Master of Arts in Higher Education Thesis Collection

2017

A Case Study for Evaluating a Discipleship Program for Student-Athletes

Abigail Hews
Taylor University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/mahe

 Part of the Higher Education Commons

A CASE STUDY FOR EVALUATING A DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM

FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

_____

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

_____

by

Abigail Hews

May 2017

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Abigail Renee Hews

entitled

A Case Study for Evaluating a Discipleship Program for Student-Athletes

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
in Higher Education and Student Development

May 2017

_____   _____
Skip Trudeau, Ed.D.   Date   Tim Herrmann, Ph.D.   Date
Thesis Supervisor   Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

_____
Scott Moeschberger, Ph.D.   Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

_____
Tim Herrmann, Ph.D.   Date
Director, M.A. in Higher Education and Student Development

Abstract

The main objective of this thesis was to provide an in-depth look at an institution of

higher learning that implemented a discipleship program for its student-athletes. A

qualitative case study was conducted at a faith-based college to answer the following two

research questions: What are the different components associated with a discipleship

program for student-athletes, and what are the benefits and challenges of a discipleship

program? The different components found in the discipleship programs included goals,

team discipleship time, evaluation assessments, an accountability program, and missions

work. The results also indicated growth in the students' character development and

spiritual maturity. Coaches felt challenged by the fact that personal change through

discipleship is subjective and not easily measurable like the skill development needed for

success in a sport. Also, coaches often experienced increased pressure to be a spiritual

guide to every athlete. The research concluded that a discipleship program through

athletics not only fosters growth in character development but in spiritual development as

well.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Student-athletes are a unique sub-population at many colleges and universities, regardless of institution type. Christian colleges claim to implement programs for promoting students' spiritual life and character development. However, few institutions have made the effort to develop a formal discipleship program specifically geared towards student-athletes. A higher education organization that promotes the spiritual development of students is the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). It is comprised of 110 schools with the mission "to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth" (CCCU, 2010, para. 1). As this is a goal for the general student population at CCCU schools, it should also be true for the student-athletes. This raises the question, "How are schools addressing this need for a program designed to foster spiritual growth for student athletes?" In order to meet their stated goals, Christian colleges need to understand intentionally the spiritual development of students and create ways to foster their growth (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, Patton, & Renn, 2010). This approach could benefit their athletes in unique ways.

Discipleship Defined

Frederick (2008) outlined the basics of discipleship, stating, ". . . one's spirituality entails understanding, emotional experience, and personal spiritual practices . . . its core

[is] discipleship" (p.1). According to Anderson's (2003) definition, discipleship is "the intensely personal activity of two or more persons helping each other experience a growing relationship with God" (para. 3). For the purpose of this study, discipleship is defined as the activity of personal or communal spiritual practices that involve growing in a relationship with God. Whether it is a teammate, a coach, or an opposing player, athletics provides a platform for reaching out to others and thus creating an environment conducive to discipleship. Anderson further stated, "You have the awesome privilege and responsibility both to be a teacher and a learner of what it means to be in Christ, walk in the spirit and live by faith" (para. 4). Growing in relationship with God can happen in a variety of ways, as every relationship looks different. To foster a unique experience, programs helping players, coaches, and administrators grow in spirituality can utilize much creativity in developing discipleship activities (Astin, 2004).

Problem Statement

Sports can lead to more than just learning skills of the game in order to post wins and losses on the scoreboard (Watt & Moore, 2001). This particular study utilized a case study approach and examined the best practices of an existing discipleship program. Existing research gives significant attention to the spirituality of student-athletes, while minimal research has been conducted in regard to a discipleship program for this same population. Seemingly, Christian colleges and universities would naturally offer a discipleship program for athletes, but many times, discipleship is an informal process between a coach and the players. Often no formal programs are put in place by either the coach or athletic department. This study examined an existing discipleship program focused on student athletes at a faith-based institution. Utilizing the constructs of

spirituality and discipleship, this study examined an "aspect of personhood that contains one's emotional, physical, moral, and cognitive experiences of the divine" while participating in various activities promoting the development of the person's spirituality (Frederick, 2008, p. 4).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this examination of the program studied for this project:

1. What are the different components associated with a discipleship program for student-athletes?

2. What are the benefits/challenges of a discipleship program?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Research on discipleship programs appears very limited. However, the foundation for this research looked at the historical context of intercollegiate athletics, the make-up of student-athletes, and examples of some established discipleship programs. An overview is important to know the past, present, and potential future of programs specifically for student-athletes.

Historical Context

Extracurricular activities – those not specifically related to the main curriculum – gained popularity in American higher education in the late nineteenth century. (Ringenberg, 2006). One university president's argument for athletics in the 1820's was that students should not spend every moment in college studying. Students began to engage in destructive activities outside the classroom; thus, intercollegiate athletics were introduced around 1852 as a diversion for student conduct. Holbrook (2004) talked about the importance of how college athletics affects the overall spirit of the university:

At colleges and universities across the nation, intercollegiate athletics is a key element of campus community. Almost since the first intercollegiate competition-a rowing race between Harvard and Yale in 1852—athletic competition has brought students together as athletes and spectators in a manner

different from the intellectual pursuits of the classroom, yet similar in embodying

the core values of collegiality, hard work, integrity, and respect. (p. 27)

Venture for Victory, a program to help foster athletic evangelism, is the oldest

form of organized discipleship for athletics. This program taught Biblical principles on

athletic mission trips for different athletic teams (Ringenberg, 2006). Another

organization, Campus Crusade for Christ, created the group Athletes in Action in 1966

with a mission "to capitalize on the broad exposure and public acclaim given to athletes

in order to present the Christian gospel" (p. 154). A man's true qualities were displayed

and encouraged through activities outside the classroom, specifically on the playing field:

The extra curriculum was also an agency of the collegiate emphasis on

fellowship, on character, on well-roundedness, and as such, it was a powerful

instrument during the period of the 1920's in bringing the university ideal into

accommodation with the collegiate ideal. (Rudolph, 1990, p. 464)

Athletics provided an opportunity to participate in something outside of academia. Even

from the beginning of intercollegiate athletics, administrators believed sports would

benefit the holistic development of student-athletes.

