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Should I Stay or Should I Go? A Mixed-Method Study of the Mentoring Relationships that  
Guide Student-Athletes toward Career Decisions

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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### Abstract

While numerous studies have observed mentoring models in the workplace, not much attention has been paid to a different “place of work”: the field of play for college athletes. Student-athletes experience stress from numerous sources, including family, school, and athletic performance. This study sought to find what role mentors and coaches play on the stress levels and career decision making of student-athletes. This mixed-method research project used interviews with university athletic coaches and a web-based questionnaire to investigate relationships among mentorship, stress, career planning and demographic information of student-athletes. This study hypothesized that mentorship (the number of mentors and degree of perceived mentoring support experienced by student-athletes) positively affects student-athletes’ progress toward making career decisions, and reduces both general and performance stress. In addition, it looked at the effect of demographic status on career decision making and performance stress. While the study found that having a mentor does impact both performance and general decision stress, socio-economic status did not have a significant impact on career decision making and performance stress.

## Should I Stay or Should I Go? A Mixed-Method Study of the Mentoring Relationships that Guide Student-Athletes toward Career Decisions

Imagine being offered millions of dollars to pursue a high-risk job with little employment security. Would you take it? This is the kind of career decision facing many student-athletes who plan to pursue professional athletics after college. Such choices introduce a great deal of stress and uncertainty. Mentorship may help student-athletes deal with making such stressful career decisions.

Mentoring is a world-wide construct that has been viewed in many different settings. Past studies have shown the beneficial effects of group mentoring (Dansky, 1996) and peer-to-peer mentoring (Sanchez, Bauer, and Paronto, 2006) on career outcomes. Many of these studies focus on mentoring within the workplace, whether it is focusing on training an employee as the next executive or teaching an employee how the company works. However, the literature lacks a focus on the type of mentoring that guides young adults through the career selection and workplace entry process. This lack of literature is especially true for collegiate student-athletes (Kimball and Freysinger, 2003). The following research investigated mentoring from two perspectives. The first side took the perspective of the head coach – a potential mentor for the student-athletes – to see how he or she viewed his or her role as a mentor to the student-athletes. Secondly, from the student perspective, the types of mentoring relationships with coaches, peers, and family were explored to understand how they help student-athletes make career decisions and manage stress. Thus, this study looked at the two-sided perspective of mentoring.

This study begins by defining some of the key concepts that are related to mentorship, describing the various sources of stress facing student-athletes, and examining the role socio-economic status has on career decisions and perceived stress. Next, drawing upon past empirical

research, the research hypotheses and the methodology followed to test them are presented. This study is a mixed-method investigation that involves both qualitative interviews with coaches and quantitative questionnaires with student-athletes. Then the analytic strategies for testing hypotheses are presented followed by results from this study. This paper ends with a discussion of the results.

### *Coach versus Mentor*

Mentorship is a relationship between two parties – a mentor and a mentee – that involves the former relating helpful and trustworthy information to the latter with the ultimate goal being personal and/or professional development (D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum, 2003). Typically, the mentor will take the mentee “under his wings,” so to speak, and act as a shrewd counselor, giving guidance to the mentee and helping the mentee with career decisions. The athlete must be willing to accept the guidance. In other words, the athlete must take on a type of process akin to the “Stages in the Coaching Process” model by Berg and Karlsen (2007), which can be seen in Figure 1. In this process, the mentor and mentee must develop trust, diagnose the problem, define goals, implement the goals, and follow up, and this leads to the development of a strong mentor-mentee relationship. These steps enhance the process of thinking, behavior, feelings, and learning within a mentorship relationship. If this model can be followed, then a successful relationship will be established between the mentor and the mentee.

One overarching theme of mentoring that has been viewed in past literature is the beneficial effect it has on stress levels. But why is there such a beneficial effect? According to Shumaker and Brownell's (1984) theory of social support, this mutual relationship between a mentor and a mentee provides the mentee with more than just a guide. It provides social support, which is defined by the authors as “an exchange of resources between two individuals perceived

by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient” (p. 11). We can see this relationship play out in mentoring, in which there are two people who exchange resources. The goal of this relationship is obviously to help support the well-being of the mentee, the recipient. Well-being, according to the authors, refers specifically to the physical and mental health of the recipient (mentee), which is what we are looking at in the study. Through providing the mentee with problem solving information and access to a wealth of wisdom, the mentor has provided the mentee with the support and guidance to be able to problem solve. Therefore, the theory of social support provides the basis for explaining the advantages of the mentor-mentee relationship in this proposed study. However, the actual social support theory will not be directly tested in this project.

Though typically seen as synonyms, coaching and mentoring have two separate connotations. There is much debate in the literature as to a precise definition of both coaching and mentoring, but D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum (2003) point out that “there is a need to better understand the meaning of developmental interaction constructs for the field to advance with more certainty, clarity, and agreement” (p. 362). The authors break down the literature into 13 types of developmental interactions that all fall under the same umbrella of “developers” – developmental interaction involves an interaction of “two or more people with the intention of development (either career-, task-, or personally relevant development),” as seen in the process of coaching and mentoring (D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 362).

As described above, mentoring deals with a mentor relating helpful and trustworthy information to a mentee. A mentor can be seen as a wise counselor to the mentee. Typically this mentor will provide the mentee with information that will help him or her to make the decision that best fits the mentee in the relationship. Thus, the mentor is looking out for the better benefit

of the mentee, not him or herself. The mentor will help the mentee set goals, receive guidance, and make correct decisions based on outside information. As the word “mentor” comes from the name of Mentor, the trusted counselor of the Greek hero Odysseus, one can see the connotation of the word as a special guide.

Coaching, on the other hand, involves some type of tutoring, or teaching of how to do something. In fact, in D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum's study (2003), they found that coaching in the literature is most closely correlated with learning related teaching, which they defined as “the instruction ... of the [mentee] to build expertise, skills, or knowledge” (p. 367). Bennett and Bush (2009) noted that in organizational coaching, the original question that coaches dealt with was “How can we help someone who is not doing well to do better at the work they are doing?” Bennett and Bush viewed this type of coaching as “the helping relationship which is formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in a professional organization and a professional coach” (2009, p. 2). Because sports teams can be seen as an organization within themselves (i.e., coach as the CEO and players as the employees), this same sort of view of Bennett and Bush can be taken and applied to coaching in athletics with the coach as the person who runs the team and manages the players. However, coaching in this type of relationship involves teaching but not necessarily mentoring.

To gain a better understanding of the mentor-mentee relationship with the University athletics context, it is important to understand the perspectives that coaches share with regard to their role as career mentors to student-athletes. While some coaches may see themselves as more of a teacher of the sport (i.e., simply there to enhance the student-athlete's athletic abilities), other coaches may see themselves as more of a guide in helping their players succeed beyond the collegiate field of play into the professional realm or even outside of the field of play. Thus,

it is important to find out whether or not coaches view being a mentor as part of being a coach, or is it a separate entity to some coaches? This question explores a new angle on the issue of the mentor-mentee relationship. By taking a look at the other side of the relationship, a greater vantage of the two-sided nature of the mentor-mentee relationship and how it works will be presented. Specifically, this study hypothesizes that the size of the team for the head coach will have a direct impact on how they view the mentor-mentee relationship. This is due to the “span of control” aspect of the team, which pertains to the optimal supervisor-to-subordinate ratio. This concept can be applied to athletic teams: Coaches with more players have less time and ability to mentor to their athletes. However, if the athlete-to-coach-ratio is small, such as in a sport like gymnastics or golf, then the coach will likely develop one-on-one relationships with the players, and thus the span of control will be far less.

*Hypothesis 1: The head coach of teams with larger athlete-to-coach ratios (span of control) will report fewer mentorship responsibilities than those affiliated with teams having smaller athlete-to-coach ratios.*

To summarize, in athletics a mentor can be one’s coach, but a coach isn’t necessarily a mentor. With this distinction in mind, this study looked at other sources of mentorship to identify other influential people in the lives of student-athletes that include peers, family, and/or other elders in the community. These mentorship sources, along with team coaches, comprise a student-athletes’ total mentoring network. Each source provides unique mentoring advantages, described below.

### *The Value and Influence of Mentorship*

This study focused on two aspects of mentorship: the presence of a mentorship network and the perceived sense of being emotionally supported by a mentor or coach. Both forms of



mentorship play an invaluable role in servicing a student-athlete's health and well-being. Both are thought to aid student-athletes in the career decision making process and help to offset stress.

### *Total Mentoring Network*

Mentors can come from all walks of life. They can be peer – such as close friends, a sibling, or a teammate – or they can be a trusted elder, possibly a parent, teacher or coach. Past literature has looked at the benefits and drawbacks of each. Elder mentors can be viewed as the “wise” individuals who have years of experience and can teach valuable lessons to the younger generations. Numerous studies in the past have shown the advantages of mentoring between an elder person and a younger colleague, particularly in the work place. Hamilton, Hamilton, and Rhodes (2002) conducted interviews with 42 mentors and 26 of their mentees. They found a high rate of success and happiness in mentees. In particular what is useful to the study at hand is that they found that the vast majority of mentors were successfully able to teach their mentees personal competence (drive, self-confidence, and career paths) and social competence (systems, rules, teamwork, and communication). In fact, 74 percent of the mentors in the study helped their mentees with their career path, which is an important aspect of this study in terms of what the study at hand viewed. Due to their findings, they argue that the work place is an “especially appropriate and powerful setting for mentoring youth of high school age” (Hamilton, Hamilton, and Rhodes, 2002). With student-athletes, who are of high school age, this can be important. Their place of work is on the field of their sport, and thus the elder mentor is thought to be extremely beneficial to the student-athlete who is faced with career decision making and the pressures of both school and athletics.

In terms of having a peer as a mentor, Sanchez, Bauer, and Paronto (2006) did a study over a four year longitudinal that put a group of freshmen with no peer mentors (control group)

against a group that was assigned mentors. They found that the mentoring intervention worked well for the students' satisfaction, but it had no effect on GPA (actual academic performance) or graduation. There were also mixed results on commitment to the University in this study. Thus, in terms of the student-athletes, having a peer mentor may have no effect on their decision to stay at a university for the younger student-athletes, but for more senior athletes, they may find more satisfaction and an easier time with making career decisions.

In exploring the total mentorship network, the person looking for advice seeks out his network of friends, co-workers, teammates, family, and coaches to help him or her with whatever trouble he faces. D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum's study (2003) found that mentoring in a group setting is more directed toward meeting long term goals of the mentee through a counseling relationship between the mentor and the mentee, and this concept is helpful in terms of a mentoring relationship between an athlete and a mentor.

