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Research project

Part 1- Cover Letter:

Throughout our lives we all have to face changes that most of the time come with challenges that require us to adapt to all kinds of different situations. My research focusses on exactly that, one of the biggest changes that young adults face on their lives, going to college.

Going from high school to college is a big change for everyone. It is the first time that most people leave their parents' house, it is our first time having freedom, and being "on our own". But, for some of college students the challenges are bigger, and the changes are even more drastic, and that is the life of an international student-athlete.

When I started this project, I thought that because I have already been through what I was researching it would be easier and faster, but apparently, I was wrong. It took me weeks to come up with an idea of what group I wanted to observe and study, and after that, days to figure out what I wanted to find out and how could I make it happen.

After a long meeting with Dr. Boyett about my paper, I figured out that I wanted to observe and make my project about international student-athletes and how they deal

with their transition from a different country, culture, and language. But, talking about the difficulties that they must deal with, and how hard it is to face the challenges would not be interesting or entertaining enough, since we all know or have an idea of how hard that must be, and there are many studies that have already researched this topic. That was when I decided to research about what resources that they must support them, how people that are around them can help and how important it is to have a support not only in the university, but also from back home.

I did not have problem finding sources, since my topic was not so revolutionary, and I also had my knowledge and the experience from many other friends that are also international student-athletes or have been living with them for a long time.

One of my biggest challenges about this research project was that I would love to have more time to make research with this student and collect enough data to bring new ideas to the university so they could help them with this transition. I think this topic is not revolutionary, as I have said before, but it is not fully understood by most people that don't have to go through that.

If I am going to be trueful, this project made me look at myself and reflect on everything that I have been through on this last year. Before coming to the US, I was sure that this would be hard, but it was even worse, and I sure that the only reason that I have survived this year was because I have full support from my family, coaches, friends, professors and all the recourses that the University provided to me.

Part 2- Observation notes:

The discourse community I researched about is the international student-athletes at the University of Louisville. I know that sometimes it is not noticed but, at UofL there is a huge number of international student-athletes from different sports. Since I did not have access or time to observe international Student-athletes from different sports, I observed the ones that I am usually in touch with, swimmers.

In my observations I was looking for the differences in the way that international student-athletes behaved, studied, socialized, and how is their routine compared to American student-athletes. I also focused on observing the differences on the same group but between underclassman and upperclassman.

I made my observations during different times and in different places so I could have a broader perspective on their routine, and behaviors in all their daily activities. My observations took place at the pool (during practice), at TACE (while studying and socializing), in their home (while socializing), and even inside the classroom.

Another interesting aspect that I observed was that international students usually need more time to do their assignments, especially when they are underclassman. That is when their roommates, teammates, classmates, or just a friend can help a lot.

Sometimes they have a simple question like, "can you give me a synonym to this word", or "what is a nice way for me to explain this".

What I have concluded with my observations was that international student-athletes were usually closer to others from the same group, especially if they were from the same country or spoke the same language. Having people around them that are going

through a similar experience and are willing to help, makes them more comfortable and it is like having a family away from your family.

Part 3- Research articles

For my project I used four articles, two about student-athletes in general, and two about international student-athletes:

- 1) Pritchard, Mary, and G. Wilson. "Comparing sources of stress in college student athletes and non-athletes." *Athletic Insight: The Online Journal of Sports Psychology* 5.1 (2005): 1-8.

In this article, Pritchard, Mary, and G. Wilson ran an explanatory study with 362 freshman students, being 52 athletes and 310 non-athletes in a Midwestern university. Their goal was to identify what were the main stressors that Division-I freshman athletes had to deal with, prevalent during their first semester in college, and then study what could be done to help these athletes to deal with this issues, so it doesn't get on the way of their academic and athletic performances, as the most important, their health.

I used this article to learn more and have validated data about how stress is different between athletes and nonathletes college students, and what are the extra stressors, and commitments that athletes must deal with in the college scenario.

- 2) Howard-Hamilton, Mary F., and Julie A. Sina. "How College Affects Student Athletes." *New Directions for Student Services* 2001.93 (2001): 35–45. Web.

This article discusses how college affects student-athletes, using research based on studies and theories of student development and results from the National Study on Student Learning. It discusses suggestions for policies that inscribe the specific needs of student-athletes.

This article was very important for me to understand the good and the bad side of being a student-athlete in college, as well as how the universities can benefit from the athletes' image and results. The source also gives some suggestions for effective programs and policies to enhance student athletes' learning opportunities

- 3) Popp, Nels, Mary A. Hums, and T. Christopher Greenwell. "Do international student-athletes view the purpose of sport differently than United States student-athletes at NCAA division I universities?." *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics* (2009).

