

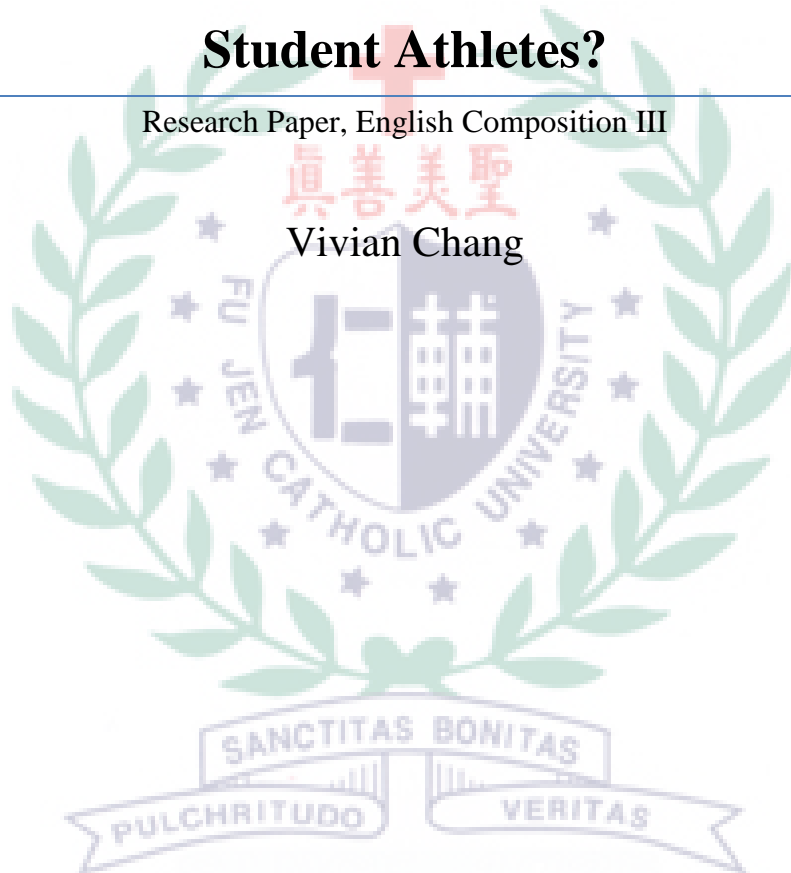
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Non-PE Department: A Better Choice for Student Athletes?

