



**UNIVERSITY** *of the*  
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UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE  
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

**Title: A Balancing Act: First team rugby Players' Perceptions about Academic and Athletic Commitments**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sport is regarded as an essential component of Higher Education Institution governance, development, and the lives of student-athletes and the academic community. Student-athletes in Higher Education Institutions around the world are increasingly needed to manage their academic and athletic commitments. The purpose of this research is to examine factors that influence student-athletes' ability to balance academic and athletic commitments. The conceptual framework basis for this study adopted Comeaux and Harrison's model of academic achievement for student-athletes. An exploratory-qualitative design methodological approach was adopted to collect data, using two focus group discussions. Using a purposive sampling method, fifteen Higher Education Institution first team rugby players consented to participate in this study. A deductive theme analysis technique was used to analyse the data. Results gathered from this study revealed that, student-athletes found it difficult to adequately manage their sports and academic responsibilities, frequently failing to find enough time for both and feeling pressured and overwhelmed by the pressure to perform well in both. Furthermore, the study identified several factors that influenced student-athletes' ability to balance their commitments, including integration into the academics, involvement in the athletics, support from institutional resources, and environmental pull factors such as financial aid. The study concludes that academic advisors, coaches, teammates, and environmental factors all play an important role in assisting student-athletes in balancing their academic and athletic commitments. It also suggests that more research be conducted to investigate interventions that can assist student-athletes in better managing the balance between their academic and athletic commitments, as well as the potential impact of technology on this balance.

## **KEYWORDS**

Balancing Act, Rugby, Higher Education Institutions, Student-athletes, Varsity sport, Academic Commitments, Sport Commitments.

## **DECLARATION**

I, Bulelani Mlakalaka, declare that this dissertation is my work. It is being submitted for the degree Master of Philosophy in Sport for Development at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other university.

## **DEDICATION**

I want to start by giving God the glory for providing the motivation I needed to finish this study. My gratitude and sense of modesty for this opportunity are immense. Furthermore, I'd like to express my gratitude to my wife, Amanda Mlakalaka, for all the help she's given me and for raising our two daughters, Bubele and Bubuhle. Additionally, I appreciate the help of all the UWC rugby players who participated in this study. We appreciate your help and dedication to this project. They made it possible for me to do this research, and I will be eternally grateful.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

HEI's	Higher Education Institutions
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace
SARU	South Africa Rugby Union
VC	Varsity Cup
SCM	Sport Commitment Model
SARM	Student Athlete Retention Model
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HSSREC	Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

This study explores first-team rugby players' perceptions of balancing their academic and athletic commitments at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Studies conducted by Apaak & Sarpong (2015), and Gomez et al. (2018), revealed that the poor academic results among student-athletes in HEIs fostered open coach-athlete communication and in-depth planning, and the need for adequate recovery. Studies from Ghana, the United States of America and South Africa found that some student-athletes were unable to adequately cope with academic projects and athletic commitments, especially during big matches that are fixtured during the domestic sports season (Apaak & Sarpong , 2015; Gomez et al., 2018; Donkin et al., 2020).

Donkin et al. (2020) study further illustrated that some academic staff do not appear to value the role of rugby and athletic achievement, which may cause undue stress for student rugby athletes. As a result, student-athletes reported not knowing how to balance their academic and athletic commitments (Apaak & Sarpong , 2015; Gomez et al., 2018; Donkin et al., 2020). To regain or keep up their performance, motivation, attention, and concentration, student-athletes, according to Nicholls et al. (2006), should obtain instruction and help to rid their thoughts of negative self-talk and replace it with more constructive thought patterns.

Apaak & Sarpong (2015) propose that HEIs should learn more about the unique challenges faced by student-athletes and how they can be overcome through the design and implementation of intervention programs that will improve the resilience and mental health of these students. Injuries are prevalent among student-athletes who participate in high-intensity sports may have an increased risk of injury (Lemoyne et al., 2017). Gomez et al. (2018) explained that student-athlete stress and recovery must be balanced for optimal training adaptation and demands with the additional requirements of an academic programme, which can create unique stressors. A study conducted by Donkin et al. (2020) illustrated that there is limited available literature on player management in South Africa on all student-athletes demands. The importance of group interference when a student-athlete falls behind with academic projects is significant due to rugby commitments.

As a result, group interventions provide more resources because members learn from each other's everyday experiences. Therefore, this study seeks to provide insight into first-team rugby players' academic and athletic balance experiences attending one HEI in the Western Cape Province of South Africa.

## **1.2 The statement of the problem**

A literature review reveals that HEI rugby players face unique challenges balancing their academic and athletic responsibilities (Apaak & Sarpong, 2015; Donkin et al., 2020; Gomez et al., 2018). These include the risk of injuries, lack of academic performance, poor performance, and academic challenges, with a significant dropout percentage among student-athletes in HEIs in South Africa.

A study conducted by Williams (2020) revealed that approximately 40% of scholarship-eligible student-athletes do not fulfil their academic obligations by transferring to another HEI, dropping out entirely, or not completing their undergraduate degrees in the standard amount of time. The program under study in this research takes a holistic, individual approach and involves students setting their academic and rugby season goals. After 14 years, the program's effects on student's ability to maintain a healthy academic and athletic schedule remain unchanged, despite efforts to help them graduate. This study aims to explore the balancing act of first-team players' perceptions of academic and athletic commitments.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

This research has the potential to help the program and HEI minimise and prevent future issues that influence academic and athletic balance challenges for student-athletes, which is useful for the program, the HEIs, investors, and stakeholders. Furthermore, many studies looking at student factors influencing academic and athletic balance at institutions in South Africa have concentrated on the overall population of students rather than student-athletes, much alone rugby student-athletes (Apaak & Sarpong, 2015; Donkin et al., 2020; Gomez et al., 2018; Williams, 2020).

The lack of research examining how student rugby players, who are student-athletes, in HEIs in South Africa manage their academic and athletic commitments is another impetus for this study.

### **1.4 Research question**

What are first-team rugby 'players' perceptions about balancing their academic and athletic commitments?

## 1.5 The aim and objective

This research aims to learn how student-athletes, in particular, first-team rugby players at one Western Cape Province HEI perceive balancing their academic and athletic commitments. The following objectives were formulated:

- To explore university first-team rugby 'players' perceptions about the balance between their academic and athletic commitments in the Western Cape Province.
- To describe how first-team rugby players cope with academic and athletic commitments.
- To explore some factors resulting in student-athletes dropout from failing their academic programme.

## 1.6 Interpretation of key terms

**The Balancing Act:** An activity that demands a delicate equilibrium between various demands or situations.

**Rugby:** A team sport played with an oval-shaped ball that can be kicked, carried, and passed between players.

**Higher Education Institutions:** Educational establishments that offer and provide higher education, including universities and colleges.

**Varsity Sport:** The premier intercollegiate sports tournament series in South Africa, known for changing lives since 2012.

**Student Athlete:** An individual who participates in, is eligible to participate in, or may be eligible to participate in, any college-level sports.

**Academic Commitment:** A dedication by both the teacher/instructor to student achievement, and by the student to achieving the set goals.

**Sport Commitment:** A psychological state indicating the resolve or desire to continue participating in sports.

## **1.7 Summary of research methodology**

In Chapter 3, the research methodology is discussed in more detail. The section provides an overview of the research approach and how it relates to the study's objectives. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it enabled the researcher to gather personal narratives and insights from participants using FGD. The data and findings were analysed through the lens of Comeaux and Harrison's Conceptual Model for HEI student-athlete academic success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Two focus group discussions were conducted, each with a group of seven and eight first-team rugby players. Data analysis involved a deductive thematic analysis process, where data was familiarised, initial codes were created, coded data themes were searched, themes were reviewed, and issues relevant to the research were identified. The final report was then published. Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology used in this study.

## **1.8 Outline of chapters**

The background and rationale for this study is presented in Chapter 1, which includes a compelling argument for its importance. The purpose of the study is to fill a knowledge gap regarding university student-athletes' ability to balance their academic

and athletic commitments, with a specific focus on rugby student-athletes in the South African higher education context.

The problem statement, significance, research questions, aim and objectives, interpretation of key terms guide the trajectory of this investigation. The chapter concludes with a summary of research. The literature review, including the background on student-athlete dropout, is discussed in Chapter 2. It also includes an overview of relevant theories and models of student dropout. The research methodology used in the study is described in Chapter 3, which includes an exploratory qualitative approach to gather data. A summary of the findings is presented in Chapter 4, in relation to the study's objectives. Finally, Chapter 5 provides the conclusions, recommendations for further research and future considerations.

The chapter which follows is the literature review.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2. Introduction**

This section will provide context for the study by discussing previous research in sports development that has examined the symbiotic relationship between academics and athletics among student-athletes. The purpose of the literature review is to contextualize and clarify the research topic and aims by providing an overview of previous and current studies on student-athletes at HEIs.

#### **2.1 Sports development**

Sports have become a significant aspect of government policies in many countries. Over the past few years, there has been a growing emphasis on promoting and developing sports as a means of improving society and the lives of its citizens (Bloyce & Smith, 2009). The concept of "sports development" encompasses the use of sports to promote growth and development within society (Nhamo & Magonde, 2014). The main objectives of sports development include increasing participation in sports and enhancing the quality of sports performance (Green, 2005; Livingston et al., 2017). There are various approaches to studying sports development, but the most used methodologies are sport development and development through sport. These approaches have distinct goals and outcomes (Ha et al., 2015). Research over the past decade has shown that the positive values of sports have led to the involvement of government and international agencies in utilizing sports to achieve developmental goals and provide hope to marginalised communities (Didier, 2019).

