

# Examining NCAA Division I Faculty Perspectives on the Role and Value of Intercollegiate Athletics

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The uneasy marriage of higher education and athletics can be seen through the conceptual lenses of former institution and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) President Myles Brand's Standard or Integrated View. The Standard View maintains that athletics serves as a business while the Integrated View argues that athletics should be appreciated as a form of education and art. Through these perspectives of athletics as a business, education, and art, this study surveyed faculty at one football bowl subdivision institution ( $n = 216$ ) on their perceptions of athletics. Analyses demonstrated faculty perceptions were varied and contradictory as they noted athletics was simultaneously a business important for their institution, but also a detractor for higher education at large. Additionally, they perceived some developmental benefits of participation in athletics but still did not believe sports to be educational in nature. Implications for better understanding faculty perceptions of athletics while improving the education-sport marriage are discussed.

*Key words:* intercollegiate athletics, faculty perceptions, academic-athletic integration

Many Big-time U officials, knowing that their schools cannot provide the vast majority of undergraduates with meaningful educations, try to distract and please these consumers with ongoing entertainment in the form of big-time college sports.

– Murray Sperber, *Beer and Circus*

As we grapple with the sobering realities that have undermined institutions as a result of athletics scandals, it is an appropriate time for us all to take a moment to examine our own perceptions. Rather than throwing stones at the convenient target as another athletics scandal is uncovered, let's first take a look at ourselves and our biases about what fields are worthy of aca-



demic study. How different might many of our previous athletics-academic scandals have been had we valued athletics like we do the arts?

– Erianne Weight, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

These quotes reflect two contrasting examples of faculty views concerning intercollegiate athletics in higher education. While Sperber framed the business of athletics as a distraction for university stakeholders, Weight alluded to faculty—Sperber included—biases concerning under-appreciating the inherent artistic and educational qualities in intercollegiate athletic participation. These divergent perspectives of intercollegiate athletics are nothing new, as sport and education scholars have engaged in similar discussions about the unique, uneasy marriage between sport and American colleges and universities (Clotfelter, 2019; Harry & Weight, 2019; Smith, 2021; Sperber, 2000; Thelin, 1996, 2011).

It is possible to categorize these distinct perspectives using Brand's (2006) Integrated and Standard Views of intercollegiate athletics. Those with an Integrated View (IV) often appreciate how athletics can serve and be incorporated into the greater institutional missions (Brand, 2006; Clotfelter, 2019; Harry, 2023; Weight & Huml, 2016). Conversely, those with a Standard View (SV) maintain that athletics is merely entertainment or an extracurricular activity, offering "more educational value than fraternity parties but less than chess club" (Brand, 2006, p. 10). This lens is particularly common across Power Five institutions or commercialized schools with abundant financial resources and high-profile sports programs (Hirko & Sweitzer, 2015). Brand (2006) argued that individuals with the SV undervalue and misperceive athletics participation's inherent educational forces, while their IV counterparts possess a more balanced perspective on sport (Brand, 2006).

Stakeholders with an IV tend to couple the importance of mind-body development, similar to in the performing arts (Foster et al., 2022; Matz 2020; Weight et al., 2020), espousing the values athletes cultivate, such as perseverance, teamwork, ethics, and the ability to cope with adversity (Brand, 2006; Harry, 2023; Harry & Weight, 2019). Furthermore, faculty with an IV may find similar value in athletes' abilities to read X's and O's and artists' abilities to decipher sheet music. For example, Matz (2020) noted athletes and artists engage in practice, public performance, and have professional ambitions, with both groups blending theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Accordingly, athletics, like fine arts majors, has pedagogical potential for integration into a holistic liberal arts education. However, Matz (2020) observed that while music performance and theater have evolved from extracurricular activities to "legitimate academic majors" (p. 284), higher education's double standards, which undervalue physical skills compared to intellectual skills, have prevented a similar shift for intercollegiate athletics.

On a larger level, individuals with an IV tend to center intercollegiate athletics benefits to National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions. Clotfelter (2019) outlined four ways college sports enhanced university communities, such as improving participants' educational opportunities and experiences, molding campus cultures and traditions, increasing visibility and status, and generat-

ing financial benefits for institutions with high-profile athletic programs (Bass et al., 2015; Clotfelter, 2019; Lifschitz et al., 2014). Moreover, Foster et al. (2022) noted the potential for a “synergistic effect” (p. 176) on learning to occur when sport and education are appropriately coupled. Further, Anderson (2017) linked a successful March Madness basketball tournament run or success in other high-profile postseason competitions with a subsequent increase in the number of applications a school receives. This afforded schools greater selectiveness in their admissions process, decreasing their acceptance rate and elevating their status (Anderson, 2017; Clotfelter, 2019). Finally, Koo and Dittmore (2014) and Walker (2015) demonstrated that athletic success increases sport and education donations. Despite the validity of these arguments, they tend to be overshadowed by the negative aspects intercollegiate sport can bring to campuses and communities (Clotfelter, 2019; Sperber, 2000).

Those with an SV believe athletics serves as an entertainment business operating—inappropriately—under the higher education umbrella (Sperber, 2000). Indeed, Sperber (2000) coined the term “College Sports MegaInc” (p. 216) to describe how big-time athletics, driven by business interests, have transformed university operations, leading presidents to cancel classes for games, debauchery from tailgating culture, and negative impacts on student behaviors. With this business focus, faculty and others with an SV lens see limited educational qualities associated with intercollegiate athletics, meaning the activity is not tantamount to an educational experience. Indeed, scholars argue that athletics culture can lead college athletes to devote more time to sport than education (Ayers et al., 2012; Rubin & Moses, 2017), resulting in lower academic performance, lower graduation rates compared to non-athlete peers, poorer career preparation, and struggles with retirement from sport (Gurney et al., 2017; Harper, 2018). Others note that funding that could—or should—support institutions’ academic mission is funneled to athletics programs rarely operating in the black (KCIA, 2010; Sperber, 2000).