To go along with the idea of group mentoring is the idea of having multiple mentors for one person. De Janasz, Sullivan, and Whiting (2003) said that in today's business society, it may be more effective to make use of multiple mentors in order to flourish. Though they are specifically relating the idea of multiple mentors to the business world, this concept is relevant to the study at hand in that using multiple mentors, and possibly even have those multiple mentors be from different age frames (i.e., peers versus elders) and relationships (i.e., family member versus friend), could be beneficial to the student-athlete. By having people from different standings, the mentee could take advantage of the multiple viewpoints of those around him in order to allow him or herself to make the best decision available. Also, having more mentors can lead to more opportunities to see the various types of options that the mentee has, especially if the mentors come from different backgrounds. If the mentee has more "walks of life," so to

speak, to look at, then that may lead to less stress about the decisions he or she will have to make because they are able to see the various options available.

Then there is also the more classical way to look at mentoring, and that is from the individual, person-to-person method. Numerous studies have shown the beneficial nature of individual mentoring on the mentee. Therefore, this study analyzed the importance of athlete-to-coach relationship as one mentoring source that is likely to have the greatest bearing on student career decisions, but it also explored the role of the total mentorship network for providing support and guidance to the student-athlete.

#### *Perceived Mentor Support*

Having a mentor isn't enough. As Shumaker and Brownell (1984) point out, "Situations in which both provider and recipient perceive an exchange as supportive represent the optimal form of *perceived support*" (p. 20, italics in original). In other words, it is more than just having the mentor present. It's about having access to all the other guidance and problem solving the mentor has available. But this is available more thoroughly if the strong bond is there for the mentor to feel free to divulge the information. In sports terms, it's all about having the cheerleader there to help cheer you along. Therefore, there must be a supportive exchange; otherwise, the mentoring relationship may not be beneficial. But in an optimal amount of perceived support, there will be a good relationship.

#### *Outcome Variables of Interest*

##### *Career Decisions and the Decision-Making Stages*

It is important when looking at mentoring from a career decision making standpoint to realize that the process of making a career decision is truly evolving process. A mentor can be useful when making career decisions for that reason – whether older or younger, a mentor(s) can

guide his or her mentee down the right steps to make the correct decision. A past model by London and Smither (2002) shows the true evolving process of outcomes and has been adapted to fit the mentoring and decision making process for a student-athlete. This model has been adapted for this study and is presented in Figure 1.

The whole process begins with the individual's mentoring access, but this is affected by the individual's attributes, such as race, gender, nationality, etc. These demographic items all have some sort of bearing on the individual's propensity to seek out a mentor, in other words, whether or not they will have access to mentoring. The individual's mentoring access affects all stages of the evolving process of making career decisions. In addition, acting upon this process is the mentoring culture of the organization or institution to which the student-athlete belongs. Specifically, organizational mentorship culture is the quality, importance, and support of the mentoring the individual gets from the organizational institution where s/he competes athletically, and it is measured as the orientation toward mentorship expressed by the head coach. It can have a direct impact on the usefulness of the mentoring an individual receives, and it can therefore have an effect on the evolving stages of making career decisions.

Mentoring help with critical events starts the process of career decisions. These are unfamiliar events which have important consequences and therefore lead to uncertainty about what to do. In terms of the study at hand, this deals with the process of deciding whether or not to turn professional and when to turn professional or what job to take down the line. The decision the student-athlete makes is obviously full of consequences. For example, turning professional often results in the student-athlete losing collegiate eligibility, and in the near-term, the opportunity for obtaining a bachelor's degree. These consequences must be weighed with the help of a mentor because athletes may be unsure about what to do in this unfamiliar situation.

In keeping with the London and Smither (2002) model, career decision making progresses in four stages, which are defined in Figure 2. The first stage of the model involves the hunt for information about professional and educational opportunities. Meanwhile, anticipation and stress builds during this early stage of the collegiate career. This anticipation and stress leads to the first thoughts on career decisions. This is where the athlete begins to realize that a decision must be made down the road (whether that is one year down the road or four). It is at this stage where the athlete's mentor can begin to take on his or her true role in career decision making assistance.

Stage two is when a person internalizes thoughts to see what others say and think. The student-athlete will begin to interpret career decision mentoring and believe or discount mentoring. In this stage, the athlete must interpret and understand the mentoring he or she receives from outside sources while dealing with the emotions (stress, joy, etc.) that come with the process.

Stage three is more of an action-oriented stage in which a student-athlete introduces career decision goals by using mentoring and begins to track the process of those goals. This stage also deals with coping with career decision stress. Making career decisions involves having a goal in mind for the next step and contingency plans if the step goes awry.

Stage four (outcomes) is where a career decision is made, and the person has a certain emotional state that relates to that decision. This may lead to behavior change, better performance, and increased self-awareness and self confidence in the athlete. Knowledge that a professional scout may be watching or knowing that a draft is approaching can lead the athlete to perform better on the field of play. Good games can lead to increased self confidence while bad

games may decrease the self confidence. A mentor will help the athlete through the stress and emotions associated with this process.

As is shown in Figure 2, the closer an athlete gets to the deadline to make a decision, the more advanced they must be in the process. In addition, they must also be advanced in being able to receive criticisms from coaches, scouts, or even professionals outside of the athletic realm. The present study will assess the stage of advancement for each athlete's career decision process, including whether an ultimate career decision has been made.

In sum, having mentorship helps one through the career decision making stages. By using a mentor, student-athletes are able to use outside sources in a way that is beneficial to finding out the best career opportunities on their horizons. But, as has been stated earlier, simply having a mentor isn't necessarily enough. There must be a supportive exchange of information and resources that give the mentee the perception of being mentored; otherwise, the mentoring relationship may not be beneficial. Because mentorship will be so useful to the student-athletes, the following hypothesis is proposed.

*Hypothesis 2: Mentorship will facilitate the career decision making process.*

- (a) The number of coach-mentors (coach network size) will be positively associated with career decision stage.*
- (b) Perceived mentoring support will be positively associated with career decision stage.*
- (c) The size of the total mentorship network will be positively associated with career decision stage.*

#### *Stress Management*

Because mentors will help with decision making and career choices, the role of mentor is very important in the life of a student-athlete. They can help to take the burden off making

decisions alone, thus reducing stress both on the playing field and in making career decisions. However, Kimball and Freysinger (2003) point out that not much research has been done on stress in collegiate athletes, even though they may at times experience more burdens in their life than professional athletes due to stress of family, friends, work, and school work on top of participating in their sport: "While many of the sources of stress may be similar, the contest of elite and collegiate athletes differ greatly, and to ignore this fact would be to ignore the fact that the situation in which individuals reside has an influence on their experiences" (p. 116). Thus, this study looks at the stress in these collegiate athletes before they turn pro. Two forms of perceived stress are investigated in this study: performance stress related to the demands and relationships associated with athletics, and general stress corresponding to stressors across a variety of sources (e.g., family, travel, school, work, etc.).

For these student-athletes, having a close peer (whether it be a friend, a sibling, or a teammate) as a guide could lead to less stress because the close peer can help out in times of need, especially with tough decision making. The closer the mentee feels to his or her mentor, whether that be an elder mentor or a peer, the less stress he will feel. The more distance between the mentor and the mentee in terms of bonding, the more stress there may be because it will be as if there is no relationship at all. Thus, it is pivotal to not only have a mentor relationship in place for these student-athletes, but it is also important that this relationship be a steady, well connected relationship. In addition, this strong bond could be even more beneficial than just general stress. If the mentee has less stress off the field, this could lead to less stress on it. Though there is not much literature on playing field related stress, because of the aforementioned reasons of off field stress, less stress on the field of play is proposed. The mentee will be less stressed about matters happening off the field, allowing him/her to be able to focus more energy

on the field, and thus it will allow him/her to have less stress come competing time. Therefore, not only will a strong bond off the field lead to less stress on it, but it will also lead to better performance because of the lack of stress. Better performance on the field leads to higher reviews from outside sources, and thus that leads to better prospects for the future, should the athlete pursue a professional career. But it is more than just family mentors and peer mentors that help the student-athlete through the process. In particular, the coach-mentors of the student-athletes are the primary mentors in this equation. The coach-mentors will have a bearing on the amount of stress in the athletes' lives, as they have the final say on playing time. Less stress on the field of play leads to less stress off it, as I have already stated. Therefore, there is a two-way relationship between the two stress levels, so this study also looks at performance stress as it relates to both perceived mentoring support with the mentor and the number of mentors for a mentee.

*Hypothesis 3: Having a mentor will reduce general stress.*

*(a) The number of coach-mentors (coach network size) will be negatively related to general stress.*

*(b) Perceived mentoring support will be negatively related to general stress.*

*(c) The size of the total mentorship network will be negatively related to general stress.*

*Hypothesis 4: Having a mentor will reduce performance stress.*

*(a) The number of coach-mentors (coach network size) will be negatively related to performance stress.*

*(b) Perceived mentoring support will be negatively related to performance stress.*

*(c) The size of the total mentorship network will be negatively related to performance stress.*



*Demographics*

Outside of the above ways to look at the mentor-mentee relationship, the demographic characteristics of the mentee should be taken into account, as this provides further information as to the effectiveness of certain types of mentoring relationships. To address the question of generalizability, this study investigated differences and similarities across sports, genders, nationalities, and socio-economic backgrounds.

National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) sanctioned athletics vary in “allowed departure” for professional athletics, which is when the athlete is allowed per both professional and NCAA rules to leave college to pursue a professional sports job in his or her sport. All student-athletes are given a minimum of four years eligibility in their sport with an extra year allotted to athletes who received a medical redshirt due to a year lost from injury or a freshman redshirt for a student who did not compete in his or her freshman season. However, some sports allow departure for professional leagues before the four years of eligibility have been fully used. A list of sports is shown in Appendix B. Because athletes may leave early for professional careers, the study at hand will not refer to the student-athletes by their traditional class ranks (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior). Instead, they will be referred to by years of eligibility remaining for NCAA sanctioned sports. Given the importance of eligibility pressures on student-athlete stress and the career decision trajectory, it is examined as a control variable in our study. Past studies have shown the effect of gender on mentoring. These studies have varied tremendously. O’Brien et al. (2010) found that male mentees received less psychosocial support than their fellow female mentees. However, males are more likely to serve as mentors and report giving more career development than female mentors. Yet Ragins and Scandura (1994) found that women were just as likely as men to be mentors. Levesque et al. (2005) found little

difference in what mentors perceived to be important functions in a mentoring relationship.

Thus, there is an open debate as to the role of gender with respect to mentorship. It is included as an exploratory variable in this study.