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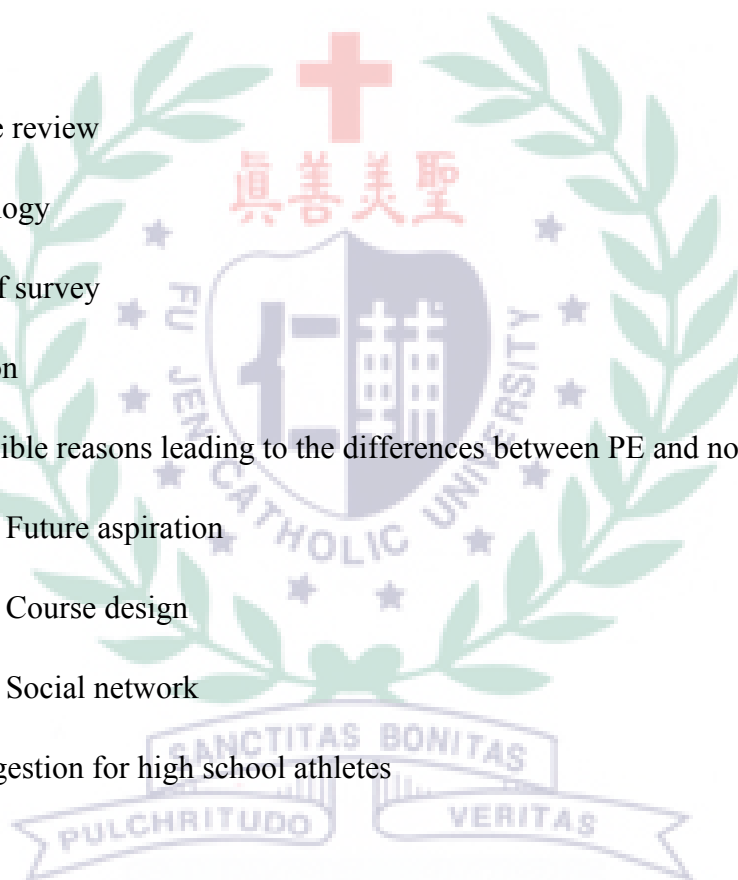
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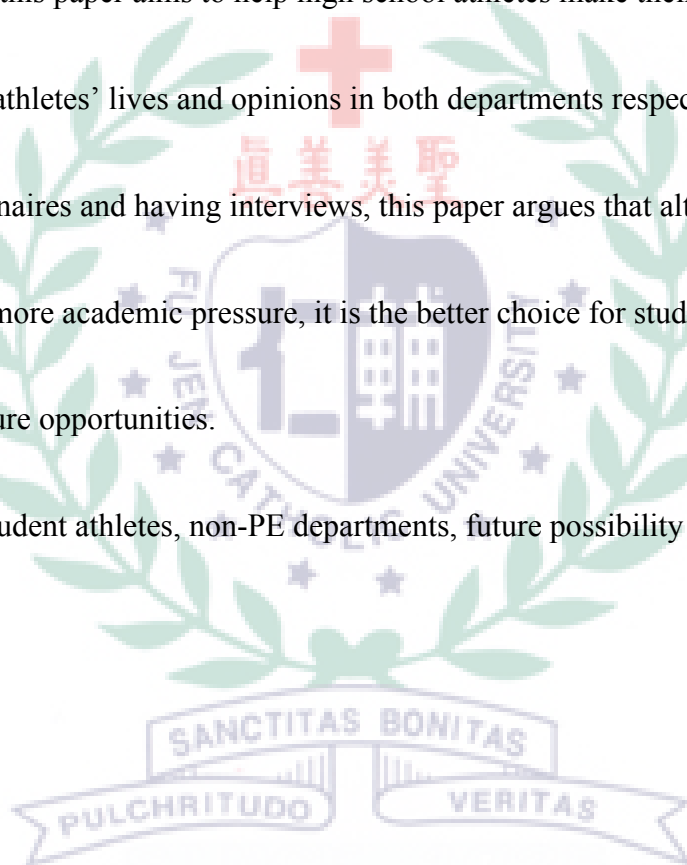
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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the merits and shortcomings of choosing PE department and non-PE department for student athletes. Since previous studies on this issue only show the difficulties each group encounters, but do not accurately point out which is the better choice; thus, this paper aims to help high school athletes make their choices by examining college athletes' lives and opinions in both departments respectively. Through giving out questionnaires and having interviews, this paper argues that although non-PE department brings more academic pressure, it is the better choice for student athletes by providing more future opportunities.

Keywords: student athletes, non-PE departments, future possibility



Non-PE Department: A Better Choice for Student Athletes?

Student athletes, the students who entered college by recommendation according to their elite sport skills, are a group of students that have captured more and more attention from people in recent years. On account of the rising awareness of the importance of second skill, studying is no longer considered as the only success for students in modern society. To give those students who reach high achievement on sport area but get poor grades, the Ministry of Education provides these student athletes to acquire chances to enter college based on their professional skills. These students, who are qualified to the standard formulated by the Ministry of Education, can enter universities without taking College Entrance Exam. Besides, the reason for choosing college athletes rather than high school athletes as the targets of the survey in this paper is that college students pay more attention to career, and consider from more aspects when making decisions.

