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# Reconceptualizing Division I Intercollegiate Athletics Participation as a High Impact Practice

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Academic practitioners have promoted the idea of high impact practices (HIPs) in higher education. HIPs are cognitive and social activities designed to prepare students for life after college. Research indicates that college athletes are less involved in HIPs than non-athlete peers; however, limited research has explored the ways in which athletics, if organized and governed appropriately and ethically, can qualify as a HIP. This conceptual article examines the intercollegiate athletics and higher education literature and provides key ways in which athletics participation has components—such as reflection, intentionality, and interaction—present in HIPs. Additionally, this article offers practical implications for athletics leaders to consider in order to further align athletics participation with other traditional HIPs. As critics note the growing divide between academics and athletics, reframing sports as an educational endeavor, such as a HIP, may help alleviate some strain between sport and the academy.

*Keywords*: intercollegiate athletics, high impact practices, integrated view

Higher education scholars and practitioners promote the idea of high impact practices (HIPs) designed to engage students in beneficial activities that spur cognitive and social development and prepare them for life after college (Kuh, 2008). Empirical data and assessments have found 11 practices in higher education that are HIPs: 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 and community-based learning, internships, and capstone projects and courses (Kuh, 2008).

While many college students engage in the HIPs mentioned above, researchers note that college athletes are less able to participate in HIPs (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Haslerig, 2020; Ishaq & Bass, 2019). The inability to engage in internships

and undergraduate research, for example, is often blamed on athletes' regimented schedules and strict time demands stemming from their participation in sports (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Ishaq & Bass, 2019). Thus, the current literature on HIPs in intercollegiate athletics focuses on athletes' inabilities to engage with Kuh's (2008) HIPs. While this may be true, this literature fails to acknowledge the ways in which athletics, if organized and governed ethically, qualifies as a HIP (Kuh, 2017).

The exclusion of athletics as a HIP likely stems from hyper-critical perspectives of sport, which maintain that limited positives emerge from athletics participation due to the commercialization of the collegiate model and the professionalization and exploitation of athletes, particularly those in the high-profile sports in the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Division I football and men's basketball programs (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020). Indeed, neoliberal values—power, capitalism, meritocracy, racism, and competition—in Division I, have raised concerns amongst critical scholars noting that such values challenge the educational opportunities the NCAA claims to provide for athletes (Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018).

One exception to the uneasy marriage of education and sport in Division I may come from the eight institutions that comprise the Ivy League (Clotfelter, 2019). Formed in 1954, the Ivy League is home to some of the most prestigious and academically rigorous schools in the country. In order to maintain this academic reputation, the leaders of the schools agreed to only offer aid based on need and academic qualifications (Clotfelter, 2019). Not offering athletic scholarships was a strong move away from the lesser academic standards of peers in Division I. Because of this move, many scholars perceive members of the Ivy League to have a healthier balance between education and athletics (Clotfelter, 2019). In fact, in calls for better academic-athletic coupling at the Division I level, many college sport advocacy groups (e.g., the Knight Commission and the Drake Group) have stated that all institutions should decrease the number of athletic scholarships or transition to the Ivy League model (Gurney et al., 2017; Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2021; Splitt, 2009).

Such reforms have gone unaddressed, and thus, the strain between academics and athletics remains palpable across Division I campuses. Tensions between the advantages and disadvantages of sport participation, especially concerning the nexus of education and athletics, are strongest on Division I campuses. However, it is important to distinguish this level of competition from Divisions II and III. Each NCAA division is seen as having its own relationship between sports and education (Clotfelter, 2019). The NCAA noted Divisions II and III have a stronger educational emphasis with the former offering partial athletic scholarships and the latter offering no athletic scholarships like the Ivy League (NCA Recruiting Facts, 2018). Divisions II and III athletes' experiences may be different than those in Division I due to more manageable time demands and the heightened focus on academic merit. Indeed, the NCAA considered these divisions to have an "integrated environment that focuses on academic success while offering competitive athletics and meaningful non-athletics opportunities" (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2018, p. 1). So, with its more neoliberal philosophy (Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018; Gurney et al., 2017), the strife

between education and sport is heightened in Division I, and is therefore the focus of this article. With this in mind, offering new ways to structure and understand athletics—through the lens of HIPs—could be beneficial to scholars and practitioners in the fields of education and athletics.

Despite some of the problems mentioned above, other research shows educational and developmental benefits from participation in sports (Brand, 2006; Coakley, 2021; Harry, 2021; Weight et al., 2020a). Advantages include heightened critical thinking skills, advanced teamwork and leadership capabilities, increased acceptance of diverse others, and improved employability post-college (Chalfin et al., 2015; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Weight et al., 2020a). Importantly, some of the athlete development scholarship notes that athletes of color do not attain similar positive outcomes as white athletes due to experiences with racism, stereotypes, microaggressions, and exploitation (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Jolly et al., 2020); however, other research demonstrates athletes do not have differential outcomes based on race (Gayles & Hu, 2009). In general, the positive findings of educational outcomes stemming from sport participation promote an Integrated View of Division I athletics, or the idea that elite sport participation in and of itself offers educational value (Brand, 2006). Despite these benefits, limited research has explored the ways in which athletics is or could be a HIP (Kuh, 2017). This is a void in the higher education and intercollegiate sports literature that this article works to address.

Additionally, this article offers two other contributions to these fields. First, this work further ties education and athletics by extending higher education perspectives and practices into athletics spaces. Such research was recommended by Springer and Dixon (2021), who noted there is minimal consideration of student development through intercollegiate athletics. Similarly, expanding HIPs into athletics can improve understanding of athletes' experiences and find ways in which their opportunities align or do not align with education and how to make improvements to adjust misalignment (Springer & Dixon, 2021). Second, such shifts in perspective may change the way scholars and practitioners conceptualize intercollegiate athletics and its role within higher education. Fostering an Integrated View creates appreciation for and coupling of athletics and academics. Enhanced coupling may also help dismantle negative perceptions of athletics and college athletes on Division I campuses (Harry & Weight, 2019). Arguably, the more athletics can be appropriately integrated with academics, the better educational experiences athletes will have (Coakley, 2021; Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020a).

While the idea of athletics as education is not a new notion, previous scholarship on HIPs has not provided an in-depth discussion of how restructuring Division I sports as a HIP is beneficial for both the academy and athletics (Kuh, 2017. With this in mind, the purpose of this conceptual research is to articulate the ways in which current scholarship on Division I athletics demonstrates how sport participation could be the twelfth HIP. Through the lens of Brand's (2006) Integrated View of athletics, this research answers the following questions:

1. How does Division I athletics participation currently qualify as a HIP?
2. How can Division I athletics participation be enhanced to further qualify as a HIP?

## Conceptual Model

This research stems from Myles Brand's (2006) Integrated View of intercollegiate athletics. Brand was an academic, university president, and president of the NCAA (Thelin, 2021). With his background, many believe Brand encouraged more education-based perspectives of athletics (Matz, 2021; Weight et al., 2020a). He also proposed a new way to understand sports: The Integrated View. However, to grasp the Integrated View of athletics, one must first understand the Standard View (Brand, 2006).

The Standard View maintains that athletics offer no educational value and distract from higher education's mission trinity of teaching, research, and service (Brand, 2006; Flowers, 2009). Those supporting this perspective tend to undervalue what athletics can offer to campuses, claiming sports have "more educational value than fraternity parties but less than chess club" (Brand, 2006, p. 10). Other scholars argue that although sport may provide some developmental opportunities, it is not a significant component to education. However, this perspective sells athletics short by undervaluing the educational avenues athletics provides for almost 500,000 NCAA participants and disrespecting the learning that takes place on courts and fields of competition. Similarly, the Standard View prevents constructive, valuable, and beneficial components of athletics from impacting the greater campus community (Clotfelter, 2019; Thelin, 2021).

Juxtaposed with the Standard View is the Integrated View. This perspective emphasizes the educational and developmental value inherent in athletics participation. Taking an Integrated View, Clotfelter (2019) contended: "beginning with the ancient Greeks, athletic pursuits have been recognized as a valuable component of a complete education. Through both training and competition, the athlete learns life lessons taught nowhere better than on the field of play" (p. 8). It is coupling of the mind and body that can help stimulate a person's development and education (Hyland, 2017).

Additionally, Brand (2006) proposed that athletics be further conceptualized into institutional missions and structures. This can be accomplished by classifying athletics as a HIP. For example, other HIPs, such as first year seminars, writing-intensive courses, and diversity/global learning are incorporated into departmental programming and curriculum and achieve the missions of teaching, research, and service (Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). Scholars supporting the Integrated View note that the same structuring can be accomplished with athletics (Brand, 2006; Harry & Weight, 2019; Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020a). Restructuring could include academic credit for athletics participation, reflexive assignments coupled with athletics opportunities, or even a minor or major in athletics. In fact, Brand (2006) argued that athletics, due to its performative nature, may play a role similar to that of art and music in higher education.

The similarities between athletics and art and music are well-documented (Matz, 2020; Weight et al., 2020a). For example, both groups of students can receive special admission to their institutions based on their talent and some will have professional aspirations in their respective areas. Similarly, college students in art and music programs and athletes find their crafts demanding, time intensive, competitive, and year-round. In a comparison of time demands between athletes and music majors, Weight and colleagues (2020a) discovered that athletes spent less time on sports and academics than music students spent on music and educational endeavors. However, if athletics was more integrated (i.e., if athletes received academic credit for their sport participation as music majors did for their performance), the authors noted that the student groups would reach greater parity in time demands (Weight et al., 2020a).

Brand's (2006) comparison of athletics and performative arts is the most controversial part of his Integrated View and this idea is often conflated with the entirety of this perspective. However, this lens is more than a minor/major in athletics. It is about challenging traditional perspectives of sports and athletes and promoting the educational opportunities athletics provides. In this way, this lens can also challenge deficit perspectives of college athletes that have become prominent within the American academy (Gayles et al., 2018).

Still, Brand and his Integrated View have received pushback with some scholars citing hypocritical perspectives held by the former NCAA president (Suggs & Hoffman, 2021). For example, while being an amateurism advocate and promoting its connection to education and athletics, Brand still stated: "amateurism defines the participants, not the enterprise" (Otto & Otto, 2013, p. 260). Thus, while Brand stated he was a proponent of education and amateurism, his actions still promoted commercialized sports. Many critics have noted this is antithetical to his statements about education-centric goals of athletics (Clotfelter, 2019; Flowers, 2009; Gurney et al., 2017). Similarly, other scholars have critiqued the former NCAA president's attempts to connect academics and amateurism (Staurowsky & Sack, 2006). These critics perceived the Integrated View and its relationship with amateurism served as a tool for maintaining the Association's hegemon status over sports, and even control over college athletes (Staurowsky & Sack, 2006). College athletics reform groups have made continuous calls for the NCAA to do away with amateurism and find ways to better support college athletes, particularly in their academic endeavors (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2021; Splitt, 2009). With such reforms, a more Integrated View of college athletics might be more attainable.

The aforementioned criticisms of Brand are warranted, but one avenue to potentially address such concerns and truly re-center education in sport experiences is through a truly Integrated View. With an Integrated View, scholars and practitioners may be more inclined to shift their understanding of athletics and view it as a practice in which those participating benefit in unusually positive ways (Kuh, 2017). If athletics participation were valued as a HIP, it may be reconceptualized as more educational, and therefore, more integrated into the academy.

## Literature Review

This section begins by describing the three main characteristics of HIPs. Next, literature on criticisms of the relationship between education and college sports is provided to give context to why most scholars and practitioners have not reconsidered athletics as a HIP. The section concludes with examples of the limited research on HIPs in relation to college athletics. This leads into the main focus of this article: An analysis of scholarship supporting the idea that athletics is and could be further structured as a HIP.

### High Impact Practices (HIPs)

Kuh (2008) noted 11 key practices that are beneficial for students from a variety of different backgrounds as they develop during their time in college. These practices or HIPs include 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 and community-based learning, internships, and capstone projects and courses. HIPs must promote three main characteristics: (1) reflection, (2) intentionality, and (3) interaction (Kuh, 2008). The components of reflection, intentionality, and interaction should be present in all HIPs; however, depending on the HIP, the components may be present to varying degrees (Clayton-Pedersen & Finley, n.d.; Kuh, 2017).

See Table 1 for a description of the three characteristics of HIPs and their components.

**Table 1**
*Descriptions of High Impact Practices*

| HIP Characteristic | Description |
|---|---|
| Reflection | • Frequent and structured opportunities to reflect and combine learning |
| Intentionality | • Frequent, timely, and constructive feedback<br>• Expectations are high, yet appropriate<br>• Significant investment of effort over time<br>• Opportunities for real-world application of knowledge<br>• Public demonstration of competence |
| Interaction | • Meaningful interactions with faculty and peers<br>• Experiences with diversity that encourage new ways of thinking and understanding |

Reflection can serve as a basis for student learning. Reflection should be designed as structured and ongoing to help students process knowledge, strategize, and find solutions to problems. While engaging in HIPs, students should have built-in and consistent opportunities to reflect on their experiences with said HIPs. This is a common class structure in first-year seminars and writing-intensive courses. Kuh (2017) noted that students often do not realize they can take what they learn in one HIP and apply it to another. Thus, reflection is key for bolstering students' understanding of transferable skills. Additionally, reflection is critical in connecting the classroom with practical experiences, such as service learning and internships (Kuh, 2008).

Intentionality is the process of establishing a coherent learning experience for students while ensuring the learning goals are transparent. Some components of intentionality include creating educationally purposeful programming, performing meaningful time on task, and communicating appropriately high expectations (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d.). The transparency part of intentionality stems from clear objectives and communication between those involved in the HIP, often faculty, mentors, and administrators. Similarly, those establishing HIPs should provide constructive and frequent feedback, offering students time to reflect and improve skills. Two additional key components of intentionality in HIPs are opportunities to apply knowledge to "real world" situations (i.e., internships) and public demonstration of competence (i.e., public speaking or performance). Finally, intentionally designed HIPs are connected to other learning experiences (Kuh, 2017). For example, instructors in a foreign language department could intentionally design their curriculum to complement a study abroad opportunity that is students' culminating experience before graduating.

The third characteristic of HIPs is interaction. Interaction involves students engaging with other students, faculty, and others across campus. Thus, interaction is key for student integration on campus (Kuh, 2009). Such interaction is critical, as Kuh (2017) contended many key HIP interactions happen entirely outside of the classroom (i.e., internships and service learning and community-based learning) or have significant learning components taking place outside of the classroom (i.e., undergraduate research and capstone projects/courses). Importantly, interactions should be meaningful and involve people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, such as through diversity/global learning. This enhances students' understanding of various perspectives and beliefs and offers opportunities for reflection.

Additionally, interactions are main avenues for students, faculty, and others to communicate their support and care for those they are interacting with. Thus, positive interactions through HIPs are linked to student satisfaction, persistence, and matriculation (Tinto, 1997). In a more developmental vein, students' interactions and subsequent engagement in HIPs have been tied to enhanced cognitive development, heightened self-esteem, and increased feelings regarding locus of control (Kuh, 2009; Tinto, 1997).

HIPs are distinct from other involvement opportunities, like extracurriculars such as joining a club, being a member of Greek life, or attending other campus events, as these activities are often not coupled with the classroom and/or do not include the triad of reflection, intentionality, and interaction to foster "deep integrative learning" (Kuh, 2017, 3:24). However, Kuh (2017) noted that the 11 HIPs are "not a pristine, exclusive list that can't be added to" (0:16), and thus, other areas of campus that foster the three characteristics of HIPs must be considered. Examples of some potential new HIPs include writing for the school newspaper, arts performances, working on campus, and intercollegiate athletic participation (Kuh, 2017). However, unlike the traditional 11 HIPs, there is less research and data from National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) on how these latter activities could be reconceptualized as HIPs based on scaffolding reflection, intentionality, and interaction (Kuh, 2008; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). Thus, more scholarship is needed on these practices as HIPs, with this work contributing to the field's understanding of how athletics may be enhanced to become a new HIP.

## Academic Criticisms of Division I Athletics

Despite Kuh (2017) positing that athletics could be conceptualized as a HIP, scholars and practitioners have not made significant strides to advocate for this shift. Part of this lack of progress in reimagining athletics as a HIP likely stems from critiques of Division I intercollegiate sports.

The relationship between intercollegiate athletics and higher education has always been tense and many scholars continue to critique the growing divide between academics and athletics, particularly in the NCAA at the Division I level (Clotfelter, 2019; Flowers, 2009; Gayles et al., 2018). Much of this has to do with the conflicting cultures of academics and athletics at institutions with big-time sports programs. Despres et al. (2008) define athletics culture as the "phenomenological environment in which college students who are athletes live and move when they are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities" (p. 200). Characteristics most commonly found in Division I athletics culture include hyper-commercialization, athlete commodification, a "win-at-all-costs" mentality, and a perceived emphasis on eligibility over education (Comeaux, 2018; Gurney et al., 2017). Combined, these factors can foster academic disengagement and isolate athletes from the academic community (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Gurney et al., 2017).

Jayakumar and Comeaux (2016) noted that while athletes in revenue-generating sports, especially athletes of color, are instructed to focus on their education, the culture of athletics and pressure from some coaches and administrators to excel in sports, win, and maintain eligibility, indicate that academics is not a true priority. This concentration on athletics over academics is particularly evident in coaching and athletic director contracts and incentives that reward athletic performance over academic success (Clotfelter, 2019; Gurney et al., 2017; Weight et al., 2015; Wilson, 2014, 2017). Wilson (2017) examined football coaching contract incentive clauses across three different years, finding that academic incentives for coaches did increase. However, this increase was still significantly less substantial than the

incentive for performance on the field (Wilson, 2017). Highlighting this research, in 2014, the University of Florida's head football coach had an athletic bonus—winning a national championship—of an additional $250,000. However, his contract did not offer a defined academic bonus for his football team's success in the classroom (Wilson, 2014). While financial incentives are not an ideal model, this is the current way and culture of Division I college athletics (Clotfelter, 2019, Wilson, 2017). With this unlikely to change, shifting some of the financial incentives away from athletic performance and toward educational engagement could help the field re-center educational priorities (Wilson, 2014). This may also align coaches more with faculty and academic leaders who are incentivized to focus on student and athlete educational development, even at significantly lower financial rewards (Clotfelter, 2019; Weight et al., 2015; Wilson, 2017). Thus, the current conceptualization of intercollegiate athletics does not consistently center educational values.

More recently, other scholars and critics have claimed that the emergence of name, image, and likeness (NIL) has also further centered athletic incentives for athletes over academic performance (Berardino, 2021). Since 2021, NIL has provided athletes the ability to monetize their rights of publicity (Brutlag Hosick, 2021). While this cannot be "pay-for-play" regarding their athletic performance, athletes generally receive NIL deals because of their athlete status, past sport performance, and predicted future athletic success and social status (Brutlag Hosick, 2021). Thus, athletes may be more financially incentivized now to focus on athletics compared to academics.

This prioritization of athletics can isolate athletes further from the rest of campus, particularly athletes of color at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Jolly et al., 2020). This further hinders athletes' opportunities for growth and HIP participation, with Comeaux and Grummert (2020) explaining involvement may be especially challenging for Black athletes as "engagement in activities are conditional on the campus racial climate and antiblack racism in a highly commercialized athletics industry" (p. 58). Thus, isolation and decreased interaction may be the result of the structure and culture of athletics, institutional racism, the time obligations from sports, or the physical location of athletic buildings away from the rest of the campus (Astin, 1984; Harry, 2021; Huml et al., 2014; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016).

Recent scandals have also heightened concerns about the combination of academics and athletics. This tension is arguably most palpable at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC) where a decades-long scandal of academic misconduct was uncovered in 2010 (Smith & Willingham, 2019). An internal investigation into NCAA extra benefits for athletes (i.e., a special arrangement to offer an athlete a benefit not provided to non-athletes or not explicitly authorized by the NCAA) uncovered over-assistance and course clustering executed by members of athletic academic support. Additionally, the investigation noted changed grades for athletes and athletes passing courses without completing meaningful work. The NCAA did not condemn these issues as academic fraud, but rather, posited that offering such courses was part of UNC's institutional academic autonomy. However, much of the

higher education community across the country expressed dismay and frustration over the NCAA's handling of the situation (Smith & Willingham, 2019).

In 2019, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) uncovered a college admissions conspiracy at elite institutions. This was dubbed Operation Varsity Blues (Hextrum, 2019). Affluent families paid the conspiracy organizer to increase test scores and bribe admissions officials. Additionally, many families used the scheme to disguise their children as athletes, even though the children had never participated in sports, as a means to admit them to the institution. It is a widely known practice that, at some institutions, the athletics department can submit a certain number of recruit names to the admissions office, where admissions officers will then view their applications more favorably. This is known as special admissions. While special admissions is available to students from various groups, like legacy students and children of donors, it is most criticized when it involves athletes (Clotfelter, 2019; Hextrum, 2019). Once these disguised athletes enrolled at the school, the coach was paid and the student was dropped from the roster (Hextrum, 2019). Given the above examples, among others, some scholars are increasingly wary of the role of college athletics in higher education, with some even calling for the separation of academics and athletics entirely (Clotfelter, 2019).

## HIPs and Athletics

Literature on athletics and HIPs is focused on the ways in which athletes cannot engage in these practices, rather than noting how athletics itself can be improved to be a potential HIP. For example, Harry (2021) explored best practices used by athletics departments to integrate college athletes on campus more effectively, and respondents noted that the culture of athletics, time demands, and pressures for athletes to perform, limited their involvement in traditional HIPs like internships. Similarly, Ishaq and Bass (2019) explored the specific implementation of HIPs in the athletic academic advising space and the obstacles that hindered HIP implementation and athlete engagement. Academic-athletic advisors and/or directors of athlete academic support interviewed in this study concluded that the main barriers preventing HIP implementation were: university control of HIPs, divergent attitudes between advisors and coaches, poor funding/resources, and time demands.

With the institution controlling HIPs, support personnel designing HIP programming specific for athletes had to go through the institution's approval process to establish a first year seminar for athletes (Ishaq & Bass, 2019). Additionally, participants noted that the universities controlled the design and implementation of learning communities and writing intensive courses. Because of this structure, participants highlighted athletes struggled to get involved in these HIPs due to time demands and scheduling conflicts. Ishaq and Bass (2019) also noted that academic-athletic personnel were more concerned with athletes participating in HIPs than coaches, but coaches have the most influence over HIP involvement. This aligns with previous scholarship on coaches lacking financial incentive regarding athletes' educational pursuits (Wilson, 2017). Academic staff also ran into hurdles for HIP engagement regarding funding, with financial support going toward other areas of athletics in-

stead of athlete development. Still, participants emphasized the significance of the relationship between the academics and athletics communities.

Haslerig (2020) continued this discussion of HIPs and intercollegiate athletics through studying the academic pathways of Division I football athletes who also engaged in graduate studies before exhausting their NCAA eligibility. In this study, Haslerig (2020) advocated for graduate coursework to be considered a HIP as it shares some of the promising components of traditional HIPs. Football athletes interviewed noted they did not have opportunities to engage in traditional HIPs such as studying abroad or enrolling in capstone courses as undergraduates. However, they felt that graduate school was an impactful experience for them. Haslerig (2020) argued "graduate study may share key features of HIPs for many students, yet this effect is likely heightened for athletes" because they have fewer opportunities during their undergraduate experience to engage in HIPs (p. 164).

While these studies offer important insight into the role, or missing role, of HIPs in the experiences of college athletes, the scholars did not explore how participation in college athletics itself aligns with the goals and purposes of HIPs and may further integrate academics and athletics (Brand, 2006; Kuh, 2017).