Spirituality and discipleship are two areas in which a student-athlete can grow.

Athletics can provide creative ways to develop different attributes in students. Every

person is unique and grows in different ways. Creativity can be incorporated into forms

of teaching, mentoring, directing, serving, and collaborating in order to serve the needs of

each student (Astin, 2004). Personal or team preferences are important in deciding

specifically how to help others in their spiritual journey and grow in their personal

relationship with God (Frederick, 2008).

Student-Athletes

Student-athletes form a unique sub-population in higher education. The definition of an athlete utilized for this study was any full-time student participating in at least one recognized intercollegiate sport at their respective institution. Whether the sport is volleyball, golf, tennis, or football, a student-athlete's life is similar yet different from that of a non-athlete undergraduate student (Watt & Moore, 2001). One of the more complicated tasks for a student-athlete is balancing the role of a student with the demands of being an athlete (Kissinger & Watson, 2009). Chartrand and Lent (1987) noted student-athletes "experience role conflict from being both an athlete and a student in a university setting" (p. 1). Miller (1974) described the challenging dual role of a student-athlete:

> While striving to meet such academic demands as attending class, completing homework assignments, meeting with tutors, and attending study halls, it is not uncommon for student-athletes to spend an additional 20 or more hours per week practicing and competing in their chosen sport. (p. 94)

This challenging schedule automatically sets a student-athlete apart from the traditional student body. Student-athletes can be stereotyped negatively in such ways as "academically unqualified, unintelligent, and socially impotent" (Watts & Moore, 2001, p.13). This stereotyping could possibly continue to widen the gap between athletes and non-athletes on campus (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004).

Spirituality

Spirituality provides a unique lens for examining student-athletes. Spiritual growth can offer a platform on which to build a discipleship program. One definition of

spirituality is "experiencing the presence of a power, a force, an energy, or a God close to you" (Dillon & Tait, 2000, p. 2). Frederick (2008) wrote, "[S]pirituality is that aspect of personhood that contains one's emotional, physical, moral, and cognitive experiences of the divine" (p. 4). Astin (2004) furthered this definition:

> [S]pirituality points to our interiors, by which I mean our subjective life, as contrasted to the objective domain of observable behavior and material objects that you can point to and measure directly. In other words, the spiritual domain has to do with human consciousness—what we experience privately in our subjective awareness. Second, spirituality involves our qualitative or affective experiences at least as much as it does our reasoning or logic. More specifically, spirituality has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to each other and to the world around us. (p. 1)

A discipleship program not only focuses on the spiritual growth of each individual student-athlete but should also emphasize other people's growth as well. One specific way to cultivate an others-centered mindset is through the idea of servant leadership. The phrase "servant leadership" was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in *The Servant as Leader,* an essay first published in 1970 (Greenleaf Center, 2011). The founder of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, Greenleaf stated, "The servant-leader *is* servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling the one wants to serve, to serve *first*" (para. 2). He also explained, "The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served,* become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous,

more likely themselves to become servants?" (para. 3). The current Greenleaf Center CEO, Kent Keith, published *The Case for Servant Leadership*, positing that "servant leadership is ethical, practical, and meaningful" (Greenleaf Center, 2016, para. 1).

One practical way to establish the concept of serving others is through service learning. Harris (2006) expressed the need for young adults to engage in community outreach opportunities to help deepen civic engagement and a sense of self-confidence, as well as become fully committed to the responsibility of being a citizen of the community. Astin (2004) stated the two important aspects of service learning are 1.) connectedness between not only the individuals and the ones being served but also among the individuals themselves, and 2.) reflection through the use of self-reflecting journals or group sessions to process what the experience meant to them personally. The more in-depth the reflection, the more a student-athlete can begin to form his or her spirituality based on serving others. This is an example of how to help foster growth in a student-athlete's spiritual journey of developing and learning about himself or herself by helping others. Discipleship can be part of this process of serving others by sharing the love and message of Jesus Christ while doing a practical service for someone.

Established Discipleship Programs

This section provides an overview of some programs already established and operating that relate to discipleship or spirituality in higher education. One of the three athletic-focused organizations, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, is designed for coaches and players of all ages to grow in spiritual development. The second organization, the Champions of Character, is a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) initiative focused on building the character of student-athletes, which can be related to

spirituality and discipleship. The final program discussed is a discipleship program for the entire student body of Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas.

Fellowship of Christian athletes. This organization started in 1954 and is the largest Christian sports organization in America. The vision of Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) (2010) is "to see the world impacted for Jesus Christ through the influence of athletes and coaches" (para. 2). Four values are pursued through various forms of discipleship among athletes of all levels, from youth to professionals. These four values are integrity, serving, teamwork, and excellence. The organization seeks to teach men, women, and children the interconnectedness of faith and athletics. Various summer camps are offered for different sports for young athletes to learn how to integrate their faith with playing sports. In higher education, institutions can start a "huddle group." In these small groups, student-athletes come together to worship, listen to guest speakers, and read passages of scripture.

