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HUMOR AND THE RETENTION OF LECTURE MATERIAL BY STUDENT-ATHLETES
IN A MENTOR INFORMATION SESSION

A Thesis in

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by

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Abstract

This study addressed the use of humor as a means to improve the academic success of college student-athletes. Student-athletes are often mistakenly viewed as the "privileged few" and hence do not deserve to be treated as a typical student. Academically speaking, however, scores for student-athletes and their graduation rates tend to be lower than other students. Humor can have cognitive and physiological abilities that would be useful to student-athletes and individuals who work with them. Humor may also enhance the educational process by helping students retain lecture material and boosting self-esteem. To determine the effectiveness of humor as a teaching strategy, 38 student-athletes from a Research One, predominately White, NCAA Division-One University participated in a two-hour training session on mentoring. After random assignment, the control group received a strict lecture format. The treatment group received the same material, but with the use of humor (e.g., comics on overheads). Using a pretest-posttest approach, both groups completed a nine-item survey of mentoring knowledge. As evidenced through key-word selection, a content analysis of their responses suggested that the humor group retained more lecture content, thus supporting the hypotheses. Future research could explore other uses and types of humor to assist student-athletes as well as other college students.

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Chapter I

Introduction

University student-athletes present an apparent motivational contradiction. Most are highly motivated to succeed in the athletic domain, having been selected to participate in intercollegiate athletics because of their proven abilities and desire to succeed. However, many of the most visible student-athletes seem to lack such motivation in the classroom (Simmons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). As such, student-athletes are often not seen as individuals who have academic potential (Whittemore, 1991). Rather, they are seen as individuals who do not care about education and are only interested in their particular sport. With such a negative image, it is understandable that they tend to graduate at a rate well below that of the average college student (Curry & Jiobu, 1984).

Humor and attempts at humor are used strategically in many of our daily interactions (Wanzer & Frymeir, 1999). During conversations with peers, humor is used to gain favor (Bell & Daly, 1984); at work, humor is used as a means of reducing tension (Winnick, 1976); in group situations, humor is used to increase cohesion, define social boundaries, and soften critical statements (Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1992); and, in the classroom, students use humor as one means of gaining liking from their professors (Wanzer & Frymier,

1999). Regardless of the context, humor is an important form of communication with a variety of uses (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999).

Humor has worked well in businesses to increase trainees' perceptions, as well as their ability to do particular tasks (Barker & Pitts, 1997). Can the same be true for student-athletes in academia? Through the use of humorous lecture material that involves mentoring, student-athletes who are interested in mentoring their peers can have an impact upon them. The purpose of this study was to examine humor as a learning strategy that may help student-athletes in their academic and athletic pursuits.

Specifically, the use of humor as a learning strategy was examined. Humor has long been a source of mystery (O'Connell, 1996) and has had practical applications over a variety of disciplines. Humor can aid the ill and provide a good feeling to those who are in good health. It has affective and cognitive benefits as well, but can humor aid in the retention of lecture material in student-athletes? The proposed study hypothesized that student-athletes will learn more from an informational presentation rich in humor, than a program that is strictly lecture.

Background of the problem

Student-athletes are required to devote upwards of 25 hours per week when their sport is in season, miss numerous classes for university-sanctioned athletic competitions, and

cope with fatigue and injuries as a result of their athletic participation. These factors detract from the realistic likelihood of academic success, which in turn affects their academic motivation to succeed (American Institutes for Research [AIR], 1989). "College sport has grown into an expensive circus, driven by an insatiable appetite for winning, and amateur athletes are getting neither the moral guidance nor the education for which they bargained" (Sanoff & Schrof, 1990, p. 50). Although some programs have been created to curb the growing number of athletes who dropout of college, the retention of student-athletes continues to be a growing concern (Apery, 2001; Goldberg, 1991; Harold, 1999; Hishinuma, 1999; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981). Due to the many challenges (i.e., classroom learning, athletic and academic competition) student-athletes are often overlooked by the academic community and are left to face major obstacles alone and with little direction (Sanoff & Schrof, 1990). For student-athletes, such issues as low retention and poor graduation rates tend to undermine the usefulness of college sports.

"Participation in athletics seems to have altered the values students' hold in college, due to an increased emphasis upon the material and the monetary (Schubert & Gilbert, 1986). At no point in the educational process has the commercialism of college athletics wrought more harm than in its effect upon the American undergraduate (Lapchick & Slaughter,

1989). The distressing fact is that the college seems to have permitted and even encouraged college sport to do these things in the name of education (Lapchick & Slaughter, 1989).

Definitions

In this study, the question of whether student-athletes, who are participating in a mentor-training program, will have better retention of lecture material when humor is utilized as the delivery system will be examined. The retention of lecture material will be enhanced through humorous illustrations, comic strips, and funny stories. Humor, which was defined as "anything that an individual deems funny," can aid in the retention of material of an educational program (Snetsinger & Grabowski, 1994). Both the psychological and the psychosocial aspects of humor will be explored to assist in understanding how humor can be used in an educational setting. Student-athletes are individuals who are participating, or who have participated in an individual sport at a college or university, who are simultaneously pursuing an undergraduate degree (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988). Mentoring, as posited by Pearson and Petitpas (1990), is the "act of teaching or learning by one individual to another in a unique or specific setting." There is much pressure placed on student-athletes to succeed in whatever they do.

Purpose of the study

Humor in the classroom has been shown to provide a sense of support when it is delivered accurately and as part of a planned curriculum (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992). Some light has been shed on the effectiveness of humor in the classroom (Callahan, Clark & Kellogg, 1992; Edwards & Gibboney, 1992; Bryant, Cominsky, & Zillman, 1988; Cornett, 1986; Colwell & Wagle, 1984.) Although the research shows that humor can be utilized as an effective classroom learning strategy, it fails to address the issue of humor and the retention of lecture material. A look into the hypothesis for this study may add some insight as to what can be expected of a mentor-information session that utilizes humor, and what athletes are expected to take away from such a program.

Significance of the study

Humor has been seen as an invaluable teaching tool in the classroom (Coleman, 1992). Humor provides an opportunity to take oneself less seriously. Humor can allow a student to become open to more possibilities, such as academics, and to increase self-awareness both on the field and in the classroom (Coleman, 1992). Five types of humor have been identified in classroom learning: humor drawn from the lecture material, humor at the expense of the content material, disparaging humor, empowering humor, and humor as

a classroom management tool (Coleman, 1992). How humor aids in certain educational settings is currently being researched. It is thought that the orientation of the student receiving the humor, and the orientation of the instructor may play an instrumental part in the retention of lecture material, possibly more than the content of the material (Wanzer & Frymeir, 1990). Most studies on humor and the classroom have been on high school students. Humor in post-secondary institutions and their students is sparse, and humor with student-athletes in higher education is non-existent. The literature that will be reviewed will show how humor and mentoring can help shape the student-athlete and gear him/her toward a future in sports and a successful term in academia.

Student-athletes lead a double life, one as an individual who has great promise as a possible athletic star and another as an individual who needs to achieve academically (Heyman, 1998). Traditionally, student-athletes are seen in dichotomous terms. On one hand they are revered as high performance sport-oriented students. On the other they are seen as uninterested, non-academically inclined individuals (Heyman, 1998). Student-athletes should not be seen on continuum where they are students on one end, and athletes on the other. They should be seen as individuals that encompass both scholarly and intellectual attributes. Since many individuals in a university system

do not see the student-athlete as a potential scholar, student-athletes are overlooked and tend to fail in the university system if they don't perform well academically (Hensen & Fry, 1994). If educators of student-athletes learn the importance of humor, they may wish to utilize it as a means to teach future student-athletes. Additionally, through the use of humor, student-athletes may learn how to become academically successful while also excelling in a particular sport.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

In this section, student-athletics, humor and mentoring will be explored further to show how they can assist a student-athlete who is interested in becoming a peer mentor. Initially, an examination of the dilemmas student-athletes face will be explored. Next, an exploration into the history of humor will aid in the discussion of humor and its' effect on the human body and mind. A look at the theories of humor will also be reviewed to see how humor can be used in an educational curriculum. Finally, student-athlete development and mentoring will be discussed.

Student-Athlete Adjustment

Student-athletes encounter many of the same problems as traditional students such as depression, homesickness, and ethical dilemmas (Goldberg, 1991). However, student-athletes differ from traditional college students in three ways. First, student-athletes have added pressure to perform on and off of the field, second, they have enhanced pressure from their coaches, and finally, student-athletes have pressure to succeed in the classroom, where they need to overcome the pressure of being seen as an underachiever by the college or university. They are also expected to be able to handle the social pressure that comes with being

recognized as a student-athlete, student-athletes are seen as athletes who may or may not have the potential to become academically inclined students (Curry & Jiobu, 1984). Student-athletes are recruited to play sports for the college or university with the expectation that they will also earn a degree (Curry & Jiobu, 1984). However, the expectation is usually mediocre or even lower, particularly if the athlete sustains an injury.

