

Understanding Athletics Academic Advisors' Experience with Job Burnout

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Chronic stress and burnout are prevalent in Division I athletics, yet there is limited research on job burnout and workplace stress among academic advisors specializing in Division I athletics. This study contributes a deeper understanding of the experiences of Division I athletics academic advisors regarding job burnout and its contributing factors. The study also introduces two athletics academic advising models in Division I and examines how job burnout manifests within these models. Interviews with eight participants uncovered four themes that articulate how participants experience constant stress and highlight the areas of work that shape their job burnout. Findings assist professionals in the field in developing a better grasp of what is influencing job burnout and its ramifications.

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Job burnout is defined as a state of emotional exhaustion, low personal accomplishment, and depersonalization that stems from a work environment with high stress (Maslach et al., 2001). Stress in the workplace and job burnout lead to high turnover, health complications, exhaustion, fatigue, and decreased work performance, and job satisfaction (Bliese et al., 2017). The scholarship consistently reports that Division I (DI) athletics is an environment that includes antecedents of job burnout (Taylor et al., 2019). DI athletics academic advising has been quoted as “one of the most challenging jobs in higher education” (Meyer, 2005, p. 15). These positions are considered human service-centered positions and take on a wide array of work responsibilities, time-commitments, and interpersonal relationships (Parham, 1993; Pope & Miller, 1999). Athletics academic advisors hold responsibilities and personal characteristics that are antecedents to job burnout. Job burnout is an urgent area for research, especially in professions like DI athletics academic advising.

The purpose of this study was to better understand how DI athletics academic advisors experience

job burnout and its antecedents. Additionally, this study introduced two types of DI athletics academic advising models, termed in this paper the *split team advising model* and the *single team advising model*, that are typical within the *autonomy conferences*. Autonomy conferences, often referred to as the “Power Five,” were the five athletics conferences (now four as of 2024–2025) that have autonomy over their legislative decisions pertaining to resource allocation for student-athletes. The essential differences between these two athletics academic advising models are how student-athletes and the respective workloads of each advisor are distributed among the advisors on staff, making the models a vital area to be introduced into the literature and explored further in relation to job burnout and its antecedents.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Maslach’s theory of job burnout and Leiter and Maslach’s *Areas of Worklife* model as its framework. Maslach et al. (1996) defined job burnout as “a psychological syndrome of *emotional exhaustion*, *depersonalization*, and *reduced personal accomplishment* that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (p. 192). Scholarship widely accepts this definition after Leiter and Maslach (2016) validated it through a longitudinal study spanning 30 years. The *Areas of Worklife* model seeks to understand the antecedents that cause and shape job burnout and organizes them in six areas: *workload*, *control*, *reward*, *community*, *fairness*, and *values* (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006). Table 1 has definitions for the antecedents.

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on comparable athletics positions, comparable non-athletics academic positions, as well as includes the minimal scholarship on athletics academic advisors themselves. Reviewing the populations that encompass a similar work environment and work responsibilities of athletics academic advisors better informs how athletics academic advisors may be experiencing job burnout and its antecedents. The literature

Table 1. Theoretical Framework Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Emotional Exhaustion	A feeling of physical and emotional depletion accompanied by a lack of energy and often associated with a feeling of dread in returning to one's work responsibilities (Leiter et al., 2010).
Depersonalization	An individual's emotional or relational detachment to the recipient of their efforts or service; it most commonly presents itself as cynicism about one's place of employment, co-workers or individuals being served (Leiter et al., 2010).
Low Personal Accomplishment	How much a person feels they are professionally developing or accomplishing as it pertains to their capabilities and is associated with negative self-perception (Leiter et al., 2010).
Workload	The amount of physical or emotional work, including work that is demanding (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006).
Control	Having professional autonomy and inclusion in making important decisions. Role conflict, which is when leadership or authority figures within a work setting have conflicting demands or values, impacts an individual's ability to have control over their job (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006).
Reward	Includes financial recognition through positive praise, promotion, or additional social or institutional benefits. Equity and perception of reward is an important piece in this area. Feeling as though a fellow colleague is rewarded for perceivably working less can cause strain (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006).
Community	Workplace social support and relationships, such as those between employers, colleagues, and those providing services (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006).
Fairness	The extent to which the distribution of workplace resources and decisions are equitable and fair. This area has some overlap with the community and reward areas. A perceived unfair work setting has connections to cynicism and job burnout, and a perceived fair work setting is associated with a positive association to work (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006).
Values	The alignment of personal core values with those exhibited in the workplace. Individuals who perceive their work setting to be working in alignment with their values have a more positive relationship to work, and those who are more mismatched in their values experience job burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006).

review also formally introduces the two types of athletics academic advising models—*split team* and *single team* and expands on their existence.

