

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

2022

Resilience & Persistence of First-Generation NCAA Division I Student-Athletes: An Evaluation of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at Colorado State University

Sarabeth Morofsky
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Other Education Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Morofsky, Sarabeth, "Resilience & Persistence of First-Generation NCAA Division I Student-Athletes: An Evaluation of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at Colorado State University" (2022). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 2067.
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/2067>

This Dissertation in Practice is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Resilience & Persistence of First-Generation NCAA Division I Student-Athletes: An Evaluation of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at Colorado State University

Abstract

This program evaluation highlights the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports (KCCS) Program at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO, a learning community program dedicated to serving student-athletes. Learning communities, considered high-impact practice in higher education, have a longstanding and successful approach to supporting new college students (Mamerow & Navorro, 2014). Many of the traditional benefits of learning community participation line up closely with the needs of student-athletes (Mamerow & Navorro, 2014). A Utilization-Focused program evaluation was implemented. KCCS students and KCCS faculty and staff were interviewed to understand if and how the KCCS program was meeting its goals. The data was collected through 1:1 interviews with four KCCS students and two focus groups with six KCCS faculty & staff. The theoretical frameworks used in this evaluation are Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012), Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002), and Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010). The program evaluation findings highlight the lived experiences of first-generation student-athletes in the KCCS program and provide programmatic context from the KCCS faculty and staff. Changes that can help with program improvement for KCCS and the parts of the program that are working well may influence the KCCS students' resilience and persistence throughout their time at Colorado State University.

Document Type

Dissertation in Practice

Degree Name

Ed.D.

Department

Higher Education

First Advisor

Christine A. Nelson

Second Advisor

Michele Tyson

Third Advisor

Guadalupe Federico-Martinez

Keywords

First-generation, Learning communities, NCAA, Student-athletes

Subject Categories

Education | Higher Education | Other Education | Sports Studies

Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

Resilience & Persistence of First-Generation NCAA Division I Student-Athletes: An
Evaluation of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at Colorado State

University

A Dissertation in Practice

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Sarabeth Morofsky

June 2022

Advisor: Dr. Christine Nelson, Ph.D.

©Copyright by Sarabeth Morofsky 2022

All Rights Reserved

Author: Sarabeth Morofsky
Title: Resilience & Persistence of First-Generation NCAA Division I Student-Athletes:
An Evaluation of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at
Colorado State University
Advisor: Dr. Christine Nelson, Ph.D
Degree Date: June 2022

ABSTRACT

This program evaluation highlights the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports (KCCS) Program at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO, a learning community program dedicated to serving student-athletes. Learning communities, considered high-impact practice in higher education, have a longstanding and successful approach to supporting new college students (Mamerow & Navorro, 2014). Many of the traditional benefits of learning community participation line up closely with the needs of student-athletes (Mamerow & Navorro, 2014). A Utilization-Focused program evaluation was implemented. KCCS students and KCCS faculty and staff were interviewed to understand if and how the KCCS program was meeting its goals. The data was collected through 1:1 interviews with four KCCS students and two focus groups with six KCCS faculty & staff. The theoretical frameworks used in this evaluation are Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012), Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002), and Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010). The program evaluation findings highlight the lived experiences of first-generation student-athletes in the KCCS program and provide programmatic context from the KCCS faculty and staff. Changes that can help with program improvement for KCCS and the parts of the program that are working well may influence the KCCS students' resilience and persistence throughout their time at Colorado State University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my amazing advisor, Dr. Christine Nelson, whose support, understanding, and guidance helped me to not give up and keep pushing forward. Dr. Nelson showed me such compassion yet challenged me the whole way while also making me a better writer and scholar. I would also like to acknowledge the other members of my committee, Dr. Michele Tyson and Dr. Lupita Federico-Martinez, who have helped me in different ways and encouraged me when I felt lost. I am honored to have the three of you on my committee and to aspire to be you someday.

I also wish to acknowledge my community partners, the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program staff, faculty, and students who have been nothing but wonderful, helpful, and supportive throughout this process. You all have shown me such kindness and took a chance on me, and I will forever appreciate it. I believe it was fate that I found your program after weeks of searching and scouring the internet. Who knew such an incredible program was right in my backyard!

Finally, and most importantly, my husband, Mike, who gave me hugs when I was stressed out, brought me snacks for those long writing sessions and supported me since the beginning. I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Relationship between Athletics & Academics	2
Introduction to Program	4
Student-Athletes in Higher Education	6
First-Generation Students in Higher Education	7
Statement of Problem	8
Purpose and Type of Evaluation	11
Significance of Evaluation	12
Gaps in literature	12
Evaluation Questions	15
Evaluation Approach & Theoretical Framework	16
Utilization-Focused Evaluation	17
Definition of Terms	19
Summary/Conclusion	21
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	23
Learning Community Programs	24
Learning Communities and Student-Athletes	28
Learning Communities and First-Generation Students	31
First-Generation College Students	32
First-Generation Case Studies	36
NCAA Division I Student-Athletes	40
Persistence & Support for Student-Athletes	41
Student-Athletes Mental Health	44
Components of a NCAA Division I Institution	47
Theoretical Frameworks	54
Conclusion	61
CHAPTER 3: METHODS & METHODOLOGIES	62
Evaluation Design & Methods	63
Purpose of Evaluation	68
Evaluand & Evaluation Design	72
Procedures & Design of Evaluation Instruments	79
Data Collection & Analysis	84
Study Timeline	92
Trustworthiness & Goodness Criteria	94
Positionality Statement	96
Ethical Considerations	98
Limitations	98

Conclusion.....	102
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	103
Findings Overview- “You’re more than just a student-athlete”	106
KCCS Administrators & Program Facilitators.....	108
Role of Key People.....	110
Intentional Course Curriculum & Inclusive Learning Space	115
KCCS Students & Four Main Themes	120
Connection.....	120
Mentorship.....	126
Community	130
Development.....	133
Program Improvement.....	136
Connecting the Themes.....	138
Conclusion.....	139
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION	142
Connecting the Findings & Evaluation Questions	145
Evaluation Question 1	145
Evaluation Question 2	149
Importance of Coaches Buy-In.....	151
Institutional leadership needs to be part of programming	153
Implications & Recommendations	156
Student-Based Recommendations.....	156
Career & Professional Development	156
Identity Development	160
Academic & Social Integration – Field Day	162
Context of Today’s Student.....	163
Program-Based Recommendations	168
Formal Program Assessment Process.....	168
KCCS Nomination & Buy-In Process.....	170
Staff Development & Training	172
Future Programming	173
Expanding KCCS to Other Institutions	174
Summer Bridge.....	175
Further Support for KCCS Students.....	176
Future Evaluation for KCCS.....	177
Non-Covid Repeat.....	177
Alumni Study.....	178
Student-Athletes not in KCCS.....	179
Future Research.....	179

Exploring Other Student-Athlete Support Programs.....	180
Extending Evaluation Beyond Division I.....	181
Role of Athletic Coaches in Student Transitions.....	182
Contributions to Higher Education	183
Use of Evaluation & Conclusion.....	186
REFERENCES	189
APPENDIX.....	198

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 2

- Figure 1. Literature Review Roadmap.....24
Figure 2. First-Generation & Student-Athlete Theoretical Framework Lens....55

Chapter 3

- Figure 3. Pragmatism & Constructionism.....65
Figure 4. Football Field Analogy.....71
Figure 5. Utilization-Focused Evaluation (Patton, 2002).....74
Figure 6. Logic Model.....79
Figure 7. KCCS Course Expectations.....88
Figure 8. Axial Coding Chart.....90

Chapter 4

- Figure 9. Connecting the Themes.....106
Figure 10. KCCS Staffing Model.....110

Chapter 5

- Figure 11. Career Curriculum Integration.....159

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter Overview

“You’re more than just a student-athlete.” (S. Morofsky, Focus Group Communication, 2021). This phrase was uttered multiple times throughout the evaluation of the Key Culture, Communication & Sports (KCCS) program, a learning community for student-athletes at Colorado State University (CSU). The “you’re more than a student-athlete” statement speaks to KCCS’s awareness of student-athletes being a diverse student population and navigating unique contexts (Lu et al., 2018). The KCCS learning community connects students, exposes students to campus resources, and integrates intentional learning experiences to support student-athletes persistence, resilience, and views of themselves (Brownell & Swaner, 2010). Learning communities have been used by institutions to support historically underrepresented students, such as first-generation students and student-athletes. (Kuh et al., 2004). Many learning communities, including KCCS, focus on the first-year experience to ensure students are well supported and persist (Ward et al., 2012, Nosaka & Novak, 2014). The KCCS learning community serves as an ideal entity to evaluate and to uncover the nuances of what it means to be “more than just a student-athlete.”

In this chapter, I begin by framing the relationship between athletics and academics to emphasize how an evaluation of the KCCS learning community contributes

to understanding how and why institutions should need to support student-athletes. I then introduce the KCCS learning community, review the problem statement, and discuss the purpose of the evaluation. I then state and explain the evaluation questions and give an overview of theoretical frameworks and methodologies used in this study. Finally, I provide a brief summary of the findings from the evaluation, review the significance of the evaluation, and define key terms relevant to the evaluation.

Relationship Between Athletics & Academics

In this evaluation, the relationship between athletics and academics is used to emphasize how an evaluation of the KCCS learning community contributes to understanding how and why institutions need to support student-athletes. The increasing exposure and pressure on athletic departments and student-athletes make the relationship between athletics and academics at higher education institutions, such as Colorado State University, interdependent. Understanding the popularity of college athletics can help better understand the breadth and depth of the discord between the academic and the athletic worlds of the KCCS students (Watt & Moore, 2001). The media coverage of college athletic events translates into a profit for university athletic programs (Watt & Moore, 2001). Many universities depend on the attention drawn by televised college sports events because they can increase enrollment and improve the overall image of the university (Watt & Moore, 2001). If student-athletes aren't successful in their sport, this can lead to negative consequences for the university such as decreased enrollment (Watt & Moore, 2001). Conversely, if student-athletes are successful in their sport, the spotlight is on them and their athletic ability rather than on their academics.

This interdependent relationship between athletics and academics brings nuance to the phrase “you’re more than just a student-athlete” that was brought up by some of the primary intended users of this evaluation. When a university’s athletics program is thriving at an elite level, especially at a NCAA Division I institution like CSU, the media exposure can cast a wide spotlight and positive perception on that institution, creating more pressure for student-athletes to be successful athletically. (Goff, 2000). This reality of Division I institutions demonstrates the pressure KCCS students may feel due to this dichotomy between being successful in their athletic endeavors and doing well in their academics.

Additionally, a large percentage of the students in KCCS, including all the KCCS students that participated in this evaluation, identify as first-generation college students. The KCCS student's first-generation identity brings an extra nuance to the KCCS student lived experience. This dual identity reality for KCCS students is meaningful to this evaluation and the relationship between athletics and academics because it frames the lived experience of the KCCS experience as unique to their non-student-athlete and non-first-generation peers. A principle of the NCAA Division I philosophy statements is finding equilibrium, serving both the institution and the public, who may value athletics as entertainment rather than the athletes as students (NCAA, 2021). The impacts of having successful athletics for CSU demonstrate an interdependence on athletics and the need for KCCS students to persist and be successful academically. In the following

section and sub-sections, I introduce the KCCS program and experiences of both student-athletes and first-generation students in a higher education context.

Introduction to Program

In 1998, the Colorado State University (CSU) created the Key Communities as a way to restructure the first-year experience, particularly for students from historically underrepresented populations (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). The Key Communities are built on the premise that structured first-year programs are effective in helping underrepresented students succeed (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). The Key Communities are learning community programs for the first year, second year, and continuing student programs are designed to honor the identities and strengths of each student to foster a student's transition to and through CSU (CSU Key Communities, 2021). The majority of students that participate in Key Communities identify as students of color and/or first-generation college students. The Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program (KCCS) is one of the communities within Key Communities. KCCS, which is the program being evaluated, is specifically designed for student-athletes at CSU. The goals of the KCCS program are to “achieve academic excellence, establish meaningful relationships, enhance leadership skills, connect with a diverse community, and engage in personal exploration” (Key Communities Website, 2022). Although not all the participants of KCCS identify as first-generation college students, many of the students are classified by CSU as first-generation college students.

A notable difference between the other Key Communities programs and KCCS is the admissions process. KCCS students are nominated and hand-picked by KCCS faculty

& staff. In the other Key Communities programs, CSU students self-select a learning community of interest and submit a submission of interest form showcasing their lived experiences and why they are interested in that particular learning community (Key Communities Website, 2022). Every academic year, there is a total between 35 – 40 students who join KCCS. The KCCS program timeline is a total of one academic year, starting Fall Semester and convening at the end of Spring Semester. Additionally, there is also a two-day KCCS Orientation prior to the start of the Fall semester.

In this program evaluation, I chose to focus on the KCCS program out of all the support structures for student-athletes at CSU and at Division I institutions because I believe that it is a unique program that is doing some incredibly innovative things for student-athletes. NCAA student-athletes consists of a group who often experience high time demands and resource constraints (Weight & Huml, 2016), which limit their opportunities to participate in learning community type programs or other high impact practices like KCCS. Therefore, evaluating KCCS provides an opportunity to better understand the student-athlete educational and lived experience at CSU. Additionally, conversation around the ability to effectively measure high impact practices, like KCCS, for student-athletes is timely because of public concerns regarding the quality of the educational experiences offered to student-athletes (Staurowsky, 2018). In the next sub-section, I touch on some key experience and components of student-athletes in higher education. I am including this sub-section on student-athletes to help understand the student-athlete experience and why it's different than a non-student-athlete experience.

Student-Athletes in Higher Education

Division I student-athletes in general, continue to experience challenges that are separate from their non-student-athlete counterparts (Comeaux, 2012; Eitzen, 2009), and the reasons that they struggle academically more often than their non-student-athlete peers are not still not completely understood. Collegiate athletes, especially NCAA Division I student-athletes, are expected to take on dual roles, student and athlete, and meet standards of success from a variety of sources within those roles (Sturm, Feltz, & Gilson, 2011). Student-athletes differ from the general student population due to many circumstances: (a) balancing athletics and academics; (b) balancing social and athletic responsibilities; (c) balancing emotions involved with athletic success and failures; (d) balancing health and injury to compete; (e) balancing the relationship demands with coaches and fans; (f) Addressing the time constraints of a college athletic career (Kissinger & Michael 2009). The consequences of failing to perform on the field and/or in the classroom can be detrimental to student-athletes success in college. Additionally, the inability to develop physically, cognitively, and emotionally can impact a student-athletes ability to succeed in society after they graduate (Apaak & Sarpong, 2015). With the interdependent relationship of colleges and athletics mentioned in the previous section and the balancing act of the student-athlete experience demonstrates that tools need to be put in place to make sure that first-generation student-athletes are set up for success.

First-Generation Students in Higher Education

For first-generation college students, Choy (2001) describes the greatest challenge for these students is to overcome the intimidation of enrolling in a college program. Similar to the student-athlete experience, Jehangir (2010) identifies several barriers that first-generation students must overcome to succeed in higher education. Jehangir (2010) describes that the first-generation college experience creates additional pressure for students to meet the expectations of their academics while simultaneously meeting the needs of their families and creates conflicting loyalties between the goal of attaining an education and family expectations. These additional pressures of balancing academics and external factors just as family and academics can be seen in the student-athlete experience as well (Jolly, 2008; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

For first-generation students, these pressures can leave minimal time to participate in campus activities for social and academic support (Jehangir, 2010; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). For first-generation students and student-athletes, the opportunity to participate in programs such as learning communities like KCCS can become limited due to the multiple obligations the student often carries. These factors of the first-generation and student-athlete experience show how necessary having intentional programming and understanding the lived experience of the students it serves is. Now that I introduced the experiences of student-athletes and first-generation students in higher education, in this next section, I discuss the statement of problem for this program evaluation.

Statement of Problem

At a program level, the problem to be addressed by this evaluation is to understand if KCCS is meeting its stated goals in supporting student-athletes, of which many also identify as first-generation college students. KCCS has yet to do a formal evaluation or assessment process of its ability to understand the KCCS student experience. This program evaluation collected KCCS student narratives to understand how students made meaning of their KCCS program experiences. Most Division I higher education institutions have developed a range of programs to support student-athletes while offering other programs and supports for first-generation students during their higher education experience (Lardner & Manarlich, 2008; Mamerow & Navarro, 2014; Smith et al., 2004; Fink & Inkelas, 2015; Chism Schmidt & Graziano, 2016). Some of these approaches may include specialized advising, individualized tutoring, and ad hoc student development units housed within athletic and academic departments (Jolly, 2008).

Many of these institutions also have learning community-type programs, like KCCS, for student-athletes and non-student-athletes. (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008). However, some of these programs risk having mixed results due to a lack of intentionality and knowledge about the lived experience of the student groups they serve (Smith et al., 2004, Jolly, 2008). This lack of intentionality can be seen in the form of creating a program to for the sake of creating a program or having a program for student-athletes that don't incorporate their athletic identity into programming. From my preliminary research for this program evaluation, I did not find many learning community

programs explicitly geared toward first-generation students, who are simultaneously NCAA Division I student-athletes.

Addressing the lack of learning community options for student-athletes at NCAA Division I institutions and doing a formal assessment on KCCS provides an opportunity to learn about a program that best helps support these students. Highlighting how first-generation student-athletes can succeed is important because current research places an emphasis on student-athlete and first-generation student success in college through a deficit lens, focusing more on what they are struggling in rather than on what they are doing well (Jolly, 2008; Bell, 2009; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gayles & Hu, 2009). Additionally, some studies have not distinguished between the influence of athletics, educational expectations, campus climate, and student engagement practices on student-athlete academic success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Failure to distinguish between these influences on academic success has led to assumptions about student-athletes that often present them through a deficit lens (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Understanding a program such as KCCS that helps student-athletes and first-generation students thrive in college helps negate the deficit lens that often follows these identities in the literature.

The current body of literature does not adequately address successful programming for student-athletes and first-generation students or describes the many factors that influence varying forms of academic success for student-athletes. Most of the research conducted on the experiences of student-athletes focuses on their graduation rates and student retention rather than on their social and academic experiences (Rivera, 2004) This gap in literature is important to note because the NCAA has stated concerns

about the quality of the student-athlete experience at colleges and universities (Gayles & Hu, 2009). On the topic of experience in college, research by Astin (1993, 1999) and Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) highlights how students who engage in extracurricular activities are more likely to have higher graduation rates than students who do not. Conflicting research regarding athletic participation suggests that there can be both positive and negative effects upon student-athletes academic success (Gaston Gayles & Hu, 2009; Hamilton, 2004; Potuto & O' Hanlon, 2007; Shulman & Bowen, 2002; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh & Hannah, 2006). However, to provide a comprehensive picture of the effect that athletic participation has upon student-athletes experience within higher education, programmatic efforts specifically for student-athletes, such as KCCS, need to be examined. Unless higher education institutions better understand the student-athlete experience from the lens of programs like KCCS and its role in positioning student-athletes for success, they may miss the opportunity on shaping that experience in a positive way.

To better understand what influences and shapes the first-generation student-athlete experience in college, this evaluation utilized a qualitative approach to suggest KCCS program improvements from a positive perspective and highlights what is happening in KCCS that encourages successful first-generation student-athlete learning in higher education. In the section below, I dive deeper into the purpose of this evaluation and the type of evaluation I am using.

Purpose and Type of Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is how KCCS supports first-generation Division I student-athletes and how future program components can be improved. This evaluation is framed as a Process Evaluation type or Program Monitoring as well as a Collaborative Evaluation (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). Process Evaluations are good to use during the operation of an existing program, which falls in line with the status of KCCS.

Collaborative Evaluation is an approach that is most compatible with a Utilization-Focused Evaluation and lends itself to evaluations trying to find areas of improvement or changes to certain practices (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p. 242). For this evaluation, Collaborative Evaluation is practical because the KCCS faculty and staff, who are a part of this program evaluation, have first-hand knowledge of how KCCS functions because they are implementing the program (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p. 243).

The purpose of this program evaluation, which is program improvement, aims to monitor how well the KCCS program plans and activities are working, showing the extent to which KCCS programming is being implemented as designed and whether the program is accessible and acceptable for student-athletes. The program plan refers to the structure and content of the KCCS first-year seminar. The program activities reference the curricular and co-curricular activities, like making connections across the CSU campus, attending the CSU Diversity Symposium, reading literature on social justice and culture, and conducting research (KCCS syllabus, 2019). Stakeholders in this program evaluation include the future, current, and past KCCS students, KCCS staff and administrators, and coaches of athletic teams. Beyond the scope of the KCCS program,

this evaluation has the potential to inform how other higher education institutions conceptualize program support for first-generation student-athletes. This program evaluation helps create a narrative to understand how students experienced KCCS and how it shaped the rest of their experience at Colorado State University. In the following sub-section, I focus on the significance of this evaluation.

Significance of Evaluation

This evaluation is significant because it addresses the gaps in the literature between program assessment and theoretical program implementation by focusing on an actual program that serves student-athletes. Another reason this evaluation is significant is that it is bringing to light the lived experiences of student-athletes and how they make meaning of their experiences. Finally, an additional reason why this evaluation is significant is that it is adding to the research on high-impact practices throughout higher education. I discuss the three reasons why this evaluation is significant in greater detail in the sub-sections below.

Gaps in Literature

When thinking of the gaps in the literature, through this evaluation, I sought to develop a better understanding of the KCCS program and how it shapes the experiences of the students who participate. Student-athletes are responsible for doing well academically, and they are also required to compete against other top athletes across the country in their sport. This is a daunting task for any student who is not properly supported to succeed in both the classroom and their sport. Understanding how the KCCS program shapes the student-athlete experience at CSU can inform the academic and

athletic community at large on how to create a space conducive to the resilience and persistence of student-athletes. The gap in research in the area of learning community programs for student-athletes is surprising given the abundance of research on learning community program design as well as the characteristics and needs of NCAA Division I college student-athletes, which comprise approximately 32% of all those within the NCAA (NCAA, 2021). Additionally, the gap in research is significant because there doesn't seem to be a formal assessment process for these programs like KCCS, which is important to demonstrate the learning outcomes and feedback from the students who are taking these courses and part of KCCS.

This evaluation better informs higher education issues such as access, retention, and degree completion by highlighting successful parts of the KCCS program and how KCCS participants experience the program. The main audience for this evaluation consists of students, coaches, faculty, KCCS program staff, academic advisors/student services, parents, and the NCAA. Current research looking at the previous factors is limited. Therefore, my evaluation findings begin to fill additional gaps in existing research and bring attention to first-generation student-athlete experiences from a new, more positive perspective. First-generation student-athletes are balancing several roles as they transition from high school to college (Larder, 2013). Learning community programs have a longstanding and successful approach to supporting new college students, and many of the traditional benefits of learning community participation line up closely with the needs of student-athletes and first-generation students (Lardner, 2013).

Lived Experiences. Additionally, this evaluation will demonstrate and bring to light how the KCCS program might best support student-athletes, who navigate a myriad of challenges and stressors they face without framing these challenges in a deficit lens. KCCS participants and other student-athletes at CSU and at other NCAA institutions are faced with the rigors of a full-time class schedule, weekly practices, numerous study hall hours, weightlifting, and other athletic-related meetings. These experiences are vastly different compared with their non-student-athlete peers.

High-Impact Practice. This program evaluation brings more recognition to this population of students and explores the benefits that learning community programs, which are considered a high-impact practice, can have. High-impact practices are active learning practices that promote deep learning by promoting student engagement (Kuh, 2008). In some cases, NCAA student-athletes can find themselves needing specific support services to help them persist. Without the help of coaches and academic support services, such as a learning community, being a student-athlete and obtaining a bachelor's degree alone would be very challenging.

The inability to fully understand the unique experiences of student-athletes can have a huge impact on the way we understand the need for specific forms of campus assistance for this student population (Comeaux, 2011). Additionally, this program evaluation is timely as the NCAA just approved a temporary policy to allow college student-athletes in all three divisions to get paid for the use of their name, image and likeness. This new temporary policy might affect the relationship between student-athlete and university and viewing student-athletes as students rather than just athletes,

especially at NCCA Division I institutions, like CSU, where athletics is a huge part of university culture. Determining the best practices for first-generation student-athlete resilience and persistence during their first year requires promoting positive agency and encouraging college completion through an understanding of what type of program and what characteristics of a program can better support them. In the next section, I go over the evaluation questions that will help support the purpose and significance of this evaluation.

Evaluation Questions

For this program evaluation, I wanted to be able to answer the following questions:

1. How does KCCS shape the experiences of first-generation student-athletes during their first year of college?
2. How does the KCCS program contribute to supporting first-generation college/student athletes?

The first evaluation question aims to examine how KCCS helps student participants make meaning of and form their experiences during their first-year of college, particularly when it comes to their resilience and persistence. This evaluation focuses on the first-year of college because the KCCS program only takes place during the students first year. The implications of the subsequent years of college for the KCCS students can be shaped by their first-year. KCCS student self-described experiences will give informative data about the program, what challenges, if any, it poses for students, and implications for how to improve KCCS.

The second evaluation question aims to look at the program through an organizational lens and how KCCS helps support the students it serves. The evaluation questions connect and seek to discover program best practices, students' lived experiences, and the way KCCS assist and creates meaningful and unique programming to help shape the experiences of first-generation student-athletes and support them. In higher education institutions, students may judge their own individual experiences by their academic success, social involvement, and their preparation for after graduation. However, those factors also depend heavily on a students' surroundings and the way they make meaning of those surroundings. If KCCS students' experiences in the program and at CSU influence their resilience and persistence through college, then the utilization of this evaluation is even more valuable in terms of creating change in high-impact practice programs for first-generation student-athletes to promote their success in college. In this next section, I provide an overview of the evaluation approach and the theoretical framework of this evaluation.

Evaluation Approach & Theoretical Framework

This evaluation uses a Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) model (Patton, 1997) and the theoretical frameworks of Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010), Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002), and Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012). In this evaluation the three different theoretical frameworks were used to help strengthen the use of the Utilization-Focused Evaluation and to understand the student experience in KCCS. Through the lens of Circumscribed Agency, which focuses on how social groups interpret and respond to their social contexts (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010), I was able to

understand how KCCS participants implemented what they learned in the program as they continued their college experience. I use Validation Theory as a lens to view the evaluation, where Validation is one lens to understand if and how students were validated in the KCCS program, which is most powerful at the beginning of a college student's career (Rendon, 2002). For this reason, Validation Theory is essential to informing first-year experience programs, such as KCCS. Through an Organizational Theory lens (Manning, 2012), I look at the data from the evaluation through an institutional and cultural context and how the KCCS program relates to the broader framework of Colorado State University and higher education. Throughout the program evaluation I incorporate Validation Theory, Circumscribed Agency, and Organizational Theory into the methods, and analysis of the data, as well as in my recommendations for program improvement. More information about the program evaluation model is in the sub-section below.

Utilization-Focused Evaluation

Through a Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) approach, which relies on the input of many different stakeholders (Patton, 2012), this program evaluation resulted in a process evaluation that sought to strengthen the ability to report on KCCS and use the information gained to improve future activities. With UFE, I also sought to understand how first-generation student-athletes balance their multiple roles, and negotiate their athletic performance, academic concerns, and autonomy, in relation to their role identities on campus. UFE is a user-oriented participatory evaluation approach where the evaluator works in conjunction with program decision-makers (the KCCS faculty and staff) to build

trust and rapport to develop and implement practical and transferable assessment tools to help determine if existing program activities produced desired participant outcomes (Patton, 1997). The KCCS faculty and staff also served as the primary intended users of the evaluation. Primary intended users of a UFE are important participants in the evaluation process and are responsible for applying evaluation findings and implementing recommendations (Patton, 2008) Through UFE, this evaluation was designed to determine what program practices of KCCS, activities, and materials were most effective for current and former student participants.

The concept of Utilization-Focused Evaluation has been endorsed by a number of evaluation experts (Alkin, 2011; Alkin & Taut, 2002; Cronbach, 1980; Patton, 1997; Stufflebeam, 1966; Weiss, 1998). UFE is highly personal and situational where the evaluator works with the primary intended users to determine what kind of evaluation they need (Patton, 2008). UFE requires the identification of individuals who care about the evaluation and the findings it generates, as well as their commitment to the use of evaluation outcomes (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). The personal factors identified from the primary intended users may involve the leadership, interest, availability, determination, commitment, or capacity “for contributing to the evaluation and its use” (Patton, 2012, p. 72). In this evaluation, it was essential to identify and involve key stakeholders within KCCS, as well as work with them to understand their personal factors, as recommended by Patton (2008; 2012). As recommended by Patton (2012), a stakeholder analysis was conducted regarding personal factors in order to assess the different degrees of potential involvement of the different stakeholders. In the sub-

sections below I go over the background on the theoretical frameworks and how they help support the Utilization-Focused Evaluation. In the section below, I go over some common terms that will be seen throughout this evaluation.

Definition of Terms

Annual Percentage Rate (APR): A measuring system created by the NCAA to keep institutions accountable for the academic progress of their student-athletes for their eligibility and retention for each academic term.

Division I: This is the NCAA highest level of collegiate athletic competition. CSU Sacramento competes in this Division.

First Year Seminar (FYS): Special courses for first year students to enhance their academic and social integration into college. The course is designed to help first year students adjust to the university, develop a better understanding of the learning process, and acquire essential academic survival skills.

GPA: Stands for Grade Point Average, which is the universal measuring format used by the education system to determine students standing in academics.

NCAA: The National Collegiate Athletic Association is the governing body that umbrellas over three divisions that mandates each institution follow their rules and regulations.

Student-Athletes: Is a student of the university but also competes on an intercollegiate team. In this report, the term, "student," will refer to those who do not compete on an intercollegiate team and is just a student of the university.

First-Generation College Student: A college student who is the first in their immediate family to attend and graduate from a four-year higher education institution.

KCCS Peer Mentor: Former participant of KCCS as well as a fellow student-athlete who serves as a mentor for current KCCS students.

KCCS Faculty & Staff: The administrators and program facilitators of the KCCS program. They involve and supervise the KCCS mentor as an undergraduate teaching assistant, conduct an orientation session with students during Key Orientation, and provide feedback on student performance (Key Communities Website, 2021).

KCCS Coordinator: This position supervises the KCCS mentors, assists with the development and implementation of KCCS.

Student-Athlete Support Services: A service at CSU that holistically develops student-athletes as independent and self-reliant learners on their path to graduation, empowers all student-athletes to reach their academic and personal potential, and prepares them to become productive members of a global society. (CSU Website, 2022)

Key Culture, Communication & Sport (KCCS): The program being evaluated. This program is part of the overarching department of the Key Communities. KCCS is specifically for NCAA Division I student-athletes at CSU.

Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE): A program evaluation theory that demands that all evaluation must be personal to those who are the primary users, or stakeholders of any program. Use of the evaluation by the stakeholders is the primary goal of that evaluation (Patton, 2008, 2012).

Summary/Conclusion

First-Generation Student-Athletes are a unique population on campus with various backgrounds and experiences. Higher education institutions can enhance first-generation student-athlete's college experience by guiding students towards things that are considered high impact practices such as learning community programs. In this program evaluation, I gather narratives to understand how KCCS students perceived their experiences and if those experiences match the expectations of the KCCS program. If those experiences match the expectations, how does KCCS continue those practices, and if not, how does KCCS improve their program? Using a Utilization Focused Evaluation and the theoretical frameworks of Validation Theory, Circumscribed Agency, & Organizational Theory, will provide context and resources to help answer the evaluation questions and guide the purpose of this evaluation.