Accordingly, many academic stakeholders see athletics as a detractor to higher education’s overall purpose (Brand, 2006; Sperber, 2000). The stakeholder group with perhaps the most contentious view of intercollegiate athletics is faculty (Clotfelter, 2019; Comeaux, 2011; Kramer, 2016; Kretchmar, 2023; Lawrence, 2009; Weight & Huml, 2016). It has traditionally been assumed that faculty hold an SV, with previous research noting faculty’s generally negative attitudes toward college athletes and intercollegiate sport (Brand, 2006; Comeaux, 2011; Harry & Weight, 2019). However, scant research has directly examined faculty’s perspectives within Brand’s (2006) Integrated and Standard framework.

The current study addresses this gap by expanding the research in higher education and intercollegiate sport regarding faculty perspectives on athletics. This is important for a multitude of reasons. First, faculty voices are rarely heard in athletics contexts (Ott & Bates, 2015). For example, while faculty leaders can voice support or opposition to athletics-related issues (e.g., stadium renovations or Title IX concerns), their vote is typically symbolic or performative, holding little weight in the final “business” decisions (Clotfelter, 2019; Thelin, 2011). Indeed, even Faculty Athletics Representatives (FARs) who act as liaisons between academics and athletics

departments hold little sway in athletics departments' policies and practices (Leary, 2014). Thus, our study offers an outlet for faculty voices and perceptions.

Second, understanding faculty attitudes toward athletics and athletes is critical, as extant literature shows the importance of faculty-student and faculty-athlete relationships for providing a holistic and beneficial college experience (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Harry, 2021, 2023). Faculty's perspectives on athletics likely influence their relationships and interactions with athletes, such as their desires to mentor or avoid athletes altogether (Weight et al., 2020). Faculty also contribute to their campuses and students' development, so understanding their perspective is crucial to fully grasp campus culture. Campus culture influences athletics culture, and thus, relates to faculty's Standard or Integrated Views of intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006; Ott, 2011; Weight et al., 2020).

Finally, this research expands upon Brand's (2006) Integrated and Standard Views while furthering the literature on the relationship between faculty and athletics. Brand (2006) proposed these perspectives nearly two decades ago, but whether faculty hold Integrated or Standard Views toward college sport remains under-examined in the higher education literature. Exploring faculty's views can identify tensions, equip higher education administrators to address those tensions, inform policy and decision-making, bolster athletes' success, and potentially mend relationships. With this in mind, we examined whether faculty at one public Power Five institution exhibited a Standard or Integrated View of intercollegiate athletics through the following research questions:

RQ1: How do faculty perceive the role of intercollegiate athletics in higher education?

RQ2: How do faculty perceive the role of intercollegiate athletics as

- a. a form of education?
- b. a business?
- c. a performance art?

## **Conceptual Framework**

Myles Brand's legacy as a former academician, university president, and NCAA president lends credibility to his Integrated and Standard Views on intercollegiate athletics (Foster et al., 2022; Renfro, 2009). Brand experienced the division between education and athletics firsthand as an academic and university president (Kretchmar, 2023). Accordingly, he made strides as NCAA president to improve academic administrators' and faculty's engagement in athletics governance while increasing academic standards for athletes (Renfro, 2009; Kretchmar, 2023; Suggs & Hoffman, 2021). In addition, he saw his work promoting an IV and challenging traditional, historic SVs on intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006).

Some perceive Brand's (2006) IV as a more holistic, balanced lens of sport—and its academic significance (Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020)—suggesting that institutions should incorporate athletics into higher education's mission and structures.

Examples include institutions further integrating athletics into service activities on campus and in the local community or athletics' budgets flowing through the standard financial processes of the broader university (Brand, 2006). Another component of the IV is that outcomes associated with athletics participation complement athletes' and students' classroom outcomes and experiences (Brand, 2006; Coffey & Davis, 2019; Katz et al., 2021; Weight & Huml, 2016). Participating in athletics has long been advocated to build teamwork, compassion, resiliency, hard work, leadership, and other qualities (Chalfin et al., 2015; Coakley, 2021; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Weight et al., 2020). Thus, the IV aims to heighten appreciation for athletics' educational opportunities and benefits while challenging the separation of sports and education.

Brand's (2006) IV also challenged audiences to consider parallels between athletes and students in other units on college campuses, such as art or music departments. For example, musicians and athletes often achieve significant accomplishments before enrolling at their institutions, and both groups frequently receive recruitment offers or earn scholarships for their programs. Similarly, musicians and athletes experience intense time demands, practice for countless hours, perform in front of crowds, and seek to pursue careers in their respective crafts (Mikszta & Hime, 2015; Weight et al., 2020). Despite these similarities, musicians and other art students can receive academic credit for learning and developing their craft, while athletes often cannot (Weight & Huml, 2016; Weight et al., 2020). So, Brand (2006) called for an athletic major or curriculum, prompting contentious arguments from critics (e.g., Feezell, 2015). It is worth noting, however, that Brand was by no means the first issue such a call, and this practice existed previously across the intercollegiate landscape (e.g., University of Washington; Renick, 1974).

Alternatively, Brand's (2006) SV maintains that faculty and other academics in American higher education are biased against athletics and athletes, seeing the "enterprise" as a distraction to institutions' teaching, research, and service missions (Clotfelter, 2019). Indeed, scholars have argued that such perspectives further divide academics and athletics, causing opposition and tension between the two sides of campus (Foster et al., 2022; Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020). The SV also contends that athletics is extracurricular, auxiliary, and offers limited educational value (Brand, 2006). At the heart of this view is an under-appreciation for bodily and physical skill development (Foster et al., 2022; Hyland, 2008). This bias means that athletics will continue to be ostracized from educational missions and structures and, therefore, unable to fully integrate into the academy. Still, many faculty and critics favor academic-athletic separation and may hold the SV despite likely not reflecting on such a perspective (Corlett, 2013; Feezell, 2015; Harry & Weight, 2019). Thus, we now focus on an overview of faculty's athletic perceptions.

