

“We are in a Better Place”: The Effect of Conference Realignment on the Culture of One NCAA Division I Athletic Department

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Conference realignment is among the most transformational changes in intercollegiate athletics. The financial ramifications of realignment are significant. Though these have garnered the most attention, many changes stemming from realignment deal with qualitative elements of athletic departments. Altering rivalries, traditions, and sport sponsorship could affect athletic department cultures, yet little research has examined them. Therefore, this study used the organizational culture perspective to investigate the effects of conference realignment on the culture of Erie University’s athletic department. In 2013, Erie joined the Catholic Athletic Conference (CAC). To assess the effect of this change on Erie’s athletic culture, 20 interviews with coaches and administrators were conducted before the move and 16 were conducted two years after. Interview and other archival data were interpreted using thematic analysis. Findings indicate the athletic department culture shifted following two years of CAC membership. Participants conveyed an improved sense of pride and better institutional alignment. This culture change occurred despite a noticeable lack of success and lingering resource shortfalls. Erie’s realignment reflected consistencies and inconsistencies with existing literature on conference change. The findings highlight the psychological power of affiliation and the importance of institutional alignment when changing conferences.

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Introduction

Conference realignment has transformed intercollegiate athletics (Russo, 2023). Cycles of realignment have occurred throughout its history, but recently powerful conferences (i.e., Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten, Big 12, Southeastern Conference) have added members that expand their geographic footprint and revenue capacity. The financial ramifications of these conference shifts are significant. Moves into the Big Ten and Southeastern Conference (SEC) have increased income for new members by at least \$27.5 million (Berkowitz, 2025; SEC, 2025). However, these windfalls do not always lead to profit. New members of power conferences still struggle to balance their budgets (Rimbach & Koloff, 2022). When conference realignment trickles down from the power conferences to smaller leagues, financial outcomes are equally bleak (Hoffer & Pinson, 2015).

Qualitative elements of conference membership may offer some clues as to why universities continue to play "the everlasting game of musical chairs known as conference realignment" (Federman, 2024, paragraph 1). Such elements include conference mottos like the SEC's "it just means more," the Big Ten's traditional agreement to send a football team to the Rose Bowl, or the Big East's strong basketball heritage. Affiliating with conferences that have widely known artifacts, values, or assumptions may benefit the organizational cultures of migrating institutions regardless of financial outcomes. For example, Southern Methodist University (SMU) recently joined the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) with the caveat that it would not receive shares of television revenue until 2033. However, membership was viewed as a way for SMU to fully reestablish itself after the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) forced the university to disband football in 1987 (Wilson, 2024).

The organizational culture perspective is well-suited to help understand such paradoxical actions. Schein (2017) defines organizational culture as a pattern of shared assumptions that drives behavior in an organization. A growing body of research has applied this perspective to sport organizations (Cruickshank et al., 2013, 2014; Dahlin & Schroeder, 2022; Heil, 2018; Maitland et al., 2015; Schroeder & Scribner, 2010). However, there has been minimal investigation of the relationship between conference realignment and organizational culture. Given its focus on artifacts, values, and basic assumptions, this perspective can provide a holistic view of universities that move conferences. Therefore, this study used Schein's model of organizational culture to longitudinally examine how conference realignment affected the athletic department culture at an NCAA Division I institution pseudonymously named Erie University. This case study provides a picture of Erie's culture two years prior to and two years after joining a new conference. It closes by offering university and athletic administrators considerations for successful conference realignment.

Literature Review

Conference Realignment

Stemming from the 1984 Supreme Court decision that decentralized television media rights (*NCAA vs. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma*), major

conferences began adding members to “capture the most value for bundled and individual broadcast and licensing rights” (Lattinville & Speyer, 2013, p. 235; Petersen & Judge, 2021). The modern cycle of conference realignment began in 1990 with Pennsylvania State University’s move to the Big Ten and the SEC’s 1991 addition of South Carolina and Arkansas (Thamel & Bonagura, 2025). It continues today as powerful conferences poach valuable institutions, while diluted conferences subsequently scramble to add members from weaker conferences. The cycle even trickles down to Division II and Division III as schools transition to Division I at the behest of conferences offering membership (Borzi, 2023; DSU Athletic Media Relations, 2019; Petersen & Judge, 2021). These developments have produced “the super conference era,” a period in which even power conferences are at risk without adequate expansion (e.g., Southwestern Conference; Pac-12; Fertak, 2013; Russo, 2023, paragraph 10).

Financial objectives drive the super conference era, and data are widely publicized (USA Today, 2024). Conferences gain financial power by negotiating media rights deals, collecting NCAA distributions, and having members appear in post-season football games. Conferences then distribute these revenues to member institutions. Members of the two wealthiest conferences, the Big Ten and SEC, received distributions of \$60.5 million and \$51.3 million respectively in 2023-2024 (Berkowitz, 2024). While not all migrating institutions immediately earn a full share of conference distributions, most will still increase revenue compared to their original conference payouts (Berkowitz, 2025; SEC, 2025). Previous cycles of realignment have resulted in statistically significant revenue increases at the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) and Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) levels (Hoffer & Pinson, 2015). However, Hoffer and Pinson (2015) also found significant increases in total expenditures for both types of institutions. As a result, realignment at the FCS level did not create increases in profit and led to only marginal returns for FBS institutions. In an extreme example, Rutgers joined the Big Ten in 2014-2015 expecting an annual conference distribution of \$55 million but ultimately ended up with \$265 million in debt (Rimbach & Koloff, 2022). In essence, realignment boosts revenue, but causes athletic department expenditures to “substantially increase, preventing profits from increasing” (Hoffer & Pinson, 2015, p. 1222).

Though financial implications have garnered the most attention, many changes stemming from realignment deal with more subjective elements of intercollegiate athletics. For example, the evaporation of traditional rivalries, increase in travel schedules, emergence of new media partners, and changes in competition levels could all impact the cultures of realigned athletic departments (Covell & Barr, 2010; Schrottenboer, 2023). Research has examined some of these elements. Havard et al.’s (2017 a; 2017b) work on rivalries found fans have difficulty adapting and accepting new rivals when their institutions change conferences. Even after multiple years in a new league “fans will often hold on to their feelings toward the former rival” (Havard et al., 2017a, p. 33). Joining a new conference can also hinder the winning percentage of a university’s athletic teams. Although conference membership cannot be pinpointed as the lone reason, teams who move conferences have struggled to sus-

tain success (Perline et al., 2012; Schrottenboer, 2023). Of the 15 schools who moved into Power 5 football conferences since 2004, only 37% of the collective 183 seasons have resulted in winning records and only eight seasons resulted in conference championships (Schrottenboer, 2023). In men's basketball, realignment has been shown to decrease three key metrics: success against non-conference opponents, competitive balance, and revenue from NCAA tournament appearances (Perline & Stoldt, 2007; Perline et al., 2012). Finally, Milstein, et al. (2023) contend that joining a new conference could alter the sports offered by a particular athletic department. Their results indicated institutions seeking to move leagues "were encouraged to add specific sports as incentives to become new members" (Milstein, et al., p. 217, 2023).