Today, many groups want the "student" put back in "student-athlete." One such group is comprised of professionals in the mental health field whose involvement with student-athletes has increased over the past decade (Aper, 2001; Goldberg, 1991; Harold, 1999; Hishinuma, 1999; Whittemore, 1991). They feel that specific programs designed to foster the intellectual development of the student-athlete will allow the focus of education to take precedence over materialistic needs. Such programs continue to be developed but are limited in number. Other authors (e.g., Goldberg, 1991; Lanning, 1982; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981) have echoed the same message, citing the need of professional assistance for student-athletes with academic, athletic, and psychosocial problems (Dannish, Petitpas & Hale, 1986).

Support services for athletes in higher education (e.g., English and Math tutoring, time, anger and stress

management programs) receive a great deal of public scrutiny (Lanning, 1982). A common myth in higher education, and in society in general, is that because athletes receive so much special attention with their academic challenges they are "the privileged few" in colleges and universities (Lanning, 1982). Hence, little sympathy is given to them in the area of academics. Nevertheless, these athletes (and their counterparts in the high schools) are perhaps more in need of assistance than their non-athlete counterparts, precisely because of their special status (Dannish, Petipas & Hale, 1986).

Many athletes are taught that they are athletes first and students second, which causes dissonance when they arrive at a university and are treated differently by their professors (Lee, 1993). The dilemma arises when accommodations are made that further pigeonholes the student-athlete as needing "privileged attention". A student may feel under appreciated when a professor devotes more time to students who do not need to miss class for a sporting event, or who may need extra time to complete an assignment. As such, student-athletes may not place academics as a priority during their time at a university, and thus, may fail both as a student and as an athlete. Athletes are seen as individuals who "buck the system" and receive "preferential treatment" (Weaver, Chelladural, & Packianathan, 1999). From the Division One football team

that has meals catered and are flown first class to away games, to the Division Three field hockey player who receives special permission to miss class due to games, student-athletes are constantly placed in an unfavorable light in regards to academics. Student-athletes have such a negative image in the minds of many educators, that often times, the performance of the athlete in the classroom is diminished due to the increased pressure placed upon them from the professors (Braddock, 1991). College athletes are believed to be less academically able (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). Indeed, athletes have been found to enter college with lower high school records and test scores (Craig & Ferguson, 1992; Hanford, 1974; Hood, Lorimer, 1972; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1985; Stuart, 1985), and athletes who are poorly prepared for college work have been found to disengage from academic roles (Adler & Adler, 1985).

Athletes were found to rate themselves lower on academic attributes (smart, studious, grade-conscious, intellectual, academically focused) than non-athletes (Prentice, 1997). Evidence regarding the academic performance of college athletes, however, is not consistent and is difficult to interpret because students may have circumvented the academic system by taking easier courses or choosing easier majors. No studies report higher grade point averages (GPAs) for athletes. Some researchers report lower GPAs for athletes than non-athletes (Cantor &

Prentice, 1996; Purdy et al., 1985); others report no differences when pre-college aptitude and achievement are controlled (Davis & Berger, 1973; Hood et al., 1992; Stuart, 1985; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). Athletes in programs that produce large revenue and grant athletic scholarships have been found to show lower academic achievement and choose less rigorous academic majors (Mayo, 1982).

The major adjustment most student-athletes face when making the transition from high school to college is being treated the same as the rest of the collegiate population (Prentice, 1997). Such treatment has been known to cause a lack of motivation, disinterest in academics and athletics, social aggressiveness, and alcoholism in some student-athletes (Wieberg, 1991).

Many people argue that athletes in higher education should be treated just as all other students are treated. Special treatment, they say, is not desirable; it only serves to send athletes the message that they are special or privileged (Wieberg, 1991). If athletes are treated the same as all other students, many of their needs may not be addressed. Typically, college athletes have academic needs similar to those of their non-athlete peers, but in addition they have needs that are either unique to them or magnified by their positions as athletes (Lee, 1993). Educators of student-athletes in the higher education system should not

only be aware of and sensitive to those needs, but should look for ways to improve education, possibly through humor. Through the use of such a device the student-athletes may receive the assistance they need (Lee, 1993).

An Examination of Humor

No one will ever know when the first human smiled, but it must have been long ago. Even our distant relatives, the chimpanzee, monkey, and gorilla, exhibit "baring of the teeth behaviors", which look remarkably like smiles (Korobkin, 1988). Also, chimps and monkeys love to do funny posturing and clowning to amuse human audiences (Korobkin, 1988).

Since the first human smiled, the questions of what makes a person laugh and why have been pondered (Cornett, 1986). "Humor has had many different connotations throughout the years. What is recorded in history is the origin of the word, "humor." It is a Latin word meaning "liquid," "fluid," or "moisture." In ancient Greece a person's temperament was thought to be controlled by four humors (fluids). When in proper balance, a person was in a good humor, so to speak. But, too much of one of the fluids produced moods: irritable if yellow bile was disproportionate, gloomy or melancholy if black bile predominated, sluggish if phlegm was too abundant, and sanguine if an individual had an oversupply of blood. A

person possessing an excess of one of the fluids came to be called a "humorist" or a person subject to "humours." The prescription for controlling bad temperament caused by excessive "humours" was laughter. Unfortunately, when the poor soul could not just laugh it off, he became the object of others' laughter. Gradually, by the 18th century, "humorist" came to mean "someone who was skilled in the artistic or literary use of humor," and humor had come to include everything from wit to buffoonery" as cited in (Cornett, 1986)

Humor has made tremendous strides from ancient days when it was seen as a base form of behavior. Today, definitions of humor focus mainly on cognitive aspects of what makes us laugh, such as: language, play, and unlikely visual and auditory images (Cornett, 1986). Yet, remaining is the idea of humor as something that is ludicrous, incongruous, abnormal, and out-of-the-ordinary (Cornett, 1986). Much work has been done to show that humor has useful purposes also. Recently, the use of laughter has produced a powerful source of literature as to how our bodies respond to a good dose of humor (Cousins, 1979; 1989). Laughter has also been found to have curative abilities. A closer look into the physiological changes of the body is necessary in order to see what benefit humor may have on an athletically inclined individual.

What is Humor?

To appreciate different kinds of humor requires varying levels of cognitive development. For example, slapstick and clowning are visual, nonverbal types of humor, while satire requires inferential thinking (Rainsberger, 1994). A prospective mentor who knows something about the nature of humor will have greater insight into possible problems involving athletes who are consistently the butt of jokes, those athletes who make frequent sarcastic remarks, those who poke fun excessively, and those who persist in drawing

attention to themselves by constantly acting out (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992). But, what makes humor happen?

The mystery of how humor works has yet to be completely unraveled, but there are theories about why we laugh when we are stimulated. According to Snetsinger and Grabowski (1994), humor involves a three-step process: arousal, problem solving, and resolution. In the arousal stage the listener is set-up by familiar cues to indicate that the situation is a humorous one (Coleman 1992). Cues can be anything from a symbol, such as a clown costume, to twinkling eyes that signal the "tease." Social circumstances will influence the arousal process, depending on whether you are with friends or strangers, the same or opposite sex, or in a small or large group. Also, the content, structure, and complexity of the joke will have a bearing on the arousal process (Coleman 1992). For example, most individuals have outgrown the knock-knock jokes that children take delight in. To amuse these individuals, the knock-knock joke must overcome the simplified structure with an intelligent play on words.

Once the arousal or set-up is seen or heard, the problem-solving step begins in order to make sense of incongruous information. Anticipating the punch line, using visual imagery, and trying to remember an answer one heard before are some thinking processes that go into action at this point (Coleman 1992). These mental efforts produce physical and emotional changes such as, increased pulse rate and mood change (Snetsinger & Grabowski, 1994). Finally, a person gets it. The punch line is delivered and the incongruities are resolved. With resolution comes myriad types of laughing or smiling, which are outlets for the emotions stimulated in the arousal step but left hanging during the problem-solving step (Snetsinger & Grabowski, 1994).

The laughter reflex results when suddenly the joke, riddle, etc. all makes sense (Coleman 1992). Mental energy built up to unlock the joke puzzle is still there at the end of the joke but is worked off by the laughter (Coleman 1992). Immanuel Kant, (as cited in Cornett, 1989) described this phenomenon as "the sudden transformation of a tense expectation into nothing." Where does the "tension" originate? Perhaps by explaining the cognitive benefits humor the mechanics of the laugh response will become apparent.

