

# The 3-I Career Advising Process and Athletes With Foreclosed Identity

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*Student-athletes who identify more strongly with their athletic role than their academic life may neither encounter nor embrace the chance to explore career options. Their lack of exposure or interest to career advising may compound career immaturity and development. Gordon's (2006) 3-I (inquire, inform, integrate) decision-making process applied to career guidance may help advisors encourage professional development and personal growth among student-athletes. Integrating knowledge of self with academic information requires engagement in the inquiry and information gathering stages of the fluid 3-I cycle, which may contribute to greater career maturity, especially for the identity-foreclosed student-athlete.*

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All student-athletes must balance their time and energy between their roles as a student and as an athlete. Evidence suggests that student-athletes who devote more time to their athletic pursuits more strongly identify as an athlete than as a student, and they may expect to continue their sport participation at the professional level (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). As a result, academic advisors face challenges in encouraging the development of the whole person as indicated by best practices.

Furthermore, efforts spent trying to balance sports and academics often leave student-athletes with little time or energy to focus on career development. Because career concerns are best addressed by those who can decode the complex college curriculum and address concerns of the student (and parent) who expect a college degree to lead to a prosperous career (Gordon, 2006; Hughey & Hughey, 2009), advisors naturally fit as guides for initial career exploration. However, to help student-athletes realize their career potential, advisors must find a way to break through the time and emotional commitment barriers created by their advisees' dedication to their sport. This conceptual paper demonstrates the usefulness of Gordon's (2006) 3-I (inquire, inform, integrate) decision-making process as a means to help

student-athletes, especially those who identify strongly with their athletic role, to make appropriate career choices.

## A Complicated Advising Process

Student-athletes frequently work with multiple on-campus personnel who provide advice. For example, most Division I institutions employ athletic academic "counselors" or "advisors" who report within the athletic department. They primarily attend to the academic needs of the student-athlete and monitor compliance with National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) academic eligibility policies (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). In addition to or instead of full-time personnel who report to the athletic department, many campuses assign an academic advisor within the student-athlete's major, and in some cases this person assists solely with course registration, relying on the athletic academic advisor as the primary source of campus academic and career information.

Thompson (2013) described the complicated communication networks and the multiple advice-givers and stakeholders associated with student-athletes, so the complex and various advising-delivery possibilities are not addressed in this article. Regardless of their specific title or role, any institutional representative assigned to help student-athletes with their decision making, especially as it applies to careers, will benefit from learning Gordon's (2006) 3-I process. Therefore, in this paper, to avoid cumbersome terms and overgeneralized role assumptions, all persons (e.g., athletic academic advisors, academic counselors, etc.) who assist a student-athlete with career exploration are referred to as *academic advisors* or *advisors*.

## Literature Review

In some cases, student-athletes strongly identify with their athletic role to the extent that they do not explore nonsport careers or areas of interest. Individuals who exhibit an ideological or occupational commitment to sports without considering other possible futures demonstrate *identity foreclosure* (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). Many student-athletes have spent a significant portion of their lives focusing on crafting their skills and performing their sport with a sense of pride. The

longstanding commitment and associated accolades seal their athletic persona (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). When this identity precludes development of other areas of self-development, the student-athlete may face disappointment and an uncertain future.

The scholarly literature suggests that student-athletes do not invest much time or energy in career development and lag behind nonathletes on measures of career maturity (Blann, 1985; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996; Singer & Buford May, 2010; Tyrance, Harris, & Post, 2013). Linnemeyer and Brown (2010) defined career maturity as “the readiness to make career decisions and to cope with vocational and educational developmental tasks” (p. 617).

More recent studies have focused on interventions to improve career decision making of college athletes. Harrison and Lawrence (2003) found that student-athletes benefited from reading about current professional athletes who have successfully integrated their athletic and academic roles. The student-athlete participants in their study stated that work ethic and status as a good student were important components in their own personal success both as students and as athletes.

Evidence from qualitative studies suggests that student-athletes are steered into majors or particular courses by advice givers or significant others in their academic lives (Beamon, 2013; Benson, 2000). This practice seems avoidable, but conflicting class meeting times and demanding practice and competition schedules leave the student-athlete with little energy left for other pursuits and challenges the academic advisor to develop the kind of rapport over time that he or she may enjoy with nonathlete students.

In a study that may help those with influence on student-athletes, Navarro (2014) examined the career-planning construction process of college athletes and developed a conceptual model for their career development. Her work revealed career development themes discovered in childhood through observations and awareness of careers as well as those explored upon matriculation and selection of a major. As student-athletes entered their final terms, they began career preparation and developed resumes, practiced interview skills, and networked with potential career contacts. As demonstrated by Navarro, career development requires a whole person approach.