Organizational Culture and Intercollegiate Athletics

Although "culture" has become a buzzword in college athletics (Athletic Director U, 2022; Smith, 2023), the organizational culture perspective originally emerged from the corporate sector (Ashkanasy et al., 2000; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Burke 2002; Hopkins et al., 2005; Schein, 2017; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Researchers of corporate culture contend that culture provides "the superglue that bonds an organization" by giving meaning and symbolism to its members (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 253). This connection ultimately aids the organization in achieving its goals (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The perspective also acknowledges that organizational cultures are dynamic and subject to change (Schein, 2017). To diminish the effects of such ambiguity, organizations and their members develop cultural forms. As these forms become patterned and internalized, they ultimately guide the way members "perceive, think, feel, and behave" (Schein, 2017, p. 33).

Levels of Organizational Culture

Although there are multiple iterations of organizational culture with varying types of cultural forms, Schein's (2017) three-level model formed the basis for this study. Its leader-centered, integrative perspective fits well with the structure and nature of college sport and has been used in other studies of college athletic department culture (Dahlin & Schroeder, 2022; Heil, 2018; Maitland et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2021). In this model, artifacts comprise the first level of culture. Artifacts are cultural forms that are easy to access, and include elements such as uniforms, architecture, colors, songs, logos, or mascots. However, as the most superficial level of culture, artifacts offer a limited assessment of its depth. Espoused values form the second level of culture. These provide an explicit declaration of what the organization deems important and often places them in a hierarchy. The significance of espoused values is they should "provide the day-to-day operating principles by which members of the group guide their behavior" (Schein, 2017, p. 27). Combined, artifacts and espoused values often present a clear picture of an organization's culture, yet on occasion, organizations still take actions that contrast with these top two levels (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Schein, 2017). Thus, research must also account for the third, and deepest, level of culture: basic assumptions. Schein (2017) contends basic assumptions are the key to fully understanding an organization's culture because they form the true

premise for organizational actions. Basic assumptions are often subconscious, yet they tell organizational members “what to pay attention to, what things mean and how to react emotionally to what is going on” (Schein, 2017, p. 32).

Athletic Department Culture

The organizational culture perspective has underpinned research across numerous levels of sport (Frontiera, 2010; Maitland et al. 2015; Thompson & Parent, 2025). However, organizational culture research at the intercollegiate level remains fragmented (Maitland, 2015). The perspective has been used to study an assortment of elements in college sport, and these studies consistently show how the culture of an athletic department can influence the attitudes and behaviors of its members. For example, cultural assumptions have been shown to affect the development and implementation of athletic department policies (Corman et al., 2019; Nite et al., 2013). Smith et al. (2021) found that misaligned athletic department cultures led to poor communication, unmanageable workloads, and employee turnover. Athletic department culture can also influence employee satisfaction and perceived opportunity for advancement (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004). More broadly, university culture can drive the manner in which university administrators situate athletics within the overall institution (Schroeder, 2010; Welty Peachey & Breuning, 2012). Conversely, strong department and institutional values can impede leaders’ ability to accomplish cultural change in athletics (Welty Peachey & Breuning, 2011).

However, much of this research looks at culture as a driver of behavior within athletic departments. Only recently have researchers begun to assess how external changes affect organizational cultures within college athletics. Recently, Corr et al. (2024) found that changes in NCAA transfer rules inhibited “the ability of coaches to cultivate longstanding organizational culture” and subsequently forced them to “continuously perform culture (re)construction in their football programs” (p. 9). Clark et al. (2025) have also suggested that the legal decisions permitting name, image, and likeness (NIL) deals have altered the power balance in athletic cultures.

Like transfer and NIL rules, conference realignment is an external change that may also affect athletic department cultures. With numerous cultural forms, college athletics are central to the identities of many colleges and universities and important to stakeholders (Sperber, 2001). However, conference realignment threatens to alter these cultures as traditional rivalries evaporate, travel schedules expand, and competition levels increase (Russo, 2023; Schrottenboer, 2023). Despite these changes, little research has explored the relationship between conference change and athletic department culture. Therefore, this qualitative, longitudinal case study explored how conference change affected Erie University’s athletic department culture. Specifically, Schein’s model of organizational culture was used to assess Erie’s athletic culture two years prior to joining the Catholic Athletic Conference (CAC) and again two years into its membership.

Method

Setting and Context

Erie is a pseudonym for a private, urban university that enrolled approximately 3,500 undergraduates on its residential campus and another 3,000 graduate students on other campuses. The athletic department was a non-football NCAA Division I member and, at the study's outset, was a member of a conference hereafter referred to as the Urban Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (UIAC). Besides Erie, the conference was comprised entirely of public institutions with enrollments over 20,000. Erie sponsored 17 sports in the UIAC, and in the early 2000's it was among the best non-football institutions in the National Association of College Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Director's Cup. However, in the three years prior to the start of this study, none of its teams qualified for post-season play. In its last year of membership, the men's basketball team did win the UIAC tournament, and the aquatics programs had significant success in the NCAA Championships.

In 2011, Erie appointed a new athletic director (AD) who established five priorities, one of which was culture change. During his first two years, the AD took several actions aimed at culture. One of these actions was spearheading an effort to join the Catholic Athletic Conference (CAC). He worked behind the scenes with athletic directors and other stakeholders to solicit an invitation to the CAC believing it would be a better fit for Erie and that would inspire change within his department. Ultimately, Erie's president filed a formal application for conference membership and the CAC presidents and commissioner offered an invitation in the spring of 2012.

Erie began competing in the CAC in the 2013-2014 academic year. The CAC was comprised primarily of private, Catholic universities with enrollments similar to Erie. Conference members were located in the same geographic region, and the conference had a strong history in men's basketball. Erie still offered 17 sports but dropped men's volleyball and added men's soccer when it joined the CAC. During its first two years as a conference member, Erie failed to win a conference title or earn an NCAA tournament bid in any sport that was sponsored by the CAC.