## Conceptualizing Division I Athletics as a HIP

This section answers the first research question about how Division I athletics currently qualifies as a HIP by reviewing scholarship bolstering the ways in which participation in intercollegiate athletics satisfies the HIP requirements of reflection, intentionality, and interaction. First, however, it is important to discuss that athletes' experiences at Division I institutions are not monolithic (Clotfelter, 2019; Gayles & Hu, 2009). Experiences are largely contingent on the institutional cultures, the school's history with racism and the race of the athlete, the athlete's sport, athletics' level of commercialization, and academic-athletic relations on campus just to name a few.

For example, research by Lu et al. (2018) discovered that Division I athletes enrolled at institutions with higher academic rankings were more likely to develop stronger student identities compared to those enrolled at a less academically rigorous institution. On the other hand, Gayles and colleagues (2018) and Harper (2018) noted that Black athletes often encounter racism and experience commodification and financial exploitation. This experience is especially exacerbated for athletes in the revenue-generating sports of football and men's basketball. These power dynamics often lead to academic-athletic strain, and limit athletes' development of positive and healthy relationships between sport and education (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Gayles et al., 2018). However, in contexts where institutions have stronger academic-athletic integration, athletic participation may be ripe for classification as a HIP.

### Reflection

Reflection is most successful when structured and frequent (Kuh, 2017). Structured and regular opportunities for reflection promote self and situation awareness

that is beneficial in athletics and non-athletics spaces. Reflection is key in all HIPs, especially undergraduate research. For example, when conducting an experiment and the hypothesized results do not emerge, the faculty researcher may ask students to reflect on why the anticipated results differ from the actual results. Additionally, the faculty researcher may have the undergraduate researchers re-do the study to see if the findings change.

Similarly, in their sport participation, athletes are given time to reflect on their experiences during training sessions and practices. For example, athletes go through different plays, routes, and schemes during practices. If the play, route, or scheme is not done correctly, coaches often ask athletes to reflect on what went wrong and why, what they could have done better, and then have them execute the play or scheme again (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). This opportunity to reflect and learn is not only structured and frequent, but also enables athletes to theorize and think critically (Hyland, 2017; Jenkins, 2020). Additionally, such reflection is common during film sessions. Athletes use these reflection opportunities to solidify their understanding of a play or scheme and then execute it in competitions.

Kuh (2008, 2017) contended that skills learned in one HIP are fluid and intersect with other HIPs. A student enrolled in a non-profit finance course while participating in service learning may take what they learn from volunteering with them to their fourth-year internship at a non-profit. This is not unlike an athlete taking what they learn in the weight room with them to an anatomy class and vice versa. Similarly, an athlete could be enrolled in a business leadership course and take strategies and practices gained from coursework and guest speakers with them to working with and leading a team. In this way, athletics is coupled with applicable experiences, a key component of HIPs (Kolb, 2014; Kuh, 2008). Indeed, scholars in sport psychology have noted that, together, practice and reflection enhance performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Similarly, through coupling sport and education, practitioners emphasize reflection and solidify meaning making (Kolb, 2014). Coffey and Davis (2019) examined college athletes' reflections about their athletics and classroom experiences. Findings indicated that when topics were simultaneously explored with opportunities in the classroom *and* athletics, athletes had better learning outcomes. Thus, classroom instruction offers reflective opportunities that mirror the experiential learning inherent in college sport participation (Coffey & Davis, 2019). Reflection allows athletes to see how transferrable skills gained in education and sports intertwine for a more holistic college experience (Clotfelter, 2019; Harry & Weight, 2019). Reflection is tightly connected to intentionality.

## Intentionality

This feature of HIPs has five components. First, feedback is necessary to engage meaningfully in HIPS and it must be constructive, frequent, and timely. Scholarship notes that for all students to improve their learning they need frequent and timely feedback (Kuh, 2008). Like non-athletes participating in HIPs (e.g., writing intensive courses and capstone projects and courses), athletes receive prompt feedback

from a host of campus leaders, particularly coaches. Feedback from coaches is often immediate, deliberate, and occurs in practice, competition, and film sessions. Feedback may go over execution of specific plays, but it can also cover work ethic, teamwork, and leadership.

John Wooden, an esteemed former men's basketball coach at the University of California-Los Angeles, is known and appreciated as being one of the best college coaches of all time. In an analysis of the coach's teaching philosophy, Gallimore and Tharp (2004) discovered that Wooden was intentional in his basketball practice design so that it included timely feedback that coupled explanation and demonstration to players. This was followed by players' imitation of that explanation and demonstration and followed by repetition (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004). This is not unlike the teaching and feedback that happens in more traditional academic settings (Kolb, 2014).

Thus, frequent and timely feedback from coaches is pivotal in athletes' collegiate careers. Still, it is crucial that the feedback is constructive as this has proven to intrinsically motivate athletes to stay resilient, overcome obstacles, and succeed in athletics and academics (Raabe & Zakrajsek, 2017; Weight et al., 2020b).

Tightly coupled with feedback is setting high/appropriate expectations for students participating in HIPs. Some research indicates that faculty hold lower academic expectations of athletes, compared to non-athletes (Comeaux, 2011), an outcome that likely stems from the dumb jock stereotype (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). This stereotype is a deficit perspective of athletes and contends that this group is not as academically capable as non-athletes, lacks educational motivation, and is only in college for sports. This stereotype is strongest against Black male athletes (Comeaux, 2011, 2018). However, athletes of all racial backgrounds often enter college with high expectations of themselves to succeed in the classroom and in athletic competition (Adler & Adler, 1985; Cooper et al., 2017; Harry, 2021). In fact, in a study of Division I men's basketball athletes, Adler and Adler (1985) discovered athletes in their sample came to college with "optimistic and idealistic goals and attitudes about their impending academic career" (p. 241). However, once they encountered negative climates surrounding their educational endeavors, such as negative stereotypes from faculty and isolation due to sport demands, they felt the need to make adjustments to their academic goals (Adler & Adler 1985). Thus, many resigned to focusing on athletic expectations instead of academic achievements. It can be inferred that the lack of appreciation and integration of athletics may force athletes to lower their own expectations.

Despite obstacles, athletes are held to very high standards and these expectations come from their coaches, teammates, administrators, families, and themselves (Cooper et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2010). The idea of meeting and/or exceeding expectations is instilled in athletes from a young age, often from the time they begin participating in their sport throughout their college athletics careers, and after (Martin et al., 2010). Indeed, coaches will demonstrate their high expectations in their timely feedback. Similarly, Weight and colleagues (2020b) examined the role coaches had in facilitating athletes' self-efficacy belief, which intertwines with self-expectations.

Findings demonstrated athletes who held themselves to high expectations and had coaches who held them to those standards felt their sporting experiences were more successful compared to athletes and coaches who held lower expectations. Similarly, athletes who stated they and their coaches maintained high expectations and aspirations, reflected that these aspirations helped them achieve other career goals after their sport careers (Weight et al., 2020b).

Another indicator of intentionality is the student's significant investment of effort over time. Students who devote significant, yet appropriate effort over time to educationally meaningful activities are more likely to advance their learning. Time on task is particularly evident in writing-intensive courses, ePortfolios, and capstone projects and courses (Kuh, 2017). However, time on task is not only significant for students participating in the 11 traditional HIPs, but also for those participating in athletics. There is no shortage of research highlighting the strenuous time demands placed on college athletes, with recent reports demonstrating athletes often exceed the maximum NCAA limit of 20 hours per week on sport-related activities (NCAA Division I Manual, 2020). For example, the NCAA GOALS (2020) report gathered self-reported data from athletes about their experiences. Track and field athletes reported spending the fewest hours per week on their sport at 27 hours, while baseball athletes reported spending the most time on their sport, dedicating 42 hours to the diamond.

While scholars critique athletes' time demands, noting that time allocated to athletics could/should be devoted to academics (Gurney et al., 2017), few have framed the time athletes dedicate to their sport as an educational experience (Brand, 2006; Harry & Weight, 2019; Hyland, 2017; Jenkins, 2020; Matz, 2020). This lack of reframing athletics as an academic endeavor, likely relates to the academic criticisms discussed in the literature review above. Scholarship has demonstrated some disadvantages when athletes spend too much time on athletics, particularly athlete role engulfment which occurs when the athlete identity becomes so salient that it replaces other identities, and limited career preparation for life after sport (Comeaux, 2018). These are important concerns, especially for athletes in the most commercialized sports of football and men's basketball, who are also predominantly Black men (Harper, 2018). Thus, leaders must consider the aforementioned concerns when working with athletes and coupling athletics and academics in HIP alignment.

However, a host of research also promotes college sport participation as an avenue for gaining life skills. This is akin to the life skills cultivated through the 11 traditional HIPs (Kuh, 2017). In a survey of athletes from 18 Division I programs by Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007), participants reported advantages related to athletics participation. Particularly, athletes noted that sports increased their tolerance for diverse others, honed their ability to take responsibility for their actions, advanced their teamwork and leadership skills, improved their studying and time management, and taught them more about ethics (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Similarly, Chalfin et al. (2015) examined the employability of former college athletes through the perspective of potential employers. Regardless of competition level, gender, or sport of the athlete, employers attached significance to someone who was an athlete, and

attributed to them the following qualities: competitiveness, coachability, self-motivation, mental toughness, time management, and ability to handle pressure. Employers believed these qualities would make athletes better candidates than other student leaders including captains of debate teams, presidents of fraternities, and editors-in-chief at student newspapers. Thus, critics who have noted that athletics is not educational and does not assist athletes in preparing for life after sport, may need to reconsider this idea from a more integrated perspective (Hyland, 2017).

Additionally, other scholarship highlights the cognitive development of college athletes. With data from NSSE, the same survey that is used to determine HIPs, Rettig and Hu (2016) found minimal differences in academic outcomes of athletes compared to non-athletes when considering active and collaborative learning opportunities, faculty interactions, and academic challenges. Athletes in the study also had statistically significantly higher scores for positive interactions with racially diverse others and learning experiences outside of traditional classroom settings (Rettig & Hu, 2016). This lends support to classify athletics as a HIP as such findings support Kuh's (2008, 2017) claims that HIPs often take place outside the classroom.

Engagement and education taking place outside of the classroom offer coupling opportunities for practical application of knowledge, another component of intentionality. As with non-athletes, athletes uncover the relevance of what they have learned from a class, coach instruction, or discussion with a peer, and see how it is transferable to other areas of their lives. In this way, intention is closely linked with transparency because this helps athletes recognize these connections between education and sport (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d.). Similarly, this is linked with reflection and the experiential learning process (Kolb, 2014; Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

For example, an athlete may be enrolled in a research methods class and required to submit a proposal at the end of the semester. The athlete could take something they have learned, noticed, or experienced through athletics—such as the underrepresentation of women and people of color in college athletics or the need for more mental health resources due to their own personal experiences with wellbeing—and examine the topic in this assignment. In this example, there is a coupling of the practical application of sport with the classroom and the classroom with sport. As more athletes enroll in graduate school (Haslerig, 2020), with many programs requiring research studies, this athlete could even consider conducting their study in the future. While this would technically not be the HIP of completing undergraduate research, it is likely that graduate research still allows athletes to experience a "sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions" that comes with undergraduate research (Kuh et al., 2013, para. 6).

Similarly, athletes often take something learned in one setting and apply it to another. This is seen as athletes break down game film and execute improved actions or plays in competition. Or an athlete can take an athletics experience, such as working through team turmoil, and apply it to working in group projects with other students. This transferability of skills from the court to the classroom is also beneficial as athletes transition out of sport into new careers (Chalfin et al., 2015; Hyland, 2017; Weight et al., 2020a).

The fifth and final component of intentionality is the public demonstration of competence. HIPs such as collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, and internships capitalize on developing students' public demonstration of competition, often through presentations to peers, faculty, and supervisors. Public competence demonstration is perhaps the most obvious way athletics currently qualifies as a HIP. Athletes demonstrate their unique talents and capabilities on some of the biggest stages (Nocera & Strauss, 2016). These stages include competing in large arenas and stadiums with hundreds to thousands of fans. Similarly, these demonstrations of competence are often televised locally, regionally, or nationally. Arguably, no other group of college students has the same kind or level of demonstration of their competence than athletes do (Jenkins, 2020).

Another unique component to athletes' public demonstration of competence is the fact that they often answer for their proficiency or struggles to the media. This adds a unique level of pressure to athletes' performances and also highlights the fact that they must not only be physically competent, but also in explaining their individual and team performance to the media, be mentally and articulately competent. Few college students showcase their capabilities in such ways, highlighting how athletics participation meets HIP requirements.

## Interaction

"Learning does not occur in a vacuum; students interact with faculty, other campus educators, other students, as well as communities and the public/private agencies within them" (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d., p. 3). Importantly, athletics participation, while not explicitly mentioned by these scholars, involves interacting with faculty, other campus educators—like coaches, advisors, and mentors, students, and stakeholders in the campus and local communities (Clotfelter, 2019; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Weight et al., 2015). Kuh (2008) contended that there are two key components to interaction: (1) meaningful interactions with faculty and peers and (2) experiences with diversity that lead to new ways of understanding. These components of interaction are significant across HIPs, but may emerge strongest in diversity/global learning, undergraduate research, learning communities, and first year seminars and experiences (Kuh, 2008). These components are also present in intercollegiate athletics.

First, some scholarship notes faculty have more negative perceptions of athletes compared to non-athletes (Comeaux, 2011; Harry, 2021). These relationships vary based on faculty and athlete race and gender identity. Comeaux (2011) discovered that faculty of color, women faculty, and faculty in education-related disciplines were more likely to have positive perceptions of athletes. This context is important as negative perceptions from faculty who identify as white and/or men may discourage athletes from seeking out interactions with these faculty, further limiting their growth and development in college (Comeaux, 2011; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Still, there is a growing body of literature discussing positive athlete-faculty interactions.

For example, more than two-thirds of NCAA athletes have self-reported having a close relationship with at least one professor at their institution (NCAA GOALS,

2016). In a similar vein, Harry (2021) examined over 500 exit interviews and surveys of graduating Division I athletes and found that 80% of athletes who were asked about their faculty interactions said professors were positively impactful in their academic careers. In interviews with Division I athletes discussing their identity development, Bell (2009) also found most athletes talked about strong and beneficial relationships with faculty. This was most common for athletes in their final years of college (Bell, 2009), which may indicate a need to encourage more athlete-faculty interactions early in college or that these interactions take time to develop.

Positive interactions with faculty might be even more critical for athletes of color (Harrison, 2007; Jolly et al., 2020). Jolly and colleagues (2020) analyzed the current scholarship on culturally responsive programming for Black college athletes and where that programming was housed. Some were run through athletics departments, while others were managed by the NCAA and included Life Skills or the Scholar-Baller model (Harrison, 2007). Jolly et al. (2020) found the most culturally responsive programs were managed by faculty. These programs were more interdisciplinary, comprehensive, relevant, and led to stronger retention for Black athletes. The results from Jolly et al. (2020) highlight how important faculty interaction and integration are for athletes, especially Black athletes.

Historically, education research has been limited in examining how other campus leaders outside of faculty (e.g., advisors, student affairs professionals, coaches) influence the experiences of students, particularly athletes (Patton et al., 2016). However, athletes cultivate meaningful interactions and relationships with coaches during their time participating in sport (Weight et al., 2015; Weight et al., 2020b). These relationships may be critically important in educating athletes as this population spends much of its time in college working with and developing relationships with coaches (NCAA GOALS, 2016; Weight et al., 2020b).

While coaches are not faculty, some scholars have acknowledged their roles as educators and their significance in influencing athletes in similar ways that faculty often do (Brand, 2006; Weight et al., 2015; Weight et al., 2020b). Positive student-faculty interactions have been shown to assist students in persisting through college, developing confidence, and planning for goals post-graduation (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Patton et al., 2016). This is not unlike the role coaches play in athlete-coach relationships (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Similarly, research by Weight and colleagues (2015) used the Integrated View to explore how Division I coaches perceived academic-athletic integration. Some of the key findings demonstrated that coaches saw themselves as educators, even if that was not the common perception of them on campus. With that, almost half of the coaches believed further academic-athletic integration could "amplify the educational foundation of intercollegiate athletics and reverse the increasing competitive and commercial pressure" (Weight et al., 2015, p. 514). Thus, many stakeholders within athletics arguably already consider sport participation to be educational, but this perspective is not valued by the academy. One avenue to promote this athletics-as-education lens is to further incentivize coaches toward athletes' engagement with HIPs (Wilson, 2014). A second avenue may be to shift higher edu-

cation's epistemological understanding of athletics and consider designs that mirror other HIPs (Brand, 2006; Hyland, 2017; Jenkins, 2020; Kuh, 2017).

The second component to interaction is experiences with diversity, which can result in new ways of thinking (Kuh, 2008). Athletics can be a diverse space regarding racial and ethnic identities, gender identities, abilities, and athletes coming from different regions/countries and socio-economic statuses (Coakley, 2021; Harrison, 2007). With this context, scholarship has demonstrated that due to their sport participation, college athletes tend to have more diverse interactions than their non-athlete peers (Comeaux & Fuentes, 2015; Harrison, 2007; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Rettig & Hu, 2016). Additionally, the NCAA GOALS 2020 study found that 81% of Division I athletes report that their college sport experiences have made them more understanding of others who are different from them (Durham, 2020).

Exposure to diversity was amplified through the recent rise in activism since the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Rather than "sticking to sports," athletes opted for the frontlines of activism concerning racial/social justice (Harry, 2023; Kluch, 2020). The ability of athletes—from all backgrounds—to come together to fight for causes is significant and indicates not only exposure to diversity, but an appreciation for diversity. Such activism actions also demonstrate new ways of understanding sports in society and how sports are connected to social issues (Coakley, 2021; Harry, 2023). This engagement is coupled with reflection on these issues and situations, and conversations with meaningful mentors, educators, and leaders on campus (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d.). Thus, this intersects across the various characteristics of traditional HIPs, and shows how athletics can be conceptualized potential 12th HIP.

## Discussion and Implications

This section answers the second research question concerning how practitioners in/around athletics can work to further enhance sports to meet HIP qualifications.

### Practical Implications

Previous research has noted that athletics personnel struggle to get athletes involved in impactful programming due to university control of HIPs and athlete time demands (Ishaq & Bass, 2019). Similarly, research with athlete development and support personnel, who are tasked with creating programming for athletes' growth and preparation for life after sport, has shown that these leaders may struggle with navigating the institution's approval process for HIP sport programming, such as athlete-specific first year seminars (Harry, 2021; Ishaq & Bass, 2019; Jolly et al., 2020). This lack of collaboration between academic programs and athletics departments to coordinate HIPs for athletes may indicate a more Standard View at Division I institutions (Brand, 2006; Haslerig, 2020).

This lack of collaboration is problematic as athletes are not considered in greater institutional design and programming, which may limit their growth and preparation and their ability to capitalize on both traditional HIPs and the developmental ben-

efits of sport participation (Berardino, 2021; Brand, 2006; Comeaux & Grummert, 2021; Jolly et al., 2020; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013; Springer & Dixon, 2021). As Ishaq and Bass (2019) stated: "When HIPs are unsystematic, it becomes very difficult to reap the positive outcomes associated with their implementation" (p. 189). While the academic arms of the universities may control the current 11 HIPs, leaders in the athletics department can control how sports are structured to either hinder or enhance athletes' growth and development. If the design of college sport further emphasized the educational triad of teaching, research, and service, the academic arms of campuses may be more inclined to devote enhanced financial support to athletics and collaborate to further center the educational components of participation in athletics (Clotfelter, 2019; Springer & Dixon, 2021; Weight et al., 2015). This would also allow for a stronger Integrated View (Brand, 2006; Weight et al., 2020a).

An Integrated View can flip the focus of HIP and sport research to center how athletics is already impactful or how athletics can be designed to further qualify as a HIP. Additionally, athletics departments and institutions focusing on reconceptualizing athletics as a HIP, may help mitigate some of the concerns of NIL suppressing educational endeavors and values (Berardino, 2021). This athletics-as-education lens may be particularly important for athlete support staff and coaches, who are seen as having the most influence in athletes' involvement and meaning making when it comes to educational experiences (Harry, 2021; Ishaq & Bass, 2019; Weight et al., 2020b). The remainder of the practical implications in this article offers avenues for athletics practitioners to enhance reflection, intentionality, and interaction to further structure Division I athletics as a HIP.

***Reflection***

Reflection is a key component to HIPs (Kuh, 2008, 2017), and reflection in athletics spaces is linked with growth in athlete autonomy (Harry & Weight, 2019; Weinberg & Gould, 2019). A common critique of Division I intercollegiate athletics is that athletes are hyper-surveilled by administrators and coaches and therefore often lack agency to make their own decisions, such as which courses to enroll in and engagement in activities outside of sport (Comeaux, 2018; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Thus, offering more opportunities for personal reflection in athletics participation is one way leaders can lessen surveillance practices and further structure college sport for HIP alignment.

For example, athlete support staff can have athletes write personal reflections as part of their development programming. Coaches could even consider incorporating reflections—written or mental reflections—as part of their practices after particular drills or watching film. Indeed, such educational components could be included in coaching contracts as a means to center education and HIPs in athletics. Reflections are beneficial in promoting active engagement, rather than passive learning (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d.; Kolb, 2014). Indeed, reflection encourages athletes to understand how skills gained in their education and sports are not context-dependent, but rather move across contexts to provide a more holistic college experience (Coffey & Davis, 2019; Harry & Weight, 2019). This connection between reflecting,

learning, and doing is one of the reasons reflections and opportunities for journaling are prominent components in other HIPs, like first year seminars, diversity/global learning, and e-portfolios (Finley, 2019).

Adding reflective elements to athletics is one avenue to ensure educational components of sports are coupled with the athletics experience. Similarly, including academic-style assignments (e.g., short essays, discussion posts, etc.) in sport may help establish a more Integrated View of athletics particularly highlighting the teaching component inherent in sport and the importance of coaches in facilitating athlete development through reflection and teaching (Brand, 2006; Harrison, 2007; Hyland, 2017; Weight et al., 2015). Reflection often intertwines naturally with intentionality and interaction (Finley, 2019; Kuh, 2008, 2017).

***Intentionality***

Intentionality includes five parts: feedback, high expectations, time investment, knowledge application, and public demonstration of competence. One unique way to add more intentionality to intercollegiate athletics is to establish an athletic-centric curriculum—similar to the major in athletics proposed by Brand (2006)—that includes all five of the aforementioned components. An athletic-centric curriculum has been proposed by various scholars advocating for a more Integrated View of Division I athletics, with the belief that such a design could reimagine the role of athletics within education and provide more coupling of academics and athletics opportunities (Harry & Weight, 2019; Hyland, 2017; Matz, 2020, 2021; Weight et al., 2020a, 2020b). Indeed, other scholars have created a curriculum—the Scholar Baller model—specifically for athletes of color (Fuller et al., 2020; Harrison, 2007; Jolly et al., 2020). Instead of being recognized as just a "baller," successful Black athletes who thrive on and off the court are labeled "scholar ballers" to appreciate their development across identity domains (Fuller et al., 2020). In combining the triad of education, athletics, and entertainment, this perspective repositions the "current model of sport in American society to place as much emphasis on succeeding in the classroom as is placed on the playing field" to address the lack of integration of athletics, academics, and entertainment (Fuller et al., 2020, p. 828). A similar concept emerges when considering an athletic-centric curriculum.

Coffey and Davis (2019) noted reflective learning occurs when instructors coupled classroom and athletics opportunities for active learning. Similarly, through the lens of the Integrated View, Harry and Weight (2019) surveyed athletics' stakeholders' perspectives of an athletic-centric minor. The majority of participants (66%) surveyed were supportive of such a curriculum, with athletes and coaches most in favor, and faculty being the least supportive (Harry & Weight, 2019). Traditionally, faculty hold a more Standard View of athletics (Brand, 2006; Matz, 2020; Sperber, 2000); however, 42% of faculty included in the survey were still interested in implementing the minor. One faculty member surveyed argued that the minor could assist in helping "athletes and others (faculty, staff, students, community) better understand competencies gained through participation in athletics, especially if this experiential education was paired up with a more traditional academic course in a classroom/lab setting" (Harry & Weight, 2019, p. 25).