Finally, not much research has been done on the effects socio-economic status (SES) (defined as a person or family's place in society based on income, parental education, parental occupation, personal education, personal occupation, and social status within one's group or community) has on mentoring. While some argue that people from different socio-economic backgrounds have the same experiences (i.e., Walker, 2007), I will argue that those from a more poor socio-economic background will be less likely to have the mentoring support that they need to help them make the correct decisions while those with from a higher SES will have more access to mentors (see Figure 3). In addition, due to their comfort level already in society, members of a higher SES will have less stress in both life and decision making processes. One must remember that for college athletes from a lower SES, their entire basis of life may be viewed on the sport they participate in because it could be a way for the athlete to "make it" in the world, despite the fact that this goal may simply be unobtainable. Kimball and Freysinger (2003) put it this way: "By the time they arrive at college, their identity and self-esteem may revolve around their actions in the field or the court. The increasing importance of sport to their life may be further perpetuated by an emphasis of athletics over academics" (p. 121). Kimball and Freysinger are quick to point out that although this emphasis of athletics over academics could happen with middle class athletes, in many cases, the lower SES student-athletes are often the first to attend college, and therefore there is more emphasis on them to succeed in life. Thus, those from a lower SES may be more compelled by the allure of high earning jobs in professional athletics. If lacking critical mentorship information and support, lower SES student-

athletes may be more likely to make hasty and poorly calculated career decisions due to an emphasis on “sport over books.” This would be evidenced by a slower progression through the career decision making stages and higher levels of perceived stress.

*Hypothesis 5: Mentorship (perceived support and network size) will moderate the relationship between social-economic status (SES) of student-athletes and career decision (advancement process and stress levels) such that:*

*(a) Student-athletes from lower SES backgrounds will have more advanced career decision processes when mentorship is high compared to when it is low.*

*(b) Student-athletes from lower SES backgrounds will report lower levels of perceived general and performance stress when mentorship is high compared to when it is low.*

### Method

There were two methods used for data collection in this study. The first portion of the study was qualitative and used data collected through interviews with 10 of the 16 university head coaches to explore attitudes toward coaching and mentorship responsibilities. The second part of the study was an online quantitative survey filled out by a random sample of 88 of the 450 student-athletes at the university. This survey inquired, among many variables, about the amount of performance and general stress athletes incur both in and out of season and about the mentoring relationships they form and who they form those relationships with.

### Qualitative Data Collection

#### *Sample*

The university that participated in this study has 12 different sports (Appendix B). Six of those sports have both men and women’s teams, leaving 18 individual teams on the campus. Two of those teams share the same coach, leaving 16 total coaches. Ten of those 16 accepted the

invitation to interview for this study. The tenure of the coaches questioned ranged from under five years at the university to over 30.

### *Procedure*

This first part of the study involved qualitative interviews with head coaches. Interviews took place in the office of each respective head coach and took anywhere from three to 10 minutes. These interviews were all given during the off-season of the coaches' sport. The interviews allowed the head coaches to discuss the ways in which they attempt to either coach or mentor their student-athletes in the career decision making process. After providing a brief rundown of definitions of mentoring and coaching, along with gaining the consent of the coaches, the interviewer asked anywhere from three to six questions dealing with the mentoring relationship these coaches take with their athletes. Appendix C has the entire list of questions that were asked. The number of questions asked to each coach varied depending on the suitability of the questions to the sport.

### *Measures*

The qualitative interview protocol was designed to assess the different strategies used by coaches in mentoring their players, along with the type of relationships they attempt to have with their players. The key variables in this portion of the study are operationally defined below.

#### *Span of Control and Mentorship Responsibilities*

Span of control is the amount of responsibility a coach has in terms of the amount of players on a team the coach has to look over. A large span of control would mean the coach has more players to look out for and vice versa. This was measured by the ratio of players on a team to coaches for the team. In addition, mentorship responsibility is the amount of recognition a

coach gives to being both a mentor and a coach. These last two measures will be collected via Likert scale questions during the coach interviews.

### Quantitative Data Collection

#### *Sample*

There were 450 student-athletes at the university at the time of the study. Of those 450 student-athletes, 91 accepted the invitation to participate in the survey. A total of 88 of the 91 responses were used. One was deleted because it was filled out in such a way as to make the investigator believe it was not done correctly. Two were deleted because they were not complete. The maximum number of athletes on any team is 124 (football) and the minimum is 8 (both men's golf and women's tennis). They range in age from 18 years old to as old as 24.

#### *Procedure*

The second part of this study was the administration of a web-based career questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed various dimensions of those items mentioned in the above literature review including, though not limited to, the dimensions of mentorship, the comfort and resolutions of career decision making, and various demographic data. This questionnaire contained mostly 5 point Likert scales to assess these areas of the study. The coaches of each sport first gave consent for their athletes to participate in this study (even those coaches that did not give interviews). The link to the questionnaire was sent to the sports information directors for each sport. These directors deal with media relations for the sports. The directors informed the student-athletes of the survey and e-mailed them the link, along with a brief statement about the nature of the study. The survey was designed to take no longer than 10 minutes. Appendix D has a list of all questions in the survey.

There were changes made to the initial survey in order to comply with athletic department regulations. At the request of the athletic department at the university, two questions were deleted. One inquired about the sport affiliation of each student, and the second question requested information about the student's scholarship status.

### *Measures*

The quantitative questionnaire was derived from previously established scales and inventories that have been validated in the psychology literature. In addition, a few questions were added to this data collection instrument to tailor it to the specific needs of this study. The key variables in this portion of the study are operationally defined below. In addition to these variables, demographic data was also collected, including race, gender, and years left of eligibility.

#### *Coach-Mentorship Network*

Coach-mentors are mentors for student-athletes that double as the head coach of the team. This was measured by the number of coach-mentors the student purports to have. This data was collected by having the student-athlete list the number of the coach-mentors he or she feels provides support and guidance. The measure was calculated based on the sum of the number of names listed. The mean for this measure was 5.10.

#### *Total Mentorship Network*

Total mentorship network is the student-athlete's entire mentorship network, including coach-mentors, peer mentors, and family mentors. This measure is operationally defined by aggregating the mentorship totals from the aforementioned coach-mentor measures. Similar measures were also collected for family, elder, and peer networks. These were combined with

the coach-mentorship network measure to calculate the size of the student-athlete's total mentorship network. The mean for this measure was 24.56.

#### *Perceived Mentoring Support*

Perceived mentoring support is the amount of help the athlete believes he or she has received from mentors, especially coaching mentors on the field of play. This was measured by two measuring scales adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986, 2002) and can be seen in Appendix D. The mean for this measure was 4.61 with a reliability of .89.

#### *Career decision progress*

Career decision progress is the behavioral activity student-athletes have engaged toward making future career decisions. This is measured by years left in academic eligibility along with a behavioral checklist that characterizes each stage within the career decision process model from Figure 2. Each participant selected the attitudes and behaviors from a pre-defined list believed to reflect his/her current level of advancement in the career decision making process. The highest percentage of endorsed items in one particular stage became the stage associated with that participant. For instance, if one student-athlete chose 4 of the 5 items in Stage 2 and fewer than 4 in the remainder of the stages, he was placed in Stage 2 based on his 80 percent rate in Stage 2.

#### *General stress*

General stress is the amount of perceived worry or anxiety felt about making a decision for one's future job. This is measured using a Likert scale to determine the amount of anxiety felt by the student-athlete in regards to making a career decision.

#### *Performance stress*

Performance stress is the amount of perceived worry or anxiety felt while performing in one's individual sport. This is measured by the amount of anxiety felt by the student-athlete while on the field of play. These questions were adapted from Jenner (1991) and can be seen in Appendix D. The mean score of this measure was 2.59 with a reliability of .75.

#### *Social-Economic Status*

Socio-Economic Status (SES) is the total income of the student, along with the student's immediate family. The operational measure is the student's report of estimated family income based on one of three estimations. The U.S. Census Bureau does not provide definitions for socio-economic status. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, SES will be based on definitions provided by Thompson and Hickey (2005). Low SES is total family income below \$30,000, as they make up the bottom 32 percent of American families. Middle class SES is total family income between \$30,000 and \$75,000, as these make up the middle 32 percent of American families. Upper class SES is total family income above \$75,000. The mean of this measure was 2.41.

### Results

This research project explores the effect that both perceived mentoring support and mentorship quantity have on career decision making and perceived (general and performance-based) stress. In order to measure the variables in this study, questionnaire and interview data were analyzed. Qualitative analysis of interview data employed a Grounded Theory Approach (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) which was used to identify modal qualitative themes, and quantitative inferential statistics were used to assess relationships between mentorship and stress level. Specifically, Hypotheses 1 through 4 were tested using Pearson's Correlation Analysis, and Hypothesis 5 was analyzed using a moderated regression analysis.



Due to concerns by the athletic department about having student-athletes list what sport they belong to, one of the hypotheses for quantitative analyses had to be changed. This will affect Hypothesis 1, which states that the span of control will affect how coaches view their mentorship responsibilities. This hypothesis was modified to be more general, and now addresses a broad overview of how coaches view their mentorship responsibilities, regardless of team size and based on qualitative data.

### Qualitative Analysis

The Grounded Theory Approach to qualitative data analysis suggests allowing modal themes to naturally emerge from empirical observation, as opposed to imposing a particular theory or framework onto the interpretation of data collected. In this present study, qualitative analysis allowed the researcher to look at the mentor-mentee relationship from the perspective of the mentor—in this case we focused on mentorship provided by university head coaches. In particular, the qualitative analysis addresses my first hypothesis, which deals with the span of control of head coaches and whether coaches feel a responsibility to be mentors to their teams. What follows is a summary of some of the key themes and ideas to emerge from the semi-structured interviews.

### *Coaching Philosophy*

The coaches questioned overwhelmingly stressed academics as important to the success of their athletes. Some 90 percent of the coaches questioned mentioned the words “academics” or “education” in reference to “top priority” or being “first” on the list of importance. This shows the importance of education to the mentoring side of the coach-athlete mentoring relationship.

Also important to coaches was the social aspect of their time at school. 60 percent of the coaches said being socially involved, whether it is with friends and family or with community

service, was important to instill in their athletes. Some (40 percent) equated it to success on either the field or in the classroom. Interestingly, only 20 percent of the coaches mentioned “trust” as an important part of their coaching philosophy. Finally, half of the coaches mentioned the importance of skills learned in the sport translating to skills learned in life. One coach made an analogy:

“It’s always to take what you learn on the field and then apply it to your personal life outside of the field...Even this past year when we had a rough stretch for four weeks, every day they were hearing about how they will deal with things like this, like disappointment in their life at times, whether it be having a tough time paying bills or having a difficult time in a relationship or having an illness to a child or loved one. Basically, you ask the kids, ‘Are you going to continue to fight your way through these tough times, or are you going to give up? If you are going to give up now, then it will be easier to give up later in your life when you face these challenges because you have created that habit. But if you stick your nose in there and not back down, then you also learn something about yourself. Later on in life when you deal with challenges, you will remember your days as an athlete and how you fought through tough times, and that will inspire you later on in other ways.’”

### *Mentorship Philosophy*

Coaches were asked to describe their role as mentors to student-athletes. In addition, they were asked to indicate how important they viewed their mentorship responsibilities. In other words, how important is your role as career mentor to the student-athletes on the team on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not at all important to 5 being of utmost importance. Coaches responded with a mean of 4.4 to this question. The lowest score any coach gave this question was a three. In other words, most coaches feel that being a career mentor to their student-athletes is at least some part of their job. The majority of the coaches felt that being a career mentor was the most important part of their job, as 60 percent of the coaches said it was of utmost importance (5).