Comparable Athletics Positions

In reviewing the literature on job burnout within collegiate athletics, the study found that coaches, athletics trainers, and athletics staff members have been the primary focus. Job burnout arises in all these positions in the three noted dimensions: *emotional exhaustion*, *depersonalization*, and *low-personal accomplishment* (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; DeFreese & Mihalik, 2016;

Goodger et al., 2007; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Kelley, 1994; Vealey et al., 1992). Antecedents of job burnout in the areas of *workload*, *control*, *values*, and *reward* remain consistent in the literature across these athletics positions (Oglesby et al., 2020; Olusoga et al., 2019; Vealey et al., 1992; Weight et al., 2021). Finally, the conflict between work and family is consistently present in athletics positions and is a contributing factor to job burnout (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; DeBoer, 2004; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Fei et al., 2017; Graham & Smith, 2021; Taylor et al., 2019; Walker & Melton, 2015).

Comparable Non-athletics Academic Positions

The work of DI athletics academic advisors is comparable to campus academic advisors and other student support services at an institution (Gaston-Gayles, 2003; Parham, 1993; Pope & Miller, 1999; Rubin, 2017). The examination of non-athletic advising positions highlights two important themes: job burnout is present in positions that hold similar work responsibilities to athletics academic advisors (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Guthrie et al., 2005; Soria et al., 2023), and the areas of *workload* and *reward* are the most consistently experienced antecedents in both groups (Anderson et al., 2000; Donnelly, 2009; Evans, 1988; Guthrie et al., 2005; Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Soria et al., 2023). As noted above, these two antecedents of job burnout are consistent with what coaches, athletics trainers, and athletics staff members experience.

Athletics Academic Advising

Rubin's (2017) survey of the National Association of Athletics Academic Advisors revealed that 91% of respondents reported symptoms of job burnout in themselves or colleagues, with 60% considering leaving the profession. Concerns over the profession's complexity were highlighted, prompting a call for further research. Subsequent work by Rubin and Moreno-Pardo (2018) found athletics academic advisors facing challenges such as low pay, limited growth opportunities, and constant work demands, experienced diminished health. Gellock (2019) supported these findings, noting antecedents of *control*, *workload*, and *reward* and intentions to leave. Hardin et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study, confirming elevated levels of burnout, particularly in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among athletics academic counselors. The research on job burnout in the field of athletics academic advising is consistent with the job burnout literature reviewed thus far; job burnout exists at elevated levels within this field and the job burnout antecedents of *workload*, *control*, and *reward* are present.

Athletics Academic Advising Models

The scholarship has yet to fully investigate or introduce into the literature the type of athletics academic advising model within which an advisor is working. Reviewing athletics academic advising models is a valuable area for further understanding the antecedents that shape job

burnout. Through professional knowledge, and individual exploration of the athletics academic advising field, academic advising units at the DI level, in the autonomy conferences, there exists two primary academic advising models. This study references them as the *single team* advising model and the *split team* advising model.

The primary advising structure found was the *single team* advising model. In this model, each athletics team has one assigned advisor. Advisors may oversee two to three total teams, equaling a specific student caseload number. Through knowledge of the field and investigation of advisors assigned to teams, the decisions on advising assignments are often based on the experience of the advisor. Typically, a more experienced advisor works with revenue generating sports, such as football or men's and women's basketball. These teams tend to encompass more at-risk students and require a greater time commitment on the part of the athletics academic advisor (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Comeaux, 2005; Pascarella et al., 1996). In contrast, typically a less experienced advisor works with non-revenue generating sports, such as soccer or rowing. These teams tend to encompass fewer at-risk students and require less time commitment per student (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Comeaux, 2005; Pascarella et al., 1996). The advisor assigned to the given team is responsible for the added responsibilities that come with supporting that program, such as team travel, weekend recruiting commitments, and additional non-academic team meetings.