For this study answers from a Purpose of Sport Questionnaire for 174 International Student-athletes from 49 different countries were compared to those from 110 student-athletes born in the United States. The results showed that domestic student-athletes see the college sport more about competition than international student-athletes.

This study has the purpose to examine differences among domestic and International NCAA Division I student-athletes' views of the purpose of collegiate sport. Getting to know the different views that these athletes have is very important, since the way that you see an opportunity determines the way that you are going to face and commit to it.

- 4) Newell, Emily M. "International student-athlete adjustment issues: Advising recommendations for effective transitions." *The Journal of the National Academic Advising Association* 35.2 (2015): 36-47.

The article cited above has many issues that international student-athletes face when they are transitioning to an American University. It presents the different view that this student-athletes usually have from college and athletics and the most important, it gives great advises on how advisors and the support system from the universities can help them.

Even though my research is not about the issues, it is extremely important to understand the background of the problems and issues to see what needs to be changed to help this student-athletes.

Part 4- Research questions:

As I mentioned before, the challenges that International Student-athletes (ISAs) face when they come to an American college are well-known, and will come out as students talk about resources, but the purpose of this study is to see how students use their resources to meet those challenges so that the university can build them up and continue solving these well-known struggles.

On my research questions my goal is to gather as much information as possible about what are the resources that the University of Louisville provide to ISAs, how people that are around them can be useful as a support system.

- 1) How important is the support of the team, friend, and staff on the transition process to college in another country?
- 2) How do relationships with other students and student-athletes help international students in their adaptation process?
- 3) How the resources like, TACE, REACH, academic advising, and coaches can help international students navigate the university?
- 4) How can stress interfere in International Student-athletes life?
- 5) How do relationships, and resources can help international student-athletes transition to another culture?

Part 5- Research Methods:

- 1) First, I asked the athletic department at the University of Louisville for access to the email of all the international student-athletes for research purposes.
- 2) After getting access to their emails, I got in contact with them explaining what the goal of my research was and asking for their help and participation. Since time is one of the most precious things in a student-athletes life, I offered a \$10 dollars gift card from Starbucks to the ones that completed all the process. *The gift cards were sponsored by the International Student and Scholars Center.
- 3) To be part of the research, the International Student-athletes had to:
 - Be from another country.
 - Don't have English as their first language.
 - Be living in the US on a student visa.
 - Be an undergraduate student.
 - Not identify as fluent in English before coming to the US.
- 4) If they fit in the criteria listed above (number 3) they would be asked to fill out a survey, where they would provide simple personal information and answer the 5 research questions already listed.
- 5) From all the international student-athletes participating, fifteen would be randomly selected (The interviewer will make sure that sports, genders, nationalities, etc., have balanced representation) to be part of a brief interview with some more specific questions. *The participants selected to be part of the interview session would receive another gift provided by University of Louisville Athletic Department.

Interview questions:

This interview session was made with the intent of taking a closer look on the researched group, taking no longer than 25 minutes. Getting to know more about them, their life, and their story, with questions that are focused in many aspects that are involved in a student-athletes daily life and their transition to college in the US.

- 1) What made you choose UofL? How has your experience been so far?
- 2) What would you change about the support system offered by the University to ISAs?
- 3) What methods did you use to manage the time between school, athletics, and social life?
- 4) When did you start learning English? Can you explain how was your process of learning and getting adapted to a new language while in college?
- 5) Who was the person or group of people that supported you the most in this transition moment?
- 6) Are you close to your family? If yes, how do you feel about being away from them, how often do you get to see them, and how do you keep in touch?
- 7) What was your biggest fear/concern about moving to a new country?
- 8) What was your biggest struggle on your freshman year?
- 9) Can you tell me about a situation where you felt uncomfortable being an international student-athlete?

10) Can you tell me a story about a struggle that you have faced since you got to college?

11) What was the biggest challenge in this process?

12) How important is the support of your family to you?

13) what do you miss the most about your home country?

Part 6- Conclusion

With this project I hoped to get to learn more about ISAs, their struggles, how people from different cultures have different perspectives and goals, how different cultures deal with struggles and challenges, how they deal with all the and changes, etc. These results could also be very useful for the University to see how satisfied the ISAs are, and what they could change.

Part 7- Acknowledgement for thesis

After writing this research project I realized how important it is to have people that are really willing to help around me. Most people say that you can count on them for everything but when you really need only a few are there for you.

I wanted to thank you Dr.Boyett, for all the support and attention that you gave to me throughout this semester. You made me feel excited about writing in a way that I have never felt before. Sometimes small things make a difference in a person's day, and every opportunity that had to talk to you made me feel special and cared in one of the

most stressful and frustrating moments of my life. I really appreciate the professor that you are, and I am grateful that I had the opportunity to be your student.