Methodology

Early in his tenure, the AD asked if the first author would be willing to track culture change in the athletic department. After discussing the structure and extent of the AD's objectives, the first author agreed to collect data and provide annual summary reports about cultural change. In addition, IRB approval was obtained in order to use the data for research purposes with the caveat that it would not be public until the AD retired. All administrators and head coaches were aware of these purposes and agreed to sit for multiple interviews. Subjects were assured they would remain anonymous. To protect participants, only status (i.e., administrator or coach) will be connected to quotes in the results, and Table 1 provides the sports and departments represented in the study. All participants agreed to the conditions, and of those, only six remain employed at Erie.

Table 1
Participant Roles at Erie and Years Interviewed

Title	Sport/Role	2011	2015
Coach 1	Women's Water Polo	Yes	No*
Coach 2	Women's Volleyball	Yes	No
Coach 3	Field Hockey	Yes	No*
Coach 4	Women's Cross Country	Yes	Yes
Coach 5	Men's Volleyball	Yes	No*
Coach 6	Women's Soccer	Yes	Yes
Coach 7	Men's Basketball	Yes	No*
Coach 8	Men's Water Polo	Yes	Yes
Coach 9	Softball	Yes	Yes
Coach 10	Women's Basketball	Yes	No*
Coach 11	Men's Golf	Yes	No*
Coach 12	Men's Tennis	Yes	Yes
Coach 13	Baseball	Yes	No
Coach 14	Field Hockey	No*	Yes
Coach 15	Women's Basketball	No	Yes
Coach 16	Swimming (men's and women's)	No*	Yes
Coach 17	Men's Basketball	No	Yes
Administrator 1	Associate AD/Senior Woman Admin.	Yes	Yes
Administrator 2	Assistant AD Media Relations	Yes	No*
Administrator 3	Director Marketing	Yes	No*
Administrator 4	Assistant AD Business/Finance	Yes	Yes
Administrator 5	Associate AD Development	Yes	Yes
Administrator 6	Assistant Director Development	Yes	Yes
Administrator 7	Assistant AD Facilities & Operations	No	Yes
Athletic Director	Athletics	Yes	Yes
President	President's Office	No	Yes

Note. A * indicates the participant was not employed by Erie during the year of data collection.

Data collection began in the summer of 2011 after the AD presented his priorities to the athletic department at an off-campus retreat. During the summer and early fall of 2011, interviews with seven senior athletic administrators and 13 head coaches were conducted. This first set of interviews was kept intentionally unstructured to gain a broad overview of Erie's athletic department culture. While Appendix A provides the baseline questions, interviews included numerous probes that led to additional questions about facilities, finances, and staff interactions. The second set

of data was collected in the summer of 2015 after Erie completed its second season in the CAC. All 16 participants were asked questions listed in Appendix B, which centered on evolution of the department culture and its facilitators. Conference change was a major focus of the questions although each interview featured follow-up questions based on participant responses. Of these 16, five administrators and five head coaches were repeat participants from 2011. Three of the 2015 participants held the same positions as those interviewed in 2011 (e.g., the women's basketball coach left, but the replacement was interviewed). The remaining three 2015 participants were interviewed due to their involvement in or perspective on conference change (e.g., the president). All interviews were conducted outside the athletic department at various locations across campus and lasted from 45-90 minutes. In addition, interview data was triangulated with observations and documents. The first author was given full access to department retreats, meetings, press conferences, and fundraisers. Extensive field notes were recorded by the first author at these events. Documents included in the analysis were prospective facility designs, strategic plans, and internal memos.

Data Analysis

The findings emerged out of a process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). It is a qualitative approach in which data sources are systematically evaluated to improve the accuracy of "interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 6; Braun & Clark, 2006). Due to its versatility, thematic analysis allows researchers to create a "rich and complex, yet, detailed, account of the data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 78). The detailed descriptions that come out of such analyses are especially valuable when "investigating an under-researched area" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 83). The process is comprised of six dynamic phases—familiarization, initial coding, developing themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, producing the report—that allow themes to emerge and fade (Braun & Clark, 2006).

In this study, thematic analysis occurred in two cycles. The first cycle focused on the set of 2011 interviews when Erie was in the UIAC. Transcriptions were read and assessed for initial codes which were developed around Schein's (2017) levels of culture and repeated patterns in the data. A coding matrix was used to develop themes and to organize codes across the entire data set. This allowed repeated codes to merge into themes while less common codes were subsumed into themes or set aside. During this step, the peer examiner was given over 250 codes and asked to connect them to initial themes or develop new ones. Then in phase four, these themes and codes were reviewed through a detailed discussion with the peer examiner. The themes that resulted from this discussion became the artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions for Erie's athletic department culture in 2011 which are presented below.

The second cycle of thematic analysis focused not only on assessing the department's culture in 2015, but also how changing conferences may have contributed to cultural differences. Again, familiarization began by transcribing the 2015 inter-

views. These transcriptions were read and meaning units related to culture and conference membership were highlighted. Other forms of data were also assessed here. Field notes taken at the CAC press conference and department retreat were scanned for meaning units as were internal documents such as the strategic plan and some memos. In step two, initial coding began by compiling lists of the meaning units. Initial codes were based on repeated patterns, previous literature, cultural significance, and contradictions with the 2011 data. The third phase, searching for themes, started by tabulating the frequency of codes across the 2015 data to establish the deepest themes (e.g., CAC prestige, increased competition). The elements of these themes were then parsed out and detailed visually on a whiteboard. In the fourth phase, reviewing themes, the authors spent hours developing initial themes with supporting codes (see Table 2). This group of themes and codes was shared with two participants during the member check.

Based on member feedback and further discussion, the data was repositioned in three ways. The category of ‘resources’ was created to include facilities and budgets, value shifts merged with alignment to become ‘(mis)alignment,’ and logistics and visibility were relocated as subcategories under ‘prestige’. Fifth, the interaction of the themes was diagrammed via a thematic map (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Thematic Map of Erie’s 2015 Athletic Department Culture After Joining the Catholic Athletic Conference

