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New Deal Spending and Stadia: Constructions Utilized by National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Institutions

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The present study examines the history of Depression era financing in the United States with respect to various New Deal programs and the impact they had on the development of stadia used by current institutions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Division I level (i.e., Football Bowl Subdivision and Football Championship Subdivision). Specifically, the current research provides findings and explanations regarding regional differences and presents data on the various New Deal programs. We further highlight the construction and renovation of stadia importantly created an atmosphere of "institutional legitimacy" for the universities, helped provide a substantial amount of work to the unemployed, and produced a significant amount of financial investments by the U.S. government. Practically, the present study offers the subsequent information as rhetorical work or as a resource for museums on and off campuses for the purpose of commercial gain, marketing, and cultivating the next generation of college football fans.

Keywords: New Deal programs, financing, stadiums, rhetorical work

Previous research by a variety of scholars (e.g., Hill et al., 2012; Howard, 2018; Johnson et al., 2016; Kohe, 2018; Phillips, 2012; Ramshaw, 2017, 2019) provided significant and substantial information about sport halls of fame and museums including those offered at college institutions or focused on specific sports. Of note, these works collectively discussed their typologies (e.g., academic, community, corporate, and vernacular) and highlighted their locations as stand-alone structures or as incorporated into sport facilities and factories (Howard, 2018; Johnson, 2016; Phillips, 2012). Next, these scholars recognized them as important vehicles to educate visitors about public life and cultural history at local, regional, or national levels (Howard, 2018). Moreover, they showed public memory is often influenced by sport and its venues to help people understand the emergence of society and how people shape their collective and potential individual identity (Hill et al., 2012; Ramshaw, 2017).

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Corporate sport museums, like the College Football Hall of Fame, employ full-time personnel to manage the facility and promote the products and services it provides visitors through rhetorical work (Phillips, 2012). Rhetorical work is the "skillful use of language to elicit the help they [e.g., organizations] need . . . to build greater or lesser support" toward consensus through the presentation of "a particular version or rendition of a topic or series of events" (Foster et al., 2015, p. 154). Importantly, rhetorical work includes the development of displays, collecting of or payment for research, and offering of educational services that may talk about their sport's contributions to the national or regional public good (Kohe, 2018; Phillips, 2012; Ramshaw, 2017). Further, the overall emphasis of corporate sport museums and halls of fame and their rhetorical work is to create a favorable image of the organization or sport and to cultivate or attract sponsors or partners to provide financial support through celebrations of past players, teams, and when possible public history (Howard, 2018; Johnson, 2016; Phillips, 2012).

Notably, Johnson (2016, p. 320) situated college sport halls of fame as valuable "cultural sites for education, community engagement, and a source of inspiration for the next generation" of fans and campus or community visitors. Furthermore, of particular interest to the present study, Phillips (2012) mentioned that many colleges and college sports in the United States strategically developed their own sport halls of fame through rhetorical work specifically focused on college football to promote their institution and provide heritage education, revenue, and tourism opportunities (Hill et al., 2012; Kohe, 2018; Ramshaw, 2017, 2019).

With respect to these points, Phillips (2012) emphasized corporate museums and halls of fame and their rhetorical work as often organized through assistance from academic sources. Moreover, it is not uncommon for many corporate sport halls of fame and museums to actively serve as repositories or archives for sport researchers (Kohe, 2018; Ramshaw, 2019; Seifried & Novicevic, 2015). This is accepted practice because the products that emanate from scholarly research often help to create the aforementioned commercial displays, tours, and formal education programming sport halls of fame and museums offer (Ramshaw, 2017; Kohe, 2018).

Kent Stephens and Jeremy Swick, historians and curators of the College Football Hall of Fame, verified such a conclusion by arguing academic sources are important to them in their rhetorical work to organize displays and explain how the past impacts or shapes our everyday reality, behavior, and engagement with one another (personal communication, January 24, 2022). Stephens and Swick also advocated for the need of their rhetorical work to engage in public history studies on college football (personal communication, January 24, 2022). Next, Stephens and Swick suggested that the College Football Hall of Fame and other sport halls of fame would be specially interested in research on the interaction between stadium histories and public history because stadia are great sources of socialization, engagement, and representatives of collective identities (personal communication, January 24, 2022). One topic they mentioned as an underexplored public history topic they feel could produce commercially attractive rhetorical work concerns the impact of New Deal era programs on college football and specifically stadium construction (Stephens & Swick, personal communication, January 24, 2022).

New Deal programs emerged during the Great Depression of the 1930s to help the United States recover economically and emotionally as unemployment soared and both manufacturing and wages declined (Darby, 1976; Mathy, 2016). New Deal programs provided two forms of financial assistance to individuals and communities (i.e., work relief and direct relief). Work relief often involved the construction of public works projects through the provision of labor while direct relief required no actual reciprocation in the form of labor (Myers, 1936; Neumann et al., 2010). The goal of both relief approaches was to help people survive, promote gifts or donations, and to stimulate spending in the economy (Myers, 1936).

Interestingly, New Deal programs helped preserve college sport throughout the United States through various work relief projects focused on stadium development (Seifried, 2016; Seifried et al., 2016, 2020). However, this phenomenon has not been adequately communicated to the public or researched. Such a fact is compelling for several reasons as rhetorical work. First, many New Deal stadia still provide architectural significance to schools and represent the commercialization of universities with respect to brand image and awareness, cultivation of alumni relationships, and the development of an attractive institutional environment (Ingrassia, 2012; Leighninger, 1996; Tutka & Seifried, 2020; Watterson, 2002). Second, complimenting the latter point, New Deal stadia serve as important social anchors for their communities and university fan nations. For instance, New Deal stadia support their fan nations through activities such as tailgating and social engagement (e.g., dialoging, cheering, and singing). Collectively, such activity promotes a unique campus spirit for each institution and develops or maintains "social capital, identity (group or individual), and/or social networks" (Seifried & Clopton, 2013, p. 50). This point is further substantiated by the frequent use of stadia related images and videos to help promote institutions and the active use of stadia on campus tours (Stephens & Swick, personal communication, January 24, 2022).

Third, as a college football history issue, it would be interesting to understand just how much money the federal government provided stadia and which schools or communities took advantage of these opportunities (Stephens & Swick, personal communication, January 24, 2022). Unveiling information about the history of New Deal programs and their connections to college sport stadia could be important items for the rhetorical work of retelling of institutional and community histories (Stephens & Swick, personal communication, January 24, 2022).

Since there has never been an organized scholarly account of New Deal spending programs on college football stadia, the present study seeks to understand more about their contribution to college football by exploring and providing answers to the following research questions: 1) What New Deal programs (i.e., 1933-1942) are connected to college football stadia construction; 2) What regions took advantage of these programs to support the development of their football product; and 3) How can any differences found between regions and New Deal programs be explained?

To complete this study, we focused on learning more about the history and funding of college stadium construction at institutions within the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Division I, which includes both the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and Football Championship Subdivision (FCS). From a practical perspective, the present study offers the subsequent information as rhetorical work or as a resource for a corporate sport museum like the College Football Hall of Fame and those organized on individual university campuses for the purpose of commercial gain, marketing, and cultivating the next generation of fans.

Rhetorical Work Part 1: Historical Background on New Deal Programs

The first official response of the U.S. government to address the burgeoning devastation brought on by the Depression occurred in late 1930 when President Herbert Hoover created an Emergency Committee for Employment- ECE (U.S. Federal Works, 1947). Initially, this committee aimed to help state and local relief efforts through a call for individuals and businesses to improve their properties and to give people short-term/temporary jobs in the process (i.e., work relief). Unfortunately, unemployment continued to grow over the course of 1930 from 4 million to 7 million so the ECE was replaced by the President's Organization on Unemployment and Relief in 1931, which similarly encouraged state and local governments to help create work relief activities (U.S. Federal Works, 1947).

Neither initiative decreased unemployment in an effective way; thus, in 1932, the federal government developed the Emergency Relief and Construction Act (ERCA). Title I of the ERCA made $300 million available to states and municipalities that declared they could not provide relief from their own resources. This was the U.S. government's first formal effort to offer federal monies for construction projects and work relief. The monies were provided based on promised repayments and facilitated through the development of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), which offered low-interest loans to those engaged in work relief efforts (Barber, 1988). The RFC repayment promises were often backed by bonds developed by institutions and/or states and communities (U.S. Federal Works, 1947). Although the $300 million was distributed fairly quickly and primarily to the "hard hit areas of the nation", it was apparent more governmental stimulus was needed (U.S. Federal Works, 1947, p. 2). For instance, despite the fact that nearly 1 million received temporary work by mid-1932, unemployment continued to soar to 11 million by the start of winter 1933 and many state governments and local municipalities became bankrupt (U.S. Federal Works, 1947).

The U.S. Congress responded to bankruptcy claims by creating the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) in May of 1933 and installing Harry Hopkins as its leader. With similar goals to provide federal funds to state and subsequently municipal entities for work relief, various public works projects completed through 1935 received monies under the administrative supervision of FERA. While the RFC delivered in total about $500 million in funding when ending in 1933, half of the initial FERA appropriation was originally contingent on matching monies provided by states and/or municipalities (U.S. Congress, 1933). In this case, one federal dollar required three dollars of public money from states and/or municipalities (Davidson, 1983). The other half of the initial FERA appropriation was made available to states financially unable to meet the match requirement. Distribution of the funds was contingent upon eligibility and since there was no federal infrastructure or supervisory organization in the early years after the passing of the FERA, state and local authorities managed projects and distributed work payments after receiving federal funds (Davidson, 1983; U.S. Federal Works, 1947).

It appears FERA was initially reactive, often supporting small-scale renovation projects that could provide immediate help to unemployed in various communities (Van West, 1994). Yet, FERA also created the Civil Works Administration (CWA) in 1933 to employ individuals on labor-heavy public work projects (Leighninger, 1996). The CWA often used the same personnel but unlike FERA, the CWA was the first true federal program, in that CWA funds required more government supervision on projects than its predecessors to make certain federal monies were being used appropriately. This was particularly important for the federal government because they accounted for over 90% of funding for the $951 million in expenditures of approved CWA projects (U.S. Federal Works, 1947; Wong, 1998).

Like the Federal Emergency Relief Act, the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) also emerged in 1933 and under Title II established the Public Works Administration (PWA). Led initially by Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, the PWA required that states applying for federal monies also accept control from federal officials (Ickes, 1948). Furthermore, the PWA expected that proposed constructions "make lasting contributions to the public" through socially useful buildings and programs (Van West, 1994, p. 130). Section 202 outlined that the PWA would support programs intended to help with the "construction, repair, and improvement of public highways and parkways, public buildings, and any publicly owned instrumentalities and facilities" (Additional public works appropriations, 1934, p. 2).

Regarding the concept of accepting government supervision, the PWA and other federal funding programs, as lender or financier, sent engineers and/or representatives to building sites to make certain projects were built according to the submitted plans (Hays, 2018). Next, PWA inspectors examined budget expenditures to ascertain if contractors were paying fair wages and if materials were adequately purchased, without suspicion of unsavory profiteering (Hays, 2018). Interestingly, the assessment of construction results, fair wages, and material purchasing was not dependent on a national standard but one that likely changed based on evolving local or regional expectations and market conditions (Fishback, 2018).

The positive outcomes intended from the PWA did not quite make the impact many believed would happen. For instance, the PWA initially required applicants to support 55% of necessary funds against the federal government's 45% match for construction (Montgomery, 1971). The poor economic and/or financial condition of many schools and communities, particularly in the South, made the pursuit of PWA funds generally challenging for most universities and communities. Next, the frequent complexity of large-scale PWA projects was problematic. In particular, PWA projects often required substantial technical planning, relied less on man power, and used heavy expensive equipment to complete projects (Clarke, 1996; Davidson, 1983; Leighninger, 1996; Wong, 1998). Many large public works within the PWA also required reliance on many skilled workers all of which limited the number of employable workers in comparison to smaller-scale projects (Davidson, 1983; Leighninger, 1996).

FERA's director, Harry Hopkins, pushed to expand the relief capacity of the federal government and to simultaneously reduce the control of local sponsors through calls for bigger public works projects like that offered by the PWA. Hopkins also importantly called for more approval of smaller-scale temporary work projects (Van West, 1994). Agreement from other contemporaries eventually compelled approval of smaller-scale building projects by the PWA but also the development of the Works Progress/Projects Administration (WPA) in May of 1935 after Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 7034. Assigning Hopkins as lead administrator, the WPA aimed to provide emergency work relief through projects that could employ as many people as possible (McJimsey, 1987). Like its predecessors, WPA projects also had to be useful to the public but they required sponsorship from local groups or municipalities and involved Roosevelt's final approval before funds were allocated (Howard, 1943; McJimsey, 1987). In this, Davidson (1983) highlighted the WPA required the federal government to work cooperatively with state, county, and municipal governments during planning, approval, and funding.

Expectedly, because WPA projects were not quite as complicated or as large-scale as PWA projects, WPA applicants frequently found success in procuring federal monies to finance their constructions (new or renovations). Furthermore, WPA allocations assumed, on average, about 80% of total project costs (USWPA, 1936). As smaller public works less dependent on mechanical equipment and more likely to employ unskilled laborers or semi-skilled workers, the WPA provided work relief for roughly 8.5 million persons in the United States (Howard, 1943).

Public sentiment or opinion often facilitated proposals and the development of various building projects like sport stadia (Ingrassia, 2012). Although reducing unemployment was the basic priority, there was interest in projects that could evoke "individual pride derived from useful work" and capable of improving or addressing the culture of American society (Leighninger, 1996, p. 226). Work relief on stadia and other sport-related projects provided individuals with self-respect while also reinforcing or developing skill sets and work habits (Davidson, 1983). Moreover, it was promoted that such work relief helped the country reinforce inherent or cultivate innate work ethics present in each American citizen (Leighninger, 1996).

Rhetorical Work Part 2: The Case for Football Stadia Investments during the Depression

American football started on Eastern college and university campuses before the 1860s through spontaneous class competitions (Ingrassia, 2012). The earliest campus fields were simple open grounds and frequently incapable of producing gate receipts; therefore, many schools sought out professional sport facilities (e.g., cricket, baseball, horse racing) in larger population centers in their region (Lewis, 1965, 1973; Watterson, 2002).

Continuing and burgeoning media attention and financial successes over the 1870s and 1880s eventually prompted many institutions to develop and expand or enclose on-campus athletic grounds during the end of the century. This occurred so that schools could avoid "paying rental fees and could secure a greater portion of the gate receipts, the only source of revenue being produced at this time" (Tutka & Seifried, 2020, p. 321). All new construction and renovations used wood and emerged primarily throughout Eastern and Midwestern areas of the United States with less activity in the South and West (Ingrassia, 2012; Tutka & Seifried, 2020). Expansion of these campus athletic grounds served to accommodate larger enrollments and alumni attracted to the spectacle of football but recruited to provide gifts to their alma mater, both athletic and academic (Ingrassia, 2012; Watterson 2002).

Interestingly, the size of these temporary wooden structures failed to capitalize on the popularity of intercollegiate football so gate receipts were limited before the turn of the century (Watterson, 2002). To capitalize on the possibility of increased gate receipts, Harvard built the first large-scale (i.e., 30,000 seats) reinforced concrete and steel venue (i.e., Harvard Stadium) in 1903. Costing $300,000 (i.e., $9,177,102 in 2021), the new facility was financed through alumni gifts totaling $100,000 and loans based on promised future gate receipts (Ingrassia, 2012; Lewis, 1965, 1973). Schools in the East (e.g., Syracuse, Yale, Princeton, etc.) were generally first to follow Harvard with construction and financing of their own permanent stadia. However, only those schools with more resources (e.g., alumni, community entrepreneurs, and students) were capable of producing large gate receipts and/or the gifts necessary to build new venues.

After World War I, permanent stadium construction boomed in the United States when schools developed stadia as war memorials and sought to use those buildings to legitimize their place as an institution of higher education (Schmidt, 2007). Specifically, Tutka and Seifried (2020) found 58 new stadiums built and 67 renovations took place between 1920 and 1929. Like the East, many Midwest and some Western schools, in larger population centers, developed their own massive concrete and reinforced steel venues financed through alumni gifts and/or bonds based on future gate receipts (Tutka & Seifried, 2020). New stadia in the South and most Western states were substantially smaller on average (i.e., under 15,000-seat capacity) as their institutional enrollments, local populations and economies, and alumni bases were smaller. Yet, all were strategically built well beyond the size of institutional enrollments to capitalize on the ascending popularity of football, growing economy, and to promote schools as legitimate through not only the size and scale of those venues but through the spectacles and spirit (e.g., play, bands, cheering) they offered or engendered (Ingrassia, 2012; Smith, 2008).

Football was seen as a legitimizing agent on college campuses and stadiums became icons before the end of the 1920s capable of representing the importance of a university and serving as social anchors for their fan nation comprised of students, alumni, and local townsfolk (Smith, 2008). In support of this position, Big Ten Conference Commissioner John L. Griffith proclaimed, when conference members Michigan, Ohio State, Illinois, and Minnesota were all constructing massive sport stadia during the 1920s, that building such structures were justifiable since they helped to reinforce a preferred standard of living in the United States (Austin, 2000).

It seems as though the amount of stadium construction during the first 30 years of the 20th century combined with the building boom of the 1920s and decreased tax revenues produced by the Depression, which meant that subsequent stadium construction would be unlikely in the 1930s; however, this was not the case for several reasons. First, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) enjoyed spectating mass sports like football as an adult suggesting "sport made life more enjoyable" and was a valuable investment for the government and American culture (Davidson, 1983, p. 114). As proof of Roosevelt's liking of football, it was widely known that he joined the school newspaper (i.e., *Crimson*) as an editor shortly after beginning his studies at Harvard University (Freidel, 1952). Often writing columns on the exploits of the football team, Roosevelt wrote to incoming freshman that they should stay active supporting the school through various activities such as "athletics . . . and athletic managements," among other types of work (Roosevelt, 1950, p. 503). Roosevelt also did not just talk about supporting athletics; he served as a cheer or yell-leader and often reflected on his time at Harvard football games as evidence that people could come together to do great things through sport (Rosenman, 1938).

Second, although it had its detractors before the 1930s, most advocates and even opponents of competitive sport would recognize it as important for developing a unique spirit of an institution that schools could use to help retain students and promote their brand (Ingrassia, 2012). Within this point, historian Ronald Smith (1990) convincingly suggested that the United States, because of its melting pot origins, almost immediately saw intercollegiate sport as commercial or professionalized. Alumni were also quite active following and supporting their institutions via the offering of intercollegiate sport competitions. As an example, David E. Ross, a member of Purdue University's Board of Regents, delivered a speech in October 1931 to the Association of Governing Boards of State Universities and Allied Institutions citing that alumni often "point with pride to stadia . . . as the acme of perfection in the Alma Mater" (Austin, 2000, p. 258).

Third, it should be noted that the interest in supporting athletic competition in the United States and thus sport facilities was bi-partisan. Both Republicans and Democrats viewed athletic competition as capable of developing or engendering important personal characteristics that were important to capitalism along with regional and national pride (Austin, 2000; Wong, 1998). Betts (1974) also concluded the federal government was attracted to support the construction and renovation of stadia to establish legacies of democracy. Moreover, some suggest that New Deal programs helped to protect the "bourgeois class under an industrial capitalist economy" (Wong, 1998, p. 174).

Fourth and finally, New Deal programs served to strengthen the economic system and consumerism generally in the United States through the various expenditures or investments to employ individuals without work on public works projects (Austin, 2000; Wong, 1998). Sport facilities like stadia were identified as smart investments for community officials, university administrators, and New Deal program assessors because of their long-term value and connections to the aims and goals of the various programs. More specifically, sport facilities would host and entertain thousands to potentially millions of visitors over their lifetime, which was expected to be 50 to 60 years (Leighninger, 1996; Raji & Chester, 2017). Next, stadia offered opportunity, through their events, for the building and maintaining of community cohesion, identity, and interaction amongst groups or engagement with local businesses to encourage consumer spending (Leighninger, 1996). Lastly, stadiums were desirable projects because the size and scope of those venues produced many construction jobs and opinions that they enhanced permanent job creation (e.g., event management, concessions, facility maintenance, etc.) to support the subsequent activities they would hold after their development (Raji & Chester, 2017; USWPA, 1936). This may be why Roosevelt was so publicly recognized as providing final approval for so many stadia projects (Craig et al., 1977).

Method

To address the aforementioned research questions, the present study began by identifying projects completed as part of the New Deal spending through various primary and secondary sources available. As a baseline, an initial list of college football stadium construction projects was assembled from livingnewdeal.org and stadiumconnection.org. From these lists, projects were limited to college stadium construction involving the NCAA's Division I FBS and FCS subdivisions.

Following other scholarship that previously outlined various steps to be taken on sport-focused historical research (e.g., Seifried, 2010, 2017), multiple primary sources were gathered. Primary sources used for the current research included items like student and local newspapers, organizational reports/memorandums, and letters of correspondence. Many of these items were collected from archival research conducted at institutions (n=15), reviews of digital collections offered by Division I institutions, and databases such as Google and HathiTrust Digital, among others. Multiple secondary sources were also referenced to gain additional information about various investments made into those properties. As an example, Google Scholar, SportDiscus, and Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals among others were used to identify funding information. Finally, multiple reports published by the U.S. government and various New Deal programs were accessed regarding stadia projects. Overall, using multiple and different primary and secondary sources provided the present study with factual accounts of facilities that was corroborated to reduce the emergence of dissonant data (Seifried et al., 2019).

To facilitate an accurate review, an internal and external source criticism was completed to ascertain the reliability and authenticity of the collected sources. An internal source criticism asked pertinent questions about the authority, perspective, and trustworthiness of the document author (Seifried, 2010, 2017). Specifically, we asked if the authors had any specific skill, experience, and reputation to research and generate conclusions about the topic at hand or if there is any bias present. An external source criticism is concerned with identifying available evidence of the origin of the document as well as the time and place the document was produced (Seifried, 2010, 2017). It is also important to determine the intended audience, purpose of the document, and the environmental conditions from which the document was created (Seifried, 2010, 2017). These were all considered and analyzed during this process.

Next, we attempted to procure sources created within the timeframe of the study. Kohe (2018) similarly emphasized the need to situate information about the construction and renovation of sport facilities into their cultural period. To assist this process, we worked with university archivists and/or special collections faculty and used finding aids or document catalogs they provided because they serves as a critical "paradigmatic [. . .] disciplinary marker" for historical-based works (King, 2012, p. 13).

The final step in the present historical research process entailed data analysis and interpretation. To organize information, we developed a spreadsheet to record data on the New Deal stadia projects. Specifically, we recorded information for: facility name, location (i.e., city, state, region), cost (i.e., real and nominal), school connection, construction type (i.e., new or renovation), federal program type (i.e., FERA, RFC, WPA, CWA, or PWA), federal contribution (i.e., real and nominal), and whether the facility is currently active or defunct. Regarding renovation, we were only interested in identifying major projects. Therefore, we followed the Energy Efficiency's (2010) description of major renovations as those projects that change a venue's layout and/or substantially upgrade its services and conditions for attendees, participants, and employees or organizational partners (e.g., media). Notably, this process allowed us to identify and establish relationships between collected data, triangulate information, and recognize overarching themes, connections, inferences, and patterns. Lastly, from this spreadsheet and other information collected, emerging themes and conclusions were drawn about the importance of New Deal funding in the development of NCAA Division I stadia.

