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Dislocation and Adjustment of International Student-Athletes

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**DISLOCATION AND ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-
ATHLETES**

In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by

THIAGO BRITO LOPES

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Date

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Abstract

One reason that attracts international student-athletes to American universities could be the interest in earning high quality education with the possibility of playing high performance sports. However, when compared to other international students, differences are seen: Other foreign students who look for a degree in the US desire not only an international education, but also potentially staying in the country. The University of San Francisco, where a cosmopolitan city meets education, fits it best. At USF, 82 countries are represented, reaching a number of 1708 students. Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the whole student population is international. The ratio with student-athletes is not different, from which 49 of them are foreigners, coming from 20 countries, representing almost a third of the whole athletics department. This study analyzes how sports contribute within their adjustment in comparison with general students, and how sports ease this process, after arriving from their home countries. Aspects such as food, weather, language barriers, campus life and academic challenges have been observed to make that comparison. Also, we will understand if living in San Francisco, a city compromised with diversity and non-discrimination, makes a positive difference within the acclimatization to life abroad. With that said, it will be possible to analyze major advantages of international student-athletes over non-athletes. Being welcomed by the athletic community (teammates, coaches and athletes from other sports) creates a feeling of belonging. This environment, however, has disadvantages. For instance, athletes are isolated from the rest of campus activities, missing a connection between the athletics department and the rest of the school. Because of their busy routines, they have no time to get involved with other activities on campus. For that, at the end of this study it is recommended the creation of an office within the athletics department that would work to include athletes (Americans and foreigners) in other campus activities, such as University Ministry, for example.

Keywords: international student-athletes, dislocation, adjustment, campus life

1. Introduction

This article aims to analyze the reasons for the phenomenon of international movement of young athletes looking to study and practice high performance sports at an American university, where athletics seek to promote an integral formation of the student, adding professional learning of a particular degree with the practice of sports at highly competitive levels, and what characterizes and distinguishes them from other international students on campus.

The differences between international student-athletes and international students (non-athletes) will be compared, in order to look for the differences in their routines, schedule and groups to which they belong.

The research has been conducted with the study of a Jesuit Catholic university (University of San Francisco) and taking into account the nature of the institution. This paper will also seek to associate researchers on the topic, with the benefits of sports as a social agent, combined with the Jesuit ideals such as respect, solidarity, non-discrimination and diversity. These principles are represented by USF's ideology, through the emblematic expression: "Change the World from Here", motivated by the awareness work through social actions developed from the University Ministry.

Motivations for this work

This work has been inspired by the experience of searching for an American university that would comprise people from different continents who opted to study under the guidance of a different culture, especially at a university that gives priority to the enhancement of human rights. USF, managed by the Jesuit principles, urges students to be instruments for a better world from the formation and union of the young students for this purpose.

This initial proposal was inspired by previous experiences that enabled me to observe and live with a large movement of young people from every continent. This temporary dislocation occurred on World Youth Day Rio 2013, with the strong performance at the International Department in the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), working for the Local Organizing Committee. At that time, it allowed me to detect many young people from different nations and cultures that strove to migrate temporarily, encouraged by an ideal, in that case, by faith and their religious values.

Looking forward on this path with young people, joining USF's University Ministry, allowed me to connect with young students from all over the world. In addition to that, the chance to work with the women's volleyball team, whose roster had six international players, permitted me to approach the sports field, going back to a scenario from years ago, as a former volleyball athlete.

That multitasking position at USF (University Ministry and women's volleyball team) provided a chance to reach out a variety of students from different regions of the U.S. and continents, mixing cultures and having the University's role to integrate them within an intercultural and interfaith environment, seeking an integral humanistic education.

Being a former athlete and, at the same time working with different religious backgrounds, this work allowed me to identify some common values between these two cultural events. Also, graduating in International Relations before coming to USF, and living a personal experience as a young migrant, strengthened the option for this research to be presented here.

During the period of work and study at USF, the process of observing migration and dislocation of young students has raised some questions. The first one is for USF's international students: What motivates young students from other countries to practice their sports and earn a degree in the U.S.? Does sport contribute in their adjustment to the American culture?

This question became the main object of the research project, focusing on the motivation for the dislocation of athletes from other continents to practice a sport and study in San Francisco and what could set them apart from other foreign students within the adjustment process and integration in a new culture and country.

How the work is divided

Initially, some other authors' thoughts on the topic will be addressed, combined with the reasons for displacement and dislocation, as well as cases of international students who opted to pursue their degree in the U.S. and at USF. Interviews with students and staff members will be presented to report their experiences on campus. Thereafter, current cases of international student-athletes and non-athletes will be analyzed to understand what brought them to this country and what challenges, doubts, or even conflicts, both groups may face. In the final section, their plans for after graduation will be discussed, if they consider staying in the U.S., if they want to play professionally (question only for athletes) or want to go back home.

2. Literature review

Much has been discussed about sports values and what sport can do to change people's lives. What many authors confirm is that sport is definitely a social agent, being able to make a change in someone's life, whether one is a high performance athlete, amateur or just a child who has just started practicing a specific activity. It is publicly known that major agents in the international community recognize sports as a life changer. The only place where everyone is treated equally is a court or field where anyone can play.

For instance, socialization through sports brings the concepts proposed by authors such as Coakley (1998) and Gmelch (2015). The power of sports as a tool in understanding children's socialization into cultural practices (Collen, 2008) and their own development as human beings is also known. The idea of sports as social agent is widely defended by other authors, such as Nucci & Young-Shim (2005), when it comes to explaining how sports integrate people while teaching them how to win and lose without losing sportsmanship.

Another great example is the Catholic Church. The Holy See has released important facts about the responsibility of sports as a social agent in people's lives. Blessed John Paul II was known as a former athlete and used to advocate for sports as a tool to connect and unite people from many cultures.

The Church recognizes the role that sport can play in perfecting the human person with its potential to moderate human instinct and its capacity to gather people together towards a common goal, promoting fellowship, solidarity, and peace through its universal appeal and ability to draw people from different cultures and backgrounds together in friendly competition. This vast horizon of positive opportunities confers on sport a generous yield, especially when it is a human action carried out with respect for the rules and in a healthy competitive spirit. These sound results are complemented by enrichment of the person and of society, in an experience of self-satisfaction as well as the joy of community. It should

be immediately noted here that the Church's "way of thinking" regarding sport, which began in an initial form and gradually developed with greater intensity and clarity, has come about by the wise intuition and the acute sensibility of the Supreme pontiffs, independently of their personal involvement in sports or their predisposition for sporting activity. Indeed, the pontiffs throughout the 20th century have shown a special interest in sport. These discourses manifest an enlightened perception of the evident value that sport plays within a modern culture that has been shaped by rapid change in the wake of the industrial revolution and the subsequent changes in the customs and lifestyles of the masses, as well as the frantic quest by man to affirm his own subjectivity and individual freedom. They have noted the physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits that come from the practice of sport, while, at the same time, they have underlined the risks and related dangers that derive from serious distortions of fundamental ethical norms. In sport, the human body is the "instrument"; but the body is not an end in itself. Pius XII clarifies this in a noted discourse on the four purposes of sport, where he states: "sport and gymnastics have, as their immediate purposes, that of the education, development, and strengthening the body in its constitution and power of movement. (John Paul II Foundation for Sport, 2011)¹.

In addition to the John Paul II Foundation for Sport, another good example of how sports can connect people is the Olympic Games. With the proposal of an "Olympic Truce", the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the United Nations (UN) recognize sports

¹ The John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport (JP2F4S) was launched by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to Britain in 2010. The charity is inspired by St. John Paul II's vision for sport, which has as its primary focus the building of spiritual character through excellence in sporting skills and fitness. The Foundation aims to enable an ever increasing number of people – in particular the young initially – to achieve inner peace through sport guided by the principles identified by St. John Paul II and set out in his declarations and writing. Website: <http://www.johnpaul2foundation4sport.org>

values and how they can integrate people among all over the world, no matter what religion they have, nationality, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

Recalling the recognition of the valuable contribution of sport in promoting education, development, peace, cooperation, solidarity, fairness, social inclusion and health at the local, regional and international levels, and noting that, as declared in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, sport can contribute to an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding among peoples and nations. (United States General Assembly Resolution on the Olympic Truce, 2013).

In the past decades, there has been an increase of international students attending American universities. Still, according to Fischer (2014), this growth causes implications for how universities recruit their international students and what they are looking for.

Zhao, Kuh and Carini (2005) came up with another common reason to host international students on American campuses: the mere fact that they contribute within the development of student body as a whole. The intercultural exchange promoted by universities enriches life experience for both groups (international and domestic students) and might be later evaluated by future employers. That being said, this international disposition proposed by universities, as shown by Andrade & Norman (2009) tends to turn campuses into the world's corner, where different cultures meet and future leaders (no matter in what area) can be shaped.

Still under these reasons, as Eder, Smith & Pitts (2010) illustrated, the decision making process is related to factors such as campus location, weather, and reputation of the institution. Also, family or friends can serve as future references, when it comes to deciding about a place or even geographic proximity and environmental issues, such as a sunny climate.

There is definitely an influence of the American culture in the contemporary world, in a process defined as "Americanization" (Tota, 2009), either by the export of food habits or TV

series, which may increase the interest of international students in coming to the U.S. The export of the “American way of life” boosts people’s interest in having that as part of their lives.

American campuses have never been more international, enrolling a record of 886,052 students. The 2013-14 academic year has reached an increase of 8% in comparison to the previous year (Fischer, 2014).

With the globalization of studies, as mentioned by Biles and Lindley (2009), students go abroad with the possibility of earning an international degree and making a difference when they return to their home countries. That being said, studying abroad is not just a form of education, but indoctrination as well.

Attending a university in the U.S. brings many changes in the minds of students. As Gebhard (2010) proposed, it must be understood how international students think and feel whenever they arrive on campus, being away from home and friends and faced with constraints concerning food and weather.

Students going to school away from home tend to face challenges they never faced before. Most of them are at the age of 17 or 18 years old, being considered young adults. That combination of distance from home and immaturity brings an extra dose of challenges into their lives (Wintre, Kandasamy, Chavoshi & Wright, 2014).

With that being said, it is important to understand why international students come to the U.S. to enroll in American universities on athletics programs, what their expectations are, and what kind of student-athletes they are.

In order for one to get to know the profile of the international student-athlete attending an American university, it is necessary to know who they are, what they are looking for and what plans for after graduation they have. However, the first aspect to be understood is what student-athletes expected before joining an athletic program.

At first, most of them are looking for the possibility to combine sports and education, both at high levels (Love & Kim, 2011). They realize that both school and sports facilities can help them improve their capabilities, and they figure out how to take advantage of that.

In many countries it is not possible to practice high performance sports without quitting school; therefore, coming to the U.S. with the possibility of combining both activities seems attractive to most athletes. The possibility of earning a high quality degree practicing a sport tends to attract them (Lopes, 2010). Other countries do not offer the privilege of a dual career path, and student-athletes are professionals for at least the four years of their collegiate careers.

Consequently, as becoming a professional athlete is quite difficult, the possibility of having another professional outcome is something to take into account. Despite NCAA's high level of competitiveness, the probability of getting a lucrative contract in sports is low (Tyrance, Harris & Post, 2013).