Champions of character. The National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) has established a program devoted to character development in student-athletes known as the Champions of Character. This model is based on five core values: servant leadership, responsibility, integrity, respect, and sportsmanship (NAIA Champions of Character, 2000). A goal for individual NAIA athletic departments is to become a five-star recognized institution, gaining points through the display of all five core values. Each core value is discussed in further detail below.

The first two core values are servant leadership and integrity. Servant leadership is putting others before oneself and setting a good example. Teams often gather outside of practice and games to help others in need. Harris (2006) stated, "Student-athletes . . .

can be catalysts for societal change and in doing so reveal the true character of the institutions they represent" (p. 20). According to the NAIA Champions of Character (2012), integrity refers to the positive "internal traits that guide behavior" (para. 1). Integrity is embedded in a person and can aid in dealing with all different life situations.

The third and fourth values of the NAIA's Champions of Character are responsibility and sportsmanship. "Taking responsibility for the decisions one makes comes as a result of being honest with oneself" (Harris, 2006, p. 193). With an increase in activities and multiple areas of life creating time demands, a student-athlete must manage time as a way to take responsibility over his or her own life (Chartrand & Lent, 1987). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) committee team (2009) believes student-athletes and coaches are catalysts to help promote good sportsmanship during a sporting event. "All must show respect for officials, opponents, fans, teammates, and the game itself. The growing lack of such respect among some elite athletes is trickling down to high school and youth sports" (Austin, 2010, p. 75).

Respect is the fifth Champions of Character value. Team sports are supposed to extol values of loyalty, fair play, generosity, friendship, and cooperation (Hoffman, 1992). In 2007, Auburn University developed a program to promote good sportsmanship behavior for athletes, coaches, and spectators. The acronym for the program's values is A.U.B.U.R.N., which stands for accountability, understanding, belief, unity, respect, and nobility (Smith, 2007). "The program encourages all 21 Auburn teams to congratulate opponents in victory and defeat, celebrate victories without disrespecting the opponent and show respect to teammates by hustling and working hard" (para. 11).

According to the working definition in this research, discipleship is not only spiritual growth but, in general, growth of an individual including character and moral development. A foundation is provided for players and coaches to begin growing as individuals, which, in turn, strengthens the larger community. The entire athletic community affiliated with the NAIA all have the same core values established by the larger corporation. The Champions of Character program and the sportsmanship program at Auburn, with all 21 teams abiding by the same principles, focuses on this community-wide effort.

Southwestern College's discipleship program. The vision of the discipleship program developed for the entire student body at Southwestern College (2017) "is that students might leave the college as informed, transformed, equipped, and healthy disciples of Jesus Christ who are prepared to live out their faith at home, work, church, and in the world" (para. 3). Different opportunities are offered on campus to get involved in discipleship, including academic classes, small groups, and mentoring. Academics are the informational component, such as classes on theology and the church, a leadership class, and also various campus lectures throughout the semester. Groups formed outside the classroom focus on transforming students through Bible studies, retreats, chapel, Fellowship of Christian Athletes gatherings, and attendance at local churches. Equipping occurs through outreach with service learning opportunities and missions work. The final component of the program is developing and maintaining a mindset of healthy living. This mentality is encouraged by promoting physical and emotional health through a mentoring program on campus. Overall, this program offers a variety of programs students can get involved with depending on their specific interests. High expectations

are placed on students to become part of accomplishing this program's mission and purpose.

Although this program does not specifically focus on athletics, it provides an example of a discipleship program developed specifically for the students on that campus. The discipleship program at Southwestern College is the most formal discipleship program discovered via this literature review. A discipleship program for athletics may potentially include some of this framework, as discipleship is more about the development of the whole student and not just his or her spiritual life.

Summary

The development of a discipleship program at a college or university can impact the development of student-athletes spirituality and has a role in character development as well. One useful framework for institutions could be based on the NAIA Champions of Character, utilizing the core values of servant leadership, responsibility, integrity, respect, and sportsmanship. Spiritual growth is a core component of a true discipleship program, and connecting team members with coaches, community members, and other students on campus is important in the development of student-athletes. Being a member of a community can also play a role in someone's spiritual growth (Astin, 2004). When everyone on a team comes together and supports one another, people are positively impacted. With spirituality at the center of colleges and universities, connectedness between one another, especially in the athletic realm, creates a tightly knit community.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This case study examined one institution with an existing discipleship program specifically designed for student-athletes. The small amount of existing research focusing on student-athlete discipleship programs led to the decision to implement a case study approach. Creswell (2009) explained, "[I]f a concept of phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach" (p. 13). "A descriptive case study presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context" (Yin, 2009, p. 5). Critical case sampling involves searching "to make a point quite dramatically or [is], for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things" (Patton, 2002, p. 236). Since few structured discipleship programs exist for athletics, this case study was categorized as a critical case sampling, which can have a strong impact on gathering significant data. This evaluative approach examined and determined the final outcomes of the results as well as the process. According to Stakes (1995), "[T]he nature of the case study, the sponsor, the activity intended, the primary issues, the time span, and burden to the parties should be made known" (p. 57). This approach is not intended to gather data from a multitude of institutions but rather to examine one or two institutions closely and get an in-depth look at all the facets of the program. The value is in knowing all the aspects and seeing how results line up with the processes.

The researcher conducted interviews of key constituents involved in creating and/or facilitating the components of the discipleship program. The research also included close observation and analysis of program components, including materials, handouts, and specific forms.