In the next chapter I review existing literature relevant to learning communities, resilience and persistence, and the college experiences of student-athletes and first-generation college students. To conclude the literature review, I further clarify and expand on the concepts and theoretical frameworks I use to explain participants' experience in KCCS. Based on the literature and the theoretical framework, the methodology and methods for this evaluation emerged. Chapter 3 explains the methodology and methods used to learn from the participants in this evaluation. Chapter 4 follows, with analysis of the data and findings from the evaluation. Finally, discussion

of the findings and recommendations for the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program will follow, as well as a discussion of limitations and implications for further study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

The literature around learning community programs and the college experiences of student-athletes and first-generation students is growing. Knowledge gained in this area is helping institutions of higher education prepare for and serve these students better when they enter college. Understanding what is known about first-generation student-athlete experience helps improve learning community efforts in higher education. By focusing on learning community programs, first-generation students, and Division I student-athletes, this literature review aims to give insight and context to better understand the foundations of this evaluation. The literature review is presented in three parts. First, a focus on learning community programs in higher education. Next, background on the first-generation student experience in higher education institutions, including examples of first-generation student programming at other higher education institutions. Finally, a deep dive into the NCAA Division I student-athlete experience in higher education is explored. This chapter concludes with an overview of the theoretical frameworks for this evaluation. The evaluation framework, Utilization Focused Evaluation, guided the process of this evaluation. The theoretical lens's that will help me analyze the literature and findings from this evaluation are Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002), Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2011), and Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012).

Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002) emphasized student persistence and navigation of college. Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2011) emphasizes decision-making of how to navigate college as a KCCS student. Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012) emphasizes organizational decisions to provide KCCS. I will go over the theoretical lenses in more detail, which will conclude the chapter. The structure of this literature review can be visualized in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1

Literature Review Roadmap

PART 1	PART 2	PART 3
LEARNING COMMUNITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intentional link or cluster of two or more courses, often around an interdisciplinary theme or problem and enroll a common cohort of students (Fink & Inkelas, 2015) • High impact practice and positive effect on student success (Henscheid, 2015) • Strong sense of community (Smith, 2004) • Collaboration among students and faculty (Larder & Malnarich, 2008) 	FIRST-GENERATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fastest growing student population in higher education (Stehia, 2010) • Multifaceted individuals/wear many hats (Ishitani, 2016) • More likely than their non-first-gen peers to withdraw from college (Soria & Stebleton, 2012) • Heavily influenced by financial aid (Warburton et. al, 2001) 	DI STUDENT-ATHLETES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding a balance between athletics & academics (Grasgreen, 2012) • Highly structured environment (Eggleston & Mitchell, 2005) • Need to interact with students outside of athletics to combat isolation (Griffith & Johnson, 2002) • Engagement on campus outside of athletics has a positive impact on college outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009)

Learning Community Programs

Smith et al. (2004) defines learning community as a variety of curricular approaches that intentionally link or cluster two or more courses, often around an interdisciplinary theme or problem, and enroll a common cohort of students. Although some learning

communities do not require students to enroll in a set of common courses, this broad definition describes most learning communities in the United States higher education system (Smith et.al, 2004). It is also important to note that there are living learning communities, which are communities where students also live in the same place as their community, and there are learning communities where students do not live with other students in their community. Tinto (1998) stated that there is no one type of learning community, there are many types. Based on the data analysis from this program evaluation, the three areas of learning communities that serve student-athletes effectively are experiential education, co-curricular learning, and the sense of cohort/community. These three areas will be used to support the relationship between first-generation student-athletes and learning community programs, and to better understand the literature and this program evaluation. To better understand how learning communities operate within the evaluation context, I provide a broader history of learning communities in higher education. I emphasize the first iterations of learning communities because each example highlighted below evolved into the current learning communities we see in a majority of higher education institutions today.

The history of learning communities can be traced to the University of Wisconsin's Experimental College, a two-year living learning community founded by Alexander Meiklejohn in the 1920's (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). Created with an integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum, the Experimental College also promoted active learning and community building (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). When assessing the effect learning communities have on the students who participate in them, student engagement is

frequently used to measure success (Lardner, 2014). Student engagement in higher education institutions combines a focus on what students are doing, their behaviors and involvement in learning, and the educational structures and practices present and supported on campuses (Lardner 2014). Meiklejohn's work on living learning communities inspired Joseph Tussman's implementation of an Experimental College at the University of California at Berkeley in the mid-1960s (Fink & Inkelas, 2015) and later the establishment of the Evergreen State College in Washington state in 1970 (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). Learning communities have a rich and deep history within higher education. However, the students that attend higher education institutions are changing.

As higher education institutions began to enroll an increasingly diverse and transitioning population in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they sought ways to ensure students persisted in college (Chism Schmidt & Graziano, 2016). First-year seminars, which are specialized courses taken by first-year students during their first semester or quarter of college, provided an ideal vehicle for meeting these goals (Chism Schmidt & Graziano, 2016). Approximately, 73.5% of colleges and universities currently offer some version of first-year seminars, and the nature of these courses varies largely (Young, 2019). While first-year seminars evolved from a desire to make sure new students were fit for the university, learning communities emerged from a different philosophy that was seeking to make sure the university was fit for the student (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). Similar to first-year seminars, learning communities helped students succeed academically and remain enrolled and responded to the need for higher education institutions to make learning more relevant and actively engaging students in the

construction of knowledge (Chism Schmidt & Graziano, 2016; Price, 2005; Knight 2003; Pike 1999; Pike, Schroeder, and Berry, 1997; Price 2005; Zhao and Kuh 2004). When exploring the similarities between first-year seminars and learning community programs, there is evidence that these two entities are merging in many higher education institutions (Price, 2005; Chism Schmidt & Graziano, 2016; Hunter & Linder, 2015). The integration of first-year seminars and learning communities as one succinct program makes sense because both initiatives have similar intents around student support and persistence. Research has shown that students who participate in learning communities showed enhanced academic performance, integration of academic and social experiences, gains in multiple areas of skill, competence, and knowledge, and overall satisfaction with the college experience (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008; Mamerow & Navarro, 2019; Hunter & Linder, 2015). Fundamentally, First-Year Seminars along with Learning Communities are high-impact practices that are designed to elicit outcomes specific to first-year students' needs, and their central goal is to help students develop academically and socially while facilitating a successful transition to college (Hunter & Linder, 2015).

In a study of learning communities at 365 four-year higher education institutions, Zhao and Kuh (2004) found that student participation in learning communities had a profound effect on indicators that are often associated with student success and retention. Specifically, by organizing the shared courses around a theme or affinity group, while also incorporating a first-year seminar, learning communities have the ability to construct a solid first-year educational experience for students who participate (Lardner & Malarnich, 2008). Linking a group of courses together so students see the connections

between them helps create a more integrated intellectual experience that gives students academic momentum (Gayles & Hu, 2009). All these successful learning community components, such as co-curricular activities and shared coursework, are part of the structure of the Key Culture. Communications & Sports program at Colorado State University, the program that is being evaluated. In the following sub-sections, I discuss learning community programs with a student-athlete and first-generation student lens to serve as an introduction for Part 2 and Part 3 of this chapter and connect these two parts to Part 1.

Learning Communities and Student-Athletes

Student-athletes are a unique population of students on college campuses who have different experiences than their non-student-athlete peers (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 2002; Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001). It is essential to build in co-curricular activities apart from academics if student-athletes are going to have a successful transition into college and to help separate athletics and academics (Lardner & Malarnich, 2008). Learning communities are supporting student-athletes who have unique experience from their non-student-athlete peers. Guidance from a unique athletic community, such as KCCS, provides student-athletes with intimate peer and leadership modeling while challenging and supporting their development.

With increased pressure, the NCAA has become progressively concerned about the educational experience of student-athletes, beyond the enforcement of eligibility rules and regulations (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Incidences of low retention, resilience, and

persistence rates, particularly for football and men's basketball, gross misconduct, academic scandals, and poor academic standing have tainted the public's confidence concerning the educational benefits of participation in intercollegiate athletics (Gayles & Hu, 2009). A study done by Gayles and Hu (2009) determined that student engagement with the campus has positive and significant impacts on a set of college outcomes for student-athletes, suggesting that student-athletes can benefit from increased college engagement in ways similar to the general student population. However, Division I NCAA student-athletes have different expectations than their counterparts in Division II and Division III (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000). In Division I, your sport is your life, and you are expected to perform, which is in contrast with Division II and III's more balanced approach. Division I institutions, like Colorado State University, can enhance the services provided to student-athletes by building ways for these students to interact more with students other than their fellow athletes (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000). Given the time constraints and additional pressures associated with participation in college sports (Shelton, 2000), Division I institutions need to be more purposeful about engaging student-athletes in activities that lead to resilience and persistence and expose them to the world outside of athletics such as a learning community program.

A distinctive feature for NCAA Division 1 student-athletes is finding a balance between their athletic participation and academic performance, and the need for special programming specifically for student-athletes. (Grasgreen, 2012) Student-athletes coming to campuses, like all other students, face transition issues, whether they are incoming

first-year students or transfer students (Rubin, 2015). Besides being in a new academic environment, student-athletes time is dedicated to participation in their sport, which comes with new relationships (Rubin, 2015). Student-athletes interact with coaches, teammates, athletic department staff, and faculty, but rarely interact with students outside of athletics (Rivera, 2004) Unlike non-athlete students, student-athletes are subject to stereotypes and assumptions about their academic performance, ability to do college-level work, and behavior outside of the field/court/arena and classroom. The demands of college athletics have also contributed to high attrition, which is the number of individuals who leave a program of study before it has finished (Stein, 2018), among certain groups of student-athletes, specifically among those who participate in revenue generating sports, such as men's basketball and football (NCAA, 2019). While the topic of student resilience and persistence in higher education has been well-documented, little research has been devoted exclusively to understanding the college student-athlete experience beyond a calculation of the graduation rates for this unique student population (Rubin, 2015). As a result, student-athlete concerns, and issues have been suppressed in studies of traditional student resilience and persistence. Further research and evaluations of programs dedicated to student-athletes needs to be conducted to avoid lumping student-athletes into the homogeneous student body when it comes to issues of resilience and persistence. In the following sub-section I go over learning community programs as they relate to first-generation college students.

Learning Communities and First-Generation Students

When creating new programming, identity should be at the forefront of any implementation of new programming (Salazar, 2019). Having programs dedicated for first-generation students experiencing their first year of college allows for higher education institutions to create first-generation support programs to engage a multi-tiered approach, geared toward utilizing the reality of the student that identifies as a first-generation student. In this approach, administrators refrain from engaging in a preconceived definition of first-generation students, and in turn, allow for participants to access the resources and support that best fits their reality.

There have been many efforts by higher education institutions to ease the academic and social barriers (Salazar, 2019). First-generation college students characteristically experience more difficulty adjusting to college after enrollment, have a more difficult time persisting through each academic term, and are most likely to drop out of school entirely (Billson & Terry, 1982; Chen, 2005; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Warburton et al., 2001). Similarly, numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of early college experiences and the long-term and short-term effects of those experiences (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Woosley, 2003; Woosley & Miller 2009). Subsequently, it is imperative that further research into the first-generation student's experience focuses on early intervention programming during the initial transition in college and the full first year.

When students feel like they belong, they adjust better to the campus and are more likely to complete their degree (Tinto, 1993). For first-generation college students, like the ones in KCCS, an increased sense of belonging and community through social

adjustment and catered programming will create more support for the completion of their respective degrees. In this evaluation, the program being evaluated incorporates both a first-year seminar course and learning community structure. Touching on the history of learning community programs also showcases that in the beginning, these programs were catered toward white, young men. So the first-generation student-athletes who are in KCCS enter into a dynamic that's catered towards white, young men. In the following section, I go over literature on first-generation college students in higher education.

First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are the fastest-growing population in higher education (Stehia, 2010). Although the definition of a first-generation college student may vary, and few higher education institutions track their first-generation college students (Stehia, 2010), there is general agreement that their numbers are increasing on U.S. college campuses. Previous research using national data sets from Gallup on behalf of the NCCA on first-generation students can be applied where 55% of these who are also student-athletes have financial concerns related to attaining their degrees (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). First-generation student-athletes rely more on self-support, need-based aid, Pell grants, loans, and athletic scholarships, whereas continuing-generation student-athletes tend to rely more on family and academic scholarships (NCAA, 2018). When comparing the study mentioned above with this program evaluation, over half of first-generation student-athletes stated that they would not likely pursue a four-year degree if it had not been for athletics (NCAA, 2019).

This statistic alone feeds the need and purpose for better programming and curriculum practices for first-generation student-athletes.

A lot of the research having to do with first-generation students and postsecondary education focuses only on the initial transition of the student's first year in college (Stieha, 2010; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Lockett et al., 2009; Pascarella et.al, 2016; Prospero, 2007). However, more research has been done on what can be implemented to help keep first-generation students in higher education institutions (Stieha, 2010). When it comes to first-generation students, they present themselves as multifaceted individuals. As time goes on, these students wear many different hats while trying to balance their educational aspirations within the college setting (Stieha, 2010). The gaps that first-generation students must bridge takes, such as identifying resources and support and balancing academics with other commitments, take a toll on the student if the proper supports are not in place to help navigate that process (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). As heterogeneous individuals, first-generation student-athletes need to have individualized approaches to their development and growth as college students.

A challenging aspect of first-generation students' higher education experience is that they are more likely than their non-first-generation peers to withdraw from college (Ishitani, 2016). Ishitani's (2016) study discovered that first-generation students were most likely to drop out during their second year in college. The most critical period for first-generation students is their first year in college, as they attempt to confirm whether they have enrolled at the right institution (Ishitani, 2016). The right institution is dependent on how the student determines and defines their own perception of that phrase.

In response to the large number of students who leave during their first year, colleges and universities allocate significant resources to develop programs designed to retain more students during their first year (Levitz et. al 1999). But, after that first year is over, many higher education institutions shift their focus to the following year's incoming first-year students. As a result, little is known about what happens to students during their second year in college, a time when more first-generation students do not continue at their institution (Ishitani, 2016). Establishing a group of institutional personnel who design and organize programs to enhance second-year retention through graduation, such as the Key Community Programs, is ideal (Kennedy-Phillips & Uhing, 2013). With the attention to best practices of first-generation students, these types of programs are imperative for first-generation student resilience and persistence.

First-generation college students, like the KCCS students interviewed in this program evaluation, tend to have navigated educational systems that did not expose them to basic knowledge about postsecondary education, such as financial aid and application process, level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniack, & Terenzini, 2004). Family cultural capital plays a significant role in informing the choices students make about the types of institutions they attend and the kinds of experiences they have in college once enrolled (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniack, & Terenzini, 2004). Conversely, volunteer work, employment, and participation in intercollegiate athletics tend to negatively impact first-generation students more than their non-first-generation peers (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniack, & Terenzini, 2004). This research shows that Division I

student-athletes, such as the participants in the KCCS program, their athlete and first-generation identities may be viewed through a deficit lens without mentioning any sort of program to combat this deficit. These activities, especially intercollegiate athletics, all tend to reduce students' involvement in on-campus academic and nonacademic activities, which removes or insulates students from broad exposure to more students and the general campus culture (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniack, & Terenzini, 2004). For first-generation students, being in a specialized and tailored program dedicated to their success, such as the KCCS, that supports their time management and decision-making process can increase their general relationship to the campus and support their overall achievement. Increases in the enrollment of first-generation college students require that colleges and universities focus their efforts and resources to support the growing population of students. Since there are more first-generation students attending college, more programming, such as learning communities, needs to be implemented.

Although important, these previous studies have not focused on specific programming that institutions can implement to help retain first-generation college students. These studies also lack a rich qualitative description and narrative of the first-generation college student experience, and how they make meaning of their experience. In the following sub-section, I highlight three higher education institutions and what they are doing for their first-generation students to provide context on successful programming experiences for these students.

First-Generation Case Studies

To provide comparisons and examples, it is imperative to highlight three baccalaureate institutions, Barnard College, Azusa Pacific University, and Colorado College, who have dedicated first-year programs for first-generation college students. As baccalaureate institutions, their focus is more deliberative and perceptive to being categorized primarily as teaching institutions, rather than research institutions. There is an institutional need to adapt to the increasing number of first-generation students. Higher education institutions with growing numbers of first-generation students seem to become homogenized and implement similar programs in response to mimetic environmental pressures, in which uncertainty causes imitation. (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148) The first example I highlight is Barnard College and their various resources for supporting their first-generation student population.

Barnard College. Founded in 1889, Barnard College is a private, baccalaureate and women's institution in New York City. They describe themselves as a diverse and close-knit community, while giving their students an opportunity to study with leading scholars who teach in a small and intimate classroom setting. (Barnard College, n.d.) Barnard also has a close partnership with the ivy-league Columbia University, which offers additional course offerings and resources for the Barnard students. Having a close relationship with an ivy-league institution is one of the factors that sets Barnard apart from some of the other smaller institutions in New York City. About fourteen percent of Barnard students are considered first-generation students. (Barnard College, n.d.) Barnard also boast a 95% first-to-second year retention rate and is a part of the online community "I'm First,"

which was founded by the Center for Student opportunity to provide first-generation college students, and those who advise them, with information and support on throughout their college career. (Barnard College, n.d.)

According to their web site, Barnard pairs their first-generation initiatives with the students who identify in the low-income demographic (Barnard University, n.d.). This could easily cause confusion because they could be alluding that they believe all first-generation students are also low-income or that all low-income students are also first-generation. These populations of students aren't mutually exclusive, and Barnard should provide separate resources for those students that do not fall into both categories.

However, through their Academic Success and Enrichment Programs Office, Barnard seems to be providing first-generation students several resources to promote success and retention. Their largest initiative, the Peer Academic Leader Program (PAL), pairs new, first-generation students with an upper classman who also identifies as first-generation and goes through a one year intensive and comprehensive training. Some other notable initiatives that Barnard has include a first-generation advisory board, academically related travel support, monthly workshops, social events and faculty networks. (Barnard College, n.d.)

Azusa Pacific University. Founded in 1899, Azusa Pacific was founded as the Training School for Christian Workers by both men and women interested in creating a space for Christian education (Azusa Pacific University, n.d.). From its humble beginnings in a small home with a gathering of 12 students, Azusa Pacific has grown to over 10,000 students and expanded to seven campuses throughout California. First-generation

students at Azusa Pacific are provided with many opportunities to connect to campus, build community and find the support necessary for themselves and their families need to succeed. The F1rst Program, offered by the Office of Orientation and Transitions, provides first-generation students matriculating to Azusa Pacific the opportunity to connect to resources, build community, engage in leadership development, and provides resources for families as their students leave home and become a part of the Azusa Pacific community.

Colorado College. Founded 1874, Colorado College is a private four-year liberal arts institution located in downtown Colorado Springs, CO (Colorado College, n.d.).

Colorado College is well known for their Block Plan, which allows students to take one course at a time. With an enrollment of 1,900 undergraduate students, the college focuses on creating small learning communities during each block period (Colorado College, n.d.). To support first-generation college students, the college offers services through their First-Generation Collegiate Program in the Butler Center. The First-Generation Collegiate Program is a collaborative effort between the Butler Center and campus departments (Colorado College, n.d.). The program focuses on providing students with opportunities for community building, campus resource awareness, faculty/staff connections and pre-counseling services (Colorado, n.d.). The program has over 100 students participate across all four years, and there are over 50 first-generation faculty and staff that volunteer their time as mentors, panelists, and advisors (Colorado, College, n.d.).

The social constructivist perspective describes a more collaborative approach for addressing issues. The First-Generation Program at Colorado College has turned supporting and increasing the persistence of first-generation students into a campus-wide initiative instead of being the responsibility of one department. Utilizing faculty and staff that also identify as first-generation, the program can create a community of pride and connection that extends beyond the Butler Center. First-generation faculty and staff wear “first” pins during events and at a Year-End formal, seniors are given the same pins as an honor and recognition of their achievement (Colorado College, n.d.). Much of their community building focuses on students, faculty, and staff being able to share their unique lived experiences with each other (Leonard-Rock, n.d.). There is an acknowledgement that there is no single story of what it means to be a first-generation student and multiple perspectives are shared during block community lunch meetings (Leonard-Rock, n.d.).

The three baccalaureate institutions examined demonstrate intentional, well-designed programs to support the needs of first-generation college students. Although each institution engages students in different ways, their approach to the transitions of first-generation students reflects the unique perspective of the student, engages the students as active participants and works to create both primary and secondary socialization realities (Bess & Dee, 2008). Providing this comparative analysis and highlighting the successes of these programs strengthens the argument and need for programs like these and KCCS at all higher education institutions. In all, this section on first-generation students was used to show that first-generation students are the fastest

growing population in higher education (Stehia, 2010), are multi-faceted individuals (Ishitani, 2016), are more likely to withdraw from college (Soria & Stebleton, 2012), and are heavily influenced by financial aid (Warburton et.al, 2001). In the following section, I go over the components of NCCA Division I Student-Athletes experience in college including persistence and support and then go into a subsection on NCAA institutions.

NCAA Division I Student-Athletes

The NCAA describes itself as being “founded more than one hundred years ago as a way to protect student-athletes...[implementing] that principle with increased emphasis on both athletics and academic excellence.” (NCAA, 2021). While student-athletes have some differing experiences from their non-athlete peers, research demonstrates numerous similarities in terms of student engagement and college experience (Crawford, 2007; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Hathaway, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Additionally, the student-athlete experience is demonstrated by finding a balance between athletics & academics (Grasgreen, 2012), being in a highly structured environment (Eggleston & Mitchell, 2005), the need to interact with students outside of athletics to combat isolation (Griffith & Johnson, 2002) and engagement on campus outside of athletics has a positive impact on college outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009). In the following sub-sections below, I go over these main points on the student-athlete college experience, the factors and importance of persistence and support for student-athletes, student-athlete mental health and well-being, and components of a NCAA Division I institution that might affect the experiences of student-athletes.

Persistence & Support for Student-Athletes

The challenge of balancing academic standards with athletic competitiveness is not a new phenomenon in higher education. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions, particularly Division I, have wrestled with the extreme pressure to win, which is exacerbated by the popularity of college sports, and the need for regulations and a regulatory body to ensure fairness and safety (NCAA Research, 2019). As an organization, the NCAA's primary responsibility is to protect student-athletes' wellbeing and to provide them with the skills to succeed on the playing field, in the classroom, and throughout life (NCAA, 2019). At an institutional level, student-athletes play an important role in the culture of the university as athletic competitions are viewed as community events where wins and losses have the potential to affect an entire campus and community (Rivera, 2004). The success of the athletics teams also often reflects on the perceived value of the university by internal and external constituents (Watt & Moore, 2001; Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). With this pressure internally and externally, student-athletes need resources and programs to support their experience in a positive, stress-reducing way, and that promotes their development.

The student-athlete identity has been viewed as one of the factors moderating the relationship between college experiences and student-athletes' perceptions of life after college (Brewer et al., 1993). As defined by Brewer et al. (1993), athletic identity is the extent to which an individual thinks and feels like an athlete and can have a substantial impact on a student-athlete's personal and psychological development. Over the course of their athletic careers, many student-athletes spend their time striving to achieve the

highest athletic performance and incorporate being an athlete into their sense of identity while they are in college (Houle et al., 2010). A strong athletic identity often separates student-athletes from external influences shifting their attention away from the sport setting, which in turn reinforces that investment in their athletic role on campus (Stephan & Brewer, 2011). Those student-athletes who overly dedicate themselves to success in athletics are more likely to encounter difficulties in organizing post-college life and making career decisions (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007).

Intercollegiate athletics are an integral component of life at many higher education institutions (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Despite their relatively low representation on college campuses, NCAA Division I student-athletes occupy a socially prominent space, especially at Football Subdivision (FBS) schools like Colorado State University. FBS schools are the top level of collegiate football competition (Verified Athletics, 2019). The FBS is comprised of 129 programs from large, mostly public, universities (with some exceptions such as Notre Dame, Northwestern, and Stanford), and includes all major teams and conferences (Verified Athletics, 2019). Additionally, FBS games are televised nationally with 12 regular season games and a potential of a bowl game for teams that win 6 or more games. In these socially prominent spaces, student-athletes can be the subjects of controversy or celebration (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Generally, Division I student-athletes tend to demonstrate less academic success than their non-athlete peers (Eitzen, 2009). However, the reasons on why student-athletes struggle is not entirely understood (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). NCAA Division I student-athletes have distinct variations such as revenue vs. non-revenue sports, athletic ability, race,

gender, etc., which causes student-athletes to not be easily classified into simple categories (Eitzen, 2009). The inability of simplified classification of student-athletes could explain why there is a gap in the research for retention and persistence practices.

Over the past decade, the NCAA has become increasingly concerned about the educational experience of student-athletes, beyond the enforcement of eligibility rules and regulations (NCAA, 2020). Recent and past incidences of low graduation rates, particularly for football and men's basketball and student-athletes leaving higher education institutions in poor academic standing have worn the confidence concerning the educational benefits of participation in sports at the college level (Gayle & Hu, 2009). Therefore, finding the proper balance between intercollegiate athletics and the goals of higher education so that student-athletes experience positive gains in student learning and personal development has been a problem unsolved by higher education institutions.

In recent years, the NCAA has responded to public criticism by limiting the number of hours student athletes spend on athletic activities such as competition and practice, restricting the number of student-athletes who live together on campus, and requiring academic support services for student athletes at Division I institutions (NCAA, 2020). Despite the limits enforced by the NCAA, a recent survey on student athletes' experiences on college campuses reported that football players at Division I institutions spend over 40 hours per week, which is essentially a full-time job, on athletic related activities (Wolverton, 2008). That much time spent on athletics is alarming because it leaves very little time during the week to devote to other activities, such as academics and

social activities outside of athletics. Student-athletes could also potentially miss out on the learning that takes place from interacting with peers and engaging in other educational activities outside of the classroom and off the field with their non-student-athlete peers. Further examination of the student-athlete collegiate experience could add to our understanding of how this group interprets the purpose of college and how they generate the competing identities of student and athlete. Investigation into the differences between the student and athlete roles can improve our understanding of the student-athlete experience.

In the following sub-section, I touch on previous research on student-athlete mental health and how participating in athletics can positively and negatively affect mental health to provide context on student-athletes being in a highly structured environment (Eggleston & Mitchell, 2005), the need to interact with students outside of athletics to combat isolation (Griffith & Johnson, 2002). Additionally, I use this sub-section to close out the literature review and as an overarching topic on the student-athlete collegiate experience.

Student-Athletes Mental Health

College athletes represent a highly diverse population that is very widely visible on campuses (Etzel, 2016) A student-athletes mental health might be viewed as secondary to physical health (Moreland, Coxe, & Yang, 2018) College is a time of transition (significant changes), and psychological disorders often develop or worsen during transition periods (Bureau, 2016)The unique physical and psycho-social demands

of often year-round training, competition, travel, and increasing pressure to perform academically can compromise health status (Armstrong & Jody, 2015) “At risk” to experience a range of distressful reactions (Lopez & Levy, 2013). Student-athlete mental well-being is best served through a collaborative process of engaging all of the resources available at the campus and community level (Moreland, Coxe, & Yang, 2018). Identifying the resources that are available and integrating strong professional working relationships across these areas are critical (Bureau, 2016). Additionally, normalizing care-seeking and fostering a health-promoting environment that supports mental well-being and resilience (Lopez & Levy, 2013) can help to train student affairs administrators on student-athlete problems & needs (Etzel, 2016)

Previous literature provides insight into the ways sport participation affects student-athletes, both positively and negatively, and the potential impact of their athlete role on tasks such as including academic and career decision making. The benefits of sport participation include physical, personal, and psychological development (Richards & Aries, 1999; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004). Buzzetta et al. (2011) reported that from their experience, student-athletes acquire an ability to accept constructive criticism and possess a set of transferable skills relevant to their future success, including time management, goal orientation, and dedication. Additionally, athletic participation can enhance a student-athletes social identity, as participants become members of a valued social group on campus (Richards & Aries, 1999). Previous studies (Richards & Aries, 1999; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004) documented the benefits of sport participation for college student-

athletes as well as articulated the way athletics can assist student-athletes in coping with key developmental tasks, including forming one's identity and setting appropriate goals.

In recent years, the NCAA has made student-athlete mental health and wellness a priority (NCAA Website, 2021). The goal of the NCAA is to create “a culture where care seeking for mental health issues is as normative as care-seeking for physical injuries” (NCCA, n.d. d, para. 1). The NCAA also encourages athletic departments to create environments that “support help-seeking and facilitate early identification through appropriate referral and care” (NCCA, n.d. d, para. 2). According to the Association for University and College Counseling Directors (2017): Anxiety continues to be the most frequent concern among college students (48.2%), followed by stress (39.1%), depression (34.5%), suicidal ideation (25.2%), specific relationship concerns (22.9%), family concerns (21.2%), interpersonal functioning problems (18.8%), sleep problems (15.8%), and loneliness/social isolation (15.5%). Additionally, 25.5% of students seeking services were taking psychotropic medications and 16.2% of center clients had extensive or significant prior treatment histories (NCAA, n.d d, p. 11)

Despite the positive aspects associated with college athletics and the resources provided by the NCAA, researchers and scholars have also documented some drawbacks associated with athletic participation. Specifically, they have noted that an athlete's academic and career planning progress may be hindered because of athletic participation (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Murphy et al., 1996). Some studies have suggested that athletes experience more difficulty in formulating future goals and plans compared to

their non-student-athlete peers (Martens & Cox, 2000; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Student-athletes role commitments may interfere with their ability to explore academic and career options, and they may struggle inappropriately attending to life-planning tasks such as setting goals (Brown et al., 2000; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). Although they may have mastered setting goals related to athletic competition, student-athletes may not have translated this focus to their academic and career and professional development goals. This topic is relevant to KCCS students and this program evaluation because student-athlete mental health is at the center of everything related to the student experience. In the following sub-section, I review literature that has assisted in understanding the components of a NCAA Division I Institution.

Components of a NCAA Division I Institution

Since it was mentioned that college sports are a billion-dollar industry and that most of the Division I student-athletes receive athletic scholarships, I felt it was important to breakdown those finances and the impact they have on higher education institutions while also highlighting consequently the pressures that student-athletes face.

Additionally, in this sub-section, I touch on NCAA Amateurism, and NCAA Division I Coaches and how it affects the student-athlete college experience.

Finance. When considering the experience of student-athletes, finance is a factor in the resources available to student-athletes including programming, scholarships, and the pressure put on individual teams. Among the three NCAA divisions, there are 350 institutions and 6,000 athletic teams within Division I (NCAA Division I, 2018). Division

I institutions, such as Colorado State University, generally have the largest student bodies, manage enormous athletics budgets and offer the most generous number of athletic-based scholarships (NCAA Division I, 2018). Another aspect of Division I institutions that sets it apart from the other divisions is that it is subdivided based on football sponsorship (NCAA Division I, 2018). Institutions that participate in bowl games, which are individual postseason championship games, belong to the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), which Colorado State University is a part of. Those that participate in the NCAA-run football championship belong to the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS).