Results and Discussion

During the period from 1933 thru 1942, the present research found evidence of 79 stadium construction projects completed with support from FERA (n=2), RFC (n=1), WPA (n=53), CWA (n=2), and/or PWA (n=23). Three projects received funding from two federal programs. Of these projects, 43 were new constructions and 36 were renovations. The current study also discovered government expenditures for 77 projects and in total and on average Division I stadia construction cost $16,042,403 (i.e., $307,528,944 in 2021) and $208,343 (i.e., $3,993,882 in 2021) respectively. Federal funding accounted for 71% of these expenditures and notably 39 are now defunct.

Regarding Division I status, the present research discovered 18 projects were for current FCS schools exclusively while 51 projects served current FBS institutions. Next, the current study discovered projects were approved throughout the U.S. with

Division I universities or colleges in 31 states receiving federal assistance. Within this point, the states of Alabama, California, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas each received four or more rewards. From a regional perspective, we found that most construction projects occurred in the South (n=43). This region was followed by the West (n=19), Midwest (n=13), and East (n=4). Next, it should be noted that most projects were generally on campus but several were also off-campus or at locales considered to be neutral sites (n=10), used by multiple Division I (i.e., FBS and/or FCS) programs annually (Table 1).

Finally, of the projects, new constructions cost in total roughly $12 million (i.e., $223 million in 2021) and averaged about $264,467 (i.e., $11.15 million). In comparison, renovations accounted for almost $4 million in spending (i.e., $85 million in 2021) and on average each project cost about $133,511 (i.e., $2.571 million in 2021). Federal investments represented approximately 73% for new construction and 69% of the cost for renovations.

Table 1
New Deal Project Location, Type of Construction, and Current Status

School	City	State	Stadium	Year
NC State	Raleigh	NC	Riddick Stadium	1933
San Jose State	San Jose	CA	Spartan Stadium	1933
South Carolina	Columbia	SC	Columbia Municipal Stadium	1934
NC State	Raleigh	NC	Riddick Stadium	1935
Multiple	Jackson	MS	Jackson State Fairgrounds	1935
William and Mary	Williamsburg	VA	Cary Field	1935
Colorado	Boulder	CO	Colorado Stadium	1936
Multiple	Pasadena	CA	Rose Bowl	1936
Multiple	Orlando	FL	Citrus Bowl Stadium	1936
Toledo	Toledo	OH	Glass Bowl Stadium	1936
Baylor	Waco	TX	Municipal Stadium	1936
ODU	Norfolk	VA	Foreman Field	1936
Cincinnati	Cincinnati	OH	Nippert Stadium	1936
NC State	Raleigh	NC	Riddick Stadium	1936
Texas Tech	Lubbock	TX	Tech Field	1936
Washington State	Pullman	WA	Rogers Field	1936
Michigan State	East Lansing	MI	Macklin Field	1936
SDSU	San Diego	CA	Aztec Bowl	1936
Arizona State	Tempe	AZ	Goodwin Stadium	1936
Multiple	Charlotte	NC	American Legion Memorial Stadium	1936

Multiple	Birmingham	AL	Legion Field	1936
Arkansas	Little Rock	AR	Little Rock High School Stadium	1936
Purdue	West Lafayette	IN	Ross-Ade Stadium	1936
New Hampshire	Durham	NH	Lewis Fields	1936
Furman	Greenville	SC	Sirrine Stadium	1936
Eastern Kentucky	Richmond	KY	Hangar Stadium	1936
Idaho State	Pocatello	ID	Spud Bowl	1936
LSU	Baton Rouge	LA	Tiger Stadium	1936
South Carolina	Columbia	SC	Carolina Stadium	1937
Tulane	New Orleans	LA	Tulane Stadium	1937
Kentucky	Lexington	KY	McLean Stadium	1937
Washington	Seattle	WA	Husky Stadium	1937
Alabama	Tuscaloosa	AL	Denny Stadium	1937
Memphis	Memphis	TN	Crump Stadium	1937
Miami	Miami	FL	Burdine Stadium	1937
Buffalo	Buffalo	NY	Roesch Memorial Stadium	1937
Bowling Green	Bowling Green	OH	University Stadium	1937
Tennessee State	Nashville	TN	University Athletic Field	1937
Southeastern	Hammond	LA	Strawberry Stadium	1937
Morgan State	Baltimore	MD	Hughes Stadium	1937
Idaho	Moscow	ID	Neale Stadium	1937
Arkansas	Fayetteville	AR	University Stadium	1938
Georgia Tech	Atlanta	GA	Grant Field	1938
Mississippi State	Starkville	MS	Davis Wade Stadium	1938
Southern Miss.	Hattiesburg	MS	Faulkner Field	1938
Washington	Seattle	WA	Husky Stadium	1938
Florida	Gainesville	FL	Florida Field	1938
Tennessee	Knoxville	TN	Shields-Watkins Field	1938
Rutgers	New Brunswick	NJ	Rutgers Stadium	1938
UTEP	El Paso	TX	Sun Bowl	1938
Multiple	Oklahoma City	OK	Taft Stadium	1938
Arizona	Tucson	AZ	Arizona Stadium	1938
Southern Illinois	Carbondale	IL	McAndrew Stadium	1938
North Dakota State	Fargo	ND	Dacotah Field II	1938
Sam Houston State	Huntsville	TX	Pritchett Field	1938

Auburn	Auburn	AL	Auburn Stadium	1939
Western Michigan	Kalamazoo	MI	Waldo Stadium	1939
Southern	Baton Rouge	LA	University Stadium	1939
Montana	Missoula	MT	Dornblaser Field	1939
Northwestern State	Natchitoches	LA	Demon Stadium	1939
Tennessee	Knoxville	TN	Shields-Watkins Field	1940
Wake Forest	Winston Salem	NC	Groves Stadium	1940
Multiple	Lodi	CA	Lodi Grape Bowl	1940
Akron	Akron	OH	Rubber Bowl	1940
Fresno State	Fresno	CA	Ratcliffe Stadium	1940
Multiple	San Antonio	TX	Alamo Stadium	1940
Arizona State	Tempe	AZ	Goodwin Stadium	1940
Auburn	Auburn	AL	Auburn Stadium	1940
Boise State	Boise	ID	College Field	1940
Kent State	Kent	OH	Memorial Stadium	1940
Louisiana-Lafayette	Lafayette	LA	McNapsy Stadium	1940
Wisconsin	Madison	WI	Camp Randall Stadium	1940
New Mexico	Albuquerque	NM	Zimmerman Field	1940
Alabama State	Normal	AL	Hornet Stadium	1940
Ole Miss	Oxford	MS	Vaught-Hemingway Stadium	1941
Multiple	Oklahoma City	OK	Taft Stadium	1941
Stetson	DeLand	FL	DeLand Municipal Stadium	1941
Southwest Missouri State	Springfield	MO	Southwest Missouri State Stadium	1941
Houston	Houston	TX	Public School Stadium	1942

Below, three main themes that emanate from the New Deal program awards are discussed to answer the previously established research questions. First, regional differences are explained. Second, the main types of innovations or constructions completed are recognized and rationalized with respect to New Deal approval. Third, differences amongst New Deal program are identified and reasoned.

Regional Differences

With respect to region, the present study found several items to discuss. First, the results show a lack of New Deal monies provided to stadia in the East. Based on the aforementioned information, we rationalize schools and towns in this part of the country were already significantly more advanced in construction (Ingrassia, 2012). Again, the first reinforced steel and concrete stadiums initially emerged in the East, followed shortly by permanent stadia in the Midwest, the second smallest region accounting for New Deal monies. Generally, college stadia in both the East and Midwest were already substantially larger than those produced by peer institutions in the South and West before the 1930s (Tutka & Seifried, 2020). Their larger student enrollments, corresponding alumni bases, and local populations typically compelled their new permanent facilities to surface so that they could take advantage of the interest in college football and potentially accommodate or cultivate new growth in the sport and their institution.

The collection of larger gate receipts undoubtedly motivated the development of permanent facilities because with capacities bigger than their predecessors more revenues could be produced for the institution and athletic department. Alumni also viewed football stadia as a critical legitimacy marker for the "coming-of-age of their alma mater" (Miller, 1997, p. 293). Thus, stadia at higher education institutions needed to be large and permanent to communicate the largess of its donors, alumni, and student enrollments. Western and Southern institutions and communities similarly sought to develop or expand their existing facilities built during the 1920s to help communicate their school or region was modern and legitimate (Downs et al., 2019; Gumprecht, 2003; Ingrassia, 2012). However, both were substantially smaller in capacity and accommodations before the 1930s. Thus, they were prompted to strategically search out for additional funding sources during the Depression to renovate or build new larger stadia as football continued to ascend in popularity.

Western Schools. Some Western schools on the Pacific Coast (e.g., University of California, University of Southern California, Stanford University, etc.) were quicker to improve their quality of play than others in the region. Therefore, they were viewed as legitimate institutions in part due their large permanent facilities (e.g., California Memorial Stadium, Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, and Stanford Stadium) and outstanding football performances in games like the annual Rose Bowl played in Pasadena, California from 1915-1941 (Tutka & Seifried, 2021). Other institutions in the region (e.g., San Jose State, University of Colorado, Texas Tech University, Washington State, Arizona State, etc.) eventually sought to emulate regional football powers and consequently New Deal investments to renovate or build new facilities. In the case of the West Coast, Yale University's famous football coach, Walter Camp, helped justify such pursuits by suggesting that a "high grade of football is played at many institutions hundred and thousands of miles away from the northeast corner of the country" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 12). Moreover, as Albert Britt (1922, p. 154), writer for *Outing* proclaimed "The story of football is no longer a story of a few teams in the East, nor even of the East . . . Football pre-eminence may be on the Pacific coast."

Southern Schools. Schmidt (2007) also presented a noticeable shift in the balance of power toward the West and later the South in the 1930s with the advancements in football performances by schools in that region. As evidence, from 1920 thru 1932, schools that would charter the Southeastern Conference produced 26 wins and four ties against peers in the East, Midwest, and West. Doyle (1994) further validated the potential need to help Southern schools search for federal monies by suggesting that with the addition of thousands of seats to existing stadia or building new venues during the 1930s, Southern schools and communities, in particular, could challenge Eastern and Midwestern perspectives about their region. More specifically, Doyle (1994, p. 243-244) claimed "staging mass market sporting events in modern stadiums was a highly visible way to showcase the progressive urban society of the 20th century South" as it recovered from the American Civil War and Depression. Their smaller wooden facilities of a previous era relegated them as exhibitions for Eastern and Midwestern schools, limited their ability to schedule opponents, and diminished their reputations as schools and communities in the process (Perry, 1914). The technical skill of coaches and enthusiasm for football after World War I prompted new interests in sport investments to produce revenues, better publicize institutions, and to develop unique campus spirits Southern schools could promote to potential enrollees and/or retain existing ones (Lantz, 1939; Schmidt, 2007).

Neutral Sites. Many universities also made use of off-campus sport facilities and within larger population centers to produce revenues from their larger capacities. Generally located in urban areas, these facilities were attractive for several reasons. Beyond their larger capacity, institutions sought to play in these venues because they provided their schools with more publicity and exposure due to a greater media presence and population located in cities. Attempting to capitalize on the early success demonstrated by professional sport entrepreneurs leasing their venues in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the present study found several municipalities built (i.e., Lodi, CA; San Antonio, TX and Charlotte, NC) or renovated existing venues (e.g., Jackson, MS; Orlando, FL; and Birmingham, AL, etc.) to host sporting events. Further, they sought to host intercollegiate football games with many regional institutions in mind.

Waco Municipal Stadium (Waco, TX) and Alamo Stadium (San Antonio, TX) exist as two sample Texas stadia that were constructed and hosted several football events. In the case of Waco Municipal Stadium, that facility housed not only Baylor University for several years (1936-1949) but also local high school games weekly and state high school playoffs annually (Seifried et al., 2021). Alamo Stadium similarly supported local high school games but also annual intercollegiate rivalries such as Texas A&M versus Texas Tech from 1943 through 1950 and regular season contests that featured Baylor, the University of Tulsa, and other schools in the region (Domel, 2010).

Innovations

To further explain the changes taking place and use of New Deal programs, the present research argues innovation diffusion should be attributed, in part, to regional growth of sport stadia (Tutka & Seifried, 2020). Similar organizations, in this case Division I football programs and conference peers (e.g., Big Ten, Southeastern Conference, Southern Conference, Southwest Conference, Pacific Coast Conference, etc.), can be influenced by the neighborhood effect, where the likelihood of adopting an innovation is higher for these organizations when they are geographically close or institutionally tied together (Tutka & Seifried, 2020). Within the innovation diffusion literature, researchers also discussed the neighborhood effect and its influence on the adoption of new technologies as well as knowledge transfer (Seifried et al., 2017). In the present study, New Deal programs helped new and renovated stadia embrace technological innovations such as reinforced steel and concrete, stadium lighting to host night contests, and radio within expanded press boxes.

Rationalization for New Deal lighting investments was important for a couple of reasons. First, night football games were rare before the 1930s with only a few Division I institutions (e.g., University of Cincinnati and Syracuse University) possessing lights before the decade. Subsequent drops in game attendance (i.e., 30% across the United States by 1933) prompted institutions to seek out novelties or reposition games to start times more attractive to potential attendees (Tunis, 1936; Watterson, 2002). Lights were a logical addition because they provided a novel spectacle (i.e., night football) and/or allowed people to attend games when they were not potentially searching for work. Second, the financial and attendance success enjoyed by Louisiana State University and other schools who previously installed lights encouraged several regional peers (e.g., University of Florida and University of Southern Mississippi) to follow suit and to beat the heat of the late summer. Likewise, many institutions out West (e.g., Arizona State University, Texas Tech University, and University of Washington) also incorporated light fixtures into their stadia during the decade using New Deal monies.

Radio similarly emerged as a substantial addition to sport stadia in the United States at this time because of the value it provided schools both publicly and financially (Oriard, 2001; O'Toole, 2013; Smith, 2001). Before the 1930s, few schools used radio to broadcast games for fear it would reduce attendance. However, as revenues from gate attendance decreased, schools and their affiliated conferences realized and sought out opportunities to sell the broadcast rights of their games by the mid-1930s (Oriard, 2001; Smith, 2001). Radio broadcasts accounted for thousands of dollars annually helping college sport survive and eventually flourish, evoking an attendance rebound toward the latter part of the decade (Smith, 2001). Radio also allowed alumni to stay connected, often encouraging them to provide gifts or to continue public support of their alma mater, which could also boost or maintain enrollments (Griffin, 1932; O'Toole, 2001).

The number of expanded press boxes to accommodate radio and newspaper personnel is also substantial within New Deal stadium construction. As some examples, the University of South Carolina not only benefitted from the construction of a new football stadium utilizing PWA money in 1934 but subsequently received WPA funds for a 1937 press box expansion project, which also included a new state-of-the-art sound system and a scoreboard (Seifried & Bolton, 2017). Elsewhere, the University of Washington's Husky Stadium also received a new press box courtesy of the WPA (Works Progress Administration, 1937), in addition to Cincinnati's Nippert Stadium obtaining PWA monies (Ohio Federal, 1936), among others.

Finally, concourses were either developed or expanded through New Deal programs to provide attendees with more amenities such as concessions and restrooms. With respect to such renovations, the Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA) serves as an exemplar for the interest in concessions and restrooms. The Rose Bowl's renovation consisted of adding or rehabilitating seven concession stands and bathroom facilities to improve revenue production and fan comfort ("List of WPA," 1935). Next, New Deal monies also often went toward improving accommodations for participants through the construction or redevelopment of locker rooms and athletic training/medical space. As one example of this work, Riddick Stadium (Raleigh, NC) obtained WPA funding in 1936 to construct a new fieldhouse on the south end zone for players and game officials (North Carolina Emergency, 1936). Similarly, Louisiana State's Tiger Stadium (Baton Rouge, LA), University of Arkansas' Razorback Stadium (Fayetteville, AR), and the University of Tennessee's Neyland Stadium (Knoxville, TN) received funding for new seats, locker rooms, and interestingly dormitories that were incorporated into the seating and locker room additions, adding extra value to those construction projects (Seifried, 2016; Seifried et al., 2016, 2020).

New Deal Program Differences

Lastly, the current study reveals and explains differences between New Deal programs. As expected, there was little use of RFC, FERA, and CWA funds for sport stadia by Division I institutions or communities (Table 2). In the case of the RFC, those funds had to be repaid since they were interest-bearing loans. FERA required a rather large percentage commitment from schools or municipalities to acquire federal monies and CWA projects were often larger-scale suggesting that approval would be harder for smaller-scale stadia constructions and renovations. Expectedly, because unemployment continued to rise and the economy deteriorated, the RFC, FERA, and CWA programs were replaced by the PWA and WPA (Table 3).

Table 2

New Deal Funding Types, Investment, and % Contribution

New Deal Funding Type	Number of Projects	Nominal Cost	Real Cost (2021)	Nominal- Federal Contribution	Real- Federal Contribution-2021	% Contribution
RFC Total	1	$53,554	$1,117,672	$53,554	$1,117,672	100%
RFC Average		$53,554	$1,117,672	$53,554	$1,117,672	
FERA Total	1	$30,000	$585,300	$30,000	$585,207	100%
FERA Average		$30,000	$585,300	$30,000	$585,207	
Combined Programs Total	3	$307,098	$5,941,088	$180,539	$3,471,916	59%
Combined Programs Avg.		$921,295	$17,823,265	$541,617	$10,415,748	
WPA Total	50	$234,812	$4,484,103	$184,767	$3,527,580	71%
WPA Average		$11,740,576	$224,205,136	$9,238,346	$176,379,003	
PWA Total	22	$3,296,978	$63,797,570	$1,959,054	$37,980,084	72%
PWA Average		$149,863	$2,899,890	$89,048	$1,726,367	

Table 3
Yearly Funding Types

Year	# of Projects	Nominal Cost	Nominal-Federal Contribution
1933-1935	6	$397,873	$336,869
1936	23	$4,208,391	$3,091,467
1937	13	$4,794,476	$4,200,428
1938*	14	$2,420,601	$1,654,067
1939	5	$586,879	$316,036
1940*	14	$2,613,873	$1,487,286
1941-1942	5	$1,020,310	$736,418

*Contains one unavailable project cost

The push to develop these programs by notable individuals like Hopkins, Ickes, and Roosevelt among others helped position them as viable and attractive alternatives. PWA and WPA stadia projects were more frequently approved under those programs for several reasons. First, the size and scope of the stadium projects could put many people back to work and in a variety of positions. As one example, Louisiana State's 1936-1938 north end zone project to expand Tiger Stadium involved over 800 WPA workers that contributed about 265,983 man hours to compliment the 119,335 hours contributed by university workmen (Seifried, 2016). Elsewhere, we discovered some WPA or PWA projects were art-related. For instance, 60 WPA workers developed four ceramic tile murals at Alamo Stadium. As part of the WPA's Arts and Crafts Division, the "colorful glazed tile murals depict a century of local sports activities, ranging from rooster races to the district's football teams of 1940" (Alamo Stadium, 2011, p. 4).

Second, under the mission of the PWA and later the WPA, stadia were attractive projects to approve because they were socially useful buildings that could make lasting contributions to the interests of the general public through the events they provide and subsequent long-term job opportunities. More specifically, stadia construction projects were large and complicated enough to require not just a desirable number of temporary construction workers but also subsequent full-time employees to manage those facilities, events, and services they provided on a daily basis.

Third, the events stadia hosted were publicly attractive across the country and generally recognized as capable of bringing not just large groups of people together but also diverse groups of people to participate in the spirit-building exercises produced by football. To complement this, WPA projects also had to be sponsored by local groups or municipalities; thus, demonstrating genuine enthusiasm and/or pride and connection to not just accommodate attendees but also participants whether they were live or remote via radio.

Finally, the current study shows there is a rather large gap between the number of WPA projects approved versus the number of PWA projects. Initially, PWA projects were approved based on their complexity and use of machinery. Thus, they relied less on general man power and more on skilled workmen (Clarke, 1996; Davidson, 1983; Leighninger, 1996; Wong, 1998). The WPA in contrast immediately supported smaller-scale projects that the PWA later began to approve as unemployment remained a problem. This might explain why of the 34 renovations discovered in the present study, 25 of them involved WPA funds.

Conclusion

The College Football Hall of Fame and other individual college or university corporate museums are regularly interested in designing educational and entertaining displays and exhibits through rhetorical work that features the interaction between sport and public history. To respond to this opportunity, the present study shows that one of the most important contributions made to the current landscape of college football occurred during the Great Depression through New Deal funding made available for stadia construction and renovation. Within this point, many athletic departments and municipalities across the United States understood the importance of football programs and sport facilities as a revenue generator, source for employment, beacon of legitimacy, and home for community or campus spirit. Evidence of this view is not only substantiated in the number of work relief projects approved during the Depression but also by looking at the amount of expenditures, number of workers, hours spent building sport stadia, and the length those buildings lasted for Division I institutions and their local communities.

The present study specifically examined New Deal era program investments used by Division I institutions of the NCAA. Within, we found notable and substantial regional differences and distinctions between New Deal programs. For instance, many Eastern and Midwestern schools were far ahead in construction and expansion of permanent venues in addition to possessing developed alumni bases and donor relationships, enabling them to better navigate the economic downturn of the Depression. Southern and most Western schools, on the contrary, were still building up their football programs during the 1930s; therefore, they found great relief from New Deal programs to help fund stadia projects when they otherwise would not have been able to afford such construction. With respect to program distinctions, WPA and PWA monies were more frequently used based on their mission and percent contributions toward new constructions or renovations. In this, RFC, FERA, and CWA required more contributions or repayment from awardees. The divergence between the WPA/PWA and RFC/FERA/CWA explains the amount of products pursued and awarded to the South and West who were generally poorer economically than communities and schools in the East and Midwest.

Next, we discovered awardees were able to justify their pursuit of New Deal monies for several reasons and that the federal government was interested in supporting a large percentage of new constructions and renovations. As an example, while football as a sport ascended in popularity and the quality of play improved, many schools or communities viewed larger venues as capable and necessary to increase revenues for both athletics and the institution or community. Football and stadia were also promoted as legitimacy markers by applicants and institutions as they fought for potential enrollees and sought to satiate alumni concerns or beliefs. For communities and schools, stadiums also served as a tool to promote their modernity. In this, and beyond seating expansions, stadia were modified to improve conditions for various stakeholders such as fans and participants. Improving comfort, access, and communication capabilities appear as some of the most prominent motivators to add press boxes, radio technology, lights, concession stands, and restrooms. Finally, stadia were characterized as adding value to institutions through the exposure and campus or community spirit they provided. Moreover, they were large and complicated enough to put many people to work in skilled and unskilled work positions and were capable of instilling pride through the products/events they produced.

Future Areas of Research and Practical Implications

Lastly, the present study presents some future areas of research and practical implications that the College Football Hall of Fame and other individual college and university corporate sport museums should consider exploring. Furthermore, through the methods presented in the current work, we demonstrate how such work might be done. First, practically speaking, the current research demonstrates there are other outlets to support stadia funding beyond athletic associations, donors, and host institutions, common features of today funding sources (Tutka & Seifried, 2020). For instance, the federal and many state governments offer grants (e.g., https://www.preservationdirectory.com/) to renovate historic properties. Second, from a research perspective, this study shows New Deal projects facilitated the national sport culture of the United States and the development of municipal stadia. Municipal stadia emerged based on interests to support sport but also draw events and people to cities. It would be interesting to learn if New Deal era stadia and the outcomes (i.e., events and attendance) they produced impacted decisions by municipalities to financially support the construction of municipal facilities across the United States after World War II. Also known as the "cookie cutter era", these facilities were also multi-purpose venues that aimed to offer many events (Seifried & Pastore, 2010).