However, the policy of the specific way of enrollment may result in student athlete's role conflict, which is also an important issue when it comes to student athletes. As students, they are responsible for keeping an eye on their academic performance. On the other hand, they have to maintain sport achievement in order to win high rank in the competition. Almond, Carodiine, and Gratto also mentioned role conflict issue in their paper that "student athletes are a diverse special population because of their roles on campus, their atypical lifestyles, and their special needs."(Almond, Carodine, & Gratto, 2001) Most of the student athletes have been trained since they were in junior high school, or even elementary school. They spent plenty of time on training, usually resulting in poor grades on academic performance. However, recommendation for college provides opportunities for them to enter either PE or non-PE departments, which allows them to learn skills other than sport.

Literature Review

There are research papers discussing the difficulties and poor adaptation student athletes encounter in PE and non-PE departments, but none of them gives an actual answer that which department is the better choice. For instance, *The Case Study of Adaptation of Elite Student Swimmers in Physical and Non-Physical Education Department* written by Chen Yi-Fan studies the cases of four elite swimmers, including two PE majors and two non-PE majors. This study found that PE majors tend to have ill-adaptation on training, while non-PE majors tend to suffer from the ill-adaptation on schoolwork. The causes resulted in the poor adaptation are explained in “College Student Athlete Success Both In and Out of the Classroom.” Almond, Carodine, and Gratto mentioned the role conflict problem of student athletes that these students entered colleges with poor high school grades, which lead to academic struggles in school. The authors also provide ideal programs to help student athletes balance academic support, career counseling, and personal development. Chen argues in her paper “The Difficulty and Adaptation of Non-PE Major Female Volleyball Student Athletes in College” that the poor grade may be resulted from student athletes’ excessive focus on training in junior high and high school. The excessive focus not only leads to lagging behind non-athletes, but also brings about lack of opportunities to explore other interests. This kind of background may affect student athletes’ choices when they are choosing departments. Also, the reasons influencing their decisions may be related to Bandura’s self-efficacy theory. Bandura states that self-efficacy refers to one’s belief about his or her ability to accomplish a given task or activity, which is the foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being. An individual examines his or her past experiences to evaluate if he or she can reach a certain goal. If a

person believes he or she is able to accomplish a certain task, the person will have more confidence to complete the task. (Albert, 1997) For student athletes' future possibility, "A Study on School Adjustment and Career Exploration of College Graduates Who were Students Athletes" tracks the working condition of thirty-four graduated PE majors. Unexpectedly, only one of them became professional athlete. For the other student athletes, half of them became teachers, while five of them joined business field. From this study, it is obvious that PE majors have restricted career possibilities. Besides, while some of the PE majors anticipated themselves to be professional athletes, the probability to make it come true is really low.

Methodology

Participants

Eighty student athletes from seventeen different universities, twenty-four different departments, including one from an overseas college, took part in this survey. Six of the departments are sport-related, and the other eighteen departments are related to mass media, information, finance, business, insurance, drama, and engineering. Among the eighty students, twenty-seven of them are from sport-related departments, while fifty-three students are from other departments, which means the respondents are composed of twenty-seven PE majors and fifty-three non-PE majors.

Materials and Procedure

By giving out online questionnaires on Google drive, this paper collects life experiences and opinions toward choosing departments from eighty students from both PE and non-PE departments. The types of questions in the questionnaire are mainly divided into three parts, which are personal profile, motivation of choosing departments, and self-evaluation. The first

two parts are opening questions that allow student athletes to give their answers and detailed reasons based on their thoughts and experiences. In the third part, student athletes have to answer several multiple-choice questions. This part examines student athletes' life experiences from academic, training, and interpersonal relationship aspects.

Results

The results show that the main reasons and motivation for the student athletes to choose departments are different in terms of their departments. For PE majors, interest is the most significant motivation that 82% of PE majors consider this reason when choosing departments. Besides, future possibility, less academic pressure, and easier adaptation are also causes that affect PE majors' choices, which accounts for 44%, 37%, and 30% respectively. For non-PE majors, future possibility is obviously the major reason that 68% of them choose this answer. They also consider interest and expanding social network when choosing departments. (See Figure 1.) From the motivations of student athletes choosing departments, it is apparent that PE department is regarded as giving less academic pressure and providing an environment that is easier to adapt, while non-PE department provides more possibilities for future career, and helps student athletes expand their social networks.

