



**WE CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO THE PUBLIC DEFENCE  
OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION IN FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF:  
DOCTOR IN MOVEMENT AND SPORT SCIENCES**

**OF MISTER KOEN DE BRANDT**

**A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON STUDENT-ATHLETES'  
DUAL CAREER DEMANDS, COMPETENCIES,  
AND OUTCOMES**

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**Wednesday, September 27, 2017 at 19:00**

in room D2.01 located on the campus of Etterbeek

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## PRESENTATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The majority of athletes advance their elite sporting careers while attending university or university college. Athletes' engagement in this dual career (DC) 'elite sport and higher education' pathway carries many potential benefits, such as increased chances of employability and financial security, the development of multiple personal identities, reduced life stress, positive socialization effects, better retirement planning, and prolonged athletic careers. To achieve these benefits, student-athletes need to effectively progress in their DC pathway in which they are not only confronted with athletic and academic requirements but also face concurrently (and possibly conflicting) requirements at the psychological, psychosocial, and financial levels of development. In order to overcome these multi-level demands and achieve the desired athletic and academic outcomes, the importance of student-athletes' effective competencies (e.g., time management, resilience, career planning) has been emphasized. In this dissertation, we address some of the gaps in the existing, mainly qualitative research on student-athletes' DC demands, competencies, and academic outcomes using quantitative investigations.

An instrument was developed to examine student-athletes' DC demands and competencies across different nations, sports, and DC systems. The Dual Career Competency Questionnaire for Athletes (DCCQ-A) measured 3,441 European student-athletes' importance awarded to and possession of 38 competencies required for a successful combination of elite sport and studies, as

well as their coping with seven challenging DC scenarios that represented a holistic perspective on demands across different levels of development (e.g., an exam coinciding with an important competition, relocating for sport and/or study, missing a significant number of days of study, combining sport and studies with social life). Findings revealed that the competencies of student-athletes could be categorized in four higher-order DC competency factors: (1) Dual Career management, (2) Career Planning, (3) Emotional Awareness, and (4) Social Intelligence & Adaptability. Student-athletes perceived all four competency factors as important to very important for a successful DC, reported average to strong possession of DC competencies, and perceived a general need to develop their competencies. Female student-athletes awarded higher importance to their DC competencies, reported a stronger perceived possession of Dual Career Management, and evaluated a stronger need to develop their Emotional Awareness in comparison with their male counterparts.

The DC scenarios were experienced by the majority of student-athletes, who prioritized different competencies in function of the scenario they were confronted with. For each scenario, a set of prioritized competencies was identified, including transferable (i.e., prioritized across different scenarios) and scenario-specific (i.e., prioritized in a specific scenario) competencies. Student-athletes' strong possession of key prioritized competencies aided them to cope effectively with the scenarios.

Finally, the academic outcomes of 111 elite athletes studying at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel were monitored. One student-athlete in three dropped out of their dual 'university and elite sport' career during the first three years. Student-athletes who were male, participated in team sports, competed at a higher athletic level, had a tso preparation in secondary school, or attended an elite sport school were identified as academic risk groups as they demonstrated higher academic dropout rates, lower study efficiency, and significant declines in study efficiency over time.

In conclusion, this doctoral dissertation contributed to a deeper understanding of student-athletes' DC demands, competencies, and academic outcomes. The challenging

holistic and developmental nature of athletes' DC 'elite sport and higher education' pathway was highlighted, and an important role for student-athletes' competencies to successfully manage the multi-level requirements of their DC was emphasized. Findings also stressed the importance of a situational (i.e., in function of the upcoming demands) and individual approach to student-athletes' competency development. A systematic monitoring of student-athletes' DC competencies and outcomes is recommended.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Koen De Brandt was born on January 11th 1989 in Aalst (Belgium). In 2012, he graduated as a master in Physical Education and Movement Sciences (minor Fitness & Health) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). In 2014, Koen obtained his Trainer A diploma in volleyball (minor Training & Coaching) at the VUB. From 2006 to 2013, Koen was a student-athlete at the VUB, combining his studies with a professional volleyball career. In May 2013, he started his PhD study at the VUB as a member of the research group Sport Psychology and Mental Support. Koen has conducted

research and developed projects on the dual career of elite athletes for the Brussels-Capital Region and the European Union, including 'Elite Sport and Higher Education in the Brussels-Capital Region', 'Gold in Education and Elite Sport' (GEES), and 'Be a Winner In elite Sport and Employment before and after athletic Retirement' (B-WISER). He also coordinates the central university department 'Topsport en Studie' of the VUB. Koen has presented at several national and international scientific conferences on the dual career of elite athletes.