The *split team* model exists at only one institution within the autonomy conferences of DI athletics. In the *split team* advising model, there are at least two advisors (potentially more) for each athletics team. Instead of basing the assignment on the advisor to a specific team, it is based on the student's demographics. Incoming students are reviewed according to GPA, test scores, strength of high school, as well as additional social determinates that might be important to consider. Distributed among advisors are students with the potential for a greater time commitment. Additionally, in this model, advisors with that specific team share responsibilities related to team travel, recruiting, and additional non-academic team meetings.

Given the presence of job burnout and its antecedents in DI athletics positions and in positions that hold comparable work responsibilities to athletics academic advisors, this study focused

on the lived experiences of DI athletics academic advisors with job burnout and its antecedents. This study adds an understanding of the experiences of job burnout and antecedents of job burnout in the two different athletics academic advising models. As noted, these models intentionally work to redistribute workload and job responsibilities differently, making it an important area to explore in understanding the antecedents that shape job burnout and possible solutions to job burnout.

Research Question

Interpretive phenomenology seeks to understand how participants have experienced the identified phenomenon as well as what situations, contexts, or factors have impacted their experiences with the identified phenomenon. In this study, that phenomenon is job burnout (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In alignment with this research approach, this study sought to answer the following central research question and sub-questions:

- 1) How do Division I athletics academic advisors experience job burnout?
 - a. How do Division I athletics academic advisors experience the antecedents of job burnout?
 - b. How do Division I athletics academic advisors' experiences with job burnout and antecedents of job burnout present in the two athletics academic advising models?

Methods

This qualitative study utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach, with a series of semi-structured interviews and participant-produced visuals as sources of data. Phenomenology works to deeply understand lived experiences and uncover the essence of a particular phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The designed interview questions and protocol align with the research questions and the two theoretical frameworks grounding the paper. To understand participants' experience at the deepest level, two one-on-one interviews occurred with each participant for a total of sixteen interviews. The first interview focused on participants' experiences with job burnout. After this interview,

participants were asked to draw or create a pictorial representation of their experience with job burnout and instructed to bring this to the second interview, as visuals necessitate additional narrative interpretation by the participant and aid in accuracy in the data being collected (Kearney & Hyle, 2004). The second interview explored the meaning of this visual and asked questions surrounding antecedents of job burnout. The discussion of the visuals turned these interviews into a multimodal research technique with the opportunity to extract more robust data through questioning (Brailas, 2020).

Research Sample & Setting

The research setting in terms of outreach, communication, and data collection occurred virtually due to participants' geographic distance. The study utilized criterion sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and selected eight athletics academic advisors total, with four of them from the only institution utilizing the *split team* model (note: this is a small university with less 10,000 undergraduates, a DI private research institution consistently ranked in the top 25 in the *U.S. News Best College Rankings*). Athletically, this institution is a member within the autonomy conferences, has an athletics department of roughly 520 student-athletes, with 19 varsity sports in total and six athletics academic advisors on staff. The final four selected participants were from institutions utilizing the *single team* advising model but who met the same institutional criteria as the *split team* institution. This alignment of *split team* and *single team* models is to ensure participants' resources, work environment, and student caseload are comparable between two athletics academic advising models.

Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, facilitate comprehension of the findings section, and to better contextualize the research. The demographic information listed in Table 2 includes name, gender, pronouns, advising model, and previous institutions worked, all details relevant in understanding the findings. Demographic information, such as race and sexual orientation, were intentionally excluded to protect participant identities.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis occurred at the start of data collection (Moustakas, 1994). Once an interview was completed and transcripts were appropriately

Table 2. Participant Demographic Information

*Name	Gender	Pronouns	Advising Model	Number of Previous Institutions Worked
Caitlin	Female	She/Her/Hers	Split Team Advising	2
Connor	Male	He/Him/ His	Split Team Advising	1
Elle	Female	She/Her/Hers	Split Team Advising	3
Pearl	Female	She/Her/Hers	Split Team Advising	2
Allie	Female	She/Her/Hers	Single Team Advising	5
Chase	Male	He/Him/ His	Single Team Advising	1
Tanya	Female	She/Her/Hers	Single Team Advising	2
Tasha	Female	She/Her/Hers	Single Team Advising	0

Notes. *Participants were provided with pseudonyms.