Thus, there is potential for more faculty interest and involvement in designing and implementing an athletic-centric curriculum than previously believed. This could help address the concerns raised by athletics administrators in the study by Ishaq and Bass (2019) who noted that the academic arms of campuses do not collaborate in getting athletes involved in HIPs. Additionally, academic-athletic collaboration is important for not only promoting the Integrated View, but also limiting athletes' experiences with isolation as they have more intentional interactions with faculty, peers, and others involved in the curriculum (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Huml et al., 2014; Kuh, 2009). If athletics is included in a curriculum, it could be more aligned with the traditional HIPs and the curriculum could even include some HIPs such as first year seminars, collaborative assignments/projects, service and community-based learning, and internships (Kuh, 2017). This inclusion of HIPs in the curriculum also links intentionality to interaction, further decreasing athlete isolation (Astin, 1984).

In this curriculum, athletes' demonstration of competence would remain a key component in the classroom and in sport competition. Faculty and coach feedback would remain prompt and constructive, and both groups of educators would maintain high and reasonable expectations for the athletes' work (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Weight et al., 2020b). One piece of these expectations could be more autonomy for athletes, which also ties into the reflection quality of HIPs discussed earlier. This autonomy, the ability to explore, fail, discover, and apply new knowledge is key to other HIPs and would need to be included in athletics participation and the associated curriculum (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d; Comeaux, 2018; Finley, 2019; Harrison, 2007; Haslerig, 2020; Kuh, 2017). Regarding time commitment, HIPs are most successful and advantageous for students when there is faculty involvement and when university leaders and the campus community understand the time, energy, and resources that are necessary to support the activities (Ishaq & Bass, 2019; Jolly et al., 2020; Kuh, 2008; McCormick et al., 2017).

The research that has explored this style of curriculum and the combination of the court and classroom has highlighted the interdisciplinary design of education through athletics (Fuller et al., 2020; Harry & Weight, 2019; Jenkins, 2020; Matz, 2020, 2021; Weight et al., 2020a). Interdisciplinary components are common across the traditional 11 HIPs as they contribute to new ways of knowing (Kuh, 2008, 2017), while also connecting intentionality to reflection and interaction (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d). Curricula and academic practices that span across a host of areas decrease programmatic siloing, enhance cooperation, and increase engagement (Kuh, 2009). Indeed, Clayton-Pederson and Finley (n.d.) contended that reaching learning goals across HIPs involves intentionally "integrating elements of the curriculum traditionally treated as separate" (p. 2).

Athletics practitioners in athlete development/support could consider intentional changes to their programming that touch on the five parts of intentionality. In doing so, athletics practitioners are taking more of the onus of designing athletics as a HIP and ensuring they have control over at least one type of HIP athletes can engage in on their campus (Ishaq & Bass, 2019).

Athlete development programming should be more intentional in demonstrating to athletes how their participation in sports is transferrable to other settings (Jolly et al., 2020). These settings include college contexts like participation in classes and other HIPs and career preparation. For example, Chalfin and colleagues (2015) showed athletes' ability to translate skills from sports to careers made them more coveted by potential employers (Chalfin et al., 2015). Thus, programming can focus on encouraging athletes to develop autonomously while finding ways to communicate these beneficial qualities through resumes and interviews.

Similarly, athletics practitioners should seek more ways to intertwine athletics with other HIPs as HIPs are scaffolded together and influenced by one another (Kuh, 2008, 2017). Athletics participation can be coupled with writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research, capstone courses and projects, service learning, and even diversity/global learning. For example, in the spring of 2017 the University of Michigan football team took a trip to Italy (Seidel, 2017), offering the players a chance to engage in the traditional HIP of diversity/global learning, while also participating in athletics. The athletes on the trip experienced educational and cultural tours to historic churches, museums and the opera, and the Colosseum (Seidel, 2017). They engaged with local residents and learned some of the language and ate authentic food. This is a clear demonstration of coupling athletics and education, engaging in learning outside of the classroom, and promoting the Integrated View.

***Interaction***

Interaction is the third characteristic of HIPs and is comprised of meaningful interactions with others, along with diverse experiences that encourage new pathways for meaning making (Kuh, 2008). Meaningful interactions with coaches can be further centered in the experiences of college athletes by hiring coaches who see athletics as educational and want to place that principle at the forefront of their work (Weight et al., 2015). Coaches are arguably some of the most influential people in athletes' lives before, during, and after college; thus, athletes are likely to trust and consider the words and actions of their coaches perhaps more than other people on campus (Harry, 2021; Weight et al., 2020b). So, a coach who promotes the importance of coupling academics and athletics may have a stronger influence on an athlete's holistic development compared to a coach with a Standard View who cares more about athletic achievement (Weight et al., 2015).

Additionally, just as athletes receive developmental programming, coaches can receive education on how to foster even stronger and healthier relationships with their athletes, both as individuals, and as a team. To bring this to fruition, participation in such educational opportunities could also be included in or incentivized through coaching contracts.

Through such educational opportunities, some coaches may go from simply providing athletics oversight to better understanding their athletes' lives and modeling respectful engagement with diverse others (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d.; Weight et al., 2020b). This enhanced interaction will foster trust and appreciation within the athlete-coach relationship, which, like strong student-faculty relationships in HIPs,

leads to growth during college and preparation for life after college/sport (Kuh, 2017; Weight et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Finally, another way to enhance interaction in designing athletics participation as a HIP is to create more opportunities for diversity training and improve the representation of athletes of color and athletics leaders of color, especially on certain historically white teams (e.g., coaches and administrators) (Coakley, 2021; Comeaux & Fuentes, 2015; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Jolly et al., 2020). For training purposes, more components of the Scholar Baller model—which centers the experiences of Black athletes—should be included in various athletics HIP programming to enhance athletes' understanding of and appreciation for diversity (Harrison, 2007). Additionally, some sports, like hockey, equestrian, and lacrosse, favor white athletes from affluent backgrounds; thus, there is a smaller representation of athletes of color and those from lower socio-economic statuses on these teams (Coakley, 2021; Hextrum, 2019). Improving the compositional diversity of these teams, and others, will expose athletes on these teams but also on teams across the department to more diverse cultures and ways of thinking. This enhances the interaction component of sports, aligning athletics participation with HIPs (Clayton-Pederson & Finley, n.d.; Kuh, 2008, 2017). While previous scholarship demonstrated athlete involvement outside of sports is challenging (Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Haslerig, 2019; Ishaq & Bass, 2019), further structuring athletics participation as a HIP may negate some of those concerns since participation in sport is a HIP in and of itself.

Similarly, increasing the representation of coaches and administrators of color across the athletics departments can provide athletes with more meaningful interactions. For athletes who are white, engaging with more diverse leaders can expand their respect for and understanding of diversity (Comeaux & Fuentes, 2015). It may even challenge any preconceived biases they bring to college concerning race, ethnicity, gender, and those with other historically marginalized identities. For athletes of color, seeing leaders who look like them in positions of power demonstrates that such positions are achievable for them. Additionally, research shows that when women and people of color are in positions of power, the athletics culture features more diversity, inclusion, and enhancements to the psychological climate (Comeaux & Fuentes, 2015).

Through highlighting the two components of interaction, athletics departments not only structure sport participation like other HIPs in the academy, but also promote an Integrated View of athletics in which academics and athletics are aligned, and the educational mission of sport participation is pushed to the forefront (Brand, 2006).

## Conclusion

This conceptual scholarship addressed two research questions: (1) how does Division I athletics participation currently qualify as a HIP, and (2) how can Division I athletics participation be enhanced to further qualify as a HIP? There are some limitations associated with this conceptual research. First, this research did not em-

pirically test athletics as a HIP, but future research can seek to expand into this arena (Kuh, 2017). Thus, more empirical evidence of designing Division I athletics as a HIP in and of itself is necessary to further advance the idea of sport as a HIP. Second, this research only examined Division I athletics due to the unique power dynamics between athletes and sport leaders and the heightened strain between education and sport at this level (Comeaux, 2018). Athletic competition at other levels and their potential design as a HIP should be explored in the future, including at the recreation and club sport levels. Springer and Dixon (2021) argued that extracurricular sport programs, unlike intercollegiate sports, tend to be more "philosophically driven by a mixture of educational, accessibility, and competitive considerations" that allow for more inclusivity for the often diverse student population" (p. 192). Thus, recreational sport participation may already be closely aligned with HIPs (Kuh, 2008).

Third, there can be detractors regarding athletics participation. These can include—but are not limited to—racial tensions and lack of representation of traditionally minoritized athletes on certain teams, athlete exploitation, noncompliance with gender equity laws and policies, chronic and life-threatening injuries and displays of violence, and other unseemly qualities (Clotfelter, 2019; Comeaux, 2018; Gayles et al., 2018). These should not be ignored, and addressing these concerns may further align athletics participation with other HIPs on campuses.

There are also concerns related to the traditional HIPs such as access to these practices favoring students from affluent backgrounds (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Comeaux & Grummert, 2020; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). For example, unpaid internships exclude students from less affluent backgrounds who cannot afford to do an internship for free or forego a campus job for such internship. Similarly, equipment necessary for ePortfolios can exclude students who cannot afford the necessary technology for this HIP. Along similar lines, NSSE data from 2016 revealed that 53% of white college seniors completed an internship compared to only 41% of Black college seniors (McCormick et al., 2017). Additionally, due to longstanding racial biases and stereotypes in the academy, students of color may be shuffled away from certain HIPs due to faculty perceptions (Patton et al., 2015). Students of color who do participate in HIPs may also experience racism and microaggressions, undercutting the benefits of these engagement opportunities (Patton et al., 2015). To address this HIP limitation, it is critical practitioners center race and equity when considering more ways to couple sport and education.

Still, at the heart of this research is shifting the epistemological understanding of athletics as something that is purely extracurricular and lacking in educational purpose and value (Brand, 2006; Gurney et al., 2017; Weight et al., 2020a). In challenging this longstanding Standard View of athletics, Fort (2015) posited:

> So let's get to the heart of the criticism that the attention paid to athletics is overblown, almost always coupled with skepticism over its academic contribution. The dominant argument goes that sports pull students away from their studies without adding anything academically legitimate. But to what extent is that simply an observation about the particular niche that sports has been driven to at the university, rather than an invitation to open

the discussion about the academic legitimacy of college sports (p. 145)? Accepting the legitimacy of college sports as an educational avenue, such as through the lens of HIPs, is a step in adopting a more Integrated View. Additionally, this new perspective allows the field of higher education to better understand the ways athletics intertwines with teaching, research, and service, while also challenging deficit and stereotypical viewpoints of college athletes. Athletes are students in their lectures and labs, but also in the gym and on their courts of competition. Thus, considering the components of reflection, intentionality, and interaction, athletics participation can be appreciated as a HIP and even further designed to align with HIPs (Kuh, 2017).

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# Analyzing the Mediating Effects of Social Capital and Sense of Community Between International Student's College Sports Team Identification and Acculturation

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The United States (U.S.) is well-known as the most preferred destination for international students (Bai, 2016), with close to a million international students supporting the fame (Institute of International Education, 2021). In addition, studies often highlight how these international students bring cultural and economic contributions to U.S. higher education institutions and local communities (Alvarez, 2016; Hegarty, 2014; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Perry, 2016; Ridpath et al., 2019). For instance, not only do international students help cultivate global perspectives in the local and/or campus communities (Hegarty, 2014), but in 2021 alone, the report indicated that international students also contributed $28.4 billion to local U.S. communities (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, 2021). However, despite the positive contributions international students make to U.S. communities, there are a myriad of studies on the hardships faced by international students during their transition to a new environment and have sought to identify ways to assist their successful adjustment in the U.S. (Alfattal, 2017; Gallagher, 2013; Gomez et al., 2014; Jolly et al., 2022; Kağnici, 2012). The psychological and cultural adjustment process international students experience because of exposure to a different culture often is referred to as acculturation (Berry, 2005).

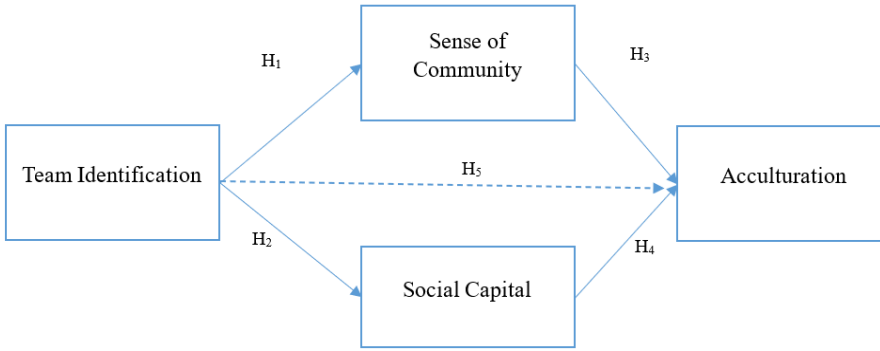
While various types of support (e.g., financial and academic, campus activities, etc.) were found to be helpful to international students' successful adjustment to the U.S. (Redden, 2014), social support is one of the essential contributing factors to acculturation that often is recognized in international student research (Aldawasari et al., 2018; Bai, 2016; Bhochhibhoya et al., 2017; Kim, Stokowski, et al., 2023; Kim, Pickett, et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2019; Martirosyan et al., 2019; McFaul, 2016). Studies found that international students who received good social support from their host country experienced less stress during the acculturation process (Sullivan &

Kashubeck-West, 2015) and went through fewer unfavorable psychological adjustment outcomes (Bai, 2016). But this begs the question: where and how should international students receive social support in the host nations?

Recent studies by Martirosan et al. (2019) and McFaul (2016) revealed international students often form relationships with domestic peers by participating in various extra-curricular activities (such as language exchange programs and conversation clubs), taking classes, and residing with a domestic student roommate. In addition, various studies highlighted the extent to which participating in physical activities could promote international students' social support and acculturation (Bertram et al., 2012; Gomez et al., 2014; Kutintara & Min, 2016; Ra & Trusty, 2017; Rienties et al., 2012). Furthermore, studies have shown that international students who actively participated in physical activities on campus were socially well-adjusted and experienced less acculturative stress (Allen et al., 2010; Gomez et al., 2014). Although a few studies have examined the influence of sport fandom on international students' acculturation (e.g., Agregaard, 2018; Stodolska & Tainsky, 2015), there is a need to explore whether college sport can provide effective social support for international students in a new environment. For instance, Kim et al. (2023) examined whether international students' identification with their college athletics team and participation in social and physical leisure activities can contribute to the successful acculturation of international students. Although their study found that international students' identification with a college athletics team contributes to a high acculturation score, their study called for including more variables in the model, as the acculturation process is a complex procedure that is affected by various factors such as social support, language competency, self-efficacy, among others (Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Brunsting et al., 2018).

In sports management research, domestic students who identified with their college athletics teams showed they received more social support, which then led to successful social adjustment to their campus communities (Clopton & Bourke, 2011; Koo et al., 2015; Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013; Warner et al., 2012). More specifically, students who followed their college sports teams felt more sense of belonging to their campus (Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013; Warner et al., 2012) and created social capital (Clopton & Bourke, 2011). Yet, college sports may be new to international students since this is a unique culture in the U.S. (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). Therefore, an in-depth analysis is needed regarding whether the same merits of developing social support that domestic students enjoy, such as developing a sense of community and social capital by being a fan of college sports, can equally happen to international students. Hence, the purpose of this study is to analyze the mediating effect of sense of community and social capital between international students' college sports team identification and their acculturation. Figure 1 shows the proposed path model based on the purpose of this study.

**Figure 1**
*Initial Acculturation Path Model*




# Literature Review

## Theoretical Background

### *Team Identification*

Team identification is a concept first developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993). This concept has been widely utilized in various sports research since the 1990s, namely sports management, marketing, and psychology (James et al., 2019). The concept of team identification seeks to assess individuals' and fan groups' degree of identification with the sports team(s) they support (Lock & Heere, 2017). The purpose of team identification can be explained by Tajfel and Turner's (2004) social identity theory, from which the team identification concept originated. Tajfel (1972) defined social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership" (p. 31). That is, this theory aims to explain one's behavior by assuming that belonging defines one's part of perceived self-concept to a certain social group (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Based on the social identity theory, team identification theory is widely utilized in various consumer behavior studies by exploring the causal relationship between one's degree of identification with the sports team they follow and their consumer behavior (James et al., 2019). Specific topics include, but are not limited to, ticket or product sales (Lee & Ferreira, 2011; Wann et al., 2004), word-of-mouth sharing (Swanson et al., 2003), star athletes (Li et al., 2019), and sponsor recognition (Chien et al., 2016).

### *Sense of Community*

According to McMillan (1976), a sense of community is "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group,

and shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). Based on McMillan and Chavis' (1986) work, a sense of community is a concept that consists of four aspects, namely fulfillment of needs, influence, integration, and shared emotional connections. Fulfillment of needs often is explained together with integration and portrays how members of a certain community feel their needs can be fulfilled by shared interaction within a community. Influence is a concept that explains how one's needs, opinions, and values are acknowledged and understood mutually by the group members. Finally, shared emotional connection is the community members' emotional attachment toward the community, which is formed by sharing important lifetime events, showing respect to community members, resolving community problems with other members, and forming a spiritual bonding with other members through positive interaction (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

### *Social Capital*

Social capital refers to resources that can be utilized through social relationships, such as being a member of a certain community, that foster positive outcomes, such as receiving a new job opportunity for members (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992; Lin, 2001). Putnam (2001, December 19) defined social capital as "features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." More specifically, the social capital concept consists of individual and community aspects (Putnam, 2000). Putnam explains the difference between the two aspects by sharing how the relationship shared by members of the communities creates social capital and emphasizes each member's choice is important in creating social capital. Further, Putnam stressed that the community aspect of society is important as the interaction among social organizations and structures creates social capital. In addition, Putnam's (2000) definition provides two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital is grounded on the thick trust among group members (Williams, 2006), which connects the members within a certain group, allowing social exclusion of people who do not belong to the same group but strengthening the network within the group. In other words, according to Staveren and Korringa (2007), "…bonding social capital generates a particular type of trust that is ascribed to the members of the group" (p. 114). In contrast, bridging social capital connects people between the groups, which benefits the community by creating various forms of tangible social capital such as human or financial capital (Putnam, 2000). Putnam further explains the importance of bridging capital in community settings as it brings in new ideas and resources from outside the original community. In addition, "Bridging social capital generates what is labelled generalized trust, which is based on the belief that everyone shares a minimum set of common values and therefore has a minimum level of trustworthiness to act upon these values" (Staveren & Korringa, 2007, p. 115).

### *Acculturation*

Acculturation is "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that occurs as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual

members" (Berry, 2005, p. 698). Two differing ideas available in research explain the cause of acculturation. First, based on Bhatia and Ram's (2001) critical and postcolonial perspectives, the immigrants and the hosting community are the two groups that cause one's psychological changes during the acculturation process. Next, based on various acculturation models (e.g., Berry, 2005, 2006; Bourhis et al., 1997; Navas et al., 2005), the cause of one's psychological changes during the acculturation process depends on the two options that immigrants possess when they transition to a new environment: whether to maintain their ethnic identity or to adapt themselves to the culture of the hosting community. In addition, some studies insist acculturation is a multi-dimensional process (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2009; Cabassa, 2003; Yoon et al., 2011). Among these explanations of acculturation, Berry's (1997) bi-dimensional acculturation is widely used, which explains immigrants' acculturation process depending on the two aforementioned choices. Four acculturation outcomes suggested by Berry (1997) are separation (one chooses to separate oneself from the host culture), assimilation (one chooses to accept the hosting culture only by denying their original culture), integration (one chooses to accept both hosting and original culture), and marginalization (one chooses to deny both hosting and original culture).

## The Effect of Team Identification on Sense of Community and Social Capital

College sports have been utilized to facilitate students' involvement on campus, leading to active social engagement with peers (Davis et al., 2020; Katz & Heere, 2016; Katz et al., 2017). More specifically, studies have shown how students in higher education utilize varsity athletics to feel more attachment and belonging within their campus community (Heere & Katz, 2014; Katz & Heere, 2016; Sung et al., 2015). In addition, students' identification with their college sports team led to more connections with the campus community members, such as peer students, faculties, and alums (Katz et al., 2017). However, previous studies have found different results by sharing that when students are passive fans of college sports, the relationship mentioned above between identifying as a college sports fan and feelings of connectedness does not exist (Lim et al., 2011; Warner et al., 2011). For international students, however, college sports may be a new culture, leading to the higher possibility of being passive fans of college sports compared to domestic students. Hence, it is necessary to study whether international students can benefit from being college sports fans, just as their domestic counterparts enjoy.

The relationship between team identification and perceived social capital has been a topic of interest in sports management research (Clopton, 2010, 2011; Gibson et al., 2014; Havard, 2014; Mastromartino et al., 2020; Wann & Craven, 2014). For instance, Havard (2014) pointed out that membership in a sport fan community may strengthen one's bonding capital in a community as fans bond together to support their favorite team. Furthermore, Mastromartino et al. (2020) mentioned the importance of bridging capital in sports organizations because of its contribution to flourishing the organization with various fan communities. Clopton (2010, 2011) found mixed results on how college students' identification with their varsity athletic teams affects students' social capital. While earlier research found a significant

causal relationship between students' team identification and social capital (Clopton, 2010), a later study utilized a more complex model and specified the social capital into two types: general and bridging. The model utilized students' university identification as a mediator and found a negative relationship between college sports team identification and overall social capital and no significant relationship between team identification and bridging social capital (Clopton, 2011). Furthermore, Wann and Craven's (2014) study found that college students' identification with their intercollegiate athletic team was more likely to lead students to interact with peer students and less likely to avoid social interaction. Yet, most of the participants in the previous studies were domestic students, while few or no international students were included. Hence, based on the previous studies and to expand the previous studies, the authors came up with the following research hypothesis:

> *$H_1$: International students' identification with college athletics teams will have a significant positive effect on their sense of community on campus.*
> *$H_2$: International students' identification with college athletics teams will have a significant positive effect on their social capital on campus.*

## The Effect of Sense of Community and Social Capital on Acculturation

A sense of community has been utilized to explain immigrants' acculturation behaviors (Barbieri & Zani, 2015; Lee, 2012; Sonn, 2002; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). For instance, when immigrants only feel a sense of community within the same ethnic community, they are more likely to separate themselves and only engage with the same ethnic community or resist perceived oppression to become enculturated into a new community (Sonn, 2002; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). In contrast, for immigrants to be open to learning and accepting the host culture in a new community, they need to feel more belonging to their new community (Lee, 2012). Lee's study found that when Korean immigrants felt more perceived belonging to their new community, they were more open to learning and accepting the host culture. Developing a sense of community has been shown to affect immigrants' well-being (Barbieri & Zani, 2015). While immigrants who had a strong ethnic identity and sense of community with the same ethnic community were shown to have positive well-being, no relationship was found when they developed their sense of community with a hosting community.