FBS is the division formerly known as Division I-A. In accordance with NCAA bylaws, the group includes those institutions that play at least sixty percent of their regular-season football games against other FBS institutions (NCAA Division I, 2021). Additionally, seven men's and seven women's, or alternatively, six men's and eight women's sports, must be sponsored (NCAA Division I, 2021). There are also requirements for attendance, scheduling, and financial aid (NCAA Division I, 2018). According to NCAA Research Data, there were large disparities seen in the FBS institutions for both revenues and expenses. Median institution data showed negative generated net revenue of approximately \$14.4 million (NCAA Division I, 2018). However, generated revenues exceeded expenses in 2016 at twenty-four institutions, not including Colorado State University (NCAA Research, 2017). The average net positive revenue for those twenty-four institutions was \$12 million (NCAA Research, 2017).

In Division I finance, salaries are the largest expense item, particularly the salaries for head coaches in the sports with the most exposure, like men's football and basketball (NCAA Research, 2017). In KCCS, a large percentage of the participants are usually on the football and men's basketball team. Other generated revenue sources include ticket sales, royalties, advertising, sponsorships, and endowments. Allocated revenue sources include student activity fees, direct government support, and indirect/direct institutional support (NCAA Research, 2017). The belief that NCAA intercollegiate sports are a financial asset to higher education institutions is erroneous. Although some larger intercollegiate athletic departments, like Ohio State University or the University of Alabama, are self-supporting, most higher education institutions that participate in the NCAA are subsidizing their athletic departments. Specifically, student fees or institutional subsidies such as endowments or state appropriations often support even the largest NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic programs (Pappano, 2012).

Even with the statistics and research behind the funding of intercollegiate athletics, it doesn't seem as if the increases in athletic department spending is expected to recede anytime soon. Not only does athletic spending per athlete exceed academic spending per student, it is also growing about twice as fast (Pappano, 2012). Subsequently, NCAA college sports programs often seem to serve as advertising vehicles, boosting exposure and prestige for those universities that are successful in their athletic endeavors (Pappano, 2012). While a winning team may generate some new students and donors, the price of participating in NCAA athletics doesn't outweigh the perceived benefits (NCAA Research, 2019). The disparities in academic and athletic spending suggest that NCAA

participating public colleges and universities need to reexamine their strategic funding plans (Pappano, 2012).

Justifying institutional spending on athletics is becoming a much more pressing issue for most NCAA participating programs, especially in Division I (Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). Does the amount of spending for athletics overshadow the student identity? If these trends continue, athletics subsidies will continue to increase in percentage for institutional budgets. For university presidents/chancellors and other institutional administration leaders, it will be necessary to assess these investments in athletics in terms of opportunity cost and the return on investment, such as evaluating how student fees should be spent. College sports can be a great experience for students and other constituents and stakeholders as well as a focus on being community centric. However, only a few institutions have athletic programs that can provide such benefits without imposing significant costs on their institutions; the other athletic programs, like Colorado State University need to strategize so that this is a beneficial initiative for everyone involved. In the next sub-section, I highlight key pieces of literature that encompass what we know about NCAA Amateurism status and how it affects student-athletes overall college experience.

NCAA Amateurism. College sports rake in billions of dollars a year for higher education institutions (Meggyesy, 2000). But student-athletes themselves, including student-athletes at CSU and in the KCCS program, have historically been barred from making money by the NCAA to preserve their amateur status. “Amateurism” has long

been a central idea of college athletics where student-athletes play for the love of their sport and education, never for compensation (ESPN – The Associated Press, 2021).

In July of 2021, NCAA president, Mark Emmert, stated that the NCAA is working on interim rules that will permit college athletes to earn money off their fame and celebrity (ESPN – The Associated Press, 2021). For decades, college sports commentators have suggested that student-athletes were never really playing as amateurs at all, but rather as professional or semi-professionals (Preston, 2019). There have also been recurring ethical discussions concerning the topic of amateurism and exploitation in college athletics. While many believe as amateurs, student-athletes are receiving more than their fair share through athletic scholarships, others argue universities are exploiting their own student-athletes, particularly in NCAA Division I institutions such as Colorado State (Preston, 2019). Collegiate amateurism refers to how student-athletes do not receive payment for their athletic services. The NCAA views these individuals as students, not as professionals or employees of their member schools. Therefore, student-athletes are not currently monetarily compensated (Murphy & Pace, 1994). According to the NCAA, student-athletes participation in athletics is just another part of their entire education, not the primary purpose for attending college (Meggyesy, 2000).

Under current NCAA regulations, compensation for student-athletes is limited to scholarships for their education (Dodd, 2021). Universities enter multimillion-dollar deals with cable networks and athletic brands, which profit from using athletes' images in marketing campaigns, apparel sales, and ticket sales, among other revenue (Dodd, 2021). In June of 2021, During the data collection process of this program evaluation, the US

Supreme Court came to a unanimous decision that will allow athletes to receive such education-related items as laptops, paid internships, and post-graduate opportunities (Dodd, 2021). These new rulings are leading to a “what now” moment for NCAA colleges and universities in the United States. First, although this ruling applies to a class of FBS football players and Division I men’s and women’s basketball players, which are considered revenue-producing sports, it is difficult to envision the NCAA or schools having different sets of rules on educational benefits for their student-athletes in other sports (Dodd, 2021). Therefore, the interpretation of the scope of educational benefits will need to apply across the athletic program and all sports. In the following sub-section, I highlight the importance of coaches on the student-athlete experience and how they can positively and negatively impact the student-athlete college experience.

NCCA Division I Coaches. Coaches at NCAA institutions have a big influence on their teams and the decisions they make during their college experience (Heinrich, 1995). Coaches were mentioned a couple of times through the data collection process of this evaluation, which will be discussed in chapters 3, 4, and 5. College coaches who have successfully recruited prospective student-athletes (PSA) to join their institution have done so by making sure the prospective student-athlete can be successful once they get to campus. The PSA that coaches recruit has demonstrated their academic performance meets or exceeds the institution's standards and athletic abilities have met or exceeded the coaching staff standards. There is a component of collegiate coaching that involves expanding the role to go beyond traditional, required athletically related tasks. This process is referred to as mentoring and has been researched and examined in the

educational and sports science domain (e.g., Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInery, & O'Brien, 1995; Bloom 1985; Gould, Giannini, Krane, & Hodge, 1990; Heinrich, 1995; McNamara, 1995; Perna Zaichkowsky, & Bocknek, 1996). Although mentoring in the world of sports does not have a clear definition, few researchers have attempted to define the term mentoring when there is a trusting relationship between the teacher/coach and the student/athlete (Bockneck, 1996).

The influence coaches have when student-athlete's arrives on campus for their first semester plays a pivotal role in the student-athlete's identity development due to the amount of time that is spent in the athletics. Ultimately, college coaches may feel that their purpose is to help student-athlete development. By becoming more comfortable with themselves, student-athletes can become more confident in "one's social and cultural heritage, a clear self-concept, and comfort with one's roles and lifestyle, a secure sense of self in light or feedback from significant others, self-acceptance and self-esteem and personal stability and integration" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 68). The role of coaches in helps student-athletes get acclimated to their new environment and new peers to be able to perform in their sport as their true selves (Evans et al., 2010). Since each sport is designated specific time slots for practice, competition, weights, and meetings, student-athletes spend most of their time with teammates and other student-athletes.

The NCAA rules and regulations state that in season sports teams are only permitted twenty hours of time that the team can officially practice (NCAA, 2019); however, athletes spend much more time than this towards their sports (Putoto &

O'Hanlon, 2007). This allotted time does not include athletes working on their skills and fitness on their own, receiving treatment for injury prevention, or time meeting with coaches to watch game highlights (Putoto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Many student-athletes experience similar schedules; some may have practices in the afternoon or middle of the day (NCCA, 2021). According to the NCCA rules, each student-athlete is required to maintain a full load of classes which is at least 12 credit hours (NCAA, 2021). At each higher education institution, it is recommended that each course a student is enrolled in should require two to three hours of homework per week outside of class. This means 24 to 45 hours of studying outside of class time. In a survey of student-athletes at 18 different Division I colleges, 53% said that they do not spend as much time on their academics as they would like to (Putoto & O'Hanlon, 2007). The workload demanded outside of competitive sports can influence student-athletes to choose an easier major to increase their downtime. Programming for student-athletes that increase the focus on academics, resources, and time management, such as KCCS, can combat the heavy workload. Similarly, programming for first-generation college students can also help build these important skillsets in navigating college. Now that I touched on learning community programs, first-generation students, and student-athletes, in the following section, I will now discuss the theoretical frameworks guiding this evaluation.

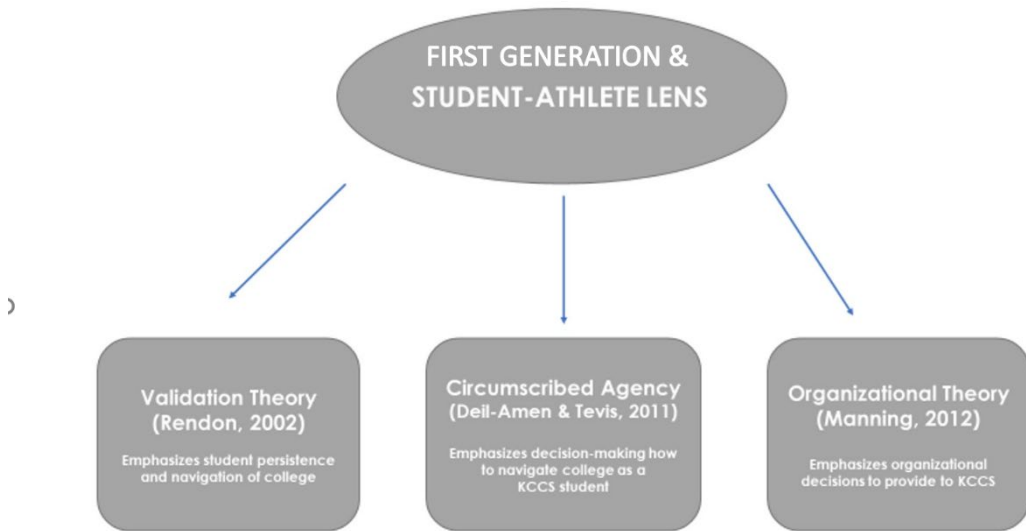
Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks that I use to analyze and make meaning of the findings of the evaluation are Validation Theory (Rendon, 1994), Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2011), and Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012). I discuss these

frameworks and review appropriate literature about the frameworks in the subsequent sections. A visual representation of the frameworks through a first-generation and student-athletes lens is below.

Figure 2

First-Generation & Student-Athlete Theoretical Framework Lens



Validation Theory

Laura I. Rendon (1994) introduced validation theory to connect to low-income, first-generation students enrolled in higher education institutions. Validation refers to the intentional, proactive affirmation of students in and out of the classroom such as faculty, student, and academic affairs staff, family members, peers etc. to validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the college learning community, while also fostering personal development and social adjustment (Rendon, 2002). The impact

of validation on students who have experienced doubts about their own ability to succeed, and lack of social and cultural capital is significant (Rendón, Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Validation helped these particular types of students to acquire a confident, motivating, “I can do it” attitude, believe in their inherent capacity to learn, become excited about learning, feel a part of the learning community, and feel cared about as a person, not just a student (Rendon, 2002). In this program evaluation, student knowledge and lived experience that can be discovered by looking through the lens of Validation Theory was used as a learning resource to determine what needs to be validated in the KCCS curriculum.

Laura Rendon (1994) describes the premise of Validation Theory came from the fact that the environments of most colleges are not designed with the identities and experiences of Black and Indigenous students, students of color (BIPOC), and first-generation low-income (FGLI) students in mind. Due to this hole in college design, these students experience college differently than white, upper-middle-class students. The factor of Validation Theory that is most applicable to this program evaluation is that students reported that validation from a person inside or outside the college community was often the game-changer for seeing themselves as capable of success (Rendon, 2002). Using Validation as a framework for this evaluation allows me to use Validation as a measuring tool for the success of KCCS.

There are two types of validation: academic and interpersonal (Rendón, Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Academic validation occurs when in- and out-of-class agents act to

assist students to “trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student” (Rendon, 2002). In a validating college classroom, faculty, teaching assistants, and staff actively reach out to students to help, encourage, support, and provide opportunities for students to validate each other through encouraging comments that validate the work of peers (Rendon, 1994). Validation must be intentional in order to be effective (Barnett, 2011; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). It is important to understand how students’ internal sense of validation indicates whether the educational environment is inclusive and whether staff and faculty proactively empower students for success. Taking an active interest in students, their chances of succeeding in college are increased (Rendon, 2004).

Group dynamics and group identification pair with validation to help evaluate a sense of belonging. Previous research on first-generation students can be applied where 55% of these student-athletes have financial concerns related to attaining their degrees (Luedke, 2020). First-generation student-athletes rely more on self-support, need-based aid, Pell grants, loans, and athletic scholarships (Rendon, 2004). In contrast, non-first-generation student-athletes tend to rely more on family and academic scholarships (Luedke, 2020). Like involvement, validation is a prerequisite to student development and is most effective when offered early in the student’s college experience (Rendon, 2004). It’s important to note that successful validation often begins at a student's first year at a higher education institution (Rendon, 2004). To frame my exploration of the first-generation student-athlete experience, specifically identifying ways they make meaning within KCCS, I utilize Validation Theory (Rendon, 1994) to provide a

sociocultural perspective of learning. Additionally, I use Validation Theory (Rendon, 1994) to ground my work and provide a perspective of understanding and academic and intrapersonal validation through the KCCS program for the first-generation student-athlete evaluation participants.

Circumscribed Agency

According to Deil-Amen & Tevis (2011), the processes of meaning-making that occur for students during their college experience are vital to our understanding of how and why students succeed or fail in college. Deil-Amen & Tevis (2011) also note that a student's agency is circumscribed in college by common perceptions and misperceptions that ultimately influence their behavior and decision-making. The concept of Circumscribed Agency integrates the emphases found in three different fields. It combines the focus on "situated contexts" and their characteristics, the focus on how social groups interpret and respond to their social contexts, the focus on individual's self-perceptions (Deil-Amen & LaShawn, 2010). Circumscribed Agency also helps the process of enacting individual behavior and decisions (Martinez, 2012). Circumscribed Agency acknowledges that behavioral outcomes of students such as resilience and persistence are a consequence of a dynamic, fluid, and ongoing interchange between environment and perception (Deil-Amen & LaShawn, 2010). In this Utilization-Focused Evaluation, Circumscribed Agency will help in the understanding of what factors are influencing first-generation student-athletes in KCCS development and perceptions of

self and how that aids in their resilience and persistence as they transitioned from high school to their first year of college.

Organizational Theory

Organizations, including higher education institutions, “change and develop through actors’ actions as they make choices within the context of the institutions in which the organization is embedded” (Manning, 2013, p 120). Although human action/agency with higher education institutions is theoretically free and open to change, organization agents rarely perform or create processes and programs in entirely new and inventive ways (Manning, 2013, p 121). For this Utilization-Focused Evaluation, an organizational theoretical lens helps move from theory to strategy, creating a foundation for comprehensive, intentional approaches to organizational change that will increase the retention and persistence of first-generation student-athletes that participate in KCCS at CSU (Manning, 2013, p 95).

Additionally, I want to talk about Organizational Saga (Clark, 1972) and Organizational Anarchy, which are components of Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012). Organizational Saga is a collective understanding of a unique accomplishment based on the history of an organization that offers strong bonds internally and externally from the organization (Clark, 1972). Followers of an organization, such as alumni of a college or university, become loyal because of their educational experiences, particularly experiences with other students, faculty, staff, and programs like KCCS. An Organizational Saga lens will help answer the evaluation questions and provide context to

the findings on how KCCS shapes the experiences of KCCS students. Organizational Anarchy (Cohen & March, 1972) is a useful perspective to consider when thinking about innovative programs, such as KCCS, that is different from other programs. The Organized Anarchy perspective or Organizational Theory provides a helpful approach to understanding CSU and KCCS in ways that are more congruent with and accommodating to their unique structures and approaches and how they support KCCS students.

Organization Theory also places responsibility on the institution rather than the students and KCCS faculty and staff and requires us to look past individual student behaviors and patterns of behaviors to the systemic, structural explanations for the patterns of behavior (Manning, 2013, p 143). Normative Isomorphism, a component of Organizational Theory, is when faculty and administrators in higher education institutions adopt practice similar with other professions in the field (Manning, 2013, p 119). KCCS needs to be able to combat Normative Isomorphism by consistently implementing an innovative and groundbreaking program for first-generation student-athletes. With Organizational Theory, this evaluation had the opportunity to dive deep and expand the scope of students' experience and resilience, and persistence on an institutional and programmatic level. In examining the experiences of first-generation student-athletes and the impact of learning community programs, an investigation including their voices and lived experiences within a learning community program, KCCS, was deemed most appropriate.

Conclusion

First-Generation Student-Athletes on college campuses, specifically in Division I, have unique experiences compared with non-first-generation students and non-student-athletes. Their experiences are supported when there are learning community programs, such as KCCS, put in place. When first-generation student-athletes first get to college, the experience is often made more difficult because of lack of social and cultural capital as well as the balancing of academics and athletics. For this evaluation, KCCS must consider the ways that they can facilitate a smoother transition to the institution and a supportive environment for the student-athletes, especially the ones who also identify as first-generation.

This evaluation examines the first-generation and student-athlete lens through Utilization-Focused Evaluation, which works with stakeholders, in this case, the KCCS faculty and staff and KCCS students to fully understand the program. This partnership with KCCS ensures that the recommendations of the evaluation will be used by the primary intended users. Along with Utilization-Focused Evaluation, which guides the process of the study, I use the theoretical frameworks of Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002), Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2011), and Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012) for the evaluation. In the following chapter, I review the methods and methodology employed in my evaluation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS & METHODOLOGIES

Chapter Overview

This program evaluation examined the practices of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program (KCCS) at Colorado State University, a program specifically designed for student-athletes, with a significant percentage also identifying as first-generation students. This chapter begins with the evaluation overview, which includes an introduction of the evaluation questions. The next section highlights the purpose of the evaluation, followed by the evaluation design and evaluator's positionality. Next, data collection, including recruitment and sampling of participants, and instrumentation are described. The chapter concludes with the data analysis and the contributions of this evaluation to the study of higher education.

The NCAA and higher education research has increasingly stated that first-year student-athletes are still indeed first-year students and as a result share many of the same challenges commonly experienced by their peers as they transition to college (Kidwell, 2005; Jolly, 2008; Gritmit, 2014, Dilley-Knoles et al., 2010; Brown 2014). In addition to facing similar challenges as all first-year students, student-athletes also navigate and overcome unique obstacles specifically related to their participation in collegiate athletics (Broughton, 2001). The learning community approach aligns well with student-athletes needs and has a strong potential to support their success in college. However, few

learning communities have been designed explicitly for student-athletes or with their needs in mind (Jolly, 2008; King, 2008; Petitpas & Danish, 1995). Finley and Kuh (2016) stated that calling something a “high-impact practice” does not necessarily make it that. Finley and Kuh (2016) also said that there needs to be intentional design and careful attention to how these practices are executed to ensure that the label high impact also means high quality. With the needs of student-athletes and first-generation students in mind, this evaluation sought to examine how the Key Communication, Culture, & Sport (KCCS) program at Colorado State University implemented their program and how that implementation served student-athletes.

Evaluation Design & Methods

For this program evaluation, a constructivist (Piaget, 1936) and pragmatic (Pierce, 1905) paradigm was implemented. The constructivist paradigm is often referred to as the “values paradigm” (Creswell, 2007). Axiologically, the constructivist paradigm acknowledges that the evaluators are not only conscious of how their value systems influence their realities, but also aware of others within the evaluation. Ontologically, the constructivist paradigm admits that there is no single reality. Epistemologically, constructivism is the process of coming to know as an adaptive process that organizes an individual lived experience, and it does not discover an independent or pre-existing lived experience outside the mind of the individual (Olssen, 1995) For a pragmatic paradigm, axiologically, values are produced by human beings. For the same object, many individuals may value in different ways by giving their own value (Maarouf, 2019). Ontologically, pragmatism is not committed to any single system of reality

(Maarouf, 2019). Epistemologically, pragmatism can have multiple explanations of reality, but only one makes the most sense (Alkin, 2011, p. 102). While the two paradigms describe different worldviews, this approach was appropriate to align with the two main stakeholders of this evaluation: the program staff and the program students.

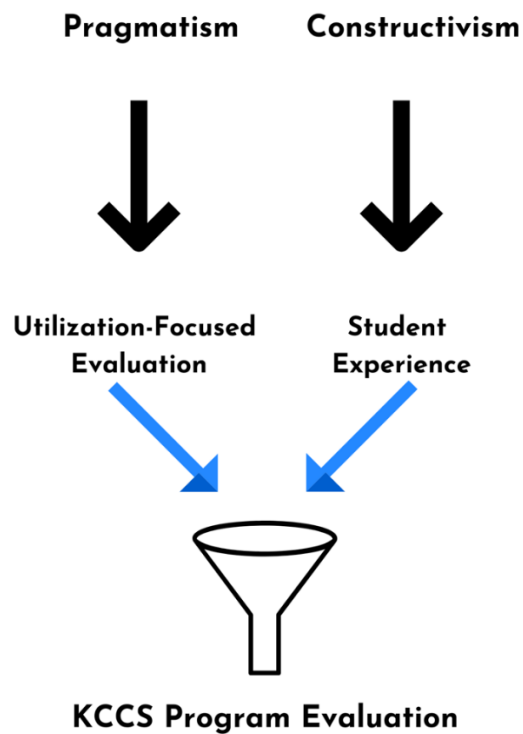
A Utilization-Focused Evaluation through a qualitative methods approach allows the evaluator to dive into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007). The Utilization-Focused Evaluation approach, rooted in a pragmatic paradigm, aligns with the program structure and how the program operates (Mertens and Wilson, 2019). A pragmatic evaluation tends to be focus on the answers, or truth, as it works at the time of data collection. Additionally, the pragmatic approach takes place within the context of other disciplines, such as historical or social contexts (Houser & Kloesel, 1998). I used the pragmatic approach to help supplement the Utilization-Focused Evaluation and create my evaluation questions. A Utilization-Focused evaluation serves nicely as a pragmatic approach because it can be perceived from multiple contexts in order for the evaluation to better represent the needs of KCCS.

However, student experiences are not always pragmatic or encompass logical decision-making. Constructivist paradigm supports this evaluation by understanding that truth and the answers may change depending on the circumstances (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For the purposes of working with the KCCS program, which is very structured and logical, it makes sense to honor the pragmatic nature of the program. When analyzing the data from this evaluation, I honor the student perspective by employing a constructivist

approach to help better understand not just one student experience, but multiple experiences to help understand the reality of the program. This approach can be seen in the infographic below:

Figure 3

Pragmatism & Constructivism connection to Program Evaluation



With this evaluation, Colorado State University stakeholders will better understand how the KCCS program, between the years of 2015 and 2019, supports first-generation Division I student-athletes and how future program components can be improved.

With this program evaluation, I wanted to also be able to answer the following questions:

EQ1: How does KCCS shape the experiences of first-generation student-athletes during their first year of college?

EQ 2: How does the Key Community program contribute to supporting first-generation college/student-athletes?

As an evaluator, I strived to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and participants in a study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Polkinghorne (2005) states that “The unit of analysis in qualitative research is experience, not individuals or groups” Qualitative evaluations vary in the kinds of experience they investigate. However, qualitative evaluations interest is about the experience itself not about its distribution in a population (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139).

The factor of the evaluation that is relevant to the approaches of UFE and a constructivist and pragmatic paradigm is the detail and the focus on lived experiences of the individuals and the influences that shape these experiences. The evaluation centers participants' perception of being in the Key, Culture, Communication, & Sports program, as opposed to an individual who has not participated in the program or is not a first-generation student-athlete (Saldana, 2009). A Utilization-Focused Evaluation, constructivism, and qualitative methods approach helps navigate identifying themes within the evaluation participants (Creswell, 2007). Identifying themes of first-generation Division I student-athletes may start to close the gap in information and be helpful for

future studies in program evaluations relating to athletics and academics and help define programmatic meaning and/or effectiveness.

The Utilization-Focused Evaluation seeks to directly involve the full range of stakeholders and constituents of the program who might be harmed or helped by the evaluation as partners in the evaluation process (Patton, 2012). According to Daniel Stufflebeam (2001), this approach is educative for all the participants in the evaluation process and the program (Stufflebeam, 2001). However, this approach does not always promise final answers. Instead, it moves from a divergent stage, in which it searches widely for insights and judgments, to a convergent stage in which some unified answers are sought (Stufflebeam, 2001). The complex layout of a Utilization-Focused Evaluation promotes flexibility and adaptability in this research.

In addition, UFE uses participants as instruments in the evaluation and focuses on their lived experience and social and cultural capital (Patton, 2012). The evaluation instruments will be discussed in further detail in later sections of this chapter. The evaluation approach makes effective use of qualitative methods and triangulates findings from different sources. This approach was also chosen because the evaluator does not control the program in any way. The evaluator looks at the evaluation as the program is occurring or as it has occurred in the past. The evaluator and evaluation looks at the program in its geographic, cultural, organizational, and historical contexts, closely examining its internal operations and how it uses inputs and processes to produce outcomes (Stufflebeam, 2001). This holistic approach will allow this program evaluation to dive deep into the various intricacies that make or don't make this program successful.

In an evaluation that incorporates qualitative methods, it is difficult finding several participants who have all experienced or are currently experiencing the same phenomenon (Saldana, 2009). It is also difficult to bracket personal experience and knowledge of the phenomenon and not to expose (or impose) the evaluator's point of view during interviews and focus groups (Creswell, 2007). For this evaluation, the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program and the unique population of students need to be the primary focus of the evaluation questions by centering the questions around their lived experiences and the institution in which the program is held. An evaluation that integrates qualitative methods is solely concerned with the study of the experience from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2007), therefore, the methodology of this study does not include a hypothesis or any preconceived ideas about the lived experiences of first-generation student-athletes, which matches with the goal of my positionality statement. Qualitative research is utilized when a problem needs to be explored by empowering individuals to share their experiences (Creswell, 2009). The use of qualitative research as the method of inquiry permits the evaluator to understand first-generation Division I student-athletes' collegiate social and academic experiences from their unique perspectives.

Purpose of Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation, which is how KCCS supports first-generation Division I student-athletes and how future program components can be improved, is framed as a Process Evaluation type or Program Monitoring as well as a Collaborative Evaluation (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p. 245). Process Evaluations are good to use during

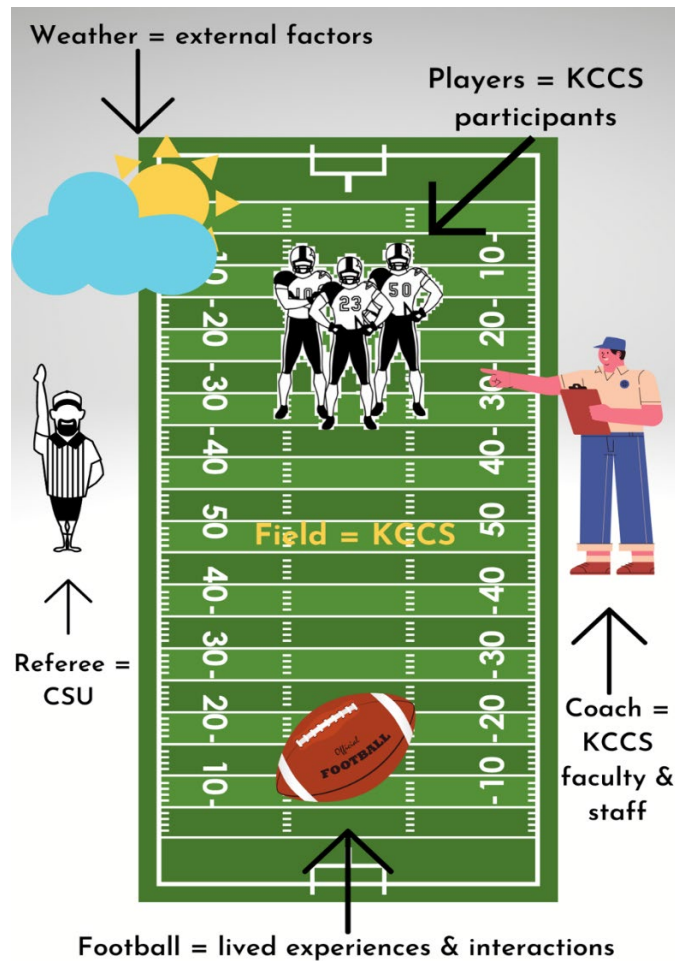
the operation of an existing program, which falls in line with that status of KCCS. For purposes of this Utilization-Focused Evaluation, Process Evaluations will help show how well the program is working and whether the program is accessible and acceptable to its target population (CDC, 2020). This type of evaluation is useful because it allows KCCS to monitor how well their program plans and activities are working and any improvements or changes that need to be made based on feedback from the student evaluation participants. Ultimately, with a Process Evaluation, for this particular evaluation, I wanted to find out to what extent that the KCCS program was implemented reflected of the KCCS program as planned (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p. 245). Additionally, a Utilization-Focused Evaluation lends itself to evaluations that are trying to find areas of improvement or changes to certain practices (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p. 242). For this evaluation, Collaborative Evaluation is effective because the KCCS faculty and staff, who are a part of this program evaluation, have first-hand knowledge of how KCCS functions because they are the ones implementing the program (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p. 243). It is important to note that most evaluations will fall under more than one type (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p 120), which is why I have highlighted both a Process and Utilization-Focused Evaluation, because I feel that this evaluation encompasses both of these evaluation types.

To demonstrate the use and structure of this evaluation, I want to introduce thinking about the purpose of this evaluation through an athletic/football lens. The

football “field” of this evaluation is the KCCS program. Utilization-Focused Evaluation serves as the type of “play” on the “field” (i.e. touchdown, penalty, out of bounds, first down, etc.), the “coaches” on the sidelines are the KCCS faculty and staff who are directing the implementation of the program, and the “players” on the field are the KCCS student participants. Additionally, the “football” on this “field” is being passed among different players, and the “referee” serves as a visual for Colorado State University as an organization who has the power to steer which way the “game” goes. Through interviews and focus groups from this evaluation, we can understand what experiences happened when the “players” for example, dropped the ball or passed the ball to someone, which is a visualization for peer interactions. Additionally, weather serves as a visual to understand external factors outside of KCCS and the unpredictable nature of a first-generation student-athletes life in college. All of these components together represent the purpose and structure of this evaluation. With all of these pieces in place, we get the end result or purpose of this evaluation: Do the players win the game, and what did they have to do to make that happen? Or it can literally be understood by: was KCCS (field), the faculty & staff (coaches), their peers (other players), successful in shaping the students (players) experience at CSU despite organizational (referee) and external pressures/factors (weather). The figure below helps create the visualization of this football/athletic evaluation lens.

Figure 4

Football Program Evaluation Lens Infographic



Additionally, this visual demonstrates how interconnected the KCCS participants experiences and the varied factors that shape these experiences are. This visual also helps connect the theoretical frameworks of this evaluation, Organizational Theory (Manning), Validation Theory (Rendon), and Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis). The “referee” or CSU serves as a visualization of Organizational Theory (Manning), the “coaches” or the KCCs faculty and staff represent Validation Theory (Rendon), and the

“players” or the KCCS student participants represent Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen, & Tevis). Additionally, this visual is a supplemental representation of the Utilization-Focused Evaluation process and the stakeholders, steps, and external factors that needed to be taken into consideration.