Some coaches didn’t respond past just giving a number, but of those that did, approximately 25 percent mentioned that they tailored their role as a career mentor on an

“individual” basis. This means that some coaches felt it was important to see if the athlete needed the mentoring first before offering it to him or her.

### *Career Decision Making*

#### *The Role of the Coach in Providing Career Mentoring*

All coaches responded they are in some way involved in helping their athletes make career decisions, whether it come in the form of picking a major or picking a career. Half of the coaches questioned say they talk to their incoming freshmen and set out a goal for them academically in the four or five years they are on campus to get a degree.

“A lot of times, the kids come in and they have goals and aspirations of what they want to be and what they want to become. If I know they want to be something and become something, then I think that I’m extremely responsible to help them keep their eye on that prize. If someone comes in, and they are just here to get a degree, and they don’t know what they want to become, then we help steer them in the direction of the professionals on campus that help them decide what they want to do.”

In addition, half of the coaches mentioned that they take more of a passive approach to helping their student-athletes in making career decisions. They listen to those who want to talk and give advice to those who want advice. This is important in the career-mentoring process, as tailoring an approach to individual athletes seems to be what most coaches feel is the most important and most reliable way to go about being a career-mentor to their student-athletes.

#### *The Role of the Student-Athlete in Seeking Out Career Mentoring*

All coaches asked this question responded that they help the athletes that come to them with questions about turning professional. One coach went as far as to say it was his “responsibility” to help his athletes with the process of deciding whether to turn professional. One mentioned that while he helps, ultimately it is not his final decision:

“I only want to help the kid lead a successful life., so ... I tell them exactly how I feel. That doesn’t mean that they are going to do what I tell them to do, and some of them have made the decision to [turn professional], and they have regretted the decision because it didn’t work out for them. And it impacts the rest of their life, but you know what, it’s their life. They ultimately have to be the one that makes that decision about what they want to do with their life.”

Also, 67 percent of the coaches questioned about this mentioned the importance of education because of the short nature of professional careers, regardless of sport.

Turning professional in any sport is a hard decision for an athlete. It may mean delaying a start of another career or perhaps terminating collegiate student-athlete status prematurely to enter a professional league before his or her collegiate athletic eligibility is up. Having coaches involved in this process can help these student-athletes make correct decisions, as the coaches have years of experience dealing with the subject. However, as the one coach pointed out, it is not the coach’s final call. In the end, the athlete must do what he or she feels is best for his or her family.

#### *Coping Skills for Managing Stress*

While most admitted, once again, to individual differences playing a large role, about 40 percent of the coaches responded “all of the above” when asked this questions. Interestingly, more than any other question, there seems to be a difference by sport. Of those that didn’t answer “all of the above,” it was a great mix as to who the coaches felt their players went to most. The majority of coaches (approximately 60 percent) said their assistant coaches were the first people their athletes would talk to about any problems. “Both [the assistant coaches] are more their age,” one head coach said. “They go to them with a lot of different things that I think they can certainly understand better because it’s more relevant to them.” Approximately 50 percent mentioned peer group as an important source for their athletes to go to.

Some coaches mentioned the sports psychology staff at the university as being a place where they will refer the athletes. One coach brought up a strong point about the difference between larger and smaller universities in terms of pressures to perform well. This coach was the head coach at a smaller university before becoming the head coach at the university in this study.

“Almost every kid on our team here is here to play [this sport]. That’s the primary reason they decided to come here. Once they get here, we hope it’s for academics. Whereas at [my old school], [this sport] is just part of their college experience. The coach has a smaller part in their experience as well. Also, the smaller schools don’t provide what we can here. Once the kids get here, the kids realize that if they need anything at all, the athletic department can help.”

This is important in distinguishing that every university will be different, depending on the size of both the school and the athletic department of the university. The larger universities will have more resources for the student-athletes to help them with career decisions and stress, whereas the smaller ones may not.

#### *Mentorship Needs of International Student-Athletes*

This question was not asked to many coaches, as only a few teams at the university have international students. However, of the coaches asked this question, there was an overwhelming sentiment that the coaches felt those from different nationalities have significant differences in both the way they go about making career decisions and in what their final career decisions are. This means that, perhaps, international students have different ways of making career decisions. Or, possibly, these students have used their athletic abilities to get a free education. As one coach stated:

Some come, and they don’t have much of an idea about what they want to do, and it’s not until they get here that they have any idea about what they want to do. Many of them prepare themselves for careers that, upon graduating, they are going to be able to go back home and know that they are going to be able to secure a good job while others are working toward careers that they hope will land them positions where they will be able to stay here in the US and work. But

it's drastically different depending on where they are from. You know, an upper-class German elite athlete versus a small Caribbean country, third world athlete that comes here, their approaches and the way they deal with things are very different when it comes to the way they deal with career decisions.

In sum, two main themes emerged from the qualitative interviews: the importance of education to the coaches and the acknowledgement that mentorship must be tailored to individual students. Throughout all questions, coaches would harp on the importance of excelling in school before excelling on the field. Some 40 percent of the coaches surveyed specifically mentioned the likelihood that their athletes would not make it professional (either because of lack of talent or lack of a professional league). They therefore said they wanted their student-athletes to take their education seriously. In addition, they suggested tailoring mentoring approaches to specific individuals. Sixty percent of the coaches interviewed said that what works for one athlete may not work for another. In other words, some may not want advice, so it is better for the coach to leave those athletes alone and let them make career decisions on their own. Others will come for advice, and all coaches agreed that it is, in some way, part of their job to help the athletes with their decisions or direct the athletes to someone who can help them make the necessary decisions. Below is a breakdown of other, specific themes that emerged during each question.

#### Quantitative Analysis

While the qualitative component of this project aimed to provide insight into the mentorship responsibilities perceived by university head coaches, the quantitative component provides a counter-point to this perspective. It investigates student-athletes' perceptions of mentorship availability and support. Through quantitative analysis, these perceptions are linked to student-athletes' progress toward career decision making and experience of general and performance stress.

Hypothesis 2a sought to explore the degree of relationship between the number of coach-mentors a student-athlete reports having and his/her level of advancement toward making a career decision. This hypothesis was tested using a Pearson's Correlation Analysis. As presented in Table 1, results from this test indicate a non-significant correlation coefficient,  $r = .182$ ,  $p > .05$ . This finding suggests that the size of a student-athlete's coach-mentor network does not have a bearing on his/her stage of career decision making. Hypothesis 2a was not supported.

Hypothesis 2b sought to explore the degree of a relationship between perceived mentoring support and career decision stage. This hypothesis was tested using a Pearson's Correlation Analysis. As presented in Table 1, results from this test indicate a non-significant correlation coefficient,  $r = -.042$ ,  $p > .05$ . This finding suggests that an athlete's perceived mentoring support does not have a significant effect on career decision stage. Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

Hypothesis 2c looked at the relationship between the total mentorship network and career decision stage. This hypothesis was also tested using a Pearson's Correlation Analysis. As presented in Table 1, results from this test indicate a significant correlation coefficient,  $r = .295$ ,  $p < .01$ . This finding suggests that the size of an athlete's total mentorship network is related to his or her stage of career decision making. Hypotheses 2c was fully supported.

Hypothesis 3 explored the effect of perceived mentorship on general stress. Though tests were run on perceived coaching support to see if any relationship was present between that variable and general stress, perceived coaching support was not hypothesized. Instead, this hypothesis dealt specifically with perceived mentoring support. Hypotheses 3a through 3c were tested using a Pearson's Correlation Analysis. Specifically, Hypotheses 3a and 3c dealt with the number of coach-mentors (coach network size) and the total mentorship network, respectively,

and their relation to general stress. As Table 1 indicates, results from these tests fell short of significance at  $r = -.118, p > .05$  and  $r = -.086, p > .05$ . Hypotheses 3a and 3c were not fully supported.

Hypothesis 3b said that perceived mentoring support will be negatively related to general stress. As presented in Table 1, results from this test indicate a significant correlation coefficient,  $r = -.225, p < .05$ . This finding suggests that general stress is related to perceived mentoring support. Hypothesis 3b was fully supported.

Hypothesis 4 dealt with the effect mentorship has on performance stress. All three parts of Hypothesis 4 were tested using a Pearson's Correlation Analysis. Specifically, Hypothesis 4a said the number of coach-mentors (coach network size) will be negatively related to performance stress. As Table 1 indicates, the result from this test fell short of significance,  $r = -.178, p > .05$ . This finding suggests that performance stress is not related to the number of coach-mentors a student-athlete has.

Hypothesis 4b dealt with the relationship between performance stress and perceived mentoring support. As Table 1 indicates, the result from this test fell short of significance,  $r = -.148, p > .05$ . This finding suggests that performance stress is not related to the amount of perceived mentoring support a student-athlete has.

Hypothesis 4c dealt with the relationship between performance stress and the total mentorship network. As Table 1 indicates, the result from this test fell short of significance,  $r = -.001, p > .05$ . This finding suggests that performance stress is not related to the total mentorship network a student-athlete has. Hypotheses 4a, b, and c were all not fully supported.

Hypothesis 5 used three different blocks, each testing a specific outcome variable (career decision stage, performance stress, and general stress). These blocks were designed to test



interaction effects between SES and mentorship on the outcome variables. Within each of the three blocks, four tests were analyzed. The tested the interaction effect of SES with each of four separate independent variables: (i) mentorship support, (ii) coaching support, (iii) total network size, and (iv) coaching network size. Therefore, twelve total tests were conducted to test Hypothesis 5 (four in each of the three blocks). Given the importance of years of remaining eligibility to the salience of career planning, the following statistical models implement eligibility as a control variable entered separately into the first step of each moderated regression model. In total, only four models reveal significant interactions. Various results from the twelve different tests are presented in Tables 2-8.

The first block of models tested the interaction effects of SES and Mentorship as it predicts career decision making. Although independent variables (i) mentorship support, (ii) coaching support, and (iv) coach network size (see Table 2) did not reveal significant interactions with SES, one model within this block showed significant interaction effects: (iii) total network size (see Table 3). As presented in Figure 7, SES and total network size significantly interacts to predict career decision stage ( $F(4, 87) = 3.31, p < .05; \beta = -.85, p < .05$ ), such that lower income student-athletes with access to a larger total mentorship network showed more advancement in their career decision stages. While this finding provided support for the idea that mentorship can buffer career decision making hardships among low SES student-athletes, the remaining three tests were not significant. In total, this component of the hypothesis was largely not supported.

The second block explored the predictive interactions between SES and mentorship on performance stress. As presented in Figures 5 and 6 and Tables 4 and 5, independent variables (i) mentorship support and (ii) coaching support revealed significant interaction effects with SES.

Tests of the relationship between performance stress and SES's interaction with both mentor and coach support were significant at  $F(4, 87) = 6.84, p < .02, \beta = .61, p < .05$  and  $F(4, 87) = 7.46, p < .01, \beta = .40, p < .05$ , respectively. There was not a significant effect with (iii) total network size, and (iv) coaching network size (see Table 6). This suggests that mentor and coach support does have an impact on performance stress. The other two tests (interactions between SES and network size variables) in this block were not significant.