The term "sport for development" refers to the various ways in which sports can contribute to the growth and development of individuals and communities.

### **2.1.1 Sport for development**

#### **a. International**

Out of 944 registered Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) programs worldwide, Svensson and Woods (2017) found that 382 were run in six African countries: South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Ghana, and Tanzania. Based on the data, it was discovered that a total of 218 education-related SDP programmes were being implemented in South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda. They reasoned that this might be due to the unique circumstances across Africa.

#### **b. South Africa**

In South Africa, sporting events serve as a platform for fostering personal growth, gender equality, societal cohesion, and the expansion of social capital (Motlhaolwa, 2016). A wide variety of institutions, from the government to schools, use sports to teach life lessons and foster unity, according to Nhamo and Magonde (2014). A more equitable way to address a deeper understanding of sports in various contexts for development programs is proposed by Svensson and Woods (2017). They also note that most South African sports' common goal is teaching life skills.

### **2.1.2 University rugby programmes in South Africa**

The South Africa Rugby Union's (SARU) Constitution places administrators responsible for adopting and promoting measures to foster, promote, regulate, and

encourage rugby in South Africa and provide rugby facilities for all persons (SARU, 2019).

Many South African HEIs have joined the Varsity Cup (VC), a tournament where HEI-level athletes play against one another. Regarding rugby regulations, legislation innovation, match play, and special requirements for full-time student-athletes, the South African Varsity Cup (VC) tournament have emerged as the most important. The VC has grown and changed since 2008, becoming a very intense and physically demanding HEI-level competition. In addition, each player is a serious student enrolled in a full course load. The top four HEI teams will advance to the elimination stages through a round-robin system.

In a round-robin tournament, each team plays the other team once, and the tournament losers are eliminated. There are nine HEI clubs taking part. The nine-week round-robin schedule includes one bye week for each team before the playoffs begin, and all teams play the same number of games at home and on the road. However, it is important to highlight that in South Africa, there is relatively little written on player management regarding all student-athlete's needs (Donkin et al., 2020).

## **2.2 Student athlete's academic and athletic commitments**

The student-athletes have the difficult dual role of studying and competing. Student-athletes must do many things every day, such as attending academic monitoring appointments, attending classes, tutoring, practising, and strengthening/conditioning (O'Neil et al., 2021).

Unsurprisingly, student-athletes find it difficult to balance their academic and athletic obligations. Despite the positive connotations that the word "student-athlete" may evoke, many student-athletes experience academic stress and even burnout due to the competing demands of their academic and athletic pursuits (Adler & Adler, 1990; Cartigny et al., 2019; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003).

### **2.2.1 Academic Stressors**

Student-athletes have identified stress as the most prevalent impediment to academic success. The stress that student-athletes face can come from a variety of different places, including but not limited to bias, stereotypes, large course loads, high expectations for success, and limited free time (Abedalhafiz et al., 2010). Within the first two years of enrolling at HEIs, student-athletes reported an increase in the psychological expenses (e.g., program demands and inability to engage in other activities) of their studies (Nicholls et al., 2009). Various research has recognised poor preparation, injuries, performance expectations, self-presentation, and rivalry as stressors in elite sports (Cosh & Tully, 2015; Gomez et al., 2018). Outside of the pressures of competition, student-athletes face other sources of stress in the sports organization, such as the demands of relationships and interactions with others, the pursuit of athletic mastery, and the cultivation of performance (Gomez et al., 2018). The training environment has been noted as a potential source of stress (e.g., high-pressure performance settings that encourage friendly rivalry among athletes) (Cosh & Tully, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic has added new kinds of stress for students on top of the academic pressures they already face (Fruehwirth et al., 2021).

Students, for example, rely on email for communication during distance study, and many emails have been linked to email stress, regardless of how individuals manage these emails. It is getting more difficult for students to keep up with the demands of their academic studies, and new kinds of stress and shifting circumstances can hinder their ability to learn. As a result, during the pandemic, it is important to consider the difference in stress levels between first-time and veteran students (Fruehwirth et al., 2021).

### **2.2.2 Commitments**

In sports psychology, the sport commitment model (SCM) is a well-known theoretical framework (Rubel, 2018). An early definition of sports commitment in the SCM posited that it was a "psychological construct" embodying "the desire and resolution to continue participating in sports" (Rubel, 2018). The sports psychology literature has expanded to include a more nuanced discussion of this concept as more research is conducted on it (Williams, 2013). In recent years, many researchers have begun adopting multidimensional conceptualizations of commitment (Santi et al., 2014).

Today, the SCM distinguishes between voluntary ('want to') and mandatory ('have to') dedication. O'Neil et al. (2021) define "restricted commitment" as "the degree to which an individual feels obligated and passively responsible to an entity." Both high and low levels of commitment can exist simultaneously in a person's life, making the two concepts orthogonal. Since there is a range of degrees that a person can perceive, dimensions are thought of as orthogonal concepts.

Academics have known for a long time that people are often bound to one or more commitment aims (O'Neil et al., 2021), but most studies on commitment in sports have focused on athletes' overall dedication to the sport. When introducing the SCM, Rubel (2018) suggested that commitment may be evaluated across multiple axes of analysis. Clubs, managers, players, and squads are all entities that might exist in such a condition.

### **2.2.3 Balancing student-athlete academic and athletic commitments**

Student-athletes today face significant challenges in balancing their academic and athletic commitments. According to research, they experience more academic pressure than other students due to demands from the institution, coaches, and the need to perform, travel, and train. According to Comeaux and Harrison (2011) and Van den Berg and Surujlal (2020), student-athletes must balance the competing demands of their roles as students and athletes. It is crucial to provide a supportive environment to prevent them from dropping out.

A study by Coggins and Raunig (2018) involving 250 student-athletes from two American universities found that time management is a key challenge for them, as they must balance their coursework, study sessions, homework, and sporting events. According to Hendricks and Johnson (2016), HEI student-athletes struggle to balance their athletic and academic commitments. They are limited to 20 hours a week of actual sports participation, which can lead them to prioritise athletic success over academic success and view athletics as a more important aspect of their identity than academics (Potuto et al., 2007).

#### **2.2.4 Role of the coach, teammates, and sports departments on student-athlete**

Traditionally, student-athletes sought guidance from coaches and athletic department officials, but they were criticized for focusing more on keeping student-athletes eligible to participate than improving their academic performance (Woods, 2013). According to research from Van den Berg and Surujlal (2020) alongside Coggins and Raunig (2018), coaches play a significant role in the lives of collegiate athletes, not only in their sports performance but also in their academic achievements. Coaches provide athletes with crucial guidance by setting goals, providing direction, and giving constructive feedback, which not only enhances their athletic prowess but also significantly influences their academic performance.

For example, by not renewing their scholarship, the coach signals that the athlete is not a priority. As coaches are often perceived as a "second family" by student-athletes, they often seek guidance in school, family, and academics. To help their athletes succeed academically, coaches can advise them on prioritising their studies and frequently remind them of the importance of their academic obligations. According to Van Puyenbroeck et al., (2018), student-athletes are more likely to succeed and feel more confident if their coaches are supportive and attentive to their needs.

However, if coaches have a poor relationship with their athletes, it may harm their long-term development and lead to subpar performance in athletics and the classroom (Van den Berg & Surujlal, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for coaches to receive training and development to improve the university environment for student-athletes.

Teammates can also have a significant impact on student-athletes' decision to continue playing, according to Raabe et al., (2016).

Student-athletes' engagement with their teammates can significantly impact their own success or failure (Evans et al., 2013). Additionally, compared to student-athletes who reported a climate centered on sport and winning, those who perceived a climate focused on learning and growth from their teammates had higher levels of competence (Raabe et al., 2016).

Ishaq and Bass (2019) emphasised the importance of sports administration personnel in creating a curriculum for athletes. Their research suggests that athletic directors who spend time getting to know student-athletes can better accommodate their cultural needs and facilitate academic growth. Sports administration staff members become like family to student-athletes as their time on campus progresses, and they are often the first to be approached for help when problems arise. They are in a prime position to help student-athletes succeed academically by fostering conducive learning environments and encouraging strong partnerships between players and academic teachers (Rubin & Moses, 2017).

## **2.3 Factors affecting student-athlete dropout rates in higher education**

### **2.3.1 HEIs dropout international**

The most frequent way to define dropout students is when they leave the educational program they were enrolled in before receiving a diploma or other credential (Casanova et al., 2018). It can be difficult to conceptualise dropouts, but they are typically defined as students who leave HEIs either voluntarily or involuntarily before finishing their studies and receiving a degree (Kehm et al., 2020). According to Stăiculescu and Ramona (2018), dropping out of an HEI is like enrolling in school but not graduating; in some situations, it is a severe failure to learn. Dropout rates at



Victoria University in Australia were roughly 25% from 1994 to 2003, 8.6% at the University of Leeds and 22 % at the University of Edinburgh (Moodley & Singh, 2015). A more organized and creative strategy is needed to address the issue of dropouts, especially among formerly disadvantaged communities (Moodley & Singh, 2015).