Evaluand & Evaluation Design

In addition to the football field analogy, the evaluation model that will be implemented is Michael Q. Patton’s Utilization-Focused Evaluation Model (UFE) (1974). UFE is a decision-making framework for enhancing the utility and actual use of evaluations (Weiss, 1998). In this evaluation model, there is a heavy focus on stakeholders and it is done for and with specific intended primary users for specific intended purposes (Patton, 2012). The reason this approach was chosen is because it seeks to directly involve the full range of stakeholders and constituents of the program who might be harmed or helped by the evaluation as partners in the evaluation process (Alkin, 2012). The perspectives and lived experience of students, faculty and staff of KCCS is crucial for a holistic evaluation. Additionally, I want to acknowledge the differences between research and evaluation. The purpose of research is generally considered to be the creation of new knowledge and theory construction, where the purpose of an evaluation is to support decision making (Mertens & Wilson, 2018, p 11)

The first step in UFE is to identify the specific intended primary users who have the responsibility to act on the evaluation findings. This means that names of specific people need to be identified and relationships established, as opposed to doing the

evaluation for a general population (Mertens & Wilson, 2019, p 108). The evaluator's responsibility is to identify who the intended users are, present them with a menu of choices for how evaluations can be used, and adhere to the other standards for a good evaluation (Mertens & Wilson, 2019, p 108).

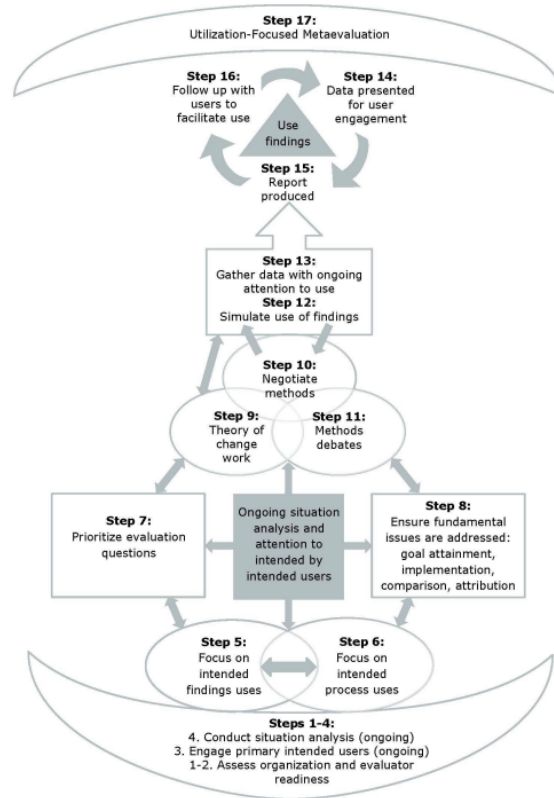
In the Utilization Focused Evaluation approach, the evaluator takes on the role of a facilitator and the evaluation is judged on its utility and actual use (Patton, 2012). Most importantly, UFE is a user-centered approach and focuses on usefulness of results for improvement of the program, which is most appropriate for a program that is trying to measure and increase resilience and persistence (Stufflebeam, 2014). Some of the beneficial impacts of a Utilization-Focused Evaluation are that it can hasten change or provide momentum to make change, while creating a reduction in uncertainty (Stufflebeam, 2014). UFE paired with a qualitative methods approach will aide in not assuming expectations, while simultaneously determining user expectations. UFE is also based on the notion that organizations need to be continually adapting to changes in the environment, and therefore evaluation should support the need for continuous information to support informed decisions (Alkin, 2012). In the year 2020, there were a vast number of changes happening in the KCCS environment due to the Covid-19 pandemic, new NCCA regulations, and the social justice issues that were happening at the time that affected everyone. These external factors that KCCS experienced are evidence that program adaptability is a factor in program success.

For the evaluator to keep the end-users in mind, Patton developed a 17 step guide to the evaluation process, which can be seen in the figure below. However, these steps are

flexible and can be completed non-sequentially, as its practicality is meant to meet the needs of the end -users (Patton, 2008). Since Patton’s steps could be completed in this flexible manner, it was beneficial for the completion of this program evaluation, as many of the research questions, literature review, conceptual frameworks, and methodologies were already pre-planned because of the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) Research Proposal.

Figure 5

Utilization-Focused Evaluation 17 Step Guide



Note: Patton, M.Q. (2012). *Essentials of Utilization Focused Evaluation*. SAGE.

Although these steps had been planned beforehand, it was critical to get support for the methodologies and conceptual frameworks before proceeding, as the entire point of the UFE is to keep the end-users and primary intended users in mind. Early on in the evaluation process, I had a meeting with a KCCS staff member that agreed to be the main contact for the UFE model. During the initial meeting between myself and the main contact, I went over my research questions and goals for the evaluation, the conceptual frameworks I would be using, and the actual utilization of the evaluation.

Additionally, during this meeting, I completed steps 11 and 12 in the UFE process. Step 11 is to ensure that the end-user understands the implications of using the interviews as a method for obtaining the information (Patton, 2008). I completed step 11 by discussing my inability to obtain individual student records, and the main contact agreed that interviews would be the best way to obtain the information. Step 12 in the UFE process is running a practice evaluation to ensure a smooth evaluation (Patton, 2008); this was accomplished by discussing the questions that I intended to ask the individuals and to get feedback on what questions needed to change or be added to ensure that the resulting information was optimized for use by the primary intended users.

The program being evaluated, the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program (KCCS), is a learning community for student-athletes. The Key Learning Community Program is the overarching umbrella program for the Key Culture, Communication, & Sport Program (KCCS). The Key Learning Community Programs were built on the premise that structured first-year programs are effective in helping underrepresented students succeed (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). The Key programs were

created because in the mid-1990s, CSU analyzed student retention and persistence data focused on the outcomes for underrepresented students, such as first-generation students and student-athletes. This analysis revealed that students at CSU from historically underrepresented demographics, such as first-generation student-athletes, are retained and graduate at lower rates than their peer groups (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). This analysis showed the need for a high-impact programming practice that is specific and intentional.

In KCCS, students are hand-picked and nominated by coaches and Student-Athlete Support Services at CSU for this academic year-long program and participate in a first-year seminar course and additional classes with their peers in the program. The KCCS course structure includes a seminar course and two university core curriculum courses. The two core curriculum courses for KCCS focus on the topics of communication & popular culture and contemporary race and ethnic relations (CSU Key Communities, 2021). The KCCS seminar course is designed to help the KCCS students integrate understandings about the human experience, which in turn grants them the ability to understand and make choices about their own behavior (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). According to the KCCS seminar syllabus, integrating ideas and concepts from the two core courses is a learning objective of the seminar; bringing all the courses together.

In the Key Seminar course within KCCS, the KCCS students focuses on learning through experiences both in and out of the classroom. KCCS students also can connect with service opportunities, career exploration, and leadership development through their Key Seminar experience. The KCCS seminar is taught by two instructors including the

Vice President of Student Affairs at CSU, Dr. Blanche Hughes. Since the KCCS program's inception in 2014, the additional instructors have been Major Franke Johnson of the CSU Police Department and Rickey Frierson, the Director of Diversity & Inclusion at CSU. Additionally, KCCS students also have peer mentors to connect with and serve as a guide throughout their experience as a KCCS student. The KCCS peer mentors are current students at CSU and are always fellow student-athletes that have participated in KCCS themselves. According to the KCCS staff, the KCCS peer mentor is a paid position and counts towards a teaching assistant credit. Every year for KCCS, there are a total of two peer mentors allocated to the KCCS students to support them and help them achieve their goals.

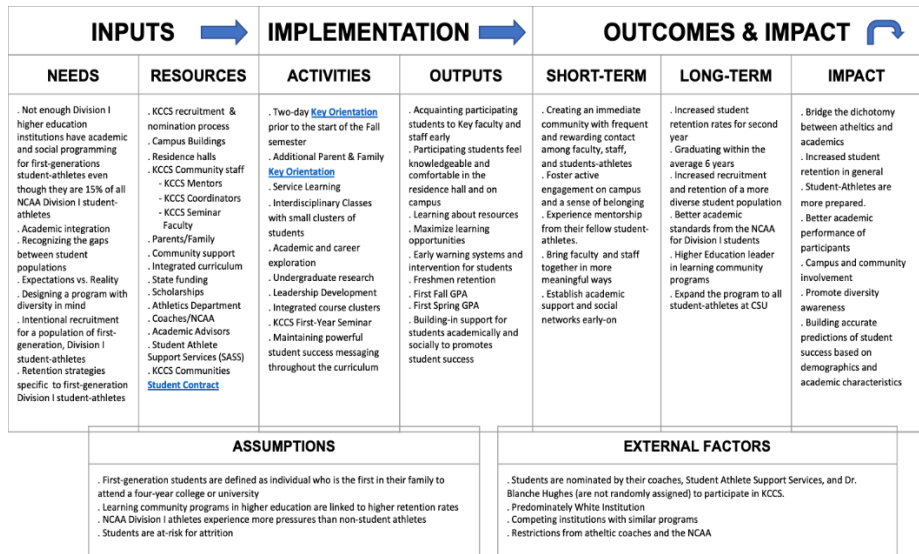
Altogether, four KCCS student and six KCCS faculty and staff participated in this study. The low response rate from students was unexpected due to the amount of preparation and faculty and staff support. I began to ask myself the question: “What does it mean when student-athletes don’t respond?” 2020 was a difficult year for everyone, especially collegiate student-athletes at CSU. The athletic program at CSU was plagued with racism and sexual assault scandals and Covid-19 cases, and I was prepped for this by the Key Staff before the data collection process and it is public knowledge. One of the student participants even stated that “I’m proud to be a CSU Ram and I’m disappointed in, you know, how they've responded to the things that have happened on campus.” All the student participants in some way stated that the dichotomy between school pride and disappointment in the way the institution handled various scandals was tough to process.

The impact of these incidents could be felt on the campus, particularly by the student-athletes. To protect participant anonymity my evaluation did not reveal the names of the participants. Instead, pseudonyms were implemented. The pseudonyms can be seen in the charts in the section below.

For student-athletes, the KCCS goals include increasing academic performance, increasing retention and graduation rates, fostering active engagement and campus involvement, increasing diversity awareness and understanding, and creating a sense of community and satisfaction among participants (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). This holistic curriculum and transparent programmatic goals are good tools for student success. The figure below is a logic model of the needs, resources, program activities, assumptions, external factors, and impact of KCCS to help conceptualize the program in a more holistic way.

Figure 6

Logic model



This logic model serves as an effective tool to assist KCCS in program planning, implementation, management, and guide this evaluation. Additionally, this logic model helps define a KCCS intended impact and goals; the sequence of intended effects; which activities are to produce which effect; and where to focus outcome and process evaluations (Friedman,2018). In the next section I discuss the procedures and design of the evaluation instruments and the KCCS student, faculty, and staff recruitment and criteria.

Procedures & Design of Evaluation Instruments

Before I started to develop and design the evaluation instruments, such as the pre-evaluation survey, I obtained information needs on program improvement and accountability (Weiss, 2008). Open-ended questions in the one-on-one interviews with four recent alumni of KCCS are useful to explore the program in depth. The focus groups with faculty and staff were structured discussions to understand staff and faculty perceptions of experiences with KCCS. The goal of the focus group was be to get contextual responses and discover meaning. However, close-ended questions were used for questions that require sensitive information such as year in school or sport in the pre-evaluation survey mentioned in the above section (Alkin, 2012). The face-to-face interviews consisted of ten open-ended questions, and the pre-program survey was be three closed-ended questions, including appropriate scales (Alkin, 2012). My logic model, which will assist me in measuring program impact, will include program inputs, outputs, and the impacts of those outputs (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Program documents such as course syllabi and the KCCS were also collected to serve as additional

evaluation instruments and help with analyzing and discussing the findings of the evaluation. Now that I've gone over the interview protocols and data collection techniques, I discuss the KCCS student, faculty, and staff recruitment criteria for this evaluation.

KCCS Student Recruitment & Criteria. After acquiring permission from the Key Community programs and athletic departments at Colorado State University, participants were selected and identified using the snowball sampling technique. With snowball sampling, I enlisted the help of the KCCS staff and faculty to assist in identifying potential participants using class data from previous years and administering a pre-program survey. Vogt (1999) describes the snowballing technique as a process of finding research subjects when one subject refers to another subject, and in turn, provides another name for another participant in the research. Snowball sampling allows for the expansion of the number of participants for the study. With those sampling criteria in mind, the researcher and Key Community program staff identified a minimum of 20 participants to invite to participate, with the goal of having up to 5 participants total. Working with stakeholders from the Key Community program, student participants will be identified with the following criteria:

- Student-athlete at CSU
- Student-athlete self-identified as a first-generation student.
- Students participated in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program
- Student is willing to volunteer to participate in the study.
- Student is willing to share accounts of their experience as a student-athlete and

as a first-generation student.

- Student is willing to share their experiences in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program and of their college experience as a first-generation student and a NCAA Division I student-athlete.

This intentional sampling was broken into three categories that include alumni of the Key Culture, Communications & Sports community from different academic years and are also concurrently enrolled at Colorado State University. Four former KCCS students participated in the evaluation, two of which had served as mentors for KCCS as well.

KCCS Faculty & Staff Recruitment & Criteria. To get a holistic evaluation process, I sought to find KCCS faculty and staff to participate in the focus groups. There were two focus groups consisting of KCCS faculty & staff under the following criteria:

- Currently employed at CSU
- Currently works or has worked with KCCS
- Willing to share their knowledge and experiences with the KCCS program.

By hearing the perspectives of students who participated in the program during different academic years and the KCCS faculty and staff, I gathered a more diverse set of perceptions and was able to hear about different student, faculty, and staff experiences during different moments in time. The Key Culture, Communication & Sports Community alumni shared their reflections on the program and discussed how the program impacted their experience in college as a first-generation student-athlete and if

the program gave them a sense of validation and agency. Below are the results from the pre-evaluation survey that show some pertinent information about the student evaluation participants.

Table 1.

KCCS Student Participant Demographics from Pre-Evaluation Survey

Year in KCCS	2015 - 2016	2017 - 2018	2019 - 2020	2016 - 2017
Sport Played	Football	Basketball	Football	Volleyball
Pseudonym	Mike	Teresa	John	Elise

This table shows the academic year that each participant was in KCCS and their sport played at CSU. When a student expressed interest in participating in the evaluation, a link to this pre-evaluation survey was sent to them and they were asked to complete it before the 1:1 interviews. The purpose of this pre-evaluation survey was to get additional information from closed-ended questions about the student evaluation participants that weren't a direct part of the 1:1 interview questions. The table below showcases the demographics of the KCCS faculty and staff participants.

Table 2.

KCCS Faculty & Staff Demographics

Faculty	YES	YES	YES			
Staff				YES	YES	YES
Pseudonym	Carla	Jeremy	Zach	Jane	Laura	Kayla

This table shows the breakdown of how many KCCS staff and how many KCCS faculty participated in the two focus groups. There were a total of six faculty and staff that participated. The first focus group had four participants and the second focus group had two. In the next sub-section, I go over the development and design of the evaluation instruments.

Evaluation Interview Questions

Steps seven and eight in the UFE seventeen step process focus on creating the questions for the evaluation. For the student 1:1 interviews, the two interview questions that provided the most context for the evaluation questions were:

1. What part of being in KCCS did you find to be the most helpful for your student-athlete experience?
2. Which KCCS activities (in and out of the classroom) did you learn from the most about the University culture?

However, we also needed to keep in mind the evaluation questions that the program-based evaluation sought to answer. Therefore, the questions were tailored to additional aspects of KCCS and CSU such as the peer mentor, connection to campus, and specific experiences within the program. After this, I created specific questions for the faculty/staff focus groups. For example, the questions for the focus groups, that were attended by the KCCS faculty & staff, were more programmatic and curriculum-related, such as:

- 1). What are the goals of KCCS? Where did the inspiration from these goals come from?

2). If you were to pick a component of the program that you feel is most impactful to the student's navigation skills on University culture, what would it be? Why?

Additionally, the faculty/staff questions focused on the system policies related to programmatic improvements, impressions of the program, and what they want to know from the student participants. The full list of questions for both the 1:1 interviews and focus groups can be viewed under Appendix B.

Data Collection & Analysis

A NCAA Division I institution, Colorado State University (CSU), was selected for this evaluation because they are considered the most competitive level of college athletics. (NCAA Research, 2019). The type of institution provides a unique context for the data collection and analysis process that would be different if this evaluation was based on another NCAA division. This evaluation's main focus is the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports (KCCS) program at CSU, a learning community type program specifically for student-athletes. In the following sub-sections, I go over the data collection and data analysis for this program evaluation in depth.

Data Collection

Research started with determining the program stakeholders and primary-intended users by identifying the stakeholders who care the most about the program or have a personal investment in the program (Patton, 2012). After this, interviewing up to ten first-generation student-athletes who are alumni of the KCCS community and participated in the program during the 2015-2019 school year, one on one and listening to their personal perspectives, diving deep into the essence of their lived experience, while also identifying

at least four overarching themes and clusters of meaning between the students took place (Saldana, 2009). Face-to-face individual interviews (virtual) were guided by a set of ten semi-structured questions with the option for additional follow-up questions. During the interviews, the conversations were recorded using the virtual platform Zoom and saved on a password-protected computer. A notebook was also used to take notes during the interview when necessary, and the researcher will keep a reflexive journal to support triangulation of the study (Saldana, 2009).

I started by continuously referring to my positionality statement, which is discussed in depth in a subsequent section of this chapter, and then bracketing any preconceived beliefs I may have had about this population of students, which will lead to a more unbiased perspective. I then conducted two focus groups with staff and faculty of the KCCS program, some were primary intended users of the evaluation. Intimate focus groups with fewer respondents were preferable because it yielded better quality data (Kellogg, 2017, p 158). After the open-ended interview questions and focus groups and after analyzing the data I was able to support my evaluation questions

Open-ended semi-structured interviews, pre-evaluation survey, and small focus groups provide a guide for the evaluation and allow for flexibility based on the experiences and are more discussion based (Smith, 2000). Each interview will start with the question “Can you tell me about your experience in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program?” I believe that this type of interview method is more suited to interpretive qualitative methods and allows the participants the opportunity to tell their own story rather than adapting their story to a more structured method of interview

(Smith, 2000). Focus groups are structured discussions to understand people’s perspectives, experiences or knowledge about a topic (Kellogg Foundation, 2017, pg 153). The goal of a focus group is to discover the how and why of something, to get contextual responses rather than “yes” or “no” answers (Kellogg Foundation, 2017, pg 153). The focus groups allowed the participants to feed off each other’s responses to think of stories or experiences that they hadn’t thought of previously. The chart below summarizes my primary data sources and their respective roles:

Table 3.

Data Source	Role
KCCS Seminar Syllabus	Information on course structure & learning objectives. Sent by KCCS staff
Program Website	Information on program goals, program description nomination process, orientation, faculty and staff structure (date last accessed: February 20, 2022).
1:1 Interviews	KCCS students lived experience as participants of the program
Focus Groups	KCCS Faculty & Staff perceptions, implemented changes, expectation setting, and goals of program

This overview of my data sources connects these sources and the meaning behind their use. This chart will assist in contextualizing the data analysis process and the findings of this evaluation, which are presented in Chapter 4. In the sub-section below, I provide additional context on my review of the KCCS seminar syllabus and the program website.

Document Review

I begin the data collection with my review of the KCCS documents, which include the first-year seminar syllabus and the Key Communities website. The primary

document used in this review was the KCCS first-year seminar syllabus. I reviewed the course syllabus to understand how the first-year seminar course is messaged to KCCS faculty teaching the course and the KCCS participants. The full syllabus can be found in Appendix C. My review revealed the course description and learning objectives emphasized identity and navigating culture and demonstrated a focus on self-reflexivity. The Key Communities website allowed me to get program specific information about the structure, how students are selected, and classes the KCCS students take. There is evidence KCCS emphasizes the importance of KCCS students understanding their own identities and positionalities and how it relates to the broader context of society.

The exploration of identity signals that KCCS is interested in supporting student self-reflexivity. The course description begins by asking students reflective questions, like “How are your culture, ethnic/racial identities, and values reflected by popular culture?” Additionally, learning objectives, like “To integrate ideas and concepts from cluster courses (Communication & Popular Culture and/or Contemporary Race and Ethnic Relations) “ and “To explore invisible and visible identities in self and others and how these identities impact interpersonal communication” further demonstrates KCCS students are expected to engage in a reflective process. Additionally, the course expectations listed below in Figure 7 establish the tone of the program and the classroom, which is important when analyzing the findings from this evaluation.

Figure 7

KCCS Course Expectations

Class Engagement Expectations of Ourselves and Others:

No cell phone or laptop allowed during class unless it is required for in-class assignments

Expectations:

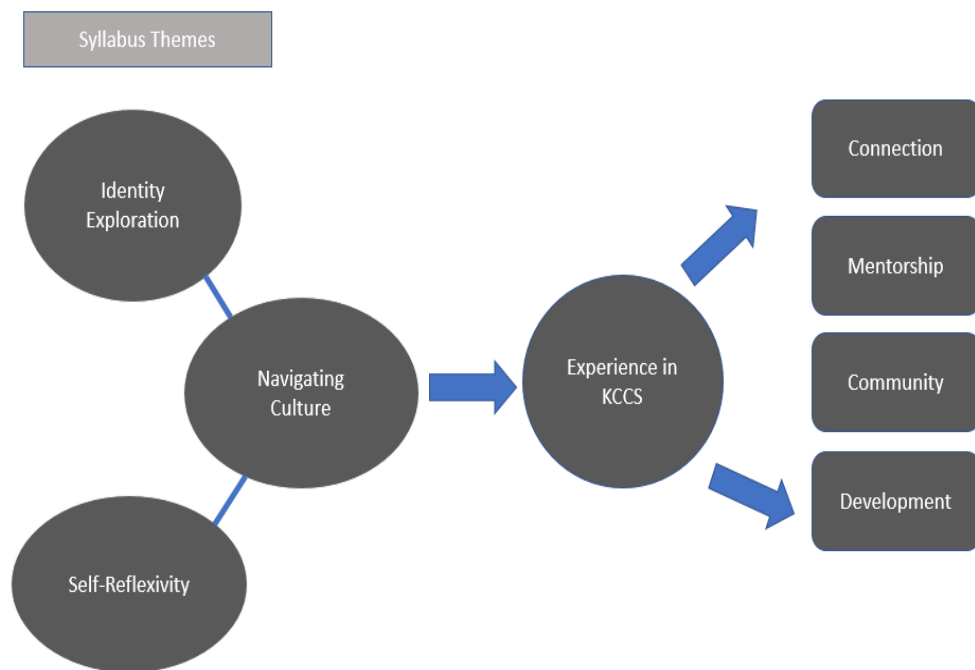
- Come to class with a positive attitude
- Be respectful
- Engage
- Have fun
- Be open to opinion
- Be a resource for each other (accountability)
- Impact community
- Be prepared for class
- Be honest
- Don't share others' stories

The classroom expectations highlighted above, and the KCCS first-year seminar syllabus also demonstrated an interest in helping KCCS students transition to college. The course description stated, "... you will learn more about the University's resources that can assist with your transition and continued success at Colorado State University." The learning objectives also included the following points: "To learn about University culture and how to navigate this culture for support and success" and "To develop academic and social survival skills to ensure that the transition from high school or pre-university experiences to college will be a successful one." These excerpts reveal what topic areas the KCCS program is prioritizing.

By identifying that KCCS program prioritizes identity reflexivity and supporting the transition to college, I was able to use those findings to inform other parts of this evaluation, including the four main themes of Connection, Mentorship, Community, and Development. Additionally, the first-year seminar syllabus informed the interview protocols, and the focus group questions (Appendix A & B). The first-year seminar also helped identify and make meaning of the themes and findings presented in Chapter 4. In the figure below, I provide axial coding to provide context for linking syllabus info to interview themes.

Figure 8

Axial Coding Chart of Syllabus Themes, KCCS Student Experience, and Evaluation Findings.



Data Analysis

The results of the evaluation highlight the components of KCSS and how the program helps to shape the experience for the KCCS students. Additionally, the results of the evaluation will support any program improvements that need to be made. During the evaluation, I developed themes between each participant that was interviewed and developed a comparative analysis (Creswell, 2007). Validation Theory (Rendon, 1994) and Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010) served as a framework to connect the themes and their relationship with the student's resilience, persistence, and decision making. The data analysis included the process of coding using the in-vivo coding technique (Saldana, 2009). This is the process of assigning words or short phrases to different sections of the data. (Saldana, 2009). Using this method, I selected certain words or phrases that were consistent throughout the qualitative data. In-vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the participants (Saldana, 2009). This form of coding can be especially helpful when evaluators interact with participants from a particular culture or microculture to help highlight how those participants use of specific words or phrases in their interactions that might not otherwise be understood when using other forms of coding (Saldana, 2009). According to Babbie (2014) and Saldana (2009), coding is an vague science that can only be taught to a certain point. The rest must come from evaluator interpretation and subjective judgment (Babbie, 2014 & Saldana, 2009). I followed the advice of Saldana, who recommended that novice coders or those coding small scales evaluations firsthand-code on paper. Following the initial hand-coding process, I engaged the computer data

analysis program Quirko to further explore and code the data received from the interviews and institutional documents.

After the interviews were transcribed, I familiarized myself with the data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and pre-surveys, by reading through each transcript and survey prior to coding. After producing a list of ideas about what was in the data, initial codes and themes were generated, and I identified as many themes and patterns as possible. After the initial coding, I sorted each of the themes into broader themes (Saldana, 2009). After sorting I reviewed the themes, collapsing sub-categories into one large umbrella category, while making sure that there is consistency amongst the data within the themes. Along with Validation Theory (Rendon, 1994) and Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & LaShawn, 2010), Organizational Theory (Manning, 2010) served as a framework to assist in conceptualizing the different theme categories and learn how Colorado State University as an organization affects these findings. These frameworks helped showcase the different lenses the students, staff, and faculty of the Key, Culture, Communication & Sports Community encompass and how they separately experience the program. As data collection was completed, transcriptions of interviews and focus groups were created to support data analysis processes. Member checks and peer debriefs were employed to ensure trustworthiness of the data and credibility of the conclusions about the data (Saldana, 2009). Member checking included sending the finished themes to participants for them to confirm that what they shared was accurately captured (Saldana, 2009). This was implemented by creating a committee with primary intended stakeholders. The categorization and combining of themes from that

data analysis and document review provides nuances and topics that emerge as meaningful information for this evaluation. The analysis of this data follows Patton's (2012) Utilization-Focused Evaluation checklist, which outlines that all data analysis must involve primary intended users and participants as well as pay attention to how it will be used by the primary intended users. Validation Theory, Circumscribed Agency, and Organizational Theory further assisted me in my analysis by providing a framework that focuses on student success and not a deficit lens.

Ultimately, the main task of evaluators in a Utilization-Focused Evaluation that incorporates qualitative methods is the transformation of data to live the experience (Creswell, 2007). The evaluator brings individual experiences into words in data collection, and then attempts to understand those experiences based on the statements and categorizes the themes in the next stage. In the last stage, I recorded the essence in writing, which results in a comprehensive description of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Comprehensive descriptions were vital to understanding the lived experience of first-generation student-athletes in the KCCS program as well as designing and developing the evaluation instruments.

Study Timeline

The Key Community programs take place at the start of the Fall Semester at CSU and conclude at the end of the Spring Semester, which is equal to one full academic year. The program evaluation began after the IRB approval process in January of 2021 and concluded at the end of the Spring Semester 2021. There was ample amount of time to meet with primary intended users, other program stakeholders, and current and former

student participants of the program. 1:1 interviews and focus groups took place during the beginning of the Spring Semester which allowed me sufficient time to analyze and transcribe the qualitative data collected. The data analyses and findings process began in June and concluded in August.

Evaluator's Field Experience

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, my field experience looked a lot different than a standard program evaluation experience. Since the experience was out of the ordinary, the results were also affected. I wasn't able to get onto the CSU campus, which in turn created difficulties in connecting with the students, faculty, and staff in a more organic way. Later in this chapter, the Covid-19 pandemic will be addressed in greater depth; specifically on how the student participants of this evaluation were processing it and how it affected their experience.

To increase the number of participants for the study, email requests were regularly sent to current and former participants in KCCS by faculty and staff of the program to partake in the study. To facilitate the ease of scheduling for the participants, I made myself available at their convenience and created an online calendar on the platform, Calendly. Once meetings were confirmed, a meeting was scheduled. During the meeting, trust was established with each participant. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted on the video platform, Zoom. The virtual "face-to-face" interaction provided the opportunity to delve into meaningful conversations throughout the interview. Even with this extensive preparation, I was unable to garner as much

participation as I would've hoped. I think it's important to note my field experience and how it provides context on the Utilization-Focused Evaluation process and the findings of this evaluation.

Responses from the students, faculty, and staff were candid and transparent. When noteworthy responses emerged, notations were jotted in a password-protected Microsoft Word document. The conversations were insightful, and as a researcher, I discovered the responses from the students, faculty, and staff to be authentic, relatable, emotional, and focused. The students, faculty, and staff sharing their experience were open about their struggles and successes, while expressing their sincere appreciation to be involved with KCCS. With a Utilization Focused Evaluation, I feel the candid and truthful responses I received from the 1:1 interviews and focus groups demonstrated the usefulness of the evaluation for the primary intended users. My field experience also demonstrates how the evaluation was planned and conducted in ways that enhance the likely utilization of both the findings and of the process itself to inform decisions and improve performance of the KCCS program, which are talked about in the next section.

Trustworthiness & Goodness Criteria

Triangulation, which refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999), was used to safeguard the credibility and validity of the study through member checking and reflexive journaling. In the interpretive design, the process of checking data and analysis from multiple perspectives ensured the consistency and authenticity of the

research (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Member checking also supported the internal validity of the data. This was accomplished after the initial semi-structured interview with participants. This process eliminated the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning and perspective of data by supporting the validation process for the triangulation of the study (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Analysis of the data was reviewed by evaluation stakeholders and primary intended users to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

As the evaluator for the evaluation, I was responsible for establishing earned trust with the participants and primary intended users while remaining sensitive to the personal experiences of participants. To uphold the rigor of the evaluation, participant engagement was conducted in an authentic and accurate disciplined process. Respect for and privacy of each participant was paramount to the evaluation, and the participants had the option to voluntarily withdraw at any time throughout the research. Additionally, Schram (2016) recommended the following four basic guidelines to build a framework to support the integrity of the evaluation. The four basic guidelines are purposeful, circumstantial, intuitive, and empathetic methods for the data collection process.

1. Through purposeful interaction, the researcher remains attentive to their personal values and bias that could potentially affect the conclusions of the study.
2. Circumstantial approaches require the researcher to consider that in some cases, the expectation of the findings cannot be absolute and unchanging; therefore, outcomes are contingent on circumstantial findings.

3. An intuitive lens of the researcher provides sensitivity to changing interpretations that might be interesting or useful to readers of the study.
4. An empathetic sense of understanding allows the researcher to be better aware of what is useful and important to evaluate the participants.

Positionality Statement

Positionality is the practice of the researcher describing their own position in relation to the evaluation, with the implication that this position may influence aspects of the study, such as the data collected or the way in which it is interpreted (Weiss, 1998). As an evaluator, I am aware of both my positionality and my role within the program evaluation. With the belief that my perceptions will affect the final program evaluation, it is important to know and understand my positionality. As an individual who consistently uses constructivism in research and believes in the construction of knowledge through social interaction, my theoretical positionality is that socially constructed knowledge impacts how individuals interact with the world around them. These beliefs are as much of who I am as my personal background.