For all individuals, athlete or not, career development often begins in early adulthood and is influenced by many factors (Hughey & Hughey,

2009). According to research by Hughey and Hughey (2009), students articulated career plans, such as pursuing a position in professional sports, which may not prove realistic. Hughey and Hughey suggested that athletes may not distinguish between athletic and vocational identities and those individuals with limited occupational information may not recognize that their vocational identity is underdeveloped.

Linnemeyer and Brown (2010) compared levels of identity foreclosure, career maturity, and career foreclosure among student-athletes ( $n = 101$ ), fine arts students ( $n = 121$ ), and “general” (i.e., from English, math, and psychology classrooms and identified by the authors as neither athletes nor artists) ( $n = 104$ ) college students. They used the *Career Maturity Inventory-Revised*, the *Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status*, and the *Commitment to Career Choices Scale* to assess the levels of career maturity as well as identity and career foreclosure among the three groups. Results showed that athletes tended to score lower on career maturity than the art and the other college students, but the results were not statistically significant. Athletes showed higher levels of identity foreclosure than the other cohorts at statistically significant levels. This study revealed that 11% of the athletes in the sample participated in the revenue-producing sports of football and basketball, which feature high profile professional careers (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). These results suggest that a strategic career intervention plan may benefit student-athletes.

Those interested in uncovering the reasons behind findings of career foreclosure looked for differences among participants of men’s basketball and football to determine whether they may articulate a less developed sense of career maturity than their counterparts in nonrevenue sports. In addition, the demographic characteristics of the student-athletes may affect attitude and information acquired about post-college careers. In particular, student-athletes involved in revenue-producing sports commit to relatively highly scrutinized programs, which may tempt them with visions of high profile professional careers. Although equally committed to their sports and some with plans to move into professional ranks, those participating on teams with smaller public followings, such as tennis, lacrosse, and gymnastics, typically do not experience the media attention and the public criticism of their male counterparts in football and basketball.

Smallman and Sowa (1996) compared levels of career maturity among student-athletes in revenue producing versus nonrevenue producing sports. They found no differences in the student-athletes' levels of career maturity between the two groups of athletes. More recently, a study examining career development and athletic identity found that student-athletes who more strongly identified with their athletic role were "less confident in their ability to handle change in future career plans" (Tyranice et al., 2013, p. 30), which often included a desire to become a professional athlete. In this study, Division I student-athletes participating in revenue-producing sports expressed relatively little optimism regarding future careers (Tyranice et al., 2013). These studies indicate a need for continued research on the complex factors that affect the futures of student-athletes.

A handful of researchers have recognized that minority student-athletes lack career information due to demographic characteristics, including economic status. For example, studies have suggested that African Americans see themselves with limited career options due to few diverse role models and real or perceived obstacles to careers (Beamon, 2014; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Smallman & Sowa, 1996). More research is needed to examine the many factors involved in the career development and career maturity of underrepresented student-athletes.

Lally and Kerr (2005) examined the relationships between student-athletes' career planning and their identities as athletes and students to find that many invest in both their student and athletic roles to develop career maturity. Many student-athletes in their study entered college with limited future career plans, but as they progressed through college their awareness and thus their career aspirations changed and expanded. These findings comport with earlier findings by Blann (1985), who showed that male student-athletes at the junior and senior levels formulated mature educational and career plans at levels nearly equal to their non-athlete counterparts. These findings offer encouragement that programming developed to enhance the career development of student-athletes can improve the prospects for students experiencing identity and career foreclosure.

A career development program at Virginia Commonwealth University (Wilkes, Davis, & Dever, 1989) included career exploratory opportunities using the *My Vocational Situation* assessment and the *Self-Directed Search*. Athletes received the opportunity to participate in a job

search seminar and to identify competencies and characteristics gained through their student-athlete experience, such as leadership and discipline. Athletes also could discuss fears and expectations as they began the job search process. Participants valued the knowledge gained in the workshops and seminars. In particular, the athletes appreciated knowing their experience with sports provided them with marketable skills (Wilkes et al., 1989). This concern was also expressed later by Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) in an article on the experience of college athletes.

Other researchers found that students who may feel little control over their future and those with low self-efficacy benefit most from career development workshops (Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, & Fletcher, 2013). All those concerned with the well-being of student-athletes would benefit from knowing ways to help them gain a sense of control over their future and improve their career decision self-efficacy. The 3-I career-decision process developed by Gordon (2006), a foremost expert in advising undecided students, provides a useful model.

