

# Background

- Evidence shows links between diet and optimal brain function, mental health<sup>1</sup>
- Student-athletes are more likely to experience mental health issues than the general population<sup>2,3,4</sup>
- Few athletes are fully aware of the effect that diet can have on their brain and athletic performance<sup>5</sup>
- Collegiate athletic programs have begun to recognize the individual effects of diet and mental health on performance<sup>6,7,8,9</sup>
- **There is a need to bridge the gap in knowledge existing between nutrition and mental health in sports**

Goal:  
**Learn the perspectives of athletic and medical personnel** involved in CAA Division I athletic programs on their:  
• Educational background  
• Resources  
• Education of athletes  
**on the relationship between nutrition and mental health**

The **Colonial Athletic Association (CAA)** is conference of 22 sports across 10 Division I colleges. University B is a part of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), but was included because of its proximity and frequent athletic competition with the other included schools. Each school may have different populations, access to resources, and perspectives on the roles and interaction of nutrition and mental health. Therefore, it is possible to **make comparisons between the perspectives of these programs** on the role of nutrition and its effect on the mental health of these elite athletes.



Use the following QR Code to view the set of questions asked to each participant

# Methods

**13** athletic and medical personnel (8 Female, 5 Male) across **4** Division I programs (marked A-D) were invited to a **30 – 45-minute** WebEx interview consisting of at least **10 questions** on the relationship between nutrition and mental health in their programs. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed for accuracy purposes.

- Participants were asked to complete:
- **A Consent Form**
  - **30-45-minute WebEx Interview**
  - **Brief Qualtrics Demographic Survey post-interview** (11 participants)

Follow-up questions (if applicable) were distributed via email within **2 weeks** of the interview, and each participant received a \$20 Amazon e-Gift Card for their participation. **3** participants received follow-up questions.

# References

1 Madison & Kiecolt-Glaser (2019). *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*.  
2 Roberts et al. (2016). *Frontiers in Psychology*.  
3 Smith, Scott, & Wiese (1990). *Sports Medicine*.  
4 Sundgot-Borgen & Torstveit (2004). *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine*.  
5 Abbey et al. (2017). *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition*.  
6 Corley et al.(1990). *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*.  
7 Parks et al. (2016). *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.  
8 Torres-McGehee et al. (2012). *Journal of Athletic Training*.  
9 Trakman et al. (2016). *Nutrients*.

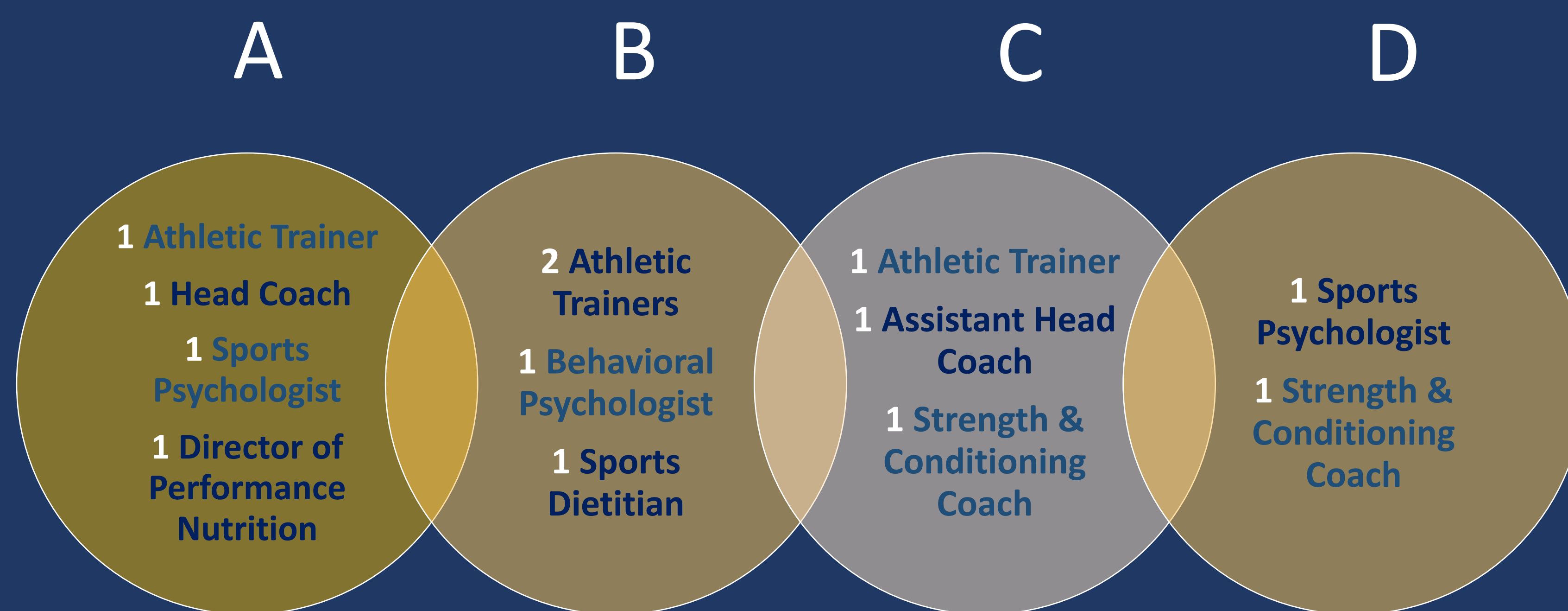
*“I think the biggest thing it comes down to is funding and having personnel, which money drives everything.”*

– Male Strength & Conditioning Coach (D)



# Good Food, Good Mood: Perspectives on the relationship between nutrition and mental health within CAA Division I collegiate athletic programs

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\* Demographics (11 Participants) → Gender (8 Female, 5 Male), Race (10 White, 1 Asian), Ethnicity (11 Not of Spanish, Hispanic or Latino Groups)



# Results

## RESOURCES

*“I think the major [revenue] sports have a completely different interaction with nutrition...that’s one area where you see the haves and have not[s] come out stronger.”*  
-Female AT (B)

*“There’s one of me here for six to 700 athletes.”*  
– Female Director of Performance Nutrition (A)

## EDUCATION

*“The university itself is always sending out... educational and training options and opportunities for us to expand our knowledge in different areas”* – Female Director of Sports Nutrition (A)

*“To be honest, there’s been no talks about nutrition stuff. In regards to the mental health aspect, there has been just talks about just where to report stuff rather than how to talk to the individual about it.”* – Male Strength & Conditioning Coach (C)

## CONFIDENCE AND COMPETENCY

*“I don’t feel, myself, a hundred percent confident how to move on from [conversations] without having to reach out to someone.”*  
– Female AT (C)

## INTEGRATION

*“With every sport we have what’s called a CARE meeting...we basically review every single athlete and their health status every month. And in those meetings we have all of the health providers, so athletic trainers, strength coach, sports psych[ology], sports nutrition, sports med[icine], the coach.”*  
– Female Director of Performance Nutrition (A)

*“The popular term in business and administration is now silos...you have silos in strength and conditioning. You have a silo of nutrition, a silo of sports medicine and they don’t communicate well.”* – Male Strength & Conditioning Coach (D)

## ATHLETE AND COACH ENGAGEMENT

Student Awareness of Resources

*“Part of how I [break the stigma] is to be a human, and not be that unknown face behind the curtain”* – Female Sports Psychologist (A)

Value and Engagement

*“I think a lot of coaches just aren’t really used to having nutrition and behavioral health on campus, so they don’t really know when to refer athletes to us.”*  
– Male Assistant Sports Dietitian (B)