I have never been a first-generation or Division I student-athlete and will not be able to fully relate on the same level as a researcher who does encompass these identities. However, I was a participant in a learning community program at my undergraduate institution, Ohio University (OU) and can speak to my experience and the impact it had on my undergraduate career. After my time in the Learning Community program at OU, I also served as a Peer Mentor, an older student who served as a leader for the traditional first-year students in the Learning Community programs. I have also been a higher

education professional for over eight years and have worked with both first-generation and Division I student-athletes in my various professional roles. However, experiencing the world through my able-bodied, cisgender female, heterosexual, white presenting lens has afforded me opportunities directly as a result of the privilege tied to these identities. It is important that I address the benefits of the privilege I have and to address them if they arise during my evaluation and research process. As I start the research and evaluation process, it is imperative I remain aware and critical of my identities, as well as the ways they can impact the voices and experiences of individuals and the program I am facilitating and evaluating.

Professionally, I strive to promote equal opportunity, equitable outcomes, and retention and I attempt to make every effort to enhance students' in and out-of-class experiences through inclusive excellence practices. I also aim to facilitate intellectual, social, and cultural development among the students I work with. My passion lies in examining best practices for the retention and persistence of students in higher education, which stimulates their experiences as alumni and throughout their career. My advising and coaching philosophy centers on engaging in thoughtful dialogue and participation to encourage students to develop autonomy, critically create and examine goals, and process new and challenging situations. My role as researcher and my positionality will contribute to me providing a deeper understanding about the impact of the Key Community programs at Colorado State University for first-generation student-athletes. In this evaluation, I was committed to using my knowledge and experience as a career advisor for student-athletes to challenge the data I collected, the conversations I had with

participants, the findings I sought to make meaning of, and the analysis and recommendations I worked through. Each student-athlete has a unique experience and perception that is valuable to this evaluation. In my role as the evaluator, I gave each piece of information and each participant the same consideration, and thoroughly combed through the data to better understand the meaning behind the data.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers face ethical challenges in all stages of a program evaluation, from designing to reporting (Patton, 2012). These challenges include anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and researchers' potential impact on the participants (Stufflebeam, 2001). With a Utilization-Focused Evaluation I needed to be intentional about the stakeholders and primary-intended users I chose and the roles that needed to be defined. Voluntary participation of respondents during the program evaluation was necessary and was practiced. As mentioned previously, the participants also had the right to withdraw from the program evaluation at any stage if they wish to do so. Utilization-Focused Evaluations are not a linear process and have an ongoing active-reactive-adaptive negotiation process, which means I needed to be flexible throughout the program evaluation (Patton, 2012).

Limitations

Identifying themes of first-generation student-athletes may start to close the gap in information and be helpful for future studies in program evaluations relating to athletics and academics. In a qualitative methods study, it is difficult finding several participants who have all experienced, or are currently experiencing the same

phenomenon (Saldana, 2009). When framing research questions, I made sure the participants experience and the program was a central part of the questions, which doesn't allow as much margin for error because the questions are so specific.

This program evaluation contains personal accounts from first-generation, Division I, student-athletes at CSU to better understand their lived experiences. The testimonies from the students who were interviewed are not homogenous to the first-year experiences of all first-generation student-athletes. However, exposing the reality of this population's process of their transition from high school to college and after their time in KCCS can lead to new discoveries and a platform to discuss policy changes within the higher education institutions, supporting high schools, and the NCAA. High school history is not addressed prior to choice of participants. Though previous research supports the idea that experiences during the first year of college depends highly on high school experiences (Bryant & Nichols, 2011), this was not standardized in participant selection. However, high school experience is addressed during the face-to-face interviews to allow for a comparison and discussion. In addition, participants for this study all participate in athletics at a singular NCAA Division I university. This is a limiting factor when considering that first-year experiences can be based on state and institutional policies, which are not uniform for all American colleges and universities.

In a Utilization-Focused Evaluation, finding a "decision maker" is not a straightforward process as well as matching the evaluation design to the evaluation purpose, resources, and timeline to optimize use (Patton, 2012). UFE will allow enough time to analyze the data because coding text and identifying themes that emerge from the

coding is more time-consuming than calculating frequencies, averages, or percentages (Kellogg Foundation, 2017, pg. 152). UFE, specifically in this phenomenological program evaluation, may need more flexibility to fully engage with the different users at different stages of the evaluation. The primary intended users that I do chose were able to commit a significant amount of time to engage with the evaluation. Because of the nature of the program, high turnover of involved users was likely as well as the evaluation becoming vulnerable to bias and corruption by the user group (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). This type of evaluation is also limited because the interest of other important stakeholders might not be addressed such as coaches and families of the students (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

Ultimately, I focused on how KCCS shaped the experience of students and supported them. A Utilization-Focused Evaluation allows the researcher and evaluator to understand and empathize with the research and explore complexities more delicately than other methods (Alkin, 2012). In a qualitative methods approach, although it sometimes might be difficult to interpret data, for this evaluation, allows the researcher and evaluator to be more thorough in the findings (Creswell, 2007). Ensuring that first-generation student-athletes stay on track and persist through their first year academically and socially is a precarious endeavor (Jolly, 2008). Using alumni of the KCCS program and current students at Colorado State University removed the need to track students' progress during their first year because these students have already completed their first year.

The lack of access to athletic coaches was also a limitation in this evaluation. Interviewing athletic coaches who coach the KCCS students in their respective teams would've added a different perspective for this evaluation. Additionally, interviewing coaches would've allowed this evaluation to produce more qualitative data on the opinions of the KCCS program and program efficacy from an external constituent. The findings of this evaluation are not meant to be generalizable to other universities or other sports. The findings are indicative of the perceptions and experiences of the 4 KCCS students that engaged in this research project. Though the findings are not generalizable to a larger group, the findings are still meaningful and tell an important story regarding the KCCS student experience in the KCCS program.

The most critical variable of this program evaluation is that the various constituents involved in the program will not be able to agree on what the program is trying to achieve. According to Carol H. Weiss (1998), if there are discrepancies in proposed program goals, the staff working with the program are functions with cross purposes (Weiss, 1998, p 25). To combat this variable and offer a different perspective I brought alternative evaluator such as academic advisors or faculty (Weiss, 1998, p 100). Another variable that came up in this evaluation is the lack of quantitative data not only on this particular program but learning community programs as a whole. This is an issue because this evaluation focuses on program effectiveness. Overall, assessment of program effectiveness is directly useful when the data shows substantial success (Weiss, 1998). I attempted to combat this variable by highlighting the KCCS student experience and collecting data on themes within the group of students participating in the program.

Conclusion

Utilization-Focused Evaluation is centered around the need for the evaluation to be used by the primary intended users (Patton, 2012). The methods and methodology are all tools used to engage participants and stakeholders intentionally so that the evaluation has meaning for the organization. Patton (2012) outlines step-by-step instructions to be followed, and alongside those instructions, the evaluator must find an approach to evaluation that will not only elicit meaningful data but will do so in a way that makes sense and is accessible to stakeholders. Each KCCS student and KCCS faculty and staff has a unique experience and perception that is valuable to this program evaluation. In my role as the evaluator, I gave each piece of information, each conversation, and each participant the same consideration, and thoroughly dissected the data to better understand the meaning behind the data. The next chapter discusses the findings that came about as a result of the analysis of these methods, all with the purpose of creating an evaluation that will be of use to the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at Colorado State University.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, the first section discusses findings related to the student-athlete experience. The findings are presented to address the goals and values of the Key, Culture, Communication & Sports (KCCS) program from the student participants, faculty, and staff. These goals and values informed me about the student experience in KCCS and the faculty/staff perception of the program effectiveness. With this program evaluation, I wanted to answer the following questions:

1. How does KCCS shape the experiences of first-generation student-athletes during their first year of college?
2. What KCCS program components contribute to supporting first-generation student-athletes and how does KCCS continue that support?

By analyzing transcripts from 1:1 interviews and focus groups with current and former Key Culture, Community, & Sport (KCCS) program student participants, and KCCS faculty and staff, four themes were identified that provided insight on how KCCS helps shape the experiences of NCAA Division I first-generation student-athletes. The four themes stemmed from the coding process: a). Connection, b). Mentorship, c). Community, & d). Development. Each of these themes was mentioned in some capacity

by every evaluation participant and primary stakeholder. These themes will be explained and discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Within each of the core themes, excerpts from 1:1 interviews and focus groups are included to highlight and examine the qualitative data. Additionally, the Utilization-Focused Evaluation, conceptual framework of Validation Theory, Organizational Theory, and Circumscribed Agency are implemented as the lenses that will help strengthen the data and participant excerpts.

Overall, the findings of the evaluation revealed the participant's gratitude for having a positive college experience and to be a part of a program like KCCS that provided multiple opportunities for education and experiential learning. In terms of the theme of **Community**, the first-generation student-athletes valued the relationships they built with their teammates, KCCS participants, Key faculty & staff, and coaches. The **Connection** theme was noticed throughout the evaluation in terms of the student participants being connected with other student-athletes and non-student-athletes, the greater CSU community, and the course assignments. With the theme of **Development**, all the student participants agreed that the structure of KCCS paired with their athletic experience taught them valuable lessons to prepare them for life and helped their transition into college. Mentorship, peer, staff, and faculty support from KCCS was especially important to their success in college and athletics.

I will first discuss the impact the KCCS faculty and staff had on this evaluation. I then highlight the role of the key people of KCCS and dive into the inclusive learning space and intentional course curriculum of KCCS. I then go into the four main themes:

Connection, Mentorship, Community, and Development. Please refer to Chapter 3, Table 1 and Table 2, for the pseudonyms for the faculty, staff, and KCCS student participants of this evaluation. Throughout this evaluation, all KCCS students, faculty, and staff are known only by their pseudonyms. The figure below is a snapshot of the four main themes collected from qualitative data and how they connect with the evaluation participants and program document review mentioned in Chapter 3.

Figure 9

Snapshot of Evaluation Findings

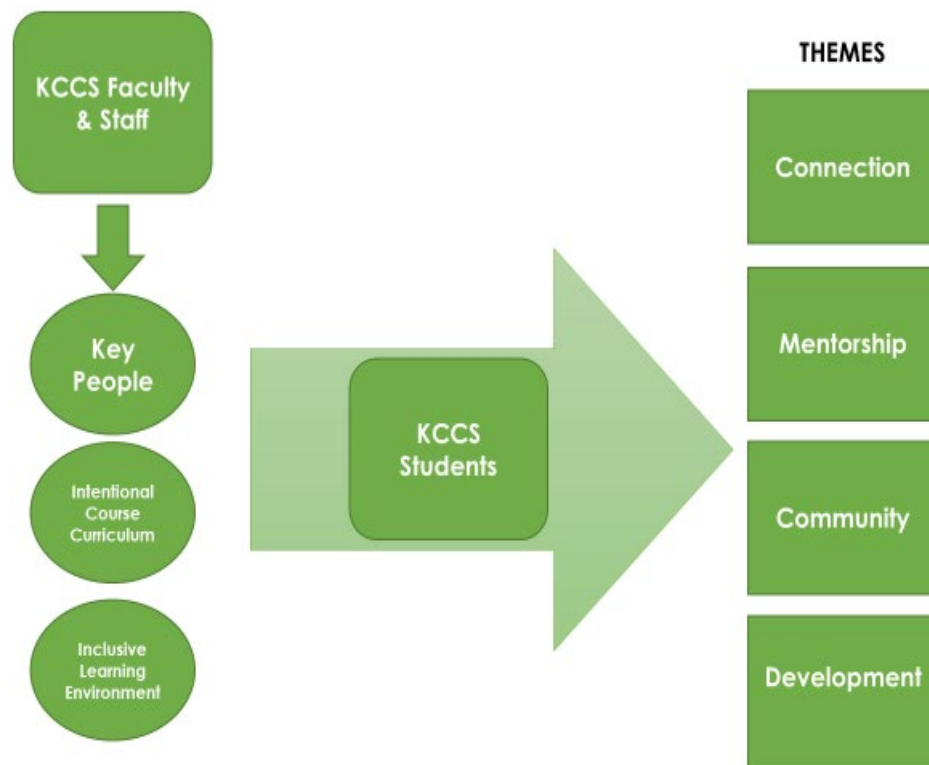


Figure 9 is being used to highlight and preview the findings of this evaluation in a succinct way. Understanding the key components of the themes from this evaluation help to shape the findings explored in this chapter. Each of the four main themes is connected to a sub-theme of the KCCS Faculty & Staff for each of the evaluation participants and evaluation instrument (i.e. Documents). This evaluation found that students who engaged in relationship with their fellow student-athletes, and had supportive experiences with KCCS, had a more validating overall experience at CSU and felt more of a connection to the institution. Forming connections with their fellow student-athletes, seeing themselves in mentorship, gaining a community through KCCS, and how the KCCS students developed during their time in the program, thread together to link the findings. As the KCCS students shared their stories, the concepts of connection, community, mentorship, and development, became foundational to all the findings of this evaluation.

Findings Overview- “You’re more than just a student-athlete”

“You’re more than just a student-athlete” was one of the most prevalent phrases used throughout the interviews and focus groups with faculty, staff, and students and was also mentioned in Chapter 1. This phrase resonated with me because in previous chapters I touch on this dichotomy between academics and athletics; you are one or the other. That narrative of “You’re more than just a student-athlete” is complicating that dichotomy and helps us to think of the student-athlete as a holistic entity rather than two competing identities. The four main themes of connection, mentorship, community, and development assist in developing that concept. KCCS students mentioned that they were able to “develop more of the student role instead of the athlete role,” and the faculty and

staff posed the question “Who are you outside of sports?” “You’re more than just a student-athlete” can mean different things to the KCCS students, faculty, and staff. The purpose of the themes found throughout the evaluation was to uncover and provide more nuance to this statement. The phrase “You’re more than just a student-athlete” sets the foundation for the KCCS program and links the four main themes that were found during the coding process together. Student-athletes enroll in higher education to earn a degree; however, the mindset that participating in sports takes precedence over all other academically enriching activities has effected many student-athletes, not just at CSU (Jolly, 2008).

This “athletics-first” mentality is typically perceived for those at major NCAA Division I institutions, such as CSU. This mindset could impact the experiences of those transitioning from high school to college level academics (Emma, 2008). There are many aspects of college life to consider for student-athletes(Emma, 2008). Many students play sports in college, but the percentage that goes on to compete professionally is small (NCAA Research, 2020). Therefore, the academic experience is vital in preparing student-athletes for success after college, so for the student-athlete participants, KCCS is part of that experience. Two of the four KCCS student participants indicated that they define themselves by their athletic participation and feel that they belong to the athletic community. However, they also considered KCCS to be a big part of that athletic community identity. Though the KCCS student participants all bring a unique personal experience and athletic experience to KCCS, all four of the KCCS student participants

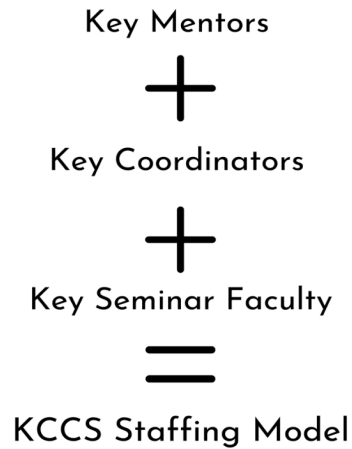
made the most out of their time in KCCS. In the next section, I highlight the KCCS faculty and staff also known as the administrators and program facilitators of KCCS.

KCCS Administrators & Program Facilitators

Before I dive deeper into the four main theme meanings and the KCCS student responses, I wanted to touch on the KCCS faculty and staff impact on this evaluation and the culture of KCCS. Culture is a ubiquitous word on college campuses (Manning, 2012, p 68). Expressions such as a culture of evidence or entitlement culture attempt to define the character of an institution or the type of character an institution aspires to be (Manning, 2012, p 68). These depictions of institutional character and ways of operating convey the idea of organizations as meaning systems, crafted by the people within them, such as the KCCS faculty and staff. (Parker, 2000). The KCCS faculty and staff were not only important parts of this program evaluation, but they also served as the primary intended users of this evaluation (Parker, 2000). The relationship between athletics academics and the campus administration plays a vital role in determining whether programs like KCCS are implemented in the student-athlete setting. Kuh (2008) illustrates the importance of this relationship by stating that university faculty and administration are vital in the implementation of programs like KCCS and must endorse the programming intended to create positive outcomes for the student-athletes. The implementation of KCCS required time, energy, and resources to provide the program for select student-athletes. The figure below shows the leadership and staffing model of KCCS:

Figure 10

KCCS Staffing Model



This staffing model for KCCS is intentional because as mentioned in Chapter 1, the KCCS Mentors are fellow student-athletes and former participants in KCCS. The full-time Key coordinators' primary responsibilities include supervising the KCCS mentors, assisting with the development and implementation of the program, connecting students to campus resources and opportunities, and ensuring that the program activities are consistent with KCCS's intended goals and philosophies (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). Additionally, KCCS mentors are students who are in good academic and judicial standing, have experience working with diverse student populations, know about campus resources, and have strong interpersonal communication and academic skills (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). In addition to developing and teaching the seminar, Key seminar faculty involve and supervise their assigned KCCS Mentors as undergraduate teaching assistants, conduct an orientation session with students during Key Orientation, and provide

feedback on student performance (Nosaka & Novak, 2014). Additionally, although the KCCS Mentors are staff, I wanted to primarily focus on their identities as KCCS students. Therefore, when I mention the KCCS faculty and staff group, this does not include the KCCS Mentors to keep their identities private throughout this evaluation.

Throughout the findings, the role of the KCCS Mentors is mentioned several times, which speaks to the impact that this role has on the program. The role of KCCS Mentors is a benefit because they continue the KCCS narrative and they themselves understand the process of being in KCCS in a unique way than professional staff because they do not necessarily know what it's like to be a student-athlete. In the next subsection, I discuss the roles of some of the key people for KCCS such as Dr. Blanche Hughes, the creator of the KCCS program, to emphasize how her legacy and impact on the institutional culture and program provide programmatic context.

Role of Key People

The following excerpts from the KCCS faculty and staff help preface the student responses and evaluation of those themes as well as provide context of the program and university through an Organization Theory lens (Manning, 2012). These faculty and staff participants also served as primary intended users and the one person of contact for the Utilization-Focused evaluation process. During the focus group, every faculty and staff participant mentioned that one of the top goals of KCCS was for the student-participants to be connected to the rest of the university.

From the KCCS faculty and staff focus groups, I learned that learning, growing, viewing different perspectives, and giving oneself some leniency is fundamental to KCCS and helps student participants to gain life skills that apply to college and beyond. Additionally, I learned that by being a participant in KCCS, student-athletes should be able to answer the questions: “Who are you outside of sports? How do you navigate pressures?” These questions are juxtaposed with how to be a refined thinker and advancing knowledge and development of self all while being authentically and holistically supported. When touching on how KCCS helps support this “development of self” for student-athletes, Jeremy said:

“[student-athletes] need to recognize and give grace to themselves while also understanding development and where you [they] need to develop to be a refined thinker, regardless of athletic ability. For example, how do they start to think critically, how do they start to think in a skillful way to advance your [their] knowledge and development of self? Right? Because this is the most important thing that we want you [KCCS students] to become, and to become a better person and walk out of KCCS as a more defined person than when you first walked in.”

After the statement above about the role of faculty and staff of KCCS, the statement below was made from Laura:

“A lot of the students who come into this community [KCCS], they look to [their] coach[es] for a lot of things, but we just want them to know that they can look to

other folks too. It's not a fight, it's not a zero-sum game or anything. We also know that athletics can be fickle in the way that they value our students sometimes, so having a space where they [student-athletes] are always supported, I think, is huge. And I've worked at multiple schools, and I've never worked at a school where the Vice President of Student Affairs is so passionate about knowing each of our student-athletes."

As mentioned in Chapter 1, It is also important to reiterate that the faculty who currently teach or have taught in the KCCS program, such as Dr. Hughes, in the past have other major roles and responsibilities on the CSU campus. Teaching in KCCS is something they do because they are "passionate about the program and its mission." When talking about Dr. Hughe's role in KCCS and CSU athletics, Jeremy stated:

"I will say that you cannot have a student-athlete go in front of Dr. Hughes and she [Dr. Hughes] not have a story about either knowing them [student-athletes] or meeting them in some kind of way. She [Dr. Hughes] always has a story or experience about each student-athlete that she comes in contact with."

The previous two excerpts from the focus groups make it obvious that Dr. Hughes presence in KCCS is palpable and that she "cares deeply" for the student-athlete population at CSU. Additionally, during the evaluation process, there was also mention of campus partners such as Student-Athlete Support Services at CSU that work with KCCS to help recruit students and work with teams to see which student-athletes would

be a good fit for the program. When asked about the student-athlete KCCS recruitment process Laura stated that:

“Getting with the Student-Athlete Support Services staff and figuring out which of the incoming student-athletes would benefit from KCCS, I mean, the answer is everyone would benefit from it [KCCS], but we are limited to just the forty [student-athletes] who can fit in the class. I wish all athletes were able to participate, but that’s not possible at the moment.”

This excerpt from Laura and the collaboration between Student-Athlete Support Services (SASS) and KCCS shows that there is a concerted effort to pick the right students for the program, but that there is a barrier of lack of programming to allow all student-athletes at CSU to be involved. According to their website, SASS’s mission is to Student-Athlete Support Service's mission is to “holistically develop student-athletes on their path to graduation, and prepare them to become productive members of a global society.” SASS offers tutoring, a physical space to study called the Anderson Academic Center, study groups, and an academic mentor. NCCA Division I institutions spend a significant amount of resources to provide additional personnel support relative to their non-athlete student peers (Huml et al., 2017). Although a greater dependence on athletic department staff happens frequently, staff housed within athletic academic centers on campus, like SASS, play a vital role in the development of their student-athletes. Although collaborating with SASS has been great for KCCS, having CSU leadership

involvement in KCCS with Dr. Blanche Hughes was the biggest factor in getting the actual program up and running.

Every student, faculty, and staff participant in this evaluation mentioned Dr. Hughes in some capacity during interviews and focus groups. Dr. Hughes not only teaches the seminar course, but she also recruits many of the students and meets the student's families as well. All the participants, both students, faculty, and staff, agreed that having Dr. Hughes be such a huge part of the program helped "boost the program's reputation amongst coaches, parents, and other stakeholders," and allows KCCS students to "...get all the resources they need." Since Dr. Hughes has such an important and impactful position at CSU, it allows KCCS to have more resources such as access to leadership and a look into the organizational governance at CSU. I believe that Dr. Hughes will continue to be a part of the program to be able to implement any recommendations outlined in the next chapter of this evaluation. Dr. Hughes has also been a part of the overarching Key Communities for a long time and used to teach other classes outside of KCCS. From teaching in the Key Communities, Dr. Hughes wondered why there were not more student-athletes in the other communities and decided to take matters into her own hands by creating KCCS. When talking about the goals of KCCS and the lived experiences of student-athletes on college campuses, Jane stated:

"One thing I always tell them [student-athletes] is that skills and talents are what gets you here [CSU], but consistency and discipline it what takes you to the next level. So how do we help define those things that can help you be consistent and

validate, affirm who you are individually outside of sports? Additionally, how do they navigate, you know, ups and downs in sports. There is a lot of pressure, you know, any given weekend or Tuesday, Thursday, whatever they play, you got twenty thousand plus students watching you represent their institution, and there's so much pressure with that for the athletes.”

This excerpt from one of the KCCS faculty & staff focus groups helps contextualize the pressures that student-athletes face and what factors can help them navigate those pressures inside and outside of sports. Contrasted with the idea of connecting the student participants to a world outside of athletics, KCCS was originally a combined program with non-athletes and student-athletes in an attempt try to co-mingle those two groups. This original structure of the KCCS program was defined as being “a weird dynamic” by Zach. This determined unsuccessful dynamic of student-athletes and non-athletes was explained at the time as not serving either student group that well. In this next sub-category, I highlight the syllabus and the learning space Dr. Hughes created for the KCCS seminar class to highlight the structure and intention of KCCS.

Intentional Course Curriculum & Inclusive Learning Space

The course curriculum and the structure of the KCCS program have been woven through the pre-evaluation, during the evaluation, and post-evaluation process. In the focus groups with the KCCS faculty and staff, we discussed some of the changes that have happened within KCCS over the last five years. The faculty and staff that had been with KCCS since that time all touched on how they tried to implement the program with

both student-athletes and non-student-athletes. In the focus groups, the KCCS faculty and staff discussed their perception of what that environment with both student-athletes and non-student-athletes was like:

“It started out the way the other Key programs were normally structured, there were nineteen students and it [KCCS] was comprised of student-athletes and non-student-athletes. That was the big goal for them to get to know students outside of student-athletes. That’s what we were hoping to do. So, we did that for a couple of years they lived together in a residence hall and it [KCCS] was really dominated by men on the athletics side. That didn’t work as well as we hoped, so the next year, we tweaked it to just be student-athletes. We realized that you cannot have a student who does not like sports in that community [KCCS]”

When discussing the beginning of the KCCS program with student-athletes and non-student athletes it was determined that “the students who were non-athletes were not getting the same KCCS experience as the student-athletes.” A few members of the KCCS faculty and staff from the focus groups also mentioned that it “...became a little awkward for the students who were not athletes to fit in, no matter how hard we tried. Sometimes you just cannot force it.” Because of the shift in the KCCS program to only student-athletes, the administrators and program facilitators had to “work harder in the classroom to connect them [KCCS students] outside of their world.” When asked about what they feel has worked well in the program, Carla stated:

“A lot of times, especially for our student-athletes who identify as first-generation students of color what we want them to know that they are part of something really big and they're seeing other students who look like them have similar backgrounds as them and they're succeeding together.”

The excerpts from the focus group with faculty and staff supports the idea that having that connection with other student-athletes and feeling like they are a part of something that is greater than just their athletic experience is important to the success of the program. These excerpts also connect back to “you’re more than just a student-athlete” by knowing they are “...a part of something really big...” For KCCS students, KCCS is more than just their athletic experience. When asked about the curriculum and learning space, Zach stated:

“I think just the space in general, of being like such a welcoming authentic space to like ask questions and explore allows them to learn about things that maybe they wouldn't in a different classroom.”

From the statements made by the KCCS faculty and staff, there was a lot of “tweaking” and intentionality that was happening after each year of the program to get the program to where it is in the present day. After every iteration of the program, the KCCS faculty and staff mentioned that they try to be proactive in making changes based off of word-of-mouth statements from students and course evaluations. The KCCS faculty and staff mentioned that they don’t get a ton of information from the course

evaluations, but they take what they can get. When asked about the components of the program that they think are the most successful Jane stated:

“I think the seminar is just the star of the show. And like I just think the curriculum is really great and I'm excited to see where it goes, because I think the instructors are also bringing in some new ideas. But yeah, I just really think that it's not just the curriculum, I think it's just the style of the classroom it's like all of our seminars are meant to be a little more informal where you can really get to know your instructor you can really get to know your peers and your mentor is a teaching assistant like there's all these components to it that are designed to make it like a really welcoming environment where you could just be yourself come in authentically you and just engage.”

This informal classroom structure of the KCCS seminar helped the KCCS students get to know the faculty and mentors in a way that was conducive to a welcoming environment. Jane thought that the seminar course was the most impactful component of the KCCS program for the student-athletes. The concept of “being your authentic self” and being a “welcoming environment” was woven throughout the focus groups as a main goal of the KCCS seminar. It is essential to create a space in KCCS that is conducive to welcoming all student-athletes to prevent unintentional marginalization of student-athletes and teaching student-athletes how to transfer the skills they use in the KCCS program to be successful in their athletic and academic environment. When asked to

think back to when they first became involved with KCCS, and what were their first impressions of the program, Laura stated:

“Previously, I felt that student-athletes in general already had enough support. Student-athletes get every opportunity that other students do to figure out what their next steps could be so I think it was it was a pretty quick switch for me in terms of like, once I learned more about the purpose and the intention of KCCS that this other part of their college experience was being given, I was very on board and wanted to be more involved with the program.”

Laura felt that and assumed that even though student-athletes have a lot of resources, KCCS went a little deeper and was more intentional with the type of resources they provided for these students. In terms of the program’s intentionality, using the term “scholars” instead of “students” was mentioned by many of the focus group participants as one of the most impactful practices of the program because of its ability to “change the tone and relevance of the program.” Some of the other impactful practices mentioned by Key faculty and staff during the focus groups were making sure the student participants were more willing to interact with folks on campus, especially through the Resource Project found in the KCCS syllabus and curriculum where student participants identify different resources on campus. Additional impactful program practices that were mentioned by Key faculty and staff during the focus groups were facilitating an increase of a sense of belonging on campus, the faculty assignment, which the purpose was that KCCS students would understand having dialogues with professors and reading a book

about destigmatizing mental health as student-athletes. In the next section, I go over the four main themes found throughout the focus groups with faculty and staff and the 1:1 interviews with KCCS students.

KCCS Students & Four Main Themes

During the data analysis process of this program evaluation, four main themes emerged from the KCCS student 1:1 interviews. These four themes that came from the interviews with Mike, Teresa, John, and Elise were Connection, Mentorship, Community, and Development. In the sub-section below, I go into detail, providing context and excerpts from the 1:1 interviews that connect with each theme.

Connection

The first of the four main themes that will be discussed is **Connection**. Connection means different things to different people. I felt it was necessary to highlight these different definitions of connection to see how the KCCS student participants of this evaluation make meaning of this word in conjunction with KCCS. This can be demonstrated by the Teresa's statement

“Getting connected to things outside of athletics, helped me have a better experience within athletics. Because of KCCS, I was able to have conversations with faculty that taught my classes, go to the career office and talk about career stuff, and get involved with the BAACC [Black/African American Cultural Center].”

The importance of the students getting connected to the rest of the university outside of athletics was one of the most ubiquitous themes that arose from the data collection process and a learning objective from the course syllabus mentioned in previous sections. Overall, the students who were interviewed felt that the KCCS program helped them to feel more connected to the campus even though their identities of first-generation and student-athlete and other identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc. don't necessarily align with Colorado State University. Another definition of connection was mentioned by Mike in the 1:1 interview in the excerpt below:

“I feel like connected is a very broad term that could mean a lot of things. During my time in KCCS and after, I said yes to everything in like I just don't know what's going to happen, but let me just say yes. And so I really think by saying yes to so many things my freshman year it was just like a snowball effect of continuing to say yes and other things which, like when I kept saying yes to like do you want to do this, or what do you want to do, or would you be interested in this, like oh yeah of course, I'll make it work.”

In terms of connection, KCCS students who were interviewed also agreed that the KCCS program helped them with the ability to network and build relationships with people who are not student-athletes and student-athletes that were not on their respective teams. Those connections were deemed as a positive experience for the KCCS students because it allowed them “to not be isolated within the CSU campus.” Isolation on campus

has shown to be detrimental to the resilience and persistence of students on college campuses (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Isolation for student-athletes from both faculty and peers is also evident early on in the student-athlete college experience (Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1993). Practice and travel schedules, the multifaceted psychological and psychosocial aspects of their sport, and even restrictive NCAA policies frequently keep student-athletes isolated from the general student population (Watt & Moore, 2001). Since student development literature (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Watt & Moore, 2001) notes the importance of campus integration and development of social and cultural capital to successfully transition to college from high school, the athletics world that student-athletes often operate within can further isolate them from the non-athlete student body.