Participants

Hilltop University, a pseudonym for a four-year liberal arts university in the South, is the institution featured in the study. Over 5,000 undergraduate students attend this faith-based institution that has over a dozen intercollegiate sports teams and various athletic-based clubs. Hilltop is a member of the NCAA Division II.

The decision to interview constituents at Hilltop University was based on some preliminary research into discipleship programs among small faith-based universities. The initial findings concluded that Hilltop University had an in-depth and organized discipleship program specifically for athletes that had been established for a few years.

The researcher conducted interviews with the Athletic Director, the Dean of Students and Spiritual Life, and three head coaches. Below is a description of each participant at Hilltop University. The researcher created and assigned pseudonyms to protect the identity of the interviewees.

1. Will is the Director of Athletics at Hilltop University. He was a partner in creating the Discipleship Program almost 10 years ago. Overseeing the intercollegiate sports and athletic club sports is his main duty at the institution, as well as guiding the progress and encouraging the coaches in the discipleship program.

2.   Ben is the Dean of Students and Spiritual Life. He was a partner with Will in creating the discipleship program at Hilltop. Recently, he started working closely with the mission trip associated with the program to help determine locations and itineraries for the teams. He also is an advocate to the university administration for the work done on the discipleship program.

3.   Sonya is the head coach for the women's volleyball team and has played and coached at Hilltop University. She also has experience coaching club volleyball teams in the area. She has been a head coach at Hilltop for the longest tenure of all the participants.

4.   Andy serves as the head coach for the baseball team. He has a background in playing and coaching at both Christian higher education and secular state schools. He is a co-creator of TAP (The Accountability Program) for the spiritual leaders on the baseball team.

5.   Nathan is the head coach for the men's basketball team. He has played and coached at a variety of institutions throughout his career. He is the other co-creator of TAP and works closely with Andy to continue to improve the program.

Interview Format

The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 25 to 35 minutes each. The same protocol (see Appendix A) was used for each interview. In order to develop an informative protocol, a pilot study was conducted at another institution that was in the process of creating a discipleship program for its student-athletes. Prior to each interview, the informed consent (see Appendix B) was examined and signed by the respective participant. The researcher digitally tape recorded and then transcribed the

interviews. After the transcription process and information analysis were completed, the researcher coded and themed the data before deleting the recording files from the digital recorders and the researcher's computer.

Summary

A qualitative case study was the method chosen for this research due to the lack of prior studies on the topic of discipleship programs. The findings of the current research came from five interviews from Hilltop University, an NCAA Division II program. Critical case sampling allowed the researcher to focus on the process of creating and maintaining a discipleship program within which student-athletes have the opportunity to grow. Coaches and administrators from Hilltop University responded to the same set of questions in individual interviews. The information gathered was synthesized to highlight the most important findings, which are explained in detail in the following sections.

Chapter 4

Results

The discussion of the results for this case study is presented in three sections. The first section consists of an overview of the personal definition of discipleship provided by the participants. The final two sections are the themes gathered from the interviews categorized by the two research questions of the study.

Definitions

Each participant was asked to provide his or her personal definition of discipleship. Existing definitions vary depending on the nature of the research or viewpoint of the researcher. The working definition of discipleship utilized for this study is the activity of personal or communal spiritual practices that involve growing in a relationship with God. The process of exploring these definitions was helpful in understanding and interpreting the results.

Although the participants were under the same set of goals as established by the discipleship program objectives, each definition was unique. Will, the Director of Athletics who oversees the discipleship program, spoke to that difference: "[A definition] varies from person to person and you know definitely school to school . . . even at [Hilltop University] I think it varies from team to team and what each coach's goals are." He viewed discipleship as "a real-life basis of dealing with day-to-day aspects . . . being able to not only survive but react and thrive in a Christ-centered manner." The following

quote from Andy summed up the three areas of discipleship touched on by the majority of other participants. He stated discipleship is "seeing somebody come to faith in Christ and then growing in maturity to the point where they can pass that on, pass their faith onto somebody else." The first part of the definition referenced discipleship as becoming a Christian. The middle part centered on the word "growth." Sonya's definition supported this process of growth, positing it as "Christians coming together, growing in the Lord, learning the Word and applying what we learn." The final part of Andy's definition was the most reoccurring thought by all participants when defining discipleship, which related to sharing their faith with others.

The definitions given by each participant showed that, although each person's definition was unique, they still all had the underlying theme of the researcher's definition of growing in a relationship with God. This process takes time to develop, and the coaches provide opportunities for their players to foster growth in this relationship.

After establishing each individual's definition of discipleship, the next stage of the interviews consisted of addressing the two main research questions. The researcher posed multiple follow-up questions to gain deeper insight into the individuals' understanding of the discipleship program. These questions are outlined in the protocol (see Appendix A).

Research Question 1

The themes below emerged from participant responses and addressed the first question that guided this research: What are the different components associated with a discipleship program for student-athletes?

Goals. The mission behind the discipleship program revolves around two points. The first is to help develop servant leaders, which is the primary mission of the university. The second is to represent the institution well on and off of the field. To begin the process of explaining the specific components of the program, overarching goals were addressed. Will provided a list of specific components each coach should strive to implement. He stressed that these outcomes helped the coaches and student-athletes see the direction of the program and how "to represent [the university] in a positive way." The program goals outlined by the athletic department and administration are set in a four-tiered system:

Tier 1: Each student-athlete is given a devotional guide or book to study.