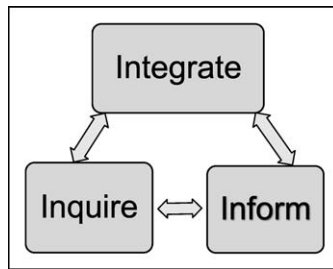
### Gordon's 3-I Process

With influence from the decision-making model of Tiedman and O'Hara (as cited in Gordon, 2006), who promoted a decision-making paradigm that includes a planning and action stage, Gordon (2006) developed the fluid 3-I decision-making process made up of three steps (inquire, inform, and integrate) as a framework for advancing career development with college students. In the inquire process, students identify their own unique academic and career concerns and clarify information needed to make decisions. At this stage, they may ask advisors to provide guidance and direction as they enter the collection, or inform, phase. Those ready to gather career information look into personal attributes as well as educational and occupational data. Finally, students start to integrate the information. At this final stage, students and their advisors determine the steps to appropriately assimilate the personal, academic, and vocational information the students have amassed (Gordon, 2006). Figure 1 shows that advisors need not process the 3-I steps linearly and may find that a student will need to revisit a stage after moving to another part of the process.

### The 3-I Process and The Student-Athlete

For a student-athlete who insists on a professional sports career, an advisor may want to initiate

**Figure 1.** The fluid 3-I process



Note. Gordon (2006)

the integrate process. At this phase, the advisor can assess the student’s knowledge about the path to a professional sports career and work it into discussions. For example, moving into the inquire phase, an advisor can ask about process instead of outcomes: “What does it take to become a professional athlete in your sport?” “Do you know how many student-athletes achieve that goal in a year?” “Do you know the typical length of a professional career in your sport?” “What particular college major do you think will help you achieve your goal?” The advisor may also need to broach some difficult areas of self-reflection to determine if the student-athlete is competing at a level likely to lead to a professional career in their sport.

The NCAA (2013) has published the following percentages of student-athletes drafted by U.S. professional leagues: men’s baseball, 9.4; football, 1.6; men’s soccer, 1.9; men’s basketball, 1.2; women’s basketball, 0.9; and hockey, 0.8. This information can be valuable for the athlete interested in pursuing a professional sports career.

#### **Athletes With Identity Foreclosure**

The fictional case study of Angela demonstrates the 3-I decision-making process (Gordon, 2006) employed with an identity-foreclosed athlete.

Angela is a first-generation college student attending State University on a basketball scholarship. She wants to be a professional basketball player in the WNBA. When asked the academic major she wishes to pursue, she shrugs and says she does not know. Is Angela’s undecidedness due to a lack of information on majors and careers or other factors?

Angela’s advisor may want to investigate Angela’s knowledge about the career path to

professional basketball. The advisor can ask if she is aware of the number of college athletes drafted by the WNBA each year and the length of a career in the league. The advisor can then suggest that Angela seek on-campus resources that provide this information.

Angela has articulated a career goal that reflects placement in the integrate stage of Gordon’s (2006) 3-I process. At this initial point, the advisor can gain Angela’s trust as they address her career development. The questions posed to Angela will move her into the inquire process and will inspire more questions designed to clarify her career development needs. Then Angela will enter the inform process to gather more data on which to make career decisions and develop a parallel plan to accompany her goal of reaching the WNBA. She then revisits the integrate process and incorporates her new knowledge with her career goals.

#### **Athletes Seeking a Career in Sport**

Many student-athletes express interest in a “career in sport” with no specific focus. The advisor must then determine, through inquiry, the reasons that inform the advisee’s interest. Specifically, the academic advisor asks about the student’s career concerns and the information she or he deems necessary to make a decision or proceed toward the goal. After identifying a focus, the student starts to gather information to integrate with personal attributes, educational background, current academic standing, and athletic accomplishments. This process provides the student with the information necessary to further narrow a career area of interest and begin to set goals to attain it. The fictional case study of Quinn demonstrates Gordon’s (2006) 3-I decision-making process for athletes who initially profess a desire to pursue a vague career in sport.

Quinn, a senior on the football team, declared accounting at the end of his sophomore year. Prior to the end of his final season, Quinn tears his ACL, significantly dimming any chance of getting noticed by scouts and continuing into the professional ranks.

Quinn tells his advisor that he may enjoy becoming an elementary school teacher. He

has spent his summers coaching at various sports camps for kids and enjoyed the work. In the inquire process, Quinn would benefit from reflecting upon key questions posed by his academic advisor:

- How is teaching like your work as a camp counselor?
- What aspects about the sports camps appeal to you?
- What are the qualifications of persons who direct these camps?
- What related occupations involve working with school-aged children? Or with sports camps? Do these careers interest you?

As Quinn processes those questions, he enters the inform process. Quinn's advisor directs him toward several useful sources, including O\*NET Online, a free web site offered by the U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.), that features detailed job descriptions, necessary qualifications, employment trends, and links to related careers. In addition, the advisor encourages Quinn to visit the campus career center and suggests he specifically ask to take career assessments, which will further clarify his interests and values. Personnel in the career center or elsewhere can help Quinn align the assessment results with his skills and experience and suggest various career fields.