cleaned, I read the transcription and data sources with an eye for coding. Specifically, I took a combination of a holistic reading approach (considering the data widely and bridging connections across) and a selective reading approach (identifying specific instances in the data). Using open coding pulled out the essence of participants' experiences, and I identified significant statements; as data collection continued, I reviewed previous transcripts for overlooked but significant statements (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). After completing all interviews, I grouped the identified significant statements into larger units of information, referred to as "meaning units" in the literature and commonly understood as themes, which are presented in the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Findings

The data analysis identified four primary meaning units or themes: *impact of turnover*, *family conflict*, *constantly "on,"* and *minimization of job burnout*.

Impact of Turnover

Turnover refers to situations of employee transitions in which colleagues leave their position, where there is a vacancy for a given reason (i.e., parental leave, failed hiring search), and where an employee is new to a position. Participants discussed their experiences with the additional stress and work created when turnover occurs. A notable excerpt from Elle on her experience with turnover in her office:

If college athletics can't keep up with the times, and if you're not willing to provide different flexibilities like, I know I can't work remote all the time, or you know, or you're

not willing to pony up the salaries that are needed, you know you're just losing. We're losing people, like hemorrhaging people, and now, as somebody that's a manager, and has had to hire 5 out of our 8 positions in the last year and a half, which is a lot of work, and not fun, like we need to do something.

Tanya brought up needing to hire new staff in her office as well, and verbalized the additional work that is coming from a failed hiring process:

A challenge this year was that we are currently down in academic counselors and so we had interviewed for some people in May, and it wasn't great, we didn't have a great turnout, so we just kinda knew that we're gonna take this year to really hunker down, and some people are gonna have to take on some more work and other teams when they don't necessarily want to.

The participants' accounts exposed a common thread, mainly that turnover can impact many stakeholders in a unit. New employees, current employees, and supervisors are experiencing challenges with turnover and acknowledge that the problem permeates the larger field of athletics academic advising. Participants in both advising models spoke about feeling burnt out from turnover and named feelings of exhaustion and fatigue.

Family Conflict

Participants spoke openly about the intersection of work and family. They noted experiences of job burnout and feelings of frustration, irritability, and anxiety. The essence of their experience with family conflict was that the culture of athletics academic advising did not allow for

alleviation of this conflict, both in workload and control over shifting this culture. Participants in both advising models shared similar experiences with family conflict. Tasha recounted a time when she was called to work on the weekend during her child's birthday party:

It was my son's first birthday. Actually, technology issue at work that I needed to deal with. Because I was still the point person in our office for a particular technology process. We had to deal with the technology issues. And working through this extended through his actual birthday party.

Tasha did not think that the issue was urgent enough for her to leave her child's birthday party, especially since she had worked to preempt this kind of problem. Tasha's case encompassed both family conflict as well as the first theme of *impact of turnover*. She was working as a full-time athletics academic advisor who had her first baby during the COVID-19 pandemic, and now her office was transitioning back to in-person. Her partner's job did not allow for workday flexibility for childcare. As Tasha transitioned back to in-person work, she experienced such burnout, which led to her submitting her resignation notice. Her supervisor, however, listened to her concerns, which centered on workload and the flexibility she needed concerning her family. As a result, the two came to a mutually beneficial compromise. Tasha stated that her new 30-hour-per-week schedule (working roughly 9–3 daily) had “massively reduced [her] feelings of burnout.” What is noteworthy here is that Tasha's only thought was that, since she could not navigate both family and job, she must resign. As it turned out, her workplace was able to alleviate job burnout, helping Tasha obtain a healthy work-family balance without having to leave her position.

Tasha's observations are noteworthy. Her experience, much like the other participants, shows us that family conflict can impact job burnout and could even lead to job turnover, as evidenced by her willingness to leave her position due to the inability to strike the necessary balance. It also shows the importance of working in an environment willing to examine an employee's workload to find an arrangement that minimizes family conflict and reduces job burnout.

Constantly “On”

The theme of being constantly “on” refers to the feelings of needing to be always working or on

call. This theme encompasses three sub-themes: registration periods, non-traditional hours, and cell accessibility. Participants spoke about how these sub-themes manifested in their daily work.

