development:

Involvement of student-athlete alumni is a prominent goal for athletics departments as this involvement contributes to the success of continual donation and annul fund programs. The challenges of involving student-athlete alumni in impactful ways and developing deeper relationships effects many, if not all, athletics departments (Brunette, C., Vo, N., & Watanabe, N. (2017). Student-athlete alumni may need and want an avenue to become involved again with their alma mater. Using interviews from student-athlete alumni, sharing their stories, insight and guidance is one way to reacquaint them with their institutions. Connecting with shared experiences through interviews and the telling of stories via podcasts provide an engaging and unique platform for reconnecting alumni. More importantly, the podcast platform can be shared publicly, allowing for student-athlete alumni's parents, friends, and colleagues the opportunity to listen to athletes experience and become more interested and invested in the success of the institution.

Evolving the Program with Technology Trends:

Finally, it is noted that technology and platform preferences change at a rapid pace. Listening to feedback from current student-athletes, adjustments can be made to increase attractiveness of programs to fit and fulfill their needs, such as the Peer Athlete Podcast program. Their feedback also suggested consideration *YouTube* and filmed interviews to engage a wider range of student-athletes.

Conclusion

Providing care and support for student-athletes using peer-podcasts brought forth welcoming ideas but more importantly more work to be done. The initial peer-podcasts were not only fun to produce but also let the Sacramento State student-athletes know that their care and wellbeing is a priority. Also, using podcast utilized a method to provide content that was timely and efficient for them to access. Further work on the project is required addressing a wider scope of issues and extending the research to better inform and direct this student-athlete mental health and wellness intervention.

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9. **Appendix**

   a. *Podcast Outline Example for Interviews*

DEVELOPING & STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE (DSR) PODCAST

THEMES
NAVIGATING INJURY
DESELECTION
TRANSFERRING TO ANOTHER INSTITUTION
LIFE AFTER SPORT – CHOOSING A CAREER
PURSUING A DOCTORATE

Interview with Aaron Crouch
Former Baseball Student-Athlete
Doctor of Physical Therapy

1. Tell us about your sport; how you got interested in playing baseball and why you choose pitching. What was it about being outfielder … that role – that intrigued you?

2. How long have you played – when did you start and how long did you play in college?

3. Talk about the overall experience; the good stuff and the challenges.

4. Share about challenges faced during your collegiate athletics career involving your sport….baseball is tough, how did you balance playing, traveling and academics.

5. Injury is a part of sport and can greatly impact the athlete physical, emotional wellbeing as well as their confidence. From your student-athlete's experience, talk about the impact and how although there are tough things, growth can be an eventual outcome…speak as to how you handled your injuries then
   a. And how you would have handled them knowing what you know now?

6. Collegiate coaches' roles, their jobs are challenging. They have both personal, athlete and organizational responsibilities and challenges, including making hard decisions to "produce" or create the best team. What perspective did you gain after being released from your sport?

7. Talk about your experiences as a collegiate athlete regarding what it brought to you, how you grew, what you learned.

8. Finally, do you think reaching the level of a college athlete with all the ups and downs, learning how to win and loosing…did that affect your ability to handle life after, specifically your work life? Why?

9. Did you include this experience on your resume? Did you discuss your athletic experience in job interviews? How did you frame it?

10. In the form of 'rules' or strategies, share your wisdom / advice to current student-athletes regarding their time in college and preparing for life after sports?

Guidebook for *Athletes Interrupted*
Peer Podcasts used to Develop Strength and Resilience in Student-Athletes
http://soundcloud.com/athletesinterrupted

These podcasts were created and developed by Dr. Joyce Mikal-Flynn and Bethany Crouch using evidence based research to identify troubling, challenging and even traumatic issues impacting college student athletes. Current and former Sacramento State student-athletes were identified and invited to speak to issues involving: transitioning to college level academics and sport, coping with injuries, redshirting, deselection, transferring from on institution to another, the evolving athletic identity and moving on…life after sport.

To Begin:

There are some basic steps to follow. First and foremost - pick the best TEAM. As an athlete, you get this. The team in terms of what they bring to the process, how well they work together, following up and supporting the creative process is key. Our team had five people; a project director, a project coordinator, two student assistants and a research director. Each person was willing, capable and interested in the project from the onset. They had special and unique skill sets including organizational, writing, research, creative process, and connections. Each member took on specific tasks and responsibilities and were accountable for their respective tasks.

Communication and Accountability

To enhance, support each other and keep on the timeline, weekly meetings were scheduled, in person or via Zoom. The project timeline and activities were discussed, each team member's

task reviewed, current status of the project discussed and each person would suggest their own plan and workload for the following week. Besides the right TEAM, we found the weekly meetings key to our productive work together, trusting and respecting each other and getting the project completed well and on time. Some meetings lasted 15 minutes, others 45 minutes depending on project and group needs.

Choosing the Right Themes and Athletes to Interview

The themes used (see above) were based on evidence. Research was initially completed to review the major issues faced by college athletes and their life after sports. Since this grant was awarded to Sacramento State, only Sac State student-athletes were invited to be interviewed. Some podcast themes involved post-graduation, thus we used both current and former athletes. Also, due to research, it was noted using peer or mentor support was helpful, so using this in the context of peer-support podcast seemed both feasible and responsible. The decision regarding athletes being interviewed rested primarily with the Athletic Academic Advisor. Trainers, coaches, and the sports psychologist was also consulted. Once chosen, athletes were contacted directly by email then by phone to discuss the project and their interest in it. All were both honored and pleased to be asked.

Preparation for Interviews

In conjunction with selecting podcast guests, a search for the right equipment and room to record the interviews took place. After sending out an inquiry, the team was contacted by a Communications professor. We met and told him more about the project and he graciously provided some 'sound proof' space for the interviews and helped find the best equipment, at no cost. Equipment used to record the podcasts included a Surface Pro laptop, a Blue Yeti microphone, and the recording platform chosen was Zoom. Accessibility to create podcasts was also a reason why this method was selected.

Those being interviewed were met with in advance, given some basic information regarding the themes and content expected in the podcasts, but no specific questions were given in advance allowing them to tell their stories in a less scripted manner. The project director and project manager, in advance, had ideas of questions and some comments they wanted to cover for the interview, however, the interviews were open ended with minimal guidance from the interviewer (see attachment of Aaron Crouch's interview guide –Appendix a.. Each interview was taped at a convenient time for the interviewed athlete. Interviews lasted between 45-50 minutes. An important team decision was to engage a company to assist in the editing process with the podcasts. Without experience regarding this skill and to honor those being interviewed and their stories, the team decided that it a necessary part of the project-to make the podcasts more professional in the style and delivery.

Podcast Production

Having vetted companies, it was decided to utilize a local production company in Sacramento, CA. They had experience with podcasts, connections to Sacramento State and were able to connect with the athletics department to gain audio footage of some of the featured athletes from their competitions. This added to the podcasts in their creativity and interest. Additionally, this creative aspect along with the editing process was very helpful. What would have taken many hours for the podcast team to do independently was fairly seamless for this production company. Additionally, and what is of great importance for the team as well, is the production company provided written transcripts of each interview allowing for a qualitative research project to emerge from these interviews or data.

Conclusion

This was an amazing project and experience. At one of the last meetings, it was discussed how proud we were regarding our teamwork, accountability, creativity and most of all, the podcasts themselves. This is a relatively simple process once you build your team, organize the time, and invest in the final production. Athletes Interrupted, a name and logo we created, was a worthwhile project. All podcasts can be found at http://soundcloud.com/athletesinterrupted.