Humor and Cognition

Some studies indicated that humor has cognitive benefits (Callahan, Clark, & Kellough, 1992; Hageseth, 1995; Pollak & Freda, 1997). The cognitive theory outlines the development of a sense of humor as it corresponds to the stages of intellectual development (Janlongo, 1985; Tamshiro, 1979). Pollack and Freda (1997) found that the use of humor with middle school children enhanced rapport building, student empowerment, creative thinking, attention, self-esteem, and socialization skills. While Chase (1998) identified seven other humor intelligences of students: random thinking; virtual memory void (erasing entire sections of personal memory); antigravity (balancing on two chair legs); extravagancy (achieving perfect, effortless aplomb); inter-Origami (intricate note-folding); stealth-kinesthetic (pea-shooting spitballs through gutted pens); and self-oblivious (behaving oddly without knowing it); which further supported the contention that humor has cognitive aspects. Humor, when used effectively and appropriately, helps individuals learn in some way. Reluctant students' attention and retention maybe maintained and enhanced by a lighter, humorous touch delivered by the teacher (Pollack & Freda, 1997).

A study by Davies and Apter (1980) incorporated humorous versus non-humorous slide tape presentations. The

study revealed that students learned more in the humorous presentation. A similar study by Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) examined the effects of humor and humorous examples upon the comprehension and retention of lecture material. A test of comprehension and retention was given twice: immediately following the lecture then six weeks later. Results indicated that immediate comprehension was not facilitated by the use of humorous examples. Upon retesting, however, retention of concept humor material was significantly improved by viewing a lecture with humorous examples illustrating concepts. Vance (1987) likewise studied the effect of humor on recognition and recall of information. He discovered that humor is an effective aid, but only when the humor is relevant to the instruction.

Humor has been shown to develop higher-order thinking skills and create modes of thinking that are investigative, seeking, grasping, and filled with trial and error (Nilsen, 1987). While breaking down stress, humor acts as an "elixir" that soothes the mind into thinking more clearly about higher order relationships (Hebert, 1991). Alice Risen (as cited in Hebert, 1991), a psychologist at the University of Maryland in Baltimore, believes that humor can bridge the right and left hemisphere of the brain, converting a "Ha-Ha" into an "Aha!" (Hebert, 1991). Sullivan (1992) suggests encouraging students to use topic-

related puns and humorous comments, which require higher level thinking skills, thus challenging students to think. Cognitively, humor seems to open the mind to endless possibilities which may help student-athletes see problems and situations differently, which may in turn lead to more appropriate solutions to athletic and academic dilemmas.

Humor and Physiology

Humor is not only cognitively advantageous, but it also has physiological benefits. Under certain conditions, humor may be physiologically therapeutic (Cornett, 1986). A good laugh improves blood flow: increases oxygen in the blood; exercises the lungs, diaphragm, and face muscles; and releases endorphins, a natural painkiller, into the body's system (Cornett, 1986). In addition, because of the increase in endorphin secretion, pain decreases and pleasure increases (Hebert, 1991). A chemical process may explain this increased feeling of exhilaration from laughter. Laughing promotes the production of catecholamines, which increases alertness, and leads to reduced feelings of stress and tension. If pleasure, exhilaration, and alertness are increased, it is only logical to experience a decrease in tension and stress, as these are incompatible states (Rainsberger, 1994).

Rapp (1991) posits that a sense of humor is, in truth, a human invention of the first magnitude; "Laughter is

healthful, and is beneficial to the body, (p. 52)". Physician J.T. Walsh concluded after ample research that:

"The effect of laughter upon the mind not only brings relaxation with it, so far as mental tension is concerned, but makes it also less prone to dreads and less solicitous about the future. This favorable effect on the mind influences various functions of the body and makes them healthier than would otherwise be the case" (as cited in Cornett, 1990 pg. 30).

Norman Cousins (1979, 1989) has made tremendous strides in advancing the notion that laughter is healthy. Through personal experience, which included burns over 80% of his body, Cousins found that a genuine dose of laughter helped him recover from his injuries at a remarkable rate. Similarly, Schwartz (1989) has done extensive research into the curative role humor plays in the healing process. His study examined the recovery process of burn victims through the use of regular treatment and humor. The patients, who were supplied with a healthy dose of humor throughout the day, recovered much quicker than did their counterparts. Zillmann and Stocking (1986) advocate the use of humor as a preventative health measure. They contend that laughter, and plenty of it helps to increase the intake of oxygen to the blood; exercises muscles, particularly the lungs and diaphragm; and produces endorphins, the body's natural

painkillers. Ziv (1984) and Zillmann and Stocking (1986) found that humor reduced the incidence of heart disease, strokes, depression, cancer, and other stress related conditions.

The functions of the brain are also affected by humor. In terms of left-brain and right brain differences, Svebak (1974) found that laughter heightened functioning of both sides of the brain simultaneously, which resulted in producing an unusually high level of consciousness and information processing in the brain, thereby allowing the brain to reach a higher level of capacity. In such a state, the individual has the ability to see both the abstract, subtle nuances of a problem and its more concrete, logical aspects at the same time. Similarly, Gardner (1981) found that laughter brought about similar simultaneous heightening of brain hemispheres in-patients with brain damage. It appears that through the use of humor the body tends to function higher on several different levels. Examining the psychosocial aspects of humor might provide insight to see how effective humor can be in social situations such as the classroom.

Psychosocial Effects of Humor

While humor can backfire or, worse, mask unseen, underlying prejudices, research reveals positive and promising connections between humor and creativity,

efficiency, and mental health. Although there remains considerable room for disagreement on the essential qualities of humor, some researchers (Duncan, 1987; Krohe, 1987; Meyer, 1990), after reviewing the literature appear to have focused on a core quality: incongruity, as experienced cognitively and affectively (Hebert, 1991). Several theories, The Anxiety Reduction Theory (Krohe, 1987), The Arousal Theory (Duncan, 1987), and The Relief Theory (Meyer, 1990), support the psychological benefits of humor. A brief description will be given of each. The Anxiety Reduction Theory (Krohe, 1978) purports that the level of humor arousal is directly associated with the anxiety level of students. For example, if a student has a high level of anxiety, the level of humor needed to reduce the anxiety must be as high or higher than the student. If the humor level is lower than the anxiety level, humor may not be effective. If The Anxiety Theory holds true, it further strengthens the case for the use of humor as a relief valve in the classroom (Herbert, 1991).

The Arousal Theory (Duncan, 1987) also emphasizes the stress-reducing effects of humor. This perspective views the function of laughter as reducing built-up tension and energy (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). In accordance with this theory is Martin and Lefcourt's (1988), and Wilson's (1979) contention of humor being an effective implementation device

for reducing the stress, anxieties, and hostilities that are encountered in everyday life situations. Martin and Lefcourt (1988) attribute this stress reducing effect of humor to its capability of allowing people to put distance between themselves and the problem at hand. For example, laughing at a problem in the moment, but attending to the problem at a later time. In this way humor may be an effective classroom strategy by reducing the fears and anxieties of students (King, 1999; Cornell, 2000; or Borchers, 2001). Korobkin (1988) found that humor decreases academic stress and anxiety toward the subject matter, which can help to retain subject matter. Cornell (2000) went further to explain that humor can build up, or sometimes even shape, identity. Humor can be used to build up student confidence and sometimes even help students forge a new, freer identity. King (1999) discussed tips on how to bring humor into the classroom, although his study was strictly on elementary school children, some tips can be very useful in a collegiate setting, and even with student-athletes as well. Some tips included: let the student bring in something funny and discuss it with their peers; start of the class with an appropriate joke or humorous instance; take a moment to laugh at something funny with the rest of the class; and include a humorous trivia question on exams (King, 1999).

The use of humor in the classroom can also be understood through The Relief Theory (Meyer, 1990). Meyer (1990) who suggested that reduction of tension and anxiety is humor's central element proposed The Relief Theory. Relief Theory differs from the other theories in one major way. Relief Theory allows for the individual to use humor as a way to handle situations in the moment and not wait until a later time to handle a problem. According to Meyer (1990), humor allows the individual to think clearer and prepares the mind for complex tasking, such as problem solving. Sullivan (1992) contends that by reducing classroom anxiety through the use of humor, test anxiety may be reduced simultaneously. Highly *anxious* students also seem to perform better on tests when humor is introduced into the testing situation (Gibbon, 1988).

Education and Humor

Three theories, The Superiority Theory, The Disparagement Theory, and The Incongruity Theory show how humor can be harmful in an educational setting. Humor may be ineffectively utilized to promote the superiority of one group or person over another. Superiority Theory (Gruner 1978) focuses upon the heightened sense of self-esteem, confidence, and reduced threat that are coupled with a humorous response to a typically stressful experience or situation (Martin & Lefcourt, 1988). A major premise of

this theory is that people laugh when they feel superior to others (Meyer, 1990). It is embodied in the slur, the put down, and the barb, in which an individual or group laughs at another, supposedly inferior individual or group (Pollio, 1983). Examples of this type of humor are the various ethnic, racist, and sexist jokes that are increasingly becoming taboo in today's more enlightened, sensitive society, particularly in educational settings (Coleman 1992).