For instance, among the types of athletes, a couple classifications can be mentioned, as proposed by Maguire & Sugden (2002). The *mercenary*: The goal is to find a job (whether in sports or not) to assure a future. The *nomadic cosmopolitan*: Athletes motivated by the fact that they want to explore and experience new cultures. They migrate to a specific country, in this case the United States, because they want to experience how life in that country is. In that perspective, it matches the case of people who desire to come to the U.S. because they were exposed to the attractive American culture. Another category that is even more specific is called *ambitionists*. The *ambitionist* athlete is looking for both high quality education and high performance sports competition. In that specific case, the motivation is to be the best in whatever they do. Lastly, the *settler*: The *settler* is the student-athlete that, after graduation, intends to remain in the United States, either working with what was learned at the University or as a professional athlete. Initially, most of them did not plan to remain in the country,

however they manifested that feeling after four years attending a university in the U.S., therefore being considered settlers. The *settler* is not different from any other international students who are not in an athletic program.

For student-athletes, a variety of factors pushing them into looking for a degree in the U.S. can be identified. Some of these factors are, for instance, access to high-level education with an athletic scholarship (not common in their home countries), the high competitiveness in U.S. collegiate sports, and the chance to be trained by highly qualified coaches and enjoy top quality facilities (Love & Kim, 2011, p.92).

The cultural exchange with domestic students also adds to the factors mentioned above, as to how both groups interact and feel and what expectations they have towards one another (Flaherty & Stojakovic, 2008).

However if, on the one hand, sports are known for helping people's socialization, on the other hand, there are authors such as Miller & Kissinger (2009) who proposed that the more involved a student-athlete is with a sport program, the lower the grades will be in comparison with other students. In addition to their lower GPA's, athletes tend not to be engaged with the academic community as a whole (Miller & Kissinger, 2009, p.30).

Nevertheless, as opposed to what is stated above, recent data suggests how sports and education, if combined properly, bring student-athletes to success. According to the NCAA's latest report on student-athletes GPA's throughout the past years, their academic performance has reached the highest percentage ever in comparison to non-athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015).

Part of their acculturation process is strictly associated with the challenges they face whenever they arrive on campus. Attending classes in a non-native language, in another country and probably under a different teaching style can be a challenge for international

students. The lack of fluency in English makes them feel even more insecure during classes (Tseng & Newton, 2002).

According to Richards (2014), within that process, they face five specific categories:

- Physical Change: When individuals or groups relocate.
- Biological Change: Exposure to new environmental effects.
- Cultural change: Occurs when social institutions start developing.
- Social relationships: Development of new relationships.
- Psychological change: When there is behavioral and mental status change.

It is widely discussed what universities do to help students increase their grades. For that reason, most schools have been investing in tutors, or academic coaches, that offer help in choosing classes or even how to organize their studies (Andrade & Norman, 2009).

Other authors, such as Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus (2014) suggested that another good way to engage students in classroom activities is asking them to participate in discussions. It is an advantage because professors evaluate it and it helps them improve their fluency in English.

However, even with all literature above, most scholars have done research only on international students, neither citing nor listening to athletes. Literature on acculturation of international student-athletes is still quite narrow and restricted, with a few exceptions, such as Richards (2014) and Love & Kim (2011), but still limited.

For instance, both Coakley (1998) and Lopes (2010) offer thoughts on how important sports are when someone wants to study abroad and how it helps within socialization. But, in order to understand the adjustment process of athletes, it is necessary to confront sports with acculturation and campus life, combined with the interviews, to better understand the scenario.

Discussions on what feelings and expectations international students have prior to their experiences on American campuses and how reality looks like are focused primarily on the

general student body (Gebhard, 2010). Consequently, there is a gap in studies concerning the adaptation of student-athletes in the United States and the reasons behind it.

Thus, this study aims to analyze what motivates the dislocation of foreign young athletes, the differences within the adjustment process between international student-athletes and international students and how important sports role is. Also, what the disadvantages in being a student-athlete are.

3. Research methods

To develop this work, both quantitative and qualitative research have been conducted at the University of San Francisco, also seeking to unite theory and practice, interviewing general students and student-athletes who enrolled between the years of 2012 to 2015, as well as head coaches, faculty and staff. The first step has been conducted through quantitative research with the Admissions department, in order to find out where foreign students come from and how many countries are represented. Then, interviews were done with students to evaluate their expectations of studying in the US. With these numbers, it was possible to evaluate and differentiate athletes and non-athletes.

The qualitative research was associated with the reasons that bring foreign student-athletes to American universities and how different their adjustments are, when compared with the general student body. With fieldwork interviews, having a selection process that is explained later in this section, it is possible to understand their behaviors. Also, the research has been conducted to evaluate their expectations prior to the academic life in the U.S., as well as plans after graduation. Professor George Gmelch, with his vast experience of a former student-athlete, advised this work, guiding the theoretical contribution for the development of this project.

In order to raise a sample of both groups and contrast their experiences on campus and thoughts of going to school in the U.S., a sample of thirty students has been taken. This group was comprised of 15 (6 male and 9 female) student-athletes and 15 non-athletes (8 male and 7 female). Their age range was 18 to 22 years old.

The interviews to be shown below have been selected based on the significance of what each student has said and expressed. Their thoughts summarized what the rest of the sample has revealed within the process. In the theoretical part of this study, literature was analyzed

for concepts about the phenomenon of migration and sports, seeking articles written by authors in the field of anthropology and sociology of sports.

In addition, some literature pertaining to the Catholic Church also offered insights on the benefits and values developed during sports practice, with thoughts on sports and their benefits to the human being.

An empirical survey of USF actors was then conducted through interviews with students. Questions about their motivations to opt for life away from their countries of origin, families and their own cultures were asked. Students were also asked about their integration process in the U.S. or in San Francisco, specifically at USF. Both groups answered questions such as: What brought you to the United States? What issues did you have with food, if any? Who do you hangout with? Do you think that athletes have an advantage over non-athletes in the adjustment process? What are your plans for after graduation?

Students who were interviewed were at different stages of their collegiate careers. Some were incoming freshmen that tend to be more excited with the new experience, and some were seniors, who are able to give a full description about their four years as student-athletes. The interviews were conducted after sport practices, during study hall hours, occasional meetings on campus and games by approaching the student-athletes.

Three head coaches (volleyball, soccer and tennis) and the Athletics Director have kindly agreed to participate in the interviewing process, sharing their thoughts on international recruiting and what they have seen in their careers regarding international student-athletes. All of them have been interviewed on campus, either at their offices or in the cafeteria.

Questions asked to the coaches included: Why do they recruit internationally? Do you think that working at USF, located in a cosmopolitan city, makes it easier to attract international student-athletes? Do you recall any food-related issues on your team? Are

international student-athletes more mature than Americans? Do they want to play professionally? If not, what would they like to do after graduation?

Professor Jose², who is a frequent spectator of games on campus and a former athlete, has also participated in the interviewing process by answering the same questions coaches and the athletics director did. He coordinates a variety of projects for the students' community and is constantly dealing with international students. Both Jose and the International Student and Scholar Services director were asked to describe differences among the students. They detailed how each ethnicity tends to behave in comparison to one another, answering questions such as: What are the main problems you see amid international students at USF? What do they usually complain about? Do you recall any issues with food? How does the school try to get international students engaged with activities and programs on campus?

In order to have both points of view (from those who are coming and those who are about to leave), the study conducted interviews mostly with freshman and senior students. A small portion of sophomores and juniors had been considered, but since this study was seeking to compare students in first and last year's expectations, freshman and senior students were the main focus.

In the case of non-athlete students, the interviewing process has not been different; the only contrast was the absence of sport practices and study halls. In their cases, most have been asked to answer the questions during events on campus, in the residence halls, or places such as the campus cafeteria. From both groups' samples, the gender ratio attempted to simulate the entire USF student population: 63% of female and 37% of male students.

All interviews took no longer than thirty minutes. Some students were more detailed; others provided shorter answers, either because of personality traits or because of their non-

² Jose teaches at USF, is a frequent spectator of athletics competitions and deals a lot with international students.

fluency in English. In order to preserve the students' identities and to give them more freedom in what to say, each of them has been given a fictitious name. During the conduction of this research, no student refused to participate.

One of the limitations was the fact that not so many athletes have been approved to take summer classes, which caused the absence of most of them over that period. The interviewing process was supposed to start in July and had to be postponed because of student absence on campus. Those who were on campus for the summer were mainly American students. Additionally, some interviews had to be rescheduled because of their intense schedules and academic and athletic duties.

At the same time, non-athletes who participated in the interviewing process were more flexible than athletes. Some conversations had to be rescheduled, but only for an hour later or next day. If, on the one hand, they do not have head coaches pushing them for better grades, on the other hand, they have a less stressful routine, allowing them to study at home, spend more time in the library and attend the classes frequently.

With regards to student-athletes, the goal is to attempt to reveal the motivations to migrate to another country, another culture, away from their families and living an innovative and challenging experience. In particular, understanding how much USF's motto "change the world from here" has influenced their decision, alongside with other factors, as well as how they perceive life in a university dedicated to promoting human rights and the Jesuits values.

Another point of interest is what motivated those who are graduating from USF, if their expectations were fulfilled, and how the proposed actions for social justice promoted by the university have affected their lives. At the same time, it was interesting to understand how human values interacted with sports to contribute to their integration in the new country, facilitating the comprehension of an international student.

4. Behind the mask: The Dons case³

The University of San Francisco, whose student population was the focus of this research, hosted, in the Fall 2014, 1,666 incoming freshman students, being 1274 of them undergraduate and 392 graduate students from 82 countries⁴. Within the athletics department, USF counts with 49 international student-athletes from 20 different countries for the 2015-2016 academic year.

When it comes to choosing where to go to school, the location of the campus makes more difference for international student-athletes than for Americans, as explained by USF's athletics director: "USF is number 8 in the country in best places for international students. It's a very international city, it's a place for internationals."

Wiktoria, an 18-year old freshman female from Poland, confirms his words. She has just joined the cross-country team in the Fall 2015 semester: "I chose San Francisco because I love the weather, the city and also the team is very good! It's a Division I team."

In USF's case, there are many reasons behind the recruiting process of international student-athletes. A very common reason is the presence of an athlete from a specific country that comes to the university, no matter to what sport, and, after a successful experience, this athlete becomes a reference for future prospects, as a head tennis coach says:

Men's soccer team was very famous for bringing Norwegian players. There was, then, a Norwegian kid who came through people that they knew from soccer. He was from Oslo, Norway, and he helped recruiting a couple of friends. He brought another friend from there and they've got another friend from Louisville at that time who transferred here and

³Inspired USF's mascot Don Francisco, who wears a mask, the "Behind the Mask" series shows what's behind of a USF athlete. Studies, family and all the effort they put to be a successful athlete.

⁴https://www.usfca.edu/sites/default/files/admission/pdf/intl/stu_population_14f_country_major_combined.pdf

they also brought another friend. So we had four guys from Norway in our team, 80% of the team was international. We have a few guys from Denmark and from Sweden in our team and the women's team has also 3 Swedish players right now. Sweden has always been like the powerhouse of tennis and Norway is like the "brother". They're still very good in Tennis and because of that we've built that network. One of our head coaches went recently to the international championship in Austria this summer to do some recruiting, and this was the first time we ever did it. A lot of other college coaches were already out there, the ones on the top 64, they were all there.

That connection created by Norwegians was the turning point of international recruitment at USF. The Dons won six national championships, having Norwegian players in five of them. That success was replicated in other sports, as said by the athletics director:

If you look back in history, our grand success specifically in our men's soccer program, one of the first programs out there to recruit internationally, with a tremendous success, being national championships with a high number of international student-athletes. So I think it's been a long history at USF and it has a lot to do with that.