## **Faculty and Intercollegiate Athletics**

In the early and mid-1800s, the values of the European Enlightenment made their way into American higher education (Thelin, 2011). As students adopted ideals

such as freedom, happiness, and fraternity, they started exercising more control on campuses, organizing various extracurricular groups like athletic teams (Flowers, 2009; Smith, 2011). Faculty and academic administrators—from a host of disciplines—were heavily involved in the initial development and implementation of athletics programs. Before students took on coaching roles, faculty lent their time and energy to intracollegiate competitions, coaching various teams (e.g., rowing, track and field, baseball; Duderstadt, 2009; Flowers, 2009; Smith, 1990). Administrators also contributed their time and resources to assist students in fundraising for athletic facilities, equipment, and eventually travel (Clotfelter, 2019; Flowers, 2009).

At this time, athletics largely comprised interclass competitions (e.g., first-year students versus sophomores). Partaking in or watching athletics offered students a sense of community and identity, as it was something the entire student body could enjoy (Smith, 2011). Similarly, faculty and administrators from various disciplines (e.g., literature and art, education, chemistry) took an interest in these competitions (Smith, 1990). With this, sport emerged as a significant co-curricular component of the college experience. As the railroad system grew across the country, intracollegiate athletic competitions transformed into intercollegiate athletic competitions between peer institutions (Flowers, 2009).

As intercollegiate sports rose to prominence, faculty found students' increased attention and time given to athletics troubling (Flowers, 2009). Accordingly, faculty at many institutions established faculty athletics committees to confront issues with growing sport enterprises, such as athletes missing class time, using professional athletes to compete, and gambling (Barr, 1999; Savage et al., 1929; Smith, 2011). To many in the academy, intercollegiate athletics was “of control” and needed to be reined in by campus leaders (Barr, 1999, p. 42). One of the ways in which sports was “out of control” was through the increased violence in athletics, especially in football. This violence was of particular concern for institution leaders, who, at the request of then President Theodore Roosevelt, met to discuss ways to make football safer for the participants (Smith, 2011). This was the beginning of the institutionalization of athletics. Ultimately, these meetings of institution leaders to discuss safety led to the creation of the NCAA (Smith, 2011; Thelin, 2011).

With greater faculty control over athletics, the NCAA and conference offices had strong academic representation. Barr (1999) noted that faculty established and led many athletics conferences in college sports' early years. However, in the mid-1900s, faculty realized that oversight over athletics took up more time than they originally intended and distracted from their teaching and research goals (Barr, 1999). Thus, faculty relinquished some control to athletics-specific administrators, who eventually became athletic directors (ADs). While presidents maintained ultimate control in the NCAA, most took a *laissez-faire* approach to sports on their campuses (Duderstadt, 2009; Smith, 2011), allowing ADs to extend their power and begin building a commercial and professional sport enterprise (Clotfelter, 2019).

The mid-1900s saw a host of commercial and professional changes spearheaded by athletics leaders including increased stadium sizes and strategic initiatives to build alumni financial support for academics and athletics (Clotfelter, 2019; Smith,

2011). Similarly, the 1950s saw the emergence of athletics-based scholarships for athletes, which irked some faculty and academic administrators who already saw the demise of the student component of the “student-athlete” (Smith, 2021).

This progression toward commercialism and professionalization was accelerated in 1984 when the University of Oklahoma and the University of Georgia successfully annexed television rights from the NCAA (*NCAA v. Oklahoma Board of Regents*, 1984). This seismic shift created what Hirko and Sweitzer (2015) referred to as the *haves* and the *have-nots*. This dichotomy can be considered in two ways. First is the distinction between revenue (i.e., *haves*) and non-revenue sports (i.e., *have-nots*). The second way to consider this dichotomy is athletic programs operating under a commercial model (i.e., *haves*) and those operating under a subsidized model (i.e., *have-nots*). This can better be understood as the majority of Power Five schools and everybody else (Hirko & Sweitzer, 2015). Indeed, Power Five programs receive roughly 5% of their budgets from subsidies, whereas Group of Five institutions—their closest NCAA competitors—relied on subsidies for 50% of their budgets (Springer et al., 2023). Others highlight how rapidly increasing coaches’ compensation and questionable commercial practices under the guise of tax exemption further indicate college athletics’ business-like operations (Sperber & Minjares, 2015; Zimbalist, 2015).

To cultivate stronger links between education and sport, in 1989 the NCAA mandated that institutions designate a FAR to serve as a liaison between academic and athletic departments (NCAA Division I Manual, 2020). FAR duties include (1) maintaining an institutional relationship with the school’s conference and NCAA, (2) cultivating athletics’ relationship with administrators and faculty, and (3) ensuring athlete health and well-being (Leary, 2014). Despite FAR’s unique and significant role on campuses and in the NCAA governance structure, their involvement on campus and in NCAA decision-making is usually limited (Lawrence et al., 2007; Leary, 2014). These limitations could result from their concerns about athletics’ culture and finances or expressions of ambivalence about sport (Lawrence et al., 2007).

The last few decades have also seen a rise in faculty-led organizations looking to reform college athletics. Groups like the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (KCIA), the Coalition of Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), and the Drake Group have challenged faculty ambivalence, highlighting sport’s significance within post-secondary education. Faculty in these groups strive to enhance academic integrity in sport, center athletes’ academic and athletic well-being, and likely promote a more Integrated View of intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006; Kretchmar, 2023). The Drake Group most recently called for faculty to improve college athletes’ educational support, discussed football and men’s basketball athletes’ racial exploitation, advocated for athletes’ increased economic rights, and expressed the need for more presidential management of sport. Still, few faculty and academic administrators have employed these suggestions, demonstrating, once again, strong levels of ambivalence toward sport-education integration (Clotfelter, 2019).

Outside of FARs and those most passionately involved in reform groups, research shows that many faculty do not fully understand college athletics governance,

organization, and role (Fine & Cooper, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2007). Finances may be the faculty's least understood and contentious athletics area (Lawrence et al., 2007). While faculty generally express strong negative feelings regarding athletic department budgets, spending, and coach salaries, research also demonstrates faculty's ambivalence toward understanding college athletics on a deeper level (Clotfelter, 2019; Lawrence, 2009; Lawrence et al., 2007).