With respect to effective rhetorical work, college sport museum and hall of fame managers should seek to establish connections between the past and present through well-developed and sequenced, psychologically engrossing, and physically engaging environments (Foster et al., 2015). In essence, these facility managers and organizers should craft messaging and engagement opportunities to help educate, facilitate interactions, and craft messages or realities they want visitors to accept. Such messaging should include strong narratives assisted through academic research in order to provide storylines featuring protagonists and compelling questions to call back individuals for future visits.

One particular question emanating from the present work suggests it would be interesting to study if New Deal programs helped support the construction and/or renovation of stadia for historically black colleges and universities (HBCU). This could serve to compliment the exhibit on HBCUs the College Football Hall of Fame previously supports and the present study's focus on Division I schools. The Federal Works Agency (1940) articulated that the PWA and WPA were not racially discriminating programs with respect to the reviewing of proposals and the awarding of funds. However, that claim does not generally match reality as state and local authorities often influenced decisions on access and application decision-making processes (Davidson, 1983; Fishback, 2018). In particular, local politics in the Southern part of the United States prevented or discouraged applications, and a general lack of education about government programs and their own eligibility likely limited the number of proposals from HBCUs. The present research only found four HBCU stadia projects supported through New Deal programs that are current Division I members. HBCUs also compete at the Division II and III levels within the NCAA. Moreover, 112 HBCUs operated during the Depression.

Finally, recognizing the presence of Division II and III schools who also successfully procured New Deal era funds, it would be interesting to better understand any differences or similarities with respect to stadia produced by schools operating at those levels and the impact of New Deal funding. In particular, it would be compelling to see if there was a funding difference established between private and public schools in addition to the purposes of this work which focused on region and program type.

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Navigating the Intersection of COVID-19 and (Re)new(ed) Calls for Racial Justice: A Qualitative Examination of the Experiences of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Professionals in College Athletics during a Year of "Social Justice Awakening"

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) professionals in the NCAA athletics governance structure. The specific focus was centered on the multiple crises of summer 2020, including both the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for social injustices and their effect on DEI work and the impacts on DEI professionals within college athletics. In total, 23 semi-structured interviews were completed with the DEI professionals, with five major themes emerging from the results, including: (1) Reorganization of Priorities, (2) Reactive vs. Proactive Work, (3) Challenges of Virtual DEI Engagement, (4) Emotional Fatigue, and (5) Validation of DEI work. The implications for future research and practitioners will be further explored.

Keywords: college athletics, COVID-19, diversity, equity, and inclusion

Introduction

In 2020, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) put a halt to the world in many ways not experienced before. Precautions meant to limit the spread of the contagion significantly impacted the economy, entertainment industry, and the social interactions people were used to having with others (Adgate, 2021; Dangerfield, 2020; Udalova, 2021). In education, by the end of April 2020, 90 percent of students across the world were completing some type of virtual or remote learning program (UNESCO, 2020). Similar to other industries, the sports industry was hit uniquely

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hard, with major event cancelations or postponements, including that of the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, the men's and women's NCAA basketball tournaments, the Little League World Series, and Wimbledon. The sport sector is a key driver in the current international market and is an entrenched structure within our global economy and society, which meant that sport lockdowns and cancelations had drastic financial impacts (Nauright et al., 2020). Economically, the impacts were felt at all levels, as the top European soccer leagues lost an estimated $7 billion and the big four sport leagues in the U.S. are estimated to have lost around $14.1 billion (Birnbaum, 2021; Lane, 2021). On top of the economic losses, most sport organizations and stakeholders experienced significant socialization impacts due to lockdowns across the country, the Centre for Sport and Human Rights (2020) suggested the social impact and potential for mental health concerns due to COVID-19 in sport could be severe, which led to them encouraging organizations to take a people-first approach and to engage in conversations with stakeholders (e.g., athletes, coaches, staff, etc.) regarding mental health and their current realities.

The COVID-19 pandemic was not the only 2020 event that had significant implications for the well-being of people living in the United States and across the world. As Donnelly (2020) stated, the U.S. dealt simultaneously with COVID-19 and renewed calls to address systemic racism in US society. Upon learning of the horrific murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd (amongst many others), a large number of U.S. citizens (and citizens around the world) voiced disgust over the inequitable experiences of racially minoritized[1] populations, allowing the summer of 2020 to be called 'the social justice awakening' (Worland, 2020). This social justice movement, similar to that of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. during the late 1960s, was elevated by groups committed to the liberation of Black people and other oppressed populations. In 2020, specifically, Black Lives Matter (BLM) was at the forefront of the national discourse surrounding racial injustice, and the BLM message centers-around a desire for change, with some of the main discussion points revolving around the incarceration of Black individuals, police brutality, social injustice, and systemic racism (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). This message took center stage during the summer of 2020, with demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins occurring nationwide to show solidarity with the BLM movement toward social justice reform. These conversations also infiltrated the sports world, with Hylton (2020) observing how many sport organizations, coaches, and athletes launched (performative) statements addressing social injustice or engaging in racial and social justice action, many for the first time in history.

Given sport is a microcosm of society (Coakley, 2015), it is not surprising that conversations surrounding racial injustice and systematic racism would (once again) permeate the sports arena. Increases in social activism within sport (see e.g., Cooper et al., 2019; Kluch, 2020) brought a level of uncertainty for sport organizations as most wrestled with how to properly handle the social justice climate during the summer of 2020 (Evans et al., 2020a). For example, in the National Basketball Association (NBA), following a video release of the Jacob Blake shooting, for the first time ever in NBA history, players from the Milwaukee Bucks decided to forego their game that night to stand in solidarity with those fighting for social justice. Ultimately, all NBA games were canceled that night, marking a transcendent moment in sport social activism history (Kreps & Reis, 2020). These actions in professional sport regarding social activism signify a potential turning point for sport leagues. In the current sport governance structures, the silencing of minoritized voices has been a long-standing practice, allowing policy makers to question, challenge, and/or dismiss persistent racial inequities, leading to a mutual acceptance of the status quo (Evans et al., 2020a).

Just as social justice conversations have influenced professional sport, collegiate sport has seen athletes, coaches, and administrators use their voices to offer statements around systemic injustice. While a thorough conversation discussing systemic racial inequalities in collegiate sports falls outside the scope of this study, it is important to note that racially minoritized athletes, coaches, and administrators face a variety of deep-level DEI issues.[2] Academically, racially minoritized athletes have to combat the 'stupid jock' narrative (Edwards, 2000) and graduation rate disparities favoring white athletes (Southall et al., 2015). For coaches and administrators, leadership positions have historically been occupied by white, heterosexual, and able-bodied males (Lapchick, 2020). Thus, these few examples highlight the injustices associated with the current landscape of college athletics.

To address these issues, athletes have been more vocal in their recent activism, mostly centered on racial inequities. For example, Kylin Hill, a football player at Mississippi State University, threatened not to play unless changes were made on campus regarding racist symbols, while also helping to push legislation at the state level to remove confederate images from the state's flag (Lyles, 2020). The increase in collegiate athlete activism (Mac Intosh et al., 2020), coupled with growing outside pressure on universities and athletic departments to take a stand and promote social justice, has led to the issuance of numerous statements regarding racial injustices (McKenzie, 2020). However, university responses to internal and external pressures regarding racial equity have historically been seen as reactionary, with the focus being on surface-level statements and actions rather than committing substantial resources to dismantle the racist systems that exist within college sport (Bimper & Harrison, 2017; Fink et al., 2003). Statements regarding diversity and inclusion at the NCAA level are more focused on following relevant and respective laws rather than forwarding the cause of creating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) focused environments (Cooper et al., 2020). Further, most DEI work in sport organizations occurs accidentally or becomes a reactionary move, based on external and internal pressures (Spaaij et al., 2018). For instance, Keaton (2020) has argued that the emergence of social movements and high-profile scandals involving failures in DEI have led to the creation of DEI-specific positions in NCAA athletic departments. With an increase in exposure, commitment, and accountability toward social justice reform, along with the barriers that the COVID-19 pandemic provided, an investigation into the impacts of these factors on DEI work within intercollegiate athletic departments is warranted. As such, it was the purpose of this study to examine how DEI professionals in college athletics navigated the cultural climate of 2020 – a climate that saw unique DEI challenges at the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and a re-emergence of calls for racial and social justice in U.S. public discourse.

Literature Review

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Sport Organizations

At the NCAA and institutional levels, there has been a long-standing history of attempts to address the inequities present within the current collegiate athletics structure. For example, the NCAA and its Office of Inclusion champion many DEI initiatives/programs, including diversity education workshops, the Presidential Pledge, the NCAA fellow's leadership development program, the NCAA leadership institutes for ethnically minoritized women and men, and the NCAA gender equity and issues forum (NCAA, n.d.a.). Despite all of the funding, programming, and pro-DEI statements, a lack of commitment toward DEI in the NCAA has long been documented (Lapchick, 2020). For instance, Fink and Pastore (1999) argued that discrimination and oppression of minoritized athletes and coaches in sport was rampant in NCAA Division I sport. One major concern has been a lack of diversity in positions of power and leadership on college campuses, as these positions have historically been occupied by white heterosexual men, leaving little diversity in the key decision-making systems (Fink et al., 2001; Lapchick, 2020). To counteract the underrepresentation of minoritized groups, college campuses and sport organizations alike have seen an increase in their DEI work. For example, research has illustrated that efforts to increase diversity within sport structures has the potential to improve the quality of decision-making and outcomes (Cunningham & Melton, 2011; Lee & Cunningham, 2019; Spaaij et al., 2020).

Diversity within sport organizations also has the ability to increase marketplace understanding and the goodwill associated with an organization's social responsibility objectives (Cunningham & Melton, 2011). Further, a strong commitment to diversity may increase attractiveness of an organization in terms of recruitment and retention of potential employees and college athletes, as organizations can leverage their commitment to diversity and promote a positive workplace (Bopp et al., 2014; Cunningham, 2009). Environments that are more inclusive may also increase cognitive and social development amongst employees within sport organizations (Hirko, 2009). However, while diversity in sport organizations holds great benefits for stronger capabilities, development, and outputs, most diversity movements occur on accident or are implemented in reaction to current internal and external pressures (Cunningham, 2009; Spaaij, et al., 2018). These reactionary commitments to DEI work are detrimental to sport organizations, as proactive diversity initiatives may lead to more overall success in DEI programming (Fink et al., 2003). To be proactive rather than reactive, Singer and Cunningham (2012) encouraged athletic departments to place value within the organizational structure on diversity. For example, they argue that an athletic department that focuses on recruiting, hiring, and retaining diverse personnel embeds DEI within its organizational structure. The ability to infuse these DEI practices into an athletic culture allows the focus on diversity to become part of the normal day-to-day of sport organizations (Cunningham, 2015). A different strategy to engage meaningfully with DEI work is by providing diversity trainings (Cunningham, 2012; 2015).

Unfortunately, research has shown that resistance to DEI initiatives and programs in sport organizations is a multi-faceted problem (Spaaji et al., 2020). One way this problem has been investigated is through analyses of DEI statements from sport organizations and athletic departments. For example, Ortega et al. (2020) examined athletic department mission statements and found that only 29 of 250 athletic departments (11.6%) had diversity-specific mission statements. The racially-charged events of the of summer 2020 transformed this commitment, as we have seen a dramatic increase in public statements, along with the creation of diversity committees, the renaming of buildings, and removal of statues honoring individuals with racist pasts (Turick et al., 2020) – yet these outward-facing DEI initiatives were seen as reactionary rather than proactive (Hylton, 2020). The growth of social justice awareness around these issues is important, but may also be detrimental, as the recent push for racial equity has centered on the importance of manifestations of overt racism rather than emphasizing the deep-rooted institutional racism that currently exists in U.S. sport governance structures (Hylton, 2020). As Brayboy (2003) noted, university diversity commitments, policies, and statements may potentially act more as freestanding narratives rather than substantial drivers in creating organizational culture change. This leads to statements on diversity and inclusion not signifying a real commitment to change, as universities are more concerned about responding to outside pressure (media, alumni, etc.) instead of actually implementing practices and policies that evoke substantial change on college campuses (Cooper et al., 2020).

One way to ensure successful DEI efforts is to gain support and/or buy-in from senior leadership. For example, Fink et al. (2003) found that when key leadership decision-makers of a sport organization promoted a culture of diversity as a core competency of the athletic department's mission, successful diversity plans and culture were adopted. A culture embracing the diversity of students and staff can assist in breaking down the pervasiveness of similarity that exists across the majority of athletic departments and establish support of, and for diversity (Fink et al., 2003). Without support from key leadership, diversity policies and processes struggle to be implemented across departments and culture shifts are rarely realized (Cunningham, 2008). This is especially true across college campuses, as diversity initiatives can reveal substantial power dynamics between leadership and faculty/staff (Griffin et al., 2019). Thus, those holding senior leadership positions have a unique opportunity to bridge potential gaps to shape and develop diversity initiatives and programs that can improve DEI in sport organizations (Cunningham, 2012; Spaaij et al., 2018). However, in college athletic departments, senior leaders often hold onto colorblind objectives with little acknowledgment of the systemic inequities (academic achievement/readiness, bias and discrimination in staffing, leadership representation, etc.) that exist within programs (Bimper & Harrison, 2017). With the lack of buy-in from leaders for diversity initiatives, the culture of a sport organization will stagnate and continue to push important DEI work to the margins (Spaaij et al., 2018).

Racial Injustices and College Athletics

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the college sport landscape. For example, the cancellation of winter and spring championship events dramatically affected individuals within athletic departments, as college athletes saw their seasons/careers come to an end and many employees were furloughed or fired altogether (Nietzel, 2020). Amongst those still working in the sport world, struggles with mental health/well-being, physical activity levels, and work-life balance were among the most common challenges during the pandemic (Evans et al., 2020b). Furthermore, the utilization of virtual settings became the new 'normal' (NCAA, n.d.b.). This was a huge shift for athletic departments, as most relied heavily on face-to-face interactions pre-COVID, leading to a unique struggle to adapt to the virtual meeting spaces for all in the department (McCarthy, 2021; Meyer, 2020; NCAA, n.d.b.). This struggle was especially seen in the additional program offerings (academics, compliance, DEI, etc.) within college athletic departments, as the information overload was a lot for college athletes to absorb (Meyer, 2020; NCAA, n.d.b.).

Experts also have stressed the importance of understanding the lived experiences of sport professionals during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Evans et al., 2020b). Answering this call, a growing body of research has focused on individual experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, including youth athletes (Branquinho et al., 2020), elite athletes (Bowes et al., 2020; Whitcomb-Khan et al., 2021), Olympic and Paralympic athletes (Clemente-Suarez et al., 2020), and NCAA Division I, II, and III college athletes (Bullard, 2020; Graupensperger et al., 2020; Johnson, 2021). The findings from these studies highlight the consistent struggle of athletes when it comes to their mental health during the pandemic, which is unchartered territory for many. For example, Johnson (2021) found that about one in three college athletes experienced heightened stress levels due to worries surrounding their athletic endeavors, academics, and personal health, leading to increased levels of stress and an overall decrease in their mental health. It was also found that COVID-19 more drastically affected Black and Latinx college athletes, who were twice as likely to report someone close to them being hospitalized or dying due to the pandemic (Johnson, 2021).

The implications of COVID-19 on DEI work is also a major concern moving forward, as Eikhof (2020) stated, without policy intervention specifically addressing diversity and inclusion in the workforce, underrepresented groups are more likely to experience discrimination and drop out of the workforce. Within the disability sport community, similar challenges were evident, as recent reintegration plans are limiting opportunities in disability sport since the population is viewed as 'at risk' (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased potential threats toward women sports worldwide. Clarkson et al. (2020) highlighted that women's sports have historically been underfunded and undervalued, leading to them being the first slated for downsizing during a recession.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic interactionism theory was first developed by Blumer (1969) to address how humans make meaning of life, and how this meaning dictates their social worlds around them. As Sage and Eitzen (2016) elaborated, symbolic interactionism theory can be described as “how individuals and groups interpret and understand their social worlds by attaching meaning to symbols” (p. 16). The original inception of symbolic interactionism was centered on three key premises: (a) human behavior is dictated by the meanings they give to certain things, (b) meaning is central to social interactions, and (c) an interpretive process is used to help make sense of the interactions that are experienced (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism theory also sets the groundwork for helping sociologists understand how individuals assign meaning to human behavior, realities, identities, and social interactions (Hewitt, 2000).

Symbolic interactionism theory helps shape and understand experiences within sport (Donnelly, 2020). Weiss (2001) described sport as the most ideal space to further examine the complexities of symbolic interactionism theory as it formulates much of our lived experience and social symbols (i.e., values, norms, and principles). Symbolic interactionism theory also has application in sport due to its ability to predict and dictate central relationships created in the field (Weiss, 2001). These central relationships have the ability to shape one’s individual identity and can be expressed through personal relationships, professional relationships, or interactions with one’s favorite teams, symbols, or players. In investigating these central relationships, there also might be some applicability to help dictate one’s behavioral outcomes in certain situations and also help shape an individual’s lived experiences and their perceived outcomes from these experiences (Blumer, 1969).

Burton (2015) highlighted the unique ability of symbolic interactionism to better understand the experiences and perceptions of women in their career advancement in sport. The findings suggested that women experienced self-limiting behavior in their attainment of leadership positions, as they fell into the ideological gender beliefs of sport leadership being a male domain. Symbolic interactionism, similarly, was used by Sartore and Cunningham (2012) to understand the experiences of female sport leaders. Their findings suggested women hold lower levels of societal power and status, potentially leading to them facing more negative experiences in leadership roles. The aforementioned studies show that symbolic interactionism can be used to understand the experiences of underrepresented groups in sport settings, as it allows one to better situate oneself within a larger system and examine how this system shapes their experience (Weiss, 2001). Given the underrepresentation of racial and gender diversity in college athletic departments, and a lack of DEI professionals in the space in general (Keaton, 2020), the lived experiences of DEI professionals in college athletic departments hold unique value worthy of examination via symbolic interactionism. Such an examination will allow for a better understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals driving DEI action within the NCAA athletic structure.

While the experiences of athletes during COVID-19 lockdowns have been established in the emerging COVID-19 and sport literature, other key stakeholders – such as athletic administrators or coaches – within sport organizations are largely missing, which is surprising as they too might be able to offer unique perspectives on their sport experience during COVID-19. Therefore, the purpose of our study was to investigate how DEI professionals in college athletics, specifically, navigated two crises in 2020 – the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustice – with a particular focus on how those crises impact DEI work in college athletics. While this study is part of a larger project looking at the experiences of DEI professionals in the NCAA, we specifically seek to understand how the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic with renewed calls for systemic racial and social justice influenced professionals and drove DEI action in intercollegiate athletic departments. Based on the relevant literature outlined above and drawing from symbolic interactionism theory to investigate lived experiences, the following two research questions guided this inquiry:

> **RQ1:** How did the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and growing calls for racial/social justice impact DEI work in college athletics?
> **RQ2:** How did DEI professionals navigate the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and growing calls for racial/social justice?

Methods

In order to answer the research questions, an in-depth qualitative interview protocol was adopted to understand the lived experiences of DEI professionals in college athletics during the COVID-19 pandemic. The phenomenological research design was selected as the most appropriate method, based on its ability to encompass a deeper understanding of participants lived experiences while allowing phenomena to emerge organically (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). The participants hold unique roles and experiences as they engage in their respective athletic department's DEI work on a daily basis. Qualitative inquiry was best suited based on its ability to better uncover the participants' experiences and record patterns that emerge from these responses (Patton, 2015). Further, this method allowed the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the DEI work in college athletics, an under-researched area in the sport management field (Glesne, 2018).

Procedure and Participants

The sample for this study was comprised of DEI professionals in the NCAA athletics governance structure. To be included in this study, participants had to fulfill at least one of the following two criteria: (1) Their current job responsibilities included DEI specifically or (2) they led or co-led DEI efforts at their respective institution. To identify potential participants in this study, the researchers collected data from all NCAA member schools' official websites, searching both staff directories and press releases, as well as the NCAA directory. To recruit participants, purposive sampling was utilized in order to target one specific group to better understand the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researchers' also utilized snowball sampling techniques, since at the time of data collection, the amount of DEI professionals in the college athletic structure was relatively small. In total, 51 potential participants were identified as meeting the criteria for inclusion in this study, 23 of which agreed to participate.

After securing IRB approval, data collection was conducted from March to August of 2020. The interview protocol followed a semi-structured approach and was developed utilizing the literature in the field and the authors' individual expertise in DEI. Some examples of questions included in the interview guide were, "How has COVID-19 affected your work on DEI?", "How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your athletic department?", "What current/future challenges do you anticipate for your work due to the pandemic?", and "What challenges have you faced in your DEI work?" The semi-structured interviews were completed either by phone or by video conferencing software (i.e., Zoom or Microsoft Teams). The interviews lasted between 40-70 minutes in length. Upon the completion of their interviews, participants were given pseudonyms to provide confidentiality to their responses. Next, the interview audio files were transcribed and checked by a member of the research team for transcription consistency. Upon completion of their interviews, participants were invited to complete a voluntary demographics form.

While the total sample of this study included interviews with 23 participants, only 19 of the 23 participants filled out the voluntary demographic form. However, it is important to note the remaining participants self-identified demographic information (e.g., their gender identity, race, or sexuality) during the interview. The sample consisted of ten participants identifying as men ($n = 10$), eight identifying as women ($n = 8$), one identifying as non-binary ($n = 1$), and four non-respondents ($n = 4$). The respondents self-identified their sexual orientation as straight/heterosexual ($n = 15$), gay or lesbian ($n = 3$), queer ($n = 1$), and not reported ($n = 4$). Lastly, the participants were also asked to self-identify their race and ethnicity, with the sample including Black or African American ($n = 12$), white, ($n = 6$), and Latino/Latina/Latinx ($n = 1$) participants. Our sample was comprised of individuals from multiple levels within the NCAA structure, including Division I ($n = 12$), Division II ($n = 3$), Division III ($n = 6$), conference representative ($n = 1$), and national governing body ($n = 1$). The job titles of participants varied; however, position titles and demographic information have been removed from our participant table (see *Table 1*) in order to protect the confidentiality of participants (relatively small sample of DEI professionals in college athletics).