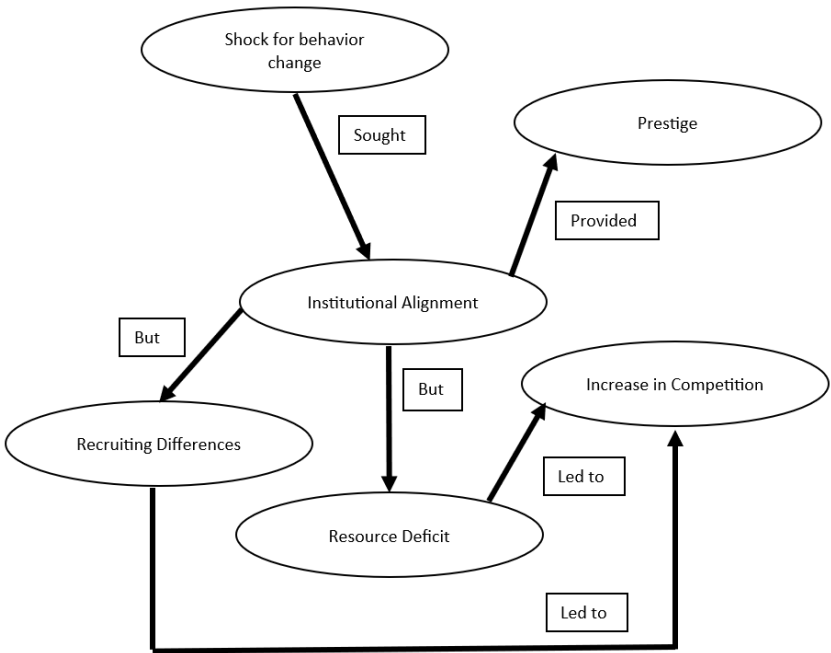


Table 2

Cultural Categories and Themes After Erie University's Conference Change

Major Themes	Supporting Codes	
Shock & Behavior Change	Adapt or die	Wake-up call
	Excitement	Harder than expected
	Need the challenge	
Budget	Fundraising	Assistant coach salaries
	Huge gaps with CAC members	Guarantee games
Facilities	Dead weight (stadium)	Lower ceiling
	Fundraising	Gap with top CAC members
Alignment	Similar schools	Similar challenges
	Similar philosophies	Facilities & budgets
Values	Basketball conference	Sports increase importance
	Sport decrease importance	Sports still w/ no conference
Prestige	Pride	First class
	Reputation	Feels/sounds better
	Job attractiveness	Parents appeal
Logistics	Tournaments	Gifts
	Organization	Professionalism
Visibility	Footprint	Branding
	TV deal	Broadcast quality
Competition	Less winning	Teams higher ranked
	NCAA bids harder	Recruiting harder
Recruiting Changes	Pass the look test	City hurts
	Lost niche	Broader competition
	Behind CAC competition	

Supporting quotes and examples were also selected here. Finally, a thick, rich narrative of Erie's conference realignment and its 2015 culture was developed.

Qualitative researchers must establish positionality and account for reflexivity, particularly when relying on interview data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the study, the first author was a faculty member at Erie who served as a major advisor to several student-athletes and student interns in the athletic department. As a result, he developed professional relationships with many members of the athletic department. This provided extensive access to the department and facilitated deep, thoughtful interviews. However, this proximity also increased the potential for bias in the interviews and analysis.

Three tactics were used in the analytical process to account for reflexivity. First, an external colleague was asked to serve in the role of peer examiner who could "scan some of the raw data and assess if the findings are plausible" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 250). He [the examiner] had no ties to Erie nor relationships with its coaches or administrators, and his experiences as an athlete, coach, and professor had been outside the NCAA Division I level. Therefore, he was able to serve as a contrarian, checking for biases and challenging assumptions. Second, a member check solicited feedback from two participants to see if the "interpretation 'rings true'" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). It is among the most important ways to ensure credibility for the analysis and enables fine-tuning to better reflect the participants' perspectives. For this study, one coach and one administrator were asked to provide input on our analysis and improve our interpretations of the data. Third, the second author served as a triangulating analyst who could "independently analyze the same qualitative data and compare their findings" (Patton, 2015, p. 665). The second author was a senior completing undergraduate research for credit. He was not enrolled at the university during data collection but, as a student-athlete, was familiar with the athletic department culture.

Several additional measures were taken to account for any resulting biases and maintain the four quality standards of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). The study's credibility was established by keeping an audit trail and triangulating data from transcripts, field notes, and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transferability was developed through transparency and description of the setting and offering attributes of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Confirmability comes through presenting the authors' backgrounds, establishing a theoretical framework, and using member checks (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). Dependability was achieved by detailing the methods, coding, and analysis (Edwards & Skinner, 2009).

Findings

This section will present the three levels of culture in the athletic department both before and after Erie joined the CAC. However, more depth and detail will be presented on the culture following realignment since that is the central focus of the study. Prior to the move, Erie's athletic culture was dysfunctional. Findings indicate

the culture had changed after two years of CAC membership to become more aligned and optimistic. Again, it is important to acknowledge the AD and other university leaders took several actions over the course of the study that could have contributed to cultural change (e.g., personnel changes, new scholarship model). This section will concentrate on changes that related specifically to conference realignment.

Erie Athletics' Culture in the UIAC

When the AD took over in 2011, the culture of the athletic department was in decay. It was described by various participants as "left for dead," "burned out," "stagnant," and "depressing." The three elements of culture—artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions—were misaligned and sent mixed messages to the members of the athletic department. The AD was aware of this and worked for a new conference affiliation in part to assist with cultural change efforts.

Artifacts in the UIAC

Two obvious artifacts defined Erie's culture in 2011. The most obvious was its football stadium. Erie dropped football in 1996, but the stadium remained the most visible structure on the west side of campus and was located on a major city thoroughfare. It sat across from the basketball arena and abutted the softball field, pool, and soccer field. Although soccer games were initially played in the stadium, it became so decrepit that it could no longer even be used for practice. Coach 6 stated "They kind of just chuckle at you when say anything about the stadium. I mean it's frustrating because the plan was to knock the stadium down." Plans to replace it with a smaller soccer stadium were mired in campus politics and lacked funding. The AD told coaches "The stadium is empty, but not this year. It's going to take time." So, the stadium lingered as a public eyesore that cast a literal shadow over many other sports facilities. Coach 13 further attributed Erie's lack of success to the absence of football. "There is a reason why people invest money in football because I think it goes beyond campus. I mean how many teams in the history of the College World Series have won without football?" In essence, the stadium symbolized the lack of success, inability to accomplish goals, and general stagnancy of Erie athletics.

The second major artifact in Erie's athletic culture was poor funding. In the initial phase of interviews, four of the seven administrators and all but one coach attributed Erie's stagnancy to insufficient resources. Administrator 6 admitted "Something that might inhibit us from doing more? It comes down to resources." In particular, subpar facilities, low coaches pay, and a lack of scholarships were consistently identified as barriers to improvement. Coach 8 added "resources-wise, you can go out and make a great dinner out of something, but if you don't have the money for good ingredients, there is only so high a level of dinner you can make." In essence, "budget" was the default excuse for any problem within Erie athletics.