Still speaking about these connections that attract athletes to a specific university, it can be either a friend who is attending that institution or even the head coach. Professor Jose emphasizes how important these connections are when it comes to bringing international student-athletes to a specific university, and that attracts them:

I think the connection (between incoming and former student-athletes) is why it is so important to have the coach for a long time, because the coach is the connection. Also, I think students, they are connected, they know the university, they know who to talk there, like processes in that university. People, especially undergrads, prefer something they already know, somebody who is guiding them. Nobody is going to jump for something they are afraid.

This guidance is also mentioned by Julia, a 22-year old female senior from Croatia, as one of the main reasons why she was attracted to San Francisco and USF alongside with the high level of competitiveness. She is a classic case of an athlete who looks to combine high quality education with high performance sports at a competitive level (Love & Kim, 2011, p. 92):

I had offers from the East Coast, St. John's and DePaul, but I knew the level is not as high as here. I did not see myself there, my intuition was telling me I could not live in big cities like New York or even Chicago. I knew I wanted something on the West Coast, also because of the lifestyle, the weather and everything. Then I was looking at all the teams and I saw USF had a Croatian player there. So I contacted her and asked if she knew anyone looking for a setter, not necessarily in San Francisco. And then she responded to me like two days later saying that one of their setters just quit. It just happened at the right moment and she told the coach she knew a setter. I talked with him on Skype and he really liked my attitude, my personality and my video.

The recruiting process is not only focused on international prospects. However, the need for more resources and the different expectations seen by foreigners tend to make a difference, according to the head volleyball coach:

We recruit everyone (Americans and foreigners), but I think USF is a great school for international students specifically, because of the location. We have some success with them, both academically and athletically they're doing well for us. People know New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, so coming from another country you want to be somewhere you can have that experience versus American kids some times look for. They look for bigger schools; they have different attractions.

Also, recruiting an international student-athlete may be associated with the maturity level they tend to have in comparison to domestic students. Living away from home at the age of

18 forces most of these young athletes to mature faster than Americans, and this is certainly an advantage for them, as claimed by a few head coaches:

International athletes are more mature at the age of 18, they can acclimate faster, and it's a different mentality. If I were 18 years old and came to a different culture, I would be shocked (head tennis coach).

The student-athlete that comes here did grow up in a different culture of what school is all about. In America you go to college, you usually go for the experience of being outside your parents house, and then, school. If you are an international student, you most likely want to go to school to play a sport. So they are more focused, in many cases, than other freshmen (head volleyball coach).

When it comes to the reasons behind the decision making process of what university to attend, the location is an important factor. The University of San Francisco, object of this study, is located in a quite popular city in the United States.

Recently, the website *Business Insider*⁵ published a list of the 25 colleges with the best location in the United States; USF was the second best. Other than that, San Francisco has been recently listed as one of the top 5 cities most visited by foreigners in the country⁶. Both publications reflect perfectly what the head of the International Students Scholar Services at USF states:

I think it depends on the student. For undergraduate students I definitely see students who want to come get an education in a Jesuit tradition where they see the values of the Jesuit community as a university and the classes here. They also think the city is a huge draw for students. It's definitely an international city, it has international airports, it's easy to get

⁵ <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-25-colleges-with-the-best-location-2015-10>

⁶ [http://www.travelersdigest.com/7528-10-most-visited-cities-in-the-united-states-by-foreign-travelers-in-](http://www.travelersdigest.com/7528-10-most-visited-cities-in-the-united-states-by-foreign-travelers-in-2013/2/)

from other parts of the world here and back home again, and there is a lot of cultural resources within the city. So it's not just the university community, but they usually have a community of their home culture outside of the university, which can sometimes be a big draw for students but also for their families. Sometimes parents like to see that too.

Additionally, there is no secret that the role international students play on campus has increased significantly within the past two decades. American universities came up with the conclusion that including an international component to their courses helps domestic students acquiring a higher level of cultural exchange. At USF it is not different, the motto "Change the world from here" aims at those students who will make a difference in the world's future.

From that perspective, attracting international students would make American undergrads more prepared for the future, especially when dealing with different cultural backgrounds after they graduate and go into the business market (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005).

Therefore, international students contribute to universities and the society. Their success and progress is an issue with far-reaching consequences not only for themselves, but also institutions and nations (Andrade & Norman, 2009, p.25).

If, on the one hand, push factors are hard to be understood based on their numerous causes, on the other hand pull factors come into play because of the attractiveness of a certain destination, which is clearly noticed by the traveler/student, as identified by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002). As for USF, the quality and the availability of technology-based programs can be mentioned as pull factors. Chong, male freshman from Malaysia, majoring in Computer Science, describes why he opted for San Francisco:

I think it is the bunch of opportunities, like job opportunities, events that happen in the city and it is very convenient, you just need to take the bus to go downtown. Also, the diverse community, different people from around the world. Somebody used to tell me that San Francisco is like the whole world in one place.

However, other components must be considered pull factors, such as language, geographic distance of the host country, the quality level of the host institution, the number of programs offered and how aware faculty and staff are of international students and what opportunities they have.

An increasing demand for higher education, either to improve skills for the future or to simply earn a good degree, is always a push factor. As pull factors, they may include the reputation of the country or the institution, the recommendation from friends and family, geographic proximity, and environmental issues such as a sunny climate (Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010, p.234).

4.1 International dislocation among young students

In order to understand displacement of international student-athletes, it is primarily necessary to understand dislocation of international students, its causes and consequences. Later on, it will be possible to compare the main differences between athletes and non-athletes.

There are multiple factors behind the decision and the reasons that make someone leave family and friends, staying away from home for a couple of semesters, or even years. In the past years, there had been an increasing number of universities in the United States admitting international students to enrich their environment, bringing new cultures to campus life.

Moreover, universities realized that studying abroad meant not only a peripheral activity, but also something strictly important in the area of both undergraduate studies and preparation for career, in which students go home in a complete different way they were before this journey (Biles & Lindley, 2009).

American universities and colleges tend to receive a vast amount of international students every year, and the number of incoming international students increased 30% from 2007 to 2012 (Institute of International Education, 2013)⁷.

An important factor in displacement of international students is globalization and its causes. In the past thirty years, with the uprising of neoliberalism, the world slowly became “smaller”, where distances have been shortened and borders disappeared.

Also, the internationalization of neoliberalism plays another important role. During the period that the world was still facing the dualism between Capitalism/Neoliberalism and Socialism, it was extremely important that peripheral countries, such as those from the Global South, were included in the international context (Biles & Lindley, 2009, p. 152). It meant that, transferring knowledge to these countries would also result in indoctrination by Neoliberalism, avoiding the so-called “Communist Wave”.

The *New Imperialism* proposed by David Harvey (2003) also had its beliefs in culture. Although economic expansion was the main goal, culture was a means of disseminating Capitalism, Neo-Liberalism and free markets as well. What he calls *Globalization through Americanization* around the world meant the export not only of political and financial institutions but also a way of life, consumerism and cultural forms (Harvey, 2003, p.41). In other countries’ societies, *Americanization* meant the arrival of habits such as eating fast-food, drinking Coca-Cola, listening to American pop music, watching famous American TV series and wearing clothing made in the U.S.A. (e.g. Levi’s jeans).

The cultural diffusion had begun in the 1980’s and is still ongoing. American common habits as those mentioned above are becoming more and more common in such countries,

⁷ Source: <http://www.iie.org/Who-We-Are/News-and-Events/Press-Center/Press-Releases/2012/2012-11-13-Open-Doors-International-Students>

present in families living rooms as they tend to prefer watching American series or movies over their local TV shows or whatever their own culture promotes.

Words in English have also been adopted, for example, diet, cellular and fitness have become part of non-English dictionaries. Events such as Halloween and Black Friday are now celebrated. In a clear demonstration of soft power⁸, people are attracted by the famous *American way of life*, just like moths attracted by the light (Tota, 2009).

Thus, for international students, the familiarity brought by the export of American culture is a motivational component when it comes to establishing an initial connection between them and the United States. The first step in the decision making process is when the barriers are knocked down and the distances are shortened. Feeling comfortable with the culture from a specific country helps a lot in the adjustment process when it comes to migrating to that place. With that said, international students may believe that the “American Dream” will come true in their lives in the U.S. just like in the movies or TV series they watch, in a true fairytale created in their minds.

Among all the reasons previously mentioned, education plays an important role when, for example, a student from Pakistan summarizes his wish to go to the United States in one word: Education. Students say they can expand their chances to get a good job in the future after graduation because of their international experience (Gmelch, 2015).

For international students, the possibility of earning an international degree in the U.S. is the main purpose of coming to this country (Ying, 2005), as confirmed by Chong:

My major is Computer Science, and I felt the U.S. could give me more opportunities. I could get internships. They have a lot of events for computer science students. Back in my country there's not much attention to computer science.

⁸ Capacity of co-opting and attract instead of applying coercion, using force or giving money as a way of persuasion.

Maria, an 18-year old female freshman from Brazil majoring in Liberal Arts and Social Justice, also repeats his words. As a musician, she agrees that for her academic area the U.S. is the place to be:

In my area, California is the state for the music industry in the whole world. So I wanted to come to California because of that.

Marco, an 18-year old freshman from Italy, also shares his opinion:

I came to the U.S. because I was looking for a different life, a new adventure. I love Verona, my city, everything there, but after 20 years it becomes boring because it's a small town, always the same life, same people. So I had the opportunity to leave. You cannot compare San Francisco to Verona! I chose San Francisco because I came here with my family years ago and I was fascinated by California. So, it's mainly because I love California.

Over the years, institutions have been founded in order to facilitate the exchange between students and universities. A well-known example is Fulbright⁹, promoting international education exchange for both professors and students. Therefore, it is accurate to say that international students are an important and relevant part of the mix of students in today's universities and colleges' campuses, being a significant source of diversity and revenue (Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010, p.233).

According to Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) the decision making process to study abroad contains three specific rounds:

- 1 - The student decides that he/she wants to study abroad.

⁹ Founded in 1946 by Senator J. William Fulbright. The Fulbright program reaches more than 140 countries around the world. The program currently awards approximately 1,900 grants annually in all fields of study, and operates in more than 140 countries worldwide. Website: <http://us.fulbrightonline.org>

2 - The student chooses a specific country and institution. Later, he/she identifies factors that make him/her choose a preferred university and host country.

One important aspect not to be forgotten is the knowledge or awareness of current events in the host country. That is the moment when personal recommendations, either by family or friends, arise. Cost concerns may also be present due to a possible financial impact that studying abroad may have on the family or the student's budget. Lastly, aspects such as the environment and the student's life style, geographic proximity and social connections will determine the place he/she is most interested in.

Similarly to other decision making processes, as shown by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002), the choice to study in another country is extremely influenced by either push or pull factors¹⁰. On the one hand, people are motivated by circumstances that push them into a new place. On the other hand, pull factors bring them to a stage at which they feel attracted to a specific location, such as a city or a university, a scholarship offered, or even the presence of relatives in that place.

In the case of Mohammad, a 19 year-old male junior from Saudi Arabia, it was primarily caused by a scholarship, but he chose San Francisco because of family reasons:

There is a scholarship offered by my government and, while I was in high school, I applied and was accepted. I applied for universities in San Francisco because my sisters live here. I applied for San Francisco State University and the University of San Francisco, but SF State did not accept my application because I was still studying in high school, they wanted me to finish first, and then send my final transcripts. USF accepted me.

Although less than 25% of student-athletes are awarded with full scholarship (full tuition, room and board), just 1% of the student-athletes among all 305 Division I universities receive

¹⁰ The push factor involves a force which acts to drive people away from a place and the pull factor is what draws them to a new location. Source: <http://geography.about.com/od/geographyglossary/g/ggpushpull.htm>

full scholarships (Coakley, 1998, p.321). Coming to the U.S. to combine athletic and academic lives still sound interesting for international athletes.