Data Analysis

Interview transcriptions were analyzed with the help of the qualitative data analysis software *Dedoose*. The analysis process consisted of both inductive and deductive coding (Miles et al., 2018). For this study, once the data was organized for the coding process, the research team read and re-read the interview transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data. The first coding cycle followed a line-by-line open coding approach. Since the research team had multiple coders, each individual coded a series of transcripts and the team met to compare the initial codes for consistency. A pre-established codebook was not used going into the study; rather the codebook developed organically as each author coded interviews, checked the coding of our colleagues, and then met to discuss the coding processes. The open coding approach was selected as most appropriate because it allowed researchers to identify the sepa-

Table 1
Participants

Name	Title	Division	Name	Title	Division
Kobe	Administration	NGB	Steve	Administration	I
Antonio	Administration	I	Allen	Commissioner	II
Carter	Administration	I	MJ	Head Coach	II
Clara	Administration	I	Red	Administration	II
Clark	Administration	I	Ruth	Administration	II
Frank	Administration	I	Alice	Administration	III
Jabari	Administration	I	Betsy	Administration	III
Paulson	Administration	I	Eliza	Head Coach	III
Pete	Administration	I	Juan	Administration	III
Peyton	Administration	I	Julia	Administration	III
Rachel	Administration	I	Leah	Administration	III
Rico	Administration	I			

rate themes that emerged from the data (i.e., inductive), while allowing symbolic interactionism theory to be infused with those themes afterwards (i.e., deductive). For the second round of coding, the research team utilized axial coding to help organize the initial codes into overarching categories and emerging themes found in the data. [3]

To address the trustworthiness and validity in this study the authors utilized various methods, including transferability and confirmability (Miles et al., 2018; Rolfe, 2006). The first approach, transferability, was achieved by actively seeking diversity in the sample, including multiple divisions and universities across the NCAA. This allowed for the codes and themes that emerged to transcend locations and experiences allowing for the generalizability of the data. The next approach to ensure trustworthiness and validity was confirmability, to achieve this, the authors relied upon the DEI expertise of the researcher group. For example, during the data analysis the authors conducted multiple group checks, and these checks were used to discuss the original codes and allowed for multiple voices to confirm the data.

Findings

Guided by symbolic interactionism theory, the data analysis revealed five higher-order themes across the two research questions guiding this inquiry. In alignment with the first research question, which asked how the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and (re)newed calls for racial and social justice affected DEI work in intercollegiate athletics, three primary themes emerged: *(1) Reorganization of Priorities,* *(2) Reactive versus Proactive Work,* and *(3) Challenges of Virtual DEI Engagement*. To address the second research question, which focused on the experiences of DEI professionals specifically, the additional themes emerged from the data: *(4) Emotional Fatigue* and *(5) 'Validation' of DEI Work*. Each theme is outlined below, with a particular focus on how participants made sense of their experiences advancing DEI work at the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and renewed calls for racial and social justice.

Reorganization of Priorities

The first theme that was identified across the participants' interviews was the dramatic shift in priorities within athletic departments toward the importance of DEI programing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the national discourse on racial and social injustice (*n*=23; 100%). This dramatic shift in priorities occurred in two distinct ways: (1) there was an increase in individual and department engagement and education (*n*=21; 95%), and (2) there was an ease of access to DEI programming through the utilization of online platforms (*n*=15; 65%). The participants first discussed the increase in individual (e.g., athletes, coaches, and staff) engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Pete (DI, administrator) stated: "I've seen people just being more involved and just aware of what's happening." This individual engagement was also mentioned by Peyton (DI, administrator), who explained that she was "having conversations with people I've never talked to in my life. I'm being asked to come in and talk to teams, and coaching groups, and consulting in all these different places and being able to educate." These two examples also demonstrate the importance of the summer of 2020 and the social justice awakening intersecting with the COVID-19 pandemic to increase the individuals within the athletic department's engagement regarding DEI work.

Participants also highlighted the shift in priorities from their athletes, often focusing on how they can utilize their platform to drive social change or provide support during the pandemic. This was echoed by Frank (DI, administration):

> This generation of [college] athletes, and I think, rightfully so, are engaged and are keenly aware of what's going on around them and they're questioning, they're asking. They're seeking better understanding. They're in a place where they want to make a difference and that they understand their platform.

Frank's quote emphasizes an underpinning of the symbolic interactionalism framework, as athletes began to give greater meaning toward their commitment to education and advocacy. Further, participants in this study expressed their need to better connect and understand their college athlete experiences, which would improve their athletic department's DEI work. For example, Antonio (DI, administration) stated:

> However, with the George Floyd incident, this is now all galvanized, and so, we're going to be doing a piece around how students are managing this moment, what their feelings are, and more importantly, how can they seek to, going forward, be actively a part of a racial uplift and civility. The circumstances thrust that into the environment.

While increased opportunities were evident due to the virtual setting during COVID-19, especially as the pandemic coincided with the continued murders of Black and Brown people at the hands of police, the re-prioritization of DEI work – as Antonio (DI, administration) discussed above – was elevated by both external and internal pressures.

Participants also discussed the increase in engagement for DEI programming in their respective athletic departments through the ease of access to learning in a virtual environment. For example, Junior (DIII, administrator) noted the ease of access for bringing in guest speakers and scheduling. He stated:

> The whole logistics of getting someone actually here and taking the whole day to do the workshop … all that kind of stuff, coaches and a lot of athletic departments, that's hard to do and harder to manage. But to schedule a two-hour webinar, now, it just seems like part of your day.

As stated by Junior, the ease of access to programming in the virtual-space has allowed DEI professionals to increase the programming in their athletic departments, based on higher demands from athletes and leadership. A similar sentiment was shared by Leah (DIII, administrator), who was one of the many participants pointing out how the shift to prioritizing learning opportunities in the virtual setting was a positive shift for DEI work. She stated, "as a result of COVID-19, there have been so many more opportunities to engage virtually via Zooms and webinars and my days are filled with a lot of professional development opportunities." This ease of access toward DEI programs and initiatives in the virtual setting coupled with the growing demand for engagement, allowed a potentially easier shift in priorities for individuals, as quality DEI programs were meeting their needs and programs were more readily available and fit within their daily schedules. In contrast, before the COVID-19 pandemic, DEI programs were potentially seen as additional time commitments from those within the athletic department.

Reactive versus Proactive DEI Work

The next theme that was identified in the data was participants highlighting reactive versus proactive DEI work (n=18; 78%). Participants shared a variety of ways in which their DEI work was reactive rather than proactive, which played out through a lack of resources and struggles in responding to current events. This theme was best captured by Frank (DI, administrator), who noted that "we need to be more proactive in ensuring that our [college] athletes are supported not just within our institutions, but within their communities … I think because it's not truly valued until something happens." Furthermore, Indeed, participants frequently pointed to specific moments that made them realize that DEI work in athletics tends to be reactive rather than proactive – such as the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police in June of 2020. Moments like these helped start conversations in their departments regarding the need to be more proactive in DEI efforts.

In another example of reactive rather than proactive DEI work, participants explained how recent events led to their universities and athletic departments releasing statements addressing the inequities that exist for Black individuals (and other minoritized populations) in the U.S. Participants even reported substantial pushback from senior leadership in response to the national unrest. For example, Leah (DIII, administration) shared:

> Well, there's a lot of politics in place and we have to be careful about the way we navigate this, and we need to get permission from this person, and this person, and this person, and to me that wasn't good enough.

Peyton (DI, administration) echoed that sentiment, saying:

> …you fast forward, what, two and a half weeks, three weeks, to when George was murdered, I'm getting a call...for me to start pulling all these things together for our athletic director to write a statement because he wants to take a stance. I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" You literally told me no, and then now because again, everyone else is doing it, you want to do that.

Although the participants discussed the importance of taking proactive steps in their DEI work, it is clear that reactive work occurs across multiple levels of the athletic departments. For example, when athletic departments release statements regarding injustices, but do not properly meet these calls to action with the proper resources (fiscal or staff), it often leads to less impactful DEI engagement.

For example, another subtheme outlining that DEI work was often reactive rather than proactive, was a lack of resources, which was first described in a lack of human resources – that is, staffing – for doing DEI work. As Kobe (NGB, administrator) stated:

> We are historically understaffed as an office. Most of the work is reactionary, unfortunately, meaning instead of staying ahead of it and keep coming up with new efforts and innovative ways to tackle those topics, we are pretty much pulling up files and reacting to current events.

He added that "institutions or leaders are okay with releasing the statement, but not necessarily investing in DEI professionals or allocating funds for that work, or if they do allocate funds, it's usually insufficient." As other participants noted as well, their athletic departments often did not have a sufficient number of staff needed to proactively provide impactful DEI work (n=13; 56%). Indeed, most individuals in this study were the only individuals engaging in DEI work within their athletic departments. This was particularly true for individuals at Division II and Division III institutions, where DEI was often not part of their official job description but rather it was their personal passion allowing them to drive DEI initiatives.

Participants also described the lack of financial resources from their department to support their DEI work, with COVID-19 putting major budget constraints on athletic departments (n=10; 43%). Paulson (DI, administrator) noted that "some institutions really can't offer the resources right now because they're trying to budget in a certain way that they can keep afloat." While DEI work has historically been an underfunded space, the COVID-19 pandemic might be further restricting the financial resources needed to implement impactful DEI work. As Clara (DI, administrator) stated:

> I just don't see athletic departments putting money towards DEI even though you probably should. I don't see them doing it when you can barely

> keep the lights on … I don’t know now, specifically post-COVID-19 it’s just like money’s gone.

Overall, worries about potential budget constraints for DEI work was a concern expressed by the participants.

Challenges of Virtual DEI Engagement

While online platforms helped enhance opportunities for virtual DEI work across athletic departments, participants noted that virtual settings can serve as potential setbacks for doing meaningful work in this space (*n*=14; 60%). For example, participants discussed how the virtual setting might not be the best space for having tough conversations, as captured by Betsy (DIII, administrator) who shared, “it’s pretty hard to do diversity and inclusion without that face-to-face contact. I know we can do presentations online, but I feel like it’s really hard to get people to engage in those materials if they’re not actually there [physically].” This demonstrates the unique predicament DEI professionals faced with engagement in virtual settings.

Participants also discussed the fact that virtual engagement was often less impactful because it was easier for individuals to get distracted or to not participate in the programming. For example, Paulson (DI, administrator) described his experience with virtual modules as “you just click [next] because you got other stuff to do … you don’t need to give it your full attention.” This was further elaborated on by Jabari (DI, administrator) in his evaluation of one of their athletic department’s latest programs offered for students:

> The biggest thing is obviously just not allowing us to be in one room to discuss tough issues. I talked about having 135 folks on Zoom to discuss race and police brutality and systemic racism. Though we felt it was powerful, it would have been so much more powerful to be in one room having these conversations, having people be face-to-face with some of the folks who were emotional in that conversation. That stuff is priceless to be able to experience that in-person. That’s been a huge miss for us right now. All the programming that we’re doing, if we could have people in one room doing it, it’s just more beneficial.

While virtual settings were the safest spaces for engaging in DEI work during the COVID-19 pandemic, data from the interviews suggests it may be leading to less impactful DEI engagement. This ties to the third tenant of the symbolic interactionalism framework, as the interpretive process individuals go through in social situations helps shape meaning and dictate our interactions, which seem to be drastically affected in the virtual online space. This lack of impact was also seen in the work the participants did themselves. For instance, Juan (DIII, administrator) stated aptly that “really just trying to reach the students is challenging.” Similarly, Paulson (DI, administrator) added that students “want to come to your office and talk to you, but they can’t. They want to have meetings in-person, but they can’t. You have to do it on Zoom. Is that really beneficial?” Thus, the participants frequently shared that they looked forward to the days when they can be back in-person to engage their athletes, coaches, and staff in more impactful in-person DEI work.

Emotional Fatigue

The second research question was focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic and the national discourse on racial and social justice affected the DEI professionals themselves rather than the work they engaged in. The first theme that participants frequently spoke to when it came to their own experience was that of *emotional fatigue* (*n*=13; 56%). The participants described that their feelings of emotional fatigue were often rooted in a lack of work-life balance (*n*=9; 39%). This absence of a stricter work-life balance brought participants new challenges, particularly as working from home blurred the lines between work and personal life. For example, Pete (DI, administrator) explained:

> Now work is always work. You can't get away from it. I'm used to separating [work and home] like church and state. I'm used to, when I leave work, I'm leaving work, and [when] I'm at home, I'm at home. Whereas now those lines have been blurred. That's been challenging.

This response highlighted the challenging aspects of separating work and life, leading to feelings of exhaustion among the participants (*n*=11; 47%). Juan (DIII, administrator) also added that "I feel as though I'm working way harder now than I ever had before … way harder."

Participants' emotional exhaustion and fatigue were further exacerbated by the fact that during the summer of 2020, they were asked to engage more with staff, athletes, and other stakeholders due to the renewed, or in some cases 'new', attention paid to systemic racial and social injustice, leading to even heavier workloads. It was not surprising, then, that participants frequently discussed the impact the increased workload had on their mental health and overall well-being. Allen (DII, commissioner), for example, described experiencing "exceptional stress" due to the "endless work that doesn't feel or appear to get us any closer at times to where we want to be." Perhaps most poignantly, Peyton (DI, administrator), echoed this sentiment by sharing that "it has been the longest month I think of my entire life, emotionally and spiritually … I don't even know what day it is." These findings tie well into the symbolic interactionalist construct that human behavior is dictated by the meanings they give, in this case, participants were highly identified with and believed in the impact of their work, therefore, they were willing to work long hours to provide a better experience for all involved in their athletic department.

A final sub-theme that emerged from participants' accounts of emotional fatigue was focused on the steep learning curve when it came to diversity and inclusion work and the feeling of constantly having to learn (*n*=8; 34%). Which is perhaps best captured by the following quote from Clara (DI, administrator):

> I've only been doing it for what? Technically, say, four years. I feel like one year of doing diversity and inclusion work is like dog years. It equates to seven years of experience based off of the number of things that you're exposed to, what you learn, interactions that you have, the things you see. You just get so much more experience in these spaces. Even though I've only been at [my current institution] for three years, it feels like I've been there for 20,000 years.

As Clara's quote shows, the pressure being put on DEI professionals leads to emotional fatigue, especially as they themselves were also trying to process the social justice events they are helping their constituents navigate.

Validation of DEI Work

The last theme that emerged was a new sense of validation participants felt for the DEI work they were doing within their athletic departments (*n*=16; 69%). In fact, many participants shared that the unique context they found themselves in – having to navigate a pandemic and renewed attention to racial and social injustice – allowed them to feel more appreciated for the DEI efforts they were promoting. Symbolic interactionalism can help explain this, as participants often discussed the importance of their work as it now held great meaning across the athletic department due to the increase in engagement, leaving our participants with feelings of validation. For example, interviewees felt that while their work may be overwhelming at times, the rewards at the end made the work worth it and renewed their commitment to DEI efforts in their athletic departments. Leah (DIII, administrator), for example, knew that her work had impact. She said that while she felt exhausted at times, what drove her was "knowing that I can make an impact if I do not let up." Similarly, Peyton (DI, administrator) discussed the recent optimism she has for her work, leading to greater personal impact. She explained: "Like I said, glass half full, very thankful to be in spaces I've never been in, having conversations, feeling like, for once, the role that we have is important."

Participants also discussed how the work they were doing was making an impact on DEI practices, specifically (*n*=11; 47%). For example, Juan (DIII, administrator) noted that his department "approved [mandatory annual] unconscious bias training for all employees … that was something that myself and the director of HR really wanted to happen." Likewise, Frank (Division I, administrator) highlighted that the unique cultural climate of 2020 allowed for individuals to push boundaries within DEI engagement:

> Here's the thing, in the past, it's always been there, but it hasn't been spoken about. Now, it is said, it is being discussed within teams, it's being discussed within large groups. … It's those types of things that are coming to the forefront, which give us an opportunity to be better as people. I think those are the things that the pandemic in some ways has allowed for it because it has slowed us down to really see what happened with George Floyd, to really see what's happening around our nation. I think it's those things now that gives us an opportunity to be better.

In this comment, Frank shows that increased DEI engagement was often linked to self-growth which led to a sense of validation. These types of accomplishments allowed participants to feel validated in their work, while also showing that the athletic departments themselves are potentially committed to furthering the DEI space as well as those that were growing personally and professionally.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how DEI professionals in college athletics navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racial injustice – with a particular focus on how those crises impact DEI work in college athletics. Two research questions were adopted to focus on how the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and growing calls for racial/social justice affected DEI work in college athletics and the experiences of DEI professionals. The qualitative results indicated five major themes, including *Reorganization of Priorities, Reactive v. Proactive Work, Challenges of Virtual DEI Engagement, Emotional Fatigue,* and *Validation of DEI Work.* These results highlight several key contributions to the growing literature aimed at examining DEI professionals driving change in college athletics, with a particular focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and a summer of social justice (re-) awakening.

This study utilized symbolic interactionism theory, which is best defined as a framework to understand individuals lived experiences through their behaviors, realities, identities, and social interactions (Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 2000). For the DEI professionals in this study, the symbolic interactionism theory allowed for unique and individual perspectives (personal and professional) to emerge. While the participants all highlighted similar experiences within their roles, they all gave meaning to their experiences in unique ways. For example, participants in this study expressed how their own personal identities play a major role in their commitment to DEI work; as such, they played a major role in their engagement and lived experiences regarding DEI work. While individuals that attain underrepresented positions in sport (DEI professionals) hold unique lived experiences, they also hold overlapping ideals, experiences, identities, and perceptions (Burton, 2015; Sartore & Cunningham, 2012). Thus, symbolic interactionism theory should be further used to analyze and understand the lived experiences of underrepresented individuals holding sport leadership positions.

In addressing the first research question, our study reinforces existing literature in illustrating how DEI work in intercollegiate athletics tends to be reactive rather than proactive, a finding that became particularly evident to the participants in this study during times of social unrest. This reactive approach to DEI work highlights a lack of commitment from sport organizations toward the work, which is often expressed in DEI action being taken either on accident or in response to external or internal pressures (Cunningham, 2009; Spaaij et al., 2018). While an increase in programming is a potential positive for the future of DEI work in college athletics, a long-term commitment to systematic change may be lacking. Bimper and Harrison (2017) found that university responses to social injustices are rather broad and lack consistent commitment to change systems rooted in systemic racism, a finding that is reinforced by the experiences of the DEI professionals in this study. This study underlines the importance of utilizing the increased awareness around DEI work in sport organizations in the context of the 2020 social justice (re-)awakening to drive long-standing commitments to furthering the culture of DEI in the athletics – something that is often lacking in reactive DEI work (Hylton, 2020).

DEI professionals also highlighted the differentiating levels of support needed to help meet the growing demand for DEI work within their athletic departments; in fact, the need for support became more evident in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased calls for meaningful social justice action. Participants expressed the need to receive support in the form of buy-in from leadership, additional staff, and financial resources (e.g., funding). This is in line with previous findings, as the support of DEI work from key leadership positions was vital in sport organizations adopting a strong DEI culture (Cunningham, 2008; 2012; Spaaij et al., 2018). Cunningham (2008), for example, highlighted the importance of leadership committing to change before any DEI work can affect the structural culture within an athletic department. Additionally, this study highlighted the unique application of DEI in college athletics post COVID-19 and summer of 2020, as outside pressures from fans, alumni, and donors have pushed athletic departments to further negotiate and reimagine their commitment to a culture of DEI. For the first time, a lack of commitment to DEI work, may actually impact external perceptions of an athletic department.

The findings from this study highlight that leadership buy-in is vital to successful DEI work, especially during the unique challenges that emerged from the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic and the summer of 2020's social justice awakening (Cunningham, 2008; Fink et al., 2003; Griffin et al., 2019). It is important to note here that while the participants expressed receiving some pushback, there was also a sentiment of optimism over leaders' willingness to engage and commit to a culture of DEI through programming, initiatives, and funding, which may lead to substantial progress for DEI work in college sport. While this expression of support from leadership might be tied to the summer of 2020's events and not long-term DEI culture shifts, it is a promising finding. This finding also directly aligns with the framework of symbolic interactionalism theory, which states, behaviors are dictated by individuals' perceptions. Thus, those in higher level leadership positions heightened engagement with DEI conversations may suggest perceptions are shifting, a positive finding for the future of DEI programming in college athletics. In regard to providing proper resources, the findings suggest the recent increase in demand for DEI programming will have to be sustained despite the financial hardships athletic departments face due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings from this study also shed light on DEI engagement in a virtual setting. While the ability to host DEI programs was easier with virtual platforms such as Zoom, DEI professionals sometimes struggled to facilitate meaningful engagement in those spaces. One concern with virtual meetings was the ability to handle tough conversations regarding DEI with empathy and compassion. As Asare (2020) argues, the online space for DEI work is a feasible outlet for meaningful work, but it needs to be reimagined into a space where engagement is simple, creative, and effective. While the virtual setting allowed for people to be together safely, the perception of community and belonging may be challenged in the virtual setting with potentially less engagement for DEI work. As such, substantial increases in demand for DEI programming, the necessity to move towards virtual meeting spaces, and a lack of funding/resources potentially impeded DEI professionals conducting meaningful and impactful work during the summer of 2020.

In alignment with the second research question, which focused on experiences of DEI professionals in college athletics, this study found navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and new calls for racial justice led to a variety of emotions. With the events leading to the feelings of heightened levels of stress, strains on their mental health, and a sense of validation for the work they engaged in. The lack of work-life balance combined with the intersection of COVID-19 and the racially charged events created high-stress environments for these DEI professionals to navigate. In the context of symbolic interactionalism theory, participants may perceive themselves as fighting a never-ending work-life balance battle, potentially leading to negative social interactions and burnout from DEI positions. These results align with recent COVID-19 pandemic sport studies, with findings indicating extreme levels of stress leading to poor mental health (Bullard, 2020; Graupensperger et al., 2020; Johnson, 2021). In similar context, Kilo and Hassmén (2016) found burnout amongst sport coaches was associated with organizational factors, in this sense, it would suggest athletic departments with a focus on leadership buy-in and organizational culture focused on DEI could lessen the feelings of emotional fatigue and stress amongst their DEI professionals.

Another potential reason for the mental health concerns expressed by participants could be tied to their own personal identities. For example, over half of the participants in this study self-identified as either Black/African American or Latino which meant these individuals were attempting to *personally* understand, cope, and heal from the traumatic events in the summer of 2020, while *professionally* occupying their DEI work roles. Ward and Akhtar (2020) observed that DEI professionals in Fortune 500 companies experienced similar struggles. While the DEI professionals in this study experienced heightened stressors, they also indicated their work was gaining power and legitimacy. This finding suggests potential – and promising – differences from past results, which found that DEI professionals held minimal power on college campuses (Griffin et al., 2019). Indeed, the newfound sense of validation for DEI work can serve as a powerful platform to create meaningful change in institutions across the NCAA.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into a unique time in college sport history, there are limitations to these findings. First, this study was conducted during 2020, which saw college sport grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic and growing calls for racial equality and social justice across the nation. As such, this spotlight into the work of DEI professionals captures a unique moment in time and may provide limited insights into DEI practices pre-COVID. Second, the sample included individuals who either had DEI responsibilities as part of their job or drove DEI work via the (unrelated) positions they held. With the NCAA passing legislation for each member institution to appoint an Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Designee (ADID), further research is needed to explore the experiences of ADIDs within college athletics specifically. Due to the nature of qualitative research, in-person interviews with participants would have been preferred, however, the virtual setting was selected as the safest option for participants and researchers. Finally, an investigation of key stakeholder perceptions is warranted, as they are vital in the development of an athletics culture that centers DEI. Future research must investigate current DEI programming to identify potential high-impact practices for and barriers to transformational change – an inquiry we have established in previous work (Wright-Mair et al., 2021; Kluch et al., 2022).