Tier 2: Each student-athlete is part of a four-to-six-person discipleship "squad" that meets weekly to discuss the devotional guide and answer basic accountability questions.

Tier 3: Each team meets weekly with the coach for a discipleship meeting in which the team discusses the Bible and applicable truths to their daily lives.

Tier 4: Each student-athlete is encouraged to participate in local church activities.

From the mission and goals of the overall discipleship program, the coaches take this framework and develop it specifically for their own teams. Evidence of the different variations appears in three categories: team discipleship time, the accountability program, and assessment.

Team variations. All six participants stated that each coach can personalize the program components to fit his or her team's needs. While describing what the volleyball team does, Sonya noted it would differ from what the baseball team does for their

discipleship since the number of players and the gender is different. Given the overall goals for the discipleship program, the coaches have freedom to devise their own set of goals, which affects the routines differently.

Team discipleship time. This time occurs once a week, typically before practice starts, and includes a Bible study or a whole-team accountability component. Different topics are addressed depending on what the coach deems necessary to cover in that particular session. The coach begins this time before either an assistant coach or a spiritual team leader continues to teach. A lot of group discussions center on certain emotional and spiritual issues to gather different opinions or help one another grow through difficult life moments. Andy's goals for the team discipleship time include "an understanding of the gospel, loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, strength, [having] a commitment to God's work, and then discipleship [by] passing that on." Other teams might gather to have discussions about a book or topical series. This was the first year the Athletic Director instructed all teams to go through the same book together. Since discipleship is unique to each individual and each team, one coach had some reservations about the mandate from administration. He initially felt the book was not appropriate in light of his team's low level of spiritual maturity. Despite his reservations at the beginning of the year, however, the book did seem beneficial for his players.

Whole-team discipleship sessions can occur before, during, or after practice. The volleyball team shares a devotional thought at least three times a week at the beginning of practice to help them focus. At the end of practice, they are held accountable to "discuss something good that one of their teammates did" during practice. This routine helps to build team communication and holds all of the players accountable to each other.

TAP (The Accountability Program). The Accountability Program (TAP) was created by the baseball and basketball coaches based on a local pastor's idea. It is a voluntary program for those who would like to grow deeper in their faith beyond the team discipleship time. The coaches actually tell the student-athletes not to sign up for this program unless they truly will be dedicated to doing everything required of them. The idea is to challenge all-stars, the highly dedicated leaders on a team, in an intensive program. The weekly routine for a TAP member consists of waking up early one day per week and meeting with the TAP group for a Bible study and prayer session. They memorize two verses of scripture a week and must have a daily personal devotional time. An important aspect of TAP is not only doing what is required but also gaining tools to do these disciplines effectively. It is a learning process. Andy stated that TAP "teach[es] them the tools they need to grow on their own [like] how to have a quiet time, how to pray, how to memorize scripture, how to share your faith, [and] prepare your testimony."

Evaluations. The assessment process consists of an evaluation given randomly to different athletes by Will, the athletic director. The surveys are completed anonymously at the end of each semester in order to gather honest feedback. Will stated that "the feedback we get is used for improvement or altering" the program. Along with the surveys, the coaches discuss as a group how to develop the program components further based on coaches' and players' feedback.

Each coach also conducts exit interviews with seniors after the season ends. All three coaches saw these interviews as a great opportunity to get honest feedback about how the season went, how the coaches did their jobs, and how the discipleship program impacted them. The seniors also give advice for how the program could improve.

Hilltop University discipleship program creators sat down with other administration and staff to determine the goals and program initiatives that would best serve their student-athletes. They took into consideration the coaching staff hiring process and the ability to let the coach feel a sense of freedom in planning their own team discipleship. They also made sure to get personal feedback from student-athletes. The baseball and basketball coach took the initial program goals and created another entire program specific to their sports. It became another level to the program to foster a positive change in the students. These components helped both the program and the individual student-athletes grow. Hilltop does not have all the answers for the best existing program, but the administration has tried to develop the program to meet the specific needs of coaches and athletes.

Research Question 2

After the components of the discipleship program were discussed, the second research question was posed to the interviewees to gather information on the outcomes of the program, both positive and negative. Below are additional themes below emerged from participant responses to this question: What are the benefits/challenges of a discipleship program?

Benefits. Each participant spoke to the positives and negatives of their specific discipleship program and the benefits and challenges to starting a discipleship program. The successes generally focused on the growth in character and spiritual development of the student-athletes.

Growth. The biggest theme of benefits from the program was the athletes' spiritual growth. Seeing student-athletes mature as individuals and in their spiritual lives

was a common measure of program success. Andy viewed a success as "seeing somebody go from not a believer at all to maturity where they are . . . laborers for Christ." Will believed the discipleship program initiates a process of maturity, and a side benefit of that process is a rise in academic success. According to Ben, spiritually, the discipleship program can help lead a non-believer to a relationship with Christ or help someone who has "grown up in church . . . and grasped their faith and grew in their faith

Nathan and Andy were passionate about the program affecting individual growth later in life. Andy stated, "[L]ook for evidences of God's grace all along the way but trying to keep the big picture too . . . it's really eternity that is going to evaluate the true success of our program." Nathan told of one player who "showed a lot of fruit and growth and repentance and the things that we want and he did it after all our formal discipleship things were over." The growth came after his collegiate athletic career had finished.

Character development. Another success of the program identified by the coaches was seeing positive character change by the student-athletes. Sportsmanship and teamwork were addressed multiple times throughout the interviews. Will believes none of the teams struggle with good sportsmanship thanks to the program changing attitudes. Ben agreed, "Their sportsmanship on the field is better," due to the discipleship program.