Social capital commonly has been found to significantly affect immigrants' acculturation (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017; Tatarko et al., 2020; Terry & Le, 2014). Most studies that analyzed the relationship between immigrants' social capital and acculturation utilized Putnam's (2000) bonding and bridging social capital concepts (Ager & Strang, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Conceptually, bonding social capital promotes immigrants' connection with their ethnic community and protects them from assimilating their original culture (Ager & Strang, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital explains how immigrants utilize a certain type of social capital to establish intercultural networks and promote cross-cultural adaptation (Terry & Le, 2014). Both bonding and bridging social capital were effective in the sociocultural adaptation of

immigrants from Central Asia when mediated by the integration acculturation strategy (Tatarko et al., 2020). Yet, bridging social capital is considered more important for immigrants' successful acculturation as immigrants can collaborate with host society members to receive social resources (Hendrickson et al., 2011). However, as far as the authors' knowledge, no studies have examined whether international students' engagement in college sports may develop their sense of community and social capital on campus and ultimately lead to their successful acculturation in the U.S. Therefore, based on the previous findings, the authors developed the following research hypotheses:

*$H_3$: International students' perceived sense of community will have a significant positive effect on their acculturation.*

*$H_4$: International students' perceived social capital will have a significant positive effect on their acculturation.*

*$H_5$: International students' sense of community and social capital will have a positive mediating effect(s) between their identification with college sports teams and acculturation.*

# Method

## Participants

The original samples included 612 international students from universities affiliated with the commonly called 'Power 5' Conference, namely Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference (Big Ten), Big 12 Conference (Big 12), Pacific-12 Conference (Pac-12), and Southeastern Conference (SEC). However, 125 participants (20.42%) were excluded from the study because they did not complete the survey or were not international students enrolled at the targeted universities. Therefore, the final samples included 487 international students, mostly from SEC-affiliated universities (336 participants, 69%), female (262 participants, 54%), and graduate students (397 participants, 82%). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

## Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, an invitation email was sent out to international student offices at each of the targeted universities (Power 5 institutions; $n$ = 65), asking if they could send out a group email to their international students. Only 10 institutions opted to send out the survey, largely due to international student survey fatigue during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study utilized snowball sampling by reaching out to peer international students enrolled at the targeted institutions and asking for help distributing an invitation email to the target population. The email contained basic information regarding the study, participant consent, and an online link to the survey.

**Table 1**
*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 487)*

| Characteristics | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| Conference | | |
| SEC | 336 | 68.99 |
| Big 12 | 91 | 18.69 |
| Big 10 | 40 | 8.21 |
| ACC | 15 | 3.08 |
| Pac-12 | 5 | 1.03 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 223 | 45.79 |
| Female | 262 | 53.80 |
| Other | 2 | .41 |
| Academic level | | |
| Undergraduate | 90 | 18.48 |
| Graduate | 397 | 81.52 |
| Years in the U.S. | | |
| Less than 1 year | 87 | 17.86 |
| 1 - 2 years | 63 | 12.93 |
| More than 2 years | 337 | 69.19 |
| Years in the current university | | |
| Less than 1 year | 60 | 12.32 |
| 1-3 years | 104 | 21.35 |
| More than 3 years | 323 | 66.32 |

*Note*: SEC = Southeastern Conference; ACC = Atlantic Coast Conference; Pac-12 = Pacific-12

## Measures

### *Demographic Variables*

Participants' demographic characteristics (e.g., gender and nationality) and their academic backgrounds (e.g., current class level, name of the affiliated college, length of time spent in the U.S.) were asked through the survey. In sum, seven questions were asked about participants' demographic information.

### *Team Identification*

Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R; James et al., 2019) was utilized to measure international students' perceived identification with their institution's varsity athletics team. SSIS-R is a revised scale from the original 7-item SSIS (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), which measures one's identification toward a team of interest. The SSIS-R scale uses an 8-point Likert-type scale, from 1 being low identification to 8 being high identification. James et al. (2019) revised the original scale by adding a self-report screening question at the beginning of the survey utilizing a Yes/No response option (e.g., do you identify yourself as a fan of your college sports team even if a little bit?). Hence, if participants selected "No" to the screening question, then the participants' score on this scale is recorded as zero. A high overall score reflects the participant's high identification with the team of interest. The original study showed that the scale has reasonable reliability (coefficient alpha = .96) and validity (TLI = .99, CFI = .99; RMSEA = .06, and SRMR = .01) [James et al., 2019]. This study modified the team of interest from the Boston Red Sox to the participant's

institution's varsity athletics team. A sample question included: "How important to you is it that your college sports team wins?"

### *Social Capital*

International students' perception of their social capital within their campus community was measured with the five items from Krishna and Shrader's (1999) Social Capital Assessment Tool, as Clopton and Finch (2010) formerly utilized. Clopton and Finch utilized SCAT to construct a latent two-factor model, which consisted of social trust (two-item) and the norm of reciprocity (three-item). The items utilized a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1, being does not apply to me at all, to 7, being completely applies to me. The higher overall score reflected participants felt more trust in their community and strength in the norms of reciprocity within the community. Sample questions asked were: "Most students/faculty at this university are basically honest and can be trusted," and "Most students/faculty at this university are willing to help if you need it." The scale with selected questions showed reasonable reliability, with coefficient alphas being .72 and .71 for social trust and the norm of reciprocity, respectively (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

### *Sense of Community*

International students' perceived sense of community in their campus community was measured using the Sense of Community Scale (Davidson & Cotter, 1986). The original scale was developed to measure how much the participant feels they belong to their local city community by utilizing a 17-item, 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 being not at all important to 4 being very important. The sample questions included: "I like the neighborhood in which I live," "I feel safe here," and "The people in this city are polite and well-mannered." The high overall score reflects participants feel more sense of community with the community of interest. The original study showed acceptable coefficient alphas for two cities: .85 and .81 (Davidson & Cotter, 1986).

### *Acculturation*

The Acculturation and Resiliency Scale (AARS; Khawaja et al., 2014) measured international students' perceived degree of acculturation into the U.S. culture. While the original scale had three factors (resilience, acculturation, and spirituality), this study utilized the acculturation subscale and modified the questions' country of interest from Australia to the U.S. The modified scale consisted of an 11-item, 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 being strongly disagree to 5 being strongly agree. Sample questions included: "I am okay with accepting both U.S. and my own cultural values," "I am open-minded and curious about my new culture," and "I feel comfortable talking about my culture of origin." The original subscale showed an acceptable coefficient alpha (.83).

## Data Analysis

Descriptive and correlation analyses were conducted to assess the normality and relationships among the variables utilized in this study. Next, path analysis was

utilized to analyze the hypothesized model (see Figure 1), which examined the mediating effect of international students' sense of community and social capital between their college sports team identification and acculturation. Path analysis was chosen as a methodology to analyze the hypothesized model due to its wide usage in analyzing causal chain that utilizes mediating variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Descriptive and correlation analyses were performed utilizing the IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Finally, path analysis was performed through the Mplus 8.5 utilizing maximum likelihood estimation.

***Initial Hypothesized Model***

The hypothesized model was decomposed by utilizing path analysis and treating the variables of interest as observable variables. Each scale's observable score was measured by aggregating the participants' responses and averaging them by the number of participants. Although the $\chi^2$ goodness-of-fit statistic was significant ($\chi^2$ (2, $N$ = 487) = 29.03, $p < .001$), other goodness-of-fit indices showed poor model fit by not meeting the acceptable values. For instance, Kenny (2003) suggested that for the hypothesized model to show a good model fit, its comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) should be more than .90, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) should be lower than .08 and .05, respectively. However, the initial model's goodness-of-fit indices did not meet the standard (CFI = .83, TLI = .49, SRMR = .08, and RMSEA = .05).

***Model Modification***

The initial hypothesized model was modified based on two rationales. First, the authors found previous literature indicating a sense of community may be treated as part of the social capital (Carpiano & Hystad, 2011; Lochner et al., 1999; Moore et al., 2006). Next, the authors utilized modification indices from Mplus and found an option to add a direct path from the sense of community to social capital (MI = 26.744). Since this option matched the previous literature the authors found, the authors adopted this option and modified the model. The modified model showed a good model fit by meeting the standard of goodness-of-fit indices (CFI = 1.00, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .03, and SRMR = .01) [Kenny, 2003; Kline, 2015; Stage et al., 2004]. Table 2 shows the comparison of goodness-of-fit indices from the original and modified model.

**Table 2**
*The Goodness of Fit Indices of the Models*

| Index | Initial model | Revised model |
|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2$-statistic (*df*) | 29.031 (2) | 1.43 (1) |
| RMSEA | .17 | .03 |
| SRMR | .07 | .01 |
| CFI | .83 | 1.00 |
| TLI | .49 | .98 |

# Results

## Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics of the variables utilized in this study are summarized in Table 2. According to the result, the variables met the normality assumption by showing absolute values of less than 10 (Kline, 2015) [See Table 3].

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics (N = 487)*

| | Measure | *M* (*S.D.*) | Skewness | Kurtosis | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Team Identification | 2.50 (2.56) | .398 | -1.335 | - | | | |
| 2 | Sense of Community | 2.81 (.35) | -.208 | -.086 | .22** | - | - | |
| 3 | Social Capital | 4.77 (.70) | .037 | .371 | .17** | .27** | - | - |
| 4 | Acculturation | 2.92 (.48) | .088 | -.151 | .16** | .42** | .25** | - |

* $p <. 05$, ** $p <.01$.

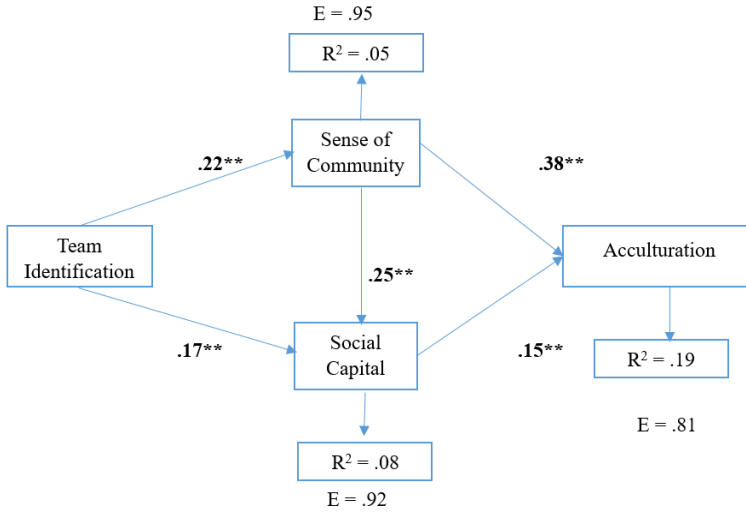
Next, the revised model's path coefficients were decomposed (See Table 4). Specifically, international students' college sports team identification significantly affected their sense of community ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$) and explained 10% of the variance of sense of community. Team identification also had a significant effect on their social capital ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$) and explained 3% of the variance of social capital ($H_1$ and $H_2$ supported). International students' sense of community ($\beta = .38$, $p < .01$) and social capital ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) had a significant effect on their acculturation, which together explained 19% of the variance of acculturation ($H_3$ and $H_4$ supported). Finally, international students' college sports team identification showed a significant indirect effect on their acculturation through their sense of community and social capital ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$) [$H_5$ supported] (See Figure 2).

***Table 4***
*Standardized Path Coefficients*

| Path | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect | Total Effect |
|---|---|---|---|
| Team Identification→Sense of Community | .22** | | .22** |
| Team Identification→ Social Capital | .11* | .05** | .17** |
| Sense of Community→ Social Capital | .25** | | .25** |
| Team Identification→Acculturation | | .11** | .11** |
| Sense of Community→Acculturation | .38** | .04** | .41** |
| Social Capital→Acculturation | .15** | | .15** |

*$p$ <. 05, ** $p$ <.01

**Figure 2**
*Modified Acculturation Path Model*




*Note.* Bold Indicates Statistically Significant

# Discussion

## Discussion of Results

***The effect of international students' college sports team identification on their sense of community and social capital***

Various studies have indicated that college sports have been widely utilized as one of the many ways students foster a sense of belonging and social engagement with other members of the campus community (Davis et al., 2020; Katz & Heere, 2016; Katz et al., 2017). This study expanded findings from previous studies (Davis et al., 2020; Katz & Heere, 2016; Katz et al., 2017) by differentiating the research participants into solely international students. According to this study's results, international students enrolled at the Power 5 conference's affiliated colleges were shown to feel more belonging to their campus community when they identified themselves as fans of their college's varsity athletics team. Interestingly, previous studies warned the causal relationship between college sports team identification and feelings of belonging to a community might not exist for passive fans (Lim et al., 2011; Warner et al., 2011). However, regarding international students, most included in this study seemed to be passive fans (having a composite team identification score of 2.5 out of 8), and a significant relationship between college sports team identification and a sense of community was found. Hence, our study found that international students may not only enjoy the benefits of being fans of college sports just as their domestic peers, but also do not need to be active fans to enjoy that benefit.

The findings of this study support previous studies that found the causal relationship between students' college sports team identification and their perceived social capital (Clopton, 2010; Wann, 2006; Wann & Craven, 2014). Along with these previous studies' results, international students in this study showed that identification with their college sports team has a positive causal relationship with their perceived social capital. More specifically, the result of our study can be explained by Wann and Craven's (2014) study, which showed higher college sports team identification leads to more active interaction with peer students. Furthermore, in line with the previous study, our study showed that international students' college sports team identification is likely to increase bonding and bridging capital since they can interact with peers, such as fellow domestic or international students, faculties, and alums. These opportunities are seemingly likely to promote international students' social capital development.

***The effect of international students' sense of community and social capital on their acculturation in the U.S.***

The findings of this study were in line with the previous studies (Barbieri & Zani, 2015; Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017; Lee, 2012; Tatarko et al., 2020; Terry & Le, 2014) and showed that international students' sense of community and social capital both had significant causal relationships with their acculturation in the U.S. More specifically, previous studies' results differed based on which community im-

migrants felt they belonged to – immigrants who felt they belonged to the new community were open to accepting new cultures (Lee, 2012), whereas those who only felt belonging to a community that shares the same ethnicity did not open themselves to accept new cultures (Sonn, 2002; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). Hence, the findings of this study share Lee's (2012), as international students felt they belonged to their new campus environment in the U.S., they were able to become more open to accepting new culture as their higher sense of community score led to a higher acculturation score.

International students' social capital also significantly affected their acculturation into the U.S. As various studies shared the importance of social capital on immigrants' acculturation into the new environment (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017; Tatarko et al., 2020; Terry & Le, 2014), our study was able to add that international students' social capital also is important for their acculturation. In our study, international students had higher acculturation scores when they showed higher SCAT scores, which measured the perception of participants' perceived social trust and norms of reciprocity toward their campus community. In other words, international students felt they became more acculturated into the U.S. when they felt their campus community could be trusted (bonding social capital) and when they were able to receive help from others (bridging social capital). More specifically, bonding social capital reflects a strengthened connection within a group, and bridging social capital reflects an improved connection between two or more different groups (Putnam, 2000). Hence, our study's findings show that when international students felt connected within a campus community and with different subgroups in the campus community (e.g., faculties, peers, neighbors, etc.), they felt more acculturated into the U.S. However, social capital's path coefficient toward acculturation shared a lower score ($\beta$ = .15, $p < .01$) than the effect of a sense of community on acculturation ($\beta$ = .38, $p <$ .01). Hence, although a sense of community may be encompassed in social capital (Carpiano & Hystad, 2011; Lochner et al., 1999; Moore et al., 2006), our study found that international students' perceived belonging to a campus community is more important than their social capital, which brings up the necessity to distinguish the two factors that may contribute to international students' acculturation.

***Mediating effects of international students' sense of community and social capital between their college sports team identification and acculturation in the U.S.***

Finally, international students' college sports team identification showed a significant indirect effect on acculturation, which revealed partial mediating effects on a sense of community and social capital. This shows that when international students become fans of their college sports teams, they can develop a sense of community and social capital in their campus community and become more acculturated into the U.S. This result adds to the previous study by Kim et al. (2021), which showed how international students' college sports team identification directly affects their acculturation. Based on our study's findings, international students' college sports team identification contributes to their sense of community and social capital on campus, which then assists this population's acculturation. Hence, our study showed

a more detailed process of how international students' college sports team identification leads to their acculturation by utilizing the mediating effects of a sense of community and social capital.

## Practical Implications

This study provides opportunities for college athletics and international student departments to utilize college sports to provide additional strategies for attracting new potential fan groups and successfully adjusting this population to a new environment. This study showed that not many international students are involved in college athletics. Therefore, college athletics offices may consider drawing this subgroup of students in cooperation with the international students' office to attract more fans to the sporting events. For instance, college athletics may utilize their international student-athletes and promote them when competing in a certain event, and the international students' office could then organize an event that shares the cultural aspects of that athlete's country of origin. Not only would this event attract international students to become new fans of their college athletics teams, but they also may develop their sense of community and social capital by becoming friends with those who watch the event together. Ultimately, with international students' sense of community and social capital developed through identification with their college sports teams, this population is more likely to better adjust to their new environment.

## Limitations and Future Study Options

Limitations exist in this study, as the targeted population came from Power 5 conference-affiliated colleges, where a significant amount of the budget is dedicated to varsity athletics compared to other colleges affiliated with non-Power 5 conferences. Hence, because the result may differ when different colleges are utilized, recruiting students from various colleges not affiliated with the Power 5 conference is suggested to increase the generalizability of the study.

Next, the model did not utilize the demographic backgrounds of the population, such as nationality, length of stay in the U.S., etc. As international students may experience a different level of stress depending on where they are from and their language capability, future study is recommended to utilize the demographic backgrounds of international students and analyze whether the model's effect changes. This will provide a better understanding of which demographic characteristics of international students need to be considered in applying the current study's results.

Finally, this study took place when the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant issue. Due to the pandemic, college athletics events were held with limited capacity openings in their home fields. Hence, the authors suggest that future studies may utilize this study's model when college athletics are open to full capacity and analyze whether international students' college sports team identification strengthens their sense of community, social capital, and acculturation.

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# Examining associations of coping strategies with stress, alcohol, and substance use among college athletes: Implications for improving athlete coping

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Mental health challenges and substance use are common among college athletes, yet few studies have been conducted to understand substance use as a coping strategy. The pressures of collegiate athletics - including commitments to training, travel, and competition - can contribute to maladaptive coping among college athletes, including alcohol and other substance use. An online survey was completed by 188 college athletes competing across NCAA/NJCAA divisions at six institutions in the United States to examine factors associated with substance use coping and whether specific strategies of coping were associated with risk of substance use. Alcohol and drug use were assessed using the CRAFFT Screening Test, NIDA-Modified ASSIST, and Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test. Coping was assessed with the Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory, stress was assessed using an adapted Graduate Stress Inventory, athletics-related anxiety was assessed with the Sport Anxiety Scale, and perceived control of stress was assessed using the Perceived Control Questionnaire. Older athletes, men, and those with higher stress were more likely to use substances to cope. Higher behavioral disengagement, higher substance use coping, and lower religious coping were associated with increased likelihood of binge drinking and substance-related risk behaviors. These findings point to the importance of developing targeted interventions aimed at addressing stress and facilitating healthy coping to reduce problematic drinking and substance use among college athletes.

*Keywords*: alcohol use disorder, cannabis, coping, substance-related disorders

## Introduction

College students, including college athletes, face a multitude of stressors that can affect their health and wellbeing. These may include pressures related to academics, athletic performance, time management, social relationships, financial concerns, and adjusting to life away from home (Baghurst & Kelley, 2014; Lopes Dos Santos et al., 2020; Salimi et al., 2021). As a result, there has been a dramatic rise in both mental health challenges and mental health care utilization among college students in the past two decades (Alonso et al., 2019; Lipson et al., 2019). One nationwide study found that 34% of college students had received mental health treatment in the past year and 36% had been diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime, both of which nearly doubled from 2007 to 2017 (Lipson et al., 2019).

College-aged adults experience higher levels of emotional distress compared to the general public (Villarroel & Terlizzi, 2020). A national survey conducted by the NCAA with nearly 20,000 student-athletes in the United States found high prevalence of self-reported depression (21% men, 28% women) and anxiety (31% men, 48% women) among college-athletes, but also found that these estimates were consistently 5-9% lower than non-athlete students (Brown et al., 2014). Unfortunately, college athletes who experience emotional distress are less likely than their non-athlete peers to seek mental health support (Kern et al., 2017). In studies examining barriers to seeking professional mental health care, college athletes often cited self-stigma and concerns about stigma from others as critical barriers (Bird et al., 2018; 2020; Moreland et al., 2018).

College athletes also report high levels of substance use. In studies with college athletes, 28-34% self-reported recent binge drinking (Knettel et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2017), 22-28% reported using cannabis during the prior year (Knettel et al., 2021; Reardon & Creado, 2014), and between 1-4% reported using other illicit substances during the prior year, including cocaine, MDMA, unprescribed opioids, hallucinogens, and amphetamines (NCAA, 2018). The NCAA found prevalence of substance use among college athletes 1-8% lower than their non-athlete peers (NCAA, 2018). Substance use among college athletes may be partially mitigated by drug testing protocols; however, off-season drug use among college athletes is approximately double in-season consumption (Yusko et al., 2008). College athletes also frequently participate in high-risk behaviors after using substances, such as driving while intoxicated, at rates similar to their non-athlete peers (Bastien et al., 2019).

In their efforts to overcome college-related stressors, students employ a variety of coping strategies with varying degrees of success (Coiro et al., 2017; Houston et al., 2017; Metzger et al., 2017). Coping efforts may include approaching strategies, such as active problem solving or social support, or avoidant strategies such as denial or substance use (Carver, 1997; Eisenberg et al., 2012; Metzger et al., 2017). College students tend to favor coping strategies that rely on social relationships, which may fall into either the approaching (e.g., seeking advice) and avoidant (e.g., drinking at a party) categories (Freire et al., 2020; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003).

Pressures associated with collegiate athletics, including substantial time com-

mitments for training, travel, and competition, can contribute to maladaptive patterns of coping, including alcohol and drug use (Brown et al., 2014; Hatteberg, 2020; Taylor et al., 2017). In a cross-sectional study of more than 1,000 college students, Metzger and colleagues (2017) observed relationships among avoidant and maladaptive coping strategies with use of alcohol and other substances. Using alcohol and other substances is also commonly embedded in the social culture of collegiate athletics teams, which may lead to social pressure for athletes to engage in dangerous consumption (Graupensperger et al., 2018; Parisi et al., 2019). College athletes report higher prevalence of binge drinking and alcohol-related problems when compared to their non-athlete peers, but are less likely to use marijuana and illicit drugs (Kwan et al., 2014; Lisha & Sussman, 2010; Parisi et al., 2019). Nevertheless, prevalence estimates of all substance use among college athletes are high, and substance use and binge drinking are associated with increased likelihood of injury and lower academic success (Parisi et al., 2019), risk of being banned from athletics (Reardon & Creado, 2014), and poor mental and physical health outcomes (Patrick et al., 2020).

To date, many studies on coping among athletes have focused on associations between personality traits and athletic performance. Optimism and mental toughness were positively associated with approaching coping strategies and improved athletic performance (Nicholls et al., 2008). Relationships among stress, coping, and athletic performance have also been shown to be mutually reinforcing, as athletes' level of success has been shown to positively influence their emotional state while poor performance contributes to emotional distress (Hadd & Crocker, 2011).

Although studies have been conducted to understand patterns of mental health challenges and substance use among college athletes, few have sought to understand substance use as a coping strategy. The aims of the current study were to evaluate the correlates of substance use coping, and to assess whether specific strategies of coping are associated with increased risk of substance use among a sample of college athletes. Based on research showing a link between stress, maladaptive coping, and substance use (Bricker et al., 2011; Crocker et al., 2015; Doron et al., 2015; Wills et al., 2001), it was hypothesized that higher stress, lower perceived control of stress, and avoidant coping strategies (e.g., substance use coping, denial, behavioral disengagement) would be associated with greater substance use and substance-related risk behaviors.

## Methods

An online survey was administered to athletes from six colleges and universities across five upper Midwest U.S. states - Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin - with athletics teams competing in each NCAA Division (I, II, and II) and at the NJCAA junior/community college level. Institutions were purposively selected for invitation in an effort to obtain perspectives from athletes residing in each state and across competition levels. Eleven athletic departments within the region were solicited for college athlete participation between November 2017 and May 2019. Of these, six institutions (55%) agreed to participate, including five that distributed email list invitations with the link to the survey and one that included the

invitation and link in a weekly email newsletter sent to all college athletes.