Implications

This study has important implications for DEI practitioners in NCAA athletics. For practitioners, this study sheds light on the unique application of DEI work during times of global crisis – in this case, a health crisis. To promote meaningful and impactful DEI work in the college athletic setting, DEI professionals need to be supported by their leaders and be provided with the structural support (e.g., finances or resources) to meet increased demands for DEI work. Future research may also build from this study to investigate the education and training of DEI professionals, potentially assisting in better understanding the impact of DEI practices in athletic departments. In addition, athletic departments should increase funding for DEI work, as expanding this work has shown to be impactful for an organization's diversity culture, and currently, these units are either not being funded at all or receiving very little support financially. One way to do this with tight athletic budgets (post-COVID-19), would be for athletic departments and DEI professionals to integrate their own work with campus-wide initiatives/departments, which may help improve the resources and reach of their programming.

Next, this study has multiple theoretical implications for future research and inquiry. For example, this study used symbolic interactionist theory to further understand the lived experiences of DEI professionals in the college athletic setting, but this study suggests inquiry into external (e.g., fans, alumni, and donors) and internal (e.g., senior leadership) group perceptions of DEI work utilizing symbolic interactionist theory may be warranted. Further, the participants in this study described powerful emotions attached to their DEI work. This is particularly important given that many DEI professionals – including the ones in this study – hold minoritized identities themselves and are thus more likely to experience heightened stress and mental health conditions. The use of symbolic interactionalism theory in the context of this study allowed for the individual voices of varying minoritized identities to be examined independently, while also highlighting similarities amongst their experiences. This suggests the theory should continue to be utilized in investigations examining experiences amongst under-represented groups in sport, as sport experiences dictate individuals' values, norms and principles (Weiss, 2001).

Conclusion

Overall, this study sought to understand the unique experiences of DEI professionals in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and renewed calls for racial and social justice across the United States. As college sport continues to grapple with the impact of the pandemic, sport management practitioners and researchers alike must center DEI in their strategic plans as they navigate unchartered territory in the years to come. The participants in this study deserve compliments for their work in advancing DEI in intercollegiate athletics, and this current moment can serve as a turning point for driving strategic DEI work in and through U.S. sport. As college sport returns to the ‘new normal,’ there is a need to meet our participants’ call to be more proactive in DEI work to meet the needs of minoritized members of the NCAA sporting community.

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Notes

1. We use the term racially minoritized throughout to describe racially and ethnically diverse populations. This term acknowledges and indicates the power of structural racism as a tool that seeks to divide and classify individuals with limited power based on social constructions of race. We do not use the term "minorities" as we recognize it is not an objective indication of quantity, but rather a status given to people who have limited power in society, and is entirely subjective based on those who hold power (Benitez, 2010; Stewart, 2013).

2. In the context of this study, the term surface-level diversity focuses on verbiage, statements, and social categories, while deep-level diversity includes attitudes, opinions, values, and action (Phillips & Loyd, 2006).

3. When it comes to the positionality of the authors, the research team represents a diverse set of identities and perspectives. The first author identifies as a white, able-bodied, and straight cisgender man. As a doctoral student in sports administration, his research focuses on DEI initiatives within interscholastic and collegiate sport structures, with a focus on women sport leadership. The second author is a faculty member in sport administration and identifies as a white, able-bodied, straight man. He has a research agenda focused on diversity and inclusion in sports as well as college athlete's well-being. The third author identifies as a white, able-bodied, and queer cisgender man. He is a faculty member with a research agenda focused on DEI in sport, athlete activism, and inclusive leadership, and has a sport-specific background in DEI consulting as well as industry experience working for sport organization's offices focused on DEI. Finally, the fourth author identifies as a Black, multi-racial, first-generation, immigrant, woman faculty member in higher education. Her research agenda is focused on creating equitable institutional environments for racially minoritized populations.

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An Investigation of the Relationship Between Minimum Gift Requirement and Number of Fundraising Staff on University Athletics Donors

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Many prior studies examining fundraising within university athletics programs have explored the effect of donor motivations and athletic success on giving, but such factors are beyond the control of department fundraisers. The current study sought to examine the effect of two key mutable factors for athletic departments, namely the minimum gift amount required to become an official donor and the total number of fundraising personnel. Specifically, this research investigated the relationship between several key variables, including minimum gift amount and number of fundraising employees, plus several common immutable factors, on the total number of donors at the lowest reward tier within NCAA Division I athletics departments. The research team used hierarchical regression to develop four models to examine these relationships. Independent variables utilized included university conference affiliation, institutional factors, athletic success factors, and the variables of interest, which were minimum gift amount required to join the donor program and the total number of fundraising staff. The dependent variable examined was total number of donors at the lower reward tier. The final model explained 73.1% of the variance in number of donors at the lowest reward tier. The variables of interest (minimum gift requirement and total number of staff) explained 20.8% of the variance when controlling for key factors such as athletic success and conference affiliation.

Keywords: fundraising, development, minimum gift, personnel

Introduction

Many sport organizations solicit donations as part of their funding or revenue structure. National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Division I athletic departments in the U.S. are a primary example as they rely on financial gifts from individuals for a large percentage of their operating budgets. In a recent NCAA report, donations accounted for 17% of all athletics department revenues among NCAA Division I universities, the third highest revenue source (second highest "generated

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revenue" source) behind institutional support (28%) and media rights (22%) and significantly ahead of revenue streams such as ticket sales and licensing (NCAA, 2020). In the same report, among Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) autonomy schools, donations account for 23% of all revenues, second only behind media rights (35%). While university athletics departments rely heavily on donor funding to sustain their operations, nearly all academic investigations related to fundraising have focused on donor motivations and behavior (Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014; Mahoney et al., 2003; Staurowsky et al., 1996; Tsiotsou, 1998; Verner et al., 1998) or the impact of athletic success on giving patterns (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007; Reynolds et al., 2017; Rhoads & Gerking, 2000; Stinson & Howard, 2004; 2008; 2010). Even though the relationship between donor motivation and giving or the relationship between athletics success and giving are important, athletics department fundraisers can do little to affect those key factors (Murphy, 2018). Instead, the current paper argues college athletics researchers should also investigate factors athletics department personnel can influence or control. Factors such as the benefits donors receive for giving, the manner in which development personnel prospect for donors, the number of interactions fundraisers have with donors, the minimum giving amounts required to become a donor, the number (and experience level) of fundraisers employed, and the leadership style of development directors are all examples of factors which may be tied to donor giving levels, but have received minimal attention in the literature (Murphy, 2018; Wanless et al., 2019; Wells et al., 2005).

An examination of the relationship between these facets of fundraising and their effect on overall giving would be quite valuable to development staff. For example, if a relationship exists between the minimum donation required and the likelihood of a donor giving, development staff could strategically set a minimum gift amount to encourage greater giving or entice more individuals to donate. Sport organizations conduct similar analyses examining ticket sales, with many teams now monitoring and adjusting ticket pricing (particularly on the secondary market) to maximize both revenue and attendance (Drayer et al., 2012; Shapiro & Drayer, 2014). Yet such "pricing" studies within college athletics fundraising are non-existent. Ironically, donor solicitation within college athletics is designed to produce greater giving, primarily through the use of tiered reward giving (Lipsey et al., 2021), but scant evidence exists indicating to what degree tiered rewards and minimum gift requirement levels actually effect donor behavior. Prior research suggests small and medium sized non-profit organizations are typically slower to embrace analytical and data-driven donation-generating strategies (Nageswarakurukkal et al., 2021). Thus, the primary purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between the established minimum gift requirements of the lowest level reward tier (the entry-level point for most donors), and total number of donors at that tier, utilizing a dataset comprised of NCAA Division I athletics development programs.

Similarly, prior research in the area of sport ticket sales has suggested the number of salespeople employed has a positive relationship with ticket revenue generated (Popp et al., 2020; Difebo, 2008). While the notion of more people selling a product would result in a greater number of sales seems logical, prior studies examining donations to universities have found conflicting results. Curry et al. (2012), for example, found the size of development staff did not predict fundraising performance at Christian-based universities. And in their investigation of college athletics donors using data from 2000, Wells et al. (2005) indicated the number of athletic development staff was not a positive predictor of total donation amount collected by the school's athletics department, although the length of time the department had employed full-time fundraisers was. Wanless et al., (2019), however, found college athletics donors who were contacted more frequently by fundraising personnel were less likely to end their giving behavior, which would suggest a greater number of development staff should result in lower donor churn. And in other non-profit settings, having a larger and better resourced or trained development staff resulted in a greater percentage of revenue coming from donors (Betzler & Gmur, 2016; Zappala & Lyons, 2006). Thus, a secondary purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between the total number of development staff and number of donors at the lowest giving tier among college athletics development programs.

Literature Review

Intercollegiate Athletics Fundraising

Researchers have studied fundraising within U.S. collegiate athletics departments for decades (Park et al., 2016). Early work in this field focused exclusively on donor motivations (Gladden et al., 2005; Mahoney et al., 2003; Staurowsky et al., 1996; Tsiotsou, 1998; Verner et al., 1998) and produced conflicting results, some of which suggested donors primarily give for transactional reasons, while others suggested altruism as the primary motive. For example, both Mahoney et al. (2003) and Wells et al. (2005) found access to ticket-related benefits was the top motivation among respondents, but Tsiotsou (2007) suggested intangible factors such as sense of belonging, trust in leadership, and vision of the university as top motivations. A handful of researchers have also investigated the relationship between donor characteristics and giving behavior, including explorations of gender (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011); geographic distance between the donor and the institution (Jensen et al., 2020), and the age at which donors first identify with the sport program (Popp, et al. 2016).

A second line of research in this space examines the impact of athletic success on giving levels (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007; Reynolds et al., 2017; Rhoads & Gerking, 2000; Stinson & Howard, 2004; 2008; 2010). Results of these studies have been somewhat mixed, but the majority suggest football and men's basketball success do produce higher levels of giving. For example, Stinson & Howard (2008) found at NCAA I-AA institutions, an appearance by the men's basketball team in the national tournament equated to an increase of over $400 per donation (a nearly 50% jump) to the athletics department in the year following the appearance. A few of these studies have also explored additional environmental variables in their predictive modeling. For example, in his study of 35 NCAA Division I programs, McEvoy (2005) found football and men's basketball home attendance, university athletic conference affiliation, and type of institution (public or private) all were statistically significant predictors of fundraising contributions, in addition to football winning percentage. Similarly, Wells et al. (2005) developed a model which explained more than 75% of the variance in total donations across 80 NCAA Division I institutions. In this study, the number of years the director of development had served in that capacity, the length of time a department employed full-time development personnel, the number of alumni from the university, and the number of people on the prospective donor list were all statistically significant predictors, in addition to total number of football season tickets sold. Of note, the number of development personnel employed and football team winning percentage were not statistically significant predictors (Wells et al., 2005). Using more recent fundraising data, Brannigan and Morse (2020) found conference affiliation, regional population, and school enrollment were all significant predictors of total athletic donations, along with measures of athletic success such as football winning percentage and game attendance.

Fundraising Structures and Institutional Isomorphism

While studies examining donors' behaviors and characteristics can help in the development of predictive models, they have limited utility for fundraising personnel given many factors are outside the athletics department's control. For example, few athletics administrators can affect on-field success, donor characteristics, or market variables. This leads to a question of what factors might significantly impact donor giving and *are* under the development team's control. One such factor is the design and structure of the donor program, which typically consists of a tiered giving format, in which donors receive greater benefits as they contribute greater amounts. Until recently, little research has investigated development program structure (Lipsey et al., 2021; Sattler et al., 2019), including the number of reward tiers, the minimum gift amount required to reach each level, and the associated benefits of each tier, within college athletics departments.

Lipsey et al. (2021) opine when university athletics fundraisers establish pricing tiers for their fundraising programs, they likely behave according to the organizational theory of mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional isomorphism helps explain why organizations with a variety of backgrounds become more similar to one another when they are confronted by the same environmental factors. Mimetic factors are one of three common constraints leading to isomorphism among universities--specifically college athletics departments--along with coercive and normative forces (Ward, 2015). Mimetic isomorphism postulates when organizations are unsure of the path in which to achieve organizational objectives, the best alternative is to imitate similar others, even though no evidence suggests such actions will lead to greater organizational efficiencies. Prior research has substantiated the pervasiveness of mimetic isomorphism within college athletics through the assessment of a variety of factors such as the value of nonrevenue Olympic sports sponsorship (Cooper & Weight, 2011), the process for hiring athletics directors (Smith & Washington, 2014) and the creation of departmental mission statements (Ward, 2015). In the current context, given that athletics fundraisers have not empirically analyzed the effects of price setting for reward tiers in order to create the most effective structure, it is quite possible development structures such as reward tier menus are based primarily on environmental factors and similar "others" rather than achieving organizational goals or efficiencies (Lipsey et al. 2021).

The primary motive for businesses or organizations to employ tiered reward levels is to incentivize consumers or members to donate or purchase more, in order to receive the benefits provided in higher tiered reward levels (Tanford, 2013). For example, in a college athletics context, Malone (2011) suggested donors to an NCAA Division I athletics department were more likely to give beyond their minimum gift when the additional donation resulted in improved seat acquisition for football games. In addition to generating more revenue, tiered reward levels can lead to improved brand commitment among members because it establishes a sense of identity within each tiered reward level (McCall & Voorhees, 2010). In fact, it is important for fundraising managers to differentiate interactions with low-level and high-level donors, given the two groups behave differently. For example, donors who give at lower levels tend to be more incentivized by tangible benefits (Park et al., 2016) and are more sensitive to price (Wei Shi, 2018). Therefore, it is critical for athletics development teams to establish the correct financial entry point and benefits associated with each tier. As Boenigk and Scherhag (2014) note in their study of donors to non-profit organizations, development officers:

> …should carefully determine which benefits to offer to the different donation levels to ensure strong donor satisfaction. Fundraising managers might consider expectations of the different donation levels as well as their varying motives, to determine which offers will be perceived as beneficial." (p. 326).

Meanwhile, it appears high end donors are motivated by socialization benefits more than tangible perks (Park et al., 2016). When upper-level donors are given greater priority through servicing and marketing efforts, revenue per donor increases at a greater rate (Scherhag & Boenigk, 2013).

While athletics departments employ a variety of benefits and set minimum donation amounts for various tiers within their giving menu to incentivize greater giving (Malone, 2011), fundraisers must first encourage donors to give an initial gift to enter the donor funnel. Yet scant research has examined the impact of adjusting reward levels and tier pricing on donor behavior (Simons et al., 2017), particularly at donors' point of entry. McCardle et al. (2009) examined gift amounts of donors to a private high school and found donors typically give the minimum, or just over the minimum, required to join a tier level; almost no donation in the dataset was close to, but below, the maximum of a reward tier. Their findings suggest minimum gift requirement and reward tier structure is highly influential on gift amount, echoing the results of Harbaugh (1998) and his work examining law school donors. Studies investigating the impact of tier level pricing have typically focused on a single case study (Malone, 2011; McCardle, 2009), in large part because of the high variability among number of tiers and minimum donation requirements within those tiers, when examining multiple institutions (Lipsey et al., 2021). A good starting point for a macro-level examination of donor behavior among multiple institutions, such as the current study, would be to solely examine the effect of minimum gift requirement at the base reward tier. This is the most common entry point for donors and all development programs have a lowest-level tier.

Development Staffing

While prior research examining college athletics fundraising has established the influence of athletic success and number of alumni or enrollment on total donations (Brannigan & Morse, 2020; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007; Wells et al., 2005), the number of development staff and the amount of effort that staff dedicates to outreach is likely to also impact gift levels. As Hiles (2010) notes, to measure the effectiveness of a development staff, the number of calls, contacts, and proposals presented must be measured. Within university development, spending on alumni relations has a significant, positive relationship on the amount of alumni giving (Harrison et al., 1995). Specifically within college athletics fundraising, touchpoints with athletics donors are influential; when number of outreach contacts were utilized as an independent variable in a study examining the length of time donors continued to give, the number was found to be statistically significant (Wanless et al., 2019). Anecdotal evidence suggests simply hiring more staff members will result in greater donations procured (DiFebo, 2008). This notion was confirmed to some degree in a study by Popp et al. (2020), which found when hiring more ticket salespeople, college athletics departments generated more donations as donations are often required for season ticket purchases. Surprisingly, however, Curry et al. (2012) found the size of the development staff did not predict fundraising performance at Christian universities. In their exploration of factors affecting donations to college athletics departments, Wells et al. (2005) found the number of years the development team had full-time staff and the number of years of experience possessed by the development director both significantly predicted total donations, however the number of development staff members did not. Wells et al, however, collected data from 2000; since that time, the number of development personnel employed by athletics departments has grown significantly. As evidence, membership in the National Association of Athletic Development Directors has more than tripled since 2003 (Murphy, 2018). With more athletics departments now hiring a significantly greater number of development personnel, it is possible the relationship between number of fundraisers and amount raised has shifted since the Wells et al. study. In other studies examining the effect of fundraising staffing on total donations in various non-profit settings, organizations which better resource and train development personal see significantly better results (Betzler & Gmur, 2016; Zappala & Lyons, 2006).

Summary

In summary, prior studies examining college athletics fundraising have frequently explored (a) donor motives, (b) donor characteristics, and (c) the impact of athletic success and environmental factors on donation volume. Reward tier structure--and the minimum gift required within that structure--as well as the size of the development staff are factors controlled by athletics administrators which could impact giving. Such factors are also accessible to researchers as reward tiers and development staff listings are frequently available on athletics departments' websites. Additional mutable factors which are likely to impact fundraising effectiveness (such as number of donor touchpoints or donor prospecting strategies) are more difficult to procure and may not be recorded in a similar fashion from one institution to another. Thus, the current study examines two factors uniformly displayed by nearly all observations in the population and poses the following research questions:

> **RQ1:** What is the relationship between the established minimum gift requirement for the lowest reward tier and number of donors at that reward tier among NCAA Division I athletics programs?
>
> **RQ2:** What is the relationship between the total number of development staff and number of donors at the lowest reward tier among NCAA Division I athletics programs?

Methodology

To answer the research questions, the research team first made a decision to only use the minimum donation required to qualify for the lowest reward tier at NCAA Division I fundraising programs. The schools in the population, all NCAA Division I institutions ($n = 357$), contained various numbers of reward tiers and minimum gift requirements for each of those tiers. A request was sent to the Assistant Director of Annual Giving (or similar position) to all schools in the population requesting two key pieces of data: (a) the total number of donors at the lowest reward tier and (b) the total number of donors to the athletics program, for a single academic year, pre-Covid (2018-19). Schools which did not respond to this initial request were sent a second request. If the original contact did not respond to two requests, a third and final request was sent to another member of the development staff.

To conduct the analysis, the research team utilized hierarchical regression analysis to develop a model exploring the relationship between several independent variables and the dependent variable of total number of donors at the lowest reward tier. Based on prior literature, the research team categorized independent variables into four groups. The first group represented both the level of football played (FBS or FCS), as well as conference affiliation, in terms of whether the institution was a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, the Pac-12 Conference, or the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Schools not playing football were utilized as the reference variable. Conference affiliation was previously found to be a statistically significant predictor of annual donations among NCAA Division I athletics departments (Brannigan & Morse, 2020; McEvoy, 2005), and thus is important to include as a control variable. The second group of variables included institution-related measures which are likely to influence alumni giving and therefore need to be controlled for, including school enrollment, tuition, endowment, and public or private status of the university (Brannigan & Morse, 2020; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007). The third group of variables included two measures of athletic success, Director's Cup ranking (an annual ranking of all sports performance by an institution) and all-time men's basketball winning percentage. Various measures of performance in football, such as all-time wins, all-time winning percentage, and bowl appearances were compiled, with each highly correlated with representation in each of the aforementioned Power Five athletic conferences and therefore they were left out of the model. The final group included the key variables of interest for the study: minimum gift amount required to join the lowest reward tier, maximum gift amount of the lowest reward tier, and number of full-time development staff. The dependent variable in the model was the total number of donors at the lowest reward tier for each school's development program, in order to determine the correlation between each of the key independent variables of development staff size and minimum and maximum reward tiers and the total number of donors.

Results

A total of 153 schools responded to the request for data (some declining participation) and 129 schools supplied the requested data, a response rate of 36.1%. Additional data regarding these schools, including number of fundraising personnel, institutional variables, and athletic success variables, were then collected from secondary sources. Among the 32 NCAA Division I conferences, 29 were represented in the sample. Responses included 39 schools classified as Power 5 institutions, 18 which did not sponsor football, and 27 that were private institutions. The average enrollment of the universities in the sample was 21,721 with a minimum of 1,172 and a maximum of 85,586. The mean annual out-of-state tuition was $33,498, with a minimum of $8,535 and maximum $64,380. The average endowment was $1.3 billion, with a minimum of $9.0 million and a maximum $25.6 billion. The median endowment was $362.6 million. Descriptive characteristics of the donor programs are depicted in Table 1. A correlation matrix for all of the continuous variables in the dataset was also generated and can be found in Table 2.

Table 1
Donor Program Characteristics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Donors at the Lowest Tier	1124	2	9000
Total Donors	4274	110	21198
Percent of Total Donors at Lowest Tier	26.6%	4.1%	92.2%
Minimum Gift Requirement	$94.19	$1	$1,500
Maximum Gift at the Lowest Tier	$328.26	$49	$3,499
Number of Tiers	8.2	2	16
Number of Development Staff	8.0	1	44

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Continuous Variables

	M	*SD*	DON	EMT	TUI	END	DIR	PCT	DEV	MIN
Donors	1134.7	1595.0								
Enrollment	22299.4	14618.6	.535*							
Tuition	33320.7	30002.9	.029	-.051						
Endowment	1323.8	3084.3	.274*	.178	.163					
DirectorsCup	141.3	93.6	-.523*	-.523*	.018	-.357*				
MBBWPCT	.539	.082	.275*	.258	.013	.234*	-.441*			
DevStaff	8.1	8.3	.635*	.532*	-.003	.294*	-.647*	.398*		
TierMin	82.7	77.3	-.036	-.150	.025	.001	.154	-.128	-.084	
TierMax	329.9	356.2	.457*	.154	-.010	.071	-.174*	.084	.042	.401*

* $p < .01$

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Results Predicting Donors at Lowest Giving Level

Predictor Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Conference Affiliation				
ACC	.237 (3.152)**	.203 (2.673)**	.186 (2.099)*	-.046 (-.563)
Big Ten	.478 (6.507)**	.392 (5.103)**	.379 (4.504)**	.316 (4.764)**
Big 12	.100 (1.391)	.089 (1.252)	.075 (.951)	-.003 (-.056)
PAC-12	1.94 (2.736)**	.129 (1.791)	.118 (1.503)	.022 (.366)
SEC	.446 (6.174)**	.381 (5.20)**	.367 (4.480)**	.043 (.576)
Institution-Related				
Public v. Private		.005 (.057)	.008 (.104)	.009 (.142)
Enrollment		.236 (2.549)*	.104 (2.437)*	.055 (.725)
Out-of-state Tuition		.012 (.167)	.013 (.189)	.019 (.361)
Endowment		.121 (1.606)	.113 (1.433)	.096 (1.574)
Measures of Athletic Performance				
Director's Cup Ranking			-.046 (-.411)	.049 (.564)
All-time MBB Win Percentage			.001 (.010)	-.025 (-.396)
Development-Controlled Variables				
Number of Full-time Development Staff				.515 (5.723)**
Min. Gift Requirement for Lowest Tier				-.191 (-3.267)**
Max. Gift for the Lowest Tier				.500 (8.20)**
F-statistics	15.205**	11.235**	9.366**	18.329**
R^2	0.476	0.522	0.523	0.731
Adj R^2	0.445	0.476	0.467	0.691
ΔR^2	0.476	0.046	0.001	0.208

To answer the research questions, the research team conducted a hierarchical regression analysis, the results of which are shown in the table below. To begin, the group of binary variables representing both the level of football played and conference affiliation were entered into the model, which ensures they are controlled for in each of the subsequent models. This group of variables explained a statistically significant amount of the variance in the number of donors, $F(7, 117) = 15.205$, $p < .001$. Specifically, this group of variables explained 47.6% ($R^2 = .476$) of the variance in donors. The variables reflecting membership in the ACC ($t = 3.152$, $p = .002$), Big Ten ($t = 6.507$, $p < .001$), Pac-12 ($t = 2.736$, $p = .007$), and SEC ($t = 6.174$, $p < .001$) were all significant, suggesting that institutions in these major athletic conferences are significantly different in terms of the number of donors than institutions from non-Power 5 conferences. The variable representing institutions in the Big 12 was nonsignificant ($t = 1.391$, $p = .167$). The variables reflecting playing football in either the FBS or FCS were nonsignificant as well.