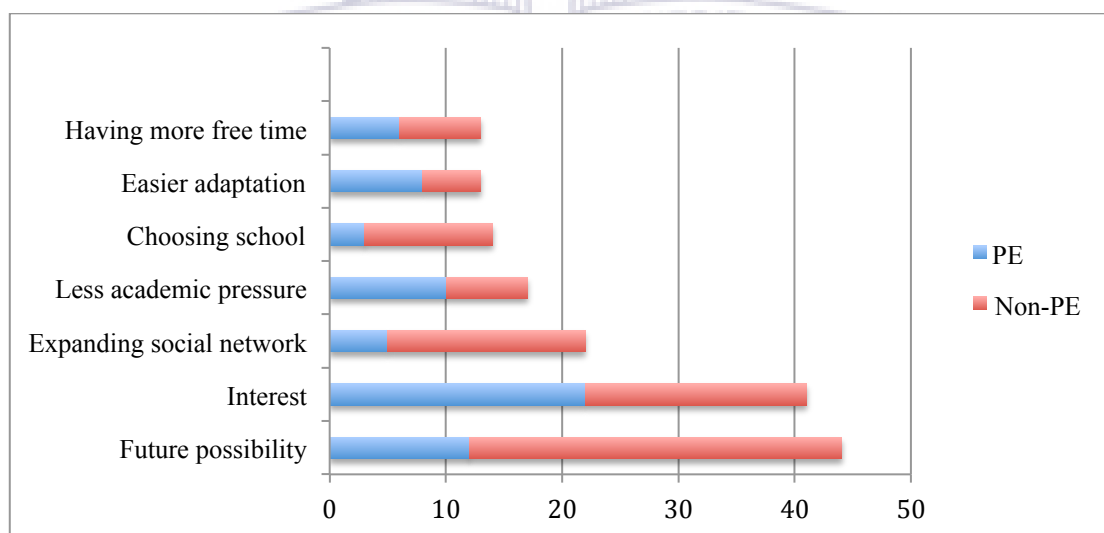


Figure 1

After entering college, PE majors spend five more hours on training than studying, while non-PE majors spend around ten hours for both training and studying. (See Figure 2.)

However, although PE majors spend more time on training than studying, the respondents from PE department argue that they still feel pressured on schoolwork.

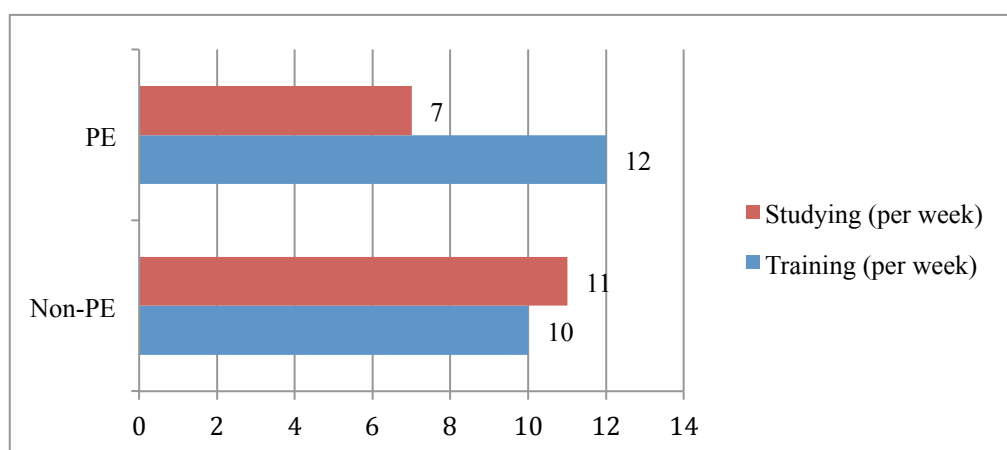


Figure 2

In multiple-choice section, the result shows over 50% of student athletes think they perform well on sport achievement, but only 28% are satisfied with their academic performance. (See Figure 3.)