The third block explored the predictive interactions between SES and mentorship on general stress. Although independent variables (i) mentorship support (see Table 7), (ii) coaching support, and (iii) total network size did not reveal significant interactions with SES, one model within this block showed significant interaction effects: (iv) coach network size. As shown in Figure 4 and Table 8, tests on the relationship between general stress and the interaction of SES with the coaching network size were significant at  $F(4, 87) = 2.53, p < .05, \beta = .09, p < .05$ . This suggests that general stress has an impact on the interaction of SES and coaching network size. The other three tests in the block were not significant.

### Discussion

This research project looked at the mentoring relationships that student-athletes at a large, southern university have with those both within the university (i.e., coaches, fellow athletes) and those outside (i.e., family friends) to understand the impact mentoring has on stress management and career decisions. In addition, it looks at the roles socio-economic status and coaches play in these variables.

A number of interesting findings emerged from both the qualitative and quantitative research method. First, head coaches in general believed they had mentorship responsibilities to their athletes. This seemed to be the case. All head coaches surveyed reported at least a three on

a scale of one-to-five. The majority reported a five. There was no difference between large team coaches and small team coaches. This shows that head coaches of all teams view themselves as more than just a coach. They see themselves as mentors actively taking a role in helping their athletes make career decisions.

This finding has implications for the student-athletes. The student-athletes can know that they can count on at least one more mentor (their coach) to help them and give them sage advice about the future. A coach with that “been there, done that” mentality will be able to help his student-athletes figure out the right path for the future, whatever it may hold. Student-athletes, no matter the sport, can know that they can look at their coach as a source of advice if they need it at any time.

While the findings on the mentor side of the relationship (Hypothesis 1) were fairly straight-forward, those on the mentee side (Hypotheses 2-5) were more complicated. One problem with the results came from the career decision stages. The researcher saw career decision stages as linear, but, as results and further research show, the stages of making a career decision are far from linear. There is no outline for making decisions, especially when dealing with career decisions. While researchers placed student-athletes into stages based on a pre-defined checklist, this method quickly became a burden. Student-athletes, and college students in general, may take two steps forward and three steps back in the career decision making process yet still be in an advanced stage. This project did not allow for that thinking.

Another finding hits at the point that student-athletes do use outside mentoring sources to help with their career decision making. In addition, just the perception of being mentored (which often means actual mentoring taking place) helps these student-athletes through the career

decision making process. This goes to show how important having mentors in the lives of these student-athletes may be in helping them along the path of making a career decision.

While Hypothesis 2a was not supported, the years remaining of eligibility factor (which relates to years left in school) was nearly supported. This shows that the number of years left has an effect on where the student-athlete is in the career decision making process. This is important because mentors can provide support and guidance, especially along the later stages, as to what type of career options are available to the student-athlete. However, the coach-mentors (who may not be quite as adept at helping to make career decision options as other, outside mentoring sources, such as a trusted peer or family member) did not seem to help with the career decision making process. This shows that student-athletes rely more on other sources for mentoring.

Overall, tests found the importance of mentorship to the career decision making process. Those who felt they had more mentoring support had less general stress. This means having the feeling of being guided puts less stress in the lives of the student-athletes, something that can have major implications in the lives of these student-athletes.

In addition, coach mentors will be more significant in helping with performance stress than would the remaining mentors outside of the sport. While coach-mentors didn't have a significant effect on the performance stress of the student-athletes, it did approach significance, showing that coach-mentors do have an impact on helping alleviate some of the performance stress in the student-athletes' lives. This finding suggests that with a larger sample size, there could be a significant effect of coach mentors and total mentors on performance, but the sample at hand did not have a significant effect.

In terms of Hypothesis 5 with the career list, which dealt with mentorship (quality and quantity) moderating the relationship between SES of student-athletes and career decision

(advancement process and stress levels), participants may have shied away from answering Stage 1 or 2 items because they no longer applied to them. The question was worded in such a way that may have been confusing: “In terms of making a career decision, which of the following statements best describe your thoughts and behaviors? Please select all that apply.” Participants may have thought of only checking the items that currently apply rather than those that have applied also in the past, as the question was asking. For this reason, the researchers decided it would be best to place the participants in a stage based upon the highest percentage of endorsed items in a particular stage, as described in the methods section. This thinking of the career decision making process as linear became a limitation, as will be discussed shortly.

The hypotheses here were not confirmed. Of the 12 tests, only four were significant. The four that were significant found that the interaction of SES and mentor support and the interaction of SES and coach support when regressed on performance stress do have a significant impact. In addition, when SES interacts with coaching network size when regressed on general stress, there was a significant interaction. This may have to do with the difference between perceived mentoring (mentor support and coach support) versus actual mentoring (total and coaching network sizes). When it comes to performance, athletes will be more stress if they have less perceived mentoring support (as was shown by the results). When it comes to general stress, though, the same does not apply.

This leaves the broad question of whether mentorship has an impact on the overall stress levels of student-athletes. While much more research needs to be done on this question, this study is a good building point. There is no doubt that mentoring has some positive interaction with the student-athletes’ stress levels. Those with more mentoring support reported lower levels of stress, especially when it came to making career decisions. These findings are significant in

that it shows the importance of mentoring in the lives of student-athletes. Mentoring helps them not only incur less stress during their sport, but it also helps them in making important decisions regarding their future careers, whether that be turning professional or entering the work force.

With mentoring, these athletes can be helped along the right path.

There is still much left to be found, though. This does open the door for future research. This future research needs to be done at different sized universities in different geographical areas of the nation in order to gain a larger overall sample of student-athletes. This will allow a broader, all-encompassing look at what needs to be done to help this population in the future. Research must also be done to see what types of mentoring are most effective and what types of programs can be put in place to help these student-athletes find the correct type of mentoring. Future research also needs to look deeper into the flip side of the mentoring coin and see more of what the mentors do to help those they mentor. In addition, a larger sample of student-athletes should be used in order to allow for a more random sample. Finally, future research should use multiple universities with a varied size of athletic departments to be able to more greatly generalize the findings. Multiple universities would allow not only a better sample size but also a more random sample of data on which to base conclusions.

While the research was successful in discovering answers to the hypotheses at hand, there were limitations to the project. First of all, the researchers were short on time to administer the survey and interview head coaches. There was also the problem of not knowing which sports responded to the survey. It may be that some sports were more likely to respond than others, leaving a non-random sample of student-athletes. The reason for this omission was due to the sensitivity of the data. Researchers were asked by the participating university to omit any questions about sport on the final survey. In addition, this study was limited in scope to one

southern university with a large athletic program. This limitation restricts some generalization; however, the researchers believe the findings here can be generalized to most universities resembling the one at hand.

Mentoring is becoming increasingly important in society as the pressures of “making it big” are plastered everywhere, from TV to the internet and various other media. Impressionable minds need someone to help mold them and help them make the correct career decisions, and mentors are the perfect source of that guidance.

Earlier, I provided a quote that I would like to reiterate, as it shows the importance of my study to not only the population of student-athletes involved but to the entire community of young adults making career decisions. Kimball and Freysinger (2003) said this: “While many of the sources of stress may be similar, the contest of elite and collegiate athletes differ greatly, and to ignore this fact would be to ignore the fact that the situation in which individuals reside has an influence on their experiences” (p. 116). As researchers, we have lacked a discussion of student-athletes. This research puts forth solid evidence that mentorship is strongly needed in the lives of these student-athletes, and it shows that the universities and the NCAA needs to get involved in establishing programs for these young, future stars of not only the playing field but the business world.

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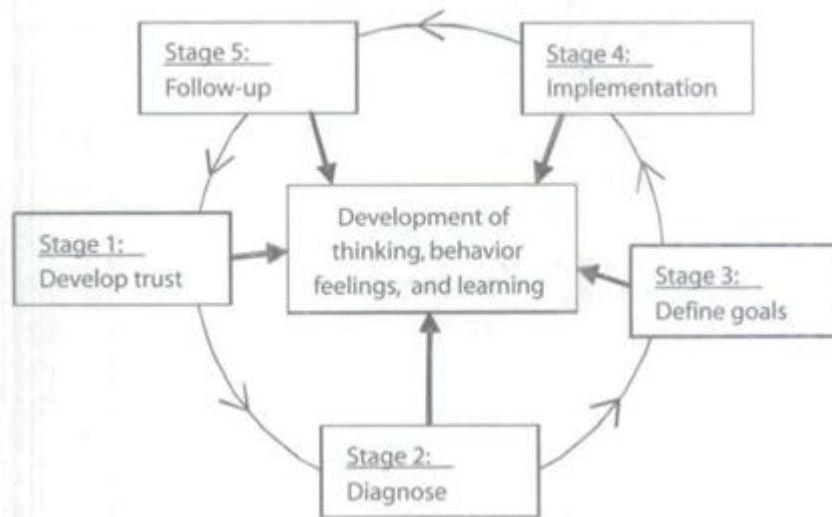
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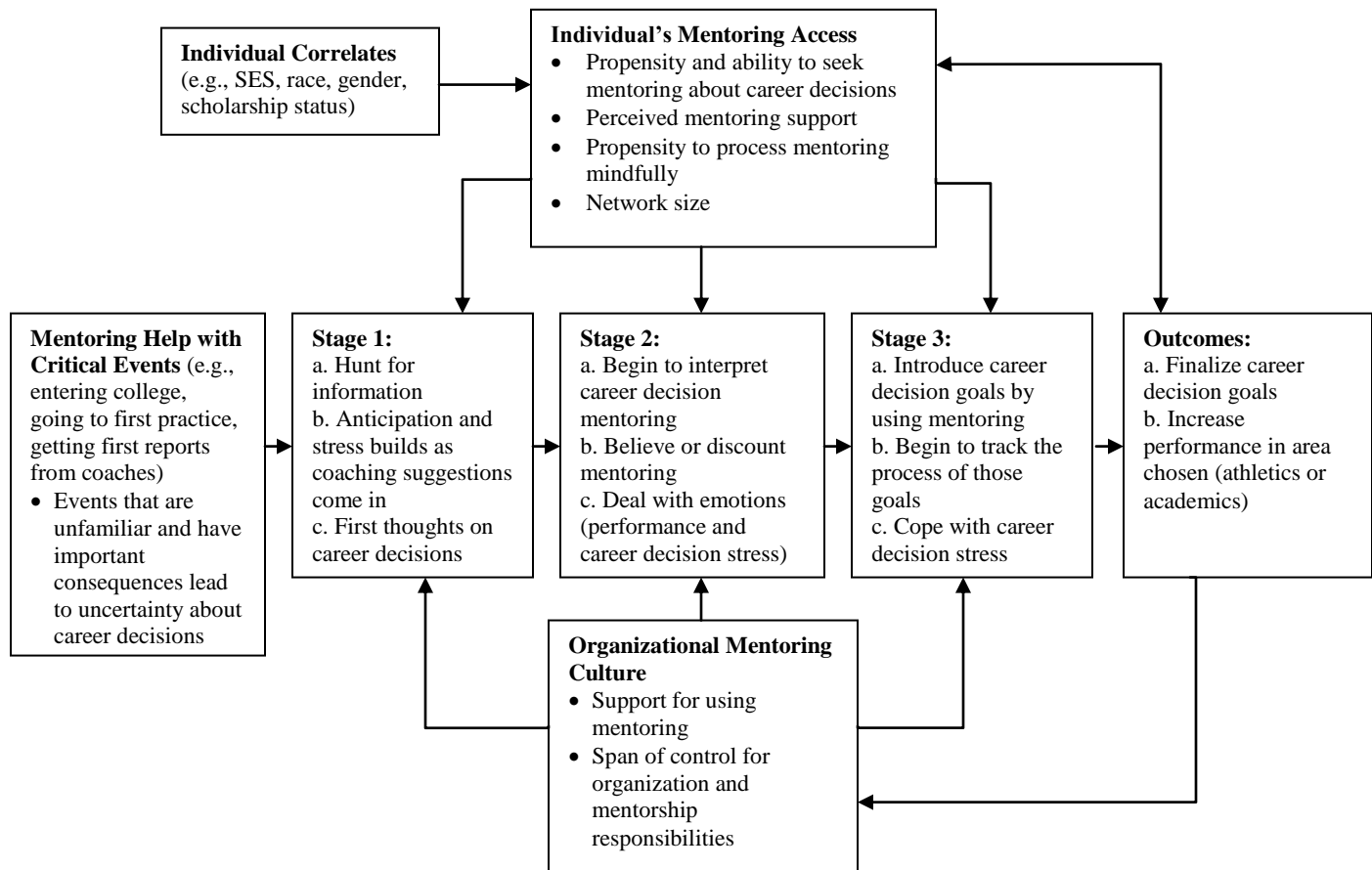
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*Figure 1.* Within the process of making a decision, there is also the process of the mentor-mentee relationship coming to bloom. This figure, taken from Berg and Karlsen (2007), shows how the process of a strong mentor-mentee relationship forms in order to help the mentee reach his or her career decision making goals.