In Model 2, the group of variables reflecting institutional factors such as enrollment, tuition, endowment, and whether the institution was public were then entered into the model. This group of variables explained an additional 4.6% ($R^2 = .046$) of the variance in the number of donors, also deemed to be statistically significant, $F(4, 113) = 2.721$, $p = .033$. In this group of variables, only the variable indicating the enrollment of the institution was significant ($t = 2.549$, $p = .012$). The third set of variables were entered in Model 3, representing the athletic department's overall performance and historical performance in men's basketball. As indicated in Table 3, neither variable was significantly correlated with the number of donors and this group of variables did not explain a significant amount of incremental variance, $F(2, 111) = .086$, $p = .918$.

Finally, Model 4 controls for the level of football played and conference affiliation, various institutional factors, and athletic performance, and adds both the minimum and maximum gift required to join the lowest reward tier and the total number of development staff employed. The group of variables reflecting the reward tiers and the size of the development staff explained an additional 20.8% of variance in the number of donors ($R^2 = .208$), deemed to be a statistically significant amount of incremental variance, $F(3, 108) = 27.787$, $p < .001$. In total, the final model (Model 4) explained 73.1% ($R^2 = .731$) of the variance in the number of donors at each institution. The variable representing the number of development staff was statistically significant ($t = 5.723$, $p < .001$), with the unstandardized coefficient (ß= 98.503) indicating that each additional staff member added would result in an increase of more than 98 donors. The variable reflecting the size of the maximum donor tier was also significant and positive ($t = 8.200$, $p < .001$), with the unstandardized coefficient (ß = 2.238) indicating that a $1 increase in the maximum donor tier would result in an increase of 2.2 donors. Finally, the minimum donor tier was also significant, but negative ($t = -3.267$, $p = .001$). The unstandardized coefficient for the minimum tier (ß = -3.944) suggests that a $1 increase in the minimum amount required to achieve the minimum tier would result in a decrease of nearly four donors.

Discussion

The primary purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between factors athletics departments control—minimum donation required and personnel--and the total number of donors at the lowest donor reward tier (entry-level point) for NCAA Division I college athletics departments. Specifically, the factors examined included the minimum gift required to join the donor program and the number of development staff employed by the department. In examining current development practices, it appears schools indeed mimic each other rather than structuring giving tiers based on quantitative analysis, providing further evidence of memetic isomorphism as suggested by Lipsey et al. (2021). As an example, despite universities in the sample spanning a wide range of athletic success, conference affiliation, or enrollment, 63.6% of the sample established their minimum gift requirement amount at either $50 or $100. Yet, while minimum gift requirement was fairly homogenous, the number of donors at the lowest giving tier varied significantly, suggesting several variables likely affect donors' decisions to give. Prior research has suggested factors such as athletic success, conference affiliation, and university enrollment all significantly predict donor volume (Brannigan & Morse, 2020; McEvoy, 2005; Wells et al., 2005). The current study confirmed several of these variables did significantly predict total number of donors at the lowest giving tier, with the peculiar exception of measures of overall athletics success. When Directors Cup points and all-time men's basketball winning percentage were added to the model, they produced virtually no change in the predicted amount of variability among total number of donors.

The unique and most important contribution of the current study is the establishment of minimum gift requirement and staff size as influential factors in predicting number of donors at the lowest reward tier, after controlling for common institutional variables. In this analysis, those two variables accounted for more than 20% of the variance in the total number of donors at the lowest giving tier. Such a finding has strong managerial implications, as it suggests manipulating the minimum giving level and hiring more staff--two factors athletics departments have the ability to alter--drives donor growth. Tiered reward systems are designed to attract members at a low entry point, then incentivize them to gradually move to higher levels (McCall & Voorhees, 2010). Because the lowest giving tier is often the entry point for donors, and because it is often the tier containing the largest percentage of all donors, it is incumbent upon development administrators to maximize the utility of this lowest tier to produce the greatest number of donors for an athletics department. Growing this base will likely result in producing more donors who give at a higher level as times goes on (Malone, 2011).

This study's analysis found the unstandardized coefficient for minimum gift requirement at the lowest tier was -3.94, demonstrating a negative, or inverse relationship between minimum gift amount and number of donors. From a practical standpoint, for every dollar the athletics fundraising organization increases their minimum gift amount, they will lose approximately four donors. The model thus becomes valuable in helping establish minimum gift requirements for the entry-level reward tier. A primary goal of the development team is to generate significant revenue. Raising the minimum giving level at the lowest tier will likely have the effect of reducing the number of donors, while reducing the minimum gift required is likely to increase the number of donors. The effect on revenue will depend on the number of donors and the amount the gift requirement changes. Below we look at two examples from the dataset to illustrate the value of our model.

In the first example, we utilize a large Power 5 institution from the dataset, which currently has 3,193 donors at their lowest giving tier, with a minimum gift requirement of $100. If it is assumed donors are contributing around the minimum level, as found by McCardle et al. (2009), this department hypothetically generates $320,000 from donations at this reward tier. If the development team increases the minimum gift amount by $50 (now $150), the model suggests they will lose approximately 200 donors, leaving them with 2,993 at the minimum level. However, if all donors gave the minimum amount (the higher entry point), this fewer number of donors would generate nearly $450,000, a 40% increase in revenue.

In a second example from the dataset, a non-Power 5 institution without football has 330 donors at their lowest tier with a minimum gift requirement of $150, thus hypothetically generating approximately $50,000. If this institution were to raise the minimum gift requirement by $50 and lose 200 donors, they would likely cut their revenue at this tier in half, generating only $26,000. If this same institution, however, lowered their minimum gift amount by $30, the model suggests an increase in 120 more donors, resulting in revenue of $54,000. This is an increase of 8% in immediate revenue, but also results in 36% jump in number of new donors, who can be cultivated to give more in the future utilizing relationship-building and an effective tiered reward system.

Meanwhile, a significant positive relationship was found between the total number of full-time development staff and the number of donors at the lowest giving level. The unstandardized coefficient for this variable was 98.50, indicating for the addition of one full-time fundraising staff member, an athletics department will gain approximately 99 donors at the lowest tier. This finding is not surprising, considering prior studies have suggested when more personnel are hired to sell tickets, athletics departments generate more ticket revenue (Popp et al., 2020). The current study suggests when more employees are hired to cultivate donor relationships, there is likely to be growth in the number of donors, at least at the lowest giving level, which is likely the entry-level point for most donors. Instead, the more important question for athletics administrators is the expected return on investment (ROI). An athletic department which requires a minimum gift of $150 to join the booster program might generate an additional $15,000 upon hiring an additional staff member, but would incur greater expenses from a salary for that employee of, say, $50,000. It is important to remember, however, the current analysis was only able to model additional donor growth at the lowest giving tier. If each new development staff hire was also able to cultivate new donors at higher reward tier levels as well, the ROI from the additional staff member may be well worth the expense. In fact, Scherhag and Boenigk (2013) found servicing more generous donors results in more significant gifts compare to less generous donors. In addition, growing the number of donors at the lowest reward tier in the short-term may result in greater lifetime giving and growth in higher reward tiers in the long-term.

Limitations and Future Research

Though this study did yield significant findings, some limitations are acknowledged. First, while the final model (Model 4 in Table 2) explained more than 70% of the total variance in donors, 27% of variance was left unexplained. Additional variables could be explored in the future to determine if a model can be developed explaining even more variance. The current study examined institutional and athletic performance variables, but did not include factors related to the donors themselves. For instance, Popp et al. (2016) examined effects of fan identification, and more specifically, the age when donors became highly identified with an athletics department, on donor behavior. In her analysis of donors, Watson (2020) utilized median household income of the Metropolitan Statistical Area and a measure of fan support, operationalized by utilizing department Twitter followers. Jensen et al. (2020), meanwhile, included the distance between where donors resided and the university, in their examination of athletics giving. Wanless et al. (2019) also included the number of contacts the development staff had with donors; future studies could also include the number of contacts, but also an investigation of the quality of those touchpoints. In addition, future studies may want to collect additional data such as experience levels of development staff or prospecting strategies employed by development staff.

Second, the current study only examined data related to the lowest giving tier within the development structure. Future studies should expand upon the current results to examine giving volume and the impact of price manipulation at all reward tiers. Several prior studies have noted different factors impacting donors who give at lower tiers, compared to those who give at higher tiers (Park et al., 2016; Scherhag & Boenigk, 2013; Wei Shi, 2018). Ultimately, athletics departments will benefit by understanding how many reward tiers to create and how tier pricing decisions impact giving behavior (Lipsey et al., 2021). Future studies in this area may wish to employ experimental designs in order to gauge the impact of number of tiers or minimum gift requirement manipulation on donor giving decisions.

Third, future studies should investigate the strategies employed by development staff in establishing reward tiers and minimum gift requirements. Such a study might provide additional evidence to determine whether mimetic isomorphic behavior is indeed driving decision making (Lipsey et al., 2021). In fact, a prior study by Morehead et al. (2021) suggested college athletics administrators are guided by several competing motives when setting ticket prices, with profit maximization serving as just one of many strategies. A similar finding could emerge among development personnel; perhaps a department's short-term goal is to generate the maximum number of donors initially, with an objective of cultivating those donors in to higher-end donors in ensuing years.

Finally, the current study examined donor behavior in the context of U.S.-based college athletics. However, many sport organizations operate as non-profit organizations and rely heavily on procuring donors to fund their operations. The current investigation provides a blueprint for future studies conducted within other contexts such as recreational sport, sport clubs, sport national governing bodies (NGBs), and other entities, although future researchers should be cognizant of the unique location of U.S. college athletics at the intersection of commercialization and non-profit status. Most prior work examining financial donations to sport organizations has focused on donor motives. Future explorations of giving frameworks not only provides fertile ground for research but can have a significant applied benefit for practitioners eager to maximize donor solicitation.

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Leading Student-Athletes to Success Beyond the Field: Assessing the Role of Leadership in Adopting High Impact Practices in Intercollegiate Athletics

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Given the current culture and climate on college campuses, it is imperative that all students have the opportunity to participate in deep learning experiences, impacting their time on campus and preparing them for their impending transition into the workforce. While high impact practices (HIPs) are readily available, and participation encouraged, to the majority of the student population, it can be difficult for student-athletes to partake in such endeavors. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the role that leadership plays in the integration (or lack thereof) of HIPs into the student-athlete development process. Through semi-structured, phenomenological interviews with 21 staff members (administration, coaching, academics) of a mid-major Division I intercollegiate athletic program, the researchers were able to further understand the impact of leadership on HIPs in intercollegiate athletics. With this, three primary themes, with multiple sub-themes, emerged. These include Resources, Messaging, and Relationships. While there was a mix of positive and negative aspects of each theme, the general idea was that without a university directive, or a transformational leader, this type of pursuit would not be an overarching priority. Both theoretical and practical implications, as well as recommendations, are discussed.

Keywords: student-athlete, high impact practices, leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership

Across the United States, student-athletes, totaling nearly half a million, compete in 24 sports annually through the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021a). Combining these students with those participating in National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and National Junior College Athletic Association sanctioned sports, there are approximately 600,000 individuals participating in intercollegiate athletics in the United States annually (National Associate of Intercollegiate Athletics, 2021; National

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Junior College Athletic Association, 2021). These individuals, making up roughly three percent of all students on college campuses, have been sold on the benefits of life as a student-athlete, including the concept that student-athletes are provided with the resources to excel both on and off the field of play. As we have seen intercollegiate athletics shift in both form and function, we must continue to question whether or not student-athletes are being provided with the tools to excel, or even succeed, in ways that will support them on campus and prepare them for the world beyond.

In an evolving academic environment, intercollegiate athletic administrators have been charged with satisfying the interests and desires of a diverse student-athlete population, while simultaneously meeting institutional and departmental objectives. Due to constraints and/or pressure brought on by institutional directives, the needs, goals and desires of student-athletes are often a last consideration, with the focus on athletic achievement surmounting all other priorities. Fortunately, whether required by governing bodies or based on genuinely holistic movements, changes to the athletic and academic landscapes are primed to shift beyond an exploitive environment that made many student-athletes feel like "used goods" (Beamon, 2008). With this, institutions and organizations have begun to rally behind the development of these individuals from a variety of perspectives (e.g., academic, mental health, nutrition, etc.), expanding the definition of student-athlete in a more all-encompassing manner. To wit, several institutions and conferences have either begun or buttressed their Academic Support Services for Student Athletes (ASSSA), Student-Athlete Mental Health Initiative (SAMI), program specific nutrition (e.g., Giardin, 2020), and even allowing for some semblance of compensation for institutional corporeal labor through the ability to generate income through name, image and likeness (NIL). While this may be the case, student-athletes will always operate within an overlapped plane of existence, attempting to toe the line between their academic and athletic goals. Therefore, as they are under the charge of the institution, more of an effort should be made to ensure that student-athletes' academic and pre-professional pursuits do not fall through the cracks. The challenge here is that many programs, bound contextually by a win-at-all-costs mentality, guide student-athletes to "easy" majors in order to maintain on-field eligibility. Practice time and skill development often comes before off-field growth, and it has been reported that many faculty treat student-athletes differently and less than traditional students (Zagelbaum, 2014). While advances have been made regarding the focus on personal growth, student-athletes remain at a disadvantage when it comes to professional development.

Governing bodies across intercollegiate athletics have launched various programs with the intent to develop the whole student-athlete and prepare them for a diverse, ever-changing world. For example, through the NCAA Life Skills program, the non-profit organization has aligned with the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) in order to focus on skills that are useful beyond the college experience (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021b). Additionally, there are opportunities for leadership development through the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) at both the institution and national governing body.

While this is the case, some of these may be limited to just a portion of student-athletes leaving only those selected to develop these particular skills. Since it is an advisory board SAAC, for instance, limits the number of participants to those who have the time, inclination, and willingness to represent themselves and other student-athletes inside and outside the institution, and there are gatekeepers (coaches and administrators) who can choose whether or not to support an individual's interest in participating.

Current literature addresses a number of themes that point towards the development and preparation of student-athletes, noting the role of leadership in this process (e.g., Naidoo et al., 2015; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). Scholars have pinpointed two contrasting leadership styles, transactional and transformative leadership (e.g., Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996), that dominate both general and athletic administration. Transactional and transformative styles, impacted by internal and external driving forces, provide the foundation for the athletic department's focus. Transactional leadership, or a goal-driven perspective with an emphasis on task delegation and intense employee supervision (Biscontini, 2015), creates an environment where employees work in exchange for benefits and is responsive in nature (Naidoo et al., 2015). In contrast, transformational leaders work to inspire their followers by engaging in effective communication, encouraging trust and commitment (Abelha et al., 2018; Burton & Welty Peachey, 2009). Consequently, transformational leadership involves less supervision, works to inspire employee creativity, stimulates growth, and is proactive at its core (Naidoo et al., 2015; Weese, 1995). In intercollegiate athletics, an administrator's leadership style will inevitably drive the athletic program in a particular direction regarding initiatives for student-athlete success.

As a result, researchers have examined three models focused on the development and preparation of student-athletes, including the Holistic Model (Etzel et al., 2002), Service Model (Etzel et al., 2002) and Triad Model (Stier, 1992). Overall, each of these models addresses the academic, athletic, and personal development of student-athletes. Echoed by DiPaolo (2017) with the Integrated Model of Player Development, a philosophical shift is of interest, moving from a siloed method of student-athlete programming towards a universally-focused approach for personal and professional development. While athletic programs develop their own initiatives, are they adequately pulling from, and encouraging the use of, other programs simultaneously being offered on campus? DiPaolo's model brings to mind cross-campus integration and if all resources are being maximized, or even considered, which may be beneficial for programs with both large and small budgets.

From a broader perspective, colleges and universities are beginning to focus on the use of high impact practices (HIPs) to enhance the learning experience for their general student population (AAC&U, 2021). Non-profit organizations Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), and Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) introduced HIPs to form centralized education programs. Specifically, HIPs have centered on broadening students' experiences and skills using the 11 noted practices (i.e., first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, eportfolios, service learning/community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses/projects; Kuh, 2008; Watson et al., 2016).

Themes addressed in HIPs run parallel to many of the development programs that have been created in athletic silos, per the aforementioned student-athlete development models (e.g., Etzel et al., 2002; Stier, 1992). Though there are numerous overlapping factors, many athletic departments have not addressed the likenesses between the two. Similarly, absent from this conversation is the role that leadership, and leadership style, plays in this process. While noted as a primary finding in Ishaq and Bass' (2019) work, leadership's impact on student-athlete participation has not been expanded. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to investigate the role that leadership plays in the integration (or lack thereof) of HIPs into the student-athlete development process. A major goal of this project is to help retain student-athletes by centering the student experience, and, at the very least, helping to create a learning environment more conducive to developing lifelong learners and citizens after they matriculate through their curriculum and athletic careers. In the following section we aim to outline the theoretical lenses around leadership that we are utilizing and briefly address those that we are not, then describe the conceptual framework provided by research on HIPs and student-athlete development from which this project draws.

Literature Review

Current literature addresses many themes in student-athlete development, most notably, the role of leadership in the process (e.g., Naidoo et al., 2015). Transactional and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) are two styles that dominate athletic administration, each impacted by both internal and external driving forces. Therefore, in order to begin to understand the role of student-athlete development practices in intercollegiate athletics, we must first understand how and why the decisions are made, by understanding the defining characteristics of these two distinct leadership styles.

Leadership is the process by which one individual works to influence other group members to work towards the achievement of group goals (Flynn, 2013). Through years of research conducted by sociologists, two leadership styles (transformational and transactional) were recognized in the 1970's, and are considered to be the most prominently adopted amongst leaders in various fields (Flynn, 2013). Importantly, servant and authentic leadership theories have emerged as useful lenses with which to articulate these dynamics; however, the transactional/transformational dichotomy was the most appropriate for an initial dive. Servant leadership theory with its focus on leadership as a "way of life-a philosophy" (Parris & Welty Peachey, 2013, p. 377) is self-admittedly unwieldy to measure, while authentic leadership theory that "represents a shift away from the larger-than-life perspective of the transformational leader to a more introspective, yet empathetic leader" (Takos et al., 2018, p. 111) would be a logical next step for this project. Within this structure, the current study has been framed by the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership, seeking to understand the way in which these styles may impact the role and value placed on non-athletic pursuits, particularly HIPs.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Originally introduced by James McGregor Burns (1978), transformational, or motivational, leadership is a process through which individuals encourage their followers to attain a higher performance than normally anticipated. This is accomplished through individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Additionally, its foundation involves leaders who are proactive, rather than reactive, and attempt to shape the environment in which they work (Avolio & Bass, 1988), focusing on direction setting, example setting, communication, alignment, bringing out the best, acting as a change agent, and crisis decision making (Hooper & Potter, 1997). Transformational leaders inspire motivation within their subordinates through their charisma, confidence, and assertiveness (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Furthermore, these individuals set higher expectations, typically leading to higher levels of performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

As previously noted, there are four main components regarding transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The first, individualized consideration, is that the leader truly focuses on the individual, which requires the leader to interact with their colleagues in order to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations, all while allowing them to function autonomously. The second component is intellectual stimulation, where the leader galvanizes their followers to utilize creativity to solve problems. Third is inspirational motivation, where the leader motivates and challenges their followers to stimulate individual growth, eventually leading to overall team or organizational heightened levels of camaraderie. Finally, idealized influence is the last component, and describes transformational leaders as active role models, individuals who should be admired, respected, and trusted.

While these character traits may seem ideal, transformational behaviors have been found to be less effective in public organizations, particularly those that have well-defined structure, rules, and procedures (see Danylchuk, et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 1996; Wells et al., 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising that transactional leader behaviors (i.e., structured and orderly), are often found in intercollegiate athletic programs, as they have been hypothesized to both appear more frequently and be more effective in public organizations (Lowe et al., 1996).

In stark contrast to transformational leadership, transactional leaders rely on authority to motivate subordinates (Biscontini, 2015). This type of leader believes that their job solely consists of delegation and supervision, while holding power over their employees. They do not accept a challenge to their authority, nor an individual who fails to accomplish a task. If employees are unable to perform at the required level, they are punished. In turn, if they perform above the noted benchmark, they are rewarded. Within transactional leadership there is the relationship between the leader and subordinate that is characterized by the exchange, conditions, and rewards (Naidoo et al., 2015). With that, transactional leadership has two behavioral categories: contingent reward and management by exception (Jansen et al., 2009). These overarching categories include a subset of, often tactical, behaviors that include establishing goals, setting expectations, creating standards, providing rewards, distributing punishment, and monitoring daily affairs (Jansen et al., 2009).

While these two theories provide images of dichotomous leadership styles, scholars have also noted that these behaviors are, in turn, complimentary. Specifically, it has been noted that transformational leadership may not be effective if there is a lack of transactional behaviors. (Bass et al., 1987). Therefore, this suggests that peak performance includes an integration of leadership styles and behaviors.

High Impact Practices

A college or university's mission, philosophy, and institutional culture today often include external factors that both encourage and drive student development through out-of-class experiences (Kuh et al., 1991). Therefore, as institutional culture is constantly evolving to meet the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the community's key stakeholders, leadership must be aware of the wants and needs of students, faculty, and administrators in order to ensure that students are successful both during and after their time on campus. If an institution's culture is characterized by school pride and domination in sports, then administrators will make decisions that affect the success of their sport programs. However, if the institutional culture emphasizes an educational experience and career preparation, then the school administrators may insist on providing quality HIPs. An institution's culture that desires a dominant athletic program, but a balance between sports and education, would impact an administrator's behavior by trying to find a balance. This process of thinking led to Kuh's (2008) work regarding curricular and co-curricular campus activities (i.e., HIPs) that could afford leaders, regardless of their style, with the opportunity to create deeper and more impactful experiences for students.

HIPs have been implemented in institutions across the United States and lobbied by non-profit organizations (i.e., LEAP and AAC&U) to continue their development and use. Led by the work of Kuh (2008), 10 academic initiatives were categorized as HIPs, or active learning strategies that result in deeper learning outcomes. The teaching and learning practices, which are adapted based on learner characteristics and institutional priorities/contexts were adapted to include an 11th practice (Watson et al., 2016) and are defined in Table 1.