Registration Periods

Registration periods are the weeks in a term where student-athletes are selecting courses and registering for them for the next term. Participants experience and identify that registration is a time when they feel burned out and emotionally exhausted. They exhibited levels of depersonalization or detachment from the student-athletes they are serving, due to an overwhelming workload. In addition to the high workload, they described situations that were not within their control to alleviate.

Allie explained that the primary reason for her burnout during registration was due to her large caseload. She has roughly 162 student-athletes to meet with prior to the registration period. At her institution, she has seven business days from the time courses are viewable for next term to the time her student-athletes begin enrolling in courses. She talked about not having time for her basic needs during these periods:

Things are more inaccessible for us to get, like our basic needs, because of all the meetings, because, like everyone needs something, I mean, and registering people, you can't get up, get lunch, or go get coffee. I mean, I was taking my computer home every night!

Caitlin's account mirrored Allie's when it came to registration periods, highlighting the compounding impact of job turnover on one of her most recent registration periods: “Not gonna to lie. Registration advising is always the hardest, but then with registration, advising with being, like, an advisor down and a completely new set of advisors, like, I felt burnout from registration.” Athletics academic advisors from both advising models described a similar experience with their feelings of job burnout and the antecedents that shape job burnout during these periods.

Non-traditional Hours

“Non-traditional hours” refers to the times participants felt compelled to work outside traditional business hours. Participants discussed the commitment of recruiting on the weekends. The weekend

recruiting commitment is the one notable difference between *split team* and *single team* advising models.

Single team advising model participants discussed their experience of when their assigned team is in their championship season and needing to work on the weekends more frequently. Allie, who is from a *single team* advising model institution, attested to having to meet with recruits nearly every weekend: "It's a lot to have to be with recruits on every weekend." Chase, also in the *single team* model, went on to say that it can be "a lot" and like the other participants he agreed that it was all part of the culture of athletics.

Participants in the *split team* advising model have an "on call" system. Each weekend only one advisor was on call for recruiting requests regardless of sport. Participants in this model discussed how much divvying up responsibilities alleviated stress. Connor said, "You know it's only like six weekends the entire year? Maybe? So, it's really not bad at all." Pearl, also in the *split team*, conveyed similar feelings: "It is pretty minimal, like recruiting, which I think, as advisors, we're each assigned probably per term, two-to-three weekends that we're on call to do recruiting visits. Um, but that's like pretty minimal!"

When reviewing this sub-theme, the antecedents that shape job burnout are *workload* and *control*. Participants' workloads necessitate working non-traditional hours, and there is minimal control they have over this. Those in the *single team* model identified a higher workload, with more weekend recruiting commitments, and conveyed more feelings of job burnout related to these commitments. By contrast, those in the *split team* advising model had a lower workload, identified less weekend recruiting commitments due to their shared responsibilities, and did not tie their weekend recruiting commitments to feelings of job burnout.

Cell Accessibility

"Cell accessibility" is the final sub-theme within the major theme of constantly "on." Participants discussed how they constantly get text messages and calls from student-athletes, coaches, and administrators on their cell phones. For example, after Chase's winter break, he mentioned receiving many calls over this seemingly "off" period, leading to feelings of job burnout: "The on-call basis annoyed me more over the course of this break, and then it helped me kind of start to think about [how] those are some of the things that

cause job burnout." He went on to discuss his experience with job burnout and its relationship to cell accessibility:

Coaches, sometimes administrators on campus, I don't know when it started, but 20 years ago, when you left to the office, you left the office. I think you were done with your day. Now, and we do it ourselves, [I] check my phone, check my email, having your little ping alerts. And then, you know, you get those. I think it only adds to the total stress and the anxiety of never feeling like you truly are off; and even when you take vacation, or whatever, it's rare . . . to not get contacted, you know. I suppose we could just shut it down. That guilt associated with it, the knowing what you're going to get on the back end of it. If you don't answer, it is a problem. So, I would say, that's my big thing, technology, the cell phone, the 24-7. If there's anything that I would change, that would be what it would be.

Overwhelmingly, the participants in each advising model conveyed similar experiences of job burnout and its antecedents within this theme, except for weekend recruiting commitments. Participants in the *split team* model cited a lower workload associated with weekend recruiting and did not tie their experiences to feelings of job burnout, whereas participants in the *single team* model expressed a higher workload in relationship to this work responsibility and did, by contrast, connect it to feelings of job burnout.