For international students not involved with any athletic program, scholarships are even scarcer. As Maria said previously, the main reason for her to come to the U.S. was the possibility of being closer to music producers. She explains that her mother had prepared herself to be able to pay for her school tuition, but it would have been better if she had been awarded with financial aid:

No, I didn't have financial aid. My mother was very smart with the way she prepared herself to pay my tuition. She worked in a way I wouldn't have to worry about that. But, at the same time, I think I could have asked for a scholarship, because I think I had a chance to be awarded one and I didn't do it because I was afraid not to get it. From now on I will certainly ask for it!

Among the reasons to become a student-athlete at an American university are other attractive factors such as involving students in school activities and increasing their interest in academics, building responsibility, achievement orientation, teamwork skills and giving students opportunities to develop and display skills in activities valued in the society (Coakley, 1998, p.438).

Collegiate sports also create a sort of school spirit, as bringing students to every game always sounds exciting to a prospect. Going to a collegiate game can become a basis for spirited social occasions (Coakley, 1998, p.457).

The combination between this atmosphere and getting a degree sounds very tempting to an international student-athlete who is not used to that culture. As mentioned by Coakley (1998, p.462), the major advantage of interscholastic sports is the possibility to provide them with opportunities to develop and test their skills, especially the physical ones.

Meant to be members of a completely different classification of students, student-athletes actually run through the same process. From listening to friends advising him/her of where to go, to the moment of the arrival, the “academic process” is not different.

There has been an increase in the internationalization of collegiate sports. According to a NCAA study, the number of “nonresident aliens” reached the mark of 10,395 participants in Division I athletics in the 2008-09 academic year, achieving 6.2% of all athletes in the NCAA’s most important division. This figure represents nearly a threefold increase from 1999-2000, when a total of 3,589 international athletes constitute 2.4% of the NCAA Division I student-athlete population. In certain sports, the migrant athletes are particularly striking. For example, 36.8% of women’s tennis teams and 35.5% of men’s tennis squads were comprised of athletes from outside of the U.S.

Both the growing quantity of international moving athletes in U.S. collegiate athletics and their particularly high concentration in certain sports present interesting issues for sport studies scholars to explore.

What illustrates that welcoming process is when international recruits travel to the U.S. prior to their enrollment in that specific school. This process is called “official or unofficial visits”¹¹.

- Official visits: Usually are paid by the university, which is interested in that recruit and should take up to 48 hours. A staff member (e.g. head or assistant coach) may even pick up the prospect at the airport.
- Unofficial visits: Paid by the prospect, it is unlimited, however the recruit should cover all his/her expenses.

Some of these trips to campuses in the U.S. are organized by the so-called “agencies”, a recent phenomenon in the athletes recruitment field. The recruiting agencies are companies

¹¹ <http://compliance.louisiana.edu/sites/compliance/files/Official%20and%20Unofficial%20Visits1.pdf>

(sometimes founded by former student-athletes) that take care of helping the prospect finding a university in the U.S. They help the student-athlete in the decision making process, giving advice and taking care of all paperwork, such as scheduling proficiency exams, helping them with the application process, and translating their transcripts and any other documents into English.

However, this work is not for free. Prospects pay a fee of approximately US\$2,000.00 to cover the expenses with translation, proficiency tests, application processes and, of course, the services done by them. Agencies offer sports programs as a unique opportunity, as promoted on one of their websites:

Have you thought about playing and studying at a college in the U.S.? Our sports program is a custom program that assists athletes interested in studying and playing at American universities. In this program, most athletes can receive partial or full scholarships, covering tuition fees, housing, food and sports equipment. The program is valid only for athletes that will make the U.S. undergraduate courses. The program's goal is to give the athlete the best options of universities, according to their profile, technical skills, travel interests, location and other factors. During the preparation process, our team is responsible for all actions, so that athletes need to focus only on training and preparation for English exams (Daquiprafora, 2015, para.1).

The agency mentioned above, for example, is the leading company in the Brazilian market, working with multiple sports (basketball, baseball, fencing, gymnastics, golf, sailing, soccer, swimming, tennis, table tennis, track & field and volleyball). At the first moment, when several universities show interest in a specific student-athlete, it is the agent who takes care of making the first contact. Agents establish the connection between coaching staff and athlete, supervising whatever the prospect may face.

That being said, the agent acts as an advisor. No student makes any decision of where to go without talking to the agent first. Sometimes that relationship causes constraints, such as universities giving up on some prospects offered by agents because they try to put pressure on head coaches to admit students. Additionally, athletes represented by agencies, those who are really sought after by certain coaches, tend to take longer to accept a scholarship offer because their agent may claim that there might be better opportunities or possibilities.

The promises are not only to help the student find a university and a sports program. In order to make both student and parents feel more comfortable, agents promise to follow up with the student-athlete on a regular basis for the four years of the program, by either giving them advice or helping with the relationship between athlete and coach. Some of these agencies take prospects also on international trips to show them campuses in the U.S. and to create a relationship with coaches:

So nowadays recruiting has changed a little bit, where players now have a lot of these agencies. We get each week emails from agencies, from a guy in Belgium, from a guy in Brazil. We met a guy and he brought the kids over one summer to show them the university, things like that. We did kind of a workout with them, they were like 14 guys touring to see how it looked like, going to an American university (head tennis coach).

These agencies are managed primarily by former international-student-athletes. After graduation, they go back to their home countries. Then, they realize they can make money guiding future students through the same journey they went years before.

However, having an agent does not mean that the student-athlete will find a good university and succeed at the process of pursuing a degree. As a head coach at the University of San Francisco says, agents do not think specifically about the lives of these athletes, they are focusing on making money, not particularly thinking about their futures:

They are not always looking for the best future for the kids. The agent comes and watches us and says “oh you guys are very good”. Before, they thought it would be just another program. And they want to make money, so they want just to place their kids. They don’t care where they go.

Lucas, 19-year old male golf athlete from Brazil, confirms his thoughts. He says he did pay an agent to get him a good school, however the work was not as he expected:

I didn’t pay an enormous amount of money, but yes, I did pay some. Honestly, I think it didn’t change anything at all because they only refer students to Division II universities and I didn’t want to go to a DII school. Sometimes they even refer students to Junior Colleges, whose level is even lower. And Americans want Division I, everyone wants to play at the DI level. The agencies’ main concern is to make money and place you at any university.

Lucas words converge to what Thiago, male senior also from Brazil, illustrates about the relationship between future student-athletes and agencies:

I did have an agent. They advised me a lot but I think it could have been much better. I arrived here knowing nothing, zero! They helped me with the tests, some contacts with coaches, but the majority of contacts were made by me, also talking to friends. They helped me organize the paperwork and that’s all. I paid around US\$2,000.00 for their service.

On the website *Star Athletes Online*¹², former High School Basketball Coach Brian Hefferan describes the relationship between agents and college coaches. In his words, coaches hardly pay attention to athletes recommended by agents:

If you think about it; recruiting services have dozens to thousands of clients that they are trying to help get recruited. They package you up with a profile, maybe do your highlight

¹² <http://www.starathletesonline.com/welcome/what-athletic-recruiting-services-dont-want-you-to-know/>

video and then ‘SPAM’ college coaches. These services do not know the coaches player personnel needs or if your child meets the school’s academic requirements. College coaches want to develop relationships with the student-athletes that they are recruiting (Star Athletes Online, 2012, para.7)!

As previously mentioned, visits are important for recruits because they serve as a first test for them to have an idea of how the school looks like. They visit the campus; meet coaches, other athletes and professors. After that, they may confirm their wishes to go to that university, as said by Nina, a 17-year old incoming Slovenian female volleyball player. She has not come yet, but she is very excited and cannot wait until she arrives in San Francisco in the Fall 2016 Semester:

I am so excited to be here, my family and friends are so jealous that I am here in the United States. I loved everything and everyone! The city is great, I am sure I will enjoy life here. I wish I could stay here right now, but I am looking forward to be here next academic year.

Although student-athletes experience the same decision making process on what to do and where to go, they have skills that “normal students” do not have. They are athletes; they have the capacity to pay for their studies by practicing a specific sport and competing for the university.

As Selbe (2013) states, being a student-athlete at a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I¹³ school is an attractive idea. Some student-athletes are seen as celebrities on campus.

Another big advantage for student-athletes over non-athletes is seen after they graduate, even if they are not becoming professional athletes. After being part of an athletic program

¹³ The NCAA contains three division levels, being division I the highest one.

for four years they tend to receive equal or greater remuneration in comparison to general students (Lopes, 2010).

Still according to Selbe (2013), if, on the one hand, being identified as a successful athlete on campus may sound exciting, on the other hand, it brings multiple challenges to international student-athletes as well. The hardest part is the language barrier. Although most of them have to take the “Test of English as Foreign Language” (TOEFL) to prove their English proficiency, they are still affected by their non-native fluency in the language.

As explained by Lucas, the reasons that made him come to the United States to play golf and pursue a degree are:

I came here because the universities give me conditions to be the number one in my sport. This is what I’m looking for; I want to be number one. And here I have all the conditions and facilities that can make me improve. If you’re a high performance athlete and you want to be great, you should go to school in the United States.

Lucas’s words fit in the students’ thoughts as well. Most of the interviewed student-athletes think that the possibility of combining high quality education and high performance sport is the main reason that motivates them to come to the US:

I came to the U.S. because in Brazil there is not much opportunity to play soccer in a competitive level and attend a university at the same time. You have to choose between soccer and studies. I came to the U.S. to attend high school on a scholarship and decided to stay (Daniel, junior male athlete from Brazil).

I wanted to do something exciting, something new after graduating from high school and I heard about opportunities to play volleyball in college, which means I could combine my studies and my sport, which is not as easy to do in Germany because back there professional clubs are separated from universities, there is no cooperation. So, playing in

college seemed to be the perfect way for me to play at a higher volleyball level and get a degree (Susan, 22 years old, senior female athlete from Germany).

The reason I came to America in general is because in Europe it is really hard to maintain both academics and athletics at the same time, and this was just a great opportunity to pursue my undergrad degree and also to play at one of the highest levels in America (Julia, female senior athlete from Croatia).

Because of athletics, I've got an offer from USF's cross-country head coach... he invited me. I just love running and in Poland I could not study and run at the same time (Wiktorija, Polish female freshman athlete from track & field/cross-country).

Moreover, for both groups (athletes and non-athletes), the decision of coming to the U.S. to study comes from different origins. Athletes expect to be awarded with a scholarship to practice high performance sports and earn a degree while non-athletes focus mostly on good education with the possibility of better opportunities in their careers in the future.

For Susan, Daniel and Julia, studying is not enough; they realized they could compete in the sport they love and receive a scholarship in return, differently from non-athletes, who would come to the U.S. just looking for an international degree and to increase their employment chances.

4.1.1. Collegiate vs. professional sports

When it comes to playing professionally, though, student-athletes face the dilemma of trying it or not. Many of them have plans of competing at a professional level after graduation, and by the time they move on to the collegiate level, their professional aspirations remain high. However, although NCAA offers a quite high level of competitiveness, reports by that same institution show that student-athletes most likely will not make it to the professional level (Tyranee, Harris & Post, 2013, p.22-23).

On a regular basis, NCAA publishes researches on the probability of a student-athlete becoming a professional athlete. For sports such as basketball, for example, a recent study by NCAA¹⁴ illustrates how difficult it is to become a professional athlete, giving the estimated probability of competing in professional athletics.