Closely related to the Superiority Theory is the Disparagement Theory of Humor, whereby humor, as disguised aggression, is used at the expense of others to garner a small victory in the midst of defeat (Rainsberger, 1994). A popular example of The Disparagement Theory is "playing the dozens", a game popular among inner-city youth. In the "dozens", disparagement is encouraged, as the winner is the individual who consistently disparages or belittles his or her opponent. This competitive edge may appeal to student-athletes at an early age, and may provide an escape from responsibility through disparagement as they mature. Currently, research has provided little evidence to support the "competitive edge" assertion.

However, humor resulting from unexpected connections is explained by the Incongruity Theory. The Incongruity Theory emphasizes the occurrence of two or more illogical

or incongruent events, often eliciting the double take or puzzled look before the laughter (Coleman, 1992). For example in the classic joke, "What is black and white and red all over?" A typical response would be "a newspaper", but the incongruent responses of "a nun falling down the steps", or "a penguin in a blender" cause puzzled or startled expressions. In the classroom, this style of humor can have both positive and negative side effects. Humor in the classroom must be appropriate and must also be congruent with the lecture material. If humor is used inappropriately, hurt feelings may inhibit learning and the effectiveness of an instructor may be diminished. For instance, if a student asks a question and the instructor uses sarcasm to answer, the student may not wish to become vulnerable again by asking another question or if an instructor's remark is incongruent with the students' response, the student can feel embarrassed. It is the responsibility of the instructor to provide an explanation for any incongruent response in the classroom that may put the student or students at risk (Coleman, 1992).

In spite of the potential risks, Colwell and Wigle (1984) argued that humor also has affective benefits. They cite learning theorists to support their beliefs that humor can motivate students who are bored or stressed or who have negative attitudes toward school. Wanzer and Frymeir

(1999) found that humor increased motivation towards and satisfaction with learning with an instructor who has a high orientation towards utilizing humor in the classroom. With the educational benefits addressed, it can be perceived that humor can play an important role in the learning process, particularly when working with the student-athlete.

Humor can assist in creating an environment that is conducive to learning, which may help retain material and may also promote cooperation among individuals (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992). Kher, Molstad, and Donahue (1997) conducted a study in the college classroom with "dread courses" and found that humor helped to alleviate the tedium experienced in such courses. A dread course is one that students sometimes avoid due to a lack of self-confidence, perceived difficulty of the material or a previous negative experience in a content area such as mathematics (Kher, et. al, 1997). "Dread course" lectures appear to provide a special challenge to students as a traditional style of learning; perhaps, humor can enhance the image that most of these courses receive.

Based on the research about humor and its' implications for educators, student-athletes would be anticipated to learn better in a classroom environment where humor is used effectively. However, in order for effective learning to

occur, the instructor must be knowledgeable about humor in the classroom and how it can affect the learning process.

Humor as a Learning Strategy

The term *strategy* was originally a military term that referred to procedures for implementing the plan of a large-scale military operation. The more specific steps in implementation of the plan were called *tactics*. More generally, the term *strategy* has come to refer to the implementation of a set of procedures (tactics) for accomplishing something. Thus a *learning strategy* is a sequence of procedures for accomplishing learning, and the specific procedures within this sequence are called *learning tactics* (O'Connell, 1996). Humor can play an important role in learning if the learner employs a particular type of strategy or tactic. For example, if a student-athlete remembers a subject by repeating it several times, the strategy used would be of a repeating nature. The same is true with humor, if the content material is humorous, and the student can relate or appreciate the nature of the material, through the process of recall, the student can learn the material much faster than if the student can not relate to the subject material (Wanzer & Fryer, 1999). The instructor that employs humor should also have familiarity with student-athlete development.

Student-Athlete Development and Mentoring

A mentor can assist in assuaging the fears of a student-athlete, particularly if the mentor has also been an athlete. Mentors can help athletes focus, they can help motivate, and they can be a resource as well as a knowledge base for an athlete. Most studies on mentoring have been conducted in the business field. Using the business framework, mentoring can be just as useful in higher education, particularly with student-athletes. Business literature uses the terms mentor and protégé, to provide consistency, the same terms will be used for student-athletes in higher education. Some universities to increase the matriculation and the graduation rates of their student-athletes use mentoring programs for student-athletes. Mentor programs are also used to enhance the image of the student-athlete. But, what is mentoring? Where did it originate? How has mentoring adapted to today's society? Mentoring is an old idea that works. The word "mentor" comes from the Greek for "steadfast" and "enduring" (Cornett, 1986). It was the name given by Homer to the man Odysseus entrusted with the guidance of his son, Telemachus. Since then, the term "mentor" has become synonymous with a wise teacher, guide, and friend (Cornett, 1986). Mentoring for athletes, informal mentoring dates back to the days of the Roman Coliseum (Cornett, 1986). Throughout the decades, mentoring has been shown to add to the experience,

development, expertise, and enjoyment of the individual who is being mentored (Zeidler & Kirch, 1998).

For student-athletes today however, mentoring is in its' infancy, in terms of how much information is available on the topic apart from the business industry. In fact, so little information is available in the literature, that student-athletes themselves would find it very difficult to find information that could help them mentor others. In the upper echelon of university sports programs (Big Ten, Southeastern Conference (SEC), and the Big East) mentoring is encouraged informally (Burton, 1989). However, in the smaller schools, mentoring is folded into a program that attempts to assist the athlete in growth and development, and also in academic pursuits (Danish & D'Augelli, 1983). What happens normally in many large universities is that many athletes become lost in the shuffle. Often they are assigned a mentor, but then, receive no further instruction or direction for the entire semester, and in some instances, the entire year which is the major problem with most of the mentor training programs (Danish & D'Augelli, 1983). Athletes are left to face many of the social problems that regular college students' face alone. The mentors that are assigned to student-athletes may become friends with their protégé, and may fail to mentor them in ways that are conducive to academic success (i.e. lack of time management,

partying, etc.). What happens then is that many of the student-athletes begin to lose focus, and forget why they are in school, and at times, they even begin to lose themselves (Auerbach, 1986). Many individuals in a university system do not see the student-athlete as a potential scholar; student-athletes are overlooked and tend to fail in the university system if they don't perform well academically. Fortunately, many universities are becoming aware of the needs of student-athletes and programs are being designed to assist in the development areas that are unique to student-athletes (Weaver, Chelladural, & Packianathan, 1999).

In theory, mentor-training programs can be designed to track a student from the moment that they enter the university, until the time that they matriculate through the system. In actuality, few of the programs follow this plan. What is important to many programs, and many student-athletes, is the issue of continued support (Auerbach, 1986). Student-athletes need some type of supervision throughout the semester to make sure they are succeeding, athletically, and academically; in short, athletes need assistance to maintain focus.

Hypothesis

Thus far the needs of student-athletes have been addressed, as well as the possible benefits that humor can

provide in learning and in the classroom. The hypothesis for this study will examine if student-athletes will retain humorous lecture material on mentoring better than those who receive lecture material without the use of humor.

Chapter III

Methodology

Participants

The participants consisted of 36 members from 15 different sports teams at a large, predominately White, mid-eastern institution. This number was determined by the availability of student-athletes who were not in season and who were interested in participating in the study.

Participant ages ranged from 20 to 24, which is consistent with the traditional undergraduate population. The student-athletes in the study participated in at least two years of active college sports and had a desire, as expressed by their willingness to participate in the training, to learn about mentoring other athletes. The sample consisted of student-athletes who were in their senior year at the university and were expecting to graduate. Exceptions were made for student-athletes who were injured or otherwise could not participate in their sport, but had an avid interest in mentoring ($n=2$).

Procedures

A convenience sample was used to assist in gathering a representative sample of the university's student-athlete population. Participants had at least a four-semester standing before enrolling in the training program. The

participants were recruited first through e-mails asking for volunteers, and then through a brief presentation to the Student-Athlete Advisory Board. Student-athletes were randomly assigned to either the control or experimental groups. The participants were enrolled in a one-day, two-hour training session on mentoring student-athletes. The control group received one two-hour presentation on the student-athlete and mentoring, without the use of humor. While the content of both groups was the same, the experimental presentation was interspersed with various forms of humor (jokes, riddles, funny stories, and sports comics), taken from newspapers, and literature on humor. The instructor of both training sessions was a male former student-athlete who has seen and experienced many of the problems student-athletes encounter. After the presentation, the student-athletes received a posttest questionnaire that tested their knowledge about mentoring. The questionnaire also asked the participants how humor can be used to assist in learning.

