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# The Student-Athlete Newsletter

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PROMOTING THE ACADEMIC, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL  
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDENT-ATHLETE

FALL/WINTER '05  
ISSUE TWO

## Student-Athlete environment poses unique and difficult challenges to some- contributing to low academic and low career maturity levels

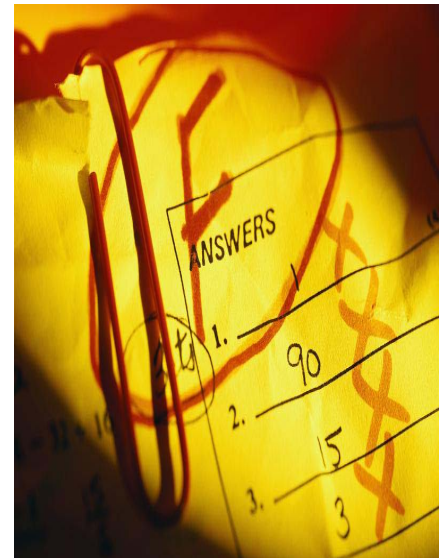
By Gerry Trapp, Former Student-Athlete and an Advocate for the Well-Being of the S/A

**Awareness of unique challenges will improve at risk student-athletes understanding of their atypical environment and strengthen their decision making abilities**

It's my contention that many of our student-athletes who struggle academically have foreclosed on an athletic identity, closing down within themselves the channels needed to have open in support of the development of their exploratory behaviors, self confidence and a focused work ethic. From Josselson '73 and Donovan '70 we know "Foreclosed student-athletes primarily use repression, denial and isolation as main defenses".

From Jane Richards study on the "Cognitive Consequences of Concealing Feelings" we know that students who block emotions may diminish their thinking abilities.

As a former student-athlete who had a foreclosed athletic identity I recall many times where I used repression, denial and isolation as part of my arsenal of defenses against anyone, teacher, coach, family or friend who tried to infiltrate my inner most feelings in respect to my academic efforts and performance. Whenever my academic performance was questioned I did one of two things, I would do just enough to take the heat off, or I would not do enough and take my chances with the consequences. Sometimes there were consequences, sometimes not, I had a good idea of what I could and could not get away with. In this situation I was dealing with the world outside my athletic environment. The basis of my thinking, my real concern, was in getting back into my safe and secure athletic environment, where I was flourishing and enjoying positive feedback.



Researchers find that letting feelings out improves learning, memory and your ability to act rationally. By concealing, suppressing feelings, emotions, research shows you diminish your thinking abilities, communication skills and reasoning ability. You tend not to communicate very well, speaking less and more slowly, not responding to the statement of others. You receive low marks on the rapport/relationship scale.

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BRINGING AWARENESS TO  
THE STUDENT-ATHLETE

## Preparing Student-Athletes for a Successful Transition into Career Environment

# Awareness

We need awareness to go inside to get rid of what does not serve us. To penetrate the veils of our motives, unconscious fears, robotic reactions, blind spots, faulty beliefs, negative self-talk and judgments. Simple awareness holds the power to release us from these blocks. For the student-athlete with EAI tendencies and identity foreclosure simple awareness is the cornerstone of acceptance and growth development. – “Inner Journey ’04”



## Bringing Awareness to Student-Athletes Unique Challenges

### Taking advantage of Athletic Status

With EAI tendencies and an Athletic foreclosed identity the student-athletes decision making abilities are compromised. The temptation is powerful to take advantage of their athletic status within a society that at times enables them to do so. If this choice is made more than likely the growth and development of the student-athlete will be hindered.

### Society’s Influences

Research has found that high school athletics are more valued than academic achievement and are the prime means of establishing a sense of industry for athletes at that level.

### Effectively Handling Success, Failure, Special Treatment

In contrast to an individual who places little value on athletic endeavors, the self esteem, affective status, and motivational status of an individual who highly values participation in sport are thought to be strongly influenced by outcomes in the athletic domain.

(Harter ’90, James ’92, Rosenberg’ 79)

Foreclosures are impulsive- (Marcia ’66) Some students that enter college in the foreclosed status subsequently undergo crisis. (Waterman & Waterman ’71)

Marcia’s belief is that for individuals to successfully achieve their unique identity it would be necessary for them to experience crisis in the form of being forced to choose from a series of meaningful alternatives

Psychologically foreclosed- cognitive style characterized by rapid exclusion of alternatives or superficial investigation- an impulsive decision style.

Situationally foreclosed- resulting from lack of exposure to information, ideas and different life styles. (Henry and Renaud ’72)

From Marcia ’67 we know that foreclosed students are more vulnerable to self-esteem manipulations and tend to change direction in ways consistent with feedback. If that thought is correct then it may be possible for school systems through the use of authority figures, or ideally through education of parents, to expose students to the benefits of vocational decisions based on a thorough exploration of various meaningful alternatives. If the pressure of having an occupational identity can be eased or lifted and students can be made to feel safe and approved of as they explore various work areas, then it may be possible to establish an environment in which foreclosed students could move toward consolidation of their unique identities. (Petipas ’78)

While in school had I known more about my athletic environment and the challenges that were and still are present in it I would like to think I would have made smarter choices. However, I am certain I would have at least recognized what it was I was encountering when I was in my transition phase, going from student-athlete into career environment. Having a foreclosed athletic identity and being unaware of the unique challenges in the student-athletic and transition environment correlates closely with studies done revealing “low career maturity levels” obtained by “some student-athletes”. The student-athletes with EAI tendencies, those who foreclosed on an athletic identity, in my estimation will correlate in high numbers with those student-athletes who are attaining low academic growth and low levels of career maturity levels. Knowing what contributes to this issue empowers us to provide solutions that will better serve these at-risk student-athletes.

Let us hear from you- Reply with your Questions