Invitations listed the study inclusion criteria: participants were required to be 18 years of age or older, currently enrolled full-time at the college/university, and a member of one or more varsity athletic teams during the current academic year. One follow-up invitation was also sent to each list. At the time of the surveys, the use of medical marijuana/cannabis with a physician's prescription was legal for adults in two states where participating universities were located; however, recreational marijuana use was illegal in all participating states and was considered a banned substance for all athletes by the NCAA, even when used legally or medically prescribed (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 2022; NCAA, 2022).

Upon clicking the link to the online survey, respondents were presented with an informed consent form and were required to indicate their understanding and agreement by checking a box before continuing to the survey. No names or other personally identifying information were collected on the survey. The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Informed consent was provided by 225 participants, of whom 197 (87.6%) completed the survey. Three validity check items were included in the survey (e.g., "Please choose Option 4, 'Quite a bit' for this item") to identify participants who were not appropriately attending to the survey. We excluded nine participants (4.6%) from the final analysis for failing one or more validity check items, resulting in a final sample of 188 participants. Five institutions provided data on the total number of students who received the invitation to participate, resulting in a response rate of 9.8% among college athletes at these institutions. This falls within the normal range for online surveys with email recruitment (e.g., Van Mol, 2017).

Upon completing the survey, participants had the option to enter a random drawing for one of three $50 gift cards. Those who wished to enter the drawing clicked an additional link to navigate to a separate online form where they provided their email address. Thus, the email address was not linkable to any study data. All data were stored on a password-protected electronic database accessible only by the research team. Study procedures received ethical approval from the institutional review board at Gustavus Adolphus College.

## Measures

### Demographic and Background Data

The study survey began with questions related to demographic information and background data, including the participant's age, gender, race/ethnicity, year in school, sexual orientation, and sport(s) they compete in, as well as the NCAA or NJCAA division of their athletics team(s).

### Coping

The 28-item Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory (Brief COPE; Carver, 1997) assesses 14 distinct coping strategies, including self-distraction (e.g., "turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things"), active coping (e.g., "taking action to try to make the situation better"), denial (e.g., "saying

to myself 'this isn't real'"), substance use (e.g., "using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it"), emotional support (e.g., "getting comfort and understanding from someone"), instrumental support (e.g., "getting help and advice from other people"), behavioral disengagement (e.g., "giving up trying to deal with it"), venting (e.g., "expressing my negative feelings"), positive reframing (e.g., "looking for something good in what is happening"), planning (e.g., "thinking hard about what steps to take"), humor (e.g., "making fun of the situation"), acceptance (e.g., "learning to live with it"), religion (e.g., "praying or meditating"), and self-blame (e.g., "blaming myself for things that happened"). Brief COPE items are rated on a scale from 1 ("I haven't been doing this at all") to 4 ("I've been doing this a lot"). A mean of the two items for a score of 1 to 4 for each of the 14 subscales was calculated. Specifically, the Brief COPE substance use coping scale evaluates how often participants use drugs or alcohol to cope with stressors. This scale consists of the mean of two items asking participants how often they cope with hardships in their life by (1) "using alcohol or drugs to make myself feel better" and (2) "using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it" (Carver, 1997).

**Substance Use**

Alcohol and drug use were assessed using three measures: the CRAFFT ("Car, Relax, Alone, Forget, Friends, Trouble") Screening Test (Knight et al., 2002), the NIDA-Modified Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) V2.0 (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2012), and the brief form of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C; Bush et al., 1998). The CRAFFT consists of nine yes/no questions examining the use of alcohol and other substances in the past 12 months and the lifetime incidence of substance-related risk behaviors (e.g., driving or riding in a car with someone who had been using, forgetting things that happened while using alcohol or drugs). A score of 1 is assigned for each "yes" response and the items are summed for a total score of 0 to 9. The ASSIST includes yes/no screening questions assessing lifetime use of various substances of abuse (e.g., amphetamines, hallucinogens, opioids, etc.). Responses to lifetime use of each of these categories were combined to obtain a single yes/no variable of lifetime use. The AUDIT-C is an assessment of alcohol use. A single AUDIT-C item was used for this specific research, "How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion?", to assess the frequency of binge drinking. The responses were dichotomized by those who engaged in binge drinking at least monthly versus those who did not.

**Stress**

A measure assessing perceived stress among university students was adapted from the Graduate Stress Inventory (GSI; Rocha-Singh, 1994). This included 12 items assessing unique sources of stress (e.g., academics, finances, social relationships, athletics). Item responses ranged from 1, "Not at all stressful" to 5, "Extremely stressful". Item scores were summed for a total stress score ranging from 12 to 48, with a higher score indicating higher stress (Cronbach's alpha = .823).

### Athletics-Related Anxiety

The survey included 13 items from the Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS-2; Smith et al., 2006) to evaluate perceived anxiety during athletic competition, including feelings of worry, difficulty concentrating, or physical symptoms (e.g., muscle tightness, uneasy stomach). These items were rated on a four-point scale from "not at all" to "very much" for a total score of 13 to 52, with a higher score indicating greater anxiety (Cronbach's alpha = .909).

### Perceived Control of Athletics-Related Stress

The survey included four items from the Perceived Control Questionnaire (PCQ; Kowalski, 2000; Kowalski & Crocker, 2001) to assess self-rated control over stress related to participation in athletics. Items were rated on a scale of 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") for a total score of 4 to 20 with higher ratings indicating more perceived control (Cronbach's alpha = .767).

## Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to report the characteristics of the sample and the use of coping strategies as measured by the Brief COPE. To examine correlates of using alcohol and drugs in an effort to cope, linear regression was used to assess self-rated stress level, athletics-related anxiety, and perceived control of stressors in relationship to substance use coping, measured by the substance use subscale of the Brief COPE. Research has shown moderating effects of age and gender on the associations between physical activity and substance use (Dunn, 2014; Kim & Kuan, 2020; Lisha et al., 2011); as such, these factors were explored as covariates. Problematic substance use was defined as binge drinking at least monthly or using an illegal substance to get high in the past year, as these behaviors have been associated with academic, legal, and health consequences (Aberg et al., 2017; Dennhardt & Murphy, 2013).

To examine whether other coping strategies were associated with substance use, four regression models were conducted to assess the 14 coping sub-scales on the Brief COPE as correlates of substance use outcomes, including (1) binge drinking once per month or more on the AUDIT-C, (2) any cannabis use in the past 12 months on the ASSIST, (3) any lifetime use of any other substance on the ASSIST, and (4) substance-related risk behaviors, as measured by the number of variables endorsed on the CRAFFT. Variables with a p-value less than .10 in univariable analyses were retained in the final multivariable models. For the first three models, binary logistic regression was used and for the fourth model Poisson regression with robust variance was used, which is a preferred statistical strategy for "count" variables (Schober & Vetter, 2021). Exploratory analyses were performed to assess the impact of limiting the regression models to only participants who engaged in problematic substance use. Doing so did not meaningfully influence the study findings; therefore, the full sample was retained for all analyses to maximize statistical power.

# Results

## Participants

Among the 188 college athletes in the study, the majority were women ($n$ = 142, 75.5%), and the mean age was 20 years (range = 18 to 25, SD = 1.4). Participants in the sample were predominantly white ($n$ = 165, 87.8%). Just over one-third of participants ($n$ = 66, 35.1%) competed at the NCAA Division I level, 48 (25.5%) competed at the NCAA Division II level, 63 (33.5%) competed at the NCAA Division III level, and 11 (5.9%) competed at the NJCAA/Community College level.

Within this sample, 78 participants (41.5%) described patterns of problematic, illegal, or banned substance use, including binge drinking at least monthly ($n$ = 44, 23.4%), using marijuana in the past year ($n$ = 35, 18.6%), or using an illegal substance other than marijuana to get high ($n$ = 44, 23.4%). Additional findings on patterns of substance use and substance-related risk behaviors in this sample are described in an earlier publication (Knettel et al., 2021). For additional participant characteristics, see Table 1.

**Table 1**
*Characteristics of the Study Participants*

| Category | Value (%) |
|---|---|
| Total Participants | 188 |
| Gender | |
| Women | 142 (75.5%) |
| Men | 46 (24.5%) |
| Mean Age | 20 years, SD = 1.4 |
| Racial Identity (self-identified) | |
| White | 165 (87.8%) |
| Multiracial/Mixed | 8 (4.3%) |
| Black/African American | 4 (2.1%) |
| Non-White Hispanic/Latino | 3 (1.6%) |
| Asian | 2 (1.1%) |
| Native American | 2 (1.1%) |
| Sexual Identity (self-identified) | |
| Straight/Heterosexual | 181 (96.3%) |
| Gay or Lesbian | 5 (2.7%) |
| Unsure | 2 (1.1%) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Year in School | |
| First Year | 59 (31.4%) |
| Second Year | 46 (24.5%) |
| Third Year | 42 (22.3% |
| Fourth Year | 38 (20.2%) |
| Fifth Year / Other | 3 (1.6%) |
| Sport (Top 7 Most Common) | |
| Track & Field | 50 (26.6%) |
| Softball | 26 (13.8%) |
| Soccer | 18 (9.6%) |
| Cross Country | 18 (9.6%) |
| Volleyball | 16 (8.5%) |
| Swimming/Diving | 15 (8.0%) |
| Tennis | 13 (6.9%) |
| Level of Competition | |
| NCAA Division I | 66 (35.1%) |
| NCAA Division II | 48 (25.5%) |
| NCAA Division III | 63 (33.5%) |
| NJCAA/Community College | 11 (5.9%) |

## Coping Strategies

Means for the 14 Brief COPE subscales are presented in Table 2, with separate means reported for those who reported binge drinking at least monthly, used marijuana in the past year, or used an illegal substance other than marijuana to get high. The most frequently endorsed coping strategies were largely adaptive, approaching strategies and included positive reframing ($M = 2.65$), acceptance ($M = 2.59$), active coping ($M = 2.59$), self-distraction ($M = 2.53$), and planning ($M = 2.52$). Substance use was the second least commonly endorsed coping strategy. The mean score for substance coping was 1.39 ($SD = .73$), which falls between "I haven't been doing this at all" and "I have been doing this a little bit." Most participants ($n = 118$, 62.8%) reported they did not use drugs or alcohol as a form of coping, while 22.9% ($n = 43$) reported using drugs or alcohol to cope a little bit or medium amount of the time, and 2.1% ($n = 4$) reported using drugs or alcohol to cope a lot of the time. When limited to the sub-sample of 78 participants who engaged in problematic, illegal, or banned substance use, the mean substance use coping score was slightly higher ($M = 1.60$, $SD = .85$).

**Table 2**

*Endorsement of Coping Strategies as Measured by the Brief COPE (N = 188)*

| Coping Strategy | Mean | Binge Drinking | | Marijuana Use | | Other Substances | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Positive Reframing | 2.65 | 2.67 | 2.62 | 2.63 | 2.65 | 2.63 | 2.66 |
| Acceptance | 2.59 | 2.55 | 2.61 | 2.51 | 2.62 | 2.57 | 2.63 |
| Active Coping | 2.59 | 2.45 | 2.63 | 2.51 | 2.61 | 2.57 | 2.60 |
| Self Distraction | 2.53 | 2.66 | 2.46 | 2.50 | 2.53 | 2.53 | 2.53 |
| Planning | 2.52 | 2.42 | 2.55 | 2.49 | 2.53 | 2.33 | 2.58 |
| Self Blame | 2.38 | 2.34 | 2.38 | 2.21 | 2.42 | 2.30 | 2.41 |
| Emotional Support | 2.33 | 2.25 | 2.33 | 2.37 | 2.39 | 2.20 | 2.34 |
| Humor | 2.33 | 2.48 | 2.29 | 2.34 | 2.33 | 2.31 | 2.36 |
| Instrumental Support | 2.32 | 2.09 | 2.39 | 2.17 | 2.35 | 2.13 | 2.36 |
| Venting | 2.00 | 1.94 | 2.03 | 1.94 | 2.02 | 1.91 | 2.02 |
| Religion | 1.93 | 1.84 | 1.98 | 1.71 | 2.00 | 1.94 | 1.96 |
| Behavioral Disengagement | 1.52 | 1.51 | 1.52 | 1.56 | 1.50 | 1.63 | 1.46 |
| Substance Use | 1.39 | 1.80 | 1.19 | 1.76 | 1.25 | 1.58 | 1.28 |
| Denial | 1.22 | 1.18 | 1.24 | 1.21 | 1.23 | 1.24 | 1.21 |

In linear regressions examining variables associated with substance use coping, identifying as a man, age 21 and over, higher perceived stress, higher athletics-related anxiety, and lower perceived control of stressors were all significantly associated with substance use coping in univariable analysis (See Table 3). In the final multivariable model, only men and those with higher perceived stress were significantly more likely to employ substance use coping. With all else held constant, men scored .34 points higher on the substance use coping scale, indicating more frequent use of substances as a form of coping compared to women ($p < .01$). In addition, for every point increase in perceived stress, substance use coping increased by .02 ($p = .01$).

**Table 3**

*Factors Associated with Using Substances as a Coping Strategy (N = 188)*

| | Substance Use Coping, mean | Univariable B (95% CI) | Multivariable B (95% CI) |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Gender*** | | | |
| Women | 1.3 | REF | REF |
| Men | 1.6 | .29 (.03, .55)* | .34 (.09, .60)** |
| ***Age*** | | | |
| < 21 years old | 1.3 | REF | REF |
| 21-25 years old | 1.6 | .26 (.03, .49)* | .19 (-.04, .41) |
| ***Stress (GSI)*** | | .03 (.01, .04)*** | .02 (.004, .04)* |
| ***Athletics-Related Anxiety (SAS-2)*** | | .02 (.01, .04)** | .02 (-.001, .03) |
| ***Perceived Control of Stressors (PCQ)*** | | -.05 (-.08, -.02)** | -.03 (-.06, .002) |

*Note.* *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. B, unstandardized beta. CI, confidence interval. REF, reference category.

### Relationships Among Coping Strategies and Substance Use

For the three binary logistic regression models, the 14 coping strategy subscales of the Brief COPE were assessed for relationships with 1) binge drinking in the past month, 2) marijuana use in the past year, 3) and lifetime other substance use. Higher substance use coping was the only COPE subscale significantly associated with increased binge drinking ($b = 1.23$, $p < .001$), marijuana use ($b = .90$, $p < .001$), and other substance use ($b = .60$, $p = .02$). The associations between substance use coping and both binge drinking and marijuana use remained significant after controlling for gender and age, but the association between substance use coping and other substance use was not significant in the multivariable model. When controlling for gender and age, for a 1-point increase in substance use coping, there was an estimated 3.23 times likelihood of binge drinking in the past month (95% CI [1.79, 5.84]) and 2.31 times likelihood of marijuana use in the past year (95% CI [1.36, 3.92]).

A Poisson regression was used to assess coping strategies as predictors of alcohol- and drug-related risk behaviors (see Table 4). In the univariable analyses, substance use coping ($b = .12$, $p < .001$) and behavioral disengagement ($b = .04$, $p = .03$) were associated with higher scores on the CRAFFT, indicating greater substance- and alcohol-related risk behaviors. Religious coping showed an inverse relationship, with more frequent religious coping associated with lower scores on the CRAFFT ($b = .03$, $p < .01$). In the multivariable model with substance use coping, behavioral disengagement, and religious coping as independent variables, substance use and religious coping were significantly associated with CRAFFT scores while behavioral disengagement was not a significant predictor in the final model. When controlling for gender and age, a 1-point increase in substance use coping was associated with a .10 log count increase in CRAFFT score ($p < .001$), and a 1-point increase in religious coping was associated with a .02 log count decrease in CRAFFT score ($p = .04$).

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the coping strategies of college athletes with an emphasis on their use of alcohol and other substances to cope with stress. Men and those with higher overall college-related stress were most likely to use substances as a coping strategy. In univariable models, being age 21 or older, higher athletics-related anxiety, and low perceived control of stressors were also related to substance use coping. Expectedly, substance use coping was strongly associated with problematic patterns of substance use, including binge drinking, illicit substance use, and engaging in substance related risk behaviors such as riding in a car with an intoxicated driver or forgetting things while using substances.

College athletes generally employed positive and approach-based coping strategies, including positive reframing, acceptance, active coping, self-distraction, and planning ahead. Of the 14 coping strategies assessed, substance use coping was the second least endorsed strategy. However, one-quarter of participants acknowledged

**Table 4**

*Factors Associated with Alcohol- and Drug-Related Risk Behaviors (N = 188)*

| | | Univariable B (95% CI) | Multivariable B (95% CI) |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Brief COPE Subscales*** | | | |
| Self-Distraction | | .01 (-.02, .04) | |
| Active Coping | | -.02 (-.05, .02) | |
| Denial | | .001 (-.04, .04) | |
| Substance Use Coping | | .12 (.09, .15)*** | .10 (.07, .13)*** |
| Emotional Support | | .01 (-.03, .04) | |
| Instrumental Support | | -.02 (-.05, .01) | |
| Behavioral Disengagement | | .04 (.004, .07)* | .02 (-.01, .04) |
| Venting | | -.01 (-.04, .03) | |
| Positive Reframing | | -.003 (-.03, .03) | |
| Planning | | -.01 (-.04, .02) | |
| Acceptance | | .01 (-.03, .04) | |
| Religious Coping | | -.03 (-.06, -.01)** | -.02 (-.04, -.001)* |
| Self-Blame | | .02 (-.003, .05) | |
| Humor | | .01 (-.02, .04) | |
| | **# CRAFFT Items Endorsed, mean** | **Univariable B (95% CI)** | **Multivariable B (95% CI)** |
| ***Gender*** | | | |
| Women | 2.2 | REF | REF |
| Men | 3.1 | .08 (.02, .14)** | .03 (-.02, .08) |
| ***Age*** | | | |
| < 21 years old | 2.1 | REF | REF |
| 21-25 years old | 2.9 | .08 (.03, .13)** | .05 (.01, .10)* |

*Note.* *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. B, unstandardized beta. CI, confidence interval. REF, reference category.

that they used substances to cope moderately or frequently. Additionally, the relatively low ratings of substance-related coping strategies may reflect social desirability bias, as described in further detail in the limitations section (Borsari & Muellerleile, 2009; Walker & Cosden, 2007).

Among the coping strategies assessed, only substance use coping was associated with increased binge drinking, marijuana use, and other substance use. However, both substance use coping and behavioral disengagement strategies were associated with higher alcohol and substance related risk behaviors, while endorsement of religious coping was associated with lower risk. Other avoidant strategies such as denial and self-distraction were not associated with substance use or risk behavior, in contrast to previous findings (Giurgiu & Damian, 2015; Samuel et al., 2015). Future intervention research may seek to focus on the mechanisms of reducing substance-related risk, rather than focusing solely on the presence or amount of use.

Further research should explore mechanisms connecting religious coping with better substance use outcomes and investigate how behavioral disengagement and

the use of substances to cope may impact risk-reduction strategies among college athletes. Religious values associated with substance use may serve as a protective factor and an opportunity for intervention among religious students (Gallucci et al., 2018), while all students may benefit from education and support related to actively addressing stressors rather than disengaging or using substances to cope (Metzger et al., 2017).

Findings suggest interventions to reduce substance use may be especially warranted among college athletes who are older, identify as men, report higher levels of stress, and/or engage in behavioral disengagement and substance use coping. Higher rates of substance use coping among men is potentially related to masculine or hyper-masculine ideals that remain common in men's athletic environments (Ramaeker & Petrie, 2019). These ideals may stifle disclosure of emotional distress, hinder help-seeking, and promote more avoidant strategies of coping with stress. Increased substance use coping among older athletes is most likely due to the legality of using substances such as alcohol after age 21 and associated exposure. However, this finding might also be indicative of socialization to substance use coping through the course of one's collegiate career (Veliz et al., 2015).

Because college athletes may be unwilling to disclose substance use, it may be necessary screen for surrogate markers of risk, including stress, anxiety, and behavioral disengagement, to provide targeted interventions to college athletes most at risk for problematic substance use. Peer-to-peer interventions may assist in reducing stigma and encouraging openness about challenges related to substance use (Tracy & Wallace, 2016), and may use the social cohesion common in athletics teams to promote healthy, rather than unhealthy norms related to substance use (Graupensperger et al., 2019).

Additionally, colleges and universities should ensure resources are readily available to help students. Research highlights potential benefits of involving athletics personnel in the prevention and treatment of substance use among college athletes (Parisi et al., 2019), and reducing the stigma of help-seeking (Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2019; Gulliver et al., 2012). This reflects new trends toward holistic health in college athletics, which eschews the traditional over-prioritization of athletics performance and instead emphasizes the central importance of medical, social, cultural, and mental health among athletes (Barkley et al., 2018).

Interventions to intervene on the link between stress, coping, and substance use could take two approaches: (1) reducing stressors and/or (2) improving coping with stressors, even when they remain present. For example, holistic tutoring and mentoring programs, mental health resources, career coaching, injury prevention, and increased financial support may help reduce the unique stressors faced by college athletes, particularly those who are engaging in problematic substance use (Barkley et al., 2018). Even with stressors present, coping interventions can be effective for improving mental health and decreasing substance use despite not directly targeting substance use behaviors (Fogaca, 2021; Gabrielli et al., 2021; Houston et al., 2017; Meade et al., 2010). Research is needed to explore whether focusing on general coping skills rather than a substance use disorder can decrease stigma, which is a barrier

to engagement in mental health care.

Research is also necessary to compare the benefits of team-based interventions versus individual interventions. There is some prior evidence that sports participation shows different relationships to substance use compared to broad physical activity/exercise (Henchoz et al., 2014). It is possible this is due to performance pressures and other factors unique to sports, including team dynamics. Some teams may foster a culture of healthy coping, while other teams may practice maladaptive methods of coping and substance use. Research suggests men competing in team sports are more likely to binge drink compared to men in individual sports, but this relationship may not exist among women (Kim & Kuan, 2020). Future studies with larger samples should explore the relationships between various sports teams and the methods of coping among the teams' respective members to gain insight into how team dynamics can shape a college athlete's ability to combat stress (Graupensperger et al., 2019).

Limitations of the study included recruitment from a limited number of colleges/universities from the upper Midwest, with the sample consisting of predominantly White and heterosexual women. As such, findings might not generalize to all college athletes. Future studies may wish to enroll a more diverse sample of students. Data were collected prior to the emergence of COVID-19, and although early published findings seem to indicate that college athletes did not suffer disproportionately from mental health concerns during the pandemic (Valster et al., 2021), future studies may seek to replicate the findings in light of the continued challenges posed by COVID-19. Study response rate was low, similar to many studies with Internet recruitment, and it is not possible to identify whether non-responders would have given similar responses. Response rate in this sample of college athletes may have been low due to social desirability bias or concern that acknowledging substance use might lead to consequences from their athletic team (Johnson, 2014), despite assurance from the researchers that responses were confidential. In future studies, researchers may seek to employ alternative recruitment and data collection strategies designed to increase response rates and reduce social desirability bias.

## Conclusion

Among college athletes, older age, identifying as a man, and higher perceived stress were associated with higher substance use coping. Higher behavioral disengagement coping, higher substance use coping, and lower religious coping were related to greater binge drinking and substance-related risk behaviors. Together, these findings point to the importance of developing interventions to reduce stressors and facilitate healthy coping with stress as strategies to reduce problematic drinking and substance use among college athletes. Coping-focused interventions are likely to have the dual benefit of reducing problematic substance use and enhancing problem solving for other stressors common among college athletes.