Values in the UIAC

While these artifacts offered a superficial view of the culture, Erie's espoused values added a deeper yet skewed view of its culture in the UIAC. Three main values

were espoused by coaches and administrators. First, they believed Erie was a place where all sports had the opportunity to succeed. This value seemed to remain from the early 2000's when multiple sports won conference championships, qualified for post-season play, and/or had award-winning athletes. However, the existence of this value was undercut by the fact that only two teams had qualified for NCAA Championships between 2005-2010. Coach 11's comment reflects this mixed message:

The vision has to be around winning, and it has to be about winning conference championships... My team cried when we lost. My four seniors, when we lost at UIAC last year, they cried on the 18th hole because they never got a ring. So at least I sold them on that vision, right, and they bought in.

The second value espoused at Erie in the UIAC was that the athletic department featured an intimate family atmosphere. Coach 10 admitted "I think why I am here and what kind of sold me on it was just the private school, family atmosphere kind of vibe." At his initial summer retreat, the AD described Erie as a place where coaches should feel support and a sense camaraderie amongst the different staffs. He even hosted department functions at his house to facilitate this sense of togetherness. Veterans of the athletic department, as Administrator 4 noted, "generally do like working with each other." Conversely, younger coaches, such as coach 1, found the culture to be "very lonely" and that "some people that maybe don't want you to do well, because they're not doing well."

Third, Erie believed it offered student-athletes a great experience. As was written in the athletic department's strategic plan, Erie aimed to provide "the best educational opportunities, nationally recognized coaching, and superior student-athlete services." The AD summarized this at a staff meeting, indicating how Erie has always been a place where "they take care of student-athletes" because there "just are not many cracks they can fall through." Again, others expressed skepticism that Erie reinforced its claim of supporting student-athletes. Administrator 1 noted "we just cannot compare to the staffing level of an Ohio State overall." Coach 1 added "[my players] go to the training room, and we can't get seen."

Basic Assumption in the UIAC

Due to the misalignment of artifacts and values, Erie's athletic culture in the UIAC was ultimately driven by one basic assumption: a desire to survive. In coach 3's perspective, there was no "Erie Way" indicating "this is how we do things, or this is how we dress, this is the spiel we give recruits, this is the spiel out in the community." Therefore, coaches and administrators all turned inward. Administrator 5 elaborated, "Everybody gets tunnel vision where, 'This is my program.... We are taking care of our own and that's what we are going to do.'" The assumption was depicted in several ways. Administrator 8 referred to the mindset as "siloed." Coach 10 said "It's every man for himself." Coach 8 stated "You play your cards super close to the vest." Coach 6 added a financial rationale for focusing on survival. "I think we did feel like we had to fend for ourselves, absolutely. I mean we are raising 40% of our budget. Hell yeah, I'm fending for myself." Locating support to survive was difficult because as coach 12 noted, "It's just quiet. It's like a jail cell. You are in your cell..."

and no one gets together." As mentioned, the AD was aware of the department's dysfunctional culture and knew changing it was imperative. He took several actions to improve culture, and one was to help Erie gain CAC membership.

Erie Athletics' Culture in the CAC

Erie joined the CAC to much fanfare. A festive press conference was held on campus to make the announcement featuring colorful decorations, the pep band, and the mascot. It also included speeches from the conference commissioner, Erie's president, another CAC president, and the AD. The ceremony was covered by several local media outlets and numerous alumni, boosters, and fans attended. The significance of the event and the conference move was apparent to coaches and administrators at the ceremony who noted "it's exciting," "you felt it right away," and "there is a sense of pride in the CAC."

Although the move had long been discussed, most thought it was a pipedream. When the CAC invitation came, it served as an eye-opener to many. Most felt like Coach 8 who said "I feel like everyone took a big bolt. Ok, like the ante was upped. I felt like kind of an 'oh crap' feeling. Here we go. We better belly up to the bar. Do we need that? Yeah." The wake up came on two levels. First, many did not realize the CAC's quality across sports. Most knew it was a strong basketball conference but were not aware of its depth in other sports. For example, Administrator 6 acknowledged he did not realize the strength of CAC tennis. "Do you realize how many teams were ranked? In tennis, seven out of the 10 teams were ranked at one point last year. God, I didn't know that." Second, the conference change was a signal to coaches that complacency would no longer be tolerated and that jobs might be at stake. Coach 4 explained "I don't know if that's why there's been turnover, but I think for some of these coaches, it's a wake-up call. Yeah, you can't be complacent and be decent. You gotta be always learning and looking for new motivation."

Erie responded to the wake-up call. After being in the CAC for two years, there were clear changes within each level of culture. Administrator 4 summarized "Overall, I think we are in a better place with schools more like us." In terms of artifacts, Erie made progress on its facilities but still suffered from obvious budgetary constraints. Erie's athletic department values adapted with a renewed focus on competition, changes in sport offerings, and altered approaches to recruiting. However, these were not always seen as positive. Moving to the CAC also transformed Erie's basic assumptions. The athletic department felt an increased sense of prestige about joining a conference that Coach 15 described as "An entirely different level and step up." The move also left the university feeling more aligned, although that sense of alignment was not true for all sports.

Artifacts in the CAC

Moving to the CAC was accompanied by changes to some of Erie's artifacts. In preparing to join the conference, a new facilities plan was developed for an "athletics quadrant." While the conference did not specifically require new facilities, the facilities plan was part of the push to get a CAC invitation. A draft of the plans involved

demolishing the football stadium, building new facilities for field hockey, soccer, beach volleyball, and tennis. In early 2014, demolition of the stadium commenced, and the field hockey turf was ready for the fall 2014 season. Ground was broken for the tennis complex in the fall of 2014, and beach volleyball courts opened in spring 2015. Initially, these facility developments enabled the members of the organization to buy into the AD's vision for culture change. Administrator 1 acknowledged "I think it's way better today definitely than it was four years ago. I think the planning, having some vision, facility changes have really got people—'Wow there's change!'" However, the AD was concerned that hiccups slowing progress of the soccer and tennis facilities threatened his credibility.

It's been disappointing to the athletes because they are told one thing and something else happens. Yeah, it's also absorbed a tremendous amount of emotional energy administratively because it's so frustrating. How can this happen? There have been a number of setbacks... When you build stuff like that, it builds a sense of excitement. It's a pretty neat deal. And whatever we were going to do for tennis and soccer, our incompetence at getting the facility built in a timely way has undermined the positive nature of it.

The resource deficit was a second artifact that became very pronounced after joining the CAC. Although coaches and administrators felt they were underfunded in the UIAC, they realized there was an even larger resource gap with their CAC peers. Administrator 6 acknowledged:

I don't know that we were funded or are still funded enough to be where we need to be. And it's not all funding. It's coaching and recruiting and stuff like that too, but when you compare most of our programs, we are in the bottom tier in terms of funding. And to compete in this conference you need as much ammo as you can get.