Teamwork among the players seemed to improve as well. A discipleship program specifically devoted to helping student-athletes grow spiritually can help teammates develop a sense of community. Nathan talked about the student-athletes' initial selfish nature, but the discipleship process allowed them to view their team as a whole instead of multiple individuals. Community building occurs when each person on the team strives

toward the same goal. If every person on the team is growing spiritually and changing his or her character in a positive way, that reflects a growth in the team as a whole. Sonya discussed teamwork in relation to trust: "I find a lot of times, when they can share with each other and trust each other, it does help with that chemistry." If student-athletes can further their character development as part of spiritual growth, such maturation not only benefits them personally but also others in the athletic department, including administrators, coaches, and fellow players. The discipleship program does impact the character of the student-athlete, but these successes do not come without challenges.

Challenges. The discipleship program at Hilltop University is still a fairly new program, and newness does not come without challenges. The administrators and coaches are trying to work through these challenges to provide a better program for the student-athletes.

One challenge mentioned by a few participants was a sense of pressure put on the coaches. The Hilltop athletic administration now takes into consideration the ability for coaches to provide discipleship training for their team within the hiring process. It is a top priority in the job description. This creates pressure for the coaches not only to help their team win but also to disciple their players and teach them about life skills and character development. Ben was the most outspoken about the pressure on coaches: "I think it definitely affects the way the coaches behave . . . if they are going to be the primary discipler then they got to back that up in the way they interact with officials and team members and managers." Another participant spoke of the pressures, saying, "At a school like ours where we want, as a university, to reflect a distinction and Christian commitment . . . there is a pressure . . . on us as coaches, that we get from the top down."

Nathan talked about a more abstract challenge. He described discipleship as "something that is at the heart level…it could be a hard thing to measure…somebody can start to pull things together on the outside, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's happening at the heart level." Discipleship is not just a mental understanding of spiritualty; an emotional component exists as well. This emotional side creates an uneasiness for generating too much of a programmatic feel to discipleship. With regard to Hilltop's program, Nathan expressed his desire to "make it fit the coach and make it fit the players." Sonya noted a challenge for her players in being willing to communicate during discipleship time. When her team consists of a range from strong believers to non-believers, she struggles to find a "happy medium" while teaching the material. Will commented along the same manner, finding it difficult sometimes for coaches to relate to the students and find material that specifically engages this generation.

Advice. Each participant was asked to give advice to an institution interested in starting or improving a discipleship program for student-athletes. Sonya suggested making sure the coaches are trained properly and are truly passionate about the program. If the coach is not passionate about the program, the players follow the example set for them and do not take it seriously either. Andy agreed on the importance of having the right people backing the program in order for it to succeed. He stated, "We could have the best discipleship program in the world from a content standpoint but if . . . there is no character behind it and [student-athletes] don't see it in real life, then this is doing nothing." Nathan commented that it should not be a "one size fits all" program because spiritual leaders on the team should be challenged in a different way than those who are new believers. Hilltop University does not have a sports chaplain or an FCA

representative. Nathan liked this stance from the university because he believed "it [discipleship training] needs to come from the coaches." They have the responsibility as the spiritual leader of the team.

Will also believed coaches need to buy into the program for it to succeed. He concluded, "If you have coaches that are intentional about recruiting Christian athletes and running a Christian program sometimes you have to put wins and losses to the side when you are looking at winning hearts for Christ." Ben gave three pieces of advice: do something if the need exists for a discipleship program, hire coaches who desire to carry out the program, and make connections, especially with global missions. Meeting new people and building relationships can help further the development of the program.

Summary

The four themes that emerged from the interviews in regard to the first research question were goals of the overall program, team discipleship time, TAP, and assessment for the discipleship program. Each theme arose from all five participants as they explained components they thought best described the discipleship program as a whole.

The program offered flexibility for each coach to provide variation for his or her specific team, which proved valuable in meeting the needs of the individuals on the teams. The second research question evoked answers relating to the benefits and challenges of the program. Benefits included growth and increased character development in the individual, which, in turn, improved the team's cohesion as a unit. Challenges were discussed along with how to navigate solutions to overcome setbacks. These results can provide other institutions with a powerful driving force to establish future discipleship programs.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter focuses on a discussion of the implications of this research. Below is a comparison of the findings with relevant literature, a listing of this study's limitations, a discussion of suggested practical implications for practitioners, and finally a discussion of potential future research. From a historical perspective, extra-curricular activities can be a source of character development while creating well-rounded individuals (Rudolph 1990). The interviews conducted at Hilltop indicated that their athletic discipleship program could foster growth in character development as well as in spiritual development. With the role of a student-athlete being so time-consuming (Kissinger & Watson, 2009), these students may not have the opportunity to go to spiritual events on campus or spend extra time attending hall Bible studies. However, a spiritual maturation process can develop through a program sponsored within athletics, such as an organized discipleship program with various components that strive to meet the spiritual needs of the student-athletes.

The findings of this research could prove beneficial for schools interested in starting a discipleship program for student-athletes. Some coaches may already do some form of discipleship but not necessarily in an organized, programmatic way. The following sections provide considerations for those institutions contemplating a move toward an official discipleship program throughout the entire athletic department.

Suggestions for Starting an Athletic Discipleship Program

First, an athletic discipleship program can develop in phases or stages. A program can start small and be molded and shaped into something larger in the future; it is crucial to keep in mind that issues of the heart for student-athletes should come before the programming aspect. The program is only a causeway to shape and mold the student.