Minimization of Job Burnout

Minimization of Job Burnout was the final theme that emerged. When participants spoke about instances of feeling job burnout, they frequently compared their experience to even worse working conditions, either from their own past or at other institutions. Chase expressed feelings of job burnout related to feeling constantly "on" and subsequently discussed his experience receiving work-related texts over a holiday break: "Those are some of the things that annoyed me. I can't complain too much because we have it much better here than we do at a lot of other places." Connor raised the problem of family conflict and ensuing feelings of burnout when describing how he worked intermittently (e.g., replying to emails) all while caring for his two young children past

their bedtimes. Subsequently, he spoke about how at his previous, smaller institution, it was “all hands-on deck for every event,” both during and after regular work hours. Even Tasha, who had never worked at another institution, acknowledged feelings of job burnout in managing her new family: “I know it’s much worse at other places.” Participants acknowledged their experiences and feelings of job burnout at their current institutions yet rationalized their burnout by comparing their experiences to worse conditions at other institutions.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that athletics academic advisors across both athletic advising models have similar experiences with job burnout, and the primary factors shaping their experience are high workloads, their inability to have autonomy in shifting their work environment, and better alignment with their current place of work than previous institutions. Data from this study shows that efforts made to redistribute workload and provide the athletics academic advisor autonomy in shaping their work responsibilities can aid in reduced feelings of job burnout and potentially prevent job turnover. The *split team* advising model provides an avenue for redistributing work responsibilities aiding in reduced feelings of job burnout. The *single team* advising model would benefit from adopting this work redistribution structure.

Job Burnout & Well-being

Job burnout influences a person’s emotional health, their relationships, and has significant associations with depression and anxiety. Additionally, job burnout can manifest itself in various ways, such as decreased motivation, difficulty concentrating, insomnia, and physical symptoms like headaches and stomach issues (Koutsimani et al., 2019). Similar experiences of health-related concerns and insomnia have been found within athletics academic advising (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018).

Within the context of higher education, athletics departments encounter elevated levels of and experiences with job burnout. A 2021 study found that intercollegiate athletics department staff often feel overworked (workload), underpaid (reward), and undervalued (reward; Weight et al., 2021) with 96.1% of athletics staff being at-risk for job burnout (Scott, 2021). Rubin and Moreno-Pardo (2018) noted that athletics academic advisor workloads

contributed to job burnout and diminished mental health. The current study supports this finding as athletics academic advisors also experience elevated workloads and conveyed experiences of job burnout, specifically in the areas of emotional exhaustion, naming feelings of anxiety, irritability, frustration, and exhaustion.

Job burnout also impacted participants’ personal relationships with loved ones and family members. They noted their experience with job burnout and named feelings associated with emotional exhaustion, such as frustration, irritability, and anxiety. Studies on collegiate athletics indicated significantly high levels of stress and difficulty when managing work and family responsibilities (Bruening & Dixon, 2007; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Taylor et al., 2019; Walker & Melton, 2015). Work-family conflict is defined as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressure from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Found repeatedly in the literature on intercollegiate athletics is work-family conflict and its contribution to the presence of job burnout in athletics staff (Taylor et al., 2019). The participants in the present study conveyed similar sentiments with respect to their inability to be fully present for their family relationships. Their high workloads named as the antecedent influencing their inability to maintain these relationships. The emotional and relational toll of burnout cannot be ignored, urging a culture shift in athletics departments to prioritize staff well-being.

The Need for a Culture Shift

The work culture in higher education faces numerous challenges that detrimentally affect employee well-being and satisfaction. Among these, job burnout is prominent (Koutsimani et al., 2019; Marken & Agrawal, 2022; Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018; Soria et al., 2023). Administrators and athletics staff contend with long hours, multiple responsibilities, and scarce resources (Maslach et al., 2001; Rubin, 2017), heightened by an achievement-oriented culture that prioritizes individual success (Giannakakis, 2019). This fosters guilt and shame around self-care and exacerbates stress due to limited resources (Schubert-Irastorza & Fabry, 2014; Slaughter et al., 2003). College athletics has a similar culture, with high expectations and intense pressure to perform, which can create a stressful and toxic work environment (Gurney et al., 2017; Huml & Taylor, 2022). These issues can negatively impact the well-being of those working in

college athletics and can make it difficult for them to perform their jobs effectively (Taylor et al., 2019). In addition, the long hours and irregular schedules can be demanding and difficult to manage, especially for those with family responsibilities. The current study supports this literature as participants discussed the experience of working long non-traditional hours, the inability to be fully present for their family, and the impact this has on their experience with job burnout and its antecedents.