### **2.3.2 HEIs dropout in South Africa**

In South Africa, educational disparities have long been a major obstacle (Neethling, 2015). A study conducted by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in 2011 revealed that 45% of students who began university in 2006 and were working towards a degree had dropped out after seven years, while 55% had graduated in the same time frame. Letseka and Maile (2008) identified financial constraints and the transition from secondary to higher education as the main contributors to student dropout. Only 5% of Black and Coloured students in South Africa graduate from higher education institutions, highlighting the need for innovative solutions to lower dropout rates, particularly for historically marginalised populations (Moodley & Singh, 2015). According to data from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 47.9% of South African university students did not complete their degrees in 2017. Despite a significant increase in the number of enrolled students, more needs to be done to assist students in completing their coursework (DHET, 2018).

### **2.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

A theoretical framework serves as the foundation for qualitative research by guiding the researcher in developing their research question (Adom et al., 2018).

Tinto's (1975) integration theory examines the relationship between the balance of academic and athletic commitments. This study uses Tinto's (1975) integration theory

and Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model of academic achievement for student-athletes as the conceptual framework.

#### **2.4.1 Tinto's Integration Theory**

Tinto's (1975) theoretical framework of student departure is a widely recognised theory of student retention and is frequently cited in the literature (Braxton et al., 2004; Kuh et al., 2006; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). According to Tinto's theory, higher education institutions are composed of both a social system and an academic system (Tinto, 1975). The level of integration a student has with the overall campus environment plays a significant role in their ability to adapt to HEI life. These systems function separately while also complementing each other (Kuh et al., 2006).

Academic performance, which includes receiving passing marks, is considered formal academic integration; in contrast, informal academic integration is defined as contact with instructors (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). According to Tinto's (1975) theory, the level of compatibility between a student's beliefs, values, and preferences, and the social environment at the institution is known as social integration. This can be divided into two types: informal social integration, which pertains to interactions with peers, and formal social integration, which refers to extracurricular activities provided by the higher education institution (Xu, 2017). The pre-HEI traits that are thought to affect how a student interacts with the campus environment are considered by Tinto's theory. These qualities include prior educational experience, family background, and skills and abilities (Braxton et al., 2004).

However, Tinto's theory contends that all else being equal, higher academic and social integration levels lead to improved institutional commitment, which improves student retention. Tinto's approach contends that individual student qualities directly influence persistence (Tinto, 1975).

Despite Tinto's theory's popularity, some researchers have found only weak empirical support for the theory (Kuh et al., 2006). Critics argue that Tinto's theory fails to account for external financial factors and variations among different types of institutions, which limits its explanatory power (Braxton et al., 2004). This is particularly relevant in the South African context, where financial constraints and the transition from secondary to higher education have been identified as major contributors to student dropout (Letseka & Maile, 2008). A study by Xu (2017) found that a student's intention to drop out is reduced by institutional control over academic quality and their ability to afford higher education.

The results of this study confirm the criticism of Tinto's model that was previously mentioned, even though it was only carried out at one important research institution. Institutions must consider the external financial strain as a barrier to student retention in an era of escalating tuition costs.

Other detractors of Tinto's idea highlight its failure to take pupils from underrepresented groups into account (Carter, 2006). Tinto's (1975) theory claims that all students undergo the same process while integrating into the dominant campus culture is unrepresentative of the heterogeneous student population matriculating on a modern HEI campus (Baker, 2008). Students must separate from their home culture to completely assimilate into the HEI community, a cornerstone of Tinto's (1975) theory.

This idea does not consider the deep cultural and familial ties that many minority students have. Numerous studies have also found that minority students benefit from having friends and family in their neighbourhoods (Guiffrida, 2006).

### 2.4.2 Eddie Comeaux and Keith C. Harrison's Conceptual Model

Examining how student-athletes balance their commitments to academics and athletics at HEI is the main goal of this study. The study will use Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model variable selection because Tinto's (1975) model of student departure has been proven to have difficulties regarding the relationship between the balance between academic and athletic responsibilities. The conceptual model suggested by Comeaux and Harrison (2011), shown in Figure 2.1, provides a culturally inclusive strategy to promote student-athlete academic success in HEIs.

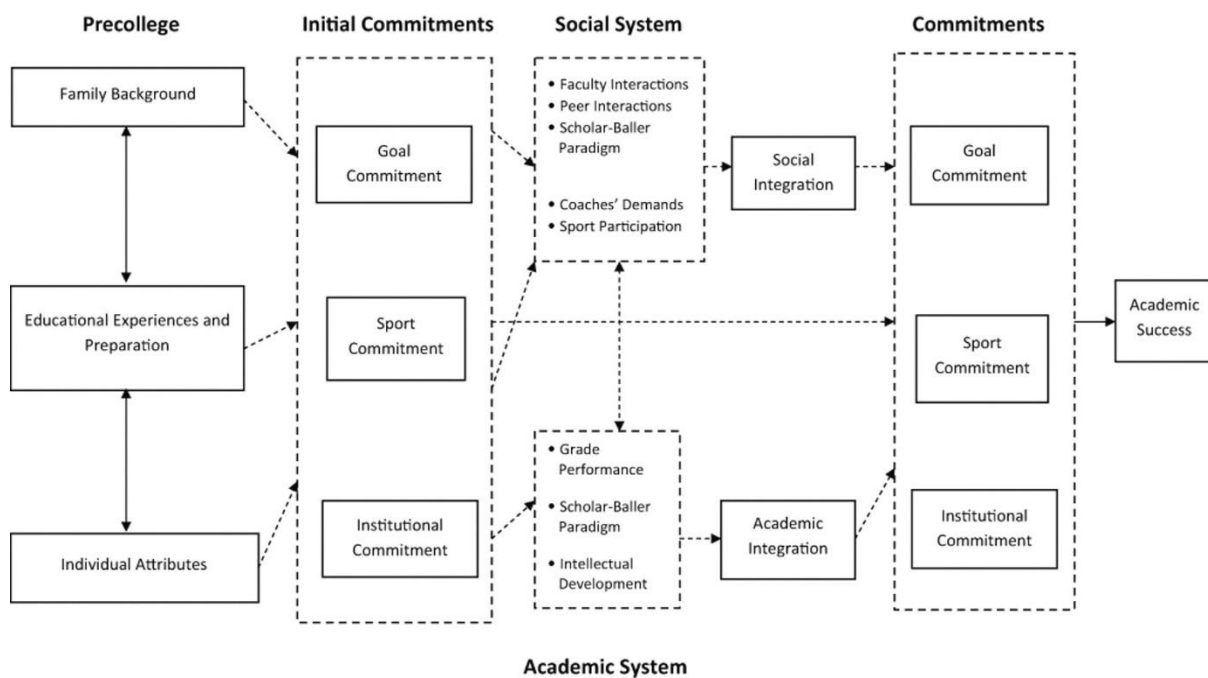


Figure 2.1: Model for HEI student-athlete academic success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011)

Individual pre-HEI characteristics are used by most comprehensive student success models (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975) since they are likely to predict certain behaviours among college students (Astin, 1996). In this example, the first stage consists of personal characteristics (such as race, gender, and academic motivation), family history (including parental or guardian education and support), and educational experiences (such as the high school setting). Athletes' academic performance in HEI is influenced in some roundabout way by all these factors. More than that, Figure 2.1 shows how pre-HEI or input qualities (such as family history, educational experiences and preparation, and individual features) interact. They may affect one's motivation, performance, and dedication to their sport and school at the outset.

Currently, the model shows how student-athletes pre-HEI attributes interact with the HEI context by placing commitments (i.e., goal, sport, and institutional) near the end of the model. Because it aids in determining the kinds of habits that HEI athletes bring with them, early goal commitment is an important factor in the model's second stage. Such actions can predict their social interactions in HEI. Bean and Metzner (1985) state that students' educational goals and aspirational higher education level are indicators of their initial goal commitment. A student-likelihood athlete of graduating in four years is higher if, for instance, they have loftier goals than a more modest one, such as obtaining a bachelor's degree, at the time of enrolment.

The initial dedication of both institutions and sports is crucial to the success of the second phase of this theoretical framework. The former is defined as the priority and satisfaction student-athletes place on earning a bachelor's degree while attending HEI (Tinto, 1975).

What is meant by "commitment" is the time and effort that a student-athlete puts into their sport physically and mentally. It seems to reason, for instance, that an athlete who is very committed to their school will have a better chance of succeeding academically than one who is less dedicated to their school, all other things being equal. It stands to reason that a student-athlete whose primary focus is on a sport will spend less time on academically beneficial pursuits than a student-athlete whose focus is elsewhere. The tremendous time and effort required to participate in a sport make this topic especially pertinent to the model because it can dilute student-athlete's dedication to their academic and extracurricular pursuits (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Eitzen, 2009; Sack, 2001).

HEI contextual elements are integral to student-athlete experiences, just as personal and dedication traits are. HEI life is multifaceted, including both the academic and social spheres. Student-athletes who want to succeed academically and, on the field, must develop a solid integration foundation in both areas. These students must know how much time they devote to each subject. There is a "reciprocal functional link" between the two modalities of integration, as stated by Tinto (1975), such that putting too much focus on integration in one domain will eventually hinder integration in the other. Student-athletes ability to assimilate into campus life varies according to their positive self-identity and the degree to which social and academic assimilation is meaningful to their experiences. This means that student-athletes are exposed to various fresh perspectives, values, and customs during their time at University. Based on their interactions, they may prefer, reject, or try to adapt to settings that are like or distinct from their own culture or lived experiences in terms of norms, values, and behaviours (Hall, 1992; Milem & Berger, 1997).