Table 1

High-Impact Educational Practices (Kuh, 2008; Watson et al., 2016)

HIP – *Name*	HIP - *Definition*
First Year Experience	Formally organized experiences for first-year students, emphasizing critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies.
Common Intellectual Experience	An adaptation of the traditional "core" curriculum, focusing on a set of required courses or a generalized program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or participation in learning communities, often under the guise of a broad theme.
Learning Communities	The grouping of students to encourage integration of learning across courses and assess broader reaching topics that matter beyond the classroom, often addressed in the context of inter-professional education.
Writing Courses	An intentional "repeated practice" style of writing where students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines.
Collaborative Projects	Group work, encompassing a variety of tactics, with two primary goals: (1) learning to work and solve problems in the company of others and (2) sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insight of others. This also encourages the inclusion of individuals with different backgrounds and/or life experiences.
Undergraduate Research	Providing undergraduate students with the opportunity to participate in research activities with the goal of engaging students in the process of actively contesting questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the excitement that comes from working towards a better understanding of important questions.
Diversity/Global Learning	Courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These often explore "difficult differences," such as racial, ethnic, gender inequalities, human rights, freedom, and power, and may be augmented by experiential learning and/or study abroad.
ePortfolios	A tactic that enables students to electronically collect work over time, reflect upon personal academic growth, and then share selected items with others, including professors, advisors, and potential employers.

Service Learning, Community-Based Learning	These programs and/or courses include field-based "experiential learning" with community partners as a core instructional strategy. The primary goal is direct application, connecting the classroom to the community while providing places to both apply these skills and/or knowledge and reflect on them at their conclusion. The goal is to create a better understanding of the value of working with partners to prepare for citizenship, work, and life.
Internships	Another oft-adopted experiential learning strategy, internship provide students with direct experience in a work setting that is related to their career interests. This differs from a job in that it should be a mentored learning experience that is an extension of the classroom and should be treated as such by the student, site supervisor, and faculty supervisor.
Capstone Courses	While it may take many forms, the capstone (course, project, etc.) is a culminating experience that is completed at the end of a student's college experience. This integrates and applies what has been learned throughout their time on campus and/or in the program.

Kuh's (2008) work was not novel, as many of these active-learning strategies had already been in place on campuses for generations; however, it was both the focus and composite nature of the recommendations that led to this particular advancement, linking these strategies to student development in a more organic and holistic manner. Additionally, Kuh noted that the inclusion of these activities, in this manner, would help to advance underserved populations (e.g., African American, Latino/a, and students with relatively low ACT scores). Subsequently, Gonyea et al. (2008) suggested that all students should participate in at least two HIPs in their first few years in higher education in order to foster "deep approaches" to learning. Per Brownell and Swaner's (2009) work a year later, this was not the reality of the collegiate experience, as many college students did not have the opportunity to participate in HIPs. In addition to access, both first-generation and African American students were noted to be far less likely to participate as well. More recently, scholars linked back to Kuh's original recommendations, finding that participation in multiple HIPs has impacted student's perception of deep learning, particularly in first generation, transfer, and underrepresented racial or ethnic minority groups (Finley & McNair, 2013), showing the importance of understanding the barriers that Brownell and Swaner addressed. Kilgo et al. (2015) also indicated the benefits of these strategies; however, these scholars noted that some of this work is more impactful in general areas such as critical thinking, cognition, and intercultural effectiveness (i.e., active and collaborative learning, undergraduate research), while others have a more focused positive effect on student learning (i.e., study abroad, internship, service learning, capstone course/experience).

Student-Athlete Development Models

HIPs are tools that universities and colleges use nationally to develop students into highly functional members of society, while preparing them for their future industry. This methodology is utilized in many variations, however, as previously noted, there are 11 main practices. Regardless of the funding and resources that an institution receives, these HIPs are vital assets to the curriculum offered. However, in a complex environment that encapsulates and glorifies college athletics, the cultural shift over the years has led to a divide between the general student body and student-athletes. This has been exacerbated, for example, by subcultures that have been created by the development of student-athlete (specific) academic centers (Rubin & Moses, 2017). As a school, the entire student body needs special attention, services, and programs that captivate them into their respective careers, while embedding the essential traits for life success. However, current literature (Etzel et al., 2002) has concluded that student-athletes' busy schedules and looming stereotypes disconnect them from the HIPs, programs, and services that are offered on campus. That being said, current literature has called for a better system that provides these fundamental attributes (Etzel et al., 2002; Stier, 1992).

While HIPs might seem focused on practices embedded in the academic affairs landscape, scholars have designed similar models that provide tools for athletic administrators to fit student-athletes' needs and wants. In this, researchers have pinpointed three models focused on the development and preparation of student-athletes, including the Service Model (academics and athletics; Etzel et al., 2002), Triad Model (academic, athletic, and personal/social advising; Stier, 1992), and the Holistic Model (academic, athletic, and social needs; Etzel et al., 2002). Overall, each of these models addresses the academic, athletic, and personal development of student-athletes, aiming to satisfy student-athlete needs and wants. Additionally, they are tools used to (potentially) organize HIPs. These models operate on a spectrum, and can be designed based on leadership style, institutional goals, and other relevant factors.

Services Model

The Services Model is a basic approach to developing student-athletes (Etzel et al., 2002). It adopts the philosophical foundation that recognizes student-athletes will have different needs at various stages in their college career. Its main concern is meeting those needs, while addressing the five main components of services for student-athletes, including academic monitoring, counseling, programs and workshops, consultation, and teaching.

Triad Model

Similarly, the Triad Model aims to address academic and athletic advising in their contribution to student-athlete success. However, this model also incorporates personal advising, providing additional support to student-athletes. All three components are considered to be the aspects of life for student-athletes, and bring additional factors such as problems, opportunities, and challenges. Through these factors, the Triad Model aims to develop student-athletes to become quality decision makers, develop their self-esteem, and establish priorities (Stier, 1992). This model encourages the development of special programs and tactics to create an environment in which student-athletes can flourish (e.g., transition program), resulting in benefits in the areas of selection and retention. Similar to HIPs, Stier's implementation and assessment of this program indicated higher retention rates as a result of exceptional advising, counseling, monitoring, and encouragement.

Holistic Model

Finally, in addition to the traditional factors, the Holistic Model focuses on emotional and mental health by incorporating professionals and/or campus resources such as psychologists and counselors. Etzel et al. (2002) argued that certain barriers such as limited time, high visibility on campus, and student-athlete stereotypes have created a barrier from utilizing services on campus. Therefore, this model was designed for "professionals to work together on behalf of the student-athletes in an effort to develop and implement programs to ensure that student-athletes have a greater opportunity to succeed as people in college and in life once the game is over" (p. 20). Through a fundamental understanding of the diverse needs and desires, the model allows academic support staff to adapt the other factors to have a greater impact on the individual student-athlete.

High Impact Practices within Student-Athlete Development Models

The three models allow administrators to create a system that fits their goals and student-athletes' needs and wants. Doing so not only allows them to build and prepare student-athletes, but also exhibits an overlap between the three models. They are adaptable and interact differently with HIPs.

Table 2 provides a brief overview of the relationship between HIPs and the three aforementioned models, given their overlapping themes. Though the table illustrates which practices have the potential to fit the philosophical foundations of each model, they are versatile and adaptable to fit any needs of any organization (or athletic department).

Ishaq and Bass (2019) assessed HIPs and barriers to implementation in the student-athlete experience, finding limitations as a result of university control of HIPs, differences in attitudes between coaches and academic staff, lack of funding or resources, and student-athlete time commitment. Additionally, while not addressing HIPs directly, Navarro and Malvaso (2015) used Kuh's (2008) framework to address the need for a more holistic approach to student-athlete development, identifying

Table 2

Overlap Between HIPs and Student-Athlete Development Models

	Services	Triad	Holistic
First Year Experience	**X**	**X**	**X**
Common Intellectual Experience	**X**	**X**	**X**
Learning Communities	**X**		**X**
Writing Courses	**X**	**X**	**X**
Collaborative Projects	**X**	**X**	**X**
Undergraduate Research	**X**	**X**	**X**
Diversity/Global Learning		**X**	**X**
ePortfolios			
Service Learning, Community-Based Learning			**X**
Internships	**X**	**X**	**X**
Capstone Courses		**X**	**X**

campus-level resources to enhance campus and civic engagement to prepare student-athletes for life after college. As a result, one must also consider the student-athlete environment as a whole, noting unique attributes of their time on campus, such as their separation from non-athlete peers, coach-athlete relationships, and athletic/academic staff relationships, as well as the role that these distinct characteristics play in their interest, intention, and ability to participate in enrichment activities both in- and outside of athletics. As previously noted, student-athletes, as with many other groups on campus, have their own subculture. With the addition of academic centers in this mix, they have a different college experience with different resources and influencers (Rubin & Moses, 2017). As a result, student-athletes often view staff members (e.g., coaches, athletic academic advisors) as their primary support and first point of contact for issues (Berg & Warner, 2019). While this may be the case, some scholars have found that this athletic bubble has also been a hinderance, particularly in regards to career exploration and planning (Huml et al., 2014) and that the academic self-concept begins in the first year (Comeaux et al., 2011). Comeaux et al. also noted differences between revenue and nonrevenue student-athletes, indicating further disparities among the group at large.

As with specific academic programs on campus (e.g., Braunstein-Minkove & DeLuca, 2015), it will benefit athletic programs to move beyond their silos, seeking expertise and opportunities elsewhere. This practice is highly relevant to and applicable in the intercollegiate athletics model. As the overlap in these models indicates, the foundation has been laid, it is now in the hands of leadership to connect the dots and allocate the resources. As previously noted, the purpose of this work is to assess the role of leadership in the integration of HIPs into the student-athlete development process. This was driven by the following research questions:

(1) What impacts athletic leaders, in varying roles, to promote specific types of development initiatives; and
(2) What role does organizational culture and leadership style play in this process?

Method

In order to better understand the underlying themes that influence leaders in intercollegiate athletics to promote specific types of development initiatives, we adopted a qualitative intrinsic case study approach (Mills & Boardley, 2016) to this research. Following Kincheloe (2001), (good) social science has destroyed the notion of the impartial, passive, systematic scholar as anything more than producing value-laden products that operate under the flag of objectivity, its avoidance of contextual specificities that subvert the stability of its structures, and its fragmenting impulse that moves it to fold its methodologies and the knowledge they produce neatly into disciplinary drawers (p. 681).

This project makes no such claims for the data were gathered by a heterosexual cisgender Jewish woman in her early 40s, and a heterosexual, cisgender, white male (former) student-athlete in his early 20s. No doubt, and echoing Kellner (1995), our data collection, interpretive findings, and conclusions were inflected with our social backgrounds, but by foregrounding these potential conflicts of interest the goal is to clarify them in such a way that another could replicate this study and come to similar conclusions (e.g., Altheide & Johnson, 2011). Throughout the following we hope to clearly lay out the methods used to best understand how various forms of leadership shape HIPs and student-athlete development.

Participants

Due to constraints associated with data gathering by a team of two people, with a goal of providing a more broad-stroked study than an in-depth review of a particular team or singular leader for a particular team (e.g., Beissel, 2015, 2018), or a socio-historical "deep dive" (e.g., King-White & Beissel, 2018; King-White et al., 2021), we narrowed our target sample to academic support staff, coaches, and administrators at a mid-major intercollegiate athletics program in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. We were able to recruit 21 participants who consisted of seven administrators, seven academic support staff members, and seven coaches to ensure an equitable (though not equal) distribution of male and female voices supporting and coaching men's and women's teams (Cavalier, 2012). On average, the participants were 39 years old, and the majority were male (52%) and white (76%). Furthermore, the average number of years participants worked in intercollegiate athletics was 16, while 38% participated in leadership training during their career. Of the interviewees, 71% (primarily administrators – 86%) earned a post-graduate degree. A breakdown of participant demographics can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Overview

Name *	**Primary Role**	**Gender**	**Age**	**Team**	**Race**	**Highest Degree Earned**	**# Years Working in Athletics**	**Participation in Leadership Programing**
Alexis	Administrator	Female	42	NA	White	Post-Graduate	20	Industry
Brock	Administrator	Male	34	NA	Black/African American	Post-Graduate	8	Industry
Michael	Administrator	Male	39	NA	White	Post-Graduate	14	Campus
Ryan	Administrator	Male	46	NA	Black/African American	Post-Graduate	20	None
Andrew	Administrator	Male	45	NA	White	College	8	None
Kate	Administrator	Female	26	NA	White	Post-Graduate	3	None
Matthew	Administrator	Male	50	NA	White	College	26	None
Meghan	Academic Staff	Female	36	NA	White	Post-Graduate	13	Industry & Campus
Jamie	Academic Staff	Female	26	NA	Asian	Post-Graduate	5	None
Nick	Academic Staff	Male	37	NA	White	Post-Graduate	18	None
James	Academic Staff	Male	32	NA	White	Post-Graduate	10	None

Morgan	Academic Staff	Female	NP	NA	White	Post-Graduate	34	None
Tori	Academic Staff	Female	26	NA	Black/African American	Post-Graduate	3	None
Emily	Academic Staff	Female	41	NA	White	Post-Graduate	16	Industry
Casey	Coach	Female	41	Women	White	Post-Graduate	10	Industry
Austin	Coach	Male	60	Men	White	College	19	Industry
Luke	Coach	Male	32	Women/ Men	White	College	10	None
Ben	Coach	Male	48	Men	White	College	26	Industry & Campus
Conner	Coach	Male	38	Women	Black/African American	College	15	None
Julia	Coach	Female	44	Women	White	Post-Graduate	23	None
Taylor	Coach	Female	NP	Women	White	Post-Graduate	NP	None

** Pseudonyms have been associated with all names to remove identifying factors*

Note: NA refers to items that are not applicable to the participant; NP refers to items that were not provided by the participant

Procedures

We followed Institutional Review Board guidelines and obtained informed consent with each participant and conducted 21 in-person interviews. We developed an interview guide based on norms in the field of qualitative interviewing (see Patton, 2002 and Appendix), and allowed interviewees to prepare by sharing this prior to our formal meeting. During the actual interview participants engaged in semi-structured, in-depth, 30-60 minute discussions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, 2012), with prompts focusing on the areas of leadership, organizational culture, and objectives (Naidoo et al., 2015) as well as HIPs, academics, and career preparedness (Kuh, 2008; Watson et al., 2016). Once each question was answered to the fullest of the participant's ability the interviewer would most often move to the next question, but also allowed for periods of exploration by the interviewee whereby they controlled the focus of the conversation. After interviews were conducted, all participants were provided with a brief demographic survey to assess descriptive characteristics of the group and each participant received a pseudonym to ensure anonymity in reporting.

Data Analysis

Data were recorded on two devices depending on which person in the data collection team conducted the interview. These interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded and reviewed by two researchers in order to identify consistent concepts threaded throughout the interviews. The researchers then worked in concert to inductively identify, and agree upon, emergent subthemes that later became contributors to major themes (Resources, Messaging/Communication, and Relationships) (Braun et al., 2006). Most often we agreed that an issue became a theme and/or subtheme when seven or more (~30%) of participants made mention of a particular issue suggesting that we had reached a point of thematic *saturation* (Saunders et al., 2018).

The third author in this manuscript (41 year-old, cisgender, white, heterosexual male) was then recruited for *member checking*. Following Pitney et al. (2020) "member checks are considered the single most important provision a researcher can make to bolster the creditability of the study" (p. 52). We specifically chose him to support in this project for his knowledge of the athletics program (King-White, 2018) and expertise in qualitative research and interviews (e.g., King-White, 2013). Through discussions we were able to (re)shape our themes and critically evaluate ambiguities and inconsistencies in our findings. In so doing we admit that our interpretations cannot be generalized, but they can serve as an exploratory lens with which to help understand emergent themes in leadership and their impact on HIP for student-athletes. That being said, we do believe that the research methodology for this project is based on sound qualitative methodological procedures, is verifiable, and replicable in such a way as to help answer the research questions.

Findings

While independent examples of HIPs were a priority for the university, similar to Kuh's (2008) claim that HIPs are unsystematic on college campuses in general, it was apparent that HIPs, as a composite idea/philosophy, were not. In turn, the athletic department did encourage participation in them in a holistic manner. What will be addressed is findings that reflect why this might have been and how (as seen in the discussion) this can evolve with minimal investment, given the proven success of HIPs (e.g., Finley & McNair, 2013; Kilgo et al., 2015) in creating a holistic educational environment.

There were examples of academic support and intent for success through tutoring and work with the athletic academic staff; however, there was not an indication of professional development beyond what was required for an individual student-athlete's major. While this was the case, there were a few instances noted where activities were developed for specific teams by an individual academic advisor or coach (e.g., resume development, alumni panels), a program for female student-athletes in conjunction with the Career Center, and significant community work; however, these initiatives often took the backseat to leadership development programming for a select group of student-athletes. With this, attendance was often low at the majority of these events/activities unless required by a coach or authority figure. Additionally, while many of these initiatives had the potential to transition to a HIP, they lacked the key elements to make them so, particularly regarding both consistent feedback and reflection (Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013).

Through our analysis, three primary themes emerged including, Resources, Messaging, and Relationships, supporting the findings of Ishaq and Bass (2019). Under these overarching concepts, we determined that there were also a variety of sub-themes, each of which will be addressed below. In addition to these distinct categories, there was some additional sub-text that ran through these conversations, linking back to the primary focus of this work. Though Ishaq and Bass (2019) discussed some of these subthemes, we posit that our exploration of aspects such as the challenges in being creative are unique additions to research in this area. Importantly, subthemes were developed because they were often discussed in relation to and not separate from the major themes that came to the fore. The first of these ideas is that leadership style has a key role in the support (or lack thereof) of HIPs for use in intercollegiate athletics. With this, intercollegiate athletic programs often have transformational intent with transactional execution. There is often the goal of "making waves;" however, due to the hierarchical nature of a college campus, this is easier said than done. And, unfortunately, a focus on HIPs in intercollegiate athletics, particularly in a setting with a stretched budget, was the sort of wave pushed aside. Therefore, within the context studied here, that led to a focus on the "low hanging fruit," or enhancement of current areas of interest and/or excellence rather than branching out with new ideas or initiatives. While this was the case, the University's mission was taken into account, with programming focusing on leadership development and opportunities (both proactive and reactive) for first-generation and at-risk student-athletes. As will be addressed below in Messaging, this ultimately comes down to leadership's expectations of the student-athlete experience and how they define success when the students are on campus and when they leave their hallowed halls. As Ben (Coach) noted, they define success as someone who leaves the University better than they came:

> I'd say it's two pronged. One the world gets to judge me on professionally and one that's more intrinsic than wins and losses, GPAs (increased GPA), high graduation rates, clearly all goals and should be goals. But for me it's watching them walk in the door when they're 17, 18 years old and playing a part in who they become to be successful human beings after college. When I watch them grow up to be responsible men, good fathers, good husbands, good employees, good leaders. I'm winning, those are the real ones.

Resources

Resources, or the means by which goals can be accomplished, are often highlighted when addressing why an organization can (or cannot) accomplish its goals. There simply are not enough resources to go around. This can certainly be heard around intercollegiate athletic programs across the country and was a resounding cry, noted by all participants in some manner, in this work as well. We found that this theme broke down into two main types of resources: human and financial.

Human

It is often said that within an organization, one's employees are its greatest resources. Without them, nothing will get done, including the support of the student-athlete experience. We found that this was certainly evident; however, there were both benefits and limitations as a result of both time and creativity.

Time. Many participants' comments indicated the importance of intangible resources, including the time it takes to work with the number of student-athletes that are on campus to stay afloat with their basic responsibilities. Emily (Academic Staff) mentioned that

> I feel as though there is a perception on campus that really the University schedule is more like an 8:00-4:00 or 5:00 and everything shuts down. But if you're walking around the facilities and Athletics, we're here before 8:00, there are definitely people here after 5:00 or 6:00. We're here on weekends.

In addition, comments revealed that not only is the time of student-athletes highly structured, but that those working in intercollegiate athletics must be creative in designing developmental programs. Morgan (Academic Staff) highlighted this, noting

> . . . we barely have any time to [expand our initiatives] . . . we have a lot of people to advise and, by the time the schedule posts, they are on spring break, they come back and before they register, we probably don't even have two weeks.

This becomes particularly challenging, as it is not just the staff who is over-scheduled. According to Casey (Coach), this is a constant struggle:

> I also want them to be able to have some down time. And I think sometimes we are on the precipice of over scheduling them because of the optics . . .

> because we want to say, look how engaged we are and look how present we are and look how much we're part of the campus and we're doing all these great things. But at the same time, I also think it's important to take a step back and recognize that they are 20-year-olds who need to breathe as well.

Interviewees indicated that student-athletes have limited time and that the interactions with athletic staff members are highly structured, limiting their ability to participate in activities beyond their requirements. This is seen as Michael (Academic Staff) explains "every time I get a chance to talk to folks outside of college athletics at all, I try to let them know, you've got to realize they've got to get up a lot of times at 6:00 and go do this."

Creativity. With these limitations in mind, employees developed creative habits to utilize both their and the student-athletes' time. Meghan, an academic advisor, revealed that there was a need to build a system independently and get creative:

> I took it upon myself – after many conversations with current student-athletes and former student-athletes who were wanting some sort of life skills training – and I pitched the idea to the head coach and he was all in because he values those types of learning opportunities and he wants his student-athletes to grow not just academically, athletically, but as well-rounded individuals.

By alluding to the fact that the budget lacks the power compared to larger/FBS schools, Academic Staff member Meghan explained that sometimes it is creativity that provides the platform for productivity, noting that "we utilized all resources, including personnel, on campus and within our athletic department, and we were able to do eight workshops. And all of that on a zero budget." While employees believe the budget is slim, those that interact with student-athletes the most use creativity to not only make ends meet but provide them opportunities to develop and prepare them for their post-collegiate careers. Therefore, for many programs, it comes down to understanding staffing needs beyond just numbers. Alexis (Administrator) confirmed this when discussing the value of partnerships in getting things done, noting that ". . . we had to be creative about that in terms of capitalizing on campus resources, building relationships with folks on campus and in the community."

Financial

Financial resources are often at the root of conversations in intercollegiate athletics. Simply put, with more money, there would be a bit more flexibility for new initiatives, including hiring additional staff (i.e., human resources) to oversee such work. While that is the case, it is not always an easy problem to solve, particularly for institutions in mid-major conferences, where they may be competing against institutions with much larger budgets both on and off the field. Not surprisingly, most athletic staff members indicated the importance of the department's budget, and that it lacks the financial resources for a quick fix. As Alexis (Administrator) noted:

> I think having some of those conversations with coaches and staff and folks on campus too in terms of . . . how do we utilize the resources we have. Certainly, we don't have a money tree that . . . can fix a lot of problems if

> you have money to throw at it, which we don't have. And so, we had to be creative about that in terms of capitalizing on campus resources, building relationships with folks on campus and in the community.

While under budgetary constraints, the academic staff and coaches discussed that they used creativity to afford the necessary opportunities for their student-athletes. Similar to the focus with human resources, the staff indicated that it would use its creativity to ensure that student-athletes were not made to feel the burden of less financial resources. Austin (Coach) discussed that "even though we may not have a (Power 5) budget, it doesn't matter. I'm going to get as close to that as I possibly can."