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# Athletic Conference Considerations for Adding New Sports

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COVID-19 has impacted the sport industry across all contexts, including intercollegiate athletics. Specifically, research has found that the Collegiate Sport Addition Process (CSAP) to add or remove a sport for athletic departments in previous economic downturns must consider multiple factors. The current study builds on previous research by exploring the considerations of adding a sport through a buyer-seller interaction framework. Specifically, the current study explored whether sport governing bodies or coaching associations should attempt to sell their sport at the intercollegiate Conference level, rather than at the institution level. The current study used a survey to collect feedback from conference commissioners across the intercollegiate sport landscape. Through surveys and follow-up interviews, findings led to emergent themes of balance, viability, funding and revenue, and post-season opportunities as factors that conference personnel considered when deciding to add a sport. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

*Keywords*: intercollegiate athletics, college sport addition, decision-making

## Introduction

COVID-19 has changed the face of sports like no other time in history. Higher education institutions have made significant changes to their athletic departments, eliminating over 206 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) programs across all divisions (NCAA.org), citing direct or indirect financial ramifications (Dellenger & Forde, 2020; Uhler, 2020). While some have reduced their sports offerings, others have made dramatic conference moves intended to increase the athletic department's bottom line. The following is an example of one such change: The Texas Longhorns and Oklahoma Sooners ended their time in the Big 12 and are heading to the SEC in a rich get richer tactic. "It made sense that the Longhorns and the Sooners would align with the other titanic brands of college football" (Daniel et al., 2021).

In addition to moves on behalf of football, Table 1 below highlights several conference movements in both sports and member expansion that appear to be focused on non-revenue-generating sports:

**Table 1**
*Summary of Conference Movement*

| Year | Conference | Association & Division | Sport or Member Expansion |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2023 | Northeast Conference | NCAA D1 | Added Men's Volleyball |
| 2022 | Southeastern Conference | NCAA D1 | Adding Texas and Oklahoma from the Big 12 in 2025 (anticipated) |
| 2022 | Big 10 Conference | NCAA D1 | Adding USC and UCLA from the Pac 12 Conference in 2024 (anticipated) |
| 2021 | American Athletic Conference | NCAA D1 | Added 6 Conference USA schools |
| 2021 | Conference Carolinas | NCAA D2 | Extends Collaboration with South Atlantic Conference |
| 2021 | New England Collegiate Conference | NCAA D3 | Added ESports |
| 2021 | The Wolverine-Hoosier Athletic Conference | NAIA D1 | Added ESports |
| 2021 | Big 12 Conference | NCAA D1 | Adding 4 New Members |
| 2021 | Pac 12 Conference | NCAA D1 | Taking steps to bolster wrestling membership |
| 2020 | Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference | NCAA D2 | Added Men's Volleyball |
| 2019 | Cascade Collegiate Conference | NAIA D1 | Added women's wrestling |
| 2019 | The Mid-American Conference | NCAA D1 | Expands Wrestling with the addition of seven new affiliate members |
| 2017 | The Allegheny Mountain Collegiate Conference | NCAA D3 | Added Men's Volleyball |

A pattern or trend of adding sports through athletic conference support appears to be emerging. After all,

> . . . conferences have immense power with the ability to restructure the state of intercollegiate athletics. With the chance for stability among conference members and the pursuit of even more revenue, conferences look more like high school dating relationships than long-term marriages among institutions with similar academic and athletic goals. Conferences are now the sole negotiators among the purveyors in the media rights market and, thus, have substantial control to manipulate the market. (Dennie, 2011, p. 253)

Whether a conference seeks to increase its revenue or support member institutions' various initiatives, it appears that direct marketing of the sport to the conference may be a valuable strategy. This study considers whether sport governing bodies or coaching associations attempting to have their sport added should be "selling or marketing" to a conference rather than (or in addition to) an individual institution.

## The College Sport Addition Process

In 2014, The Collegiate Sport Addition Process (CSAP) emerged from a study designed to understand the factors, priorities, and processes that NCAA Division I Athletic Directors use in the determination to add one or more sports to their institution (Milstein, 2014). There were several themes of the decision-making process identified– *University Viability, Sport Popularity, Association Membership, and Access and Opportunity.* Within the themes were 23 individual factors: Academics, Enrollment Management, Profile of Student-Athlete, Popularity & Marketability Related to Geography, Direct or Indirect Benefits, Alumni, Donor, Community & Sponsor Support, Association Requirements, Association Membership, Compliance Gender Equity and Access and Opportunity, Competitiveness of the Sport, Popularity for Recruiting, Good Fit, Recruiting, Add-on to an Existing Sport and Sport Popularity, grouped under the emergent themes of University Viability, Association Membership, Access and Opportunity, and Sport Popularity (Milstein, 2014).

Association requirements were listed as the single most discussed theme in the initial study, which was not surprising since the study was conducted at the end of 2014 as institutions concluded their realignment moves. Results highlighted the priority themes, including conference requirements, conference alignment, and NCAA divisional sport status change. Between 2010 and 2013, 120 institutions moved to new conferences, resulting in significant changes in the intercollegiate landscape (Milstein, 2014). Participants in this study that were involved in the conference realignment anticipated enrollment increases as one of the significant changes to their institutions. Furthermore, those that did not cite academics discussed switching conferences to have more schools in their region to compete against, which resulted in the added benefit of lower travel costs (Havard & Eddy, 2013). Conference realignment was promoted to get the universities academically aligned. Nwosu (2015) described academic alignment as *academic prestige*, which refers to the overall ac-

ademic profile of an athletic conference. This is a construct of the academic profiles of the conference member institutions (Nwosu, 2015).

Milstein and Dixon (2019) looked at how and why some sports organizations successfully had their sport added while others struggled. The 2019 study's findings point to a marketing mismatch between what the institution (buyer) is looking for in a sport and what the sport's governing body (seller) is promoting. For example, it was not enough for a sport seller to try to market their sport as being a fix for a Title IX compliance issue. Buyers were aware that women's sports would help with Title IX and wanted to know how else the sport could benefit the institution.

The present study provides a deeper dive into the priority theme of Association Membership, attempting to extend that line of research and consider what factors would make a sport attractive and useful to an entire conference and member institutions alike. The current study will build on previous research in intercollegiate sports realignment and navigating the Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) landscape (Petersen & Judge, 2021), reflecting on the five utilities of the sport product within the buy-seller mismatch framework. Additionally, the current work will add to the sports development area (Mullin et al., 2014; Sotiriadou et al., 2008). Specifically, the current study relates to the college level sports development area and its dynamic landscape seen with the current changes in college sports. Further, the current research will continue to build on examining the processes and factors involved in adding a sport (Milstein & Damon, 2021; Milstein & Dixon, 2019). With the framework in place, the current study specifically aims to enrich the association membership theme discovered by Milstein & Dixon (2019) to explore the factors that make a sport attractive and useful to a college conference and its member institutions. The association membership theme was defined to describe when a university strategically adds a sport to then change conferences or association levels (Milstein & Dixon, 2019). Whereas the previous work exploring the association membership theme was aimed at what sports an institution may add, the current study adds to the theme by exploring what sports a conference adds. This study expands the buy-seller framework but focuses on the utilities (Sheth, 1976) of the framework given the emphasis on conferences. This framework led us to explore whether sports governing bodies and coaches' associations (sellers) should sell their sport to a conference or member institution (buyers) and what mismatches may occur during the process. To guide our research, we constructed the following overarching research question: What factors do athletic conferences consider when adding a new sport?

## Literature Review and Historic Context

Collegiate athletic conferences have a history that dates back over 100 years, and one that includes divergent rationales for their original creation.

> Universities pioneered football, the prototypical collegiate sport, in the late 1800s, before prominent scandals inspired diverse attempts at reform at the turn of the century. Most notably, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) formed in New York City in 1905–6 and promptly suggested

> new rules for football. Meanwhile, college officials created regional conferences. The Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives—formed in Chicago in the 1890s and now called the Big Ten—is considered the first intercollegiate athletic conference, the prototype for the big-time conference (Soleburg, 2018).

Initially managed by students, today's collegiate athletic conferences have been established to organize and regulate competition for higher education institutions **(**Perline et al., 2012). Conferences "establish rules and regulations that support and sustain a level playing field for member institutions, while creating in-season and post-season competitive opportunities" (Staurowsky & Abney, 2011, p. 149) and competitive balance (Rhoads, 2004). Memberships are sought after based on enrollment, geography, academic orientation, athletic department philosophy, division, and revenue-sharing potential (Lopiano & Zotos, 2022). For competition to occur, a level of profitability for conference members must exist (Depken & Wilson, 2006). This is achieved " . . . by distributing rights fees from media agreements, corporate sponsorships, licensing, and other forms of revenue received by the league (Grant et al., 2008). Schools initially competed in the "University Division," currently known as Division I, and the "College Division," (now Division II and III). In 1973, the NCAA split into today's Division I, Division II, and Division III. Then, in 1978, the NCAA split Division I into I-A and I-AA (NCAA, n.d.).

## Conference Realignment—A Shift in Perspective

Conference realignment refers to sizeable changes in NCAA conference membership and, since 1936, there has been at least one change annually with only a few years with no moves: 1955, 1958, 1985, 2006, and 2010. At most institutions, realignment was being driven primarily by university administrators who saw an opportunity to improve the academic image of their schools. It was not driven by athletic directors as originally thought (Forde, 2010). In addition to academic alignment, there was an expectation that member institutions would also see an increase in revenues through broadcasting, ticket sales, and support through donations. However, any time athletics and academics are discussed together, a debate ensues.

Academically speaking, current research suggests that switching conferences leads to academic gains. On average, colleges that moved to a new league saw a 3% decrease in the admittance rate (meaning they became more selective) and a 5% increase in their admission yield rate (more admitted students enrolled) three years after joining the new conference (Havard & Eddy, 2013).

### *Opportunity to Renegotiate Broadcasting*

Several conferences now have their own broadcasting networks as they moved from cable to streaming services. For example,

> The schools within the three conferences [Big Ten, Pac 12, ACC] believe they are like-minded in that they want to continue to prioritize broad-based sports offerings and, that the academic profile of their institutions matters — as does graduating athletes. One driving force behind the alliance for

> (any) two conferences is a concern that ESPN controls and dictates too much of the sport (The Athletic.com, 2021).

The timing of this announcement had many wondering if this was a reaction to Oklahoma and Texas leaving the Big 12. However, if social media has also taught anything, it is that viewers now expect on-demand and customized experiences (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2018). Sports fans have likely ended their days of endless channel surfing. Other concerns are highlighted by the advances in new media, technology, and revenue stream options and opportunities (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2018).

#### *Competition On and Off the Field*

It should be noted that like-minded conference members compete on and off the field for wins, media attention, enrollment, staff, revenues, and resources (Covell & Barr, 2010). Identifying like-minded peers who can be trusted to act in a like-minded manner is challenging (Oriard, 2009). For many institutions, a change in conference caused increases in spatial characteristics, travel distances, and financial commitments (Covell & Barr, 2010). Increased financial investments in athletics and its fans often come at the expense of student-athletes who miss classes and academic obligations.

## Theoretical Frameworks

### Buyer-Seller Interaction: A Conceptual Framework

As noted earlier, the current study aims to provide greater depth of understanding into the Association Membership theme; with an aim to explore what factors make a sport attractive to an entire conference and its member institutions. Previous research (Milstein & Dixon, 2019) invoked a buyer (individual university) and seller (governing body or coaching association) relationship when exploring what factors are essential in the decision-making process at the NCAA Division I level to add a sport. While such previous work is a foundation for the current research in that we draw on the relationship between a sport and intercollegiate entities, here we focus on the conference and sport potential relationship. As such, we focus on the utility framework of a product's offering rather than the buyer and seller framework of previous research (Milstein & Dixon, 2019). Sheth (1976) noted that a product can be broken down into five different utilities: functional utility, social-organizational utility, situational utility, emotional utility, and curiosity utility. We position the sport being offered to intercollegiate conferences as the product. Further description of the five utilities follows with an example of how a sport can fit into each utility.

### Utility

The first of the five utilities mentioned by Sheth (1976) is the functional utility. The functional utility relates to the values of the product, including product-specific features, measurable qualities, and other outcomes related to the functions of the product (Sheth, 1983). In sports, *functional utility* refers to a sport's function or value at a university (Milstein & Dixon, 2019). The functional utility of a sport may

then impact the outcomes of increased enrollment, raising the brand and perceived prestige of the university, increased broadcasting opportunities, and greater revenue. Next is the *social-organizational utility*, which deals with other non-functionally related values with which the product may imbue and be associated. Such values may include demographic and cultural groups, perceived financial well-being or socioeconomic status, and overall organizational image (Sheth 1976, 1983). This relates to the sport itself fitting in with the university brand and identity. The sport's social-organizational utility has been seen with decisions related to gender representation in intercollegiate sports offerings through Title IX and other means and increasing awareness and representation of diverse racial groups.

Next, *situational utility* pertains to an unplanned need and the related transaction or action to address the unplanned need (Sheth, 1976). Recently, the sports landscape has been littered with numerous unplanned needs, particularly at the college level, as decisions are made to add or drop a sport (Milstein & Damon, 2021; Milstein & Dixon, 2019). Additionally, conference realignment and the 2021 NIL legislation (Petersen & Judge, 2021) represent unplanned needs that have required action from universities, specifically their athletic departments and leaders, through situational utility. Indeed, Petersen and Judge (2021) point to these two phenomena as key situations that will cause university athletic departments to reevaluate their inter-departmental competition across institutions as it relates to recruiting student-athletes and deciding which conference to align their athletic programs within. This situational utility is also an ample example of emotional utility. *Emotional utility* is based on an attachment to a specific product or event and can elicit an emotional response to the product (Sheth, 1976); for example, capturing strong feelings after an event and attempting to persuade people to act in a certain way while the strong feelings persist. The NIL legislation has been an emotional situation with college athletic departments and the student-athletes' brand as the product. Consumers, specifically fans, have engaged in an emotional response as their programs have been helped or hurt by the passing of NIL, allowing for programs to facilitate competitive NIL deals in an attempt to sway potential student-athletes into choosing to attend a specific college and athletic program (Petersen & Judge, 2021). Another sports-related example of emotional utility is when a niche sport becomes popularized through success on a large stage, such as at the Olympics (Milstein & Dixon, 2019). It endears an emotional response for brief periods following the Olympics. An example of this was after the U.S. men's curling team won gold at the 2018 Olympics, and the subsequent fanfare for the team and the sport of curling that ensued.

Finally, *curiosity utility* insinuates an exploratory approach to acquiring the newest, latest, and greatest product simply because it is the newest, latest, and greatest (Sheth, 1976). A simple example of the curiosity utility in sports would be a school adding an emerging sport, such as ESports, in recent years. With all five utilities defined and connected to the sport context, the following research question guided our study to achieve the purpose: What factors do athletic conferences consider when adding a new sport? This research question and our framework informed our survey instrument, detailed in the methods below.

# Methods

## Procedure

This study was an extension of the College Sport Addition Process (CSAP) Model to explore the Association Membership Theme. During the initial 2014 study participants mentioned adding a sport as a result or a requirement of conference membership. The purpose of this inquiry was to generate an in-depth understanding of the factors, priorities and processes pertaining to the decision to add a sport to an NCAA Conference. The research instrument followed the CSAP interview protocol focused on factors and decision making and was adapted into a survey format. For example, the initial protocol asked which sports had been added or dropped for an individual institution, while this study asked the same question but focused on the conference as a whole. The survey provided the "what", however the interviews assisted in answering the "why". Interview questions were open-ended, and often started with participants being asked to provide an overview of what sports were added to their conference and why the membership chose to add that sport. From participant's survey results, questions about Automatic Qualifiers, Associate Memberships, and Single Sport Conferences were asked to provide context associated with their individual conference.

Prior to survey distribution, the instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts, including collegiate athletic administrators whom a conference office had previously employed. Following Institutional Review Board approval, this study was conducted via survey methodology with a sample database comprised of the names and email addresses of the commissioners of each conference within all three divisions of the NCAA. The contact information was obtained from the official website for each conference.

The Qualtrics platform was used, and the survey was available for 49 days. For all survey items, respondents were permitted to skip questions. Of the eight participants who agreed to follow-up interviews, three meetings were scheduled with commissioners representing one of the NCAA divisions. In follow-up interviews, the researchers sought insight into the survey data collected, which revealed consistency and thematic clarification.

## Participants

This study sought to obtain feedback from the collegiate athletic conferences that were affiliates of the NCAA (NCAA, 2020) as of the 2020-2021 academic year. Participants were identified through their member conferences listed on the ncaa.org website. An initial survey was sent via email to the commissioners of each NCAA conference ($N = 97$). After a review of the responses, a second request was resent to 17 conferences to seek varied representation in the regions and divisions. Ultimately, 27 conference commissioners responded, with 25 completed surveys for a response rate of 92.59%. Eight respondents agreed to a follow-up interview. The distribution of respondents with usable surveys is reflected in Table 2. Regions were established

using criteria from the U.S. Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2022).

**Table 2**
*Participants by Region*

| Region | Division I | Division II | Division III |
|---|---|---|---|
| Region I: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Region II: New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Region III: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Region IV: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Region V: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Region VI: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Region VII: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Region VIII: Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Region IX: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands) | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Region X: Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington | 1 | 0 | 0 |

## Study Design Rationale

The initial survey design allowed the researchers to gain insight from the conference commissioners related to the specifics of their conference structure and recent activity concerning the addition or termination of sports. Follow-up interviews with willing participants enabled the researchers to elicit emic from the respondents (Sirahkaya-Turk et al., 2017), thereby understanding the ways process by which college conferences contribute to the sport addition process at their member schools.

## Peer Debriefing and Inter-rater Agreement

Multiple qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Weiss, 1994) suggest the practice of peer debrief-

ing to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. Each of the researchers reviewed the survey results individually and then discussed their interpretations. Two initial researchers designed the study, and a third joined to contribute to peer debriefing. According to Spall (1998), peer debriefing supports the credibility of the research findings and can contribute to the overall trustworthiness of the research. At different times during the research process, these individuals were contacted to review the data and the findings and discuss the implications. These individuals helped explain terminology in the context of the results.

## Findings and Discussion

This study sought to better understand the role of the collegiate conference in the decision-making process when member schools decide to add or delete a sport. This study specifically addressed what factors should be considered or prioritized if a sports governing body or coaching association desires to sell or market its sport to an entire conference. While the results varied, several themes emerged, and are discussed below. Survey results and follow-up clarifications are provided. Results are accompanied by a discussion using Sheth's Utility Framework to consider what adding a sport can provide an athletic conference. Quotes from respondents are provided to give voice and context to these results.

### Sport Adoption by Participating Conferences

Of the 27 participants, 10 conferences indicated that they had added a sport in the last three years (2018-2021) or would be adding one during the next three years (2021-2024). Eight indicated that they had not added a sport in the past few years or were not planning to add one. Another seven did not respond. Below, Table 3 provides a list of sports that were included in the addition by participants in this study.

### Membership Driven

Athletic conferences are member-driven; therefore, data collected and reported results have a direct throughline from institution to conference. As membership changed and individual institutions adopted sports, a request to add a specific sport to the conference would usually come up for discussion. For example, men's wrestling has been a sport that has had a rocky road. Having been eliminated from numerous institutions in the past few decades, Division II and Midwest conferences have taken most recent ownership of the sport as noted below by the Mid America Conference expanding their wrestling offerings and Big 10 dominance in the sport (Couch, 2015, Simon, 2006). According to the National Wrestling Coaches Association, on the women's side, wrestling became an NCAA emerging sport and is now considered one of the fastest-growing sports for women in both high school and collegiate arenas.(Weiman, 2022). From individual conference press releases announcing the addition of a wrestling has been noted below.

- 2023: Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference has announced the adoption of women's wrestling as the 22nd conference-sponsored sport (RMAC anncouces, 2023, para 1).

**Table 3**
*Sports Included*

| Adding Men's Sport(s) 2021-2024 | Number of Conferences Adding | Adding Women's Sport(s) 2021-2024 | Number of Conferences Adding |
|---|---|---|---|
| Men's Lacrosse | 2 | Women's Ice Hockey | 1 |
| Men's Swimming & Diving | 2 | Women's Lacrosse | 2 |
| Men's Volleyball | 1 | Women's Lacrosse | 1 |
| Men's Wrestling | 2 | Women's Field Hockey | 1 |
| Men's Football | 1 | Women's Indoor Track and Field | 1 |
| Men's Indoor Track and Field | 1 | Women's Swimming & Diving | 2 |
| | | **Mixed Sport** | |
| **Number of Conferences Adding** | | | 1 |
| | | **Total Additions** | **18** |

- 2021: Pac-12 Conference announces a series of steps to bolster wrestling membership (ac-12 Conference announces, 2021);

2019: National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Cascade Collegiate Conference has added women's wrestling NAIA votes to adopt , 2022);

- 2019: The Mid-American Conference (MAC) announced expansion in the sport of wrestling as the MAC has added seven new affiliate members. The addition of seven new affiliate members increases MAC wrestling membership to 15 total members.
  "Our membership spent significant time discussing and studying the possible inclusion of these new members and we believe this will strengthen what has already grown into an elite wrestling league," said Dr. Jon A. Steinbrecher, Commissioner of the Mid-American Conference. "This addition of affiliate members is good for the Mid-American Conference, and good for collegiate wrestling. It broadens our footprint across a part of the country where youth, high school, and collegiate wrestling is very strong" (Leisering, 2019, para 7)

From the voices of this study's participants, the following quotes demonstrate how members drive the conference:

> [Membership Sustainability]. Football expansion plans include initiating football based on the need to build a strong sustainable membership for the future. We initiated women's lacrosse, followed by men's lacrosse – which

> subsequently was transferred to another conference. We now are starting men's lacrosse again as a service to the marketplace which held multiple independent programs that needed a conference home (Respondent # 10).
>
> [Required Roster Numbers]. Any sport expansion is directly related to sports sponsorship opportunities by full members with affiliate members used to reach a minimum number of six (Respondent # 21).
>
> [Sport Adoption]. As a conference, we sponsor a sport if at least five of our members sponsor the sport. Conferences at DIII typically sponsor sports based on their membership. Almost all will have some sort of threshold to offer a conference championship/conference play or not. We don't make decisions on sponsoring sports on our own. We as a conference also don't require teams to sponsor any specific sports. Our policy is that you need at least seven sports per gender, at least six of which need to be sports in the North Coast Athletic Conference(NCAC) - which is to say sports sponsored by other NCAC members (Respondent #3).
>
> [Member Led]. Simply put. . . It's a ground up movement in either direction. Momentum from a group of members typically leads to the addition or elimination of a sport at the conference level (Respondent #18).
>
> [Decision to Add]. We had enough schools participating to sponsor the sport at the championship level (Respondent #9).

One institution's press release shows how athletic conferences are influential:

> Adding both men's and women's wrestling has been discussed as part of the Lebanon Valley College in Annville's current athletic strategic plan. The biggest challenge, however, is facilities, according to Associate Athletic Director and Senior Women's Administrator Stacey Hollinger. 'Men's and women's wrestling are on the potential list to add to sports in the future,' Hollinger said. 'Our challenge for us right now is we do not have a facility where we can practice, have locker rooms or compete. But it has been talked about, and it has been considered because other teams in our conference have added it, so it is definitely on our radar and part of an athletic strategic plan' (Pawlikowski, 2022, para 4).

## Emergent Theme: Viability

Figure 1 shows the emergent themes of *Conference Viability, Balance, Post Season Opportunities, and Funding and Revenue Sources.* Each will be discussed individually, without priority, recognizing that each theme overlaps and affects the other themes. Consistent with the original CSAP, *viability* emerged as a theme in the current study. While it was not surprising to see the viability theme emerge again, our current findings help refine our understanding of this theme and provide further

perspective on how integral it is to decision-makers and participants. Viability revolves around individual institutions' and conferences' growth, development, and continued sustainability. For example, at the institution level, there was evidence to support the notion of recruiting a diverse study body. In contrast, for conferences, there was evidence of communication to the institutions, efforts to sustain membership, sport growth, and marketing initiatives. Further, the participants pointed to financial considerations as part of the viability theme with what the institutions or conferences were willing or able to pay to sustain the sport's growth, marketing, and competitiveness across institutions. Conferences considering the addition of a sport discussed viability in several ways.