Second, it must be decided who will join the conversation to build the program from the ground up. Institutions must consider including members outside of the athletic department. For example, the Hilltop program involved Ben, the Director for Spiritual Life. The president of the university and other staff and faculty members outside of athletics can also be beneficial to include in the initial planning stages. Buy-in from all areas of campus can help the program succeed. It also proves valuable to get thoughts and ideas from various departments both at the beginning of the process and after the program is established. This helps to continue the program's development and growth.

Third, institutions should determine program goals by knowing what the athletes need and how best the department can meet those needs. Some of the athletes can be a part of the goal setting process, providing firsthand insight into what athletes deal with on and off the field. Goals could include attitude of coaches and players while competing, setting a structure in place for mission trips or service projects, and deciding how best to lead athletes to Christ. Important topics for initial discussions also include thoughts on how to further athletes' faith journeys and how to establish some form of assessment tool to see whether or not the goals have been accomplished.

Finally, sufficient freedom and flexibility allows the coaches to foster their student-athlete's character growth and spiritual development. All goals should be

measureable, allowing an institution to be creative when dealing with issues of discipleship. This can help to gain buy-in from the coaches while still letting the program feel more organic than rigid. Not every school knows where to start or how quickly a program may take off. By pulling components together from already established programs such as Hilltop University, the NAIA Champions of Character initiative, and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes program, an institution has the opportunity to impact the student-athletes in a unique way. It is important to know the audience at hand and to piece together a program to meet the specific needs of the athletes.

Challenges will arise, but assessing the program and discussing alternative solutions to problems can help increase the longevity of the program's success. Even one student-athlete growing and maturing in a positive way would overshadow nuances in the program development. If an institution has proper support and motives behind creating a discipleship program for student-athletes, the impacts could be greater than ever imagined.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this project was the selection bias of the participants. When contacted, the athletic director chose which participants to interview. The coaches who were asked to participate had strong ties to the discipleship program and coached the larger sports at the institution. The smaller teams were not represented. Smaller teams might have voiced more or different challenges.

Participants from only one institution were interviewed, resulting in a small sample that limited the applicability of these results. A low external validity is apparent with a case study approach because only one institution is studied. Analysis of the results

cannot be generalized, as it does not allow a sample of multiple institutions to establish the best practice of discipleship programs.

The researcher also had a perspective bias while doing the study. She was a student-athlete at a Christian university and understood the research from that lens. Interests and prior knowledge of student-athletes affected the direction of the research questions asked of the participants.

Future Research

Several research foci could shed more light on the topic of discipleship programs for student-athletes. Qualitative interviews with Hilltop student-athletes themselves would provide a comparison study. What administrators and coaches see happening as a result of the discipleship program could differ greatly from what actually occurs with individual student-athletes. Using existing institutional data could provide some quantitative measurement from the student's perspective to help make this comparison. By knowing more about students' needs and how they benefit from the program, the administration can further develop these positive components of discipleship. The administration would not have to feel pressed to create new ideas yearly but, rather, could plan future discipleship initiatives based on information from student-athletes.

One way to increase the external validity of this research would be to do case studies of multiple institutions with established discipleship programs and compare the results, noting similarities and differences. Every school and every population of student-athletes is different, but gaining knowledge from other institutions could help illuminate new and creative ways to disciple athletes. Challenges could be avoided based on prior experiences from another university setting a tone of being proactive and not reactive.

To get an in-depth analysis of the results from a discipleship program, a longitudinal study could observe the student-athletes over the course of their lifetime. Such a study would allow researchers to see if the discipleship program has a lasting impact throughout someone's life. The study could even focus on spiritual growth over a certain amount of time, as not all change occurs quickly. Student-athletes may mature over a longer period of time than just their four or five collegiate years. A longitudinal study could measure changes over time as well as outside influences apart from a discipleship program. Could those outside positive influences affect a person in the same way as a program in college? Different types of future research could expand on this initial research to measure the discipleship program's effectiveness.

Conclusion

This case study of a discipleship program established at a faith-based institution provides helpful insight for schools looking to develop a similar program. Integration of faith and learning inside the classroom and beyond is an expected outcome for most CCCU affiliates, so athletics should not be exempt from this integration. Programs can be developed in various ways with multiple facets to help reach each goal established by the administration. However, if student-athletes are not impacted on a level deeper than simply head knowledge, the results of the program will not meet the desired goals. Evaluating the program in multiple ways will help gather useful data to measure the true impact that specific discipleship program has on the student-athletes themselves. If genuine impact is made on a student-athlete, his or her life could be changed forever. This change is an outcome Hilltop University would be pleased to see in every student-athlete who goes through their program.