Importantly, academic persistence depends on the complex relationship between the student and their ability to integrate academically, referring to attending class and studying, and socially, as well as fitting in the university over time (Tinto, 1993). There is evidence from previous research that academic and social integration shape college retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Each mention of connection from the evaluation participants helps form the argument that connection in and outside of the classroom is important for programs to implement to assist in retention and persistence of students. Student Elise mentioned that they thought “the most helpful thing [from KCCS] would be being involved outside of athletics, getting connected to things outside of athletics helped me have a better experience within athletics.” Not being siloed and being exposed to opportunities outside the world of CSU athletics turned out to be very beneficial for this

student participant, and even landed them their first job on campus. This additional excerpt from Student Elise clearly shows why connection outside of athletics is beneficial for student-athletes specifically:

“Obviously, each sport is a little different, but we all have very similar experiences of like, you know, you have your weight room, you have your team, you have practice. You have all these things structured with your teams. And so those are usually like your only people that you interact with and only people you know, and the only buildings you know. You can go through your whole college experience without meeting anybody else or seeing anything else.”

The last line of Elise excerpt puts the world of college athletics into perspective and strengthens the research about the student-athlete experience from the literature mentioned above. The connection piece of KCCS aided the student-athlete participants ability to develop the “student” part of their identity. The challenge of balancing academic standards and student life with athletic competitiveness is not new (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Teresa spoke about the differences between talking about being connected mentally and physically:

“Being connected physically [to the campus] and just knowing where I'm at, and at least being connected in terms of like, just knowing people outside of the athletic department and knowing different resources that are offered and knowing them enough to help other people and other students or my own teammates.”

That physical and mental connection to the CSU campus was declared in some way shape or form to be an important factor of KCCS by every student participant. Additionally, Teresa also mentioned that KCCS “Developed [their] ability to have a full college experience rather than an athletic experience,” which contextualizes both the physical and mental connection to CSU and the individual college experience. However, there did seem to be a disconnect when discussing interactions with non-student-athletes and the ability to connect with them in a more intentional way. When asked about connecting with non-student-athletes, Mike mentioned:

“I think a lot of the times us athletes find it easier to connect with other athletes because we always have a topic of conversation. And I think when people who were athletes are easier to transition to this because, you know, they know they can relate to it. And I think it's really important to build and have those skills to build the foundations of a relationship or a friendship or, you know, a coworker, with people who haven't been athletes, just because I feel like there's always a connection [between athletes].”

This statement by Mike speaks to one of the components of the KCCS program that has changed over time, which was that when the program first started, KCCS incorporated both student-athletes and non-student-athletes. In 2018, KCCS changed its policies to only recruit student-athletes into the program and closing it to non-student-athletes. The factor of only having student-athletes in KCCS is a component of the program that is viewed as a shared benefit by both student participants and faculty and

staff. However, this shared belief between evaluation participants exposes the dichotomy between wanting to be connected outside of athletics, but also not wanting anyone outside of athletics to be in KCCS. Umbach et. al (2006) suggested that while programs that continue to segregate student-athletes from the general student body may help student-athletes adjust to college in some ways, they also often contribute to isolation. However, it is still not clear whether student-athletes benefit from separate or integrated programming (Umbach et. Al, 2006). According to Zach , the change of moving from combined program with non-student-athletes to just student-athletes was said to be implemented because “It just didn’t work out. The connections felt a little awkward and hard to cultivate.”

The way that the student participants described connection helps outline how they experience the CSU campus and form opinions on the best course of action they can take based on their individual pathways and goals. The way that the student participants describe connection is important because student-athletes are often perceived by outside entities to have a built-in support system through their team (Rivera, 2004). But in reality, the split nature of their lives contributes to their alienation from non-student-athletes and from an academic world that is often interpreted for them by coaches and athletic support staff (Rivera, 2004). John described the isolation and alienation they feel as like “being a fish out of water” in and out of the classroom. In the following section I discuss the theme of Mentorship and how it may have helped mitigate that feeling of isolation and alienation.

Mentorship

The second of the four main themes is Mentorship. Mentoring is an interpersonal relationship that fosters support between a mentor and mentee and is often seen as a developmental tool in higher education (Lucey & White, 2017). Mentorship was mentioned frequently, both from the peer mentor perspective and as an overarching entity, throughout the 1:1 interviews and focus groups.

I found that one of the most compelling parts of the KCCS program was the Peer Mentor Role. I mentioned in the beginning of the chapter that for every cohort of the program, there was a Peer Mentor who was a former KCCS participant and who served as a resource for the students. Each KCCS participant met with the Peer Mentor at least once per month to touch base and see how things were going. During the evaluation, before asking specific questions about the mentor role (Appendix A), KCCS student participants always mentioned that having a Mentor in KCCS was their favorite experience and component of the program. Every student interviewed mentioned that they felt like they could go to their Peer Mentor with issues and that they were a “safe space” and that their peer mentor was “someone to talk to for mental health reasons too.”

Student-to-student support and peer encouragement was prominent subtheme under Mentorship. The participants interviewed described the importance of the daily communication and solidarity they felt with their peers and mentors in KCCS. They knew their peers and their peers knew them. Some noted that one reason to go to class was to “see their friends” and that “they wanted to be in class, so they wouldn’t miss out.”

Additionally, the KCCS students expressed the benefits of studying together and helping one another through the academic rigor of their studies. The strong bonds the students described appear to be a result of students being together throughout their time in KCCS, mentoring each other, sharing the same class experience and goals. Both hierarchical (e.g. student-faculty member or student-adviser) and peer (e.g. student-student) mentoring are recognized as best-practice strategies for promoting college student success (Collier, 2017). Faculty of KCCS shared their beliefs that student-to-student collaboration on assignments and skill building were positive and could foster a team approach that would be useful when they become employed. When asked what their favorite experience of KCCS was, student Mike stated:

“Getting the chance to build a relationship with my mentor that has been there, you know, take bits and pieces of what they have to say and what they've learned about campus and kind of use that as guidance as I find my own way. And the other thing about my mentor that I really enjoyed is just being able to connect with other athletes that I wouldn't be able to see up here at CSU. The football program is separated from the rest of the department. So, we're in the stadium and everyone else is at a different facility, so I never got to see anyone who wasn't on my team.”

Two of the four KCCS students interviewed in this evaluation not only participated in KCCS, but also later served as mentors for KCCS. One of the student participants stated that “the mentor role has really helped me realize just how students,

when they first come in, are really lost and they need guidance.” The importance of “seeing myself in my mentor” was stressed by one of the KCCS students as having a huge impact on their success in the KCCS program and their first year of college. In the past, the mentoring role was set up to mirror the other Key community programs at CSU; where students meet with their mentor three times per semester and have monthly cluster events and activities. When asked about the time commitment of mentors, Zach participant said:

“To be honest, that process is just not that feasible with student-athletes because of their schedule. They're [student-athletes] usually meeting every so often with someone from the athletic support services office. And Dr. Blanche Hughes used to meet with the KCCS students in conjunction with one of our other instructors. They would actually have a mid-semester meeting with the students to get to know them, to check in to see if they had concerns or questions. And so, the students were finding it very difficult to fit in like they had to meet with their advisor they have to meet with their mentor they had to meet with Blanche and her co-instructor, and it was just too much for them, and it was a lot for the mentors, who were also student-athletes, like depending on if they're in season or not. So, we really wanted to make sure that those meetings were not just like meetings for meetings. And we shifted it to meet with them within the first month of the Semester and then meet with them within the last month of semester.”

For the theme of Mentorship, stressing the importance of the student participants seeing themselves in a mentor was significant to their transition from high school to college. Having someone to look up to and having some consistency in support was a highlight of the KCCS program to the student participants. Within higher education mentoring is increasingly seen as a high impact strategy for promoting student success (Collier, 2017). Student participants also having a point person to go to when they are struggling or have questions was also a common factor in their KCCS experience through the lens of mentorship. When talking about the role their KCCS Mentor had in their time in KCCS John stated that:

“My freshman year, I red-shirted, so I wasn't getting a lot of playing time and I wasn't traveling with the team. I basically had my weekends off and I just remember talking to my mentor and just asking like how to get involved. So, based off that conversation, I just got involved with different organizations on campus. So, by not being able to like, experience the full, like responsibilities of football, I was able to go build relationships off-campus and get involved with communities and programs.”

These excerpts from KCCS students demonstrate that the KCCS Mentors were a significant part of their experience in the program and at times, even after their participation in the program. In KCCS, the theme of Mentorship came in different forms. Whether it was through the KCCS Mentors, faculty, staff, peers, the theme of Mentorship was embedded throughout the KCCS program. The next section goes into the evaluation

theme of Community and the importance of building and cultivating relationships while you're in college and feeling a sense of belonging.

Community

The third out of the four main themes was community. The concept of community is a cornerstone of the student affairs profession in higher education (Keeling, 2004, Boyer, 1990). However, there is still, a large debate about the fundamental meaning of “community.” (Keeling, 2004). Seeing how the participants in KCCS and the Key staff and faculty make meaning of community provided a lot of context about what their own perceived definition of the word is.

“They [KCCS participants] find so much community with each other, outside of their sports like when you walk in and they're not sitting with their teammates they're sitting with people that they have met in this space that they've built relationships with maybe over their shared love of sports, but often it's because of other things. Maybe it's where they come from or, I mean, most of our athletes are out of state students and so like there's a lot of things binding them together.”

This quote from Zach goes into the notion that having a sense of community is incredibly important for first year students, especially first-generation college students (Salazar, 2019). Belonging ties students to their college, increasing a greater sense of worth in their education, their college community, and in their activities (Salazar, 2019) In terms of resilience and persistence, thirty three percent of first-generation college students drop out of by their third year of college. (Carenvale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). By

cultivating community, student participants consistently mentioned feeling validated in their activities in and out of the KCCS community. Validation theory (Rendon, 2002) supports the sense of Community that KCCS creates and fosters an enabling, confirming, and supportive process (Rendon, 2002). KCCS student Mike mentioned this supportive nature of KCCS:

“What really made me happy and the way Key CCS kind of just expanded my mind about college in general was that I wasn't just going to get just to play football. I was going to experience all the other things that, you know, a student should have, and that was building resources and building relationships throughout campus; creating community.”

This quote from Mike helps foster the notion that learning community type of programs, such as KCCS, consistently have shown positive impacts on students' experiences and academic outcomes in college (Inkelas et al., 2007; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pasque & Murphy, 2005; Stassen, 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Learning Communities, such as KCCS, offer several benefits to students such a sense of community, additional academic support, and the opportunity to interact with each other, staff, and faculty (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Participants display higher levels of college engagement and stronger academic outcomes (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Stassen, 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), sense of belonging (Spanierman et al., 2013), retention and graduation rates (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013), overall satisfaction with college (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).) On the topic of engagement, student Mike stated:

“I was able to go interview different departments on campus or like the LSE and, or the career center, and just being aware of all these different resources that are being offered. Because again, student-athletes very much siloed. If you need anything we're told to go to the Athletic Center, you don't need the whole university, you know, blah, blah, blah. And so just realizing oh, there's a whole university, not just my own little place where I'm supposed to be all the time was impactful.”

The utilization of the greater CSU community, not just athletics, was spoken about throughout the 1:1's and focus groups with Key faculty and staff. Being exposed to the community of Fort Collins, where CSU was located, gave the participants a greater sense of meaning for the work they were doing in the Key seminar course and their overall experience at CSU even after participation in the KCCS program. Whether through course projects or making connections, the building and application of community was a recurring theme.

The sub-theme of Culture, which is mentioned in the program name and course syllabus as “University Culture” and Sports Culture” can be interwoven into the theme of Community. For purposes of this evaluation, Culture will be defined as the combination of language, behavior, values, and philosophy or outlook that are part of a college education (Markovits & Smith, 2005). However, during the 1:1 interviews and focus groups, culture was rarely mentioned in any capacity by both student participants and KCCS faculty and staff. Since the term culture was embedded within the course

curriculum, name of the program, and into the focus group and 1:1 interview questions, I assumed it would be talked about or mentioned more frequently. Even though culture wasn't explicitly mentioned during the data collection process, aspects of culture, such as campus climate, mission and values, and behaviors of the community were certainly mentioned. Student Mike mentioned being in KCCS made them "very well connected with the upper administration at CSU, and the athletic department, so it was very beneficial for [them]," which dives into the hierarchy of the culture and administration at CSU. Student John stated that they were "joining so many different groups and that's how [they] built [their] relationship through just the campus and learned how to be a part of it." Even though Student John didn't overtly mention community or culture within that statement, groups on campus and building relationships can be facets of culture and community.

The next section goes over the final main theme of the evaluation, Development. In this section, Development is discussed as one of the tangible parts of KCCS that were intentionally curated by the KCCS faculty and staff and absorbed as "life and survival skills" by the student participants.

Development

The fourth and final theme from this evaluation is development. **Development** comes in many forms; personal, academic, professional etc. In this evaluation, development was talked about in these different forms and was regarded as being a conscious and meaningful practice of the program.

Carla stated that “The more you put into it [KCC], the more you get out of it.” Development, whether it was personal, academic, or professional was woven into the KCCS course curriculum. All the student participants mentioned in some way that the assignments from the Key seminar always seemed very “intentional” and “reflective.” One KCCS student participant mentioned that KCCS helped them “build a sense of confidence to feeling like it's okay to do things that are not just your sport.” This same KCCS student participant also stated that their participation in KCCS directly led to their first professional experience. Teresa mentioned that KCCS:

“helped [their] ability or develop [their] ability to have a full college experience, not just college athletic experience. I think it [KCCS] really also helped to develop my confidence and just, um, like navigating the world, which is like, granted, that's kind of what college is supposed to do. Right? But if you think about it a lot of student athletes never get to develop their voice or never get to develop other interests, like, because they, you know, are probably never in a position to advocate for themselves because they're always just told the coach says jump, you say how high, right?”

This statement is incredibly important because student-athletes, especially at competitive Division I institutions like CSU, can have difficulties avoiding their athletic experience overshadow their academic experience. Bandura (2005) explained that people tend to avoid actions that they perceive as exceeding their capabilities but that they pursue activities that they judge to be more within their ability. Additionally, Bandura

(2005) mentions that any factor, such as the KCCS program, that influences choice behavior can have profound effects on the course of personal development. The curriculum and course activities in KCCS support the student participant's agency in persisting through college and increasing their resiliency as they get further into their college careers. When it came to additional strategies that students used to cater to their development, Elise stated:

“I was able to go build relationships off of campus and get involved with communities and committees and programs. So I really was able just to develop more of my student role instead of the athlete role. I spent that first year, you know, going to the back office, which is like a multicultural community center that we have on campus. And then I got involved with like John Mosley, which is like a student athlete program for first-generation black athletes. I was also able to travel to UT, Texas for the all black student athlete summit. So like I was able to really dive in to other areas that I was interested through the resources that were given to me through key.”

As Elise mentioned, student-athletes are challenged to manage their dual roles (i.e., student and athlete). Of the KCCS student-athletes in this evaluation who were participating in sports which are traditional pathways to professional careers, few expected to advance to the professional ranks and KCCS had helped them focus on “what else is out there.”

Based on interviews with KCCS past participants, the students seem to develop within the KCCS program based on their habitus and the range of cultural capital available to them when they start the program, which develops as a function of their school, family, social, community, and racial context (Del-Amen & Tevis, 2010). Looking at development as a theme in KCCS through the lens of Circumscribed Agency (Del-Amen & Tevis, 2010), there seemed to be similar responses to what the students felt helped them develop during their time in KCCS. For that reason, the strategies that the KCCS student participants employ will not be a direct response to their lived experience, but a response filtered through the collection of strategies that make sense to them based on their context and habitus.

Program Improvement

One of the questions asked during the 1:1 with KCCS students was: “What was something that you wish you could’ve done while participating in KCCS that you feel would enhance your first-year experience at CSU?” I wanted to highlight this question and some of the responses because it directly relates to the purpose of this Utilization-Focused Evaluation, which is program improvement. When asked this specific interview questions Teresa stated:

“I wish I was able to do the Key Games while I was in KCCS. It’s [Key Games] like just a whole bunch of games and tournaments and literally like if you remember the field days and like elementary school like they were the best thing ever. They make decorated T-shirts and took pictures and won all these things.

And like [athletic] coaches are not even allowing their student-athletes to do this [Key Games] anymore, just because they're don't want us to get hurt, even though it's like relay races and like just fun things like that so that's definitely one big example. It feels like they tell that we're going to do all these cool things and coaches are like just kidding, no you're not”

The Key Games were mentioned by two out of the four KCCS student participants as something they wish they could've done during their time in KCCS. The Key Games were a way for the KCCS students to make connections with fellow Key students who were outside of athletics. The statement made by Teresa also demonstrates the influence that coaches have on not only the student-athlete lives but also KCCS.

When asked the same interview question, Elise stated:

“I really wish I was able to get to know other Key community program participants. We only meet other Key Communities once, and not again. I just remember meeting a lot of people that one night and just not seeing anybody else and I've worn them. That's obviously due to like their schedules and my schedule is not aligning, but I felt like it would've been cool to build relationships with other Key communities.”

This excerpt from Elise shows that meeting other Key students was important to them and something they wish that they were able to do more while they were in KCCS. I will address both of these themes in the discussion portion of Chapter 5 and through my

three main takeaways from the findings. In the next section, I attempt to connect the four themes of Connection, Mentorship, Community, and Development.

Connecting the Themes

For all four themes, the validating classroom environment, relationships with other student-athletes, the agency to create their own path, and the support from CSU administration are embedded throughout. Every interview with KCCS students included elements of the participant's time during and after KCCS and their interaction and engagement with peers, mentors, KCCS professional staff, and faculty all play a role in the experiences that students have in KCCS and at CSU. The KCCS student-athletes shared these experiences yet make meaning of them in different ways. Additionally, the conversations with the KCCS faculty and staff added to context to the four themes by providing tangible ways KCCS caters to these themes (i.e. class assignments, peer mentor role, curriculum, etc.)

The findings from this evaluation, through its purpose of helping with program improvement, can provide guidance for the KCCS faculty and staff on how to continue “tweaking” their roles within KCCS and the program itself in new ways. Following the frameworks of Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002), Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2011), and Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012) the next chapter will address these findings specifically, and make recommendations on how to use the findings for program improvement and to continue to develop the program that meets the needs of student-athletes and the goals of the program.

Conclusion

Overall, the results from this evaluation suggest that the experience of being a student-athlete at the Division I level has multiple layers. The student-athletes who participated in this evaluation expressed experiencing a variety of feelings about their experience at CSU and the way that KCCS has shaped their college experience. As student-athletes progress in their college career having a structured program their first year that features, connection, mentorship, community, and development sets the foundation for what they do during their remaining college years. Fortunately, all of the student-athletes in this evaluation spoke highly of their experience with KCCS. Their experience in KCCS allowed them to overcome some of the obstacle that they faced as first-generation NCCA Division I student-athletes that present themselves on a daily basis. Regardless of their unique and sometimes isolating college experience that is part of being a student-athlete, one overarching common sentiment was that they would not be where they were today without KCCS .

In sum, the student participants shared that there was an adjustment period to the new environment of academics and athletics during their first year in college at CSU. Finding the balance between practice, travel, and academics was a challenge for the KCCS student participants. They shared frustration, understanding their role at the university, and their expectations as a first-year college student and how KCCS made those expectations a lot more achievable. Overall, through the four main evaluation themes, the participants shared that although the college experience was difficult and overwhelming at times and took time for them to find a way to balance athletics and

academics, KCCS aided them in adjusting to the new environment. They learned to deal with challenging roommates, coaches leaving, and difficult faculty members. It is also important to note that the student participants did not know about KCCS until they got to campus and were nominated to join the program. Three out of the four participants were reached out to by Dr. Blanche Hughes, the founder of the program. For some of the student participants, they realized that having a powerful campus figure like Dr. Hughes backing the program meant that the program was in a unique position compared to other programs on campus and even other Key programs. For the other evaluation participant that wasn't contact Dr. Hughes, they heard about KCCS from their coach. Throughout this chapter, these findings and consequent main themes are discussed in more detail.

The findings produced by this evaluation are notable because many of the results contradict previous research on looking at first-generation students and student-athletes in a deficit lens, provide new insights, and fill gaps in the existing literature. Additionally, very little research has been done about programming for student-athletes that exposes them to a world outside of athletics and allows them to collaborate with other student-athletes that are not on their team. Finally, this evaluation helps fill gaps in the literature by researching the unique needs of first-generation student-athletes, who are less visible in the literature compared to non-first-generation students or non-student-athletes. Following the principles of Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002), Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2011), and Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012) the next

chapter will address these findings specifically and make recommendations on how to use the findings to create an environment that meets the goal of program improvement for KCCS.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this study was to present the experiences of first-generation NCAA Division I student-athletes in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports (KCCS) learning community at Colorado State University and be able to discover factors for program improvement. Although the primary purpose of this evaluation is program improvement, the findings of this evaluation may be helpful to the NCAA, colleges and universities, coaches, administrators, potential student-athletes, and any individuals who have an interest in this topic and want a different perspective than what has been offered in previous research.

The student-athlete experience often encompasses demands that exceed a full-time job, and therefore, academics become a secondary priority (Weston, 2006). While the separateness of student and athlete might be justified, an individual may not have the time or resources to obtain a meaningful education that will be beneficial to their lives and future goals; particularly when student-athletes have conflicting priorities during the rigors of their higher education experience like many first-generation college students do (Ishanti, 2016). In this battle of the student and athlete role, athletic performance often takes precedence over the academic quality of the student-athlete to meet the minimum

NCAA eligibility standards (Saffici & Pellagrino, 2012). Some argue it is inequitable to potentially damage an athlete's future when a university knows they have a low chance at obtaining a meaningful education as a student-athlete (Saffici & Pellagrino, 2012). Making the most out of their athletic and academic experience makes being part of a program like KCCS necessary for student-athletes to learn the skills they need to be successful and not just meeting minimum requirements.

The research is significant regarding college students and their resilience and persistence; The more involved and engaged students are, the greater the likelihood for academic success (Kuh, 2009; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Additionally, a more involved student is more likely to build lasting relationships, which will in turn create future career opportunities. A good chunk of a student-athletes' time and energy is dedicated to developing athletic ability and often results in conflicting schedules with little time to explore other educational and social interests, or pursuing internships (Person & LeNoir, 1997; Watt & Moore, 2001). For many student-athletes, the time constraints hinder the opportunity to excel off the field whether it was the classroom and on campus (Adler & Adler, 1985; Jolly, 2008). If all relevant people in the higher education community are committed to supporting student-athletes in achieving balance and success in their academic and athletic roles, it is possible to assist student-athletes in achieving a meaningful education and a successful life after college (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

According to Warner (2016), a first-generation student-athlete is concerned with three goals while attending college: acclimating within the community, navigating the

duality role of student and athlete, and establishing career goals. Warner (2016) describes the acclimation within the community as the ability to establish their social identity through their relationships with teammates and within their new learning community. Additionally, Warner (2016) reports that social identity is developed through team influence, cohesion within the team, and support from the community. Warner (2016) further describes student-athletes as maintaining two distinct roles: student and athlete. Warner (2016) describes the duality of roles as a “conflicting identity of roles difficult to separate” due to expectations and demands from coaches, teammates, and parents to graduate from college and achieve career goals (p. 21). It is important to highlight these goals from Warner (2016) because it provides context and sets the tone for the findings from this evaluation dealing with first-generation student-athletes.

To help direct higher education institutions in the development of programs to increase the likelihood of meaningful learning experiences, Kuh (2008) established that existing educational practices, such as first-year seminars, which is embedded within KCCS, have a higher tendency to engage learners than traditional lecture-based instruction because of the active learning environments they create for students. Student-athletes often feel a sense of security embracing the athletic role and are unwilling to engage in the self-exploration essential to the process of identity formation (Beamon, 2012). The athletic role, especially in Division I, is the primary reason that many student-athletes can attend college and the financial support of the university is dependent upon athletic performance (Beamon, 2012). The athletic identity takes precedence over social and academic roles and student-athletes often become detached from their academic and

social roles. Additionally, student athletes' identity formation process may be hindered due to limited opportunities for exploration associated with a sense of overprotection, depersonalization, and segregation felt by student-athletes (Eitzen, 2009). Because of these factors, I sought to dig deeper into how first-generation student-athletes at a large NCAA Division I institution make meaning of their college experience and if a program they were recruited for their first-year (KCCS) helped aid in their time at Colorado State University. In the section below I offer to connect the findings and answer the evaluation questions.

Connecting the Findings & Evaluation Questions

This section aims to connect the findings to the evaluation questions. This evaluation is a Utilization-Focused Evaluation and followed the methods outlined by Patton (2002) to conduct the evaluation. This evaluation is also a qualitative evaluation, using different methods to learn the lived experiences of the participants and gain understanding through their experiences and insights. In the following sections, I will discuss recommendations for KCCS, including future programming, future evaluations, and future research. The final section will discuss some concluding thoughts.

Evaluation Question 1

How does KCCS shape the experiences of first-generation student-athletes during their first year of college?

Using Validation Theory (Rendon, 2002) and Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2011) as a lens, which emphasizes persistence and decision-making, we can

ascertain from this evaluation that attending college and participating in a KCCS as a first-generation student-athlete positively shapes aspects of the college experience. The major factors of validation and agency of first-generation student-athletes come from their families, their own athletic and academic ambitions, coaches, and understanding the importance of maximizing the opportunity to be in KCCS (Rendon, 2002). For these individuals in KCCS, being first-generation student-athletes has helped define who they are. The findings of this evaluation helped aid in the understanding of how the intended practices of KCCS (which are to help students persist) were implemented and how those practices shaped student experiences.

For a student-athlete or first-generation student arriving on a college campus, it can understandably be a daunting experience, especially at a large public institution like Colorado State University. Though there is not enough concrete evidence based on this one qualitative program evaluation, an assumption between the persistence and resilience of first-generation student-athletes is the role an athlete holds. Based on literature on first-generation students, being a student-athlete, especially in Division I, on campuses intensifies the role of athlete and the need for these students to persist to graduation. While more research must be done, there is evidence that students who are involved in college and participating in a learning community-type program their first year, like KCCS, can enhance and help first-generation student-athletes students persist after their first year of college. (Priest et.al, 2016)

This program evaluation found that when first-generation student-athletes first step onto campus, they are unaware of what to expect academically and athletically, especially when all the student participants were not aware of KCCS before they arrived on campus. While the students arrive “not knowing what to expect”, they also transitioned quickly and adapted to the demands of academics, athletics, and relationships. KCCS helped the students who participated in this evaluation feel a sense of belonging to the institution, which eased their early unknowns and allowed them to thrive in a new environment. It was clear from the interviews that KCCS was instrumental in that ease of transition. Additionally, the KCCS students who participated in this evaluation mentioned that connecting with other student-athletes outside of their own team also helped ease the transition. In the sub-section below, I address one of the main takeaways from the findings of this evaluation that can help answer EQ1, that student-athletes connect best with other student-athletes.

Student-Athletes connect best with other student-athletes

When the KCCS program was first implemented, there was a mix of student-athletes and non-student-athletes. The KCCS faculty and staff quickly found out that this strategy of connecting the student-athletes to other students was not as successful as they had hoped. According to observations from the KCCS faculty and staff, even though both groups identified as college students, they still couldn't connect in a conducive way to long-lasting friendships or a continued support system. While the non-student athlete is faced with academic and social stressors, the college athlete has additional challenges related to their sport (Durm, 1999). Being a student-athlete comes with stressors that the

non-athlete does not have to deal with. Student-athletes connecting well with other student-athletes in KCCS is based upon the narratives from the students who participated in this evaluation and not what KCCS staff perceived about the early iterations of the program that is no longer in practice.

This student-athlete peer-to-peer connection is one of the staples of the KCCS program and supports the KCCS intended outcomes and practices and how they shape the KCCS student experience. Using Validation Theory (Redon, 1994) as a lens to explain student-athlete's connections with other student-athletes demonstrates the KCCS structure can foster academic and personal development. This can also be seen in the KCCS mentor role and the connection they have with the KCCS students. The fact that the KCCS mentors are also student-athletes and have been in the KCCS students' shoes before brings more authenticity to the relationship. Having that sense of validation from other student-athletes who have been there before or are currently going through the same thing helps foster a sense of connection, and community, and validates their experience than if the program incorporated non-student-athletes. Additionally, the KCCS students mentioned that connecting with other student-athletes outside of their own team helped them feel less isolated on campus and helped shape their experience at CSU.

Student-athletes academic and athletic roles both require commitment, energy, and effort (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Because of this, student-athletes experience a unique conflict between the competing time and energy demands of their academic role and their athletic role (Sack, 1987; Simons & Van Rhee, 2000). Comeaux and

Harrison's (2011) conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes is based on many of the student development theories that have been previously explored in relation to college student success while recognizing the role of athletic participation in the student-athlete experience (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). One of the stages of their models focuses on the importance of social integration and connections to the collegiate success of student-athletes. This stage of the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model helps make meaning of the KCCS student narratives dealing with connections with their peer mentor and other student-athletes in KCCS. Now that I've answered EQ1, in the next section, I go over my process for answering EQ2.

Evaluation Question 2

How does the KCCS program contribute to supporting first-generation student-athletes?

In reviewing interview and focus group data, it became clear that CSU as an institution and KCCS present some innovative and intentional ways to cater to and support student-athletes. Additionally, based on the document review in Chapter Three, which helped understand the intended outcomes of KCCS, this evaluation helps develop an understanding of how KCCS intended to support students in their identity reflexivity and navigating through college. The role of key people in KCCS and the intentional curriculum help answer Evaluation Question 2 (EQ2). Being that KCCS is the only program of its kind that I could find in Division I institutions speaks to CSU & KCCS innovation and organizational practices. The program design of KCCS responds to the

research that a learning community-type program that caters to underrepresented students can make college more approachable and provides personalized attention from dedicated faculty and staff (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These factors of support can be seen throughout the structure of KCCS.

Using Organizational Theory with the components of Organized Anarchy and Organizational Saga as a lens (Manning, 2012) we can connect the qualitative data from this evaluation to further help answer this research question. The term Organized Anarchy was created by Cohen and March (1986) to describe the paradoxical ways of higher education. Higher education as a system is unique in the number of stakeholders invested in its outcomes practices (Manning, 2012, p. 142). In contrast to a traditional top-driven approach in organizations, all members within an organized anarchy can imagine a role they may play in an institution. In the case of KCCS, the faculty and staff have a great deal of autonomy to create programming that best supports the students it serves and have a shared understanding of the program benefits.

Additionally, from the faculty and staff perspective, CSU bolsters KCCS efforts and supports KCCS goals of aiming to increase retention and academic performance of participants, encourage campus and community involvement, and promote diversity awareness (Key Communities Website, 2021). It is important to note that 1 in 5 students at CSU identifies as first-generation and that the Key programs are part of the CSU Student Success Initiative to close the gaps in graduate rates (CSU, 2021). “We have to find our students; our students don’t find us” was a phrase uttered during the focus

groups by one of the faculty/staff participants. This statement shows that there must be a good deal of collaboration between CSU as a whole and KCCS to identify these students. In the sub-section below, I address two of the main takeaways from the findings of this evaluation that best answer EQ2, that emphasizes the importance of coach buy-in, that this program is worth the financial investment, student and faculty time, and that institutional leadership needs to be part of programming.