Success in HEI depends on how they manage and react to these continual interactions.

Lastly, the overall values and standards HEI or university community members hold are also important factors to consider. This model must consider exogenous and endogenous elements such as systemic racism, administrative policies and decisions, the scale of the institution, and external forces (Astin, 1996; Brooks & Althouse, 2007; Duderstadt, 2000; Eitzen, 2009). Student-athletes capacity to adjust to changes will affect how well they fit in and out of the classroom.

These considerations led to the development of a conceptual model that focuses on two primary factors related to student-athlete enrolment and academic success:

- the individual characteristics of student-athletes, such as their pre-HEI characteristics and evolving commitments to the institution, educational goals, and sport, and
- the degrees and types of interactions between student-athletes and the HEI environment (identified in the model as the social and academic systems).

The model suggests that, even after adjusting for pre-HEI qualities and commitments, a student-degree athlete's integration into an HEI's academic and social surroundings is considerably associated with varying degrees of academic accomplishment. It stands to reason that student-dedication athletes' potential for success at their HEI will increase the more active they are with campus life. The model's foundation may be traced back to Tinto's interactionalist attrition model, namely to his central concept of "integration."

Tinto's (1987) student-attrition model predicts that a student's academic performance, intellectual growth, and interest in the curriculum all contribute to the student's retention in school. Students' commitment to their academics, goals, teams, and schools is expected to enhance with integration into the classroom. Interactions with one's peers, one's teachers, the curriculum, and with one's community all contribute to a sense of belonging in society. The likelihood of achieving one's academic goals, one's sports achievement, and one's overall level of social integration all increase together. Similarly, student-athletes engagement in team training and games leads to social integration. Positive or negative effects on goal, sport, and institution-related dedication, as well as academic performance, are expected to follow from such social integration.

Thus, this study will be guided by Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual framework model for HEI student-athlete academic success.



## **2.5 Summary**

The chapter delves into the complexities of student-athlete experiences in higher education, beginning with the role of sports in personal development and the delicate balance required between academic and athletic commitments. The chapter delves deeper into the factors that contribute to student-athlete dropout rates, recognizing the multifaceted challenges they face. The theoretical and conceptual framework underlying this investigation is based on Tinto's (1975) integration theory, which investigates the interplay between academic and athletic commitments, and Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model of academic achievement, specifically for student-athletes. The research methodology is discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3. Introduction

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used in the academic study to learn more about a phenomenon. However, qualitative research allows researchers to hear from participants and get insight into their experiences and motivations by sharing personal narratives and conversations (Almeida et al., 2017).

The current study used a qualitative approach to understanding first-team rugby players' perceptions of academic and athletic commitments. In this section, the methodologies and procedures that will be used to investigate first-team rugby players at one HEI's perceptions of the balance between their academic and athletic demands

#### 3.1 Research design

This study uses an exploratory qualitative research method to investigate a specific issue. As Creswell and Poth, (2018) described, exploratory research tries to discover something new and exciting. Whilst an exploratory study does not provide us with conclusive evidence it does however allow researchers to draw conclusions and recommendations based on the phenomenon being studied, and to offer insight into the problem more efficiently. This approach is used to understand the factors affecting student-athletes in HEIs in the Western Cape to balance their academic and athletic commitments.

### **3.2 Research setting**

The study focus group discussions took place at the hotel board room, Hatfield, Pretoria in the Gauteng province, South Africa during the University Sport South Africa rugby tournament week in Pretoria hosted by University Pretoria. The face-to-face FGDs were conducted privately, at the request of the participants, for minimal disruption and to maintain privacy and confidentiality. They lasted 45 to 90 minutes.

### **3.3 Selection of participants**

A sample is a representative selection from a larger population that has some characteristics with the larger group (Latham, 2007). Probability sampling and non-probability sampling are the two most common approaches to data collection. The key distinction between probability and nonprobability sampling is that the latter does not involve random selection. Purposive sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling method that provides researchers with theoretical justifications for their unit (or case) selections in qualitative research designs (Taherdoost, 2016). This study used a purposeful sampling strategy, a common method in qualitative research for maximizing the utility of scarce resources by focusing on the most informative cases (Creswell, 2012).

Purposive sampling is the process of picking persons who have knowledge of or experience with a unique phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). In addition to being a cost-effective and trustworthy method for overcoming numerous research limitations, it also enables the researcher to sample from a handy pool of respondents (Rahi, 2017). Consequently, this study employed purposeful sampling because its participants were chosen consciously considering population characteristics and the study's objectives.

The researcher applied in writing and made a phone call to the programme's Head of Recruitment, requesting the names and phone numbers of student-athletes who are First-team rugby "players" in 2018–2022. Every team must have 23 players in their match-day squad.

Recommendations for focus group sizes varied greatly, from 2 to 40 groups, with the average group size being 6-12 participants (Guest et al., 2017). The focus group discussions for this study were two, with group sizes ranging from 7-8 participants each.

### **3.4 Delimitation**

#### **3.4.1 Exclusion Criteria**

The following criteria served as study exclusions:

- The HEIs programme rugby coaches.
- Additional Western Cape HEIs.
- The HEIs are other sports codes.
- Students-athletes who participated in the programme before 2018 –2022.
- Any student-athlete who does not give informed written permission.

#### **3.4.2 Inclusion criteria**

The following criteria served as study inclusions:

- The first-team rugby players during the period of 2018 –2022.
- Focus on one Western Cape HEI.

### 3.5 Research instruments

Mohajan (2017) states that the researcher's approach determines how the information is gathered and what descriptions it can create. Creswell and Poth (2018) have also stated that quality data collected is advantageous to qualitative research, dependent on the collection mode. Focus group discussions (FGDs) have been selected as the mode to collect data for this study. The FGDs are a data-sourcing approach that helps the researcher address problems related to the study problem with the participants (Lichtman, 2010). FGD can be suitable if all group members know the subject under review. Focus group discussions provide broad information on social problems within the culture and an in-depth understanding of how social context decisions are made and how those decisions are driven by the system (Bricki & Green, 2007). This study used FGDs with a focus group guide (Appendix A) to collect information regarding first team rugby players.

In this investigation, researchers used a pre-made interview guide consisting of 13 questions for focus groups. These inquiries were made, as detailed in Annexure C: 1) "How did you come to know about the programme?"; 2) "What were your expectations about the University Programme before joining?"; and 3) "What were your perceptions about the University Programme before joining?". Following this, six questions were asked in light of the academic, namely, department factors and environmental factors, namely: 4) "What was your initial goal regarding balancing your academics and rugby when joining the programme?"; 5) "What was the main reason for choosing your course of study?"; 6) "How did you find to balance academics and rugby?"; 7) "How was your relationship with the coaches, and teammates?"; 8)

"Do you feel you received enough support from the coaches and teammates regarding your academic responsibilities?"; and 9) "Tell me how you feel about the University Sports Department support with regards to your academic responsibilities?";. The researcher followed up with two inquiries concerning environmental pull factors, 10) "Tell me about your experience on financial gain whilst having academics and rugby commitment?" 11) What is your opinion about getting a chance to play professional rugby whilst having an academic commitment? The final two questions, 12) "What, in your opinion, would have prevented you from balancing academics and rugby?"; and 13) "If you oversaw the programme, what measure would you put in place to ensure that students complete their studies and at the same time excel in rugby?".

### **3.6 Data collection**

The researcher of the study obtained first received permission from the Registrar, then the Director of Sports Administration, then the Head of Rugby. The researcher then contacted each participant via WhatsApp, phone calls, and emails to inform them about the study and invite them to participate. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions to the researcher and only those who provided written consent were interviewed for the study. All participants were informed of the study's goals and objectives and were provided with consent and focus group confidentiality forms in advance. These forms were emailed to the participants and they were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study without any penalty. The focus group then met in person at a time and location that was convenient for the participants.

The researchers implemented a procedure for conducting face-to-face focus groups considering the COVID-19 outbreak; participants were given disposable masks, access to a hand sanitizing station, and temperature checks. Following the introduction, the interviewer leads the focus group discussion by posing questions based on the guidance for semi-structured interviews. Between 45 and 90 minutes were devoted to the discussions in the focus groups. With the permission of the participants, the sessions were recorded using smartphone technology. Two focus groups were conducted, each with seven and eight people in attendance.

The University approved the research of the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, and the researcher then extended an oral invitation to the members of the first team rugby squad to attend a meeting to discuss their participation in the study. The researcher first gave each participant a sheet of paper (Annexures A) explaining their role in the investigation. Following thoroughly explaining the study's goals, the researcher asked for their informed consent (Annexure B). The participants were given the information sheet and two weeks to read it. The study's participants were instructed to read the data sheet with the study's six primary themes in mind: "Background variables," "Academic Integration factors," "Coach and Athletic department factors," "Environment Pull elements," and "Intervention factors."

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with the first-team rugby players two weeks after the information was given to them. All told, 15 first-team rugby players participated in the two FGDs, with seven and eight in each.

Using the FGD interview guide (Annexure C), the researcher and a trained research assistant conducted two FGDs in English at times that were most convenient for the participants. Krueger et al. (2015) suggested holding these FGDs (2002). Participants were asked to sign a "focus group binding form" (Annexure D) at the commencement of the FGD, promising to keep the group's discussions private and not share any of the data they provided with anyone outside of the group. We spent 45-90 minutes on average on each FGD.