**Exhibit 5.** Stages in the Coaching Process (Berg, 2006)



*Figure 2.* Career decision making is a complicated process that evolves over numerous stages and involves not only the individual receiving mentoring help but also the individual's ability to take and receive the mentoring in a helpful manner. With the mentor-mentee relationship, the mentee must go through these steps with his or her mentor before reaching an outcome. In addition, he or she must be able to use mentoring in order to help make career decisions. This model is adapted from London and Smither (2002).



*Figure 3.* Mentorship will moderate the relationship between social-economic status (SES) of student-athletes and career decision (advancement process and stress levels). This figure shows that dynamic.

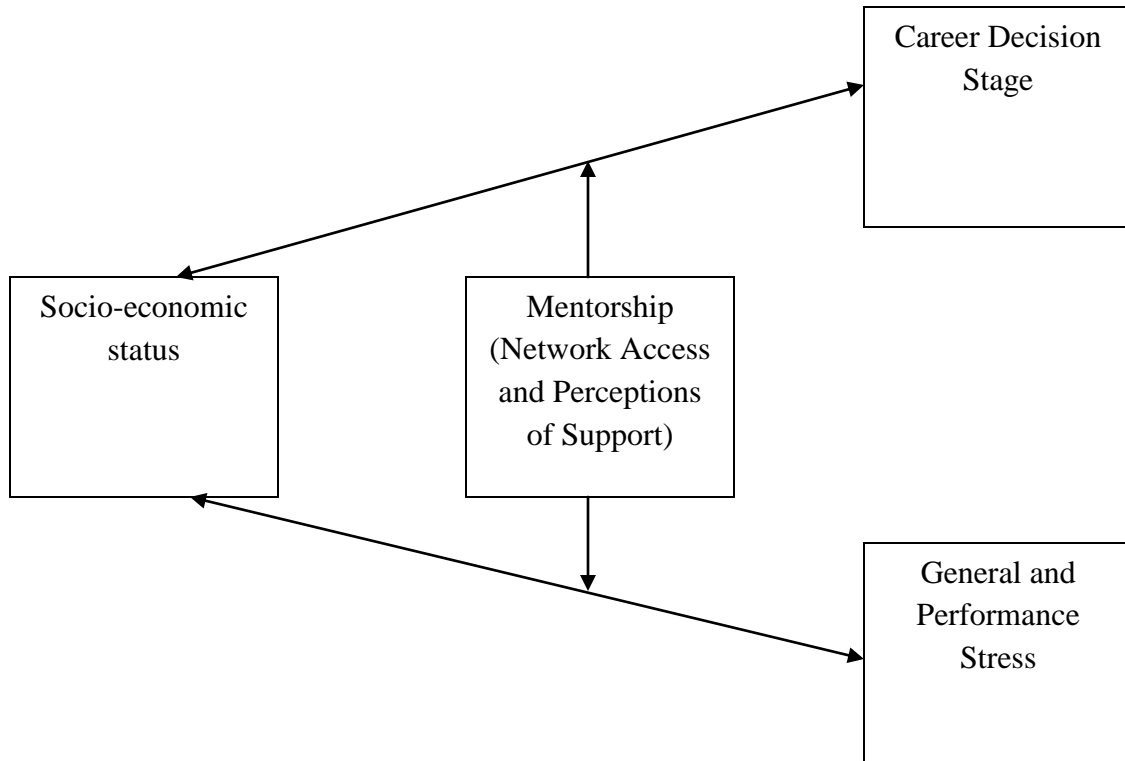


Figure 4. Significant interaction between socio-economic status and coach network size on general stress.

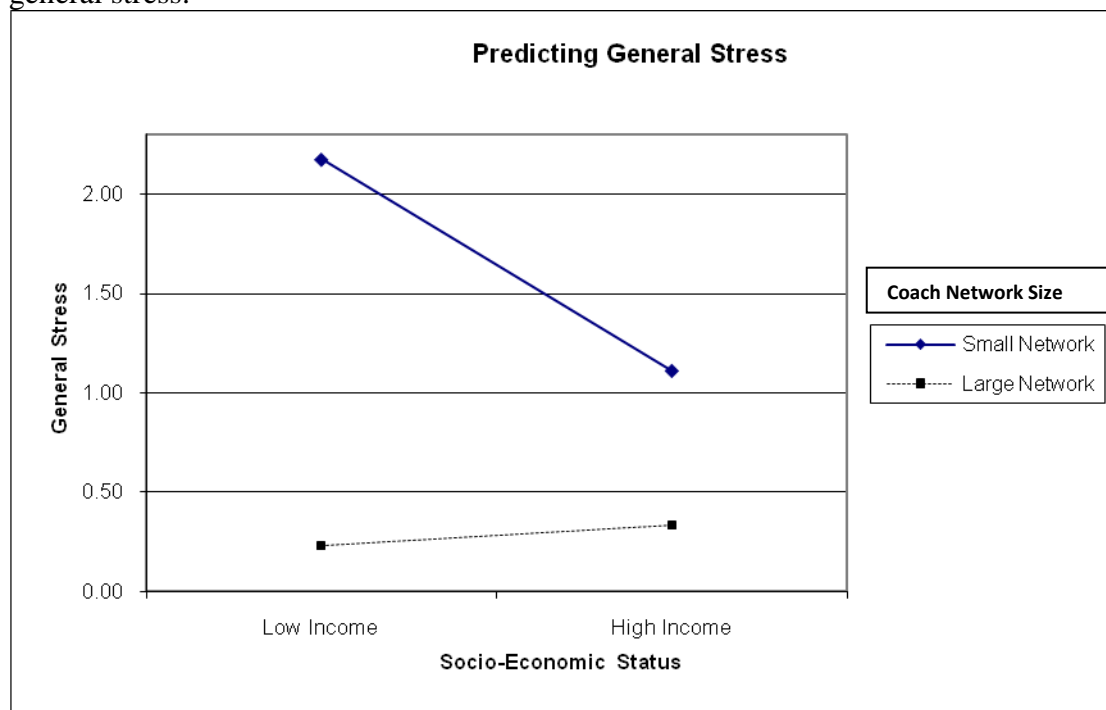


Figure 5. Significant interaction between socio-economic status and perceived mentor support on performance stress.

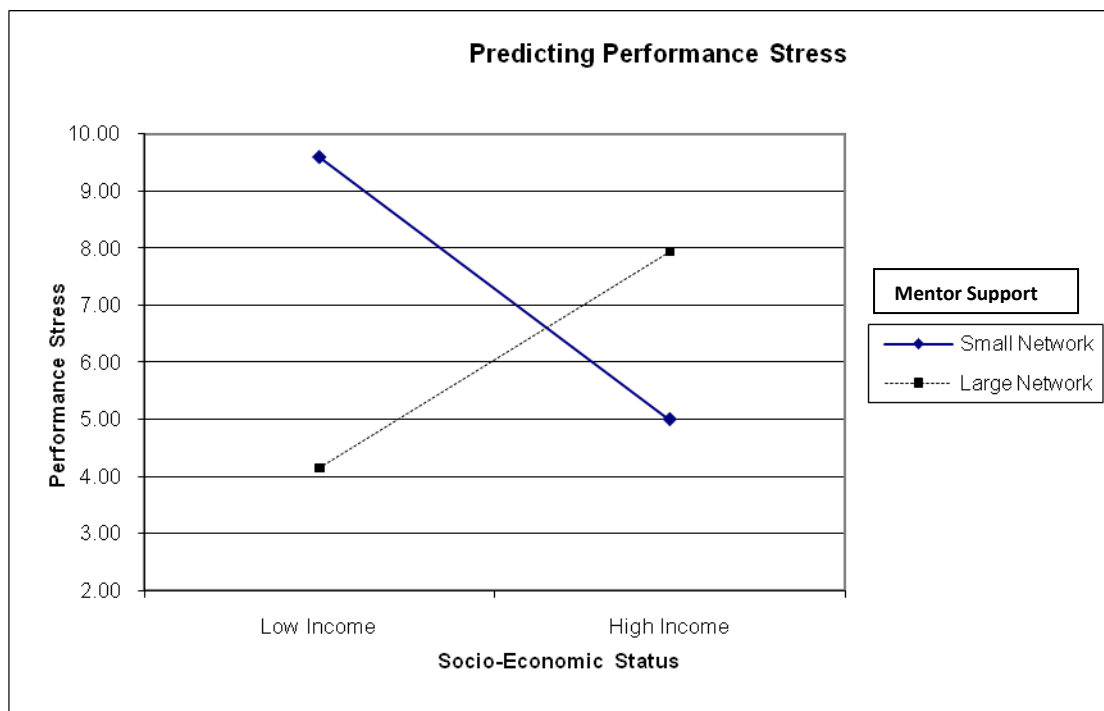


Figure 6. Significant interaction between socio-economic status and coach support on performance stress.