Of the three primary themes, Resources was mentioned most often (i.e., 80% of the interviewees). Both human and financial resources are vital in creating new platforms for student growth and engagement; however, if there is not support, it is often asking a lot of over-stretched staff to go beyond its means to create new platforms for student-athlete growth, particularly as it has been noted that first-year initiatives are the most effective (Comeaux, 2011). Therefore, with initiatives in areas such as HIPs, it often does come down to the directives that are placed upon the staff member.

Messaging

As indicated above, constrained budgets often impact how the athletic staff interacts with each other and with student-athletes. Therefore, Messaging (both formal and informal) emerged as one of the most discussed topics during the interview process, noted in 78% of the conversations. As such, Messaging was viewed as a vital aspect to the work, leadership, and directives when working in this space. The importance of messaging was most apparent when Ben (Coach) noted how the department "wants nothing more than athletics to be top tier in the region and to be the driving force of a spotlight on the institution." While this provided a glimpse into the overarching (and formal) directive, there were underlying messages as well. Specifically, it was noted that some staff members feel that "location causes a siloed effect. I think a lot of times we're not involved in different committees [and conversations] because we get busy in our day to day" (Emily, Academic Staff), causing a communication disconnect. Therefore, the sub-themes that emerged for Messaging include consistency, values, authenticity, student-athlete trust, and communication.

Consistency

With consistent messaging, administrators, coaches and academic staff members indicated the value of consistent messaging vertically and horizontally throughout the organization, with both their co-workers and student-athletes. Julia (Coach) indicated that administrators continue to put heavy emphasis on success, noting that the standard message of "you're getting this, you know, it, you have a little time, but you need to win." In addition to winning, there was an emphasis on the consistent communication with student-athletes in regard to the decision-making process. Austin (Coach) implemented a system where the student-athletes have a voice in decision making in all team-wide issues, while he "would like to think that other programs other than ourselves include their student-athletes in some of the decision-making process." This thought shows that consistency is an important aspect when interacting with both staff and student-athletes.

Values

This particular sub-theme could stand alone; however, within the context of these conversations, values were often discussed by the manner in which the message of the department's values were disseminated to various audience(s). Within the department, all participants highlighted an acronym that was implemented to describe organizational values. In addition, these values directly represented the focus on student-athlete success. "Much in line with university. We are committed to diversity, and we are student-athlete centric – meaning they are in the core of what we do – the trust and respect values are mandatory" (Ryan, Administrator). Coach Austin reiterated this, stating: "I think if you look at it from the [concepts of] trust, integrity, in those icons, I think we embrace the opportunity to grow the students . . ." Andrew, an administrator, knew the acronym's meaning by heart and Coach Taylor believes the execution of the acronym is done with an emphasis on, " . . . what is best for our athletes, what is best for our students." This message was noted in meetings and posted around buildings, highlighting departmental values and their student-centric philosophy. While this was the case, an interesting point was that upper-level administrators and head coaches were much more familiar with the specifics of the acronym than those further down the chain of command.

Additionally, the values associated with the messages varied, depending upon the participant's role within the Department, which was not unexpected. Specifically, the measure of success differed from unit to unit, including those in upper-level administration. Administrators such as Andrew believe that ". . . championships are the ultimate success . . . I hope that every student-athlete that you would talk to would say the same thing. I want to win." This viewpoint feeds the stigma that the focus of intercollegiate athletics is primarily on athletic performance. However, the perspective is not overarching in nature, as academic advisor Emily believes " . . . that a successful student-athlete is someone who achieves their personal, athletic, and academic goals or has the ability to do that."

Authenticity

The importance of authenticity plays a vital role in messaging. An athletic department's goal is often to grow its reach as Emily (Academic Staff) stated: "I think that the sport brand has gotten stronger, but also in the university, the brand has gotten stronger, that we're really more of a presence." However, this presence and push for building the university brand through messaging has left staff members to question its authenticity. Emily (Academic Staff) believes that the

> . . . athletic department does a lot of things for face value. They want to be seen as a strong mid-major competitor. If other places do it, they want to do it to stay competitive. However, I don't know that there's a lot of substance

> behind it.

This was echoed by Casey (Coach):

> I would say our department is very geared towards the optics. Making sure the outward appearance looks good, and I absolutely, wholeheartedly agree with that. I think Athletics is a big part of outreach of the schools. But it would feel, I guess more authentic, if I felt like the expectation was consistent with all of the coaches.

Student-Athlete Trust

Through messaging, it was apparent that the athletic staff tries to cultivate a relationship with the student-athletes. Jamie (Academic Staff) mentioned that she is ". . . able to connect with student-athletes more than admins do . . .", reflecting that student-athletes feel more comfortable with those that they interact with the most. Kate (Administrator) agreed, but focused on the impact of coaches, noting that

> Everything has to be charged by the coaches, as that's who the student-athlete interacts with and trusts the most. They're with their coaches six days a week, they see them all the time. So them promoting HIPs would make student-athletes feel more comfortable to ask about it or participate in them. Student-athletes look to coaches as an authority figure. If it comes from the coach then they'll be more responsive.

This was a consistent note; however, this concept of trust had a reach beyond those with traditional power or authority in Athletics as well, as Morgan (Academic Staff) stated: ". . . they're going to listen to their teammate who has maybe only one more year experience then they do." Therefore, understanding who student-athletes trust, and listen to, is the key to ensuring that the messaging is not only pertinent, but heard. As seen here, this primarily comes from those whom the student-athletes interact with most, including coaches, academic support staff, and the other student-athletes.

Communication

Athletic staff members discussed the importance of communication, and how there are some barriers between different levels within the department. Athletic departments use communication to build the school's image and brand on-campus, as Andrew (Administrator) had a " . . . meeting with one of the Colleges [within the University]." With that, he planned to ". . . talk about next football season and how are we going to get better, bringing in higher attendance and school support." However, internal communication appeared to be an issue, as Emily (Academic Staff) believes "there's really kind of a division between the coaching staff and the support staff. I feel that sometimes in our athletics role we can become a bit siloed." In addition to this concern, there was also the indication that some voices carry more weight than others, with one coach noting that "I don't feel like there is room at the table for everyone's voices to be heard, given the current organizational structure under which we are functioning (Casey, Coach)."

Messaging supported by clear, consistent, and authentic communication was a prevalent principle in conversation with student-athletes, particularly when they discussed their academic and pre-professional pursuits. Ideally, this refers to an authentic message, most often coming directly from those who have the greatest impact on them (e.g., coaches, academic staff; Berg & Warner, 2019).

Relationships

The theme of Relationships (again, both formal and informal) was addressed in 76% of the interviews, as many participants' comments indicated the importance of trust and being close with co-workers to accomplish the department's short-term and long-term goals. As noted by Julia (Coach), "[our] administrators are very strong and I think as a coach working in an environment where you feel the trust is huge." While this type of praise was often heard at the higher levels of administration, it was not always reflected on the ground level. Here we heard that while lower-level employees felt supported by their superiors, there was often a lack of collaboration amongst the athletic staff. With this, the sub-theme of Relationships includes collaboration, administrative trust, internal support, and place/space.

Collaboration

Many of the participants indicated various issues regarding peer-to-peer collaboration. Nick (Academic Staff) argued that they ". . . don't see how there can be any type of organization in the first place or culture even created. There's too much chaos as you go down levels within the organization. . ." Through a lack of organization and collaboration, the department appears to struggle to execute transformational objectives. With that, Casey (Coach) believes that "we're more focused on the day-to-day, trying to make ends meet, as opposed to the visionary aspects of trying to go higher." To support this, Brock (Administrator) addressed strategy, again focusing on the tactical rather than the strategic:

> We have our sport assessment meetings as well, so we'll sit down with the head coach, sport administrator and they will meet with our Athletic Director Council. They'll go over how the season went, where we think we are headed, ways we think we can improve, ways we did well, and ways we can continue to improve on a day-to-day.

The intention here is for administrators to create a cohesive unit to "govern" each team and provide an all-encompassing assessment of the student-athlete experience; however, this collaboration could be even more successful if it was approached from a strategic/long-term perspective.

Administrative Trust

Considering that individual units within the department felt a lack of collaboration, it is also noticeable that there is a lack of trust with upper administrators. Meghan (Academic Staff) explained: "I was told that my performance review would not be signed by my direct supervisor until I noted that I collaborate or consult the administrator that oversees the [specific] program being discussed." This exemplifies the relationship that the academic staff has with upper-level administrators, as their seemed to be an inherent disconnect embedded in participant responses. However, when addressing a direct report, Nick (Academic Staff) did note that

> . . . you might get shot down and maybe it's something you truly believe in that gets shot down on, but so be it. I mean, they've never said, and you'd never get the feel of, I can't ask that, but sometimes it doesn't go in your favor.

Thus, while the support might not be there on all levels, this trust is often present with direct reports. This was also noted with coaches, as Taylor (Coach) noted ". . . when [XX] came, she became my sport oversight, and she was fantastic. She was really the one that helped me (learn to) develop the student first." Through this support, this coach was able to transition and adjust their own style to transformational leadership, understanding that they had the trust of their supervisors to create the ideal environment for their student-athletes.

Internal Support

To accomplish tasks, both large and small, staff members indicated the value that support from administrators play in this. Meghan (Academic Staff) thinks ". . . as a lower-level employee within the athletic department I feel that having the support and backing of my superiors is helpful in order to do my day-to-day operations." When probed further, this included new initiatives or those that go beyond the traditional day-to-day role of academic support staff. While this is true for some, not all staff had this same perspective, as Nick (Academic Staff) stated that "I do not like going to [XX]. Not because I have any problem with [XX] at all, just because I feel like, if I recommended something to you, and you didn't do it, and that becomes a trend, there is a lack of support." On the contrary, Matthew (Administrator), believes that they provide enough internal support, as they " . . . put so much emphasis on student-first student wellbeing . . .". To achieve this, there is the belief that there must be the proper support from upper administrators; however, as was seen from these interviews, these divergent viewpoints may indicate a disconnect in perspectives regarding perceived support from those higher up versus those in the trenches.

Place/Space

Within the athletic department, units are sectionalized based on role and physical location. Within these physical places, philosophical spaces developed, including the unit's own culture and relationships. Kate (Administrator) believes that "there was already a fairly positive culture when I got here, so if anything, I hope that I only benefited that positive culture more and coming in and being a positive role model. . .". Michael (Administrator) supported that idea, noting that " . . . my staff (can) come in if they need to vent. I think that's an important piece of it." Regardless, Conner (Coach) addresses the coaching "space" as ". . . exhausted and I don't think people know who they're working with just because of some of the change. . .". Through consistent turnover in the department, it is hard to solidify a unit culture. Additionally, the place/space dynamic rung true between units in the department. Accordingly, James (Academic Staff) stated that

> I think there is a communication disconnect between our unit and the department [across campus]. All communication is done via email or text

> messages with coaches making it difficult. For me, I need to contact coaches almost every day, which makes it difficult.

Relationships need to be broad, sweeping, and genuine. These characteristics need to be pervasive throughout the entire organization, matching the mission of the university; however, they need to be true to the mission of athletics as well. This is possible with any type of leadership style; however, if these concepts are not taken into consideration, it will be unlikely that HIPs will go beyond that of a creative coach or academic support staff member if this is not under the guise of the university mission or a transformational leader. Additionally, as student-athletes are most often impacted by the messaging of their coaches and support staff (Berg & Warner, 2019), and those individual's initiatives are driven by their administrators, we hope to see the concept of "leaving better than they came" expand to the types of opportunities that are available to students outside of the athletics bubble.

Overall, we were surprised that there were no emergent themes directly related to the styles of leadership that were the initial foundation for this work. While that may be the case, informal observations do provide evidence of transactional leadership, with pockets of other leadership styles (e.g., transformational) found on the ground level, rather than with those in high-level administrative roles. This could be the result of a number of things, but as the culture in Athletics stems from the campus culture as a whole, the investigation would need to expand further to fully address this. While this was disappointing, our findings do support both theoretical and practical foundations for growth in academic programs through leader-supported initiatives. Therefore, the discussion will focus on ways in which these findings can provide a platform for growth moving forward.

Discussion

For individuals entering the world of intercollegiate athletics, the idea that personal development is a primary goal of sport is intrinsic; however, the concept of professional development of those in one's charge is not discussed quite as often. HIPs, woven into the framework of the collegiate landscape, can provide these opportunities (Kuh, 2008; Watson et al., 2016); however, the findings presented here, aligning with the findings of Ishaq and Bass (2019), indicate that it will warrant an overarching directive, or an insightful coach or administrator, who will encourage the introduction of these initiatives into the intercollegiate athletics lexicon. This is where leadership, and leadership style, comes into play. Given the situational nature of this work, this will be dependent upon the unique attributes of leaders on a given campus or within a specific athletic department. While the primary themes found here can certainly guide any athletic administrator in the future, individuals with varying leadership styles may interpret them different. Unfortunately, without the emergence of a designated leadership style from this work, it is unclear whether the initiatives described were top-down or bottom-up tactics. As previously noted, observation indicates that these are grassroots projects that stretch one's staff, often to the limit, without additional support. Therefore, while the interviews provided an indication of sincere interest in student-athlete success, both during and post-college, there was a lack of focus on activities that would fall under the umbrella of HIPs. Perhaps that is due to the fact that the organized concept of HIPs were not integrated into the Athletics or University's mission at the time of data collection. As conversations around Messaging alluded to a very hierarchical nature, the fact that this was not a priority is not surprising. Additionally, the leadership style came off as transactional through the majority of the conversations. Therefore, if these were not mandated directives, then it was unlikely that they would take place, save for the rogue initiative by the transformational staff member here or there.

This work adds to the current literature, as it supports the majority of the models that have been developed and implemented in the student-athlete development space (e.g., Etzel et al., 2002; Stier, 1992). Specifically, the Holistic Model (first year experiences, common intellectual experience, learning communities, writing courses, collaborative projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning, internships, capstone courses - Etzel et al., 1996) is one that was most reflective in this scenario. While the department did not show indications of focusing on HIPs for their student-athletes, they are already participating in a variety of activities that can be integrated into this space (e.g., community service activities, international trips). This was most often seen on a case-by-case basis, where staff members broke out of their silos to seek opportunities and expertise from those outside of the department (Braunstein-Minkove & DeLuca, 2015). Finally, the fact that organizational values are directed by leadership style was clearly evident. While there were glimpses of transformational thinking within the interviews, this came from individuals and their own initiatives, alluding to the emergence of the servant-leader role on the ground level (Parris & Welty Peachey, 2013). This is also where there was evidence of HIPs. However, the transformational/transactional divide (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) certainly put a limit on this.

For those around intercollegiate athletics, there is often the pre-conceived notion that student-athletes "don't have time for . . .". While this might be true for many, it is simply not the case for all, nor should that stand as an excuse for why student-athletes cannot share in developmental experiences that their non-athlete classmates have access to. For example, all student-athletes may not have time to participate in a significant number of pre-professional co-curricular activities (e.g., internships); however, by expanding an emphasis on other types of opportunities, it might give student-athletes greater value, and potentially greater employability, when they do participate. HIPs provide just that platform, expanding the once-rigid nature of "professional development" by increasing its definition through flexibility. However, as seen here, this will likely warrant a well-defined directive, begun through a greater understanding of the value of HIPs, or a leader with vision beyond the typical initiatives built into a student-athletes repertoire. There are many ways to approach this conundrum, but if the intent is to change the culture, this must be a top-down initiative. With this, both leadership style and administrative support must be taken into consideration. All three primary themes were impacted by the decision of organization leaders, as they set the stage (or field) for what is expected. While athletic departments are often hierarchical in nature, a more strategic, creative, and transformational approach will allow for a tight knit culture, regardless of physical location within the department. Additionally, if place is impacting space and, therefore, relationships, an examination of the physical location of parts of the unit could prove beneficial. If it is not convenient to have that necessary conversation – face-to-face – there is a better chance that the conversation never takes place. Finally, while it is recognized that winning is important, we must go back to what we are selling potential students before they sign that letter of intent. Will they actually leave the hallowed halls of higher education "better" than when they joined us? In order to fulfill this promise, a focus on student-athlete success beyond the field, including pre-professional preparedness into one's life skills/life success programming is a great place to begin. Based on these findings, examples may include peer-to-peer mentoring and alumni panels focusing on campus activities that did – or did not – support their post-academic career.

Implications

As noted by Kuh and O'Donnell (2013), there are a number of quality dimensions that often accompany HIPs, including: 1. Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels; 2. Significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time; 3. Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters; 4. Experiences with diversity, wherein students are exposed to and must contend with people and circumstances that differ from those with which students are familiar; 5. Frequent, timely and constructive feedback; 6. Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning; 7. Opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications; and 8. Public demonstration of competence. So, what does this mean for athletic administrators? Ideally, it will mean thinking outside of the box, or giving others the freedom to do so, taking into account not just the activities but the reflection, and feedback necessary to transition an action into a HIP (Kuh & O'Donnell). While resources, both human and financial, may not change dramatically (or at all), how they are being used should be assessed. Within the ranks, low-hanging fruit (i.e., currently adopted practices within athletics) could be transitioned into HIPs. For example, many departments adopt a strong culture of community service. Is there a way that this can be enhanced to meet the guidelines of HIPs so that these are activities that student-athletes see as beneficial for them as well as the community? In addition to resources, who is doing the communicating and how the message is being communicated is vital. Given the closer relationship, perhaps academic support staff or coaches should be encouraging and incorporating these types of initiatives, even if the overarching message comes from above. Finally, relationships, both inside and outside of the department, should be addressed. The value of the campus community should be a top priority, tapping into resources outside of athletics. Therefore, it will be beneficial to investigate academic coursework (e.g., classes on professional development or those with a service-learning component) or general campus offerings (e.g., Career Center programming or activities through a global or community initiatives office) that can supplement what is taking place in athletics.

A shift in perspective may mean investing more time in one's employees to ensure that they have the ability to provide this type of programming. This could come in the form of education of academic support staff and coaches regarding the types of activities offered on campus that student-athletes can participate in, teaching them ways that they can be integrated into their programming, or it can be transitioning current activities into HIPs. In general, the focus should be on both areas of interest and areas of excellence - both within the department and on campus as a whole. Just as faculty must be aware of how to create an environment that will ensure that students are highly employable, athletics should take that same perspective. These initiatives may not require a shift in strategic thought; however, what may need to alter is the tactical approach to reach these overarching goals. While this may be the case, it could provide athletic departments who are not currently taking advantage of these opportunities with a platform to successfully meet those individual goals promised in living rooms around the world.

Limitations and Future Research

While this work begins to assess the role of leadership in addressing student-athlete professional development activities via co-curricular activities, particularly HIPs, there are certainly limitations that need to be addressed regarding the current study. Specifically, the fact that only one institution was assessed is quite restricting on the generalizability of the work. Additionally, while this institution does have some generalizable characteristics, there are many that are unique, including the type of athletic program (i.e., FCS/mid-major), the fact that the university is situated in a large metropolitan area, the fact that the athletic program resides in a strong athletic conference, the number of sports offered, and that the program has a smaller budget when compared to conference opponents. While all these ideas must be taken into consideration, we believe that this work still provides a platform for growth in understanding the environment in which these types of programs will, or will not, flourish.

While sporadic, research has begun in this area (Ishaq & Bass, 2019; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015). As a result, there is much to consider, including student-athlete perceptions such as defining preparedness from their perspective, how leadership (e.g., administrators, coaches, academic support staff) makes recommendations – including the previously noted concept of authentic leadership (Takos et al., 2018), and faculty (mis)perceptions. Additionally, as the circle would not be complete without understanding how participation in HIPs impacts the perceptions of employers, it would be beneficial to understand what they are looking for when recruiting/hiring student-athletes and how they perceive HIPs, in addition to athletic participation, when hiring. Finally, as has been of interest with the NCAA, can (or should) athletic activities, on their own, evolve into HIPs? If not, then can/should the oft-adopted practice of student-athlete leadership program fit that bill and evolve into a HIP itself?

Conclusion

While HIPs are not new to college campuses, they are not as widely adopted as some other educational practices. Until such a time when individual HIPs become commonplace as a collective, it is up to the insightful individuals who work directly with student-athletes to ensure that the value of these educational activities is included in the messaging that is both provided and received. Ultimately, it is difficult to be transformational in a transactional environment; however, there are many opportunities to do so if an individual, or organization, seeks them out.

As noted, transactional leaders may thrive in a transformational environment as long as they allow for the creativity of others to flourish through task-oriented assignments. This is particular important, as the ideal environment for many organizations is one where there is a melding of styles (Bass et al., 1987). Thus, when we look at both the structure and resources applicable to college campuses and, therefore, intercollegiate athletic departments, all it may take is a bit of creativity to infuse these much-valued experiences into the student-athlete experience.

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Appendix

Interview Prompts (Administrators)

Leadership

1. What do you believe are the key components of organizational culture?
2. How did you learn and assess your organization's culture when you began your position?
    a. Have you had the opportunity to impact it? How?
3. How would you describe your leadership style (provide an example, if possible)?
    a. How does the University's and/or Athletics mission drive your decisions?
    b. Have you changed your style since you were hired by XX University?
4. What is your, and the department's, philosophy about new ideas and initiatives?
5. Are you encouraged to use your creativity/your own ideas? Or do they make the decisions and you must see them through?
6. How do you define success of Athletics? Student-athletes (winning, academic performance, career preparation, etc.)?
7. What role do you play in developing and promoting academic initiatives? (self-directed, contracted, etc.)

HIPs / Academics

1. What is your philosophy on HIPs?
    a. In what ways does the administration incorporate them into athletic programming (or recommendations)?
2. How important is academic success from all programs for the department?
3. What are some HIPs that you think are beneficial to student-athletes?
4. Whose messaging do you believe is most impactful to student-athletes?
5. What would you like to see SA involved in beyond what is required by athletics/academics (e.g., HIPs)

Interview Prompts (Coaches)

Leadership

1. What do you believe are the key components of organizational culture?
2. How did you learn and assess your organization's culture when you began your position?
    a. Have you had the opportunity to impact it? How?

3. How would you describe your leadership style (provide an example, if possible)?
    a. How does the University's and/or Athletics mission drive your decisions?
    b. Have you changed your style since you were hired by XX University?
4. How often do you communicate with the administration?
5. What does that process look like?
6. Do they encourage you to use your creativity/support your own ideas? Or do they make the decisions and you must see them through?
7. Describe how open they are to your ideas or recommendations
    a. So far in your career, has this been successful?
8. What do you think upper administration's goals are for student-athletes and the program?
9. How do you define success of Athletics? Student-athletes (winning, academic performance, career preparation, etc.)?
10. What do you believe your role is in developing and promoting academic initiatives? (self-directed, contracted, etc.)

HIPS / Academics

1. How do you address academics with your team (Through you? Assistant coaches? Academic support staff? Etc.)
2. Are academics important to your athletes?
    a. Do you spend time communicating how important academics are?
3. What are your feelings about the academic services provided to your student-athletes?
4. Do you discuss pre-professional preparedness with your athletes?
    a. Do you encourage participation in any of the events offered through Athletics, on campus or imbedded into classes?
5. Do you believe that your athletes spend enough time participating in career-development programming (through Athletics, on campus, in classes)?
6. Had you heard of HIPs before today? What about the opportunities that fall under these categories on campus?
7. If there are any HIPs you would like to see your student-athletes complete before leaving campus, what would they be?
    a. How do you share this with them?
8. What role do your administrators play in encouraging this, if any?