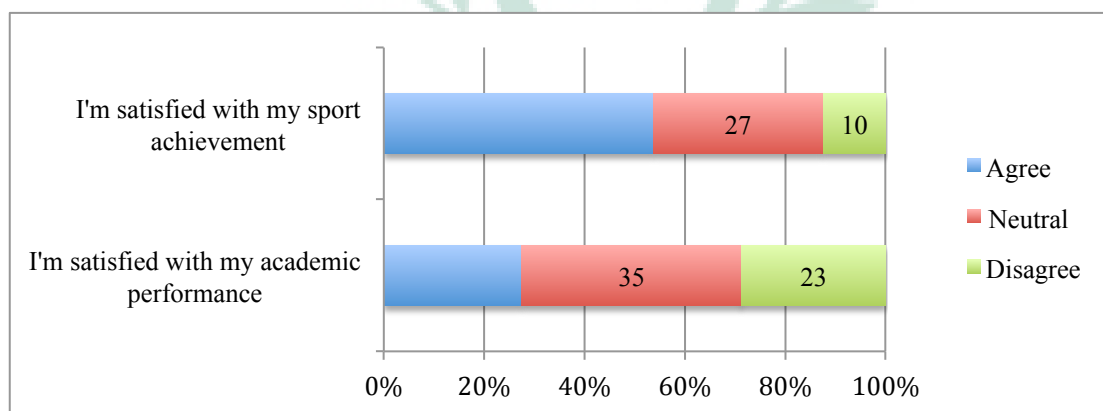


Figure 3

Besides, more than half of the respondents think it is difficult to balance academic performance and sport achievement. Among these student athletes, 24% of them had given up schoolwork and 30% of them had given up training on account of the difficulty to balance

training and studying. (See Figure 4.)

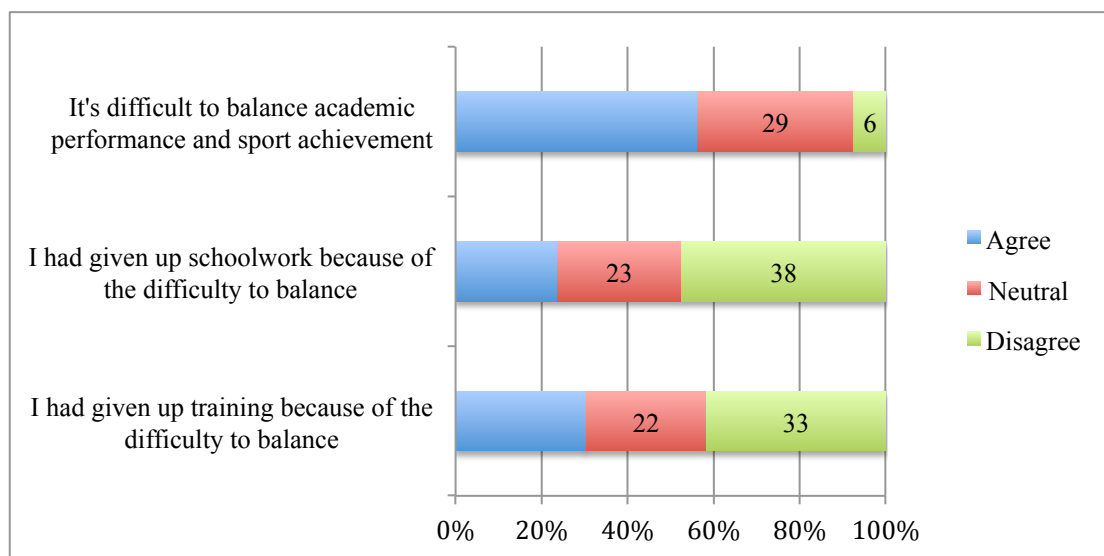


Figure 4

Among the eighty respondents, over 60% of non-PE majors and about half of PE majors agree that non-PE departments provide more opportunities for future. (See Figure 5.)