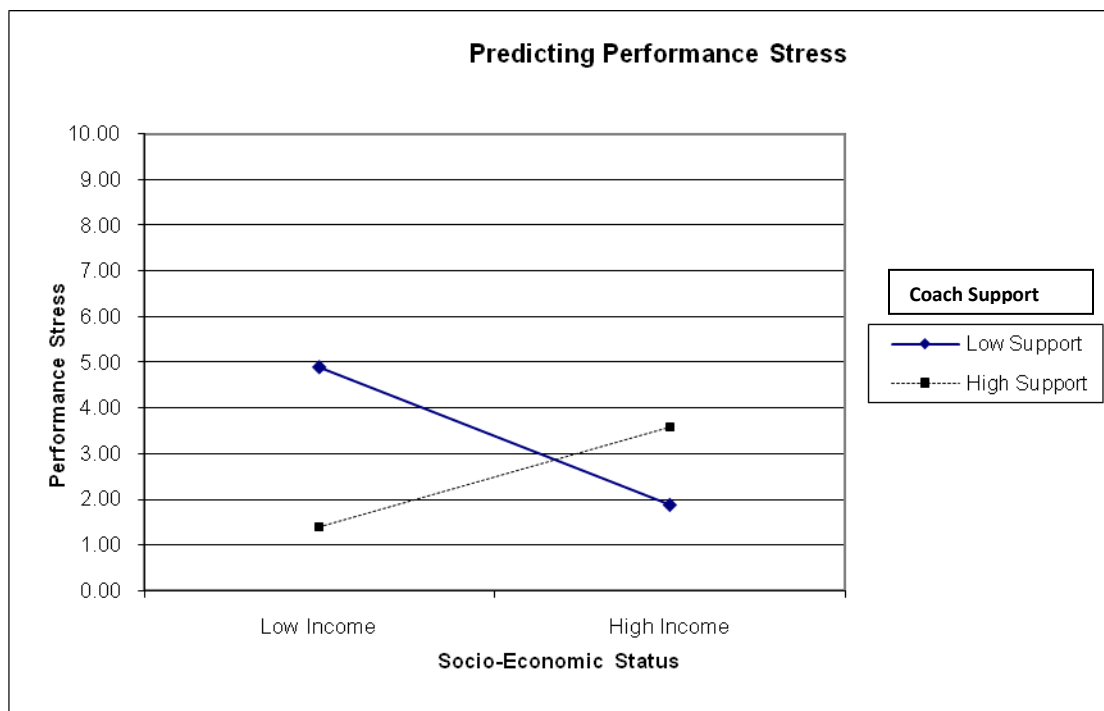


Figure 7. Significant interaction between socio-economic status and total network size on career decision stage.

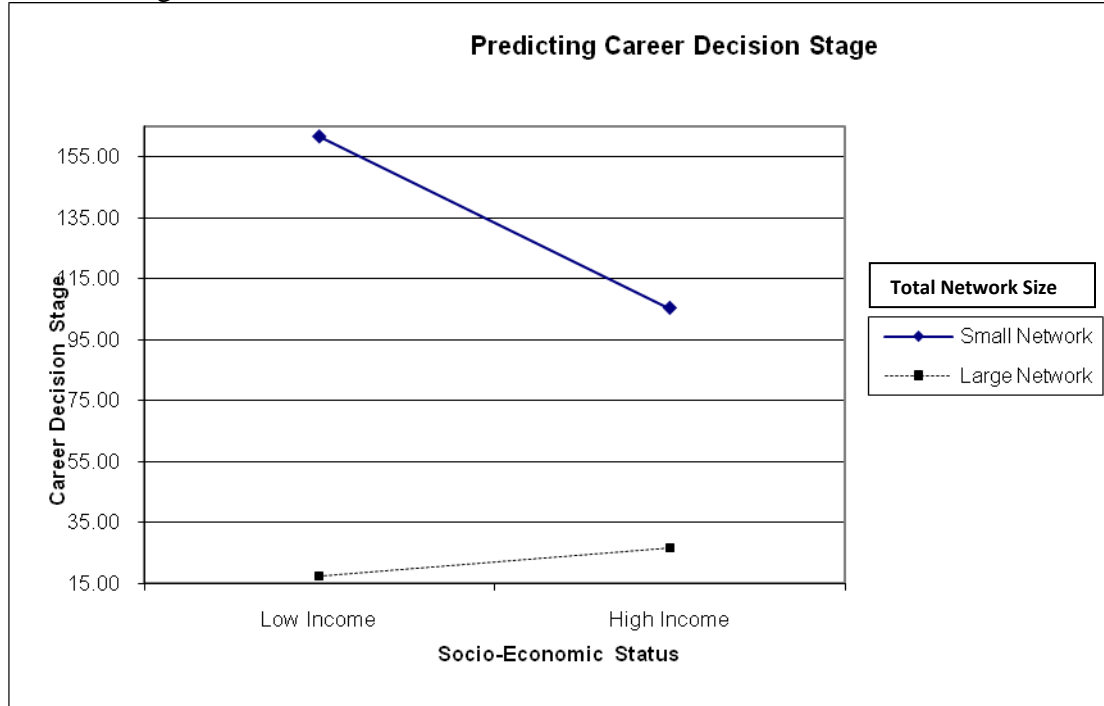




Table 1

*Scale, Correlation, Reliability, and Descriptive Analyses*

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	88	19.83	1.51												
2. General stress	88	2.61	.75	-.001	<b>(.88)</b>										
3. Performance stress	88	2.59	.83	.111	.593**	<b>(.75)</b>									
4. Mentor support	87	4.61	.43	-.015	-.225*	-.004	<b>(.89)</b>								
5. Coach support	88	4.37	.68	-.136	-.320**	-.146	.558**	<b>(.89)</b>							
6. Mentorship network size	88	19.45	17.04	-.089	-.067	.035	.133	.021							
7. Coach network size	88	5.10	3.46	-.168	-.118	-.178	.003	.084	.188						
8. Total network size	88	24.56	18.02	-.116	-.086	-.001	.126	.036	.982**	.370**					
9. Socio-economic status	88	2.41	.768	-.058	-.133	-.150	.205	.188	.048	.036	.052				
10. Career decision anxiety	88	2.80	1.05	.122	.331**	.334**	-.124	-.039	.103	-.060	.086	-.038			
11. Thoughts about career	88	1.88	1.14	-.059	-.242*	-.250*	.143	.095	-.031	.058	-.018	-.098	-.174		
12. Career decision stage	88	2.55	.97	-.061	.044	.019	-.042	-.079	.275**	.182	.295**	.021	-.103	.031	
13. Eligibility	88	2.63	1.23	-.803**	-.167	-.172	.029	.198	.088	.160	.114	.168	-.121	.122	.007

**Notes:** Internal consistency reliability is presented in bold on the diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 2

*Hierarchical Linear Regression Model Estimates in the Prediction of Career Decision Stage (Hypothesis 5a Coach Network Size)*

	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$R^2$ total	F (d.f.)
			.76	3.20 (2,4)
Step 1: Eligibility	.5	.75		
Step 2: Coach Network Size	-.17	.01		

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 3

*Multiple Moderated Regression Analyses within Prediction of Career Decision Stage  
(Hypothesis 5a Total Network Size)*

<b><u>Models</u></b>	<b><u><math>\beta</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>\Delta R^2</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>R^2</math></u> <b><u>total</u></b></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>
<b>Step 1</b> Eligibility	-.01		.00	.00
<b>Step 2</b>				
Socio-economic status (SES)	.01	.09		
Total Network Size (TNet)	.30*			
<b>Step 3</b>		.05	.14*	3.31*
Socio-economic status (SES)	.31*			
Total Network Size (TNet)	1.04**			
Interaction (SES X TNet)	-.85*			

Table 4

*Multiple Moderated Regression Analyses within Prediction of Performance Stress (Hypothesis 5a Mentor Support)*

<b><u>Models</u></b>	<b><u><math>\beta</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>\Delta R^2</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>R^2</math> total</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>
<b>Step 1</b> Eligibility	-.11		.03	2.37
<b>Step 2</b>		.03	.05	1.14
Eligibility	-.09			
Socio-economic status	-.12			
Mentor Support	-.19			
<b>Step 3</b>		.07*	.13*	6.84*
Eligibility	-.09			
Socio-economic status	-.08			
Mentor Support	-.01			
Interaction (SES X M_Support)	.61*			

Table 5

*Multiple Moderated Regression Analyses within Prediction of Performance Stress (Hypothesis 5a Coach Support)*

<b><u>Models</u></b>	<b><u><math>\beta</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>\Delta R^2</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>R^2</math> total</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>
<b>Step 1</b> Eligibility	-.12		.032	2.63
<b>Step 2</b>		.02	.05	1.08
Eligibility	-.09			
Socio-economic status	-.12			
Coach Support	-.12			
<b>Step 3</b>		.08**	.13**	7.46**
Eligibility	-.09			
Socio-economic status	-.08			
Coach Support	-.03			
Interaction (SES X C_Support)	.40*			

Table 6

*Multiple Moderated Regression Analyses within Prediction of Performance Stress (Hypothesis 5a Total Network Size)*

<b><u>Models</u></b>	<b><u><math>\beta</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>\Delta R^2</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>R^2</math> total</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>
<b>Step 1</b> Eligibility	-.11		.03	2.63
<b>Step 2</b>		.02	.05	1.33
Eligibility	-.10			
Socio-economic status	-.14			
Total Network Size	.00			
<b>Step 3</b>		.00	.05	.99
Eligibility	-.11			
Socio-economic status	-.14			
Total Network Size	.00			
Interaction (SES X TNet)	.00			

Table 7

*Multiple Moderated Regression Analyses within Prediction of General Stress (Hypothesis 5a Mentor Support)*

<b><u>Models</u></b>	<b><u><math>\beta</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>\Delta R^2</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>R^2</math> total</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>
<b>Step 1</b> Eligibility	-.11		.03	2.73
<b>Step 2</b>		.11	.14	5.15
Eligibility	-.07			
Socio-economic status	-.04			
Mentor Support	-.56			
<b>Step 3</b>		.02	.16	2.25
Eligibility	-.07			
Socio-economic status	-.02			
Mentor Support	-.47			
Interaction (SES X M_Support)	.31			

Table 8

*Multiple Moderated Regression Analyses within Prediction of General Stress (Hypothesis 5b Coach Network Size)*

<b><u>Models</u></b>	<b><u><math>\beta</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>\Delta R^2</math></u></b>	<b><u><math>R^2</math> total</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>
<b>Step 1</b> Eligibility	-.10		.03	2.48
<b>Step 2</b>		.02	.05	1.40
Eligibility	-.08			
Socio-economic status	-.10			
Coach Network Size	.02			
<b>Step 3</b>		.06*	.11*	2.53*
Eligibility	-.06			
Socio-economic status	-.08			
Coach Network Size	-.01			
Interaction (SEX X CNet)	.09*			