**Figure 1**
*Emergent Themes*


No conference openly stated (in the survey) that a university must add a sport to be part of its conference. However, in follow-up conversations with conference representatives, they discussed supporting existing member institutions by adding a sport to the conference that fulfills the needs of its members. New members were encouraged to add specific sports as incentives to becoming full members. The following quotes from respondents and recent press releases give voice to those sentiments:

> [Sustaining Membership]. Conference XYZ added women's lacrosse in the last three years. The conference saw the schools adding the sport and "went out to the schools to say, 'should we add more?' and we sought out new members (Respondent #12).

As noted below, growth was discussed frequently.

> [Growth]. Started as a single sport conference, not battling for members but as a pathway. If schools leave, it is ok. There was a deliberate plan to grow and split. The income model comes to $0 each year. They can go to ESPN, and they can cover individual institutions and not pay high profile conference fees (Respondent #10).

> [Growth and Diversity]. Cited from reasons to add the sports was that it was . . . fastest growing collegiate sport in America, [notable] growth in local high schools, . . . opening up new recruiting markets for our institutions (Respondent #8).

> [Sport Growth]. Conference Carolinas (SAC), has been collaborating on the addition of the emerging sports women's triathlon and women's wrestling (Naasz, 2021).

> We initiated women's lacrosse, followed by men's lacrosse, which subsequently was transferred to another conference. We now are starting men's lacrosse again as a service to the [collegiate] marketplace which held multiple independent programs (athletic teams) that needed a conference home (Respondent #10).

Regarding eliminating a sport, its usefulness by conference members drove decisions. Three participants responded that their conferences would eliminate women's field hockey, men's lacrosse, men's tennis, and women's tennis. As an overarching theme, respondents conveyed that adding (or eliminating) a sport to the official conference offerings is a "ground-up movement," and there was no "official checklist." However, the sentiments expressed in their comments indicate that the conference or membership can and does influence the sport(s) they choose to sponsor.

> [Conference Collaboration]. Field hockey was run as an associate sport made up of schools in the two conferences. When the one conference added more programs the obligation to conduct the championship was assumed by that conference. All member schools had access to the championship (Respondent #6).

> [Member Interest]. We require a minimum of four members to sponsor a sport before we will consider sponsoring it as a conference championship sport. We had four teams for Men's Lacrosse but then one member discontinued the program, so we did the same as a conference (Respondent #13).

> [Institutional Roster Management]. Reduced interest by athletic departments, loss of sponsoring members institutions, including affiliate members, Institutional budget concerns, Collegiate athletic industry/higher ed

> growing mentality to sponsor sports with bigger rosters to assist with admission efforts, Fewer competition opportunities within region due to slow elimination of programs making it more costly to compete. (Respondent #18)

Beyond the research instrument, supporting statements for the theme of viability were also noted in press releases. For example, the New England Collegiate Conference (NECC) has added Esports to their conference offerings. While Esports does not fall under NCAA offerings, the member institutions felt that elevating the sport to varsity would assist enrollment for it's member institutions ; according to NECC Commissioner Jacob VanRyn.

> We are extremely excited to announce the addition of Esports. Esports is one of the fastest-growing competitive efforts on college campuses, and it is a tremendous opportunity for us to expand the impact of the New England Collegiate Conference beyond traditional sports on campus. We are proud to announce the addition of Esports as an NECC-sponsored sport. We take great pride in all of our sport and championship offerings, and we will continue to do everything we can to help create memorable and meaningful experiences for all of our student-athletes. (NECC, 2019).
>
> The reason for that growth is often attributed to Esports' ability to engage the current student body, attract new students and present a cutting-edge image. For some liberal arts schools, Esports can provide an anchor to new technological programs and help attract a different type of student than the school traditionally lures. With that development potential, student-life departments, in addition to athletics departments, have become involved in starting the programs on many campuses, seeing Esports as part of their school's broader growth strategy (NCAA, n.d.)

***Discussion on Utility***

These factors or themes speak to Sheth's (1976) functional utility regarding the product and are limited to performance, measurable qualities, and evaluative criteria. In this case, *functional utility* refers to what function an individual sport could serve at an institution. For example, sports might be seen as a recruiting tool, assisting with enrollment, or providing a pathway to post-season play. When conference decisions are member-driven, and alignment or realignment has brought together like-minded institutions, it is natural that the results discussed here for conferences follow their member institutions. As a service to the marketplace, popular sports in regional high school markets make for good recruiting opportunities for local higher education institutions.

In most cases, the attractiveness of adding a conference sport fulfills multiple needs and might speak to both functional and social utility. In early 2019, the NAIA Cascade Collegiate Conference added women's wrestling. The quote below is from a single-sport conference that will now support two NCAA emerging sports, which points to demographic attractiveness. Whether related to the diversity of race or gender to fulfill athletic goals or enrollment objectives, social outcomes to increase more

women's opportunities are noted in the quote below:

Conference Carolinas Commissioner Chris Colvin said,

> We are really excited about the addition of working with the South Athletic Conference (SAC)to administer the emerging sports of women's triathlon and women's wrestling. I know both the Conference Carolinas and South Atlantic Conference student-athletes are thrilled to be able to compete against each other in a conference format that also allows us to help lead the way nationally in promoting the growth of these two sports. (conferencecarolinas.com, 2021, para 3),)

The two conferences will start women's triathlon in the 2022-23 academic year, while women's wrestling will begin in the 2023-24 academic year (Naasz, 2021).

## Emergent Theme: Balance

While most industries prefer minimal competition, sports programs can only thrive if they have competition. "Fans want their teams to win, but they also appreciate a level of uncertainty regarding the outcome of a sporting event" (Humphreys, 2002, p.133). Therefore, negatively impacting fan interest may exist without competitive balance within the conference can cause diminished attendance, viewership, and revenue from media rights (Humphreys, 2002; Perline et al., 2018). While professional sports leagues use methods such as salary caps, luxury taxes, and revenue sharing to affect competitive balance, intercollegiate sports use their rules and regulations at the NCAA level and scheduling, budgeting, and membership selection at the conference level to attempt to achieve an appropriate amount of competitive balance (Humphreys, 2002; Perline et al., 2018).

The concept of competitive balance is characterized by a relatively equal opportunity to be competitive with teams that have similar characteristics with regard to athletic competition, facilities, amenities, and finances to support athletic competition (Johnson et al., 2017; Nwosu, 2017). Most conferences exist to provide competitive opportunities for their members. Therefore, some degree of balance must exist for the conference to remain viable and for institutions to keep their membership sports offerings and alumni support. Addressed in the participants' sentiments from the current study was the idea of competitive balance, specifically, travel schedules and "geographic balance." In 2021, the NCAA Division I Pac-12 Conference announced a series of policy changes to increase wrestling membership through affiliate members and provide a geographic balance to support student-athletes and competition in the western part of the United States (Media Center, Pac-12, n.d.). The following participant quotes suggests regional growth could lead to increased opportunities for member institutions potentially adopting the sport.

> [Regional Interest]. Member institutions already sponsoring Men's Wrestling have infrastructure in place. (There is) growing interest in the sport, and increased competition opportunities within the region with conference members. (There is a) greater likelihood of a conference championship opportunity as more institutions decide to add the sport. (Respondent #18)

> [Financial Consideration]. Field Hockey provided a more regional "better fit" for travel.
> (The institutions are) willing to invest in football and basketball travel but count pennies for other sports (Respondent 12).

***Discussion on Utility***

Competitive and geographic balance has a direct throughline to the functional utility of facilities and amenities as both are product-specific features with measurable qualities regarding balance. As lacrosse, wrestling, and volleyball are showing up in more high schools, adding a sport to the conference allows for more recruiting opportunities for all member institutions. Increasing recruiting opportunities likely to impact enrollment could be an example of functional utility. Outcomes related to the functions of the product can be viewed through the over-inflated athletic budgets and gross revenues seen at the most prominent Division I Football Subdivision (FBS) Conferences. Geographic balance or geographic proximity is echoed in the sentiments of those scholars reimagining a football realignment:

> The COVID-19 pandemic's effects have been profoundly felt in a realm where, for 10 years, money was no object, and the map made no sense. Slapped in the face by a new fiscal reality, maybe we're due to both rein in and reach out—to contract geographically into more regional conferences, while expanding the scope of the revenue gusher that is the College Football Playoff (Forde, 2020, para 3).

Beyond football, members with affiliate memberships or which are part of single-sport conferences are often forced into undesirable schedules, connecting to social-organizational utility. Higher-profile sports often have a higher number of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who often need additional academic support services to be successful. When individual teams travel further, negative consequences emerge in the form of more expensive and geographically undesirable situations, with student-athletes unable to perform at their athletic and academic peaks. With greater travel distances, students lose access to academic services and can feel pressured to prioritize athletics.

Having a sport be part of the conference, with regional opportunities to compete and the potential to make it to post-season play, will be seen as more attractive compared to participating in a sport where student-athletes must travel far and make additional academic sacrifices. As a positive ramification, this might also result in the retention of student-athletes across the conference who are connected to that sport.

## Emergent Theme: Post-Season Opportunities

Most conferences noted that they had a Conference Championship Award: All-Sports, Commissioner's Cup, President's Cup Athletic Excellence Award, or similar. These awards serve to recognize athletic excellence within a conference. However, the Automatic Bid or Qualifier (A.Q.) was the single most discussed element of this study. Institutions need more than competitive balance; they want opportunities to

participate in post-season play, with an opportunity to potentially win a national title. Regardless of their regular-season performance, teams that win their conference tournament automatically earn a trip to the NCAA post-season (or championship) tournament. Therefore, when enough member institutions began sponsoring the sport, the conference expanded to provide a pathway to an NCAA tournament. Simply put, "Sufficient number of member institutions began sponsoring the sport," as indicated by Respondent #12 regarding the addition of women's lacrosse, men's wrestling, men's swimming and diving, women's field hockey, and women's swimming and diving to their Conference.

The following quote more fully summarizes this sentiment:

> [Automatic Qualifier]. We added men's volleyball in 2019. We added it as a sport when at least four members sponsored it. Men's volleyball was growing as an NCAA sport, and it became a Division III championship shortly before we added it as a conference. This was a strong motivating factor for us to add it as a conference sport and seek additional affiliate members so that we could achieve an automatic bid (Respondent #13).

> [Single Sport Conference]. Forming a single sport conference, jointly allowed us to have an automatic bid to Championships, which accelerated the growth and development of our programs, primarily through enhanced recruiting. Our agreement called for the partnership to be dissolved once one of our leagues hit the NCAA minimum of seven programs for championship A.Q. status (Respondent #8).

***Discussion on Utility***

Automatic qualifiers point to post-season play, which speaks to functional and situational utility. While only one member institution can receive the Automatic Qualifier in a conference, having the opportunity for post-season play brings more media attention, which connects to both conference and institutional marketing initiatives. While obtaining an Automatic Bid is a clear objective for many conferences, there appear to have been strategic initiatives where individual members worked with an affiliate or a single-sport conference until timing or a situation allowed for the conference to fully adopt a new sport. When discussing Automatic Qualifiers, it was often associated with leaving or dissolving a single-sports conference.

> A single-sport conference must be comprised of at least seven members. If a single-sport conference is comprised in part of provisional or reclassifying members, the conference must still contain a minimum of four active members. For a single-sport conference in a National Collegiate sport, the minimum number of active institutions is controlled by the number needed for a National Collegiate automatic qualification. Provisional and reclassifying schools may not contribute to the minimum number of active institutions but may be included in the overall conference composition (NCAA Conference Membership, 2023, para 3).

As noted by a joint press release, the Conference Carolinas extended their collab-

oration with the South Atlantic Conference into the sport of women's wrestling in 2021. This single-sport conference now sponsors multiple sports but does so under a single-sport model.

> The addition of women's triathlon and women's wrestling also comes with the announcement that the South Atlantic Conference will be the sole sponsor of field hockey starting in the 2022-23 academic year. The two conferences will still administer men's wrestling together until the start of the 2023-24 academic year when both conferences will then solely sponsor the sport (Naasz, 2021, para 2).

With hundreds of sports being eliminated from individual institutions due to the pandemic, the single-sport conference model may become more popular not only with emerging sports looking for pathways to NCAA championships but also with less financially stable sports.

## Emergent Theme: Funding and Revenue

At the height of the pandemic, institutions cut sports at an alarming rate. One must spend money to make money, and with programs having less money to work with, the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant budget cuts and sports being eliminated, as summed up by the following study participant:

> There has been reduced interest by athletic departments, loss of sponsoring members institutions, including affiliate members, institutional budget concerns, collegiate athletic industry, and the higher education growing mentality to sponsor sports with bigger rosters to assist with admission efforts. There are fewer competition opportunities within the region due to slow elimination of programs making it more costly to compete (Respondent #18).

### *Revenue*

For many, institution-initiated sports eliminations are the reality of the current time, while others see opportunities. Because of, or despite, those cuts, opportunities have materialized for institutions to make a conference move. With dozens of institutions announcing a change of conference between 2022-2025 (Miller, 2022), there can be no question that revenue is the top priority of NCAA Division I athletic conferences and athletic departments (McCullough et al., 2022).

Institutions with significant brand value are highly sought after as members of conferences with the direct impact that they can have on revenue through collective conference streaming and broadcast rights (Smitt, 2022). With the 2021 introduction of NIL statutes at the state level, collegiate student-athletes are now poised to leverage their personal brands for monetary gain. This new intersection has demonstrated that student-athletes may have a highly influential impact on how conferences and universities make decisions concerning sport adaptation and conference realignment as it directly relates to financial viability for all (Christovich, 2022).

For smaller conferences and emerging sports, revenue still matters. Sports with growing popularity and a student-athlete population that has built a strong brand

presence can impact institutional awareness. Student-athletes at NCAA Division II and Division III schools are not as generally sought after as their Division 1 counterparts, but that does not mean they are not staking a claim to some of the NIL benefits (Christovich, 2021).

***Discussion on Utility***. As branding dictates, the first step is consumer awareness (Rossiter, 2014). Without awareness, the buyer-seller relationship cannot exist (Sheth, 1976). The existence of opportunities for a sport to gain and expand on its consumer awareness, thereby positively impacting revenue generation opportunities, would seem to be a natural desire of the conference, university, and the sport itself. The curiosity utility insinuates an exploratory approach to acquiring the newest, latest, and greatest product simply because it is the newest, latest, and greatest (Sheth, 1976). From traditional sponsorships to digital collectibles like Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), athletes are considering schools that offer stronger opportunities for NIL revenue (Drew, 2022). With NIL in its infancy and student-athletes gaining opportunities, institutions and conferences are experiencing this phenomenon in real-time, each determining how the short-term and long-term effects will play out.

While the impact is still unknown, it is plausible to think that high school students benefiting from NIL legislation will impact the collegiate level, leading the discussion to a situational and functional utility. "College football has completely changed from what it was a year and a half ago," Scott said. "Then, it was about facilities. Now, it's completely different. The No. 1 factor that determines your future success in bringing in talented players and retaining them, the very No. 1 factor, is your NIL ability, bottom line" (Zier, 2022, para 2).

### *Funding*

Grant initiatives have been in place for approximately a decade, as seen with the case of the NCAA emerging sport of women's triathlon. While emerging sports move towards full NCAA Championship status, they often must operate as single-sport conferences, determining rules, recruiting new members, organizing competitions, and assisting with funding.

> [Triathlon]. To assist with this monumental opportunity, USA Triathlon announced the USA Triathlon Foundation Women's Triathlon Emerging Sport Grant. The first round of funding was $2.6 million and then an additional $895,000 was approved; this totals roughly $3.5 million. This grant is distributed to selected NCAA membership institutions to develop, implement, grow and sustain varsity women's triathlon programs at the NCAA level. (Women's Triathlon Grant, TeamUSA.org, n.d.).

Early in 2022, with National Governing Body grant assistance, women's triathlon has now had its 40th institution sign on to add the sport, allowing them to request and move to full-sponsored NCAA championship status just in time to meet the 10-year deadline. It is assumed by the volume of schools that applied and were sustained by the grants that this method likely worked for sports addition. Except for women's equestrian, whose conferences might hold more power, other emerging sports that did not meet the 10-year mark did not fare so well. Archery, badminton, team

handball, and synchronized swimming could not meet the NCAA's requirements to become championship sports and thus were dropped.

***Discussion on Utility.*** While sports expansion is at the heart of the grant, the utility framework points out both a situational and social organizational connection since grants are not offered in most sports. The previous example of women's triathlon and the next example of men's volleyball are aimed at expanding opportunities for a minority population. In 2016, First Point Volleyball Foundation started offering grants in an attempt to revitalize men's volleyball. Then, in 2019, it partnered with the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC) and associated Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) by providing a one-million-dollar grant to help six SIAC schools start varsity men's volleyball programs. Each of the six historically Black schools will receive $150,000 over three years, and the conference office will receive $100,000 to help conduct a league championship. For the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, such efforts have come due to a $1 million grant from USA Volleyball and the First Point Volleyball Foundation. The conference used the funds to start men's volleyball programs at Central State (Ohio), Benedict, Fort Valley State, Kentucky State, Morehouse, and Paine in the 2020-21 academic year (NCAA).

> The introduction of men's volleyball to HBCUs is just one phase of an effort to simultaneously bring the sport to underserved communities and build the pipeline of talent. It was the brainchild of Team USA men's coach John Speraw, who also heads UCLA's program, but it required buy-in from Moore, the SIAC commissioner. (Gold, 2022, para. 3).

Highlighted here are new diverse populations to be recruited, enrolled, and provided educational opportunities while also allowing for an increase in broadcasting as the conference and member institutions enter new markets.

## Limitations and Future Research

As with any study, there are limitations to the current study that need to be acknowledged. First, although we captured a variety of responses from most U.S. regions, region VI (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas) were not captured in our responses and thus constrained how our findings may apply to schools in this region. A follow-up study aimed at conferences in this region would do well to capture this data point. A second limitation is that while we were able to capture interviews with eight participants of a limited population, further insights from other qualitative interviews may help to identify more emergent themes or additional information to enrich the current themes. As data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, future research may glean more insights through qualitative interviews with a larger number of respondents as society and conference commissioners emerge from the chaotic pandemic period. Finally, data were collected before the ongoing conference shuffle seen in 2022, limiting the current study's impact and ability to capture these changes. As we noted earlier, the athletic conferences are member-driven. As members continue to move or attempt to move from one confer-

ence to another, this will have the potential to change what sports will be requested to be added as institutions continue to change conferences. Future research can use the current study as a foundation to build on and capture the continued changes seen across NCAA member institutions and conferences through the realignment phenomenon.

## Conclusion

The current study aimed to understand the role of the collegiate conference in the decision-making process for how schools determine whether to add or remove a sport. Based on the survey method, we found evidence of four main themes: conference viability; balance; post-season opportunities; and budgeting, funding, and revenue sources. These themes provide additional understanding of Sheth's (1976) Utility Framework applied to intercollegiate athletics. The themes also enlighten further understanding of the buyer-seller relationship (Milstein & Dixon, 2019) and leaders' decision-making processes (Milstein & Damon, 2021) in athletic departments and conferences.

With our emergent themes expanding on previous research, the current study offers insights and guidance for administrators when considering adding or removing a sport from an athletic conference. We aim to invite other scholars to continue the evolution of the research stream centered on adding or removing a sport and the various factors influencing the decision-making process. The current work stands as a resource for both practitioners and academics alike.

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# #USportsSoMale: Gender (In)equity in Canadian Interuniversity Varsity Sport

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Herein we examine the current state of gender (in)equity within Canadian interuniversity varsity sport (U SPORTS). In so doing, we build upon the previous work of Canada's Centre for Sport Policy Studies at University of Toronto (see Norman et al., 2021). In our examination, we accessed all 56 U SPORTS universities' Department of Athletics official webpages. We investigated the opportunities for women to participate as student-athletes on U SPORTS interuniversity varsity sport teams as well as opportunities for women to serve as sport leaders as their universities' Directors of Athletics (DAs) and head coaches. Our findings suggest the current situation in Canadian universities remains bleak. We also argue that immediate attention and action is needed—by multiple potential stakeholders—for meaningful change to occur. Finally, considering these findings, we offer suggestions for moving forward and creating change.

*Keywords*: gender, equity, Canada, university, college, sport, women, coaches

## Introduction

In 1972, Title IX was created in the United States. However, no such law exists in Canada. Consequently, achieving gender equity has mainly been left to individual universities. U SPORTS, the primary interuniversity sport system in Canada, has attempted to create change. However, real authentic change has been slow. Herein, we provide a contemporary analysis of the current state of gender equity in Canadian university sport, related to both student-athlete and leadership opportunities. We argue that the overall state of U SPORTS is fraught with gender inequities. Moreover, given that Canadian women have been waiting for two decades for substantial and promised change to occur, we recommend that universities' senior administrators (i.e., university presidents) play more of a role in leading policy and action for gender equity if progress is to come. Prior to offering this analysis, it is important to consider the Canadian landscape with respect to sport and gender, to provide context for the related Canadian university sport system.

## Canadian Landscape

Efforts toward achieving greater gender equity within Canadian sport have been facilitated, somewhat, by several enabling undertakings, including the introduction of key policies and practices by the Federal Government and its National Sport Organizations (NSOs). For example, the introduction of Canadian Heritage's 2009 sport policy (*Actively Engaged: A Policy on Sport for Women and Girls*) signaled the Federal Government's continued commitment "to a sport system that provides quality sport experiences, where women and girls are actively engaged and equitably supported in a range of roles" (para. 1). Notably, this sport policy's three goals were related to improving opportunities for girls and women as participant-athletes, as coaches (and technical leaders and officials), and as governance leaders (e.g., as senior administrative staff). The Federal Government's commitment to these 2009 goals was reaffirmed (2021), when Canadian Heritage set a goal for the nation to achieve "gender equality in sport at every level by 2035" (para. 1).

Canadian Heritage's (2009) sport policy offers guidance related to a host of endeavors within the broad Canadian sport system. Perhaps most significantly, Canada's 65 NSOs—the national governing bodies responsible for sport governance, program management, and implementation of national initiatives, amongst other important functions—all play important roles in attending to Canadian Heritage's gender equity-seeking agenda. For example, Sport Canada's Sport Funding Accountability Framework (SFAF), introduced in 1995, requires NSOs to meet various eligibility criteria, including those related to gender equity (Donnelly, 2013; Safai, 2013). Meeting these gender equity-related eligibility criteria has required NSOs to "demonstrate through their policies, programs, procedures, and practices a commitment to equity and access, notably for women" (Safai, 2013, p. 333). Consequently, gender equity has been brought to the fore of many of Canada's NSOs and their sports. For example, a focus upon gender equity has become plainly evident in many NSOs' strategic plans (Ponic, 2001; Safai, 2013).

Various other sport- and/or gender-focused organizations have also drawn attention and action towards gender equity in sport through their own advocacy and research initiatives. For example, the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI; 2022) continues to monitor sport participation in Canada, *always* reporting that fewer women participate in sport than do men. Additionally, True Sport (2022) has embraced the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including gender equality and reducing inequalities. In their gender-related advocacy efforts, True Sport has problematized the gender disparity that remains in amateur sport participation and amateur sport coaching. Lastly, and likely most relevantly, Canadian Women & Sport (CW&S) has as its core mission, "creating an equitable and inclusive Canadian sport and physical activity system that empowers girls and women—as active participants and leaders" (2022a, para. 2). As Canada's foremost organization dedicated to achieving gender equity in sport, CW&S offers publications, research insights, tools, case studies, grants, webinars, and workshops and presentations to a wide-ranging audience seeking support for their own gender equity-seeking efforts.