This gap manifested in several ways. Head coaches felt it was hard to hire and retain assistant coaches on low salaries. Unlike top teams in the conference, Erie did not have the money to pay for guarantee games. Administrators and coaches both felt facilities were better in the CAC. Even though Erie was progressing with facilities, there was a sense that other schools had deeper pockets and would ultimately out-build them. Some coaches felt this was only specific to the top-tier CAC members. Coach 6 said "No one would be able to compete with [top CAC program]. They got the facilities. They got the money. That's the easiest to sell an athlete on: the facility. They're way better than anyone in the UIAC." Other coaches felt it applied even to the lower tier members. Coach 17 explained "Now we're tenth in facilities. The problem with tenth is we might be tenth and 800 miles behind nine. [Unsuccessful CAC member] is better than us."

As a result, members of the athletic department felt extra pressure to fundraise. During the introductory press conference, the president openly stated that additional university resources would not accompany the conference shift. Thus, administrators and coaches spent more time fundraising in order to compete in the CAC. Erie's coaches did not believe this was a task that concerned their peers. Coach 6 indicated:

I think the president even said it...that we would be fully funded. Still not happening, right. I'm still having to raise \$40,000 a year just to operate and whatever it is—\$42,000 this year, \$38,000? I don't know. And [CAC colleague] is not worried about fundraising to keep his program afloat, right. He's fundraising to enhance either what he's bringing home or what his assistant coaches are bringing home.

Values in the CAC

Moving to the CAC also altered the values of Erie's athletic culture. The most obvious change was an increased emphasis on competition. Outside the athletic department, there was a belief that the president and public knew men's basketball was entering a more difficult league. Otherwise, coaches and administrators sensed a public perception that Erie would regularly contend for conference titles since it was now competing against true peers—small, private institutions. These stakeholders failed to realize that CAC had teams nationally ranked in several sports. Coach 6 explained "I don't know that everybody understands...this is a soccer conference, and we got two teams in the top 10 in the RPI. So, for us, I knew what we were getting into." This expectation left coaches somewhat frustrated because they suspected it was going to be harder to win conference titles or earn at-large NCAA bids. However, some in athletics believed that a shift in perspective *was* needed. Administrator 7 observed "I think it definitely raises the bar competition-wise. It makes it more difficult to compete, but also you want to compete at that level."

Moving conferences also forced Erie to change what sports it valued. Only a few months after it joined the CAC, Erie dropped men's volleyball and added men's soccer. Administrator 7 said that "We had planned on both until the [budget] thing. They really were two independent decisions." However, the CAC sponsored men's soccer but not men's volleyball. In addition, men's soccer was seen by Administrator 8 as "another men's sport besides basketball that the community has an interest in." So, to the chagrin of some coaches, men's soccer was intensely marketed by the department. Coach 12 stated:

I mean, it's a visible sport and they talk about it in our staff meetings, and we gotta hit the Hispanic community because it's in soccer, and it's just natural. It's a realistic thing that they can do. They put it up there on the slide shows on the screens. You know, this is what we're prioritizing. So, it is at least clear. It's *very* clear.

Other coaches also sensed a shift in priorities with the conference move. Some sports that had been strong in the UIAC were not strong in the CAC. Coach 9, whose team had qualified for multiple NCAA tournaments, expressed "I'm still not convinced of the CAC's investment in our sport." Others whose sports were stronger in the CAC felt better about the move. Coach 6 indicated that "When the CAC came in, their first statement was...Soccer and basketball are our priorities on the women's side."

Values around recruiting were a third set of adaptations that arose from joining the CAC. Most coaches found they had to adapt their recruiting philosophies although the adjustments varied by sport. Many started looking for different qualities

in recruits. Some began looking for “athletic” or “skilled” players while Coach 17 believed he would have to recruit players “We’re gonna have to develop” because the CAC was a “junior/senior loaded conference.” Others, like Coach 15, changed where they recruited. “I think we can get somebody from the inner city a little bit better attracted to our school.” Coaches also struggled to develop their recruiting niche in the CAC. In the UIAC, Erie was the lone private school and by far the smallest, and as Coach 6 noted “We were the odd one, you know, we drew because we were different than everybody in the UIAC.” Conversely, Coach 17 noted in the CAC “A lot of those options look exactly like us. They look identical.” Not only did Erie lack distinction, but many participants also felt they were at geographic and facility disadvantages. Coach 9 acknowledged “in the grand scheme of things, [CAC schools] are in more destination cities than [our city]. And facility wise? [Two CAC schools] are ahead of us and they didn’t have to raise any money.” According to Coach 12, new values and loss of a niche made recruiting “harder. We actually have to work more in the CAC.”

Basic Assumptions in the CAC

Moving to the CAC did alter the deepest level of Erie’s athletic culture—its basic assumptions. The first new assumption was a sense of prestige. The AD believed conference membership enabled Erie to move beyond its past survival assumption because “the CAC gave us more of a collective identity.” Furthermore, an identity associated with the CAC was viewed as a step up for the athletic department. Administrator 1 acknowledged “I just think there is a prestige with the CAC. The UIAC was always thought of negatively and its public perception is not the strongest... So, I think the prestige of the conference is a big positive.” Coach 12 added “I guess it’s just word of mouth. There is a gap in the CAC. It’s just more prestigious...people think of it differently.” Administrator 5 suggested the CAC “for many of us, this is where we belong.”

The assumption of prestige was rooted in the CAC’s visibility. The conference had national and regional media rights deals for men’s basketball, and virtually all participants were excited about the benefits those might provide. Even though Erie games were not designated for national TV, many felt even the regional visibility would raise its profile and provide revenue for athletics. Coach 12 explained:

I get that it’s important to every person because we are in a conference that there’s going to be a basketball game on [TV] once a week, whether it’s us or not...UIAC: four games a year. Here: 40 games a year. Do the math, ok? The CAC also had its own digital network that allowed members to stream any sport, and the conference provided financial assistance to purchase the equipment needed for production. Administrator 4 said “I mean just the sheer broadcast element alone with the ESPN deal and the online broadcasts, the digital initiative that the CAC had. I think it is better for the university exposure wise, prestige wise that we are in the CAC.”

Prestige was reinforced by the sense that Erie had joined a more professional organization. Coach 15 felt that “the CAC operates with a whole different level of class

than the UIAC does... It just makes you feel like, entirely different, you know, you're an entirely different program all together." For administrators, this feeling stemmed from the aforementioned streaming platform as well as the locations and logistics of conference meetings. For coaches, prestige came from the way the conference treated its athletes and ran its tournaments. This even extended to non-revenue sports. Coach 4 described his experience:

We show up at the [CAC tournament], tents are set up for every team already with our logo and a banner. There's a team tent for food. We have our meeting at the hotel with the CAC folder there. I mean, this is quality. It's not thrown together. So, even on the organizational level... it's just a different mentality.