Table 1:



Estimated Probability of Competing in Professional Athletics

| | NCAA Participants | Approximate # Draft Eligible | # Draft Slots | # NCAA Drafted | % NCAA to Major Pro* | % NCAA to Total Pro^ |
|--------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Football | 71,291 | 15,842 | 256 | 255 | 1.6% | 3.7% |
| M Basketball | 18,320 | 4,071 | 60 | 47 | 1.2% | 11.6% |
| W Basketball | 16,319 | 3,626 | 36 | 32 | 0.9% | 4.7% |
| Baseball | 33,431 | 7,429 | 1,216 | 638 | 8.6% | -- |
| M Ice Hockey | 3,976 | 884 | 211 | 60 | 6.8% | -- |
| M Soccer | 23,602 | 5,245 | 76 | 72 | 1.4% | -- |

It also reflects what coaches say:

I think, on our team, I'd say 99.9% of the boys want to be a professional. Those who make it could be anywhere between 0% and 5%, maybe even less than 5%. If you want to say, just being a professional, signing a piece of paper, OK, maybe a few. If you want to talk about being a professional for longer than three years, that number is going to drop drastically (USF's assistant men's soccer coach).

His thoughts fit perfectly with Tyrance, Harris & Post's (2013) words when it comes to explaining that they really want to be professionals, and some of them are actually drafted by teams in the major leagues, but it does not mean that they will sign a lucrative contract and they may remain for a long period in the franchise's roster.

With that said, it is most likely that these athletes that do not make it to a professional league will end up doing other activities. They will use their college career and experience to formulate their life outside sports (Tyrance, Harris & Post, 2013, p.23).

¹⁴http://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/2015%20Probability%20Chart%20Web%20PDF_draft5.pdf

A very recent case of a quite successful student-athlete who gave up on turning into a professional is Stanford's junior male soccer athlete Jordan Morris. Morris, member of one of the best soccer programs in the country, has been called to represent the U.S. National team in some friendly matches. It is not common to see college players being called to the national team, which evidences why he is treated as a jewel.

After succeeding in matches against Brazil and Mexico, Morris received offers to play both in MLS and in Europe, but he decided to stay at Stanford and pursue his degree. Why? When interviewed by the website *Grantland* in October 2015¹⁵, Stanford's Head Coach Jeremy Gunn shared his thoughts on Morris' decision, supporting his ideas:

You're going to school, but just barely. So you have this system, and it produces some really fantastic players. But what does it do for most of the other players? It just spits them back out. They'd dedicated their lives to soccer, but they're still not good enough to play professionally. Now what? They don't have many options. If you're the club, then that's great — all you need to do is develop a few really good players. But for society, for developing human beings, is that really something we want? I think we have something really special here in the United States. There's always talk about how we should be copying these other countries, and in some ways that might be true. But in other ways, they should be copying us (Grantland, 2015, para.30).

Coach Gunn's words meet what many athletes have previously said, as well as the NCAA reports on how many student-athletes actually turn professionals. Even if they reach the professional level, they know they will not be athletes forever. Thus, having a degree and being able to do something apart from sports in the future is key to a good career.

¹⁵ Blog created by ESPN to debate actual sports journalism, <http://grantland.com/features/jordan-morris-soccer-usmnt-stanford-cardinal-jurgen-klinsmann/>

As USF's soccer assistant coach stated, there is no doubt student-athletes would love to play professionally, but when they realize that the road has more obstacles than expected, they gradually move on to other projects in their lives. Education in the US is built in that way, to give them multiple alternatives in their future.

In Brazil, country where some of the student-athletes that were interviewed come from, the high school dropout rates among athletes, especially in soccer, are astonishing. The few opportunities for social mobility, combined with the precariousness of the Brazilian academic system and the labor market for the new generations, make professional soccer become a life saving project for those who have talent.

At the end of the training process in soccer, if the young athlete cannot find a spot in the sports market, he tends to enter the formal labor market with low schooling, depending on the compatibility between strength and conditioning training and school. Thus, when they are unsuccessful in a soccer career, players trained under this system face more difficulties in settling in other occupations away from this sport (Rocha, Bartholo, Melo & Soares, 2011).

As some of the student-athletes have mentioned above, the American academic system offers them a unique opportunity to combine high quality education and high performance sports. It is true that most of them would consider playing professionally, but they want to have a second choice if anything goes wrong, either by not having any good contract or an injury that forces them to retire earlier. That model stands out for its excellence in comprehensive education that promotes training for both their professional and sport lives, allowing for the inclusion of the athlete in society (Lopes, 2010).

A recent report by NCAA shows that the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) increased two points over last year, reaching 86% (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015, para.1), which is the highest rate ever. When compared with the general student body, Division I student-athletes continue to outpace the non-athletes. The federal rate for Division I student-

athletes rose one point to 67%, the highest rate ever. The student body federal graduation rate remained flat at 65% (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015)¹⁶.

4.2. Acculturation and integration on campus

There is no doubt about the importance of attracting international students to the United States colleges and universities. However, incorporating them into the cultural and academic system must be even more important. In order to grant them full integration and adjustment, there must be many sorts of cultural exchange and acceptance of diversity. Interactions through campus activities, extra curricular events between American and international students can be a key to integrate these populations with one another. International students who socially interact with American students tend to adjust to the social and cultural differences through their daily experiences (Gebhard, 2010, p.14).

Still according to the author mentioned above, every single part of the process is connected to their feelings and affects their lives when they arrive in the U.S.

Establishing an intercultural exchange is a key point to remove the gap between international and American students, resulting in the integration between them and creating a successful campus life for both groups (Flaherty & Stojakovic, 2008). Chong, a male freshman from Malaysia is a good example, as he celebrates the fact that he has an American roommate:

I have a roommate, he is American and he is at ROTC¹⁷, a very nice guy, good roommate, responsible. I am involved with the University Ministry and the choir. Initially, I was involved with the Taekwondo club, but the timing wasn't right, it was immediately after classes and I was a bit tired, so I felt University Ministry was the best choice. Usually on

¹⁶ <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/graduation-success-rate-continues-climb>

¹⁷ Reserve Officers Training Corps. Program offered by the US Army at over 1,100 American Universities, offering merit-based scholarships. Source: <http://www.goarmy.com/rotc.html>

Friday nights I meet all the ROTC's; last Friday we went to the Mission District and the week before we went out for frozen yogurt. They are very nice people! You get to know the American culture as well. The funny thing is that they asked me if I wanted to join, they didn't know you have to be American!

And here are Maria's thoughts on her two American roommates; one is from San Diego and the other one from Los Angeles:

We do have a great relationship, we would definitely be friends off campus if we were not roommates, but there is some tension sometimes because of the limited space. Sometimes I wake them up accidentally or they wake me up accidentally, things like that. But I really like them.

The formation of new friendships is part of the social change process (Richards, 2014), when students exchange their cultures and share their own life experiences with one another. They move to another country, settle down, make new friends and then finally adjust to the location. Marco describes the differences between his own habits and Americans in general:

I'm kind of a shy person, and American people are very open, they all come to you and say "Hi!" and I'm not that kind of person. I'm friendly but I'm not the kind of person who goes to a person and says "Hey, nice to meet you".

It is true that a lot is being done to ease international students lives on campus, however it must not be forgotten that, even with all these measures, they may face constraints in their adjustment to the American culture. Food, weather, off-campus life, and attractions are extremely important in that process.

That social support is essential to make students feel more comfortable when difficult times come. Such downturns in life would obviously be challenging even if they were living in their home countries, but emotions tend to be more overwhelming for students away from home.

As explained by Chong, USF counts also on University Ministry¹⁸, which promotes programs on and off-campus for students to ease their struggles caused either by classes or any other instabilities they may have in life. Both Chong and Mohammad are involved with their activities. Although USF is a Catholic institution, it is not required to be Catholic to participate in the University Ministry programs.

University Ministry, commonly called by the students as UM, seeks to integrate these students with one another. It offers retreats to international students, meditation or even immersion trips to countries like Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua or the West Virginian Appalachia. These activities serve not only as an integration tool, but also as a way to get them involved with activities associated with social justice (one of the school's mottos) and the American culture.

What University Ministry does is called social support, as it gives resources to students to relax and to ensure that they are living in a sane environment. UM activities can also be seen as emotional support, since they promote friendship and warmth to make the student feel he is cared about (Richards, 2014, p.16).

In order to facilitate that process, the USF International Student and Scholar Services office (ISSS) encourages students to leave their comfort zone and get involved with other groups on campus.

We definitely encourage them to not spend time just with their own cultural groups, because that would be a real challenge for them, to make that leap and meet other people.

We encourage students to be involved with not just their country clubs, but also clubs and student organizations they have a broad interest in (ISSS director).

¹⁸ University Ministry's homepage: <https://www.usfca.edu/university-ministry>

At USF, ISSS also attempts to engage students in what is called “International Education Week”. As ISSS describes on its website, it is “a yearly *extravaganza* of cultural performances, storytelling, food fests, and other events celebrating global diversity at USF”¹⁹.

The International Education Week promotes events such as the *International Soccer Cup*, where students make their own teams to play a campus wide co-ed tournament. Another event is called *Stories and Food from Home*, which allows them to share stories about their own countries and introduce typical food from their countries to others. Lastly, the *Global Trivia Night*, where they test their international pop culture competing for prizes.

International students in general tend to face multiple challenges within their adaptation process. They face difficulties to make new friends, find their own community, to solve problems and deal with their lack of proficiency in English (Tseng & Newton, 2002). For most of them, it is the first time away from home, and having to deal with problems without their families can be quite challenging.

Most of them are in a time of transition; they are going to a university for the first time in their lives and they just became young adults. Thus, it is also a change from teenage years to adult life. International students at this age tend to be intimidated by this environment as any other student is. However, they face it at a larger scale. For them, such experience does not mean that they are simply attending university, it means that they are conducting life far away from their comfort zone, in a different country, with a different culture and, especially, taking classes in a different language (Andrade & Norman, 2009, p.26).

For Professor Jose, initially, there is no rejection by American students towards foreigners, but the adjustment of international students varies according to their groups and their origins. He emphasizes differences among the international groups:

¹⁹ International Student & Scholar Services <https://www.usfca.edu/iss>

People in the host country don't know how to interact with international students, and it's not because they don't want to, they just have no idea of how. Usually people from the United States are extremely friendly at the beginning with people from other countries. For example: Europe. They are more reserved, they have this confidence on them, but they are not too friendly. People from Latin America, I would say they like to blend more, to be the center off attention. People from Africa, they hangout with each other and usually African Americans approach them more than other races. I think the hardest is Latin Americans because they like to blend. Chinese, they usually hangout with each other, they're also very intense when they talk.

Being an international student brings an extra amount of challenges. They face not only a change in the school environment and their social surroundings, but, at the same time, they are away from home. Many of them also experience cultural, social, and linguistic differences, bigger financial costs, and job restrictions (Wintre, Kandasamy, Chavoshi & Wright, 2014, p.4).

For athletes, though, this acculturation process tends to be easier. To help the adaptation process, athletes count on specific assistance, such as tutoring to help them improve especially their language skills and, of course, general help provided by their teammates.

We encourage the coaching staffs to foster some team-building opportunities so that their domestic student-athletes will intermingle with international student-athletes more”, according to Magdi El Shahawy, director of the Student-Athletes Academic Services at University of Southern California (USC) (Selbe, 2013).

Still in accordance with Mr. El Shahawy's thoughts on international student-athletes, it is extremely relevant to note his comments on this specific population of students, who demand more special care than other students do. Athletes require different orientation, especially

when it comes to what is offered on campus, such as services provided by the office of international students.