### **3.6.1 Data Saturation**

The concept of data saturation as a methodological guideline in qualitative research is generally acknowledged. Given what's been collected and examined, doing more is no use. However, there appears to be ambiguity in how saturation should be considered and discrepancies in its application (Saunders et al., 2018). The difficulty in identifying saturation stems largely from the debate over whether it is an event or a process. The term "point" is widely used to describe the moment when a substance is completely saturated.

According to this gradual interpretation of saturation, adding even one additional interview does not make the analysis "richer" or "insightful." Because of this, we need to ask, "How much saturation is enough?" rather than "Has saturation occurred?" Saturation is a continual, cumulative judgment that one makes and perhaps never completes, rather than something that can be targeted at a specific instant. Thus, this is a less straightforward question, but it better emphasizes the reality that this can only be a matter of the analyst's choice (Lichtman, 2010; Saunders et al., 2018).



When deciding how much data is needed for a purposive sample, saturation is typically applied (Hennink et al., 2019). Hennink et al. (2019) found six factors that affect the degree to which focus group data is saturated: the study's goals, the codes used, the stratification of the groups, the number of groups within each stratum, and the type and level of saturation. The data saturation in this investigation was measured across six dimensions.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

To gather qualitative data from the FGDs, the researcher and a trained research assistant used an audio recording device and made field notes during the sessions. The audio recordings were transcribed for ease of reading and to reduce the possibility of bias, the researcher conducted the FGDs. Thereafter an independent transcriber, fluent in the English used by the participants, transcribed the audio data word for word to identify and analyse themes that emerged during the discussion. As part of the member-checking process, a summary of the transcripts was presented to the participants during a subsequent visit.

In this study, the process followed was firmly grounded in qualitative research methods. The primary data was collected through interviews with first-team rugby players. Once these conversations took place, transcripts were created and subsequently validated by the participants to ensure the content accurately represented the discussions that occurred.

The data analysis process followed a deductive thematic approach as described by Creswell (2012) and Braun et al. (2006). This technique involves deriving themes from the data based on pre-existing theories or analytic interests. Instead of trying to explain

the entire dataset comprehensively, the emphasis was on providing an in-depth analysis of specific facets relevant to the study's theoretical framework.

In this case, the study was driven by the theoretical interests embedded in Tinto's integration theory and Comeaux and Harrison's model of academic achievement for student-athletes. The data from the interviews were analyzed in the light of these theories to extract meaningful themes and insights, effectively providing a more nuanced understanding of the experiences and challenges of student-athletes in the context of higher education.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness**

Nowell et al. (2017) have stated that four strategies must be followed to build trust in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformity. According to Latham (2007), credibility means that researchers must demonstrate and ensure that the study participants have been identified and accurately described. The researcher will use convenience tests to ensure credibility. Convenience samples are unlikely sampling where the ease of location or recruitment of potential participants is the primary concern. It covers online panels, mall intercepts, samples of rivers, snowballs, and observational studies (Latham, 2007). In Nowell et al. (2017), the authors highlight how easily their findings can be adapted to different contexts by emphasizing the study's transferability. Transfers will be obtained from data analysis using transcripts and descriptions. Rather than relying on the researchers' preferences, the compliance analysis provides a neutral basis for the neutrality of compliance (Nowell et al., 2017).

By adhering to the guidelines by Nowell et al. (2017), researcher could ensure that the data gathered in FDG 1 and 2 were reliable. Informed consent forms were used to establish trust by informing individuals that their involvement was optional. The researcher established more trust with the focus group participants by verbally probing them for information during the discussion to collect the data needed to answer the study question.

As the last step, member verification was implemented to establish trustworthiness. This might be done technically, as stated above, or informally among peers.

The study's transferability and reliability were ensured by the availability of thorough information about the technique used and the fieldwork sites. Finally, confirmability was achieved by maintaining an audit trail of the processes utilized; this allowed for a line-by-line reconstruction of the research's development down to the individual choices and actions.

### **3.9 Study Delimitations**

Delineation of research is the process of defining the limits of a study so that the researcher can conduct the study effectively while staying within those bounds (Lancaster, 2005). The author believes a better work-life balance is necessary for university rugby players.

The following are some of the caveats of the study:

- There is a lack of up-to-date literature, particularly journals and textbooks, covering topics relevant to the South African context.
- The population of interest may be too busy with work to participate in the study.

- The data collection phase may take much longer than expected, delaying the project's milestones.

### **3.10 Ethics considerations**

The study strictly adhered to ethical standards throughout the research process, as sanctioned by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at UWC. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the university's registrar and permission was sought from the student-athletes to participate in the study. A voluntary, informed consent form, highlighting the potential benefits, risks, and contributions of the study, was signed by all participants before their involvement in the research.

The study guaranteed the participants' rights to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative repercussions. Additionally, access to counselling was made available to those who requested it. The privacy of the participants was paramount; pseudonyms were used to ensure their identities remained confidential, even if the study was published.

Regarding personal information handling, this study strictly complied with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). Data collected from participants was securely stored and only accessible by the researcher and their supervisors for a period of five years, as per university policy. After this period, all documents will be destroyed, further ensuring the protection of participants' privacy.

The careful adherence to ethical guidelines and data protection laws ensured the study was conducted in a responsible, respectful manner, maintaining the dignity and privacy of the participants while ensuring the integrity of the research.

### **3.11 Summary**

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study. A qualitative approach using focus group discussion was adopted to investigate student-athlete academic success among first-team rugby players. The deductive thematic analysis procedure, which encompassed data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, and review, was systematically followed, delineating the boundaries of the study and maintaining the research focus. Trustworthiness was upheld through rigorous validation of findings, including checks for consistency and credibility. All significant insights identified were compiled and communicated in the final research document. The detailed research findings, analysis and discussion is discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on the information obtained from the focus groups. The study aimed to apply Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model of academic achievement for student-athletes to the perceptions of first-team rugby players regarding the balance between their academic and athletic demands. The model developed by Comeaux and Harrison (2011) considers factors such as students' background, HEI obligations, their social and academic environments, and their long-term dedication and success.

The research was conducted at a single HEI in the Western Cape to evaluate whether the research objectives were met and to gather perspectives and potential solutions to the research topics. The following questions will direct the study: "What are first-team rugby players' perceptions about the balance between their academic and athletic commitments?" and "how do first-team rugby players cope with academic and athletic commitments?". First-team rugby players from 2018 to 2021 were interviewed to collect data. Two group discussions were conducted with groups of eight participants of first-team rugby players, how could help the programme and HEI minimize and prevent factors that influence student academic and athletic balance challenges in the future.

#### 4.1 Profile of Participants

Fifteen first-team rugby players aged 20 to 24 took part in the focus groups.

Pseudonyms have been employed to ensure that all participants remain anonymous.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below provide information about the study's participants.

Table 4.1: Focus Group 1

<b>PSEUDONYMS</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>POSITION</b>
Aydon	Male	23	Coloured	Player
Taliesen	Male	24	Coloured	Player
Tiaan	Male	23	Coloured	Player
Christian	Male	21	White	Player
Conwill	Male	20	White	Player
Tandie	Male	22	Coloured	Player
Romuha	Male	22	Black African	Player
Klein	Male	23	Coloured	Player



Table 4.2: Focus Group 2

<b>PSEUDONYMS</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>POSITION</b>
Liam	Male	20	Coloured	Player
Louan	Male	20	Coloured	Player
Tasriq	Male	23	Coloured	Player
Johannes	Male	20	Coloured	Player
Mauritz	Male	20	White	Player
Asive	Male	21	Black African	Player
Joshua	Male	22	White	Player

#### **4.1.1 Summary of Tables 4.1 and 4.2**

The table features first-team rugby players between the ages of 20 and 24. The age range of the rugby players is mostly between 20 and 24, with the youngest player being 20.

## **4.2 Results**

The following topics and subthemes emerged from the qualitative data collected through FGDs with the first-team rugby players about how they manage their academic and athletic responsibilities.

### **4.2.1 Themes and sub-themes**

Challenges faced by first-team rugby players at the HEI were explored by interviewees, along with other topics. Background, academic integration, coach and sports department, environment pull, and intervention were the five topics that emerged from the thematic analysis.

Table 4.3: List of Themes and sub-themes

Theme number	Theme Name	Sub-Theme
1	Background factors	University programme
2	Academic Integration factors	Balance academics and rugby
3	Coach and Athletic department factors	Academic support from coaches and teammates
		Support from the sports administration
4	Environment Pull factors	Financial compensation
		Opportunity to play professional rugby
5	Intervention factors	Barriers to balancing rugby and academics
		Support measures

#### 4.2.1.1 Theme 1: Background factors

The data from this study shows that within this theme, a sub-theme of the university programme emerged from first-team rugby players.

The first theme discovered and presented deals with students' prior knowledge, impressions, and anticipations of university-level study.

i. University programme

An academic advisor is a professional who works with students to facilitate the academic aspects of higher education. They assist with class attendance and registration, arrange tutoring and mentoring for struggling student-athletes, and oversee a player's eligibility and career preparation in HEI (Coggins & Raunig 2018). Participants in this study also discussed the role of academic advisors in advising them about the program. By having access to students' academic records and building relationships with them, academic advisors can gain a holistic understanding of who their student-athletes are and better empower them to find motivation to succeed not only in their sport but also academically (Murray, 2020). The quotes below capture the participants' perceptions about academic advisor role on student-athlete's university programme.

