The Effect of Varsity Athletic Participation on Student Success Evidence from the First-Time First-Year Entering Cohort of 2010

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OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES
The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between varsity athletic participation and student success in undergraduate education. Three different hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis 1: Four-year, five-year, and six-year graduation rates would not be significantly different for athletes compared to non-athletes.

Hypothesis 2: Varsity athletic participation would not significantly correlate with academic performance as indexed by cumulative GPA and cumulative major GPA, without controlling for the other factors.

Hypothesis 3: After controlling for the pre-existing differences in high school GPA, student demographic background, and college experiences, varsity athletic participation would not have a significant effect on academic performance.

This study informs institutional policies and practices regarding varsity athletic participation on student success at Bucknell.

METHODS
1. Graduation rates and cumulative GPAs are proxies to measure student success.
2. Chi-square Test, ANOVA, Independent-Samples T Tests, and Multiple Regression Models. Cumulative major GPA was used as the dependent variable in multiple regression models. The independent variables included race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation, POSSE, citizenship, high school academic index (AI) *, student first majors, fraternity/sorority participation, and athletic participation.

CONCLUSIONS
1. Students participating in athletic groups are just as likely to graduate as students who do not participate in athletic groups.
2. Before controlling for other factors, athletes earned significantly lower test scores than non-athletes. The difference in academic test scores between non-athletes and athletes was larger for males than for females. After controlling for other factors participating in athletic groups was not significantly correlated with student academic performance.
3. High school academic index is the strongest predictor for student cumulative major GPA. The difference in cumulative major GPA between athletic groups and non-athletic groups was not related to athletic participation itself but was highly related with high school class rank, SAT scores and ACT scores. If the admissions requirements are lower for recruited athletes than for their non-athlete counterparts, recruited athletes are more likely to earn lower college GPA and do more poorly on other measures of academic achievement. Therefore, the student athletes should be recruited with, and perform at, the same academic standard as the general student body.
4. Having some important non-cognitive and behavioral measures would allow us to have a more comprehensive understanding and build a better model in the future.

REFERENCES