Instrumentation

The 36 volunteers were then assigned to different groups, strict lecture, or humorous lecture. A demographic sheet was used to collect data in the following categories: age, marital status, semester status, and semester standing (See Appendix A), as well as an informed consent form (See Appendix D). A questionnaire on mentoring knowledge (See

Appendix B) was given to each participant before the training program, and also after the completion of the study. The questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended questions that assessed the depth of mentoring knowledge for each of the participants. The questions were drawn from comments made by student-athletes about how a mentor could have made their athletic experience in college more complete. A pilot study was then done to see if the questions actually created responses that assessed the mentor's role in athletics. The pilot showed that the questions asked targeted responses that were directly related to mentoring knowledge, experience with mentoring, and how a mentor can impact a student-athlete. The training program consisted of mentor material from the educational system, including secondary and post secondary schools. This information was provided to show the participants how mentoring can assist to aid in the development of student-athletes. The program then examined the development of student-athletes using the Chickering/Ressier Model (1993). The seven vectors covered student-athlete development from developing competence (intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence), to developing integrity, which consist of dualistic thinking, and unrealistic goal attainment. Next an interrelationship was established using Kegan's model of the evolving self (1981). The stages of the impulsive self, the imperial

self, the interpersonal self, the institutional self, and the interindividual self were connected to the vectors. Next, mentoring was defined briefly using the roles developed by Lebowitz and Schlossberg (1981).

Data Analysis

Historically, content analysis was viewed as an objective and neutral way of obtaining a quantitative description of the content of various forms of communications. Thus, counting the mention of specific items was important (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). As content analysis has evolved, however, it is viewed more generously as a method for describing and interpreting the artifacts of a society or social group (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Probably the greatest strength of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive and non-reactive. It can be conducted without disturbing the setting in any way. The researcher determines where the greatest emphasis lies after the data have been gathered. Also, the procedure is relatively clear to the reader. Information can therefore be checked, as can the care with which the analysis has been applied. A potential weakness, however, is the span of inferential reasoning. That is, the analysis of the content of written materials, for example, entails interpretation by the researcher, just as in the analysis of interactively gathered data; numbers do not speak for

themselves. Care should be taken, therefore, in displaying the logic of interpretation used in inferring meaning from the artifacts (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

A content analysis was performed in this study to see if humor played an instrumental part in the retention of the material or in their enjoyment of the program. The content consisted of the various responses given by the participants. The responses were then categorized by the number of times a particular response was given, from a key word list. (Appendix C) The responses were then indexed according to how many times humor was referenced in the responses from the last question asked in the questionnaire. Humor was the main category observed to see if the retention hypothesis was true. The questions pertained to the effectiveness of the mentor program. Either the use of humor was increased, decreased, or had no effect on the retention level. A possible confounding variable was that the participants were volunteer student-athletes who wished to be mentors. The lecture included various comics to convey a point, and humorous stories by the student-athletes to accent certain topics salient to mentoring. The non-humor lecture was strictly based on the aforementioned themes without humorous examples, or funny anecdotes.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the retention level of student-athletes enrolled in a mentor information session that used a lecture format where humor was used as a delivery system. When addressing humor and education in this study, the following hypothesis was addressed: will student-athletes who are enrolled in a mentor training information session retain more information from a lecture that utilizes humor than in a lecture that does not use humor as an instructional delivery system? The differences between the two groups were identified through a content analysis of their responses.

The findings of this study have been arranged by the questions asked (Appendix C). Within the question section, first findings for those in the non-humor group are presented, followed by findings from the humor group. Key words, phrases, and quotes from the participants for each question are presented to demonstrate salient findings. This chapter concludes with an overview of the findings of the research question as reflected in the quotes from the participants. The quotes from the two groups were randomly chosen.

There were key words or phrases documented during the pre-test and posttest that helped determine the retention level for both groups. These words were taken directly from the presentation. The key word, phrase or any variation of the word was accepted for coding purposes and served as an indicator of information retention from the lecture.

How do you define the role of a mentor? (Question #1)

This first basic question was asked of both groups to assess how their perceptions or knowledge of the mentor role changed. For the pre-test and post-test in both the humor and non-humor lecture groups, the responses to this question were fairly similar. Although both groups had similar responses in the posttest, the humorous lecture group responded referencing more material- (keywords)- from the lecture presentation than did those in the non-humorous group. Overall both groups' responses revealed a more informed definition and description of the mentor role.

Key words for Question One- (Pre and Posttest):

A friend, teacher, role model, advocate, counselor, broker, change agent, helper, support person, someone you look up to, a guide, instrument, positive facilitator or advisor.

The following excerpts demonstrate how both groups learned from the presentation and retained information by elaborating on question # 1 during the posttest.

Quotes

In both groups, posttest answers to question #1 tended to provide as much information or more in-depth information than when the question was asked initially. For clarification, two excerpts from the non-humor and the humor group pre and posttests are provided.

Non-humor Group

Pretest- In the pretest the definitions were relatively direct and reflected a single dimension of mentoring.

Someone who helps direct another person in different situations(Participant # 9)

A mentor is someone that you can look-up to for guidance (Participant # 12)

Post-test- The following post-test comments from the non-humor group participants reflect more complete definitions of a mentor.

*A mentor is someone who can use their experiential knowledge to **help** you reach specific goals as well as **help** you balance your life despite a busy schedule*

(Participant # 27)

*A mentor is someone that meets and **helps** another in various areas of that persons' life. A mentor offers*

guidance, support, and friendship to another.

(Participant # 19)

Humor group

Pretest- Many of the humor group pretest responses were similar to the non-humor group in that brief responses were provided.

A mentor is a person who can always be counted on when the athlete needs them. (Participant # 36)

A **role model** (Participant # 30)

Post-test- In the posttest responses, respondents provided more detailed responses as contrasted with the typical response on the pretest. Two typical responses follow.

*A mentor is a person who **guides** you through an experience. By sharing a part of themselves through personal commitment they also **help** you learn, reflect, and reach your full potential.*

(Participant # 23)

*A person who can serve as an **advocate** and a **change agent** for a student-athlete.* (Participant # 21)

These excerpts demonstrate how both groups learned from the presentation and retained information by elaborating on question one during the posttest. The pretest responses to define a mentor were typically very brief. In contrast posttest responses were more encompassing, reflecting the

totality of a mentor role. In essence, both groups learned something.

How can a mentor help aid in the matriculation of student-athletes? (Question # 2)

Although the responses for Question 1 seemed to increase from the pre-test to the post-test, the answers generated from question two varied greatly in the post-test. For the post-test, members of the humor group used more key words from the presentation than did their non-humor counterparts. For the pre-test many answers between the two groups were similar and reflected the individual knowledge of the student-athletes and their previous experiences. The answers ranged from very basic needs of the athletes, to more comprehensive and polite answers. Below are the key words used for question two, and two answers from both the non-humor and humor groups

Key Words for Question Two- (Pre and Posttest):

**The key words or phrases for this question included:
provide guidance, help with problems, answer questions,
act as a guide**

Quotes

Non-humor group

Pre-test-

*Perhaps by being a role model to help them achieve
their goals (Participant # 4)*

*They can **help solve problems** that the athlete may have
in order to graduate also they can serve as role models
for the athletes (Participant # 1)*

Humor group

Pre-test-

*By **helping them** see the big picture, and **helping them**
cope with the pressures of athletic and academic life.
(Participant # 21)*

*Student-Athletes can be helped by a mentor in different
ways; they can help them get accustomed to the practice
schedule a regimen- they can **help them** with time
management, and they can help them get to know others
on the team, and learn study habits from them.*

(Participant # 31)

Non-humor group

Posttest-

A mentor can help student-athletes to stay on track with their education and studies as well as having someone to talk to about personal problems and issues on a regular basis. (Participant #4)

They can help them graduate when they are supposed to, unless they red-shirt and have to spend extra time in school.

Posttest-humor group (Participant #1)

*Student-Athletes can be helped by a mentor in different ways. A mentor can help them with the practice schedule; **answer questions**; help them with managing their time, personal relations, and anything else necessary to help them get through college.*

(Participant # 21)

*By helping them see the big picture, **act as a guide** for them, and by helping them cope with the pressures of athletic and academic life. (Participant # 31)*

What are advantages/disadvantages of being a mentor?

(Question # 3) The advantages/disadvantages question examined the perceptions of what an athlete felt were the benefits of giving their time and effort to another individual. In the posttest, the question examined how an athlete may or may not have seen the value in mentoring, or seen how mentoring has been beneficial in their athletic lives. Finally, the question served as an overview of every experience the athlete has been through as either a mentor, protégé, or as an observer.

In both the pretest and the posttest, the student-athletes grew, (learned something), from the time of the initial question, whether they learned from the presentation or not. As can be seen the posttest, answers were more comprehensive and specific.