*'I came to know about the program through the academic advisor who notified us about this program.'* – Louan

From the quote above the Louan indicate that academic advisor, provided information about the university programme. When asked about their expectations about the university programme before joining, Christian said:

*'I just wanted a degree to uplift others in the communities. My initial goal regarding balance now academic and joining the program was to get a degree while playing well directly and getting something after university playing professionally.'* – Christian

Similarly, another participant indicated that on television the program provides certain picture.

*'I thought it was a place to be, a dream come. It looks perfect from the outside. When you look at the television, you have your own picture of what you think it's.'* – Tjaan

The response from Loan indicates academic advisor provide information regarding to the university programme. Christian response indicates that his desire was to get his qualification while playing rugby. Tjaan indicated that television gives certain idea of what the program is.

#### 4.2.1.2 Theme 2: Academic Integration factors

##### *i. Balancing academics and rugby*

A related discussion factor among participants was the balance between academics and rugby commitments. Participation in university sport programmes may require a significant amount of time as student-athletes are expected to attend meetings training sessions games whilst attending to their academic project and attending to their social lives (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012). In this study, most participants expressed that they found managing sports and academic commitments difficult. The quotes below capture the participants' perceptions about balancing academics and rugby.

*'Having to play rugby and study requires time management skills of which at university level academic are primary, and they demand a lot from you. Whilst on the other side, rugby also requires your attention. So, finding balance becomes a challenge due to academic pressure created by limited time'* – Aydin

*'As student-athletes, I believe that is one of the most difficult challenges we face due to the time commitment involved. You had to go to class during*

*the day, come back to the rugby field for a training session and complete your academic assignments, tutorial, preparation for the test and other responsibilities’ – Asive*

*‘It is challenging to balance sport and academics because the University has no special programme that caters to or aligns with our schedule as rugby players. As a result, we have to deal with divided attention leading to high chances of falling short on academics and rugby’- Johannes*

From the quotes above the participants indicate that time management appears to be one of the biggest challenges when trying to balance academic and sport commitments. Aydin indicates that there are academic demands placed on him as a student whilst rugby also requires his attention. Similarly, Asive also indicates that there are many academic responsibilities during the day and afterwards going to rugby training whilst Johannes concurs and indicates that the institution where he is registered does not have a special programme that aligns with their schedule as rugby players.

In contrast, some participants indicated that they found the balance easy due to the introduction of online learning. Mauritz said:

*‘Studying online made it easy for me because of pre-recorded and recorded lectures. I don’t have to go to class. Classes would have been difficult in person because you would have to attend and spend the longest hours before training.*

*Online is easier because you have your own time to study. Therefore, it's easier now to play rugby and study with online classes. The best thing that has happened to us is online learning' – Mauritz*

Similarly, another participant indicated that academic support was provided by the institution to assist them to find the necessary balance.

*'On the rugby, we have staff who ensure that we can balance rugby and academics. So, they assigned us with academic tutors that can help us with academics and check on us all the time' – Klein*

The responses from Klein and Mauritz indicate that there are necessary support measures in place to assist participants to find balance. Firstly, Mauritz indicated that online learning has assisted him with finding more time whilst Klein indicated that tutors assisted them with their academic project.

#### 4.2.1.3 Theme 3: Coach and Athletic department factors

##### i. Academic support from coaches and teammates

A related discussion factor among participants was the academic support from coaches and teammates. When a student-athlete requires additional academic resources, they can turn to their academic advisor, coaching staff, and athletic administrators for assistance (Thiessen, 2022). Coaches play a crucial role in providing support to student-athletes throughout their careers (Tyranse, 2010). However, according to Comeaux et al., (2017), athletic advisors and fellow teammates may not provide adequate academic support and guidance for student-athletes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

In this study, most participants expressed that they felt they received adequate academic help from their coaches and teammates. The quotes below capture the participants' perceptions about coaches and teammates encouraged and inspired them to do better academically.

*'Yes, they get our marks before we get them. If they see if there's a problem or you are struggling with academics, they can see. So as a player and student, you cannot hide it from them. Some tutors are assigned to assist us, and with academic-related assistance.'* – Romuba

*'So, now that coaches have gotten used to the university system and put academics first, they tell all their players that academics come before rugby.'* – Liam

*'I feel like they help, and they support both sport and academic balance.'* – Tandie

The responses from Romuba, Liam and Tandie indicate that there are necessary support measures in place to assist participants with academic support from coaches and teammates. Firstly, Romuba indicated that marks are shared with coaches first and if they notice participant struggles they assign a tutor. Liam indicated that coaches and teammates put academic first. Tandie affirmed they provided receive help for both sport and academics.

#### ii. Support from the sports administration

A related discussion factor among participants was the academic support from support from the sports administration.

Student-athletes reported that faculty and staff have a positive perception of their work ethic and are willing to assist them when they miss class due to athletic commitments. (Simon, 2016). In this study, most participants expressed that the sports administration department's primary focus was to support the programme. The quotes below capture the participants' perceptions about sport administration department.

*'They are the ones who help us, for obvious reasons. They are the program's leaders, and they check up on how we are doing.'* – Conwill

*"The University Sports Department helps us with things that aren't academic. They try to make sure, even if they don't have the means, that we are sorted with certain things and responsibilities and stuff like that, and they give us the support we need to continue with our mix and sport management issues.'* – Mauritz

The responses from Conwill's perception were that the department is the program's leader and Mauritz affirmed.

#### 4.2.1.4 Theme 4: Environmental pull factors

##### i. Financial compensation

A related discussion factor among participants was the financial compensation for student-athletes.

HEIs across America Student- athletes with plenty of fair financial compensation, like scholarship opportunities, apparel, academic assistance (Lionetti, 2022). In this study, most participants expressed that they received bursaries. The quotes below capture the participants' perceptions about financial compensation.



*'As an education student, I receive financial assistance from Funza, which supports this program because I prioritise my studies and because I am a student-athlete, which requires a lot of my time and is beneficial as well. Still, financially I am in a good position.'* – Asive

*'So, everyone knows the student experience regarding finance and budgeting about the university does is helps us to ease the load financially because it offers bursaries and at times, we used to get match fees and another double, so a lot with some pocket money for petrol and I think Overall, academics associates as up for financial gain after degrees.'* – Johannes

The responses from Asive acknowledged that student-athletes receive compensation fees and bursaries and Johannes affirmed.

ii. Opportunity to play professional rugby

A related discussion factor among participants was the opportunity to play professional rugby. Many student-athletes have a goal of playing professional sports after HEI (Ohashi, 2018). Participants in this study often brought up the chance to perform at a professional level. The quotes below capture the participants' perceptions about opportunity to play professional rugby.

*'My opinion on getting a chance to play professional rugby while having an academic commitment is that it's a great honour to be able to place every professional rugby player to get the chance to make a professional so that if you don't get that professional contract to wonder you still have something to fall back on so that you can go in from there financially.'* – Joshua.

*'If you receive a professional contract, you must decide whether to decline or accept the contract and continue your studies part-time. These are the options available to you. It would help if you decided which is more important. Is it that you will accept the contract and wait for another opportunity, or will you accept the contract and go part-time, requiring you to complete your degree over a longer period?' – Tjaan*

The responses from Joshua suggested that it would be a great opportunity to play professional rugby and Tiaan affirmed.

#### 4.2.1.5 Theme 5: Intervention factors

##### i. Barriers to balancing rugby and academics

A related discussion factor among participants was barriers to balancing rugby and academics. Teammates, coaches, and teaching staff all play a crucial role in helping student-athletes effectively balance their athletic and academic commitments. By working together, they can create a supportive environment that facilitates the successful integration of sports and education and helps to overcome any obstacles that may arise (Cho et al., 2020; English et al., 2022; Thiessen, 2022). In this study funding as well as support from lectures and coaches are identified as utmost importance as it facilitates the balancing act for academics and sport commitments. The quotes below capture the participants' perceptions about barriers to balancing rugby and academics.

*'The only thing that could have stopped me from juggling rugby and school would have been if my lecturers or coaches had been not accommodating of my schedule and willing to help me figure out what would have been the best possible outcome and support system for me to look for in the pursuit of my academic and athletic goals.'* – Klein

*'Not receiving support from my coaches and teammates and no funding for my studies would have made me unable to balance rugby and academics commitments.'* – Aydon

The responses from Klein indicated that funding as well as support from lectures and coaches are of utmost importance as it facilitates the balancing act. Aydon affirmed Klein response.

ii. Support measure

A related discussion factor among participants was support measure in place for student-athletes. Student-athletes often require specific support to meet their needs, as cultural differences can greatly influence their sense of self and motivation (Quinaud et al., 2019). By providing tailored support to this student, their academic and sport engagement will be heightened, leading to an improvement in their academic and sport performance (Rozali et al., 2022). The quotes below capture the participants' perceptions about support measure for student-athletes.

*'As many activities are shifting to an online format, I think that rugby student-athletes would benefit from having their classes offered remotely, as well as evening classes, as this would allow them to return to their dormitories or homes and attend to their academic work.'*

*However, I also believe that additional support for these students would be crucial to ensure their success.’ – Taliesen.*

*‘The programme is running smoothly, but one measure I would put in place is paying them.’ – Liam*

The responses from Klein and Liam indicated that there are procedures that are in place to help student-athletes succeed academically.