This support process comes through socialization, which is faced by both athletes and non-athletes. Nevertheless, student-athletes may have some benefits that other students do not. Socialization is an active process of learning social development that occurs as individuals interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world where they live, forming ideas about who they are and making decisions about their goals and behaviors (Coakley, 1998, p.88).

Still according to Coakley (1998, p.27) sports are a social phenomenon, either played at a high performance or just for fun on a weekly activity. There are those who compete in sports to set new standards, write their names in History and those who just practice sports to stay healthy. What is clear according to sociologists is that sports are part of our culture. In that sense, sports become part of people's lives, allowing people to get integrated. It is the perfect atmosphere to create an environment of comprehension and understanding (United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the Olympic Truce, 2013). In this case, it does not matter if the athlete is fluent in English or not. In sports, the language is universal.

With that said, it is possible to assert that sports have the power to change people's lives, acting like a social agent and providing values that will stay forever in people's lives.

Both social and economic changes, alongside globalization, motivate international migration of high performance athletes. Given those aspects, migration of athletes becomes an interesting topic for studies and research (Maguire & Falcous, 2011).

For international student-athletes, the adaptation process, followed by their adjustment, is definitely facilitated by their lifestyle on campus. Right after their arrival, they realize that they are members of a selective group of people; it is therefore easier for them to integrate themselves to the local culture.

Student-athletes are clearly privileged because of their status. Both international and local students immediately become team and roommates, and travel and hangout together. They have the advantage of becoming members of a social group, either on their own team or in the whole athletics program. Therefore, it is fair to consider that through the athletics department, these students face an easier way to make new friends and find their community (Gmelch, 2015).

Also according to Richards (2014, p.18), for athletes, social support, when introduced in the form of a team, is an effective tool to combat loneliness in order to ease their adjustment on campus.

Student-athletes tend to have an easier acculturation process on campus, having a variety of activities offered to them by coaches, staff or other athletes. Non-athletes tend to act on their own and face the acculturation process by themselves. When asked if she was offered any opportunities to mingle with her academic peers, Maria explains:

Yes, I looked for opportunities and some people offered me some options, but only after I had already looked into that. In my case, I tried to get involved with everything related to music.

Her situation is quite similar to Marco's case when it comes to acculturation on campus. Being a former rugby player, he met a member of the rugby club team on campus, who offered him the possibility to join them: "The first day I was here, I met a rugby player and he said I should join the team."

Students tend to use strategies that will help in their adaptation process to college life culture, such as the use of humor and optimism, observation and behavior matching (Gebhard, 2010, p.169).

I haven't found my group of friends yet because in the beginning I was a lot involved with other international students, and I still hangout a lot with another Brazilian freshman, but I

don't get along with her friends. They like to party a lot and that's not for me. I'm still looking for people whose lifestyle is more similar to mine, somewhat healthier, like people who enjoy jogging, etc (Maria, female freshman from Brazil).

Professor Jose agrees with her when it comes to programs offered on campus. In his opinion, non-athletes have to find their own way to integration activities:

If you don't know University Ministry, you are never going to come and probably nobody is going to tell you that University Ministry exists. If you don't know the Psychological or the Career Services... So people have to discover it. I think that not having a track of development for international students, what they do, where they go and how people take care of you as a whole person.

Another advantage athletes have over other students is having athletic trainers to take care of them when they get either injured or sick. They are the first people student-athletes usually ask help from whenever something is needed: "Usually I ask either the trainer or, if not the trainer, my coaches" (Thiago, senior male athlete from Brazil).

Maria explains that she had to find her own way to treat herself when she gets sick:

I don't ask anyone for help, I just go and find a solution. If things get harder, I have my health insurance and go to the doctor. My Brazilian friend got sick a month ago and it was the first time she got sick away from her family. She always used to be close to her mother. She asked me "what should I do?" then I said we should go to the doctor.

Having medical assistance is something Marco also misses; he says that the club team does not have as many privileges as the varsity team does:

I know they have their own gym and massage. I wouldn't like to have our own gym to practice, but we really miss an athletic trainer. When we get injured or if I want a massage I need to pay 50 dollars in the gym for that. So, if possible, if the gym is available and if

they have some time, I would like to schedule an appointment with them. It's not OK paying 50 dollars, it's a lot.

It is widely known that the practice of sports teaches important values, such as learning how to win and lose, cooperation and teamwork. Sports can help socialization as they provide learning environments where participants have the opportunity to learn how to compete, to cooperate, and to have discipline. The structure of social relations in sports gives participants in various roles and groups the chance to interact, contributing to the development of social characteristics that integrate them into existing larger social structures (Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005, p.123).

Although seen by some people as a mere "organization", the Catholic Church, whose leader is an actual head of state, releases, on a regular basis, reports on how sports impact people's lives. In 2004, Pope John Paul II instituted the "Church and Sport" section, to ensure that sports are a means of bringing about holistic growth of the person at the service of peace and brotherhood between peoples (Pontifical Council for the Laity, 2005).

Another successful case connecting the Holy See and sports is the John Paul II Foundation for Sport. Established in 2010 after Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Great Britain, its cornerstones are based on building character through sports. In order to integrate people, Karol Wojtyła²⁰ used to organize soccer matches between Catholic and Jewish groups, sometimes even playing as goalkeeper of the Jewish team to complete the squad. In his thoughts, sports lead the human being to their own development (John Paul II Foundation for Sport, 2011, para.4).

Sports build people's characters (Coakley, 1998, p.96), and it has been a successful way in children's education process. Values such as ethics, empowerment (not power), accommodation of differences in physical skills, democratic decision making and

²⁰ Karol Wojtyła was Pope John Paul II's birth name.

interpersonal support (Coakley, 1998, p.99) are carried throughout their lives, no matter if they become professional athletes or not. That being said, becoming involved with sports helps people build their formation (Coakley, 1998, p.112): “My teammates help me a lot. Sometimes when I don’t know a word in English, they either help or correct me.” (Juliana, 18 year-old female student-athlete from Brazil).

For those students, the adjustment process to the environment, such as a new city, starts when they have to deal with issues they would not have back in their home countries. However, in some cases it can be actually quite easier. In terms of food, for example, being in a cosmopolitan city like San Francisco, which offers a variety of culinary options, can be an advantage, as defined by the head volleyball coach:

That acculturation always depends on the individual, so we have some easy adjustment, some difficult adjustment, but I think it is not different. Everyone moves out of their culture, their home. You come here, I think, the city can provide a lot of outlets for international students because of the diversity, and having people from all over the world, they most likely will find a restaurant they like, food types they like, versus other places. But the adjustment really depends on the individual.

As mentioned above, San Francisco is not only one of the top destinations for tourists; it is notably one of the best cities to live in the United States, where its mild weather is an advantage. The city has been listed as one of the places with best public transportation systems in the country. For sports lovers, as student-athletes are, it has two professional sports teams to follow (San Francisco Giants, San Francisco 49ers) and five more in the Bay Area (Golden State Warriors, Oakland Athletics, Oakland Raiders, San Jose Earthquakes and San Jose Sharks). It is also listed as one of the best destinations for single people²¹.

²¹ <http://www.moneycrashers.com/best-cities-live-us/>

Once again, having an international airport close to the main campus (from USF to San Francisco International Airport it takes up to 40 minutes depending on traffic conditions) is a direct connection between students and their home countries. Under these circumstances, the adaptation process to the city becomes easier for both types of international students, athletes and non-athletes. Susan says how she takes advantage of that:

I love to explore the city, I used to drive around as much as I could, taking the MUNI (San Francisco Municipal Railway) and just with my teammates. There was another girl from Israel and we just tried to explore the neighborhoods, walked around and tried restaurants. So I'm pretty familiar with the city. And since my boyfriend has a car, we drive around a lot, and on weekends we do activities in the city.

Maria agrees that San Francisco offers a wide variety of things to do and how good the city is for her:

I don't want to sound impulsive nor naïve, but I'm feeling at home; I'm loving this city! I have already lived in Australia and it was much harder for me to adjust there. Ok, it was a Western country, but the Australia I lived in was much more conservative than the California I've met now. Here you have a lot of culture, arts on the streets and I'm going to school, which is a super progressive environment; I am learning something new everyday. At the same time, I think San Francisco has something about Human Rights, Ecology... these things that attract me a lot.

When it comes to adjustment of athletes, especially who they mainly hangout with, being a student-athlete has pros and cons. Whenever they arrive in the U.S., they are already part of a group; their teammates and athletes from other sports welcome them. However, being confined in the athletic environment causes some other constraints, as Daniel explains:

Being an athlete helps in your adjustment. It helps you in the beginning because you're already inserted in a group, a family. But it may be a problem due to the fact that, once

you are an athlete, and you are only with athletes, you end up not meeting so many people who are just students on campus. I travel a lot, I hardly go to class, take class with other athletes and sit with other athletes.

Susan agrees when it comes to the fact that student-athletes belong to a pre-established group:

Yes, it definitely helps. It was one way to bring something that is familiar to you. Having that in a different country, that's what you're used to, even if sport here is done differently, different workouts, and different people. You bring something you grew up with and you make connections easier, you make friends, you know who you can talk to if you have issues. It can be a coach, it can be a teammate, it can be someone involved.

Julia points out the advantages of being an athlete within the adjustment process to campus life:

Absolutely it did help me. Since I arrived here I already was belonging to something bigger than me, and that was my team. And within our team we had already diversity, girls from different countries and religion, and Americans, too. So it's a mix and that was definitely adjustment, because they understood me and I had to understand them.

Wiktoria confirms Julia's thoughts on that: "Mostly I hangout with people from my team."

At other schools that acceptance is not different. In a recent interview to the *Contact* magazine, both Soclaina van Gulp, softball athlete from Curaçao going to the Palm Beach State College, and Isabella Hindley, a swimmer going to Yale, explain how much sports helped them to adapt to life in the United States (Share America, 2015, para.7): "Having the support of my teammates was the best thing ever. Basically, they are my family here; I'm with them 24-7" (Soclaina van Gulp, female softball student-athlete from Curaçao).

Isabella agrees with her that swimming helped her to feel better in a different country and to adjust faster:

Swimming has definitely helped my transition into living in a different country. As all of your experiences are new and different, having one constant throughout the transition makes it a lot easier. The people I'm swimming with are different, the people that are coaching me are different, the place where I'm swimming is different, but I'm still doing the same thing in the pool, and to me that is very comforting. (Isabella Hindley, female swimmer at Yale).

As cited previously, this welcoming environment created by the "athletic community" has some disadvantages. Athletes may be isolated in their own world, not having contact with other students. Their training routine as well as their immersion into the sport culture have increased through the teammates togetherness (Coakley, 2008, p.25).

Maria agrees that athletes have advantages in comparison to her:

I do think they have privileges. They can pick their classes before us, they have guaranteed housing for 2 years. Of course they work hard to combine their academic and athletic routines, but many of them don't pay tuition. Actually my tuition goes towards them.

Also, athletes take advantage of privileges other students do not have, as exemplified by Maria. She is not an athlete and she is an international student, so she is still looking for her group of friends.

Professor Jose observes the absence of a connection between athletic community and the rest of the campus:

Athletes have a group of staff that already works with them to make sure that nothing happens. They're taking care of their body, their minds and their soul. If you're an international student (non-athlete) you don't have what they do in Athletics, because they want to be at their 100%, in shape, well and good spirit. With other people, they just care about how they're performing in the classroom, and that's unfortunate. USF has the tools

to take care of the full person here, but it's not integrated within one office. For athletes, the coach is monitoring each person to make sure that they have everything they need. The coach becomes a mentor, a tutor, it's somebody who is not going to have all the answers but can guide the athlete in how to take most of the advantage of the university.