For example, in a faculty survey at institutions with high-profile sport teams, Lawrence et al. (2007) found that 40% of participants felt faculty roles and athletics oversight needed to be better defined and understood. Similarly, Ott (2011) surveyed faculty who expressed they were fairly satisfied with intercollegiate athletics at their institutions but were still dissatisfied with their role in athletics governance and finance. Indeed, over 43% of faculty surveyed voiced concerns about the lack of diverse perspectives when making sport decisions. Faculty in this study were also discontented with using institutional subsidies to support athletics and expressed skepticism regarding their school's balance of education and commercialization (Ott, 2011). Importantly, findings from Lawrence et al. (2007) and Ott (2011) also highlight the ambivalence of faculty toward athletics, contributing to what Barr (1999) called a "tradition of inaction" (p. 43). Such decisions to remain inactive in athletic oversight have likely contributed to faculty holding a Standard, rather than Integrated, View of intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006).

## Methods

### Site and Participants

We used survey method to explore whether faculty at one institution held an Integrated or Standard View of intercollegiate athletics (Groves et al., 2011). To protect the anonymity of the institution's and the participants' privacy, we will refer to the institution using the pseudonym Middle America University (MAU). This public Midwest institution is a Division I Power Five institution providing athletes opportunities in over 15 sports. MAU consistently finishes in the top 20 of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Learfield Directors' Cup, a primary ranking system for college athletics success (NACDA, n.d.). Further, the MAU athletics department's revenue regularly exceeds its expenses (Knight Commission, n.d.).

Additionally, MAU is classified as a Research 1 (R1) institution offering doctoral degrees and producing and disseminating high levels of research, suggesting a strong faculty presence. U.S. News and World Report ranked the institution in America's top 200 national universities (US News and World Report, n.d.). We collected faculty email addresses from academic department websites. We used systematic random sampling to select faculty from MAU. Of the roughly 1,600 faculty at MAU, we selected every 2<sup>nd</sup> faculty member and sent an email to participate in the study (Riddick & Russell, 2015). Two hundred and sixteen (26%) completed the survey. Participants largely identified as white Assistant or Associate Professors with 12+ years at MAU. More demographic information can be found in Table 1.



**Table 1**  
*Participant Demographics*

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Academic Rank</b>		
Administrator	12	6.2%
Assistant Professor	48	24.7%
Associate Professor	54	27.8%
Full Professor or higher	49	25.3%
Instructor/Lecturer/Adjunct	31	16.0%
<b>College</b>		
Education	46	23.7%
Engineering	19	9.8%
Agricultural	33	17.0%
Architecture	3	1.5%
Arts and Sciences	64	33.0%
Business	29	14.9%
<b>Years of Experience</b>		
0-3 years	17	8.8%
3-6 years	26	13.4%
6-9	27	13.9%
9-12	33	17.0%
12 or more	91	46.9%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	84	43.3%
Male	110	56.7%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Asian	9	4.6%
Black or African American	4	2.1%
Hispanic or Latinx	7	3.6%
Mixed	7	3.6%
White	167	86.1%

### **Instrument and Data Collection**

Using statements from Brand's (2006) seminal article on the Standard and Integrated Views, we created a survey instrument to determine the most prevalent perspective among MAU faculty. Example questions about the Standard View included: "intercollegiate athletics is a detractor from the mission of higher education" and "intercollegiate athletics is an extracurricular activity." Example questions centering the Integrated View of athletics included: "intercollegiate athletics is central to the mission of my institution" and "athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics are participating in an educational endeavor." Brand (2006) made these or similar statements, which served as the baseline for questions in the survey.

This and the review of relevant literature on the Brand's (2006) two views provided greater content validity (Groves et al., 2011). However, some topics were more represented based on Brand's (2006) emphasis and emphases from previous studies. For example, the survey included a few more questions about athletics as education than athletics as a business because Brand addressed the former more than the latter. Additionally, there is a slight emphasis on athletics as art given Brand's (2006) contentious comparison between sport and performance art. Such emphasis is likely due to his own biases as the NCAA president at the time (Kretchmar, 2023) and presents a limitation of the survey. The notion of athletics as education and art through an Integrated View is also further supported by the literature (Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020). However, in building out this study, we honed in on Brand's (2006) unique perspective, which leaned more toward an Integrated View. Regarding reliability, this study was piloted with faculty from MAU who were not in the final sample and no faculty in the pilot expressed concerns with the questions (Groves et al., 2011).

Faculty were provided a seven-point Likert scale to select whether they (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) slightly disagree, (4) neutral, (5) slightly agree, (6) agree, or (7) strongly agree with the statements. We used Qualtrics to make the survey and emailed it to the faculty in the Fall 2022 semester. After two weeks, we provided a follow-up email reminding faculty about the survey. We then closed the survey two weeks after the reminder email for a total window of four weeks (Groves et al., 2011).

### **Data Analysis**

We began by establishing the normality of our data distribution. The Shapiro-Wilk score for each item was significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that our data were non-normally distributed. We checked the survey's reliability using Cronbach's alpha, which makes no assumptions of normality. The Cronbach's alpha for the survey was .776, indicating that the survey items were internally reliable (Pallant, 2016). We originally sought to determine whether differences existed between demographic groups. However, our data were non-normally distributed. Thus, we tried to transform the data using various methods (Pallant, 2016), but none were successful. Accordingly, we used nonparametric alternatives to analysis of variance (ANOVA; i.e., Kruskal-Wallis & Mann-Whitney U). However, there were relatively few significant findings and those findings lacked the power to explain the variation we observed between faculty responses. This suggests that other demographic variables may account for the variation we observed.

## **Findings**

Overall, the findings from this study suggest that faculty at MAU recognize the role of intercollegiate athletics as a source of entertainment and a potential opportunity for athletes to develop critical thinking skills and a value system but do not view it as central to the institution's mission or as equivalent to other educational

areas involving physical skill development. The following sections provide insight into this study's specific research questions. It is worth noting that the standard deviation for our survey questions ranged from 1.082 to 1.894 (on a scale from one to seven), indicating moderate variation within participants' perceptions of the value of intercollegiate athletics to MAU. We have organized the questions into four primary categories (e.g., *Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics*, *Athletics as Education*, *Athletics as Business*, and *Athletics as Performance Art*) to better organize the data. However, this is not to suggest that the survey consisted of multiple subscales.

### Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics

Faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics were varied. Respondents believed that their institution was more well-known for its intercollegiate athletics program ( $M = 5.753$ ,  $SD = 1.377$ ) than its academic programs and perceived intercollegiate athletics as entertainment ( $M = 5.711$ ,  $SD = 1.358$ ). There was slight agreement that intercollegiate athletics was central to the institution's mission ( $M = 4.119$ ,  $SD = 1.894$ ), that mental development is more important than physical development ( $M = 4.258$ ,  $SD = 1.542$ ), that athletics detracts from higher education's mission ( $M = 4.325$ ,  $SD = 1.807$ ), and that athletics is an extracurricular activity ( $M = 4.655$ ,  $SD = 1.888$ ). Finally, faculty strongly disagreed that intercollegiate athletics' role is undervalued by their institution ( $M = 1.794$ ,  $SD = 1.082$ ) and slightly disagreed that most faculty members are anti-intercollegiate athletics ( $M = 2.840$ ,  $SD = 1.304$ ).

**Table 2**

*Faculty Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics*

	Mean	SD
My institution is more well-known by the general public (in the state/outside of the state) for its intercollegiate athletics programs rather than its academics programs.	5.753	1.377
Intercollegiate athletics is a detractor from the mission of higher education.	4.325	1.807
Intercollegiate athletics is just an extracurricular activity.	4.655	1.888
Mental development is more important than physical development.	4.258	1.542
Most faculty at my institution are anti-intercollegiate athletics.	2.840	1.304
Intercollegiate athletics is entertainment.	5.711	1.358
Intercollegiate athletics is central to the mission of my institution.	4.119	1.894
The role of intercollegiate athletics is undervalued by my institution.	1.794	1.082

### Athletics as Education

Faculty agreed that intercollegiate athletics offers opportunities for athletes to develop critical thinking skills ( $M = 4.943$ ,  $SD = 1.648$ ) and offers individuals an opportunity to develop a value system ( $M = 5.139$ ,  $SD = 1.470$ ). There was less agreement that athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics are participating in an educational endeavor ( $M = 4.036$ ,  $SD = 1.831$ ). Finally, faculty showed moderate to strong disagreement that the role of intercollegiate athletics should be further integrated into the mission of MAU ( $M = 3.309$ ,  $SD = 1.637$ ), that college athletes should major in athletics with faculty oversight ( $M = 3.124$ ,  $SD = 1.889$ ), that intercollegiate athletics coaches roles share similarities with their own, and that college athletes should receive academic credit for their participation ( $M = 2.747$ ,  $SD = 1.713$ ).

Table 3

*Faculty Perceptions of Athletics as Education*

	Mean	SD
Participation in intercollegiate athletics offers individuals an opportunity to develop a values system.	5.139	1.470
Intercollegiate athletics offers opportunities for athletes to learn developmental and critical thinking skills.	4.943	1.648
Athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics are participating in an educational endeavor.	4.036	1.831
Intercollegiate athletics should be further integrated into the mission of my institution.	3.309	1.637
With faculty oversight, college athletes should be able to major in athletics.	3.124	1.889
Intercollegiate athletics coaches are educators with similarities to professors.	2.866	1.799
College athletes should receive academic credit for their athletics participation.	2.747	1.713

**Athletics as Business**

Faculty reported relatively strong agreement that intercollegiate athletics should be financially self-supporting ( $M = 5.387$ ,  $SD = 1.574$ ) and that athletic budgetary decisions should flow through the normal university budget process ( $M = 4.691$ ,  $SD = 1.794$ ).

Table 4

*Faculty Perceptions of Athletics as Business*

	Mean	SD
Athletics at my institution should be financially self-supporting.	5.387	1.574
Athletics department budgetary decisions should flow through the normal university budget process.	4.691	1.794

**Athletics as Performance Art**

Faculty at MAU reported a moderate agreement that athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics have similarities with students in the performing arts ( $M = 4.232$ ,  $SD = 1.698$ ) and that there were inherent similarities in the performance aspects ( $M = 4.232$ ,  $SD = 1.765$ ). Despite this agreement, there was a low level of agreement that intercollegiate athletics should be treated similarly to education in other areas involving physical skill development ( $M = 3.747$ ,  $SD = 1.639$ ).

Table 5

*Faculty Perceptions of Athletics as Performance Art*

	Mean	SD
Athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics have similarities with students who participate in the performing arts.	4.232	1.698
There are inherent similarities in the performance aspects of students enrolled in performing arts majors (i.e., music, theater, and dance) and students competing in intercollegiate athletics.	4.062	1.765
Intercollegiate athletics at my institution should be treated similarly to education in other areas that involve physical skill development.	3.747	1.639

## Discussion

This discussion offers potential explanations about MAU faculty's complicated attitudes toward intercollegiate athletics, paying particular attention to their general perceptions of MAU sports, how athletics is/is not a form of education, and the business of athletics. Implications of these explanations and ways to improve the education-sport nexus at MAU are provided after the discussion.

### Faculty's Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics

MAU faculty's varied and often contradictory responses indicate their perceptions about intercollegiate athletics' role at their institution are complex. Given this study's descriptive nature, it would be difficult to definitively claim whether MAU faculty held a Standard or Integrated View of intercollegiate athletics. However, faculty's perceptions generally appear to align more with a Standard View. For example, faculty perceived MAU as more well-known for its athletic accomplishments than academic success. This perception reflects the reality that the school consistently ranks highly athletically but has shown only slight improvement over the years in the USNWR academic rankings. This idea may also be linked to the faculty's moderate agreement that athletics is central to MAU's overall institutional mission (i.e., since MAU is more well-known for athletics, it *must* be important to MAU's mission).