### **4.3 Discussion of the results and findings**

- **Theory and Conceptual framework**

Tinto (1975) argued that one would expect a reciprocal functional link between the two modalities of integration such that excessive attention on integration in one domain would, at some point, subtract from one's integration in the other area. Student-athletes capacity to balance their academic and athletic commitments depends on their level of positive self-identity and the extent to which integration (academic and athletic commitments). Student-athletes reportedly experience greater academic pressure than other students. These stressors are brought on by demands from the school, coaches, and the desire to perform, travel, and train (Woods, 2013). How well students handle these difficulties may impact how committed they are to rugby and their academics.

Tinto's Integration Theory and Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual framework model for HEI student-athlete academic success suggest that the academic success of student-athletes is influenced by several factors, including integration into the academic community, involvement in the athletic community, and support from institutional resources.

- **Theme 1: Background factors**

Academic advisors play a crucial role in addressing the background factors that can impact the academic success of student-athletes by providing them with information and resources to support their academic success and helping them to manage the stress and pressure that can come with trying to balance their academic and athletic commitments (Murray, 2020). Academic advisors for student athletes play a crucial role in helping these individuals succeed both academically and athletically (Coggins & Raunig 2018). One of the keyways in which they do this is by having access to their student athletes' academic records (Murray, 2020). This allows them to monitor the student's progress, identify any areas of concern, and provide support and guidance as needed. Student-athletes in this study expressed that they were assisted by academic advisor and advertisement on television to know about the programme.

Additionally, academic advisors for student athletes also employ relationship building practices, such as regular meetings and check-ins, to get to know their student athletes on a personal level. This can help them gain a deeper understanding of the student's individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses, and tailor their support accordingly (Murray, 2020).

Overall, the combination of access to academic records and relationship building practices allows academic advisors for student athletes to gain a holistic understanding of their student athletes, which enables them to better support them in achieving their academic and athletic goals.

- **Theme 2: Academic Integration**

Rothschild-Checroune et al., (2013) noted participation in a varsity athletic program can negatively impact academic success as it requires a significant amount of time and effort for practices, meetings, training, and games, which can add extra stress to student-athlete trying to balance sport and academics commitments. These time commitments can decrease a student-athlete's engagement in academics and affect their academic success (Coggins & Raunig, 2018; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013 & Woods, 2013). Student-athletes in this study expressed that they found it challenging to manage their sports and academic commitments effectively. They noted that they often had to balance a demanding schedule of practices, competitions, and travel with the demands of their academic coursework. They reported that it was difficult to find adequate time to study and complete assignments while also dedicating enough time to their sport. They also mentioned that they often had to miss classes or other academic activities due to their athletic commitments, which could negatively impact their academic performance.

Additionally, many of the student-athletes in the study reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed by the pressure to perform well in both their sports and academics. They shared that the constant demands of their athletic and academic commitments made it difficult for them to relax and enjoy their downtime. Overall, the student-athletes expressed that they found it challenging to manage the balance between their sports and academic commitments, and they felt that the demands of both could be overwhelming at times.

- **Theme 3: Coach and Athletic department factors**

Coaches and teammates can play an important role in assisting HEI student-athletes in their transition to a career after athletics. Coaches can provide guidance and mentorship on how to develop the skills and habits necessary to be successful in the workforce, as well as assist in networking and job placement. Teammates can provide support and accountability and can also serve as a valuable network for job opportunities (Thiessen, 2022). Additionally, many universities have career centres and programs specifically for student-athletes to assist them in their transition to a career after athletics (Tyrance, 2010).

According to student-athletes, effectively managing time appears to be a significant challenge when balancing academic and athletic responsibilities. This may involve finding ways to effectively allocate time for studying, training, and competing, while also ensuring that they have adequate time for rest and recovery. They also reported feeling that they received sufficient academic support from their coaches and teammates. They shared that their coaches and teammates motivated and inspired them to improve academically. Their words illustrate the positive impact that coaches and teammates had on their academic performance.

- **Theme 4: Environmental pull factors**

Financial compensation for student-athletes is a controversial issue, as many argue that paying student-athletes would change the nature of college sports. However, others argue that student-athletes should be compensated for the time and effort they put into their sport, as well as the revenue they generate for their universities.

The opportunity to play professional rugby depends on the country and the league (Lionetti, 2022).

There are several professional rugby leagues around the world, including Super Rugby in Australia and New Zealand, the English Premiership, and the French Top 14 (Saulière et al., 2019). Players who perform well in these leagues may play for their national teams (Smit, 2012). The opportunity for a student athlete to play professional rugby in South Africa would depend on their skill level and experience. Many professional rugby teams in South Africa have youth academies and development programs that provide opportunities for young players to train and potentially earn a spot on the senior team. It's also possible for a student athlete to be scouted by a South African team while playing for their college or university team. It would be best to reach out to the teams directly or through a sports agent to inquire about opportunities (Donkin, 2020).

Student-athletes in the study mentioned that they were provided with financial aid through bursaries. This financial support helped them to offset the costs associated with their academic and athletic pursuits and allowed them to focus on achieving their goals. Additionally, many of the student-athletes in the study also highlighted the opportunity to perform at a professional level as a major motivation for their involvement in sports. This could include the chance to be scouted by professional teams or to represent their country at the highest level of competition. The opportunity to reach this level of performance was often seen as a significant incentive for the student-athletes to pursue their athletic careers while also maintaining their academic commitments.



- **Theme 5: Intervention factors**

Student-athletes often face challenges in balancing their athletic commitments with their academic responsibilities. Some common barriers include time management issues, difficulty prioritizing tasks, and conflicts between practice and class schedules. Additionally, student-athletes may experience physical and mental fatigue due to the demands of their sport, which can affect their ability to focus and perform academically (Apaak et al., 2015; Gomez et al., 2018, & Woods, 2013). To support student-athletes in balancing their athletic and academic commitments, some HEIs provide resources such as academic advisors specifically for student-athletes, tutoring services, and flexible class scheduling options. Additionally, some universities offer study halls or quiet spaces for student-athletes to complete their coursework (Coggins & Raunig 2018; Rozali et al., 2022).

The funding and support from lecturers and coaches were identified as crucial factors in enabling student-athletes to effectively balance their academic and athletic commitments. Financial support, such as scholarships or bursaries, can help alleviate the financial burden associated with participating in sports, allowing the student-athletes to focus on their studies and athletic pursuits. Moreover, support from lecturers and coaches can also play a key role in helping student-athletes balance their commitments. Lecturers can provide academic guidance and accommodations, such as extra time for assignments or exams, to help student-athletes keep up with their coursework.

Coaches can also provide support by being understanding and flexible with their athletes' schedules, and by helping them set and achieve goals.

Furthermore, the study highlighted that the combination of funding and support from lectures and coaches, can facilitate the delicate balance of academics and sports commitments. This can lead to a better academic performance, enhance athletic achievements, and overall a better well-being for the student-athletes.

#### **4.4 Summary**

In summary, the study suggests that student-athletes face challenges in balancing their academic and athletic commitments. Tinto's Integration Theory and Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual framework model for HEI student-athlete academic success suggest that the academic success of student-athletes is influenced by several factors, including integration into the academic community, involvement in the athletic community, and support from institutional resources. It is noted that from this study, student-athletes have a greater pressure to balance their academic and athletic commitments, and that their positive self-identity and integration in both areas may affect how they handle these pressures. Academic advisors play a crucial role in providing support by having access to academic records and building relationships with student-athletes. Additionally, time management, support from coaches and teammates, financial aid through bursaries, and the opportunity to perform at a professional level were also identified as important factors in helping student-athletes balance their academic and athletic commitments.

The chapter which follows is the conclusion and recommendation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5. Introduction

The conclusions are made in this chapter. During the study process, gaps are found, recommendations and further research areas are proposed.

#### 5.1 Achievement of the aims and objectives of the study

This study examined the first-team rugby players' perceptions about balancing their academic and athletic commitments at one HEI in the Western Cape Province. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were devised:

- i. To explore university first-team rugby 'players' perceptions about the balance between their academic and athletic commitments in the Western Cape Province.

In this study, first-team rugby players' perceptions of the balance between their academic and athletic commitments were explored. The student-athletes reported that they faced challenges in balancing their academic and athletic commitments, with many citing time managements as a significant issue. They also reported that they received support from their academic advisors and coaches, which helped them to effectively manage their commitments. Additionally, the student-athletes noted that the opportunity to perform at a professional level was a major motivation for their involvement in sports, and that the financial aid they received through bursaries was also important in helping them to balance their academic and athletic commitments.

Overall, the study found that the perceptions of first-team rugby players suggest that balancing academic and athletic commitments is a challenging but manageable task when supported by institutional resources and the opportunity to reach professional level.

- ii. Describe how first-team rugby players cope with academic and athletic commitments.

First-team rugby players often cope with the demands of balancing academic and athletic commitments by utilizing a variety of strategies. Some of the most common strategies include:

- Time management: players may use schedules, calendars, and to-do lists to organize their time and prioritize their commitments.
- Setting goals: players may set both short-term and long-term goals for their academics and athletics, which can help them stay focused and motivated.
- Support systems: players may rely on the support of their coaches, academic advisors, teammates, and family to help them navigate the demands of balancing academics and athletics.
- Self-care: players may engage in self-care practices such as getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising to maintain physical and mental well-being.
- Communication: players may communicate with their coaches, academic advisors, and teaching staff to coordinate their schedule and get the necessary support to balance academic and athletic commitments.
- Prioritising: players may prioritize their academic and athletic commitments, which can help them to manage the demands of both.