Key Words for Question Number Three

Pre-test- **Advantages-helping someone, guiding someone, problem solver, role model responsibility**

Disadvantages- time, bad, responsibility, constrained, boundaries, overwhelming

Post-test- **Advantages-self-esteem builder, support person, knowledge giver, guiding someone, problem solver, role model, responsibility, difference builder, self-reflection**

Disadvantages- time, bad role model lack of responsibility, constrained, boundaries, overwhelming

Quotes

Pretest-non-humor

*Advan-**role model**, friend, support person, and a **guide***

*Disadvan-bad **role model**, lack of experience*

(Participant # 7)

ad- change a students life

no disadvantages were listed (Participant # 16)

Posttest-non-humor group

*Ad- **support person**, someone who can see other points of view, learning experience, growth experience*

*Disad- **time** commitment, **poor role model**, blurred **boundaries** (Participant # 7)*

*Ad- change you life, and an athlete's life-provide counseling and **guidance-help with personal problems** and problems with performance.*

*Dis-time **time constraints**, poor patience, and faulty logic (Participant # 11)*

What kind of training does a mentor need? (Question #

4)

The majority of the answers from the pre-test centered on the individual's experience and/or impressions of what they felt a mentor needed to have in order to be effective.

The question asked about the amount of training that a mentor actually needs. Surprisingly, many of the respondents in both groups did not think that a mentor needed any type of training besides actual experience in the sport, even after the lecture material had been presented.

Although the responses from both groups became more comprehensive, meaning that some type of knowledge was gained from the presentation, neither of the groups seemed to utilize much information from the presentation (keywords).

Key Words for Question Four- (Pre and Posttest):

none, not much, just being in the sport, counseling, the ability to understand and communicate, relate, listen, empathize, open, experience, none, not much, just being in the sport.

Non-humor group

Pre-test-

Don't think training is necessary, maybe how to get along with your peers (Participant # 15)

*A mentor needs to "**experience**" the demands placed on a student-athlete. An ability to **listen** and an **understanding** of various lifestyles (ethic, religious ,etc.) is also necessary. (Participant # 22)*

Humor group

*A mentor would need some sort of **experience** in the sport. The training would include ways of dealing with student-athlete peers, in different situations.*

(Participant # 24)

*how to effectively **communicate**, how to appropriately handle success and failure (Participant # 28)*

Non-humor

Posttest

*The training should focus on **relating** and **patience**, on both the mentor and the protégé's part. They should learn confidence and how to be nurturing so that they both can grow. (Participant # 15)*

***Counseling** abilities, **communication** skills, how to refer, time, and stress management, knowledge of*

academic rules, NCAA rules, and how to schedule courses. (Participant # 22)

Humor Group

Posttest

*At first I thought that just being trained **in the sport** would be enough, but I've seen that some training is necessary, A mentor should go through a training program that encompasses a bit of **counseling**, dealing with others-(coaches), how to help others handle stress, and time management, how to refer, and other things that I've learned to become an good role model. (Participant # 24)*

*The same info that I learned today should be included in a mentor training program, such as: **communication** skills, awareness and an **understanding** of where you are in life, learning how to be a resource person and how to find answers to difficult questions. (Participant # 28)*

What types of needs do student-athletes have that a mentor can address? (Question # 5)

With this question most of the student-athletes were concerned that either their coach, or their senior teammates did not address their needs effectively. They further added that if they had the opportunity to take the place of the teammates or the coaches, they would address the needs of each athlete in detail, or at least refer them to someone who could assist them if they were not available mentally or physically. During the pretest, most athletes from both groups cited the basic support and academic needs of most student-athletes. However, during the posttest, the humor group showed a much higher level of retention than did their non-humor counterparts (i.e. used more keywords).

Key Words for Question Five- (Pre and Posttest):

academic needs, support needs, social needs, stressful needs, time management needs, family needs, personal needs, and emotional needs

Non-humor

Pretest-

time management-nutrition-high/risk behavior

(Participant # 2)

Support in academics and **social** life (Participant # 10)

Humor

Student-athletes need someone who can help them balance their lives and stay sane at the same time.

(Participant # 19)

balancing schedules (Participant # 27)

Non-humor

Posttest

they need the aspect of communication and the need of patience, they have got to realize they aren't going to be pros right away. (Participant # 2)

*Academic, life, **social**, and competitive pressures are just a few. Being a student-athlete is not as glamorous as I once thought. A great deal of responsibility and trials and tribulations come with it.* (Participant # 10)

Humor

Post-test

*A SA needs to have someone who has been there to provide **support**, someone who understands the situation, if the circumstances are different, and someone who is there for them **emotionally**, and **personally**.*

(Participant # 19)

***personal** needs, post sport adaptation, how to **manage time**, developing mature friendships, and taking responsibility for one's actions* (Participant # 27)

Do you think that a mentor should be in the same sport as the protégé. Why? (Question # 6)

The above question was asked to see if the experience of time spent in the same sport (as the protégé) would mean more to a protégé than mere training. In the non-humor group during the posttest, many student-athletes reported that it was extremely important, or necessary for the mentor to be in the same sport, although the presentation showed that there were just as many reasons for the mentor to have experience elsewhere. In contrast, the humor group, overwhelmingly decided, based on material retained that the mentor could serve the protégé better if athletic/academic experience was gained from more than one sport. The humor group added more key words to their responses than did the non-humor group, which leans toward a higher retention level when tested for immediate recall on this item.

Key Words for Question # 6

Pretest

Yes, understand, relate, help, teach, learn

No, not necessary, no need,

Posttest- **Yes, understand, similar experience,**

relate, help, teach, learn

**No, not necessary, no need, different experience,
growth, development**

Non-humor group

Pretest

***Yes**, I think that person should be in the same sport.*

The more similar the circumstances, the better.

(Participant # 10)

***Yes**, because it is easy to **relate** your person if they are doing similar things. (Participant # 13)*

Humor group

Pretest

***yes**-- you must know the physical and mental demands of that sport speak from experience while traveling, the mentee has the mentor their for guidance (Participant # 23)*

***Yes** because they know the schedule and rigors of the program the best, but they can also get on your nerves if you see them all of the time. (Participant # 32)*

Non-humor group

Posttest

*I thought that it was absolutely essential, but now I think that it may help the situation, but I don't think that it is **a necessity**.* (Participant # 10)

*Definitely, this way the two can **relate** to each other, and they can help them traverse the trials and tribulations associated with their sport* (Participant # 13)

Humor group

Posttest

*Not really, it helps, but I guess that both people can **grow** and **learn** from each other. Both parties are still student-athletes* (Participant # 23)

*Not really, it **helps**, but it can also hinder the development of an athlete* (Participant # 32)

Have you ever been a mentor? If yes, explain

(Question # 7)

Mentoring experience can be a crucial element in any type of scenario, whether it experience in a new job environment, or experience in solving arithmetic problems. The mentoring experience can provide extra insight into situations and it can also help to rectify and even avoid mistakes. The question for the athletes was to see if their athletic/academic experience truly made a difference if they had been in a mentoring role.

Both the humor and the non-humor groups felt that mentoring experience was very helpful. With this question, the retention effects were negligible because both groups used key words in the pre and post-test.

For this item, the "no" responses were not included because they did not add to, nor distract from the data. If a participant had no experience as a mentor, they were excluded from question seven. The next question looked at the perception of the student-athletes.

Key Words for Question Seven

Pretest- **Yes, rewarding, good, experience, nice, learn, help, talk, special, interesting, enjoy, appreciate, positive, No**

Posttest- **Yes, rewarding, exciting, good experience, fun, nice, learn, help, talk, special, enjoyable, wonderful, excellent.**

Non-humor group

Pretest

Yes, Captain of the Lady Lion Basketball Team at PSU.

Taught me a lot about communication & differences in people. Real learning **experience** and learned skills that will help me in the future. (Participant # 5)

Yes, it was very good I **learned** a lot, I think that the person I mentored **learned** a lot also. (Participant # 9)

Humor group

Yes, it was a **learning experience** for both of us.

Sometimes you can **learn** about yourself through the actions of others (Participant # 29)

yes, it was a very, very, **positive experience**.

(Participant # 33)

Non-humor group

Posttest

Yes, teacher to 3rd grade students. The best part was guiding them & watching the growth through the entire year. (Participant # 5)

Yes, it was very **rewarding**, I did more than I thought I did now that I know what the "definition" of a mentor is and what all being a mentor entails.

Humor group

Posttest

*Yes, it was a **learning experience** for both of us. We **learned** from each other. (Participant # 29)*

*Yes, an **excellent experience**, I invested myself and knew that I had **helped** and had an impact on another person. (Participant # 33)*

Have you ever had a mentor in the past? If yes, how was the experience? (Question # 8)

This question addressed the perceptions of what student-athletes thought a mentor was during their sporting years. What was found, from the yes responses, was that everyone in both groups had some type of mentor, after the definition of a mentor was given in the posttest. The answers also reflected what was learned from the presentation.

The no response from participant twenty-three was replaced by a comprehensive answer of her mentor experience, showing that she had a mentor previously, but did not realize this fact until after the lecture on mentoring. There were only two responses in which the respondents did not feel that they had a mentor after the presentation and during the posttest.