Although Erie's department felt more prestigious, its teams' success did not reflect that. While their recent level in the UIAC had dropped, Erie was still viewed as one of the more prominent members of that conference. Coach 17 explained:

We had a serious niche in the last league, like we're the only private school in a public school league. Wow. I'd say we were top two or three all the time...everything you look at in a job: facilities, salaries, coaches, scholarships. Everything you want, we were one, two, or three. You could argue that we were one. Now? We are 10.

As suggested above, Erie did not hold the same status in the CAC. None of its basketball games were nationally televised, and none of its teams finished in the top three of the league standings. In the all-sports competition, Erie finished tenth out of ten in its first year as a member and ninth in year two. Even coach 14 acknowledged:

The only thing I see is that none of our sports' records were as good as they were when we were in the UIAC. So do people look at that and go, 'Oh, that was a dumb move for us?' No, I've never heard that was a dumb move.

So, while Erie did not have tangible evidence of increased prestige in the CAC, participants still felt it improved their culture.

The second assumption that changed after joining the CAC was a sense of university alignment. On a macrolevel, Erie felt it had become partners with institutions that better reflected who they were and wanted to be. With one exception, the other conference members were small, private schools that had strong academic reputations and focused primarily on undergraduate education. The university president was very clear about the role of institutional reputation during the decision-making process, saying:

And so, for me, what really drove the conference was much less, how would it impact the [athletics] department. That was sort of secondary. My thinking was much more of how would it align with the values of us as a university and our identity as a university?

Administrator 7 believed the effects of CAC membership were felt in other parts of the university. "I've talked to [admissions director] about admissions and said, 'How does this transition work for you and other folks in admissions?' And they are like 'It's a different deal. People think of us differently.'"

This macro-perspective was also reflected in the athletic department. Competing against peers with similar admissions standards, tuition costs, budget models, and institutional challenges felt more fair to coaches. The AD explained:

I think we're in a conference now where other people are not taking short-cuts to be successful. Not only is it more prestigious and people feel better about it, but it's also a league where other people have the same challenges we have. There's not that feeling out there that [former UIAC peer] has so many advantages we don't have.

While the general sense was that conference realignment was better for the university and athletics, that was not true for all coaches. On a micro-level, some were concerned the conference was not a good fit for their sports. Some sports that were not sponsored in the UIAC also failed to get a desired home in the CAC and were forced to remain in hybrid leagues. Coach 16 claimed the move “doesn't make sense. I mean, we're still in the [hybrid conference]. All the UIAC schools and the CAC schools that have [his sport] are in still in [the hybrid league].” Other coaches found the CAC weaker in their sports. Coach 9 explained how that hurt his team's chances for post-season play.

Truthfully, for me, it's been tough, not just because of the relationships over the years in the other conference, but the UIAC has more teams with an RPI. So, if you take some lumps, you still have a shot at [the NCAA tournament].

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how conference realignment affected the culture of Erie's athletic department. Conference realignment did appear to help instigate culture change at Erie. Hopkins et al. (2005) contend a crisis is needed to unfreeze old assumptions and “develop a sense of urgency for change” (p. 177). Erie's move to the CAC was seen as a shock and helped instigate change to multiple levels of its athletic culture. Artifacts like the football stadium were removed and new facility plans were developed. In terms of values, joining the CAC increased Erie's focus on competition, reset its sport offerings, and changed the way its coaches recruited. Even Erie's basic assumptions shifted because athletic department members thought they were in a superior conference that was, for the most part, better aligned with its overall institutional values.

Comparison to Existing Literature

In some ways, Erie's cultural shifts after joining the CAC are different from the existing literature on conference realignment. Unlike realignment in the power conferences, this move was not driven by the influx of media rights revenue (Hoffer & Pinson, 2015; Latinville & Speyer, 2013). The CAC did have a better media rights deal and assisted with streaming broadcasts, but it did not provide Erie with a financial windfall. So instead of being driven by financial motives, this move re-

flects a more traditional approach to conference affiliation in which philosophically aligned institutions in geographic proximity join for equitable competition (Abbott, 1990; Farley, 2015). The move also did not appear to affect Erie's rivalries in any meaningful way. While loss of rivalries was a notable finding in Havard's (2017a; 2017b) work on realignment, it almost never came up at Erie. Erie did not have any long-standing rivals in the UIAC, and the lack of an engaged fanbase probably limited the significance of these cultural elements as compared to power conference realignment.

In other ways, the changes in Erie's culture were similar to those seen in past research on conference realignment. Consistent with the findings of Milstein, et al. (2023), changing conferences did affect Erie's sport offerings. Not only was men's soccer added when Erie joined the CAC, but it also became a focal point of the athletic department's marketing efforts. Men's soccer was seen as a way to connect the athletic department with a new group of fans and deepen its connection to the community. Simultaneously, men's volleyball, a sport not sponsored by the new conference, was dropped. These moves reflect what Milstein et al. (2023) call a "functional utility" where sport offerings are not random but help the university achieve specific institutional objectives. Erie's lack of success in the CAC was a second consistency with the literature. Both Perline et al. (2012) and Schrottenboer (2023) found realigned schools struggled to succeed in their new conferences. Likewise, Erie had trouble competing in sports across the CAC. While participants acknowledged and expected it in some sports, continued losing may make cultural buy in more difficult. To embed cultural changes, organizations need to experience success, and leaders need to connect those successes to new values and assumptions. According to Schein (2017), leaders can implement numerous cultural change actions "but none of those changes will produce culture change unless the new way of doing things actually works better" (p. 339).

Theoretical Implications

The findings demonstrate several key notions about culture change in college athletics. First, prestige is an extremely strong assumption. Erie's coaches and administrators quickly adopted the assumption that affiliation with nationally prominent schools and athletic programs was good for its culture, despite evidence to the contrary. Compared to their CAC peers, Erie's teams were underfunded and less successful. Coaches had a harder time recruiting and felt disadvantaged when doing so. Yet virtually all participants were excited to be in the CAC and believed it had changed the department culture. This contradiction may best be explained by research on institutional logics in college sport (Nite & Bopp, 2017; Southall et al., 2008; Welty Peachey & Bruening, 2011). Welty Peachey and Bruening (2011) note the dominant logic among athletic departments is to take the actions necessary to provide "legitimacy and acquire resources necessary for competitive success" (p. 211). However, subscribing to dominant logics may become problematic and place leaders in "precarious positions" when it creates incompatibilities with "field-level logics" (Nite & Bopp 2017, p. 369).