Another common explanation for student-athletes' isolation on campus is the mere fact that they have no time for anything but studying and training. Their exhaustive routines combined with the lack of time and the days spent traveling with the team do not give them the opportunity to participate in activities on campus as they would like to.

Also, for some of them, not being 100% fluent in English contributes to their non-involvement with on campus activities: "I didn't engage in anything now also because of my English limitations. Maybe next semester or year (Wiktorina, female athlete from Poland)."

Despite the weak connection between athletics and the rest of the campus community, USF and UM organize a sports service trip to Peru once a year, where students work with street children on a project financed by the Spanish soccer team Real Madrid FC.

Student-athletes are encouraged to participate, but as they hardly hear about this opportunity, it so happens that just a few apply for the trip, sometimes none of them. It is open for any student, but it is designed for athletes. Last year Julia and her fellow Croatian teammate joined the head volleyball coach, being the only athletes in that group that traveled to Peru. For the next trip in January 2016, no athletes have signed up, which illustrates the isolation.

The consequences of having student-athletes going on that trip are enormous for both local community and the individual him/herself. Jose is proud that Julia joined the group on the trip:

Julia is a person of very good heart, very charismatic, she's very lovely. In one of the vivid memories, she was playing volleyball with a girl who lost an arm. And it was amazing! The woman was so happy to be able to play volleyball with a real player.

Julia's experience in Peru has been a success. She always says how grateful she is for having the chance to be involved with that trip and she encourages everyone to join, in a clear example of how sports can change not only the athlete's life, but also an entire community. For those children they visited in Peru, the USF student-athlete is a role model, someone they would like to be in the future. And giving people some aspirations is what sports do at their best. It is a perfect combination between sports and social justice, all this under the Jesuit principles promoted by the school.

4.3. Academic challenges

Academically, it is always challenging for an international student to take classes in a different language and to be evaluated under a different grading system. Language barriers tend to be one of the hardest obstacles as they start their lives on campus.

Academic challenges are one of the most common acculturative stressors in international students lives (Ying, 2005). Chong says the American education system, for him is more challenging:

The Malaysian education system is very structured, so we only have a major exam at the end of the year, so we study throughout the year and then we sit for finals. But, in the U.S., assignments, attendance, everything is taken to account, so you have to work consistently throughout the year and the semester to get a good GPA. It's different back home, I think it's more challenging, but you get more involved in education. Back in Malaysia some students don't work hard in the beginning of the year and then the exams come, they just study like never, and in Malaysia you need a good memory most of the

time. Here's more understanding because you actually have to apply. So I think this is more challenging for me.

Mohammad, for example, agrees that the American system is very challenging, also because of the subjects he chose:

At a college level I haven't tried it in Saudi Arabia, but I assume (in the U.S.) it is much more demanding. Over there you don't have any plagiarism laws, so I guess it is much easier. It is much harder over here. Basically my struggle in my academic life is not the language itself, but more the subjects. I'm taking a couple of math classes, and I haven't taken math since I graduated from high school. But as I decided to focus on International Economics, I'm going back to math.

Maria, female freshman from Brazil:

I think my high school was harder than nowadays, but now I am learning more than I did when I was home. Back home, it is an enormous amount of classes, one exam next to another without having time to learn the content. The thing here is that we have a lot of homework, which represents a big percentage of your final grade, so I have to study. I have to sit down and revise concepts. The exams count too, but homework is a big part of your final grade. I think, back home, it is harder but the system is wrong because it was made not to work right. Here I really think I am learning something, it is worth it.

Marco, male freshman from Italy: "I think it's easier here than in Italy. In Italy you have to work harder to get an A. Also, here you're free to choose what you want to study".

Part of their adjustment, and a potential key to success, is explained by the existence of tutors. When confronted with academic challenges, which is something quite common for international students, American universities offers assistance, in order to keep them enrolled in the institution.

A lot of universities work hard to provide these services to the students, including orientation, academic support, tutors and counselors (Andrade & Norman, 2009, p.26). Universities such as USF offer the tutoring service for these students, whenever they are struggling with academics or just to keep them on the right track, as elucidated by the ISSS director:

One thing our office works a lot with is CASA (Center for Academic and Student Achievement) and so we work really closely with them when students are having troubles with academics, maybe they are in danger of being put on probation because they are going to fail. It is helping them getting connected with resources, the learning and writing center. For example, every year they hire tutors specifically for international students, someone who's experienced supporting international students with academic issues. So we definitely see that just like you would see it for domestic students, they just have different issues.

Professors tend to be a decisive factor when it comes to helping with the acculturation process. For example when they are receptive and sensitive to the importance of having these students included. They focus on asking international students to participate in discussions in the classroom and on giving special attention to them before and after class (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2014).

For international student-athletes, academics bring the same barriers that non-athletes encounter. However, in some cases, they mention that the American system and the teaching techniques are better than in their home countries:

I think it is easier (here in the U.S.), because they take into account both homework and other assignments. In Brazil it is just exams. You do well in the exam you pass it. If you do poorly, you get in trouble. Also, schools in the U.S. apply multiple-choice exams (Daniel, male athlete from Brazil).

So, my degree in Germany was very difficult and then I came here and took mostly classes that were similar, if not easier. I took English, History, and core classes. It was basically repetitive, so not too challenging. Now that I am more in my major field, it gets more challenging but also more interesting (Susan, German female athlete).

I think the system is different. I think here professors are more approachable, they have more understanding and just the whole system works better, and everything is more organized. You know the dates of exams, you know exactly what is going to be in the exam, nobody is trying to trick you, everyone is trying to help you to get better. In Croatia you're on your own, it's more demanding and it's more material covered (Julia, senior female Croatian athlete).

Nevertheless, for Daniel, being a student athlete in a different country provided him a few accomplishments. In 2015 he has been selected to the West Coast Conference All-Academic team after reaching a 3.6 GPA, one of the highest in the conference.

4.4. Cultural shock

The acculturation process for international students is often complicated by the cultural shock in their lives. Once they arrive in the U.S., they are aware that they will face environmental, linguistic, academic, and social challenges. However, all of these factors are greater and more difficult than they had imagined. The weather is colder, the food is more problematic and their relationship with the English language is harder than expected. That shock causes even other problems such as fatigue, depression and confusion (Gebhard, 2010, p.55-56).

Among the adjustment stages of international students in the U.S., food is definitely one of the barriers in order to feel completely comfortable. It is not uncommon to hear from a student that food does not taste the same as it does at home or that it is not as healthy. For Asian students, sometimes it can be even more of a dramatic change since they come from a

profoundly different cultural background. As an example mentioned by Gmelch (2015), a Chinese student, whenever possible, goes to a Chinese restaurant off campus to feel more at home.

Being in an international city as San Francisco helps considerably in that process, as the ISSS director describes, when asked if she usually hears about any students with food problems:

We hear food occasionally, but I think most students are able to make the food work. I think Bon Appetit (USF's food supplier) has enough options for people on campus. People can usually find something that works. It definitely helps USF; we are not a 4-year residential campus. So, really undergraduate students are on campus for the first year and then the vast majority is living off campus. When students live off campus they are usually able to source their own food, so even if they were not completely satisfied with their food options in their freshman year, hopefully by the time they are sophomores they have figured out how to get access to food they might be more comfortable or familiar with. You can find food from any culture of any country in this city. It's definitely a lot easier here to keep that connection with food than a small city in the Midwest.

For both athletes and non-athletes, food has been an issue, at least in the beginning of their student lives. Both groups have reported complications within the adaptation process to the local food, which means food on campus. San Francisco is quite known for its international character in serving food from all over the world. However, students complain about the lack of choices at the campus cafeteria, due to seasoning, spice and how food is prepared.

Even going to school in a large city as San Francisco, where supposedly there would be more food choices, Daniel faces the same troubles:

I don't like to cook, I am actually lazy to cook. I have no meal plan and, when I am at home, I need to cook for myself. I end up eating out a lot, out of laziness or because I have

no time to cook. What I end up doing is, during the week, I have breakfast at home and sometimes I buy a hamburger, meat, something to make at home.

Having a meal plan, though, does not mean life on campus is easier. Not every athlete on a scholarship is awarded a meal plan. It is a benefit just for those who have full scholarships. Nevertheless, the meal plan does not satisfy their needs completely, as Susan points out:

I had issues with food when I got here, since I depended on the meal plan and there were not as many choices, especially if you are not a big meat eater, or in terms of having small snacks in between, healthy snacks like vegetables. The cafeteria has improved a lot. Also, in terms of food, we did more weight lifting, and then my appetite increased, I just ate more and that was, in the beginning, hard to balance. Then there was an emotional impact too, because I was missing my family after first getting here and I was injured and depressed because of that. It was not easy. As soon as I moved to a place and had my own kitchen, I could buy my own food and everything changed then. I lost 12 pounds just by cooking by myself!

For Julia, however, hard sports practice routines influenced in her habits, making her gain some weight:

In my freshman year I gained 10-15 pounds. Here I practice more, the workouts are harder and practices are harder than in Croatia, so you're constantly hungry. Even before practice you're so stressed thinking about how to survive it. Sometimes I eat more than I need to. And here you have a lot of time during the day, you study at night and then to keep yourself awake, you get some snacks, so I think those snacks killed me!

Maria also mentions the lack of food options offered by the cafeteria at USF. She criticizes the prices, too:

I can't handle the cafeteria food anymore, its smell, etc. Also, there is the fact that you can eat at another restaurant off campus here on Fulton St. for way cheaper price. The prices

are absurd, they are closed on Sundays, so I have to find a restaurant and spend my own money. I think it's ridiculous, I think nobody should be forced to accept the meal plan²². It is affecting my stomach.

Marco agrees. In his opinion, there could be more choices and lower prices:

It's unhealthy; they always fry everything with bad oil, something like that. The meal plan is expensive, too. I cook sometimes but it's complicated because down the kitchen there are no windows, it's always closed, people don't care about the kitchen. In the evening, at least, I would like to eat something light and healthy and I can choose only between pizza and burger, or burrito. Maybe a salad, but it's not a lot. (Marco, male freshman from Italy).

Wiktorija, female student-athlete from Poland:

Yes, I do have problems with food served in the cafeteria. First I could not eat here, I just had stomach issues every time I ate something, however it's getting better now. But I would love to have Polish food here!

Despite all the problems to cook their own food and to find a variety of choices on campus, which is a common problem for both groups of students, athletes count on a component nobody else on campus does: The Training Table.

Historically, the training table referred to the one meal per day for scholarship student-athletes outside of their institutional meal plan and on days when campus-dining facilities are under normal operation. Student-athletes have an additional incentive to make good food choices and to pay particular attention to the food they fill their plates with – athletic performance. Many things go into helping a student-athlete successfully perform at a high level: sport-specific training, recovery, rehabilitation, talent, strength and conditioning and

²² At USF, any incoming freshman student is required to purchase *Flexi*, the meal plan offered on campus. If you are on a full scholarship, you are awarded with it, if not, you have to buy it.

nutrition (among others). The training table is the perfect opportunity to provide the fuel student-athletes need while also providing the opportunity to educate them on the importance of proper nutrition (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2014)²³.

Besides the training table, athletes have another advantage in comparison to non-athletes. USF, as well as many other universities, counts on a “regeneration room”. In that room, athletes can get healthy snacks that include fruits such as apples and bananas, milk, whole wheat bread, and peanut butter. They have access to this room whenever they want between practices and classes.