Indeed, previous research has noted that athletic success can increase notoriety for less academically prestigious institutions (Clotfelter, 2019; Lifschitz et al., 2014). This is particularly true with high-profile sports like football and men's and women's basketball, in which MAU has excelled. In line with this research, MAU's most recent incoming freshman class was the largest in school history and possessed the best academic credentials of any previous class. While this correlation certainly does not imply causation, such increases around times of athletic success are referred to as the Flutie Effect (Clotfelter, 2019) and may reflect a synergistic relationship between athletics and MAU when it comes to improving the school's academic profile and attracting higher caliber students. This offers a counter perspective to MAU faculty's view that athletics detracts from higher education's overall mission, given that improving students' academic capabilities may enhance MAU's standing in the USNWR rankings. Thus, leveraging these athletically related benefits challenge the faculty's slant toward a Standard View.

Further, it is interesting to note the contradiction in faculty's perceptions that athletics was simultaneously central to MAU's overall institutional mission but a detractor from higher education's overall mission. This contradiction could indicate that faculty's expectations are higher concerning the academic rigor across higher education more broadly than MAU's, potentially stemming from its lower USNWR rankings. Moreover, faculty perceived that intercollegiate athletics was not undervalued by their institution and that faculty across campus generally supported athletics (Brand, 2006). This demonstrates alignment with an Integrated View and their notion that athletics is central to MAU's institutional mission while contradicting the finding that athletics is not central to higher education as a whole.

This cognitive dissonance further highlights the notion that MAU faculty are conflicted when it comes to situating big-time college athletics in the context of higher education, broadly and at their institution. Conversely, this may indicate that faculty believe a threshold exists regarding integrating athletics into the university's mission that has been met or exceeded by athletics' current status at MAU. This framing may also aid in understanding why faculty believe that athletics should not gain academic standing at MAU (e.g., academic credit, curriculum), as they perceive this to be an expansion of athletics' role in MAU's mission.

### **Athletics as Education**

MAU faculty generally did not view college athletics as a form of education, but such perceptions were also not without inconsistencies. In line with previous scholarship about skills cultivated through athletics (Chalfin et al., 2015; Harry & Weight, 2019; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007), faculty somewhat strongly supported the idea that athletics helps students develop critical thinking skills and values systems, indicating a more Integrated View. However, they also noted that these components, despite being seminal in other educational endeavors, did not elevate athletics to the level of an educational pursuit. Such expressions are key in maintaining a Standard View (Brand, 2006; Harry & Weight, 2019). These ideas also support the faculty's perception that students' mental development is more significant than their physical development and that athletics is simply an extracurricular physical activity (Brand, 2006; Harry & Weight, 2019; Hyland, 2008). Extracurricular or auxiliary components in higher education, like student activities, recreation, parking, or food services, are often viewed as peripheral to the educational mission (Brand, 2006; Clotfelter, 2019). Such beliefs are seminal to the Standard View (Brand, 2006).

Likewise, faculty moderately agreed that similarities exist between performance arts and athletics and that there were parallels between athletes and students in the performing arts. This suggests an alignment with an Integrated View (Brand, 2006). However, faculty did not believe athletics should be structured in ways aligned with these educational and performance-based areas. This matches their previous contradictory statements and suggests a more Standard View (Brand, 2006). Still, these expressions are unsurprising given that faculty did not favor awarding academic credit for athletic participation or creating a major or curriculum based in athletics at MAU. Once again, this suggests a degree of cognitive dissonance, given that art students receive academic credit for their performance and have the opportunity to major in their craft (Brand, 2006; Harry & Weight, 2019).

Finally, the notion that athletics coaches are educators to their athletes the way faculty are educators to their students received the strongest disagreement from faculty. However, this notion is key to the Integrated View (Brand, 2006; Harry, 2023; Harry & Weight, 2019; Weight et al., 2015). This aligns with faculty's perception that MAU should not further integrate athletics into its mission. Likening athletics coaches to educators could further the perception that athletics is more valued at MAU than academics. It may also threaten the collegial governance model often employed within the academic components of colleges and universities (Birnbaum,

1988). Given the perceived power that Division I athletics departments—particularly at the Power Five level—currently exercise (Clotfelter, 2019), faculty may feel that further legitimizing athletics as an educational endeavor and athletics coaches as educators would potentially strengthen that power and provide athletics personnel access to an area currently only governed by faculty.

Another potential reason for these views may be that college coaches often receive significantly higher compensation than faculty, particularly at the Division I Power Five level (Clotfelter, 2019). Indeed, Berkowitz et al. (2019) outlined steep increases across non-revenue sports at the Power Five level. For example, they reported that in 2018, the average salary for wrestling coaches increased to \$266,000 (55% increase over five years), baseball coaches increased to \$651,445 (51% increase), and gymnastics coaches averaged somewhere between \$196,068 and \$315,860. By comparison, the average salary for full-time faculty at public, four-year institutions increased roughly 12% from \$79,897 to \$89,640 in that same span (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021). Further, a comparative analysis by Clotfelter (2019) found that head football coaches from 44 Division I programs made almost four times as much as university presidents and roughly 16 times as much as full professors at the institutions. This was likely also the case at MAU, given that their current head football coach was the highest-paid state employee when data collection occurred. Million-dollar buyouts for football coaches released before the fulfillment of their contracts may also taint faculties' perceptions of coaches-as-educators (Clarke, 2022), further prompting their belief that athletics is a business.

### **Athletics as Business**

In contrast to viewing athletics as education, faculty perceptions supported the idea that it is a form of entertainment through their moderate to strong disagreement toward implementing a major or curriculum rooted in intercollegiate sport that would allow athletes to receive academic credit for athletic participation. Geographic location may provide some insight into this perception, given that MAU's athletic program is the state's most high-profile and competitive level of sport. Further, entertainment options are limited for faculty, students, and the greater MAU community outside of sport. Thus, athletics is how faculty and other stakeholders are entertained, potentially preventing them from seeing athletics and college athletes performing as more than a commodity (Coakley, 2021).