References

Anderson, N. (2003, January 5). The definition of discipleship. *John Mark Ministries.*
Retrieved from http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/8349.htm

Aries, E., McCarthy, D., Salovey, P., & Banaji, M. R. (2004). A comparison of athletes
and non-athletes at highly selective colleges: Academic performance and personal
development. *Research in Higher Education, 45*, 577–600.
doi:10.1023/B%3ARIHE.0000040264.76846.e9

Astin, A. W. (2004). Why spirituality deserves a central place in liberal education.
Liberal Education, 90(2), 34–41. Retrieved from
http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ682573.pdf

Austin, M. W. (2010). Sports as exercises in spiritual formation. *Journal of Spiritual
Formation & Soul Care, 3*, 66–78. Retrieved from
http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=e9bdc5ce-e327-
4b18-87fe-dd802db90d1a%40sessionmgr4006

NAIA Champions of Character. (2000). Five core values. Retrieved from
http://www.championsofcharacter.org/fls/27910/1NAIA/doc/NAIAChampionsof
Character_FiveCoreValuesPoster.pdf?DB_OEM_ID=27910

NAIA Champions of Character. (2012, February 28). Lead by example. Retrieved from
http://www.championsofcharacter.org/ViewArticle.dbml?DB_LANG=C&DB_O
EM_ID=27910&ATCLID=205389544&SPID=102595&SPSID=655048

Chartrand, J. M., & Lent. R. W. (1987). Sports counseling: Enhancing the development

of the student-athlete. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 66,* 164–166.

doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.1987.tb00837.x

Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. (2010). About the CCCU. Retrieved

from http://www.cccu.org

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods

approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dillon, K. M., & Tait, J. L. (2000). Spirituality and being in the zone in team sports: A

relationship? *Journal of Sport Behavior, 23*(2), 91–100. Retrieved from

http://people.stfx.ca/x2009/x2009hxu/qualitative%20article%204.pdf

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido-DiBrito, F., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010).

Student development theory in college: Theory, research, and practice (2nd ed.).

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fellowship of Christian Athletes. (2010). About FCA. Retrieved from

http://www.fca.org/aboutus/who-we-are/vision-mission

Frederick, T. V. (2008). Discipleship and spirituality from a Christian perspective.

Pastoral Psychology, 56, 553–560. doi:10.1007/s11089-008-0148-8

Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. (2011). What is servant leadership? Retrieved

from www.greenleaf.org.

Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. (2016). *The case for leadership: 2nd Edition.*

Retrieved from https://www.greenleaf.org/products-page/the-case-for-servant-

leadership-2nd-edition/

Hoffman, S. J. (Ed.). (1992). *Sport and religion.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Pub.

Holbrook, K. A. (2004). Jumping through hoops: Can athletics enhance the academic

mission? *The Presidency, 7*(1), 24–31.

Harris, J. T., III. (2006). Involvement builds campus character. *NCAA News,* 4.

Kissinger, D. B., & Watson, J. C. (2009). Promoting student-athlete mental health: The

role of campus counseling services. In D. B. Kissinger & M. T. Miller (Eds.),

College student-athletes: Challenges, opportunities, and policy implications (pp.

93–108). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Miller, D. M. (1974). *Coaching the female athlete*. Philadelphia, PA: Lea and Febiger.

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2009). NCAA football rules committee

strengthens rules to protect student-athletes and confirms sportsmanship

enforcement. Retrieved from

http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/PressArchive/2009/Playing%2BRules/20090211_football_

rules_committee_rls.html

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand

Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Ringenberg, W. C. (2006). *The Christian college: A history of protestant higher

education in America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Rudolph, F. (1990). *The American college and university: A history*. Athens, GA: The

University of Georgia Press.

Smith, J. (2007). Auburn program spreads sportsmanship message. *NCAA News,* 6.

Southwestern College. (2017). Discipleship. Retrieved from

http://www.sckans.edu/activities/discipleship/

Watt, S. K., & Moore, J. L. (2001). Who are student-athletes? *New Directions for Student Services,* (93), 7–18. doi:10.1002/ss.1

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

I.   Introduction
    a. Welcome
    b. Informed Consent
        i. Purpose of the Interview/Study
        ii. Recording Guidelines
        iii. Confidentiality
        iv. Signature

II. Questions
    a. Background
        i. Job description
        ii. Any past athletic history
        iii. Christian education or secular institutions for job background
    b. General Discipleship Program
        i. Please provide a definition of discipleship and what it means to you.
        ii. Rate on a scale of 1-5 how passionate you are about having a discipleship program here?
        iii. Describe your involvement with the program.
            1. What is your role?
            2. Do you feel supported in that role?
    c. Characteristics of the program
        i. Who facilitates and creates guidelines for the program?
        ii. Do you have a mission, goals, or outcomes and what are they?
        iii. If teams are allowed to modify the program to fit specific needs, how do they go about doing that? Can you please provide an example?
        iv. Specifically focusing on discipleship, what would a typical day look like that maybe would involve all aspects of your discipleship program?
        v. How do you perceive the character of the student-athletes changing throughout the process of the program?
        vi. Is there an assessment component to the program and if so, what does it entail?
            1. If there is not one, then what do you think it should look like?

       d. Successes/Challenges
          i. What were the successes you saw after starting this program?
          ii. What were the challenges you have encountered and what did you do to solve them?
          iii. What advice would you have for an institution that is thinking about implementing a discipleship program for student-athletes?

III.   Closing
       a. Do you have any additional comments or concerns you would like to express?
       b. Expressions of gratitude

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Discipleship Program

The purpose of this research is to understand the process and experience of creating a discipleship program for student-athletes. For this project, you will be asked to answer a series of questions about your experiences through a face-to-face interview. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will be recorded using a digital recorder.

Data will be transcribed and analyzed for major themes. All data will be maintained as confidential; any direct quotes used in the presentation of data will utilize pseudonyms in order to preserve anonymity. Data will be kept in a safe place with the researcher. No one will have access to raw data besides the researcher. All audio files will be erased upon completion of the study from the recorders and from the researcher's computer. There are no foreseeable risks or ill effects from participating in this study.

One benefit you may gain from your participation in this study could include the opportunity to share your experience with others.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing the Informed Consent and beginning the study, as well as any time during the study.

****

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, "Discipleship Program." I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date