4.5. Plans after graduation

When it comes to plans after graduation, both groups of international students, athletes and non-athletes, consider staying in the U.S. Some have set it as a main goal, others want to try it for a while and see how it goes. Also, those who initially do not want to stay, start thinking of establishing themselves in the country, if possible. They all come with the idea that America is a land of opportunities.

As previously stated by Maguire & Sugden (2002), most athletes can be seen and understood as *ambitionists*. However, it is known that it is quite complicated to find a spot in the professional career (Tyrance, Harris & Post, 2013). Because of that, they all think of remaining in the country, turning them into *settlers*.

When asked about her plans after graduation, Susan says that the U.S. is where she wants to live:

I would like to stay in the U.S., I'm looking into options, how to be able to stay here. I found out that there is a possibility to do grad school as a grad assistant, to get financial aid. So if that's possible I would like to do my grad school at USF and if that doesn't

²³ <http://www.ncaa.org/health-and-safety/sport-science-institute/student-athlete-training-table>

work, there is the option to do OPT, which is one year of working and then, for the long term, it would be getting a job and being sponsored, so you can get the H-1B visa.

Julia initially does not consider staying in the U.S., since she wants to play professionally in Europe. Nevertheless, she may change her plans if necessary:

No, but it's very tempting because here you have more opportunities. On every corner you find something to get better at... to finish your school or to get a job. It's just so many things and such a great city and I think the American mentality is like "let's do work, let's believe, let's be more positive" and back home it's just the economy so bad and people have no jobs. I do consider staying in the U.S.

Thiago, senior male tennis athlete from Brazil, also mentions that staying in the U.S. for a period after his graduation sounds interesting: "I would like to stay here to have a working experience for at least a year, if possible".

Wiktoria says she was not considering staying in the U.S. before coming here, but the fact that she is in San Francisco is contributing to change her mind:

So far I really like San Francisco and I really enjoy living here. Six months ago I would definitely say, "No, I want to go back to Poland", however it has changed very quickly. It's completely different, people are very positive; I would definitely consider staying here.

On the other hand, non-athletes also consider staying, based on the idea that the U.S. is considered the "land of the opportunities":

Yes, I want to stay here and establish my life as an artist, I'm hustling a lot to be able to graduate with everything done for that. I've already been to the Career Services Center to look for more information on that (Maria, freshman female from Brazil).

I want to explore different places and countries, since I am an International Studies major, but if there is an opportunity to stay, I'll stay. I'll probably apply for the OPT

(Mohammad, junior male from Saudi Arabia).

For Computer Science, San Francisco is the place to be. Hopefully I can go to grad school here too (Chong, freshman male from Malaysia).

I would probably stay here. Of course it depends on the job, the opportunity, everything.

But if you compare the unemployment rate in Italy, it is around 13% and among young people is even more, and here it's like 5%. So here you're more stable; I would like to stay and try (Marco, freshman male from Italy).

In that sense, both groups, when confronted with a new future after graduation, take into account a possible life in the U.S. For some of them, going back home would mean being unemployed and they all come to the U.S. with the idea that America is indeed the land of opportunities. They all say it depends on the scenario, but the U.S. is still seen as a great option.

5. Conclusion

After the conduction of this study, it was possible to reach some conclusions about life experiences on campus concerning both international student-athletes and non-athletes and their motivations to study in the U.S.

During the research process, the hardship of being a student-athlete was analyzed, and most of them reported lack of time for themselves and no contact with other students. Although no student declined to cooperate, scheduling interviews with the student-athletes, especially on season, was quite difficult. The best time to talk to them was either right after practice or on the road, or during study hall hours set by their coaches. Other than that, their intense routine of practices, classes, trips and physical training exemplifies how busy they really are.

Working with student-athletes made possible to observe how much USF's academic environment contributes to integrate those who come from different countries. The atmosphere created on campus has been helping to break down barriers, especially the language ones.

As seen on a quite popular video called "15 Sports, 1 Team²⁴", athletes talk proudly about wearing green and gold, USF's colors. No matter what sport, religion, nationality, gender or sexual orientation, they all rise up to represent the school, united by passion, feeling embraced by this sense of community they represent, saying aloud: "For our university, for our city, we are the Dons!"

An institutional video like that works to set the standards and demonstrates the challenges they face, both in the classroom and on the court. However it also shows that, if you fall, you have your teammate to assist you. For an international student-athlete it is evident how much

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPXg5iF0O9g>

they love to be part of that community. The routine is hard, but they do it because they love what they do and where they are and who is next to them. You will never walk alone.

Their routines are so intense, that this research has been an enormous challenge also for the researcher. The lack of time student-athletes often encounter caused situations like short interviews, unclear answers, and multiple rescheduling. Lucas, for example, asked to reschedule his interview three times because of his intense routine.

Contrary to non-athletes, the main reason for athletes to come to the U.S. is the possibility of combining high performance sports with high quality education all under an athletic scholarship. Initially they do not care where they are going to, the scholarship's value is the most important, and they go wherever it is higher. Of course that going to a good location, close to attractions, and a nice weather are important factors as well, but it is not their main motivation initially.

However, for non-athletes it is mainly the possibility of earning an international degree that determines their motivation. Coming to the U.S. with the idea that it is the land of opportunities, most non-athletes want to live their "American Dream". In their case, yes, the location plays an important role. They choose the specific university they want to attend and the city where they want to be based on what they get out of the entire experience, either from campus life or future employment opportunities. As some students have mentioned, they chose California and San Francisco because of its diversity, international character and proximity to Silicon Valley, known as a great place for young graduates to start their professional lives.

For them, San Francisco's welcoming environment, where culture meets freedom under the diversity umbrella, being at a place where they can seek self-fulfillment by doing what they love and being who they are proud to be, has a huge impact on their decision on where to go to school.

A explained throughout this paper, non-athletes need to find on campus activities on their own to get to know other people while athletes have the advantage of being included in their own group from day one. Both groups have acknowledged how privileged athletes are to be members of their own strong community.

The fact that they are athletes is a key advantage from the first day of classes all the way to graduation day in the U.S. Right after the arrival in the country the athletic community embraces them, giving them a sense of community, where people help one another.

They have a wide variety of services offered to them on campus, from athletic trainers who take care of them when they are either injured or sick to academic tutors that help them choose classes that are better suited for them. Non-athletes students have to buy their own medications or, if necessary, go to the hospital on their own.

Despite all the issues with food on campus (reported by both groups), athletes still have an advantage because of training tables, pre-game meals, and the regeneration room that provides them with a healthy diet established by a nutritionist.

Athletes hangout only with athletes not only because they are part of this group; they have similar routines and they travel, work out and go to class together. Most of them, in return to that sense of belonging, go cheer on their friends when they are playing. It is common to see volleyball athletes going to soccer games, soccer athletes going to basketball games, etc.

Another difference in comparison to non-athletes, this time in the classroom, is that being an athlete makes you more prepared to deal with pressure and tension pre-midterms. They are used to hard training that makes a difference for them in the classroom. Overcoming is a very common word in an athlete's dictionary.

Both groups face academic difficulties, but coaches push athletes not only on the court, but also in the classroom. Head coaches demand high GPA's in order to be on the team, which is something non-athletes do not have to deal with. They look for higher GPA's based

on their personal will and future professional possibilities. If they fail, they will probably have to deal only with their parents and themselves, if that is the case.

In addition to that, being an athlete makes a difference in a future professional life as activities such as teamwork, motivation and positive mentality to achieve common goals are exercised during their athletic life. These activities help them in the future as better professionals in general.

All the easiness given by the university to student-athletes has consequences, though. The good thing, of course, is that, as mentioned above, they tend to struggle less with their adjustment than non-athletes do. Because of all services they have at their disposal, the only two things they need to care about is studying and perfecting their sport practice.

A clear disadvantage is that such system also causes an isolation of the athletic community. As some other athletes have reported, that isolation prohibits them to hangout with other students. They would love to have contact with the student community, but sometimes are “segregated” as athletes, being part of their own group only. They take classes with other athletes and their roommates are their own teammates, making the connection with the campus community even more infrequent.

In regards to plans after graduation, both groups cogitate remaining in the United States, once they all believe this country offers better job opportunities. Some of them already come to the U.S. with that idea in mind; others develop that desire as years go by. Other international students do not think of staying at all in the country until they realize that life can be easier here than in their home countries and then they decide to remain in the U.S. For athletes, this scenario also merges with the remote possibility of reaching professional level in sports. Once they realize chances are scarce, working in the U.S. and doing what they studied during four years at school is something to also take into account.

Hence, after everything that has been reported with the interviewing process, this research raised some reflections towards some interventions to achieve a better integration and adjustment of international student-athletes such as the creation of an International Affairs branch within the Athletics Department. This department would deal not only with the currently enrolled students on campus, but would also take care of the future incoming foreign athletes.

Because of USF's international character, it would be quite interesting to have someone acting as an adviser for coaches, athletes and staff, as well as helping them organize tours abroad to expose USF's brand around the world. Having international recruiting camps as well as bringing international kids to participate in athletic camps would absolutely contribute to USF in keeping its international potential as home of international student-athletes.

Moreover, whenever foreign prospects or coaches intend to visit the school, the director of international affairs would be in charge of hosting this guest, talking about the school and showing the campus facilities alongside head coaches and/or any other staff member.

USF, an international university in an international city deserves a global view. With all those international students (combining athletes and non-athletes) it would be interesting to launch USF Athletics website translated into the foreign languages most spoken on campus: Spanish and Chinese. In order to avoid extra costs, international students could take this work as extra credits, enabling them to practice their skills and contributing to the entire campus life. As an integration tool, the website could be translated by international students, whether language majors or not. They feel involved with the campus community and make some extra money. Once finished, the website would attract these two groups of students to athletic events or even to recruit future athletes.

These actions would be coordinated by the proposed International Affairs Department, under the Athletics Department umbrella. This department would be in charge of all international student-athletes (past, current and future), also working in conjunction with both compliance and coaches.

Such office would, for instance, organize recruiting trips for coaches, as well as international trips for the teams. The volleyball team could go on tours abroad to play against local opponents, providing coaches and players an international experience and, of course, establishing a connection between the university and future students. These trips would allow USF to expand its name and achieve visibility in other countries. The fact that USF is listed among the 25 best-located campuses in the country is something that could also be explored in the future.

Another interesting suggestion would be the creation of an “athletics ministry”, quite close to what some Archdioceses around the world have been doing, calling it “sports pastoral”, which would connect athletics and religion. In USF’s case, it would allow the university to explore its inter-religious agenda, where all religious backgrounds are respected and preserved, which includes even those without any religion. In that sense, it would be able to connect the Athletics Department to the University Ministry, offering faith support or “services” to the athletes, or involving them in human rights and social justice activities, following, once again, USF’s motto. Two well-known and successful cases connecting sports and faith are the John Paul II Foundation for Sport in Great Britain and the Olympic Games. There is an interfaith center inside the Olympic Village, where athletes can go pray and ask for religious assistance prior to their competitions.

As Professor Jose has mentioned in the previous section, the connection between Athletics and University Ministry is not as good as it could be, and both sides do find it relevant to work together. However, it has never happened.

For future research, a deeper study on athletic isolation on campus is highly recommended, analyzing causes and consequences. It should be better understood why student-athletes are not engaged with on campus activities, if it is simply lack of time or caused more by lack of interest. Most of them are involved with programs suggested by professors or their head coaches, but these programs are not something athletes show too much interest in, they are usually just required to do so.

It is clear that USF can contribute even more to international student-athletes, adding quality to their athletic, academic, and spiritual lives, all at the same time and at the same place. By doing that, as one of the universities that best treat its students and respects their diversities, USF could keep putting their motto to practice by “Changing The World From Here”.

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