Previous scholarship has demonstrated that faculty often view athletics as a business operating within the walls of higher education (Clotfelter, 2019; Gurney et al., 2017; Kretchmar, 2023; Sperber, 2000). Indeed, MAU faculty held relatively strong views that MAU sports were a business, a common perspective for faculty throughout the academy (Clotfelter, 2019; Feezell, 2015; Lawrence et al., 2007). Accordingly, faculty agreed that the athletics budget should flow through the standard university budget process. Ironically, this desire to have athletics' budgetary decisions go through the university-wide process is an example of an Integrated View, as going through such processes treats the athletics department similarly to other academic departments (Brand, 2006).

Alternatively, faculty noted that MAU's athletics department should be financially self-supporting, a perspective in line with the Standard View. Brand (2006) noted that the individuals with the Standard View maintain that "something without academic value," like intercollegiate athletics, "should not be entitled to a university budgetary subsidy if at all possible. Athletics should earn its own way" (p. 15). This lens treats athletics departments differently than academic departments, as most academic departments are not required to be self-supporting revenue centers (Clotfelter, 2019; Lombardi, 2013). Currently, MAU's athletics department is one of the few self-sustaining universities within Division I (KCIA, n.d.). Additionally, their athletics department consistently transfers funds to the university to support academic research, which is uncommon at this level of competition (Clotfelter, 2019). With such conflicting views on the financial side of athletics, it may be helpful for faculty to receive some form of education about the economics behind MAU's athletic department and how it supports academic endeavors on campus (Lawrence et al., 2007).

In summary, it appears that MAU faculty held an Integrated View regarding some components of their athletics department but stopped short when actualizing those beliefs, instead reverting to a Standard View. For instance, the faculty's acknowledgment that athletics help students develop critical thinking and values systems (i.e., Integrated View) but do not consider athletics as an educational pursuit (i.e., Standard View). Another example is the faculty's moderate agreement about the similarities between athletics and the performing arts (i.e., Integrated View) but disagreement that athletics should be structured in ways that align with educational and performance-based areas (i.e., Standard View). Finally, faculty agreed that athletics budgets should flow through standard university budgeting processes (i.e., Integrated View) while believing they should be financially self-supporting (i.e., Standard View). Given the complex and contradictory nature of MAU faculty's perceptions of intercollegiate athletics, it is important to consider the implications of these findings for the institution, particularly those that may be more transferable to the broader higher education landscape.

## Implications

Faculty in this sample held varied and contradictory perceptions of intercollegiate athletics. Such perceptions are likely influenced from their prior understanding of and experiences with intercollegiate athletics generally and with MAU sports specifically. To address the varied and contradictory perceptions, we propose two avenues institutions can use to better align faculty's perceptions of intercollegiate athletics. The first is promoting the synergistic relationship between academics and athletics to foster enhanced dialogue, understanding, and collaboration. Second is redefining athletics' role in higher education. While these may be particularly beneficial for MAU, they may also prove helpful for other institutions looking to better understand and improve the relationship between education and sport.

Faculty's inclination toward a Standard View presents a barrier for MAU to fully capitalize on the benefits athletics brings to the university (Brand, 2006; Clotfelter, 2019). Thus, MAU and similar institutions might benefit from intentionally show-



casing synergies across athletic and academic departments to bolster awareness and address faculty's cognitive dissonance toward athletics. This could include accentuating scholarly work done by the institutions' sport management, higher education, or other faculty across academia whose work centers on the academic-athletic nexus (Foster et al., 2022; Harry, 2023; Kretchmar, 2023). Institutions could also develop an incentive structure (e.g., internal grant funding) to encourage faculty and athletic staff collaboration, particularly regarding research and/or educational endeavors that would increase faculty's intercollegiate athletics knowledge and deepen our field's understanding of intercollegiate athletics from multiple disciplinary perspectives (Brand, 2006; Coakley, 2008; Foster et al., 2022).

For example, faculty in kinesiology, physiology, and psychology could conduct studies with athletes that not only benefit the faculty with potential funding, publications, and conference presentations, but also the athletes and the athletics department with enhanced knowledge about athletes' physical and mental performances and areas for improvement. This would of course require athletics departments, who are often seen as lacking transparency (Gurney et al., 2017; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016), to allow or even encourage athlete participation in research. This also promotes sport-education integration if athletes are able to participate in the research and further draw connections between their sport participation and research opportunities and advancement. This could be seen as an avenue for engaging athletes in a HIP, while also showcasing athletics as education (Harry, 2023).

There are also a host of symbiotic opportunities for athletics departments to work academic programs. Some institutions, like the University of Colorado-Boulder, an institution also similar to MAU, offers students in the College of Media, Communication, and Information (CMCI) opportunities to partner with media and communication directors in athletics (Be Involved, n.d.). For example, CMCI faculty have created courses in which students are tasked with developing social media content for the university's athletics teams as part of their course projects. This offers opportunities for faculty to engage with athletics personnel and determine the needs/wants of athletics, while also gaining a unique curricular opportunity for their own classes. Similar integrative opportunities exist across college campuses but are under-explored. Engineering, architecture, and economics faculty could be consulted for renovation projects, while faculty in nutrition could support work with athletics administrators on training tables and meal plans for athletes. Athletics departments have myriad options when it comes to engaging with faculty to promote an Integrated View; however, these options remain largely untapped. Importantly, this involvement or consultation must be more than superficial or symbolic (Lawrence et al., 2007; Leary, 2014).

Likewise, university administrators could collaborate with athletics administrators to host semesterly town halls open to other institutional stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff, students) to demystify athletics and increase transparency. This could allow athletics leaders to learn more about academic spaces, furthering their understanding of higher education and their position in the broader institutional context (Harry & Weight, 2019). Town halls could also further enhance stakeholders' understanding of

the campuses' academic and athletic arms (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Encouraging dialogue and collaboration and intentionally cultivating space for intergroup contact allows MAU and similar institutions to develop a shared understanding of athletics' role within the institution to prompt a more Integrated View. This could potentially strengthen the academic-athletics nexus while also dispelling faculty's stereotypical perceptions about athletes in their classes (e.g., dumb jocks) that can lead to stereotype threats or other negative impacts on athletes' educational pursuits (Comeaux, 2011; Winger & White, 2008; 2015).