Key Words for Question Eight- (Pre and Posttest):

Yes, rewarding, good, experience, nice, learn, help, talk, special, enjoy, problems, provide, grow, succeed, teach

Non-humor Group

Pretest

Yes, other captains, academic advisors I **learned** a lot from them. Having so many made it better because I could take the positives and negatives and combine them together to create my "ideal mentor" whom I can be in the future. (Participant # 5)

Yes. The **experience** was wonderful for me as I **learned** so much and was able to gain some valuable **experience**. (Participant # 12)

Humor group

Yes, during the beginning of college, she **helped** me with academics and with my adjustment to college--it was a great **experience**. (Participant # 20)

No (Participant # 23)

Non-humor group

Posttest

*Yes, mentor for elementary/special education student teaching. Both provided support & guided me to grow positively. The best part was when they let me try things on my own to see if I would **succeed** or not*
(Participant # 5)

*Yes, unofficially. I benefited greatly from the **experience**. I **learned** a lot and personally it was very fulfilling and **enjoyable**.* (Participant # 12)

Humor group:

*Yes, during my freshman year, she was very **good** in **helping** me become adjusted to college, **learning** my role on the team.* (Participant # 20)

*Yes, we had mentors by committees, the way I see it. I try to take the best of what everyone has to offer and integrate it into my everyday life; to **learn, grow, and provide** others with what I had **learned**.* (Participant # 23)

In your opinion, how can humor be used to assist in learning? (Question # 9)

This final question was only asked during the posttest to see if the student-athletes thought that humor would help them remember the lecture material, or just make the program more enjoyable. In the non-humor group, the respondents stated that humor would have helped them retain the material better than they had done so. The humor group stated that

the use of humor actually helped them remember more material from the presentation, which seems to prove the initial hypotheses. Below are several quotes from both groups.

Key Words for Question Nine- (Posttest Only):

barriers, calm, easy, enjoy, enlighten, learn, point, receptive, reduce, appropriate, relax, retain, remember, teach, tension, relieve, fun, laugh, smile, lighten, loosen

Non-humor group

Posttest

*Humor can help with the overall **enjoyment** of class, and it can help you **remember** some things because you **smile** when you hear something that you **learned**, because it made you **laugh**. It could have been very helpful in this information session (Participant #1)*

*Able to **lighten** a situation without being rude, may help with teaching by helping the protégé see what they can and can't do, makes **learning** easier. (Participant # 3)*

*Make someone feel more comfortable with failure, especially when the "failure" is not that important in the big picture-(can **laugh** at self-no big deal, -if **learning** is "**fun**" or "funny", person is probably more willing to listen/ **learn**, -great **tension**/ice breaker (Participant # 6)*

*I think that humor would be great. particularly in the area of sports. I think that humor helps people **remember** things that they may otherwise forget if it was not presented in a humorous nature. I think more humor should be used in college, and in college sports.*

(Participant # 7)

Humor group

Posttest

*A sense of humor needs to be present in a mentor. In many situations, humor can put things in a different light. In **learning**, humor makes a presentation **fun** (as this one) and I think that you tend to **learn** more if things are **fun**. (Participant # 19)*

*Humor can help immensely with **learning**, if used **appropriately**. In this instance, it allowed me to **relax** and open my mind to the thought of becoming a mentor. It made me **remember** a lot more than I thought I would due to the amount of information presented.*

(Participant # 29)

*Humor eases **tension**, breaks down **barriers** and allows for people to be **calm** and **relax**, and want to **learn**. It also makes **learning fun**. (Participant # 34)*

*It provides great stress **relief**/eases **tension** can provide a common ground for everyone, it **enhances***

retention, makes it stick in so it is easier to
remember. (Participant #36)

Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence humor had on the retention of lecture material in student-athletes who were interested in becoming peer mentors. The hypothesis of this study seems to have been supported. The participants in the humor group did retain more material than did the group where humor was absent. Also, the findings, which supports the current literature on humor and retention, was that the humor group also found the presentation more enjoyable than the non-humor group. The non-humor group also stated when asked the question about humor that humor would have made the presentation more enjoyable, and they also thought that they might have learned more.

What was not anticipated was that the non-humor group gave comprehensive answers in the posttest, however they did not use the key words from the lecture. This is not to state that the non-humor group learned less than the humor group, but they did not use the key words from the presentation. Which may be interpreted as some type of learning regardless of the use of humor. What was not supported was the notion of no difference in the immediate recall of information after the presentation as was found by Kaplan & Pascoe, (1977), and Davies & Apter (1980). What

distinguished the post-test responses between the two groups was the amount of keywords stated from the lecture.

There were several strengths in this study. First, the study used the topic of mentoring, which was something that the participants had an avid interest. Mentoring, more precisely, the retention of information about mentoring can enhance an athlete's collegiate experience. Through mentoring, an athlete can have someone there in his or her corner to act as not only a support person, but as someone that they can learn from as well. Second, the student-athletes in the study were interested in the information about mentoring, having a sample that is interested in the study is advantageous especially when the information disseminated could be seen as uninteresting. Finally, the self-reporting of information gained was a major strength to this study. Allowing the athletes to assess the amount of knowledge gained gives them a sense of control. It allows them to feel as though they are the suppliers of vital information. The information that they provide can be used to assist others in future endeavors.

Although the hypothesis was supported, a few aspects should be considered with scrutiny before any kind of replication is attempted. This study examined the retention of lecture material in an immediate recall situation. Perhaps findings may be different if the same study was conducted with an elongated time period between the

presentation and the posttest, as is typical of college courses.

The groups differed because one group received humor and the other did not. However, since there was only one instructor, the question must be asked was it the humor that made the difference in the presentation, or was it the instructor's use of that humor. There could have been a slight mis-perception in the way the material was presented. Since the instructor was the sole instrument involved in the delivery of the humorous material, changes had to be made when teaching the two groups, although much of the material in the presentation was humorous, the instructor's style was also humorous, which could have swayed the participants into thinking that the material presented should be humorous as well. The non-humor group did not receive the humorous material, however the instructor also attempted to stifle any type of humorous overtures that may have appeared during the presentation. By stifling the humorous nature, perhaps the non-humor group may have not received the optimum level of information that the instructor could have delivered. In essence, the instructor may have overcompensated to quell any humorous circumstances that may have arisen. A point of fact, the humor group received the presentation first. Frymier and Wanzer (1998) did a study where the instructor had a high humor orientation, and that orientation led to

increased student learning. The same may be true for the students who received the humorous material.

Next, is the fact that the material was presented by a male and not a female instructor, did the gender make a difference? Studies have shown that people react differently to male and female instructors (Bryant, Comisky, & Zillman, 1980; Frymier & Wanzer 1998). Students tend to view male professors as more effective and appealing while females were seen as less effective. Those reactions could have played a part in the perception of the program. It would be interesting to see whether a female instructor, using humor with to a group of graduating senior student-athletes, would be perceived differently.

Were the participants attempting to please the instructor by being adamant about having humor in the presentation, by the effect that humor had on them? In the non-humor group, the question concerning the use of humor and learning can be understood. There was an overwhelming response indicating that humor was needed. However, in the humor group, the participants may have perceived the humor question as an attempt to validate the instructor's use of the humor during the presentation. The participants may have been attempting to please the instructor by stating how humor was very important to their learning, and that it should be utilized more often in a classroom setting. So the participants may have invalidated the study by placating

the instructor from their faulty perceptions, but based on the quality of their responses to other items, humor did seem to have an effect on learning.

The maturity level of the participants may also be a limitation; they were all graduating senior athletes who have had time to think about many of the questions asked in the presentation. Did the fact that all of the participants were about to graduate have an effect on the outcome? Could the same results be found with lower division participants, or less experienced learners? The outcome of the study could possibly be affected if it was done on first or second year student-athletes, who have not had the benefit of experiencing many of the situations that the presentation addressed. Although listed as an aforementioned strength, the fact that the student-athletes were interested in mentoring could also be a limitation. Would the results be the same if the presentation were made to student-athletes who were indifferent about mentoring which might be typical of "dread course" material? Through experience working with student-athletes, it is easier to be funny with material they want to learn. Another possible limitation was that the participants were volunteer student-athletes who wished to be mentors.

My Experience

As the researcher, it was very difficult to teach the information session to the athletes differently. This

researcher has a high humor orientation as found by Frymier & Wanzer (1998), which was difficult to repress when teaching the non-humorous group. The problem arose when a humorous situation presented itself, and the humor was stifled. As mentioned earlier, stifling an otherwise humorous instance, may have actually hinder the learning process of the student-athletes. By seeing the instructor withholding humor, they may have also been inclined to repress a natural tendency to find humor in a situation or in lecture content. Perhaps next time, the study could use humor in both groups to see if there is a true difference in learning, and the perception of an instructor with a high humor orientation.