## Appendix A

A list of my hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1: The head coach of teams with larger athlete-to-coach ratios (span of control) will report fewer mentorship responsibilities than those affiliated with teams having smaller athlete-to-coach ratios.*

*Hypothesis 2: Mentorship will facilitate the career decision making process.*

*(a) The number of coach-mentors (coach network size) will be positively associated with career decision process advancement.*

*(b) Perceived mentoring support will be positively associated with career decision stage.*

*(c) The size of the total mentorship network will be positively associated with career decision stage.*

*Hypothesis 3: Having a mentor will reduce general stress.*

*(a) The number of coach-mentors (coach network size) will be negatively related to general stress.*

*(b) Perceived mentoring support will be negatively related to general stress.*

*(c) The size of the total mentorship network will be negatively related to general stress.*

*Hypothesis 4: Having a mentor will reduce performance stress.*

*(a) The number of coach-mentors (coach network size) will be negatively related to performance stress.*

*(b) Perceived mentoring support will be negatively related to performance stress.*

*(c) The size of the total mentorship network will be negatively related to performance stress.*

*Hypothesis 5: Mentorship (perceived support and network size) will moderate the relationship between social-economic status (SES) of student-athletes and career decision (advancement process and stress levels) such that:*

- (a) Student-athletes from lower SES backgrounds will have more advanced career decision processes when mentorship is high compared to when it is low.*
- (b) Student-athletes from lower SES backgrounds will report lower levels of perceived general and performance stress when mentorship is high compared to when it is low.*

## Appendix B

A list of sports:

1. Baseball
2. Men's Basketball
3. Women's Basketball
4. Men's Cross Country
5. Women's Cross Country
6. Football
7. Men's Golf
8. Women's Golf
9. Gymnastics
10. Soccer
11. Softball
12. Men's Swimming and Diving
13. Women's Swimming and Diving
14. Men's Tennis
15. Women's Tennis
16. Men's Track and Field
17. Women's Track and Field
18. Volleyball

### Appendix C

A list of questions asked to the coaches during qualitative interviews.

1. Please discuss your take on your coaching philosophy, including how you have your athletes balance school, play, and sometimes family.
2. Do you view being a mentor as part of your role as a head coach on a team? In other words, how important is your role as career mentor to the student-athletes on the team on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not at all important to 5 being of utmost importance.
3. How are you, if at all, involved in career decision making processes dealing with your athletes?
4. (If applicable) In your sport, athletes are allowed to leave early for a professional draft. When athletes are making this decision, are there some that are more prone to come to you for advice. If so, are these athletes typically ones you have a close, mentoring-like relationship with?
5. When your athletes are going through a rough stretch, whether it's on the field of play or off the field of play, what type of coping mechanisms do you see your athletes use? Do you see them typically go to a trusted peer, to you, or to another outside source?
6. Do you see any differences in the way students that come from an international background deal with decision making processes?

## Appendix D

Below is the student-athlete questionnaire.

Here is the key to the career development stage question (question number 6):

Stage 1:

- a) I have gathered information on various career paths
- b) I have asked for suggestions from people I trust about the best career path for me.
- c) I plan to change my major.
- d) I have just begun to consider what career options are available to me.
- e) I have a plan in place to track my progress toward choosing a career path

Stage 2:

- a) I have declared a major.
- b) I spend a lot of time thinking about which career options are available to me.
- c) I am dealing with emotions regarding career decisions
- d) I experience stress related to making career decisions.
- e) I have eliminated some career pathways.

Stage 3:

- a) I have attempted to contact alumni in my sport to learn more about various career options.
- b) I have narrowed down my career pathway to a small number of options.
- c) I am beginning to learn about the sub-specialities within my area of study.
- d) I plan to stick with my major for the rest of my college career.

Outcomes:

- a) I plan to pursue a career in my major area of study.
- b) I have made my career decision and know exactly what path I hope to pursue after college or after my sports season.
- c) I have made my career decision and have a job lined up for after college or after my sports season.
- d) I have made my career decision and know exactly what path I plan to pursue, but I do not have a job lined up yet.

# Questionnaire for Student-Athletes

**Principal Investigator:** Andrew Schwehm, [aschwe3@lsu.edu](mailto:aschwe3@lsu.edu), (504) 666-9480

**Research Advisor:** Dr. Tracey Rizzuto, LSU Department of Psychology; (225) 578-8924

## I Purpose of the Study:

There will be anywhere from 250 to 450 total subjects in this study. The purpose of this research project is to determine types of mentoring and coaching practices student-athletes use with those they view as mentors and the extent to which these relationships are beneficial for the student-athletes.

## II Subject Inclusion:

Student-athletes currently both enrolled in school and participating in their sport in the 2010-2011 school year on the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, are included in this study.

## III Study Procedures:

Student-athletes were identified, and head coaches gave consent to allow their players to participate. Participation is voluntary, and all information given will be used for research purposes only. The web-based questionnaire will be approximately 15 minutes in duration. Data based on these discussions may be published, but no individual names will be included in the publication. Participants' identities will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

## IV Benefits/Risks:

In exchange for participation, student-athletes will be provided a copy of the research report that will summarize key themes. Other benefits include knowledge of how both coaches and student-athletes view mentoring relationships. There are no known risks associated with this study. Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of participants. All questionnaires will be kept confidential.

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

**These terms should be retained for future reference. For more information about the research project, please contact Dr. Tracey Rizzuto (Department of Psychology, 225-578-8924) or Andrew Schwehm (504-666-9480). For questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, please contact Robert C. Mathews, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692.**

**"The study has been described to me above, and I have been informed about avenues for obtaining additional information regarding this study."**

- ☐ Yes, I agree to participate in the study. Please begin the survey.

[No, thank you. \(Please click this link.\)](#)

Next

**Part I - Stress Related to Athletic Performance**

1. The following questions deal with the amount of stress you experience as a student-athlete. Please respond to each statement below using the 5-point scale provided.

	None	A Little	Moderate Amount	A Lot	Excessive Amount
How much stress do you experience in a given day as a student-athlete during your team's competition season?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much stress do you experience in a given day in the off-season when your team is not competing?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. How much stress do you experience in relation to the following?

	None	A Little	Moderate Amount	A Lot	Excessive Amount
Academic responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal/Social responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travel for competition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Please indicate the degree to which the following statements are true of your athletic performance experience.

	Not at all true	A little true	Sometimes true	Moderately true	Absolutely true
People make conflicting demands for my time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have too much to do and too little time to do it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have unsettled conflicts with my teammates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I spent my time trying to fix things in the past rather than working on the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performing in my sport is stressful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Next

**Part II - Guidance-Seeking as an Athlete***Influential People Who Provide Guidance and Support*

4a. **How many influential people do you have in your life who provide guidance and support? To calculate this number, consider the following categories separately. Do not double count the same individual twice.**

Peers  
(friends, classmates, and teammates)

#

Family

#

Former Coaches

#

Current Head Coach(es)

#

Current Assistant Coaches

#

Others

#

4b. **Using the scale below, please indicate the degree to which these statements are true, in general, of the influential people you referenced above.**

	Not at all true	A little true	Sometimes true	Moderately true	Absolutely true
These individuals care about my well-being.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These individuals strongly consider my goals and values.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Help is available from mentors in my personal life when I have problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My mentors would forgive an honest mistake on my part.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If given the opportunity, my mentors would take advantage of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My mentors show very little concern for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Instruction and Advice within the Realm of Your Sport*

5a. **How many people in your life provide helpful instruction and advice related to your involvement in your sport? To calculate this number, consider each category separately.** Do not double count individuals across categories. However, you may reference people listed in Question 4 if they provide both INFLUENCE and INSTRUCTION.

Former Coaches

#

Current Head Coach(es)

#

Current Assistant Coaches

#

Others

#

5b. **Using the scale below, please indicate the degree to which these statements are true, in general, of the individuals you referenced above.**

	Not at all true	A little true	Somewhat true	Moderately true	Absolutely true
These individuals are willing to extend themselves in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These individuals care about my well-being.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These individuals take pride in my accomplishments on and off the field.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These individuals strongly consider my goals and values.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These individuals try to make my sport as interesting as possible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These individuals value my contribution to the team's well-being.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Part III - Career Decisions of Student-Athletes**

**6. In terms of making a career decision, which of the following statements best describe your thoughts and behaviors? Please select all that apply.**

- ☐ I have gathered information on various career paths.
- ☐ I have asked for suggestions from people I trust about the best career path for me.
- ☐ I have declared a major.
- ☐ I am beginning to learn about the various sub-specialities and possible career paths associated with my major and academic degree.
- ☐ I plan to stick with my major for the duration of my college career.
- ☐ I plan to change my major.
- ☐ I have just begun to consider what career options are available to me.
- ☐ I have attempted to contact alumni in my sport to learn more about various career options.
- ☐ I spend a lot of time thinking about which career options are available to me.
- ☐ I am dealing with emotions regarding career decisions
- ☐ I experience stress related to making career decisions.
- ☐ I plan to pursue a career in my major area of study.
- ☐ I have a plan in place to track my progress toward choosing a career path.
- ☐ I have eliminated some career pathways.
- ☐ I have narrowed down my career pathways to a small number of options.
- ☐ I have made my career decision and know exactly what path I hope to pursue after college or after my sports season.
- ☐ I have made my career decision and have a job lined up for after college or after my sports season.
- ☐ I have made my career decision and know exactly what path I plan to pursue, but I do not have a job lined up yet.

**7. Are you planning to pursue a professional career in your sport?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**7a. If not, please describe your current career plans.**

**7b. How certain are you about your current career plan?**

- ☐ Not at all certain
- ☐ Fairly certain, but open to alternatives
- ☐ Absolutely certain

**8. How much anxiety to you experience when thinking about making a career decision?**

- ☐ Not at all anxious
- ☐ Fairly anxious
- ☐ Moderately anxious
- ☐ Very anxious
- ☐ Excessively anxious

**9. How often do you think about your future career?**

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ At least once a week
- ☐ A couple of times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A couple of times a semester
- ☐ Once a semester
- ☐ A couple of times a year
- ☐ Once a year
- ☐ I don't think about my future career

**Part IV - Demographic Questions****11. What is your age?**Years: **12. What is your gender?**

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

**13. What is your race/ethnicity?**

- ☐ African American  
☐ Asian  
☐ Caucasian  
☐ Hispanic/Latino  
☐ Native American  
☐ Pacific Islander  
☐ Other
- 

**14. How many years of eligibility do you have remaining (including this year, if competing)?**Years **15. What is your on-campus employment status?**

- ☐ Full-time employment  
☐ Part-time employment  
☐ No on-campus employment

**16. What is your off-campus employment status?**

- ☐ Full-time employment  
☐ Part-time employment  
☐ No off-campus employment

**17. To the best of your knowledge, what is your family's approximate annual income?**

(i.e., On average, what is the average annual income of the legal guardians with whom you lived for the majority of your life?)

- ☐ \$29,999 or less  
☐ \$30,000 to \$74,999  
☐ \$75,000 or more

**Thank you for participating in this survey!**