In promoting the synergies between academics and athletics, the field can further discern components of athletics and continue the work of Brand (2006) and others to redefine athletics' role in the academy (Coffey & Davis, 2019; Harry & Weight, 2019; Kretchmar, 2023; Matz, 2020; Springer & Dixon, 2021; Weight et al., 2020). MAU faculty generally did not perceive athletics as a form of education; however, they still appreciated the physical development and critical thinking skills athletics promoted in its participants. This aligned with much of the previous scholarship on the Integrated and Standard Views (Harry & Weight, 2019; Weight et al., 2020). Thus, redefining athletics' role to include and even emphasize its educational merit may help address Foster and colleagues' (2022) concerns regarding faculty's "narrow understanding of intercollegiate sport environments" and the increasing "separation between athletics and academics" (p. 190).

Redefining college athletics' role and value affects how institutions and athletics departments govern and organize sport (Harry, 2023; Springer & Dixon, 2021). For example, Harry (2023) advocated for the ways in which intercollegiate athletics could be reconsidered and designed as a high impact practice (HIP) to include stronger reflection, intentionality, and interaction opportunities for athletes participating in athletics. Such an idea follows an Integrated View and positions athletics more in line with other academic and HIP experiences like internships, service learning, and diversity/global learning (Harry, 2023). Similarly, other scholars calling for a redefinition of intercollegiate sport have suggested shifting the athletics department to more directly mirror academic departments or even having athletics be enveloped by an academic unit, like colleges of health and human performance or education (Matz, 2020; Springer & Dixon, 2021). Perhaps the most Integrated View perspective on such an idea would be reimagining athletics departments within a college of music, performance, and art (Brand, 2006). These reorganizations allow for more faculty involvement in and oversight of athletics, which various scholars and reform groups have promoted over the years (Clotfelter, 2019; KCIA, 2010). Furthermore, such a design bolsters relationships and understanding across campus, promoting the Integrated View.

Further, reorganizing athletic departments could aid in reconceptualizing faculty's perceptions of coaches as educators, aligning them more closely with the academic mission. This shift would require establishing clear guidelines for coaches as instructors. Further, partnerships between coaches and faculty would help maintain rigor and ethical behavior, result in mutual appreciation for one another's roles, and contribute to an Integrated View of athletics. To achieve this, institutions might con-

sider developing a curriculum in intercollegiate athletics analogous to the performing arts (Brand, 2006; Harry, 2023; Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020). While designing such a curriculum is beyond this paper's scope, it aligns with the faculty's perceptions of similarities between athletics and performing arts. Involving faculty from relevant fields in curriculum design can further ensure rigor and ethics, which may ease concerns about restructuring athletics as a performance art (Harry & Weight, 2019).

Although this proposition is relatively novel, similar structures exist at the NCAA Division II and III levels and are thus worth considering for Division institutions with greater resource availability. Failing to explore this redefinition could result in athletics further diverging from higher education's mission. However, there are several factors that institutions would need to consider when assessing the feasibility of this approach, including institutional priorities, stakeholder resistance, financial considerations, competitive success, or NCAA compliance. A key consideration of such a reorganization would be striking a balance that preserves athletic departments' competitive advantage and strengths while simultaneously addressing their educational shortcomings. Doing so would foster a more integrated approach that emphasizes academic and athletic success, allowing institutions to work toward creating an environment where institutions can excel on the field and in the classroom.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As noted in the methods, there are a few limitations with our study that future researchers should consider when conducting similar studies on Brand's (2006) Standard and Integrated Views. First, this study relied heavily on Brand's (2006) article to create the survey and understand the views of MAU faculty toward athletics. Thus, some topics pertaining to the Standard and Integrated Views, based on Brand's own potential biases (Kretchmar, 2023), were examined less (i.e., athletics as education versus athletics as business). Future research could address this limitation by examining Brand's (2006) less-discussed topics further to develop a more holistic scale/survey for understanding faculty perceptions.

Second, the data collected about faculty views on athletics were only from one Power Five institution, thus, findings should be generalized with caution. It is likely that faculty from other types of institutions could have different perspectives on the role and value of athletics at their own institutions (Clotfelter, 2019). Finally, our findings are based on a limited sample in terms of racial and institutional heterogeneity. Thus, findings and implications are potentially limited in their generalizability beyond MAU faculty and definitively limited in their generalizability beyond NCAA Division I Power Five institutions. Moreover, the perspectives of MAU faculty may not accurately reflect the views of a racially diverse population.

Future research can address these limitations by collecting data from faculty across various institutional types and comparing the findings to those in this study. This would also allow for a more holistic understanding of faculty perceptions of

athletics across the NCAA. Future researchers should also consider what variables might account for faculty's varied responses. For example, preliminary analysis of accompanying qualitative data indicated that previous sport involvement, fan identification, or experience with athletes might be fruitful areas to interrogate. Finally, this research did not explore causal relationships between faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics and its influence on college athletes. However, previous scholarship has noted faculty's negative perceptions of college athletes, particularly those in revenue-generating sports (i.e., football, men's basketball). It would be intriguing for future researchers to examine if a connection exists between faculty's Standard or Integrated Views of intercollegiate athletics and their attitudes toward athletes.

## Conclusion

This research extends the higher education field's understanding of faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics, particularly regarding Brand's (2006) Standard and Integrated Views of intercollegiate athletics. Ultimately, this sample of faculty from one institution demonstrated that this stakeholder group is fairly confused and at odds regarding the appropriate role and place of athletics in higher education and within their institution. However, as faculty in this study generally maintained athletics detracted from the overall mission of higher education, was not educationally valued or worthy of academic credit, and operated as a business, most of their perceptions continue to foster a Standard View of intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2006). These findings are consistent with much of the previous research in this area, noting that faculty can be biased toward athletics and its participants (Comeaux, 2011; Foster et al., 2022; Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020).

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