Recommendations for Practice

Mentoring through humor, is just the beginning for student-athletes. Humor could be incorporated into their daily routines to assist with the rigors of practice. Humor releases endorphins and produces moods that are akin to exhilaration. Humor assists the individual cognitively, which could heighten an athlete's performance. We know that humor assists socially where appropriate humor could be used to bridge the gap between athlete and academics, it also can help student-athletes feel more comfortable around their non-athletic peers. Through appropriate application, humor can add an immeasurable quality to the life of a student-athlete attending college. Professors could utilize humor in their classrooms not only for the benefit of student-athletes, but also, for students as a whole. Coaches using humor may see more performance-based gains from their student-athletes. Coaches may even earn not only respect from their athletes, but they may earn trust and friendship. Mentors using humor from their own experiences, humor learned through a presentation, or both can enhance the growth and development of a student-athlete. Through humor, a mentor can ease tensions between an athlete and coach, peer, or classmate. Through humor, a mentor can provide much needed relief to the athlete that is concerned about academics and athletics. A mentor can shown a student-athlete, based on his/her experiences, or through resources,

other ways to complete an assignment, handle a stressful situation, and even how to study. Through the use of humor, the student could be put back into the student-athlete, and possibly, the student-athlete may begin to earn the respect academically that is reserved for those students who enter college through strictly academic means.

Future Research

While the research on humor in many areas is growing in the areas of attention, motivation and comprehension (Bandes, 1988; Bryant et al., 1980; Wandersee, 1982; and Gorham and Christophel, 1992), there are not many studies that focus on humor and retention (Snetsinger & Grawbowski, 1993, Borchers 2001; Boerland 2000). Kaplan and Pascoe (1973), along with Snetsinger and Grawbowski (1994) have found that students can improve their retention level when instructors used humorous examples by linking learning to the use of memory devices. Further studies can look at everyday college students, or college clubs to see how humor will affect their performance or participation. Student leaders are also privy to the use of humor in their roles across campus. Or studies can go beyond mnemonic devices and utilize humor as an everyday addition to lectures. There is research that suggests that a good dose of humor at the beginning and interspersed throughout a lecture raises class participation, increases the students' interest in the class and is attended more frequently throughout the

semester (Civikly, 1986; Hebert, 1991; Edwards & Gibboney, 1992; Rareshide, 1993; Steele, 1998). If student-athletes are assigned a mentor who has shared many of the same experiences, then a report system could be developed to assess the effectiveness of the mentor and the program at various stages during the semester. Both the mentor and the protégé need periodic assessments of one another to gauge progress. Through the use of humor, an otherwise tedious and arduous process can be enjoyable and informative at the same time. Humor may actually increase the cooperative nature of both the mentor and the protégé to the point that the assessment process is pleasant, but still effective.

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Appendix A

Table 1 Summary of Demographic and Athletic Characteristics of Participants (n=18)

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	13	36
Female	23	64
Age		
18-20	9	25
21-24	27	75
Race		
Black	17	47
White	13	36
Hispanic	2	6
Other	4	11
Year in Sport		
1-2	1	3
3-4	12	33
4-5	23	64
Sport		
Basketball	4	11
Crew	11	31
Equestrian	1	3
Football	4	11
Golf	1	3
Gymnastics	2	6
Lacrosse	2	6
Soccer	2	6
Swimming	3	8
Tennis	2	6
Volleyball	2	6
Wrestling	2	6
Group		
Non-humor	18	50
Humor	18	50

Appendix C

Key Word List

Key word list for Questionnaire #1

- Question #1 A friend, teacher, role model, helper, support person, someone you look up to, a guide
- Question #2 provide guidance, help with problems
- Question #3 Advantages-helping someone, guiding someone, problem solver, role model responsibility
Disadvantages- time, bad, responsibility, constrained, boundaries, overwhelming
- Question #4 none, not much, just being in the sport, counseling, the ability to understand and communicate
- Question #5 academic needs, social needs, stressful needs, time management needs, family needs, social needs, personal needs, and emotional needs
- Question #6 Yes, understand, relate, help, teach, learn
No, not necessary, no need,
- Question #7 Yes, rewarding, good, experience, nice, learn, help, talk, special, enjoy, appreciate
No
- Question #8 Yes, rewarding, good, experience, nice, learn, help, talk, special, enjoy, Problems

Key word list for Questionnaire #2

- Question #1 A friend, teacher, role model, helper, support person, someone you look up to, a guide, instrument, positive facilitator, advisor, broker
- Question #2 provide guidance, help with problems, advise, develop, mature, adjust, trust
- Question #3 Advantages-helping someone, guiding someone, problem solver, role model responsibility, learn to trust
Disadvantages- time, bad, responsibility, constrained, boundaries, overwhelming
- Question #4 counseling, relate, understand, communicate, listen, empathize, open, experience, none, not much, just being in the sport,
- Question #5 academic needs, social needs, stressful needs, time management needs, family needs, social needs, personal needs, and emotional needs, intimacy, independence
- Question #6 Yes, understand, relate, help, teach, learn
No, not necessary, no need,
- Question #7 Yes, rewarding, good, experience, nice, learn, help, talk, special, enjoy, appreciate
No
- Question #8 Yes, rewarding, good, experience, nice, learn, help, talk, special, enjoy, Problems

Question #9 barriers, calm, easy, enjoy, enlighten, learn,
appropriate, point, receptive, reduce, relax, retain,
teach, tension, laugh.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form for Student-Athlete Mentor Training Research Study
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project

Applied Research Project in Student
Development Theory

Supervised by:

Dr. Daniel W. Salter, Assistant Professor of
Education

Persons in Charge: Mr. F. Christopher Williams, M.Ed., and Dr. Daniel W. Salter

Explanation of Study

The study in which you are participating is part of a qualitative study based on the research of Arthur W. Chickering and Jerome Kegan that will increase the understanding of mentoring of Penn State student-athletes within a training model. The training model will attempt to focus on identity and development issues of freshmen student-athletes. If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to answer a series of interview questions at the beginning, middle, and at the end of the mentor-training period. All identifying participant information will be destroyed immediately after completion of the study to ensure confidentiality. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will take a maximum of two hours, over two training sessions.

Your Rights as a Participant

As a participant, it is your right to ask any questions about the research procedures. These questions may be directed to any of the investigators listed above. It is also your right to know that the results and information shared in the interviews will be kept strictly confidential and only the investigators listed above will have access to your results and information. In the event of publication, only group summaries will be reported. No identifying information will be disclosed. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you are free to stop participating in the research study at any time or decline to respond to any question without consequence.

-----Please Turn Over to Sign the Informed Consent Form-----

Informed Consent Form for Student-Athlete Mentor Training Research Study
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project

Applied Research Project in Student
Development Theory

Supervised by:

Dr. Daniel Salter, Assistant Professor of
Education

Persons In Charge: Mr. F. Christopher Williams, M.Ed., and Dr. Daniel W. Salter

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Appendix E

Informed Consent Form
The Pennsylvania State University

This is to certify that, I (please print your name) _____, agree to participate in a qualitative study based on the research of Arthur W. Chickering and Jerome Kegan that will increase the understanding of how Penn State student-athletes develop and learn within a training model. The study is an authorized part of the Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology and Rehabilitation Services program at the Pennsylvania State University and is also sponsored through The Athletic Support Center for Student-Athletes. I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedure. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described. To the best of my knowledge and belief, I have no physical or mental illness or difficulties that would increase the risk to me in participation of this study. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, and that I may withdraw from this study at any time with no consequence. I also understand that I will receive no compensation for participating. I am 18 years of age or older, and/ or a full-time student of the Pennsylvania State University.

I understand that I am to keep a copy of this consent form.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed, and that I have answered any questions from the participant above as fully as possible.

F. Christopher Williams _____ Date _____

-----**Fold Here and Tear**-----

Informed Consent Form
The Pennsylvania State University

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Your Signature _____ Date _____

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F. Christopher Williams _____ Date _____

F. CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS, M.Ed.

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EDUCATION

Doctor of Education, Counselor Education/College Student Personnel Emphasis
(Specialty-Humor and the Student Athlete)
Minor: Sports Psychology
The Pennsylvania State University, December 2001

ADMINISTRATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Graduate Coordinator/Strength Adviser/Mentor- Morgan Academic Support Center for Student Athletes
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
(August 2000- present).

Graduate Coordinator, Leadership Programs, The AT&T Center for Service Leadership.
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
(August 1998-August 2000).

Undergraduate Academic Advisor, Division of Undergraduate Studies, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
(Summer 1997-2000).

Academic Counselor/Assistant Women's Basketball Coach, Indian River Community College, Fort Pierce, FL. (January 1996-January 1997)

Academic Adviser/Mentor- The Penn State Football Team, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA (September 1997-May 1998)

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS

Member, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators 1996-present

Member, American Counseling Association 1998-present

Member, American College Personnel Association 1996-present

Member, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People 1990-present