Stakeholders have raised concerns about a culture of employees being pushed to increase their commitment to their departments (Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Graham & Dixon, 2014). A more recent study examined and identified three sources within an organization or a department that impact an employee's working presence: inadequate staffing, work demands, and long hours (Graham & Smith, 2021). These factors are creating conditions that require an employee to be working constantly, even if the place of employment is not overtly communicating this as a requirement. The current study provides evidence for this when participants described their high workloads necessitated having to work in ways that are outside of their control.

Turnover Workload Loop

An overworked culture lacking control is causing significant turnover in the field (Rubin, 2017; Soria et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2019). A recent study showed that DI athletics departments had a turnover rate of 48% over a two-year period, almost double that of the two-year turnover rate found in corporate, professional sports, and higher education (Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019; Weight et al., 2021). Athletics academic advisors have reported high levels of job burnout, so much so that by 2017, close to 60% of this population was considering leaving the profession (Rubin, 2017). Participants in the present study discussed their thoughts on the normalization of job turnover, a lack of control in shifting the status quo, and being reconciled to existing worklife conditions, leading to elevated workloads and greater feelings of emotional exhaustion. Athletics scholarship shows that elevated workloads lead to job turnover, and the current study suggests that turnover leads to enhanced workloads which create a looped cycle of high turnover and high workloads.

Overwhelmingly, athletics academic advisors in both models have similar experiences of job

burnout and its antecedent. However, there was one aspect of work redistribution in the *split team* model that reduced burnout. Because the *split team* model distributes recruiting work among all advisors, it reduces stress. Typically, as seen in the *single team* model, the recruiting responsibility is exclusive to that athletics team's advisor. Research suggests that lowering workload can aid in reduced feelings of job burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2017; Pines & Aronson, 1988; Taylor et al., 2019).

Implications

The study indicates redistributing weekend recruiting workloads could alleviate job burnout for athletics academic advisors. *Single team* advising institutions could review their structures to share recruitment responsibilities, easing burdens on high-commitment teams. Additionally, advisors are likely to experience less burnout when they have greater autonomy or control in shaping their work environment and are not required to be at the control of a particular team's coach who is not their supervisor (Rubin & Huml, 2023). Finally, additional staff and consistency in staff retainment could help lower case-loads and mitigate burnout.

Future Research

Three pertinent avenues for future study emerged. First, participants often inquired about interviewing individuals who had left athletics academic advising, recognizing turnover as a significant issue linked to job burnout (Huml & Taylor, 2022). Future research should explore why former advisors left and how it relates to burnout experiences. Second, *workload* consistently contributed to burnout in athletics and higher education and is an important antecedent to further investigate. Finally, given that workload distribution differences exist between the *split team* and *single team* advising models, it is worth further investigating differences between these models for additional areas of burnout alleviation.

Limitations

Certain limitations existed within this study, the first being the possible bias I may have brought to the overall design and execution of the study, given my previous work in the field of athletics academic advising and my own experiences with job burnout. Phenomenological research intentionally works to set aside these biases; even

with intentional measures, however, eliminating all biases is impossible. Another limitation was that only one institution utilizes the *split team* advising model. Therefore, the experiences of job burnout and antecedents of job burnout in this model are only representative of one institution. Lastly, including demographic information such as race and sexual orientation was not possible while maintaining the anonymity of participants, and these are important identity markers to better understand workplace stress and job burnout.

Conclusion

This study highlights that athletics academic advisors experience job burnout because of high workload demands, which leads to turnover and institutional instability. Therefore, college athletics departments should consider a culture shift to reduce burnout. One simple first step is to adopt the *split team* model for recruiting, especially during extremely busy recruiting periods. Doing so can reduce stress during periods of heightened activity, such as work on weekends. This may also reduce burnout, and thus turnover, thereby improving the stability of departments. This is a common-sense, yet evidence-backed approach that could improve the lives of administrators, athletics academic advisors, and student-athletes alike.

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