Importance of Coaches Buy-In

NCAA Coaches play an important role in the development of student-athletes, often undertaking the roles of teachers and mentors (Shipherd, Wakefield, Stokowski, & Filho, 2018). However, coach turnover is frequent in collegiate sports in the United States (Shipherd, Wakefield, Stokowski, & Filho, 2018). According to the NCAA (2020), nearly half of intercollegiate football student-athletes selected their respective institutions based solely on the coach. Subsequently, two out of the four student-athlete participants in this evaluation mentioned the coach turnover and how it affected them.

Using Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010) as a lens for coach buy-in to KCCS and programs like it we can argue that these programs and consistency in coaching enact agency to student-athletes to direct their decisions and behaviors. Therefore, being in a program like KCCS that is supported by the coaches will give student-athletes the agency to succeed in both their academics and athletics. Since Circumscribed Agency (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010) can be used to describe what factors play a role in student-athlete decision-making and instilling confidence, KCCS can use

this theory as a lens for curriculum planning in the seminar course. Giving students in KCCS the agency and confidence to make decisions and know who their resources are during their time in KCCS and CSU will set them up for success in their remaining time in college. Additionally, because of the coaches' influence, having more coaches buy-in to KCCS will enable the program to reach more if not all student-athletes at CSU.

Additionally, CSU and other NCCA institution's athletic departments play an integral part in student-athlete's lives. Athletic departments are responsible for many of the practices that impact student-athlete's lives daily. The athletic department at CSU should hold coaches accountable for the academic successes of all their student-athletes, not just those receiving athletic scholarships and therefore measured in the NCAA Academic Progress Rate (NCAA, 2021). An emphasis on the academic success of all student-athletes can trickle down to coaches and influence the value they place on academic success. Having a program like KCCS that is catered to student-athletes creates built-in programming that should make it easy for coaches to support.

Coaches' support for KCCS is necessary for encouraging student-athletes' participation in the program. Coaches serve as authority figures for student-athletes and play a vital role in student-athletes' buy-in to programs and workshops (Shipherd, Wakefield, Stokowski, & Filho, 2018). If coaches value and support these resources, this will ultimately filter down to the student-athletes themselves. Although coaches relate most to the student-athletes' athletic role, they can implement activities to encourage student-athlete academic success (Shipherd, Wakefield, Stokowski, & Filho, 2018).

Coaches can establish set times to meet with student-athletes regarding academics. When student-athletes know coaches are going to ask about their academic progress in their various courses, it also serves as a motivator and agency for that student to complete their program. Like coaches, institutional leadership of CSU will be imperative for program improvement and supporting KCCS students. In the sub-section below, I go over why institutional leadership at CSU needs to be part of programming and how it helps answer EQ2.

Institutional leadership needs to be part of programming

Gabelnick, et al. (1990, p. 51) mentioned that stable leadership and an administrative “home” will ensure a greater chance for long-term stability and success in a learning community program. KCCS was created by the Vice President of Student Affairs, Dr. Blanche Hughes. KCCS is as successful as it is because of Blanche’s relationship with and proximity to the program. She was able to create trust with not only the students, but the faculty, staff, and coaches as well. Even though KCCS is part of the overarching Key Community programs, it encompasses a different process than the rest of the Key Communities do. Dr. Hughes hand-picks the student-athletes that participate in KCCS whereas there is an open application process for the rest of the Key communities, which was mentioned in the previous chapters.

Using Organizational Theory (Manning, 2012) and Organizational Saga, which is a collective understanding of a unique accomplishments based on historical exploits of a formal organization (Clark, 1972), with a post-conventional lens can create tangible

processes to create change and create a shared understanding of programs like KCCS. Mentoring programs and academic and student services programs that serve the needs of underrepresented groups, such as KCCS, are examples of programs established through bureaucratic management and reactive leadership (Manning, 2012, p.105). Bureaucratic management can be described as “A place for everyone and everyone in their place.” (Manning, 2012, p. 29) Reactive leadership means that leaders' actions depend on the situation and the society (Manning, 2012, p. 29). If more leaders at CSU and other higher education institutions were reactive used their institutional and bureaucratic power to create and support programs, there will be a significantly less amount of jumping through hoops or getting approval. Learning communities connect students to each other, to campus resources, and to intentionally integrated learning experiences that make a significant difference in students’ persistence, learning, and views of themselves (Brownell & Swaner, 2010).

However, one size does not fit all in the organization of student affairs work (Magdola & Magdola, 2011 p. 398) Higher education is a mature industry (Altbach, 2011; Bills, 2016; Levine, 2001; Manning, 2012). Mature organizations, such as higher education institutions are slow to change (Manning, 2012, p. 20). Most colleges and universities have concrete structures, with less room for nimble modifications or novel innovations. The labor force (i.e., faculty, administrators, and staff) is specialized by function with minimal flexibility within a set of self-perpetuating functions (Manning, 2012, p. 21). Additionally, mature organizations have a choice to stay dynamic or pass into decline and must actively work to remain dynamic. Given the climate of U.S. higher

education organizations, a fresh perspective at potential organizational models can help colleges and universities rejuvenate and revitalize their structures and programming for the ever-changing college student population.

Multiple, often-conflicting roles such as faculty, administrators, staff, students, and external stakeholders by structure, temperament, and responsibilities play vastly different roles within higher education organizations (Manning, 2012, p. 21). The representation of these roles is becoming more pronounced with the introduction of technology, the increasingly complex fiduciary responsibilities expected of administrators and trustees, and the raised expectations of students, parents, and other stakeholders. George Kuh (2009) pointed out that there are important differences between organizational structures and organizational behaviors, with the latter demonstrating individual actors in organizations bring the cultures, values, and identities to life (Magdola & Magdola, 2011). For KCCS, it comes down to institutional leaders at CSU creating strategies for comprehensive and transformational change that target these individual behaviors and organizational structures simultaneously (Magdola & Magdola, 2011) The continued success of the KCCS program is going to depend on the role of institutional leadership in KCCS once people like Dr. Blanches Hughes leave and then keeping the organizational saga going.

The three main takeaways of this program evaluation of KCCS were that student-athletes connect best with other student-athletes, coach buy-in of KCCS is important, and CSU institutional leadership needs to be part of KCCS programming. These three main

takeaways were important to contextualize the findings of this evaluation and to help answer the evaluation questions. In the section below I touch on implications and recommendations based on this program evaluation.

Implications & Recommendations

The following recommendations are for the Key Culture, Communication & Sports community (KCCS) faculty and staff as well as other NCAA Division I institutions. These recommendations include staff development and training, career and professional development/career curriculum integration, further identity development, Generation Z support services, and mental health and well-being services. These recommendations were made as a result of the Utilization-Focused Evaluation process and assessment of the qualitative data collected from 1:1 interviews, focus groups, and program documents. Gabelnick, et al. (1990, p. 51) also offers guidelines for how to create learning communities that achieve the best possible results for learners. Broad support from both faculty and staff is essential and means that collaboration must be present from the inception of the learning community development process. I break the recommendations into two separate sections of student and program.

Student-Based Recommendations

Career & Professional Development

A lot of attention has been given to student-athlete graduation rates, with much less attention given to student-athlete career development. Even though student-athletes are graduating at higher rates compared to twenty years ago (NCAA, 2019), this does not mean that they are prepared to pursue a career after graduation. For NCAA Division I

student-athletes, there is about a 2% chance that they will make it professionally in their sport (NCAA, 2019). For the other 98% of student-athletes, career and professional development is critical in ensuring they are equipped with the skills to succeed by emphasizing and highlighting career development to prepare them for life after graduation early on. A solid career readiness framework invites faculty and instructors to focus on how coursework can prepare students not just intellectually, but personally and professionally as well. The more faculty encourage students to reflect on the competencies they are developing and how these competencies translate into other contexts, such as a resume or interview, the more the students will understand the benefits and importance of what they are learning in the classroom.

Career curriculum integration, which is the process of inserting career-related outcomes into articulated individual program learning outcomes, within the KCCS Key Community courses for their whole first year of college can help students make a connection between the curriculum and practical application. This is also an excellent opportunity for KCCS to interact with and introduce students to the Career Center at CSU. All college students need assistance with academic and career decision making, and some students need more concentrated help with this process because of their unique circumstances (Gordon, 2006). Student-athletes experience complexities related to their various role commitments as competitors (Gordon, 2006). Both identity foreclosure and athletic identity have been shown to inhibit career decision-making in student-athletes (Brown et al., 2000; Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997; Houle, 2010; Lally & Kerr,

2005). Some examples that can be used to effectively integrate career into the KCCS curriculum are outlined below:

Figure 11.

Class Integration Assignment Menu

All assignments below can be created with the help of a CSU career advisor, many of which have already been created for various classes. We can present presentations on these topics and help tailor the assignment to your particular goals.

- **Resume and Cover Letter:** Submit a resume and cover letter to online platform.
- **LinkedIn:** Create a LinkedIn Account
- **Internship/ Co-Op/ Job Search:** Find a position and create a tailored resume and cover letter to apply.
- **Informational Interview:** Complete an informational interview with an industry professional.
- **Effective Interviewing:** Prepare answers to common interview questions (submit as a homework assignment). An option to include mock interviews (1 class devoted to interview prep, a second class devoted to a practice session in class with student-athlete alumni volunteers).
- **Career Program Attendance:** Attend a career event of your choice during the semester.

Having tangible assignments related to career instead of just simply talking about career paths will assist in the KCCS participants professional development early on.

Identification with the student-athlete role may prevent athletes from thoroughly exploring options associated with a particular field of study or occupational area (Finch, 2007; Murphy et al., 1996). Prior research indicates that student-athletes with strong athletic identities, which happens frequently in NCAA Division I institutions, are less likely to engage in career exploration and related decision-making processes (Brown et al., 2000; Grove et al., 1997; Houle, 2010; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Tyrance, Harris, & Post, 2013). Brown et al. (2000) surveyed 189 NCAA Division I student-athletes and found a relationship between identity foreclosure (strong identification with the athlete role) and

low decision-making self-efficacy, which strengthens the need for a robust career and professional development plan and practice for student-athletes.

Access to and utilization of career and professional development during college has shown to have positive effects on retention and persistence (Eggleston & Mitchell, 2005). Career curriculum integration will also expose valuable campus resources that will cater to their first-generation identity and expose them to even more resources outside of the athletics department. First-generation college students often lack the social and cultural capital to help them connect with meaningful and relevant experiential learning opportunities, which is an opportunity for athletics and KCCS to help foster that network (Tierney, 1992). By assisting students to articulate the transferable skills using validation theory and circumscribed agency, they can start building through their student-athlete experience and create their personal brand for the job or internship search process. Transferable skills can also encompass volunteer and campus involvement opportunities as well, which is more time friendly for the demanding Division I student-athlete schedules. Using validation theory as a lens, students can co-create and set learning opportunities for themselves and how they define their own success to productively use mentors, peers, faculty, employers, and other resources.

The more literature that is written and data that is focused on student-athletes and career development, the more knowledgeable career coaches/advisors and college coaches will become about the importance of career development within the college student population. Also, the results of this program evaluation presented the need and

brought awareness to the role of professional development engagement in boosting career self-efficacy for student-athletes. It is hoped that future researchers will continue to broaden and strengthen the literature in this area to gain a deeper understanding of how professional development relates to career decision-making for NCAA Division I student-athletes. When a student focuses on their career goals and professional development it is also imperative to have a sense of self and identity, which I discuss in the sub-section below.

Identity Development

Another recommendation for KCCS to help aid in the resilience and persistence of the student participants of the program is having even more of a focus on the identity development of first-generation student-athletes and the challenges they face as they transition into higher education woven throughout the curriculum and community activities. Although identity development is already in the KCCS curriculum more can still be done. While all students will inevitably face difficulties transitioning from high school to post-secondary education, collegiate athletes bear the burden of balancing at least two demanding public roles, student and athlete, along with other interpersonal relationships, such as friendships, familial ties, and connections with teammates and coaches (Rendon et al., 2004). Using validation theory as a tool, incorporating activities such as mind-mapping, which is a graphical way to represent ideas and concepts, or discussion groups and more one on one meetings with mentors or faculty could help foster this sense of identity. Allowing the students to co-create the curriculum and class expectations can also be a great tactic for identity development. Additionally, extending

the program beyond the first year to promote a sense of community is another way that the KCCS program can help promote identity development and resilience and persistence of these students.

When it comes to identity development, the constructivist approach corresponds to learning by doing if the more one does something, the more efficient they become at it. It consists on different forms and activities which can include curriculum integration and identity development (Berger, Blanco-Ramirez, & Lyon 2012). Constructivism is also based on active involvement of learners and their interactions for creation of new knowledge (Berger, Blanco-Ramirez, & Lyon 2012). Without curricular integration, validation, self-determination, and community building, a learning community does not take full advantage of the potential benefits for students. The benefits of having or participating in an intercollegiate sports program should outweigh the challenges for students to be successful. The intercollegiate athletics infrastructure and attentiveness to the overall first-generation student-athlete experience should be integrated into the fabric of the institution and its governance to create learning community programming and to have an increased rate of first-generation student-athlete success. When students have the space to be introspective about their own identities, that is the makings of a successful program. In the sub-section below I discuss the context of today's college students and offering support services for Generation Z, life skills for student-athletes, and implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Academic & Social Integration – Field Day

During the data collection of this evaluation, all of the KCCS student participants felt as if they were a little less socially integrated into the institution as they wanted to be. The example that every KCCS student talked about was how they were not allowed to attend the Key Communities Field Day. Field Day is a one-day event during the Fall semester during which each cluster forms a team and all the communities come together and play games, design t-shirts, eat food together, meet new people, and spends a few hours engaging in friendly competition. However, the KCCS students have not been allowed to participate. I want to be clear that this was not a decision that the KCCS faculty and staff implemented, but was instead a mandate by the coaches. Currently and in the past iterations of KCCS, coaches have told the KCCS faculty and staff that they did not want the KCCS students to participate in field day due to risk of injury. Thus, preventing the KCCS students from connecting with their non-student-athlete peers.

An Astin (1984) study revealed that student-athletes were more likely to describe a positive college experience when aspects of their pre-college goals and expectations, experiences transitioning into the institution, and characteristics of the environment were described using a combination of academic, athletic, and social perspectives. Since there are certain barriers in place that prevent KCCS students from participating in Field Day, a social perspective (Astin, 1984) I recommend alternative social integration group activities so KCCS Students can connect with non-student-athletes. These alternative activities can include team-building and bonding through trivia, story-telling, gaming, art, etc. so as not to make coaches nervous about extracurricular physical activities.

Context of Today's Student

College students in today's age are different from ones in previous generations, particularly Generation Z. The sub-sections below go over different support services for this generation of students, including their mental health and wellbeing, and college in the age of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Generation Z & Support Services. Generation Z (Gen Z), who are individuals born between the years 1997-2012, pose some additional challenges. Coaches and administrators must face these additional challenges of supporting Generation Z student-athletes who continue to struggle with issues of mental health and wellness (Gould, 2020). Every generation of student-athletes brings changes that coaches must consider and adapt to in stride. Athletics-specific factors, like new NCAA regulations, come into play, but so too do external and social dynamics such as communication skills and preferences.

All of these factors together have created a unique group which has posed significant challenges for student affairs, academic affairs, and athletics practitioners over the last 10 years (Strange, 2014). This is of specific interest to student-athlete development professionals, as research now illustrates the mental health and wellness challenges that student-athletes face during the transition to unstructured environments in college. Adding workshops and training on best practices of working with Gen Z student-athletes should be incorporated into the whole life cycle of a student-athletes time in college. According to Dan Gould (2020), coaching has not changed much across

generations at the individual level. Student-athletes still want to feel confident, competent and enjoy the camaraderie of their teammates. What's different with Gen Z is their attention to technology, to social media and the effects of extensive use of these technologies on them (Gould, 202). Gould (2020) also mentioned that the changes we're seeing with Gen Z have come quicker than other generations, which requires higher education institutions and coaches to adapt quickly.

Gen Z student-athletes are wired to instantaneous information and feedback is expected (Strange, 2014). Therefore, when coaches assume that they can impose traditional methods of instruction and motivation, it might make the student-athletes grow impatient and look for what they seek elsewhere. However, the desire for instant gratification can be leveraged to create an advantage if the correct approach is taken. When everyone's greatest achievements can be posted online for millions to see instantaneously, Gen Z student-athletes have been competing with one another for attention from the moment they stepped onto the court or field. This competition has created a drive to succeed that has rarely been seen among past generations (Gould et. al, 2019).

Coaches, faculty, and staff at CSU and in KCCS should channel this competitive spirit in ways that promote individual development. Some examples of this channeling include the gamification of team competition, in which individual student-athlete academic accomplishments are tracked, recognized, and validated. In the same way college football teams reward their players with "helmet stickers" for making big play,

almost every aspect of game and their experience and performance in KCCS can be used to drive competition among student-athletes and make them feel validated in a positive way. In the next sub-section, I touch on the mental-health and well-being of today's student-athletes and building those life skills.

Mental Health & Well-Being. The aim of colleges and universities and the athletic division that they represent should be the betterment of student-athletes, especially if they are first-generation college students simultaneously. It is essential for colleges and universities, as well as the NCAA, to learn more about the experiences of their student-athletes to ensure that they are benefiting from engagement in purposeful activities such as KCCS (Jolly, 2008). Athletic programs at every college and university across the country maintain performance statistics on each student-athlete who plays for them, no matter the sport. Institutions need to stay abreast of not only the grades and retention of their student-athletes, but the quality of the student-athletes' educational experience as well and the support services they provide.

Jolly (2008) states "while NCAA schools provide academic support for student-athletes, few can provide significant study hall space and computing resources" (p. 145). College athletic financial resources among smaller higher education institutions are restrictive and institutions usually need to rely on professional staff within a student affairs division to provide support (Jolly, 2008). Student affairs professional staff members are trained to work with most students in the areas of mental health, wellness, academic support, and transitional issues, yet there are limitations from the student-

athlete perspective. Generally, smaller institutions rely solely on the support from student affairs professionals with the aptitude to recognize the challenges of student-athletes (Watt & Moore, 2001). In most cases, student affairs professionals lack the appropriate training to recognize the demands and challenges faced by student-athletes (Watt & Moore, 2001).

Once adequate support services are in place, where and how to access these resources needs to be made clear and consistent to student-athletes. I believe that every student-athlete at CSU, especially those who also identify as first-generation college students, need to participate in KCCS. Opening KCCS up to all student-athletes might mean hiring a lot more faculty and staff. If hiring more faculty and staff to expand KCCS is not doable, the KCCS curriculum should be integrated in some way during practices. Information on resources cannot be something that is glossed over just once to incoming student-athletes. Finally, the NCAA should develop stricter policies pertaining to student-athlete wellbeing. For example, the NCAA should enforce continual training for athletic staff, including coaches, and additional workshops for the student-athletes outside of KCCS. The NCAA should also improve the monitoring of each institution's resources and services that are available for student-athlete mental and emotional health. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, student-athlete mental health is at the forefront more than it has ever been, but there are still great strides that need to be made.

COVID-19. In the next couple of years, I foresee there being a lot of research done on the mental health and well-being of student-athletes amid and after the COVID-19

pandemic. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, athletes have expressed significant grief and frustration, attributed to alterations in routine, limited or modified training and the postponement of sporting events across the globe. There is a current lack of research and attention on the unique mental health needs of student-athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a limited response from higher education institutions in addressing athlete-specific concerns (Grubic et.al, 2021).

Additionally, at CSU, more than 20 current and former Colorado State University football players, many who have participated in KCCS, and athletic department staff say they have witnessed recurring instances of racial insensitivity and abusive behavior within the department (Blumhardt, 2020). Sources within the CSU Football program had claimed that a pattern of concerning behavior has spanned the tenure of former head and a current head football coach. The Athletic director at CSU and other athletic administrators have turned a blind eye to the issues and student-athletes and athletics staff have called the environment "toxic." (Blumhardt, 2020). This was all happening at the same time as the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others. However, Key was quick to release a joint statement with Community for Excellence stating, "Black Rams Matter," and that they recognized that the CSU campus community is not immune from anti-Blackness, racism, and injustice and that they have much work to do locally as well (Key Communities & Community for Excellence, 2020). Now that the student-based recommendations from this evaluation have been discussed, I will now go over the program-based recommendations for KCCS.

Program-Based Recommendations

Formal Program Assessment Process

During my data collection process, I discovered that the KCCS program does not have a formal assessment of student participant evaluations of the program. Student evaluations will be critical moving forward because as they make changes to the program, it will be good to know how the stakeholders of the program felt about their participation. Filling out a course evaluation gives KCCS students an opportunity to reflect on their progress throughout the program. Being thoughtful about their experience as the KCCS program comes to an end can help the students make better decisions when selecting classes for a new academic year or when exploring options for a major. Thoughtful program evaluations will also help faculty and staff identify what is working for KCCS, and what could use improvement. Having a customized program evaluation instead of the standard Colorado State University assessment will also allow for further evidence of program effectiveness. These customized program evaluations will improve KCCS in the future and can also assist in providing evidence and data for future KCCS participants and athletic coaches to be more inclined to allow students to participate in the program.

By restructuring a student's time, credit, and learning experiences, learning communities, such as KCCS, aim to bring more coherence to the curriculum, increase student engagement, and help build social and academic community (Smith et al., 2004, p. 67). Learning communities rearrange students' otherwise haphazard academic experiences to bring focus, coherence, and community to their learning. As mentioned in

the literature review in Chapter 2, learning community program structures vary greatly, from a pairing of two courses to highly complex learning communities involving a constellation of courses that compose a year or more of student work (Smith et al., 2004). Higher education institutions often give their learning community programs special names, such as “Freshman Interest Groups,” “First-Year Communities,” or “Coordinated Studies Programs”. Individual learning community offerings usually have their own titles that present the theme or question around which the coursework is organized. A formal assessment process would allow KCCS to get feedback on the name and structure of the program in real time.

From the research and literature review mentioned in Chapter 2, learning communities can serve as an exciting and enduring vehicle for large-scale institutional improvement and sustained organizational learning. Additionally, learning communities can also help address several the dilemmas within higher education by providing a platform for other reforms, by bringing coherence to institutions increasingly beset by student mobility and seemingly endless choice, and by serving as a cornerstone for ongoing invention and curricular problem-solving. Learning communities can also engage faculty, other academic staff, and student affairs professionals in reinvesting their energy and imagination into the first year college experience.

Hundreds of college campuses across North America have created learning community programs to strengthen these curricular arenas (Kuh, 2008). However, only a small number have invested deeply in learning community teaching and learning in the

ways the Colorado State University has with the Key programs and specifically KCCS. Having a formal assessment process in the beginning, middle, and end of the program will allow KCCS to continue its success and make the program even better. When thinking of the students the KCCS currently serves, and will be serving for at least the next decade, having additional staff development and training for KCCS is discussed in the sub-section below.

KCCS Nomination & Buy-In Process

Currently, as mentioned in Chapter 1, KCCS students are nominated and hand-picked by KCCS faculty & staff with additional recommendations from coaches. In the other Key Communities programs, CSU students self-select a learning community of interest and submit a submission of interest form showcasing their lived experiences and why they are interested in that particular Key learning community (Key Communities Website, 2022). Every academic year, there is a total between 35 – 40 student-athletes who join KCCS and a total of 425 student-athletes at CSU. To optimize persistence goals, I recommend expanding the program to allow for more student-athletes to join KCCS. To do this, KCCS will need to obtain coach buy-in and the funding for more resources and staff. To aid in coach buy-in, KCCS faculty and staff should find a way to include coaches in curricular input. Additionally, the help of more individuals in CSU leadership like Dr. Blanche Hughes could assist in gaining the momentum needed to be able to make these program expansions and nomination process changes. I believe getting rid of the nomination process entirely and have the KCCS program incorporate the same application system that the rest of the Key programs go through, will prove to be more

equitable and less exclusive. Additionally, if opening KCCS up to all the student-athletes at CSU is not feasible, allowing student-athletes who do not get chosen for the KCCS program the first time they apply to be able to apply again the next year.

Doing more of a push to market KCCS in the Summer, when a majority of the new student-athletes at CSU are starting, by doing KCCS information sessions and getting the word out to student-athletes and coaches early, could be effective. Having an organized marketing and information session plan put in place will assist in providing necessary information and getting coaches to buy-in to the program so they will recommend it to more of their athletes. A big marketing push can also be done with The Presidents Committee on Climate in Athletics at CSU. This committee allows any student-athletes, coaches, faculty, and staff at CSU to report any concerns about the climate in the CSU Athletics program through the President's Committee on Climate in Athletics report form (CSU Website, 2022). The Information reported is reviewed by the President's Committee on Climate in Athletics and routed to relevant university offices to ensure proper follow up and resolution when appropriate. The committee is a group of university personnel independent of the Athletics Department. The Committee members include:

- Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs over Student-Athlete Support Services
- Faculty Athletics Representative Chair of the Faculty Council Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics
- Vice President for Equity, Equal Opportunity

- Title IX Executive Director for Human Resources Representative from the Office of the General Counsel

Getting this committee involved in seeing the value of KCCS for student athletes is a way to get more CSU leadership support. The goals and mission KCCS certainly aligns with what this committee is trying to do, which is a commitment to the health and well-being of all student athletes, coaches, faculty and staff. With this marketing, KCCS can have streamlined messaging around value added of KCCS by providing clarity in how it will enhance a student-athletes experience at CSU and clarity on how it can connect with their athletic experience. Additionally, identifying other KCCS seminar topics or links that would be appealing and valuable such as leadership and sports or student-athletes in STEM or Pre-Health could increase interest.

Staff Development & Training

The next recommendation for the KCCS program is to add staff development and training opportunities to further educate coaches, peer mentors, faculty, and Key staff. Gabelnick, et al. (1990, p. 51) states that broad support from both faculty and staff is essential and that collaboration must be present from the inception of the learning community development process. In addition, athletic departments should be aware of the need to have staff, faculty, and coaches that mirror the cultural background and identities of the students to help in the mentoring process of KCCS and all student-athletes. These recommendations are important because they will bring more awareness to NCCA

Division I coaches on how to mentor and develop KCCS participants and all student-athletes.

Some tangible next steps for KCCS and athletic coaches is to include specific informational meetings regarding KCCS so coaches can be more effective with the students who participate in the program. This can also be done by creating workshops to train coaches on how to effectively use their social capital to help mentor KCCS participants. KCCS having the buy-in from coaches is incredibly important to student participation and scheduling. With the high coach turn-over rate in the NCAA, which was something mentioned by two of the student participants, having a standard set in place will also be incredibly effective. This recommendation might imply that Key and Athletics will have to hire more staff and possibly expand KCCS to all student-athletes. With the development of KCCS staff and faculty, I discuss the future programming opportunities for KCCS in the sub-section below.

Future Programming

In this next section, I go over future programming opportunities for KCCS and other higher education institutions. I first touch on expanding KCCS to other institutions, specifically in NCCA Division I, and the benefits it will bring for student-athletes. I then go into the possibility of offering a Summer-Bridge program for KCCS students and the impact that type of program will have on KCCS and college students in general. Lastly I go over the possibility of KCCS providing support to the KCCS students beyond their first year and possibly the entire duration of their time at CSU.

Expanding KCCS to Other Institutions

This program evaluation has ultimately demonstrated that KCCS is a one-of-a-kind program and has a positive impact on the students it serves. During my initial research of this evaluation topic, I found that CSU was one of the only NCAA Division I institutions to have this type of program for student-athletes. This was alarming to me and I wondered why so few Division I institutions had not implemented a program like this. Given the literature discussed in Chapter Two of this evaluation on the unique pressures that student-athletes face and the impact of learning communities, as well as the findings from this evaluation, a program like KCCS can be incredibly efficacious for student-athletes.

Expanding KCCS to other higher education institutions, specifically in Division I, has the possibility for KCCS to become a best practice for student-athletes. If other higher education institutions have a program like KCCS, more research can be done on the effectiveness of this type of program and fill the research gaps that were discussed in Chapters One and Two of this program evaluation. While it is still not clear from this evaluation and the literature whether student-athletes benefit from separate or integrated programming, what is clear is the desperate need to balance dual roles as students and athletes and to focus beyond just the athletics environment during the academic experience (Mamerow & Navarro, 2014; Bell, 2009). The findings from this program evaluation indicate that changes or modifications to KCCS at CSU could benefit all student-athlete participants and positively influence the effectiveness of student-athlete learning in higher education institutions. Since the findings of this evaluation are not

generalizable and are specific to the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at Colorado State University, this evaluation design could be carried out at a different school, with a different group of first-generation student-athletes, and a different program, to determine if any of the findings hold water. In the next sub-section, I go over another type of program that is considered a best practice in higher education and connect it with KCCS.

Summer Bridge

When thinking of future programming, KCCS could explore a way to assess the effects of a Summer Bridge-type program, which is a program that gives students a head start the summer before they start college (Knox, 2005) and determine the degree to which it influences student-athlete academic and career planning factors. One method of introducing students to college life, whether it's socially or academically, is Summer Bridge programs (Tomasko et al., 2016). Summer Bridge programs have been cited as a "best practice" in student success at the undergraduate level (Knox, 2005; Roach, 2015; Stolle-McAllister, 2011). Tomasko et.al (2016) states that Summer Bridge programs are a common method to introduce students to the rigor of college coursework and the study skills necessary to succeed in their chosen major.

With sports commanding such popularity on college campuses, there is an undeniable level of competitiveness, especially within NCCA Division I. Universities in Division I, like CSU, attempt to recruit top athletes and are willing to extend scholarships even to student-athletes who are academically underprepared. Colleges and universities

with competitive athletic programs enroll students with low standardized test scores if coupled with high GPAs (Winters & Gurney, 2012). Though these students fail to meet the admissions requirements of their respective institutions, they may be admitted if they meet the initial eligibility standards of NCAA.

Transitional assistance through a Summer Bridge Program helps student-athletes adjust to both social and academic challenges in college (Bennett, 2011). Frequently, Summer Bridge programs include social support with peer-mentoring programs and collaborative learning through structured learning communities. NCAA legislation requires colleges to provide academic support to student-athletes and there are varying ways of addressing these mandates across institutions (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). For KCCS, the Summer Bridge program would be a way to provide additional support to the KCCS students while giving them a true introduction to CSU. Therefore, when Fall Semester comes around, those KCCS students will have already been acclimated to CSU and the first-year seminar course can start right away with more in-depth programming and coursework.

Further Support for KCCS Students

Continuing the support of KCCS students after their first year at CSU and even their full time at CSU will require a lot more resources, but will ultimately be extremely effective. Expansion of KCCS beyond the first-year may require additional resources in the form of specialists or restructuring of KCCS. Although the KCCS students who participated in this evaluation mentioned that their time at KCCS had a positive impact

on their college career, there is still a gap in research on the benefits of prolonged programming and mentorship of KCCS. Additionally, facility improvements may help improve the environment in which services are offered and additional staff training, which was discussed in previous sections, could help improve perceptions (Otto, Martinez, & Barnhill, 2019). Benefits, in addition to improved student outcomes, could also ultimately improve retention efforts and increase student-athlete persistence and resilience.

Future Evaluation for KCCS

In this section, I touch on future evaluation and research opportunities for KCCS. I first go over the possibility of doing an evaluation post-Covid-19 pandemic. I then go over the prospect of an evaluation on KCCS students who have graduated from CSU and the implications it entails. Finally, I go over conducting an evaluation on student-athletes at CSU who have not participated in KCCS vs. KCCS student-athletes participants.