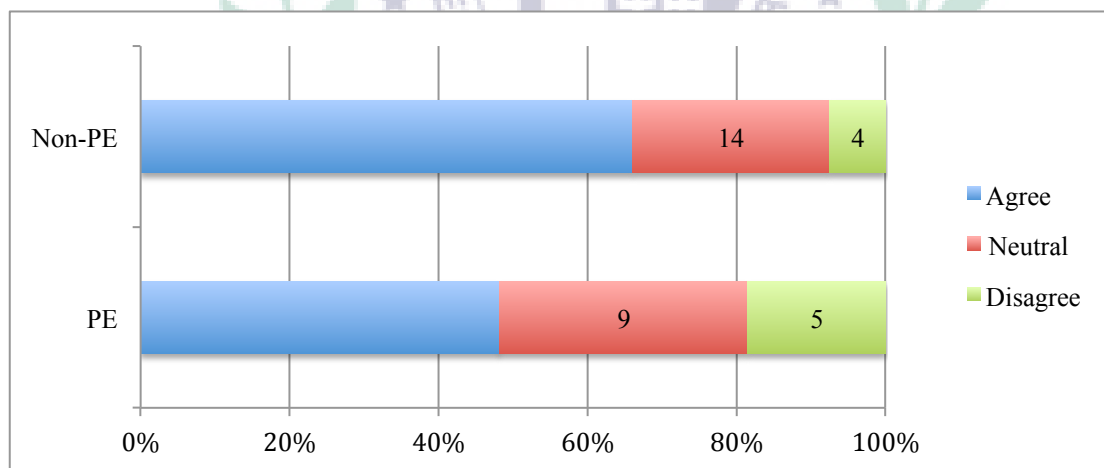


Figure 5

Thus, in the end of the questionnaire, student athletes are asked to choose the department again if they had the chance. The result is that about two-third of student athletes choose to be non-PE major, while one-third of them choose to be PE major. (See Figure 6.) Interestingly, one-third of PE majors change their mind to join non-PE departments. For PE majors, those who choose to stay in current department tell that joining sport team develops

one's independence, willpower, and pressure resisting ability. Also, some of them are used to a sport-leading life, and they feel free and joyful in the sport environment. On the other hand, those changing their minds state that they still attach more attention to studying than training, and that PE major has a more restricted future development than non-PE majors. Besides, they argue that joining non-PE departments helps broaden their horizons, learn second skills, and enhance competitive capability. Moreover, few of them report that sport field is being saturated in Taiwan so that they do not consider being professional athletes.

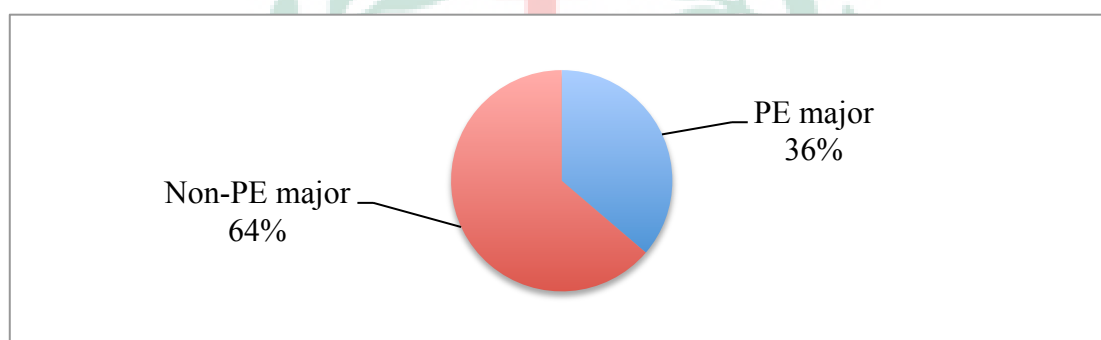


Figure 6

The survey shows the different motivation and time distribution of PE and non-PE major athletes, and it is obvious that the opportunity of future development is esteemed by both PE and non-PE majors. However, both PE and non-PE majors are not satisfied with their academic performance and regard balancing sport achievement and academic performance as a hard work, which results in some of them even giving up schoolwork due to the hardship of balancing studying and training. Yet, most of them think student athletes in non-PE departments have more opportunities for future career. Besides, most of them choose to enter non-PE departments if they had the second chance to make choice.