Second, Erie's move to the CAC highlights the importance of cultural alignment. Schein (2017) notes strong cultures feature "beliefs, values, and assumptions [that] are in alignment" (p. 181). At Erie, there appeared to be diverse perspectives on the rationale for joining the CAC. The president valued affiliation with other small, private schools. Many administrators and coaches wanted to be members of a stronger, more visible conference. A minority of coaches did not see the value in joining the CAC. When diverse values are allowed to linger, subcultures can arise and potentially impede the development of a strong central culture (Hopkins et al., 2005).

Third, Erie's move to the CAC suggests changing conferences might lead to unintended cultural consequences. Erie, which was the lone private school in the UIAC, lost its recruiting niche when it joined the all-private CAC. Its coaches thought budgets were in the top three of the UIAC but were drastically lower than their CAC peers. As a result, their teams were struggling to see the expected benefits of conference realignment. In some ways Erie's situation reflects Rutgers' move to the Big Ten where the athletic department suffered as a result of realignment. Rutgers' leaders expected to generate more revenue but had more difficulty winning and amassed millions in debt trying to do so (Rimbach & Koloff, 2022).

Practical Recommendations

Changing conferences may be an effective way for athletic directors and presidents to assist with athletic department culture change, but it is a mechanism that has the potential to backfire. Therefore, leaders must carefully consider the rationale for conference change, how they resource it, and its possible consequences. First, university leaders must establish clear institutional intentionality about conference change. Whether the goals for realignment are financial, cultural, reputational, or something else, senior leaders need to share this rationale clearly and repeatedly with internal and external stakeholders. When the rationale for change is clear, coaches and administrators will be less likely to resist, and cultural alignment will improve (Hopkins, et al., 2005).

Second, athletic directors and presidents must support conference change with resources. Schools 'moving up' to wealthier and more visible conferences need support for coaching salaries, facilities, travel, recruiting, and revenue-sharing. Even if the new conference provides resources via media rights, it is still imperative for university leaders to obtain additional funding. Boosters, sponsors, institutional support, and/or ticket revenue can be used to maximize benefits of the move (Wilson, 2024). Failing to do so is likely to undercut whatever goals the university seeks to achieve with conference realignment.

Third, it is important for leaders to try and foresee the unintended consequences of realignment. This can be achieved by researching the past movements of peer institutions, tracking the history of conference membership, and/or digging into conference financial models. Such knowledge will enable university leaders to best determine if and where a conference move should occur. As research on institutional logic demonstrates, joining a more prominent conference seems like a rational or

even desired decision (Nite & Bopp, 2017; Welty Peachey & Bruening, 2011). However, if the new conference is unstable or the university cannot reap the benefits of membership, such a move might actually hurt the athletic department's culture.

Finally, leaders must constantly remain abreast of conference realignment. Change is happening at every level of college athletics and conference decisions are made rapidly (Spisak, 2024). It is imperative leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of their existing conference, potential conference destinations, as well as their own athletic department's fit with them. As the demise of the Pac-12 and Southwest Conferences demonstrates, getting caught on the periphery of conference decisions can have longstanding effects on department finances, values, assumptions, and ultimately cultures (McCullough, 2023).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The findings of this study may be mitigated by a few limitations but offer possibilities for additional research. First, the study took place at an NCAA Division I institution outside the power conferences, without football, and lacking a passionate fan base. Studying realignment in a variety of other settings (e.g., power conferences, Division II or Division III conferences) would likely yield different and valuable results. Additionally, examining cultural change at schools with football or other sports of significant public interest may alter stakeholder interpretations of conference change. While the study did draw from numerous forms of data, it did not include input from athletes, boosters, or fans. Such perspectives would add a deeper understanding of culture before and after conference realignment. Finally, the data may be somewhat dated as it comes from earlier cycles of realignment. However, numerous universities are still transitioning to new conferences without overt financial objectives (e.g., SMU, University of Delaware, Lindenwood University; Becton, 2025; Wilson, 2024). Therefore, the findings can still provide value for administrators considering conference changes.

Conclusion

Conference realignment is certain to continue. Media companies, conference commissioners, governing bodies, and the schools themselves are creating conditions that will keep conference membership in flux (Mandel, 2024). To best grapple with the dynamic conference landscape, leaders of college athletic departments need to have a strong sense of their cultures. Athletic directors must establish and communicate distinct values for their departments, including which sports to offer, how they expect coaches and administrators to operate, and the type of experience they want athletes to have. Presidents need clear assumptions about the role of athletics within their overall institutions — be it a revenue generator, a marketing tool, a driver of enrollment, or a forum for alumni relations. Only when leaders firmly establish these elements of culture will they be able to make judicious decisions about what conferences best fit their institutions.

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Appendix A

Initial Culture Questions for Coaches and Administrators (2011)

How would you describe the vibe in the Athletic Department? What's the culture like?

What were your takeaways from [the new athletic director's] retreat?

How do you feel about the vision and the plan presented at the retreat?

Follow-up on some of the major themes from the retreat:

1. What is your sense of the "the genius of and" [a core value presented by the AD]?
2. The AD wants the decisions in the athletic department to stem from what's best for the student athlete [core value]. Has that not been happening? Why/why not?
3. What could be done to make the athletic department feel more like a family [core value]?
4. Describe the level of planning and professionalism in the athletic department [core value]?
5. Is this a great place to coach? Why? If not, what would make a better place to coach [core value]?

Are there any other things I should know about the culture of the department or improving it?

Appendix B

Culture Change Questions Year Four (2015)

How would you describe the culture of the department today?

Is the culture different than it was 4 years ago? In what ways?

What has led to those changes?

Personnel changes? Is there a common theme in the new hires/replacements?

What gets a staff member or coach fired?

How do you feel about the CAC move?

-Dropping of men's volleyball?

-Adding men's soccer?

-Facilities?

-Budgets?

-Are there things that have detracted from a change in culture?

How do you feel about the technology and innovation push? Is everyone buying in?

What determines how resources are allocated?

Are star coaches treated differently if they win/produce?

Anything I missed?

University Administrator extras:

What was your sense of the culture in the athletic department when you came to Erie?

How did the idea of joining the CAC make its way to you?

What were your objectives specifically for the athletic department? How did you think the CAC would transform the athletic department? Have those objectives borne out?

How did you think it would affect the university? Has it?

How has it changed the administration's engagement with athletics?

Do you feel differently about Erie because it is now in the CAC?

Anything I missed about the effect of the CAC on the athletic department?