Armed with this type of self-knowledge, Quinn can return to his advisor to discuss programs of study that may help him achieve his new career goals. That is, Quinn enters the integrate process with his advisor to assimilate his personal preferences and views as well as his academic and athletic knowledge with his newly acquired information about careers. After engaging in all 3-I (Gordon, 2006) processes, Quinn will be ready to make a sound decision regarding his future.

The fluid 3-I decision-making process (Gordon, 2006) allows the student-athlete and advisor to cycle through the career development process. This nonlinear path, that may involve entering and reentering 3-I phases, allows the student-athlete to explore all possible options and feel involved and in control of his or her own career development.

### **Implications for Advisors**

As many student-athletes work with more than one person to negotiate their unique dual roles, all persons responsible for the long-term success of

the student-athlete can embrace and adapt Gordon's (2006) 3-I decision-making process. Of course, a collaborative relationship between these entities, including coaches and faculty members, can reinforce key aspects of inquiry, inform, and integrate as the student-athlete explores careers and transitions from being a foreclosed student with a sole identity as an athlete.

Most advisors in and out of the athletic department must understand the impact that a lifelong commitment to sport has exerted from a very early age on college athletes; these students have achieved success, received accolades, and are hailed by friends and strangers alike as "athletes." As a result, many have never considered an alternate or additional identity. All advisors must recognize the distress in identity change or loss that may confront the large numbers of student-athletes who will not enter sports as a vocation. However, encouraging student-athletes to grow through career exploration, and potentially other areas as well, can prove rewarding for the student and should not be avoided (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011).

Student-athletes do not necessarily distinguish their athletic identity from a vocational identity and so will not seek out career counseling centers on campuses (Martens & Lee, 1998). Academic advisors can help student-athletes make intentional decisions using the Gordon's (2006) 3-I process to introduce career exploration, first by asking questions about the individual's plans for the future and second by explaining ways her or his current courses and major fit into those plans.

Advisors must assess the student-athlete's readiness to make career decisions by inquiring about his or her career goals. Furthermore, not all college athletes develop a foreclosed identity. Developing rapport with student-athletes and creating a safe place to discuss and explore their career options can help them deal with issues of foreclosure and develop problem-solving skills that will benefit them throughout their lifetime (Shurts & Shofner, 2004). All personnel seeking to help student-athletes succeed in and after college, from advisors in athletics, career counseling centers, and academic units (including faculty members), can collaborate on career advising to enhance the personal growth and development of student-athletes.

Although debate continues to rage about the role and significance of sport on college and university campuses, participation in collegiate athletics confers specific advantages to the student (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Watt & Moore, 2001).

Advisors of all types can encourage student-athletes to identify skills learned and utilized in sport that can be transferable to and marketable in the work place. Danish et al. (1993) found that some athletes did not recognize the skills they had gained through their athletic endeavors and therefore did not promote them as attributes to potential employers. However, athletes who were educated about the competencies gained from participation in sports readily applied them. More recent studies have confirmed that awareness of these employable skills and traits enhances the career development of student-athletes (Paule-Koba & Farr, 2013). Applying positive personal and work-related qualities learned through sport may also help the advisee appreciate the ways sports have helped to shaped her or his persona and take comfort that *athlete* will always remain a part of her or his identity.

### Summary

While participation in intercollegiate athletics has been linked to low levels of career maturity and decision making, effective strategies increase career development in student-athletes. Participation in sport engenders skills and traits valuable to employers: leadership skills, demonstrated teamwork, a solid work ethic, the ability to handle adversity, and capacity to interact effectively with individuals different from themselves (Danish et al., 1993; Melendez, 2007; Pierce, 2007). Once prompted, student-athletes may identify other competencies developed as athletes, such as problem-solving, communication, and analytical skills transferable to a career. Advisors who encourage growth and development, based on their current state of readiness to explore careers, empower students for their lifelong career and personal journeys.

The 3-I decision-making process (Gordon, 2006) offers a framework for academic advisors to understand and apply career advising with student-athletes. It can be used for advisees at all levels of career maturity and development, but it may prove especially valuable for the identity-foreclosed athlete. It may inspire academic achievement for student-athletes as they set both academic and career goals (Brown & Bohac, 1997; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003).

Although inform often appears first in descriptions of the 3-I process (Gordon, 2006), student-athletes may first present at the integrate stage, perhaps expressing an unrealistic or unclear vision of their future in professional sports. However, by

working through inquire and inform, the student reenters the integrate stage ready to make parallel plans for a career in sport and in another area to pursue when his or her athletic participation is over.

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