Discussion

Both student athletes in PE and non-PE departments suffer from role conflict that they are students and athletes at the same time. In order to give suggestion to high school athletes

who are going to choose which department to enroll, this paper compares the different answers and conditions between student athletes in PE and non-PE departments based on their life experiences, and finds out few possible reasons resulting in the differences between the two groups, which are their future aspiration, course design and social network.

Future aspiration may significantly influence student athletes' motivation of choosing PE or non-PE departments. As Hsieh mentioned in his research, "student athletes have been spending lots of time on training since early age," student athletes did not spend as much time and attention on schoolwork as non-athletes, usually resulting in poor grade in school. (Hsieh, 2000) Also, Chen argues that student athletes' excessive focus on training in junior high and high school leads to their lack of opportunities to explore other interests. Having been used to the life that putting sport achievement as priority, student athletes may be divided into two groups based on their considerations when it comes to choosing college departments. One is the group that regards themselves elite enough to be professional athletes, or wants to stay in a sport environment continuously. This group is more likely to join PE department. The other group is aware of their lack of knowledge and considers developing second skills lest they end up graduating without enough competitive capability. This group chooses to be non-PE majors in order to learn the skills other than sport. Their future aspirations may also be affected by Bandura's self-efficacy theory that for those who do not perform well on sport achievement, they might change their minds to focus more on academic performance and choose to enter non-PE departments.

However, the pressure in college may bring troubles to student athletes as they suffer from the difficulty of balancing academic performance and sport achievement. In Chen's research, she argues that "student athletes have to face the challenges brought by the

environment, causing harder adaptation due to training, competition, educational foundation, background, and linking up schoolwork after entering college, especially for student athletes in non-PE departments.” (Chen, 2009) From this aspect, the course design in different departments may result in the differences between PE and non-PE majors. Student athletes in non-PE department take courses that they are very unfamiliar with, which force them to pay more attention to and spend more time on studying. Thus, they experience tougher adaptation than PE majors, for it is more difficult for them to balance training and studying. Sparent argues that this kind of situation often leads to “academic schizophrenia” that they have two extremely different roles in their college lives, sometimes causing catastrophic consequences. (Sparent, 1989) On the other hand, the courses are mostly sport-related in PE department, making it easier for student athletes to adapt and maintain their grade. Training is more emphasized for PE majors, which means the environment is more like their backgrounds of growth. However, there are courses such as “Professional Training” in PE department, which force them to spend more time on training. As a result, although PE majors are in the environment that is easier to adapt, they still feel pressured on studying since they have no choice but to put the focus of their college lives on training even if they want to make efforts on schoolwork.