Non-Covid Repeat

The Covid-19 pandemic created many internal and external obstacles during this evaluation. I was not able to conduct the focus groups or 1:1 interviews in-person, and there was a general sense of fatigue that was palpable not only the KCCS faculty, staff, and students but from me, the evaluator, as well. Additionally, physical distancing measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 presented challenges for the mental health and well-being of college students. As campus activities ceased at college campuses, including CSU, student-athletes abruptly became isolated from teammates and were no longer able to participate in sport activities that are often central to their identity as a

student-athlete. However, during the focus groups, a few of the KCCS Faculty & Staff mentioned that the KCCS program in 2020 was one of the most successful iterations of the program despite being virtual. Although the quality of the four KCCS student 1:1 interviews was excellent, increasing the quantity of participants in future evaluations may enhance the validity of the findings. Conducting a Non-Covid repeat evaluation will also present the opportunity to observe the KCCS classroom and spending more time on the CSU campus to further enhance the findings.

Alumni Study

Although this program evaluation worked with KCCS students who had already completed the program, they were all still current students at CSU. Conducting a robust study on KCCS students that have graduated from CSU will add another level of research to see if participating in KCCS had an effect on their time after college. A lot of research done on student-athletes focuses primarily on their time in college. Adding the extra layer of the student-athlete experience once they graduate will fill any current research gaps.

Granted that many student-athletes are viewed as university ambassadors (Hunter, 2020), former student-athletes have not developed a stronger affinity for their athletics department. This lack of strong connection may be due to student-athlete alumni feeling they have already given back by playing their sport, a negative athletic or undergraduate experience, or not being prepared for life after graduation (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Multiple studies have shown that a student-athletes undergraduate experience influences their perceptions of their alma mater (Meer &

Rosen, 2009; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Rankin et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2010).

Additionally, student-athlete satisfaction with academic support services directly impacts a student-athlete's career decision-making self-efficacy (Burns et al., 2013). This literature extends the need to have a robust alumni study of KCCS to determine if any of these factors have affected their experience after they have graduated. In the next subsection, I go over future evaluations on student-athletes who have not participated in KCCS.

Student-Athletes not in KCCS

As mentioned in previous chapters, not all student-athletes at CSU are involved with KCCS. Student-Athletes are handpicked by their coaches, Dr. Blanche Hughes, and Athletic Support Services to participate in KCCS. Conducting an evaluation on other support structures put in place for all student-athletes at CSU will bring to light any additional factors that promote the success of student-athletes. Additionally, doing a comparative evaluation on the resilience and persistence of KCCS vs. Non-KCCS participants will further support the notion that KCCS is a best practice for all student-athletes. In the next section, I go over future research opportunities.

Future Research

Although this evaluation shows evidence of intentional programming and answered some pertinent questions and provided insight into the lives of a small number of student-athletes at a NCCA Division I institution, there are still inquiries about student-athletes that have yet to be answered. Some future research topics are discussed below. These research topics include exploring other student-athlete support programs

and their approaches, extending this research beyond NCCA Division I institutions, and the role of athletic coaches in student-athlete transitions.

Exploring Other Student-Athlete Support Programs

If we begin to evaluate support services as a separate entity from the student-athlete lens, certain high-impact educational practices have been identified as effective in providing positive educational results for students from diverse backgrounds across several institutions (Kuh, 2008). High-impact educational practices consist of the following ten practices: (1) First-Year Seminars and Experiences, (2) Common Intellectual Experiences, (3) Learning Communities, (4) Writing-Intensive Courses, (5) Collaborative Assignments and Projects, (6) Undergraduate Research, (7) Diversity/Global Learning, (8) Service Learning, Community-Based Learning, (9) Internships, and (10) Capstone Courses and Projects (Ishaq & Bass, 2019; Kuh, 2008).

Through a student-athlete lens, intercollegiate athletics programs spend a significant number of resources to provide additional support relative to their non-student-athlete peers (Huml et al., 2017). These support services include academic advisors, tutors, and coaches. However, this additional support extends greater than the staff available for the general student population and, ultimately, results in a sense of dependence on resources prevalent within the student-athlete respective athletic departments versus utilizing outside resources for their academic development (Huml et al., 2017). Conducting an evaluation based on the effectiveness of these additional

student-athlete support services outside of KCCS and even outside of CSU will provide more context for best practices for student-athletes.

Extending Evaluation Beyond Division I

Performing research at a Division II or Division III school may also produce compelling findings. According to the NCAA (2022) Division II is all about balance. In Division II, Students participate in highly competitive athletics, have the best access ratio to NCAA championships of any division, and can earn athletics scholarships. Division II prides itself on a more balanced approach in athletics, academics, and community engagement. Additionally, Division II allows student-athletes to focus on things such as their academic pursuits, internships, and studying abroad. (NCAA, 2022).

Division III is the largest division in the NCAA (NCAA Division III, 2018). Even with the large population of students in Division III athletics, the institutions that participate in Division III do not offer any athletic-based scholarships (NCAA Division III, 2018). The Division III mission focuses on providing a “well-rounded collegiate experience that involves a balance of rigorous academics, competitive athletics, and the opportunity to pursue the multitude of other co-curricular and extra-curricular activities on these campuses” (NCAA Division III, 2018). This intentional focus on academics sets Division III apart from the other NCAA divisions. An additional strategic initiative based on the Division III Mission are “The Three D’s,” which are **Discover, Develop, Dedicate (NCAA Division III, 2018).**

With the distinct differences between the NCCA divisions, discovering student-athlete support services, such as learning communities, at Division II and Division III institutions will create a more holistic evaluation process. This type of evaluation or research will also highlight the differences between the student-athlete experience at each division including support services, retention and persistence rates, and athletic coach and team expectations. In the next sub-section, I go over the role of athletic coaches in the student-athlete college experience.

Role of Athletic Coaches in Student Transitions

While research indicates that coach turnover can have a negative impact on student-athletes academically, there is a gap in the literature on how coach turnover affects student-athletes' mental states (Johnson et al. 2013 & Johnson, Wessel, & Pierce, 2012). When a coach leaves, does it affect how student athletes persist? When there is a coach who supports programs like KCCS and then quits, this creates a dilemma and causes a cyclical phenomenon of trying to get new coaches' support and persuade them of the benefits of the program. It is a constant cycle of starting all over again, which can put a strain on the faculty, staff, and students who are a part of the program. Figuring out what departments can do to put a plan in place that mitigates coach turnover is imperative for a program's success.

While interventions need to be developed that consider the unique needs of the student-athletes, particularly at a NCAA Division I institution, future research or evaluations should address the types of prevention and intervention methods used. It is

the hope that the NCAA will help to facilitate research and evaluations in this field not only for the purpose of bettering the experience of student-athletes, but to provide a level playing field among higher education institutions, to hold coaches and administrators accountable for reasonable department practices, no matter how much publicity their teams get. In the following section I go over the contributions this program evaluation will have to higher education as well as the actual use of this program evaluation and some concluding thoughts.

Contributions to Higher Education

As the higher education student population has grown and diversified, so have resilience and persistence issues (Berger, Blanco-Ramirez, & Lyon, 2012). Social integration, not academic integration, is key to understanding student departure and lack of resilience (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2016). Without organizational effectiveness, validation, agency, and community building, a learning community does not take full advantage of the potential benefits for students. The benefits of having or participating in an intercollegiate sports program should outweigh the challenges for students to be successful.

Among all students enrolled at public 4-year institutions, about eighty percent are retained to the second year and only fifty nine percent graduate within six years (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Students from underrepresented backgrounds, such as first-generation student-athletes, have even lower retention and graduation rates (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Additionally, the persistence, resilience, and graduation

gap for students from underrepresented backgrounds has increased significantly over the last twenty years (Jolly, 2008). To address the widening inequality in undergraduate success, interventions that are targeted for students who have been historically underserved by higher education must be considered. The implications of the program evaluation and its contributions to higher education, and only fifty-nine percent graduate within six years (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Students from underrepresented backgrounds, such as first-generation student-athletes, have even lower retention and graduation rates (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Additionally, the persistence, resilience, and graduation gap for students from underrepresented backgrounds has increased significantly over the last twenty years (Jolly, 2008). To address the widening inequality in undergraduate success, interventions that are targeted for students who have been historically underserved by higher education must be considered. The implications of the program evaluation and its contributions to higher education as a whole, will assist in closing the gaps of these inequities.

Campus climates and cultures contribute to how students feel like they belong to the campus community. In relation to the program evaluation, over half of first-generation student-athletes stated that they would not likely pursue a four-year degree if it had not been for athletics. This statistic alone feeds the need and purpose for programs such as KCCS. Campus climates and cultures contribute to how students feel like they belong to the campus community. In relation to the program evaluation, over half of first-generation student-athletes stated that they would not likely pursue a 4-year degree if it

had not been for athletics. This statistic feeds the need and purpose for resilience and persistence practices for first-generation student-athletes.

Faculty and student interactions can also affect a student's sense of belonging. Intensive informal contact with faculty occurs for a few students in higher education (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2016). Most of the student-faculty contact occurs in the classroom, which can aid in highlighting the differences in power between students and faculty (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2016). However, a student's interaction with their peers becomes a dominant agent of informal socialization (Luedke, 2020). Categories of non-classroom interaction with faculty include career plans & aspirations, satisfaction with college, intellectual & personal development, academic achievement, and persistence. This program evaluation will use sense of belonging as a guiding principle in the qualitative data collected and will aid in the construction of conclusive statements for higher education institutions to use.

Few programs have intentionally taken first-generation student-athletes' needs into consideration in a learning community design like Colorado State University has done. Prior research and theory developed around learning community participation, however, does strongly suggest that this approach to undergraduate education could benefit first-generation student-athletes. The unique needs of first-generation student-athletes align with the strengths of the learning community approach. This program evaluation and research will increase buy-in from athletic departments, learning

community programs, academic departments, athletics staff, and student-athletes themselves from other institutions.

For almost a century, the learning community has produced a community benefit for a diverse array of student populations at almost every type of institution in higher education (Ostrove & Long, 2007). With this program evaluation, there is a unique opportunity to extend that same benefit to first-generation Division I student-athletes throughout colleges and universities, which will better support success in their undergraduate education. This program evaluation is a call to action for higher education institutions to do more for first-generation students who are simultaneously NCAA Division I student-athletes regarding implementing programs tailored to them and providing support to these students during their collegiate experiences.

Use of Evaluation & Conclusion

For almost a century, learning community programs, such as KCCS, have produced a community benefit for a diverse array of student populations at almost every type of institution in higher education. In today's world of higher education and backed by a strong rationale rooted in research and practice, we have a unique opportunity to extend that same benefit to all student-athletes throughout colleges and universities, and better support success in and after their undergraduate educations. This evaluation explored the experience of first-generation student-athletes that participated in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program at Colorado State University. Findings in this evaluation helped to better understand what specific aspects of the KCCS program

helped contribute to the resiliency and persistence of the participants during their time at CSU. The experience can be summed up in the four major themes that emerged: Connection, Mentorship, Community, and Development. Finally, results from this evaluation assisted in creating suggestions that learning community programs and athletic departments can implement and partner on to improve the experience, aid in the transition, and build resilience in order to provide first-generation student-athletes with a positive college experience and tools for success.

From the research of this program evaluation and the literature review, few programs have been found to intentionally take student-athletes' needs into consideration in learning community design such as Colorado State University has done. Prior research and theory developed around learning community participation, and from the results of this program evaluation strongly suggest that this approach to undergraduate education could greatly benefit student-athletes. Beyond the significant benefits enjoyed by all participants, the unique needs of student-athletes clearly align with the strengths of the learning community approach. Work still remains to test that fit, and that process must begin with increased participation of student-athletes in these programs.

Purposeful engagement activities within the academic and social systems of higher education institutions are associated with desirable college outcomes (Astin, 1993a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that the impact of college was largely determined by the degree to which students engaged in various in-class and out-of-class activities, such as preparing for class, interacting with

faculty inside and outside of the classroom, and learning how to work well with peers on problem-solving tasks and community service work (Kuh, 2001). Studies have revealed that the more time and energy students devoted to learning and the more intensely they engaged within the college environment both academically and socially, the greater their potential outcomes for achievement, satisfaction with the educational experience, and persistence in college (Astin, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Therefore, the degree of student-athletes integration into both the social and the academic systems of college life is an essential aspect of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program at Colorado State University. In conclusion, the present evaluation contributes to the literature by providing a qualitative exploration of the experience of first-generation student-athletes in the KCCS program at a NCCA Division I institution.

REFERENCES

- Adler, P., & Adler, P. A. (1985). From idealism to pragmatic detachment: The academic performance of college athletes. *Sociology of Education*, 58, 241–250.
- Alkin, M. C. (Ed.). (2013). *Evaluation roots: A wiser perspective of theorists' views and influences* (2nd edition). Sage.
- Astin, H. S. (1996). Leadership for Social Change. *About Campus: Enriching the Student Learning Experience*, 1(3), 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.6190010302>
- Beamon, K. (2012). “I’m a baller”: Athletic Identity Foreclosure among African-American former student-athletes. *Journal of African American Studies*, 16(2), 195–208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-012-9211-8>
- Bell, L. F. (2009). *Balancing act: Negotiations of the athletic and academic role amongst Division I-Football Bowl Subdivision student-athletes* (dissertation). University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.
- Bowen, W. G. (2018). Reclaiming the game: College Sports and educational values. *Ever the Leader*, 117–138. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400888924-012>
- Boyer, E. (1990). *Campus life: In search of community*: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

- Berger, J. B., Blanco Ramírez, G. & Lyon, S. (2012). Past to present: A historical look at retention. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success* (pp. 7-34): Rowman & Littlefield.
- Carodine, K. & Almond, K. & Gratto, K. (2001). *College Student Athlete Success Both In and Out of the Classroom*. New Directions for Student Services. 2001. 19 - 33.10.1002/ss.2.
- Chism Schmidt, L., & Graziano, J. (Eds.). (in press). *Building synergy for high impact educational initiatives: First-year seminars and learning communities*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- Choy, S. P. (2001). *Findings from the condition of education 2001: Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment* (NCES 2001-126.). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). Concepts and coding. In A. Coffey & P. Atkinson (Eds.), *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies* (26-53). Sage Publications.
- Comeaux, E. (2005). *Environmental predictors of academic achievement among student-athletes in the revenue-producing sports of men's basketball and football*. The Sport Journal, 8(3).
- Comeaux, E., & Harrison, C. K. (2011). *A conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes*. Educational Researcher, 40, 235-245.

- Creswell, J. W. & Poth C. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th Ed.): SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). *Determining validity in qualitative inquiry, theory into practice*, 39(3), 124-130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. SAGE.
- Deil-Amen, R., & LaShawn Tevis, T. (2010). *Circumscribed Agency: The Relevance of Standardized College Entrance Exams for Low SES High School Students*. *The Review of Higher Education* 33(2), 141-175. doi:10.1353/rhe.0.0125.
- Eggleston, T. & Mitchell, J. (2005). *Addressing student-athlete issues in a first year seminar*. *E-Source for College Transitions*, 2(4), 6.
- Emma, T. (2008). *A college perspective on academics and the student athlete*. *Coach Athletic Director*, 77(8), 29-37.
- Federico-Martinez, G., (2012). *Giving it the Old College Try: Understanding Degree Commitment Among Division I FBS NFL Aspirants* (dissertation)
- Fink, J. E., & Inkelas, K. K. (2015). *A history of learning communities within american higher education*. *New Directions for Student Services*, (149), 5-15.
- Gayles, J. G., & Hu, S. (2009). *The influence of student engagement and sport participation on college outcomes among division I student athletes*. *Journal of Higher Education*, 80(3), 315-333.
- Griffith, K. A., & Johnson, K. A. (2002). *Athletic identity and life role of Division-I and Division-III collegiate athletes*.

- Gould, D., Nalepa, J., & Mignano, M. (2019). *Coaching Generation Z Athletes*, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/10413200.2019.1581856
- Henscheid, J. M. (2015). *It is time to count learning communities*. *Learning Communities: Research & Practice*, 3(2), 1-22.
- Higbee, J. L., & Schultz, J. L. (2013). *Responding to the concerns of student-athletes enrolled in a first-Year experience course*. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER)*, 6(2),155. <https://doi.org/10.19030/cier.v6i2.7724>
- Huang, C., & Chou, C., & Hung, T. (2016). *College experiences and career barriers among semi-professional student-athletes: The influences of athletic identity and career self-efficacy*. *Career Development International*. 21. 571-586.
10.1108/CDI-09-2015-0127.
- Ishitani, T. T. (2016). *First-generation students' persistence at four-year institutions*. *College and University*, 91(3), 22-32.
- Jehangir, R. R. (2010). *Higher education and first-generation students: cultivating community, voice, and place for the new majority*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jolly, J. C. (2008). *Raising the question #9 is the student-athlete population unique? And why should we care*. *Communication Education*, 57, 145-151.
- Jordan, J. M., & Denson, E. L. (1990). *Student services for athletes: A model for enhancing the student-athlete experience*. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 69, 95-97.

- Keeling, R. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American College Personnel Association.
- Kellogg Foundation, W. (2017). The Step-by-Step Guide to EVALUATION How to Become Savvy Evaluation Consumers. *W.K Kellogg Foundation* pp 1- 264.
- Kidwell, K. S. (2005). Understanding the college first-year experience. *Clearing House: Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 78(6), 253.
- Kimball, A., & Freysinger, V. J. (2003). *Leisure, stress, and coping: The sport participation of collegiate student-athletes*. *Leisure Sciences*, 25, 115-141.
- Kuh, G. D., Schneider, C. G., & Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Lardner, E. (2014). What campuses assess when they assess their learning community programs: Selected findings from a national survey of learning community programs. *Learning Communities: Research & Practice*, 2(2), 1-19.
- Lardner, E. & Malnarich, G. (2008). A new era in learning community work: Why the pedagogy intentional integration matters. *Change*, 40(4), 30-37.
- Logan, Kelli A., "Student-Athlete Learning: How Learning Spaces Influence Athletic and Academic Success" (2015). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1038.
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/1038>

- Luedke, C.L. (2020). Lifting While We Climb: Undergraduate Students of Color Communal Uplift and Promotion of College-Going within Their Communities. *The Review of Higher Education* 43(4), 1167-1192. doi:10.1353/rhe.2020.0016.
- Mamerow, G. P. , Navarro, K. M. (2014). Put Me in, Coach! Making the Academic Learning Community an Option for Student-athletes. *Learning Communities Research and Practice*, 2(1), Article 6. Available at: <http://washingtoncenter.evergreen.edu/lcrjournal/vol2/iss1/6>
- Manning, K. (2018). Organizational theory in higher education. Routledge.
- Maarouf, H. (2019). Pragmatism as a Supportive Paradigm for the Mixed Research Approach: Conceptualizing the Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Stances of Pragmatism. *International Business Research*. 12. 1. 10.5539/ibr.v12n9p1.
- Nosaka, T. , Novak, H. (2014). *Against the Odds: Impact of the Key Communities at Colorado State University on Retention and Graduation for Historically Underrepresented Students*. *Learning Communities Research and Practice*, 2(2), Article 3.
- Pascarella, R.T., C.T. Pierson, G.C. Wolniak, and P.T. Terenzini. 2004. *First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes*. *Journal of Higher Education*. 75(3): 249–284.
- Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Advocacy impact evaluation*. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*, 5(9), 1-10. https://journals.sfu.ca/jmde/index.php/jmde_1/article/view/159/181

- Patton, M. Q. (2012). *Essentials of utilization-focused evaluation*. SAGE.
- Patton, M. Q. (2013). The roots of utilization-focused evaluation. In M. C. Alkin (Ed.), *Evaluation roots: A wider perspective of theorists' views and influences* (pp. 293-303). SAGE.
- Patton, M. Q. (2013). *Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) checklist*. Western Michigan University.
http://www.managingforimpact.org/sites/default/files/ufo_checklist_2013.pdf
- Patton, M. Q. (2018). *Facilitating evaluation*. SAGE.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506347592>
- Patton, M. Q. (2012). Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) Checklist [Map]. In *Essentials of Utilization-Focused Evaluation* Sage, 2012.
- Rendon, L. I. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education*, 19(1), 33-51.
- Rivera, C. (2004). *The identification of key factors student-athletes perceived to be important to the college student-athlete retention process*. (Electronic Thesis or Dissertation). Retrieved from <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>
- Rubin, L.M., (2015). Advising student athletes. Retrieved from the *NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources*, <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-Student-Athletes.aspx>.
- Salazar, E., "First-Generation College Students: Sense of Belonging on Campus" (2019). *Community Engagement Student Work*. 50.

- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Sharp, L.A., & Sheilley, H.K. (2008). The institution's obligations to athletes. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2008, 103-113.
- Shpherd, A. M., Wakefield, J. C., Stokowski, S., & Filho, E. (2019). The influence of coach turnover on student-athletes' affective states and team dynamics: An exploratory study in collegiate sports. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 14(1), 97-106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954118766465>
- Smith, R. (2000). A brief history of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's role in regulating intercollegiate athletics. *Marquette Sports Law Review* 11(1), p 13.
- Soria, K. M., & Stebleton, M. J. (2012). First-generation students' academic engagement and retention. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(6), 673-685
[doi:10.1080/13562517.2012.666735](https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.666735)
- Stieha, V. (2010). Expectations and experiences: The voice of a first-generation first-year college student and the question of student persistence. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 23(2), 237-249.
[doi:10.1080/09518390903362342](https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903362342)
- Stufflebeam, D. L. (1997). A standards-based perspective on evaluation. In R. L. Stake, *Advances in program evaluation*, 3, pp. 61-88.
- Stufflebeam, D. L., & Coryn, C. L. (2014). *Evaluation theory, models, and applications* (Vol. 50). John Wiley & Sons.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.

- Tinto, V., & Goodsell J. (1994). Freshman interest groups and the first-year experience: *Constructing student communities in a large university*. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience*, 6(1), 7-28.
- Upcraft, M. L., Gardner, J. N., & Barefoot, B. O. (2005). *Challenging and supporting the first year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Warburton, E.C., R. Bugarin, and A. Nuñez. 2001. *Bridging the Gap: Academic Preparation and Postsecondary Success of First-Generation Students*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Watt, Sherry & III, James. (2002). Who Are Student Athletes? New Directions for Student Services. 2001. 7 - 18. 10.1002/ss.1.
- Weight, E. A., & Huml, M. R. (2016). Education Through Athletics: An Examination of Academic Courses Designed for NCAA Athletes. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 9(2), 352–378. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jis.2015-0051>
- Weiss, C. W. (1998). *Evaluation: Methods for Studying Programs and Policies*, 2nd Edition Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Workman, J. L., & Redington, L. (2016). Developing a comprehensive learning community program: Implementing a learning community curriculum. *Learning Communities: Research & Practice*, 4(1), 1-7.
- Zhao, C., & Kuh, G. D. (2004). Adding Value: Learning Communities and Student Engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(2), 115
138.doi:10.1023/b:rihe.0000015692.88534.de

APPENDIX A: IRB ACCEPTANCE FORM

IRB Acceptance Form



DATE: December 21, 2021

TO: Sarabeth Morofsky, MPS
FROM: University of Denver (DU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1662966-2] Resilience & Persistence of First-Generation NCAA Division I Student-Athletes: An Evaluation of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at Colorado State University

SUBMISSION TYPE: Other

ACTION: ACKNOWLEDGED

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 27, 2021

NEXT REPORT DUE: January 27, 2023

Thank you for submitting the Other materials for this project. The University of Denver Institutional Review Board (IRB) has ACKNOWLEDGED your submission. No further action on submission 1662966-2 is required at this time.

The following items are acknowledged in this submission: the date for the Next Report Due has been administratively extended.

We will retain a copy of this documentation and this correspondence for our records.

If you have any questions, please contact the University of Denver Human Research Protection Program (HRPP)/Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (303) 871-2121 or at IRBAdmin@du.edu. Please include your project title and IRBNet number in all correspondence with the IRB.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within the University of Denver (DU) IRB's records.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT E-MAIL & SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

To be distributed to freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior, and alumni student-athletes who have participated in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports community by email via the Key faculty and staff.

Hello!

My name is Sarabeth Morofsky, and I am a student from the Higher Education Department at the University of Denver. I'm writing to talk to you about participating in my research study. This is a study about your experience in the **Key Culture, Communication & Sports** program at Colorado State University. You're eligible to be in this study because you have participated in the program in the past, and you're a student-athlete that identifies as a first-generation student (the first one in your immediate family to attend college).

If you decide to participate in this study, you will partake in a brief survey (2 minutes) and a 30-minute listening session on Zoom. You will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card for your participation immediately after the listening session.

I would like to audio record the listening session and then we'll use the information to highlight your experience in the **Key Culture, Communication & Sports** program at Colorado State University. Your participation is voluntary and there are no repercussions for not participating. If you do decide to participate, you are able to end your participation at any time.

If you'd like to participate, or if you have any questions about the study, please e-mail me at sarabeth.morofsky@du.edu

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,
Sarabeth Morofsky, MPS
347-563-3794

Faculty Sponsor: Christine A. Nelson PhD/Assistant Professor
Office/Cell Phone #: 303.871.2487
Email Address: christine.nelson@du.edu

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW & FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1:1 Interview Questions:

Trust between the KCCS students, faculty, and staff is crucial to the success and implementation of this program evaluation. With this community-based participatory research, I plan on sharing findings with community members and engaging my community partners in the dissemination process. With a Utilization-Focused Evaluation I will be intentional about the stakeholders and primary-intended users I choose and the roles that need to be defined. Voluntary participation of respondents during the program evaluation will need to be practiced. The participants also have the right to withdraw from the program evaluation at any stage if they wish to do so. A consent form will be given to all participants. Utilization-Focused Evaluations are not a linear process and have an ongoing active-reactive-adaptive negotiation process, which means I will need to be flexible throughout the program evaluation.

1. Why did you join the KCCS program?
2. What was your favorite experience you had with KCCS?
3. What part of being in KCCS did you find to be the most helpful for your student-athlete experience?
4. Which KCCS activities (in and out of the classroom) did you learn from the most about the University culture?
5. Can you describe the type of relationship you had with your mentor? Did you find having a Peer Mentor to be helpful? Why or why not?
6. Finish this statement: My participation in KCCS helped me develop my ability to... (please explain why)
7. What was something that you wish you could've done while participating in KCCS that you feel would enhance your first-year experience at CSU?
8. After you completed the KCCS program, do you feel more connected to the campus and a sense of pride for CSU? Why or why not?
9. After participating in KCCS, did you get more involved on campus? Why or why not? What drove you to be more involved?
10. What was something you experienced while participating in KCCS that was unique to any of your other classroom experiences at CSU?

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (KCCS STAFF & FACULTY):

Trust between the KCCS students, faculty, and staff is crucial to the success and implementation of this program evaluation. With this community-based participatory research, I plan on sharing findings with community members and engaging my community partners in the dissemination process. With a Utilization-Focused Evaluation I will be intentional about the stakeholders and primary-intended users I choose and the roles that need to be defined. Voluntary participation of respondents during the program evaluation will need to be practiced. The participants also have the right to withdraw from the program evaluation at any stage if they wish to do so. A consent form will be given to all participants. Utilization-Focused Evaluations are not a linear process and have an ongoing active-reactive-adaptive negotiation process, which means I will need to be flexible throughout the program evaluation.

1. Tell me about your role, how often do you interact with the students in the KCCS community?
2. What are the goals of KCCS? Where did the inspiration from these goals come from
3. What changes have been implemented within this community over the last 5 years?
4. Think back to when you first became involved with the program. What were your first impressions of the program?
5. What has worked well in the program in the past with students? What hasn't?
6. If you were to pick a component of the program that you feel is most impactful to the student's navigation skills on University culture, what would it be? Why?
7. Do you feel that there are administrative or structural gaps in student support for KCCS? Why or why not?
8. What are some things that you want to find out from the students that participate in this community?

APPENDIX D: QUALTRICS PRE-EVALUATION SURVEY

Qualtrics Pre-Evaluation Survey Questions

1. What is your year at Colorado State University?
2. When did you participate in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program at Colorado State University?
3. What sport do/did you play at Colorado State University?
 - Baseball
 - Basketball
 - Golf
 - Football
 - Soccer
 - Other
4. Do you identify as a first-generation student (the first person in your immediate family to attend college)?

One a scale of 1-10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how would you rate your experience in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program at Colorado State University?

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Resilience & Persistence of First-Generation NCAA Division I Student-Athletes: An Evaluation of the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports Program at Colorado State University

IRBNet #: 1662966-1

Principal Investigator: Sarabeth Morofsky, MPS

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Christine Nelson, PhD

Study Site: Zoom (Virtual Platform)

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not you may want to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

Purpose

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to reflect on your experience in the Key Culture, Communication, & Sports program at Colorado State University.

- The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Key Culture, Communication & Sports program at Colorado State University. There will be one on one interviews with the option to participate in a Focus Group which should be between 20-45 minutes in duration.
- The requirements of the study are a pre-evaluation survey (5 minutes) and a one on one interview with 10 questions [or a focus group](#) that will be conducted on the virtual platform Zoom.
- Participants may refuse to answer any question or item in questionnaire or interview.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

There will be audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups. After the study, these recordings will be permanently deleted. You will be given an opportunity to review the recordings if you choose.

Benefits

There are no benefits to be expected to result from this study. We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your grades in school or status as a student or student-athlete.

Confidentiality of Information

The link between your identifiers and the research data will be destroyed after the records retention period required by state and/or federal law.

Online Survey

Before you begin the survey, please note that the data you provide may be collected and used by *Qualtrics* as per its privacy agreement. This research is only for U.S. residents over the age of 18. Please be mindful to respond in private and through a secured Internet connection for your privacy. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted and password protected. You will be given a code number in place of your name.

Your responses will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password-protected file. Only the principal investigator will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, the list will be destroyed.

With your permission, I would like to audiotape this interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Your name will not be in the transcript or my notes.

You will not be identified in any report or publication of this study. Even though we will tell all participants in the study that the comments made during the 1:1 interviews or focus group should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside the group.

The information that you give in the study will be anonymous. Your name will not be collected or linked to your answers.

Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Information collected about you will not be used or shared for future research studies.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Representatives from the University of Denver may also review the research records for monitoring purposes.

Use of your information for future research

Your information collected for this project will NOT be used or shared for future research, even if we remove the identifiable information like your name or date of birth.

Data Sharing

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information (e.g., your name, date of birth) that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information or samples we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Incentives to participate

For your participation, you will immediately receive a \$10 Amazon gift card after the interview or focus group is completed. As per NCAA guidelines A student-athlete may receive compensation from an institution for participating in a research study involving only student-athletes, provided: [R] (Adopted: 4/30/09, Revised: 8/7/14) (a) The study is initiated and conducted by a faculty member at a member institution; and (b) The study and compensation arrangements are approved by the institutional review board of the faculty member's institution consistent with policies applicable to other institution-based research studies.

Consent to video / audio recording / photography solely for purposes of this research

This study involves audio recording. If you do not agree to be recorded, you can still take part in the study.

_____ YES, I agree to be audio recorded

_____ NO, I do not agree to be audio recorded

Questions

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Sarabeth Morofsky, MPS, sarabeth.morofsky@du.edu 347-563-3794 or Christine A. Nelson PhD/Assistant Professor

Office/Cell Phone #: 303.871.2487 Email Address: christine.nelson@du.edu

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at 303-871-2121 or email at IRBAdmin@du.edu.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

**Printed name of
subject**

Signature of subject

Date

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep this form for your records.