- Adaptability: players may adapt to changes in their schedule, such as unexpected game or exam, by being flexible and adjusting their schedule.
- Professional aspirations: players may be motivated by the opportunity to play professionally, which can help them to focus on achieving their goals and maintain discipline in balancing academics and athletics.

Overall, the strategies used by first-team rugby players to cope with the demands of balancing academic and athletic commitments may vary depending on the individual, but the key is to have a plan and support system to help navigate the challenges.

- iii. Explore some factors resulting in student-athletes dropout from failing their academic programme.

There are several factors that can contribute to student-athletes dropping out of their academic programs due to poor academic performance. Some of these factors include:

- Time constraints: Student-athletes may face significant time constraints due to the demands of their sport, which can make it difficult to balance their academic commitments. This can lead to student-athletes falling behind in their coursework and ultimately failing their academic program.
- Lack of support: Student-athletes may not have access to adequate support from academic advisors or coaches, which can make it difficult for them to navigate the demands of balancing academics and athletics.
- Academic pressure: Student-athletes may feel a significant amount of pressure to perform academically, which can lead to stress and anxiety. This pressure can be brought on by the expectations of coaches, family, and the university.

- Inadequate academic preparation: Student-athletes may have come from a high school environment that didn't prepare them adequately for the rigors of HEI-level coursework.
- Difficulty in adjusting to the college environment: Student-athletes may find it difficult to adjust to the academic and social demands of college life, which can lead to poor academic performance and ultimately dropping out.
- Injuries and health issues: Student-athletes may suffer injuries or other health issues that can prevent them from participating in their sport and from keeping up with their academic commitments.
- Financial constraints: Student-athletes may face financial constraints that prevent them from affording the costs associated with their academic program.
- Lack of motivation: Student-athletes may lose motivation due to poor academic performance, which can lead to them dropping out of their academic program.

Overall, these factors can contribute to student-athletes dropping out of their academic programs due to poor academic performance, it's important for universities and other organizations to provide support and resources to help student-athletes navigate the demands of balancing academics and athletics and to address these factors.

## **5.2 Study Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study has explored the challenges that first-team rugby players face in balancing their academic and athletic commitments. The literature review has highlighted the importance of integration, positive self-identity, and support from institutional resources in student-athlete academic success.

The study's findings revealed that student-athletes found it challenging to manage their sports and academic commitments effectively. They noted that they often had to balance a demanding schedule of practices, competitions, and travel with the demands of their academic coursework. They reported that it was difficult to find adequate time to study and complete assignments while also dedicating enough time to their sport. They also mentioned that they often had to miss classes or other academic activities due to their athletic commitments, which could negatively impact their academic performance. Additionally, many of the student-athletes in the study reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed by the pressure to perform well in both their sports and academics. They shared that the constant demands of their athletic and academic commitments made it difficult for them to relax and enjoy their downtime. Overall, the student-athletes expressed that they found it challenging to manage the balance between their sports and academic commitments, and they felt that the demands of both could be overwhelming at times. The study also found that academic advisors, coaches, and environmental factors such as financial aid, play an important role in helping student-athletes balance their academic and athletic commitments.

### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations of this study that should be considered when interpreting the results.

- **Sample size:** The study may have been limited by the small sample size, which may not be representative of the larger population of student-athletes.

- Self-reported data: The study relied on self-reported data from the student-athletes, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies.
- Single Institution: This study was conducted at a single institution, which may not be generalizable to other institutions.
- Single sports: The study focused on one sport (rugby), results may not be generalizable to other sports.
- Cross-sectional design: The study used a cross-sectional design, which only captures a snapshot of the student-athletes' experiences at a specific point in time. A longitudinal study would be more beneficial to understand the dynamics of how factors change over time.
- Lack of control group: The study did not have a control group of non-athlete students to compare the results with, which would have provided a better understanding of the unique challenges faced by student-athletes.
- Limited cultural and ethnic diversity: The study sample may not be representative of a diverse student population, as most of the participants were from a specific cultural or ethnic group.
- Lack of data on student-athletes who dropped out: The study did not collect data on student-athletes who dropped out of their academic programme, which could have provided important insights into the factors that contribute to student-athlete dropout.

Overall, these limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of the study.



#### **5.4 Recommendations and further research**

In terms of recommendations, academic advisors should be provided with access to student-athletes' academic records and should employ relationship building practices to better understand the individual needs of student-athletes. Coaches and athletic departments should also work to create more flexible schedules that allow student-athletes to manage their time effectively. Additionally, more resources and support should be made available to student-athletes to help them cope with the stress and pressure associated with balancing academic and athletic commitments.

Future research could explore more in-depth the role of academic advisors, coaches, and athletic departments in supporting student-athletes. Additionally, research could investigate the impact of different interventions, such as time management workshops and stress management programs, on student-athletes' ability to balance their academic and athletic commitments, as well as the potential impact of technology on this balance. Additionally, research could explore the impact of online classes and remote learning on student-athletes' academic and athletic performance.

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## ANNEXURE A



# UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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*Tel : +27 21-959 4111, Fax : N/A*

*Email : [research-ethics@uwc.ac.za](mailto:research-ethics@uwc.ac.za)*

### INFORMATION SHEET

**Project Title:** A balancing act: First team rugby player's perceptions about academic and athletic commitments

#### **What is this study about?**

This is a research study will be conducted by Bulelani Mlakalaka a MPhil student in the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences at the University of the Western Cape. The purpose of this research project is to identify is to explore first team rugby players' perceptions about the balance between their academic and athletic commitments at one Higher Education Institution in the Western Cape Province. We are inviting you to participate in this research study, because you could provide us with meaningful information regarding balancing of academic and athletic commitments.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?**

You will be requested to sign a consent form to participate in a focus group discussion. The discussions will focus on your experience perception about the balance between

your academic and athletic commitments of Varsity Cup rugby from its inception in 2008 to the present. Due to COVID-19 the focus group discussions will be conducted online. The focus group discussion will be held face to face for approximately 45-90 minutes.

**Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?**

To ensure your anonymity, pseudonyms will be used in place of your name, and only the researcher will have access to the identity of participants. To maintain confidentiality, all information gathered will be stored on a password protected computer. All data and records will be destroyed and deleted after 5 years.

**What are the risks of this research?**

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. Some of the known risks are that you may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable with answering some of the questions, and you may withdraw from the study or refuse to answer any question, without penalty.

We will nevertheless minimize such risks and act promptly to assist you, if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise, during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a rehabilitation care worker or to nearest health care facility, for further assistance or intervention at Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS).

**What are the benefits of this research?**

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help us to understand and inform the programme regarding factors that influence the balance

between your academic and athletic commitments. and to address these problems in the future.

**Do I have to be in this research, and may I stop participating at any time?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time and you will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

**What if I have questions?**

This research is being conducted by Bulelani Mlakalaka A MPhil student at ICSSD within the Department of Sport, Recreation and Exercise Science at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact:

Bulelani Mlakalaka Cell: 083 530 0344

Email: MlakalakaB@cput.ac.za

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Dr E McKinney and S Dr Titus

Researcher/Lecturer

Head of Department: Interdisciplinary Centre for Sports Science and Development (ICSSD).

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Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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**ANNEXURE B**



**UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

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*Email : research-ethics@uwc.ac.za*

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project:**            **A balancing act: First team rugby players' perceptions about academic and athletic commitments.**

The study has been described to me in language that I understand, and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

\_\_\_ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

**Participant's name**.....



**Participant's signature.....**

**Date.....**

## ANNEXURE C

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARTICIPANTS

#### Demographics

Age	Year of study	Programme enrolled

**Add demographic questions age, year of study, programme enrolled.**

#### **Background factors:**

1. How did you come to know about the programme?
2. What were your expectations about the University Programme prior to joining?
3. What were your perceptions about the University Programme prior to joining?

#### **Academic Integration factors:**

4. What was your initial goal regarding balancing your academics and rugby when joining the programme?
5. What were main reason for choosing your course of study?
6. How did you find to balance academics and rugby?

#### **Coach and Athletic department factors:**

7. How was your relationship with the coaches, and teammates?
8. Do you feel you received enough support from the coaches and teammates regarding your academic responsibilities?

9. Tell me how you feel about the University Sports Department support with regards to your academic responsibilities?

**Environment Pull factors:**

10. Tell me about your experience on financial gain whilst having academics and rugby commitment?

11. What is your opinion about getting a chance to play professional rugby whilst having academic commitment?

**Intervention factors:**

12. What, in your opinion, would have prevented you from balancing academic and rugby?

13. If you oversaw the programme, what measure would you put in place to ensure that students complete their studies and at the same time excel in rugby?

## ANNEXURE D

### FOCUS GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY BINDING FORM

**Title of Research Project: A balancing act: First team rugby player's perceptions about academic and athletic commitments**

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve, and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone by the researchers. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits. I understand that confidentiality is dependent on participants' in the Focus Group Discussion maintaining confidentiality.

I hereby agree to uphold the confidentiality of the discussions in the focus group by not disclosing the identity of other participants or any aspects of their contributions to members outside of the group.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

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