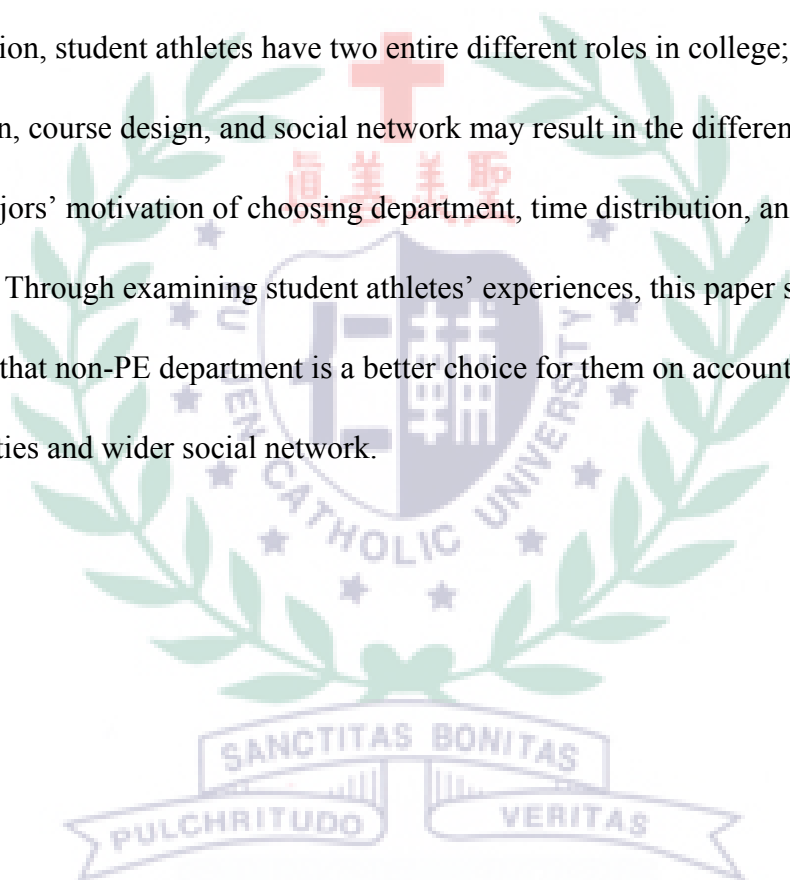
Social network is also one of the reasons that cause the differences between PE and non-PE majors. Most student athletes were in athletic class when they were in junior high and high school, which means that they were surrounded by athletes. In PE department, student athletes maintain this kind of condition that they have few chances to know people outside of sport field. However, non-PE majors meet people coming from diverse backgrounds, which helps them expand their social networks and broaden their horizons. Moreover, non-PE

majors obtain more opportunities for their future career by meeting people with different professional specialties.

In consequence, although entering non-PE department faces more challenges, student athletes can have more future opportunities by acquiring knowledge other than sport field, and expand their social networks at the same time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, student athletes have two entire different roles in college; the different future aspiration, course design, and social network may result in the differences between PE and non-PE majors' motivation of choosing department, time distribution, and pressure they take in college. Through examining student athletes' experiences, this paper suggests high school athletes that non-PE department is a better choice for them on account of the more future possibilities and wider social network.



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Appendix A. Online Questionnaire

1. Which university do you go to?
2. What do you major in?
3. What grade are you in?
4. Why did you choose to enter this department?
 - Interest
 - Future possibility
 - Expanding social network
 - Choosing department regardless of school
 - Less academic pressure
 - Having more free time
 - Easier adaptation
 - Other: _____
5. Average hour on training
 - 1~5
 - 6~10
 - 11~15
 - 16~20
 - more than 21
6. Average hour on study
 - 1~5
 - 6~10
 - 11~15
 - 16~20
 - more than 21
7. If you had chance to choose again, which department would you choose?
 - PE department
 - Non-PE department
8. From the above question, why?
9. I'm satisfied with my sport achievement
 - Agree Neutral Disagree
10. I'm satisfied with my academic performance
 - Agree Neutral Disagree
11. I'm satisfied with my interpersonal relationship



- Agree Neutral Disagree
12. I spend more time on training than studying
 Agree Neutral Disagree
13. Training brings more pressure to me than studying
 Agree Neutral Disagree
14. It's difficult to balance academic performance and sport achievement
 Agree Neutral Disagree
15. From the above question, I had given up schoolwork because of the difficulty to balance
 Agree Neutral Disagree
16. From question 6, I had given up training because of the difficulty to balance
 Agree Neutral Disagree
17. My fitness and sport skill have declined after entering college
 Agree Neutral Disagree
18. My passion to sport has declined after entering college
 Agree Neutral Disagree
19. Non-PE majors obtain more career opportunities in the future
 Agree Neutral Disagree
20. Majoring in non-PE department provides me a clearer direction for my future
 Agree Neutral Disagree
21. Majoring in this department had once resulted in the difficulty of adaptation
 Agree Neutral Disagree
22. I regard choosing this department a right choice
 Agree Neutral Disagree
23. Would you like to have an interview with me? If yes, please leave your name contact information below. Thank you.
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