### Objective

It is in this milieu that we took on the task of examining the current state of gender (in)equity within Canadian interuniversity varsity sport. In so doing, we built upon the previous work of Canada's Centre for Sport Policy Studies at University of Toronto. We argue that the current situation in Canadian universities remains bleak. We also argue that immediate attention and action is needed—by multiple potential stakeholders—for meaningful change to occur. Furthermore, we recognize that most research on gender equity at the university level has focused on the American collegiate system (e.g., see Hattery, 2012; Hattery et al., 2007; Lopiano, 2014) and, consequently, herein we attend to the observable gap in the research literature focusing on the Canadian context. We analyse the context within a gender equity lens. Specifically, our analysis is situated in Burke's (2010) feminist theories on creating more opportunity and voice for women. Burke (2010) argues,

> it is important to recognize that entry into cultural institutions and practices that have a long history of male control and definition may be a necessary condition of greater authority for females, but it is not a sufficient condition. What women do when they get to play these sports is also critical to the development of an/several authoritative female voice(s). (p. 22)

If real change is to occur, we need to ensure that there is meaningful equity (e.g., recognizing the importance of training; encouraging and supporting women head coaches).

Our investigation focused upon the most recent 2021–2022 academic/athletic year, and two groups of women (and men). First, we investigated the opportunities for women to participate as student-athletes on U SPORTS interuniversity varsity sport teams. And second, we investigated opportunities for women to serve as sport leaders as their universities' Directors of Athletics (DAs) and head coaches (again, of U SPORTS interuniversity varsity sport teams). This multi-opportunity/role focus attends, closely, to Canadian Heritage's (2009) three sport policy goals, as well as the necessary multi-focus suggested by others (e.g., CFLRI, True Sport, CW&S). As government and non-governmental organizations continue to advocate for gender equity in multiple sport roles/opportunities, we have purposely focused upon these two areas.

## Relevant Literature

### U SPORTS

Students at Canadian universities can find competitive sport opportunities in a few different contexts. Basically, these opportunities may be found on club sport teams, non-U SPORTS varsity teams, and U SPORTS varsity teams.[1] U SPORTS stands apart from and above both club sport teams and non-U SPORTS varsity teams; U SPORTS is the bona fide "leader of university sports in Canada" (U SPORTS, 2022a, para. 3).[2] Certainly, without question, U SPORTS represents the highest and most recognizable interuniversity sport system in Canada—similar in many ways to

the United States' National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA; Norman et al., 2021; White et al., 2013). By U SPORTS's own admission, "no other sport organization in the country can match the breadth and scope of such a program" (Beaubier, 2004, p. 2).

Originally formed in 1906 as CIAU Central, today's U SPORTS offers national championships in 12 different sports (U SPORTS, 2022a). There are 10 men's U SPORTS championships: basketball, cross-country, curling, football, hockey, soccer, swimming, track & field, volleyball, and wrestling. There are 11 women's U SPORTS championships: basketball, cross-country, curling, field hockey, hockey, rugby, soccer, swimming, track & field, volleyball, and wrestling. There are 56 universities within U SPORTS, in four regional conferences: 11 in the AUS (Atlantic University Sport), 17 in the CWUAA (Canada West Universities Athletic Association), 20 in the OUA (Ontario University Athletics), and eight in the RSEQ (Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec).

## Gender Equity in University Sport (and U SPORTS)

Norman et al. (2021) analysed Canadian interuniversity varsity sport participation opportunities and leadership positions for/by women in the years between 2010–2011 and 2016–2017. Norman et al.'s review found relatively equal numbers of men's and women's varsity teams (as well as club teams) in all years within their analysis. However, they found that there were more roster spots for men than there were for women in all these years. Moreover, when they considered the populations of students within Canadian universities, they found an especially pronounced difference in the *proportional* roster spots available for men and women (i.e., roster spots/100 students)—favouring men. With respect to leadership positions, Norman et al. observed that men occupied an "overwhelming majority of coaching positions" (2021, p. 217) and that the percentage of men in coaching positions *rose* over the course of their analysis years. Similar observations were made with respect to DAs, with men holding around 80% of such positions in all years of their analysis. Given there has been such little progress in creating meaningful change since Norman et al.'s (2021) analysis of the 2010–2011 and 2016–2017 seasons, we think it is necessary to provide a recent analysis of gender inequities and build on their foundational analysis.

Hoeber (2007) examined the gaps and gender equity in one Canadian university's Department of Athletics and found that many individuals rationalize or deny observable gender inequities—dissonant responses which reinforce the same staffing and student-athlete complements, thus enabling gender issues to persist. More explicitly, Hoeber (2007) argued "the privileging of one version of truth that argues gender equity is not a problem over evidence of continued gender inequities demonstrates that hegemony is operating to perpetuate them" (p. 250). Relatedly, Hoeber (2008) interviewed administrators, coaches, and athletes at one Canadian university and discovered that most of the participants considered gender equity to predominately be a "women's-only" issue and, consequently, implied that gender equity was then the responsibility of women to address. Though Hoeber's (2007, 2008) findings

are somewhat dated, we consider them relevant, and we concur with observations suggesting university sport is subject to continued hegemony and many individuals within it are hesitant to acknowledge the significant gender issues that continue to exist. We consider U SPORTS's culture, in some locations/contexts, to generally involve hegemonic masculinity traditions (e.g., "an old boys club").

Within an analysis of gender equity in Canadian interuniversity varsity sport, it is particularly relevant to examine the lack of head women coaches. LaVoi et al. (2019), in *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*'s special issue devoted to women in coaching, described the consistent findings from that issue's research pieces, suggesting they,

> further uncover and reveal that structural-level systemic bias is *deeply* embedded within the culture of sport—the data tell the story. With more data, the story plotline becomes sharply focused and illuminates the many obstacles women coaches face and how challenging it is to change the gendered system. (p. 136)

The authors emphasized the need for and importance of data in analyzing gender inequities in sport, specifically the lack of women coaches. They also provided an especially apt metaphor, referring to the current state of women coaches as "the war on women coaches" while referencing esteemed gender sport scholar Pat Griffin, explaining,

> misogyny, sexism, and homophobia. This trifecta of hostility towards women in athletics is made more threatening in an athletic climate in which financial resources are strained to the max and athletic administrators in schools large and small buy into the pipe dream of cultivating big time football (and men's basketball) as the salvation of cash strapped athletic departments. (LaVoi et al., 2019, p. 136)

It is discouraging that little has changed in over three decades and that women athletes need to continue to challenge the institutionalized hegemonic masculine structures. According to LaVoi and Dutove (2012), it is important for women to be represented in positions of power like coaching. When women are not "viewed" in these positions, their skills and abilities are often, by their absence, devalued and trivialized. The authors have emphasized that scholars often refer to the "glass ceiling" when describing barriers women face in coaching. However, after conducting their extensive literature review, they described the barriers as a "labyrinth" as an illustration of all the barriers at play: "based on the literature outlined thus far, we feel the labyrinth metaphor is more accurate in describing the often unknown and unforeseen barriers females face in pursuing and remaining in a coaching career" (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012, p. 25). They also highlighted that data support homologous reproduction where the dominant group, men, systematically reproduces itself as men continue to be hired as coaches and administrators.

Most recently, Finn (2022) examined the underrepresentation of women coaches in Canadian university sport and argued it is critical to incorporate the voices and experiences of women coaches to challenge the traditional practices and processes in university sport, "calling for a more nuanced understanding of women's work in

coaching" (p. 2). Finn, like LaVoi and Dutove (2012), argued that the institutionalized hegemonic masculine culture of sport has allowed gender imbalances to continue in Canadian interuniversity varsity sport.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that it has been over 20 years since Danylchuk and MacLean (2001) argued that the future of university sport in Canada would see continued and increasing gender equity issues. For example, they found that 78% of DAs (in the then-CIAU) were men in 2001; that percentage most recently found by Norman et al. (2021) in 2016 was 79%. They also found that despite there being equal numbers of men's and women's teams at Canadian universities, there were more roster spots for men than women (on nine potential men's teams and 10 potential women's teams); Norman et al. found the same 15 years later (albeit on 10 potential men's teams and 11 potential women's teams). Certainly, their predictions thus far remain accurate and, consequently, demonstrate the need for ongoing and up-to-date analyses. Such ongoing and up-to-date analyses may provide data that is needed for meaningful change to transpire.

## Gender Equity and Gender Equity Policies in U SPORTS (and its Conferences)

According to CW&S (2022b), gender equity is defined as "the process of allocating resources, programs, and decision making fairly to all genders without any discrimination on the basis of gender and addressing any imbalances in the benefits available to people of different genders" (para. 2). CW&S suggests that gender equity-seeking endeavours require purposeful examinations of organizations' practices and policies, particularly at those practices and policies that may dissuade girls and women from participating. Such practices and policies might include hiring and recruitment practices, resource allocation, participation rates, and activity programming. In this investigation, we mainly focus upon hiring and recruitment practices and participation rates (which clearly intersect with resource allocation and activity programming).

Beaubier (2004) has made a case for Canada to adopt a policy like the United States' Title IX—a term that "has become a form of cultural shorthand for equity in women's sport" (Staurowsky & Weight, 2011, p. 192). Given that Title IX is now in its 50th year, Beaubier has suggested Canada lags, significantly, behind the United States in terms of creating gender equity-related laws and/or policies for university sport. Notwithstanding this concern, it has been over 20 years since U SPORTS began to develop policies on gender equity (Beaubier, 2004). Initially, U SPORTS started examining athletic scholarship numbers and, in 2003, decided that their scope should be broadened to not only include athletic awards but also consider opportunities to play and coach as well, amongst other outcomes and metrics. Beaubier's call for attention also emphasized that, in 1999, CIS undertook a gender study on university coaching and administrator positions. Though for nearly two decades U SPORTS has been discussing gender equity policy, limited advancement has seemingly been made, in some areas.

U SPORTS has an equity policy which has been revised multiple times, most

recently in 2018. This policy emphasizes U SPORTS's commitment to equity (that treatment of individuals be fair and just) and equality (that all persons enjoy the same status and face equal conditions). Sections from this policy especially relevant to our investigation include the following:

> U SPORTS promote member institutions to assume a leadership role in their local and regional communities to encourage young women to pursue sport as a career option...
>
> U SPORTS continue to participate in and lead the development and perpetuation of women in coaching initiatives at the post-secondary level...
>
> U SPORTS use equity as a basic principle when considering developing any type of partnerships with other agencies or organizations...
>
> U SPORTS encourages participation in interuniversity competition by as many males and females as can be accommodated, both as student-athletes and in the fields of coaching and sport administration...
>
> U SPORTS member institutions should have a policy that allocates resources in a given sport on a relatively equal basis between all-male and all-female programs. (U SPORTS, 2019a, pp. 6–7)

In 2020–2021, U SPORTS released its *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Report (EDI) 2020–21*. The briefing within it indicated U SPORTS rebranded its committee from Equity (EQT) to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). The report also focused on governance and goals for 2021–2022. In *U SPORTS 2019–2024 Strategic Plan* (U SPORTS, 2019b), "equity" is listed as its third value after "students first" and "excellence." We note the trend of U SPORTS and its four affiliated conferences focusing on EDI. While this is clearly an important and vital trend and action, we still have a concern that gender equity continues to be largely neglected.

Here, it is also important to briefly outline U SPORTS's conferences' gender equity policies. The AUS has an EDI Committee, as well as a *Statement on Equity in Sport* (AUS, 2016) emphasizing the need for AUS universities to maintain an equitable balance in athletic opportunities for men and women. The CWUAA does not have a specific gender equity policy. However, in its *Strategic Plan* (CWUAA, 2019), equity and respect are listed as core values. In the CWUAA 2021–2022 *By-laws*, there was an addition of a new role, Vice President of EDI (see CWUAA, 2021). The OUA's website includes a main "EDI" tab. There is information there about an anti-racism report and details about its Black, Biracial and Indigenous Committee, and information about its Women in Sport (WIS) Advisory Committee (whose mandate is to prioritize gender equality). Finally, the RSEQ (2022) has a *Code of Ethics* for athletes, coaches, and spectators. The RSEQ released a media statement in January of 2021 on EDI, and one of the initiatives highlighted then involved women in sport (see RSEQ, 2021).

## Proportionality

Contemporary discourse surrounding Title IX and gender equity has tended to focus on proportionality. Compton and Compton (2010) have argued, for example, that proportionality has become a sort of "gold standard" for determining if varsity

athletic offerings are in compliance with Title IX's equal opportunity mandate. Although some critique proportion regulations because they believe such regulations position women athletes with an advantage in a manner not "justifiable as a meritocracy-based distribution model" (Compton & Compton, 2010, p. 10). Compton and Compton (2010) have responded that,

> proportionality is probably best justified as a perfectionist resocialization measure aimed at providing girls with a set of alternative viable conceptions of themselves either through the role modeling affects [sic] of having visible college varsity female athletics or, indirectly, through helping to change the social meanings attached to athleticism, specifically, and physical agency, more generally. Proportionality is thus best justified on the grounds that it encourages girls to develop a set of traits, skills and possible self-conceptions that are considered important for their future success and also important, more generally, for a rewarding human life. (p. 11)

There is a case to be made that proportionality has potential for human flourishing for women varsity student athletes. Williams (2013), from a Canadian perspective, has proposed proportionality as a pragmatic solution for gender equity in Canadian sport. Specifically, Williams has offered,

> gender proportionality should exist between available elite opportunities and the population from which that roster is drawn. This is equitable because athletes of both sexes can expect equal opportunities to rise to the elite level…In the university sport context, this population is easily defined as the student body or the student athlete population. (2013, p. 26)

Additionally, Williams has maintained that to achieve proportionality there needs to be an equitable framework that "allows both sexes the opportunity to reach their athletic potential" (2013, p. 32). For Williams, the solution is a pragmatic one, and it extends beyond increasing funding. As elucidated in the discussion, we make a case that to see meaningful change and improve gender equity in Canadian interuniversity varsity sport, specific policies should emphasize and require proportionality.

## Investigation

Our investigation has been informed by, and extends upon, the work of pioneering others. These others (Donnelly et al., 2011, 2013; Norman et al., 2021), working from Canada's Centre for Sport Policy Studies at University of Toronto, have repeatedly found and shared the gender inequity that exists, broadly, amongst multiple Canadian interuniversity sport opportunities/leagues. They conduced biennial reviews (2010–2011, 2012–2013, 2014–2015, 2016–2017), releasing two grey literature reports (Donnelly et al., 2011, 2013) and publishing one summary manuscript (Norman et al., 2011).

Our investigation attended closely to these colleagues' methods and findings. More specifically, we have adopted *some* of their methods, and we present updated data related to *some* of their findings. We offer the following extensions, or re-

finements, in our investigation: (a) our 2021–2022 focus offers an important update on existing data five years after the last available report; (b) our focus is purposely placed upon the lone major Canadian interuniversity sport organization's (U SPORTS) interuniversity varsity sport programs, rather than upon it and others; and (c) our focus is also purposely placed upon the four conferences and the individual universities within them.

## Data Collection

To investigate opportunities for women (and men) to participate as student-athletes, we accessed all 56 U SPORTS universities' Department of Athletics official webpages. There, we tallied all U SPORTS teams that were offered in the 2021–2022 academic/athletic year. In the small number of instances where this information was unclear (e.g., with respect to a university cancelling a season), follow-up phone calls with personnel from Departments of Athletics helped address any ambiguities or uncertainties. To determine roster spots for each of the 21 U SPORTS teams (10 men's and 11 women's), we accessed U SPORTS's defined roster spots for national championships for 2021–2022 from their most recent playing regulations (see U SPORTS, 2022b).[3] All men's and women's teams in the same sport had identical roster spots. Additionally, men's football had 48 roster spots while women's field hockey had 16 and women's rugby had 25. To determine proportional roster spots (i.e., roster spots per 100 students), full-time undergraduate student populations and gender ratios were taken from *Maclean's* full profiles of Canadian universities (see "Full profile", 2022), where such demographic information could be found for 53 of 56 U SPORTS universities.[4]

It is important to note here two points about this process. First, because we have not included roster spots for track & field, our gross numbers of roster spots are certainly less than the number of "real" roster spots possible for men and women at U SPORTS national championship events. However, in track & field, equal numbers of men and women generally participate as student-athletes so if these were to be accounted for within this investigation, the gap between men's and women's proportional roster spots would actually *be greater*. Second, the number of roster spots made available by coaches is oftentimes greater than what is allowed for at a U SPORTS national championship. For example, some football teams may have close to 100 student-athletes and some cross-country teams have many more than seven athletes. Because we do not know which teams have larger "extra" roster spots, it is not possible to make assertions about how this might have impacted our investigation (with respect to gender differences).

To investigate opportunities for women (and men) to participate as sport leaders, we accessed U SPORTS's (2022c) 2020/21 Annual Report as well as all 56 U SPORTS universities' Department of Athletics official webpages.[5] Again, in the small number of instances where this information was unclear, follow-up phone calls with personnel from Departments of Athletics helped address any ambiguities or uncertainties. We attended to the gender of all DAs and head coaches, relying upon names and pronoun-affirming language to confirm the gender of all sport leaders.

# Findings

## Opportunities for Women to Participate as Student-athletes

In the 2021–2022 academic/athletic year, there were 323 men's U SPORTS teams and 344 women's U SPORTS teams. Though there were 19 more women's teams than men's teams, there were more roster spots (again, excluding track & field) for men than there were for women (i.e., men's = 5,231, women's = 4,968). Across all U SPORTS universities, there were 343,869 men and 461,786 women who were full-time undergraduate students.[6] This amounted to 1.5 roster spots for every 100 men and 1.0 roster spots for every 100 women (see Table 1). Such a difference between proportional roster spots available for men and women may be attributed to the observation that in all but four Canadian universities there were more women than there were men as students. Moreover, this difference is especially pronounced in some universities. For example, St. Thomas University (AUS) has 75% women, Brandon University (CWUAA) has 68% women, Nipissing University (OUA) has 69% women, and Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (RSEQ) has 66% women.[7] Additionally, some might point to the observation that (men's) football has 48 roster spots—more than any other women's-only team, by a large margin (e.g., see Norman et al., 2021). However, there are still fewer U SPORTS varsity sport teams for every 1,000 women than there are for every 1,000 men, in every conference.

**Table 1**
*U SPORTS Teams and Roster Spots (excluding track & field), by Conference*

| | AUS | CWUAA | OUA | RSEQ | U SPORTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Men's U SPORTS Teams | 54 | 90 | 136 | 43 | 323 |
| Women's U SPORTS Teams | 60 | 96 | 143 | 45 | 344 |
| Men's Roster Spots | 874 | 1,453 | 2,111 | 793 | 5,231 |
| Women's Roster Spots | 867 | 1,435 | 1,978 | 688 | 4,968 |
| Full-time Students, Men | 26,631 | 94,336[1] | 181,057 | 51,300[2] | 343,869[3] |
| Full-time Students, Women | 34,982 | 123,978[1] | 232,765 | 72,471[2] | 461,786[3] |
| Men's Roster Spots/100 Students | 3.3 | 1.4[1] | 1.1 | 1.5[2] | 1.5[3] |
| Women's Roster Spots/100 Students | 2.5 | 1.0[1] | 0.9 | 0.9[2] | 1.0[3] |

[1] Excluding students/roster spots from Trinity Western University, University of British Columbia Okanagan, University of Northern British Columbia.
[2] Excluding students/roster spots from Université du Québec à Montréal.
[3] Excluding students/roster spots from Trinity Western University, University of British Columbia Okanagan, University of Northern British Columbia, Université du Québec à Montréal.

Following is an overview of men's and women's university varsity sport teams, as well as proportional roster spots for men and women on them, in U SPORTS's four conferences and the 56 universities within them.

**AUS Universities**

All AUS universities, other than Cape Breton University (which has equal numbers), have more women than men as full-time undergraduate students (see Table 2). Five universities have equal numbers of men's and women's teams and six have one additional women's team. Most AUS universities have similar numbers of proportional roster spots for men and women. Though similar, in no AUS universities other than St. Thomas University are there more proportional roster spots for women. Additionally, at three AUS universities the gendered differences are especially pronounced: Acadia University has 9.3 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 5.2 roster spots for every 100 women); Mount Allison University has 9.9 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 4.9 roster spots for every 100 women); and St.

Francis Xavier University has 7.9 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 3.7 roster spots for every 100 women). It is important to note that these are the only three universities in the AUS that have men's football teams. Still, only Acadia University has an additional women's team. Both Mount Allison University and St. Francis Xavier University offer equal numbers of teams, despite having some of the poorest numbers with respect to gender equity in varsity sport roster spots.

**CWUAA Universities**

All CWUAA universities (again, excluding Trinity Western University, University of British Columbia Okanagan, and University of Northern British Columbia) have more women than men as full-time undergraduate students (see Table 3). Ten universities have equal numbers of men's and women's teams and five have one additional women's team. One other (University of Victoria) has two additional women's teams, and one other (University of Saskatchewan) has one additional men's team. Most CWUAA universities have similar numbers of proportional roster spots for men and women. Though similar, in no CWUAA universities other than University of Victoria and University of Winnipeg are there more proportional roster spots for women. Additionally, at three CWUAA universities the gendered differences are especially pronounced: Brandon University has 4.2 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 1.3 roster spots for every 100 women); University of Regina has 2.3 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 1.3 roster spots for every 100 women); and University of Saskatchewan has 1.8 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 0.9 roster spots for every 100 women). Two of these three universities have men's football teams (University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan). University of Regina has an additional women's team and University of Saskatchewan offers an additional men's team. Given that University of Saskatchewan's student population is 56% women, and these women have one half as many roster spots as do men, it is curious that they would be an outlier institution offering more men's teams than women's teams.

**OUA Universities**

All OUA universities (other than Ontario Tech University, Royal Military College of Canada and University of Waterloo) have more women than men as full-time undergraduate students (see Table 4). Ten universities have equal numbers of men's and women's teams and eight have one additional women's team. Two others (Royal Military College of Canada and University of Windsor) have one additional men's team. Most OUA universities have similar numbers of proportional roster spots for men and women. Though similar, in no OUA universities other than Ontario Tech University and Royal Military College of Canada are there more proportional roster spots for women. Both universities have fewer women than men; they also have very few U SPORTS teams (four at Ontario Tech University and two at Royal Military College of Canada). Additionally, at two OUA universities the gendered differences are especially pronounced: Nipissing University has 7.2 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 3.2 roster spots for every 100 women) and University of Windsor

has 2.8 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 1.4 roster spots for every 100 women). As was the case with the CWUAA's University of Saskatchewan, given that University of Windsor's student population is 56% women, and these women have one half as many roster spots as do men, it is curious that they would be another outlier institution offering more men's teams than women's teams.

**RSEQ Universities**

All RSEQ universities (again, excluding Université du Québec à Montréal) have more women than men as full-time undergraduate students (see Table 5). Three universities have equal numbers of men's and women's teams and four have one additional women's team. One other (Université de Sherbrooke) has one additional men's team. Most RSEQ universities have similar numbers of proportional roster spots for men and women. Though similar, in no RSEQ universities are there more proportional roster spots for women. Additionally, at two RSEQ universities the gendered differences are especially pronounced: Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières has 2.9 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 1.4 roster spots for every 100 women) and Université de Sherbrooke has 3.0 roster spots for every 100 men (compared to 0.9 roster spots for every 100 women). Once again, as was the case with the CWUAA's University of Saskatchewan and OUA's University of Windsor, given that the Université de Sherbrooke's student population is 55% women, and that these women have less than one half as many roster spots as do men, it is curious that they would be another outlier institution offering more men's teams than women's teams.

**Table 2**
*Teams and Roster Spots, AUS (excluding track & field)*

| | Men | | | | Women | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Teams** | **Roster Spots** | **FT Students** | **Roster Spots/100** | **Teams** | **Roster Spots** | **FT Students** | **Roster Spots/100** |
| Acadia Univ. | 5 | 125 | 1,341 | 9.3 | 6 | 100 | 1,929 | 5.2 |
| Cape Breton Univ. | 3 | 36 | 1,755 | 2.1 | 3 | 36 | 1,755 | 2.1 |
| Dalhousie Univ. | 7 | 98 | 6,664 | 1.5 | 7 | 98 | 7,744 | 1.3 |
| Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland | 4 | 61 | 5,133 | 1.2 | 5 | 75 | 7,088 | 1.1 |
| Mount Allison Univ. | 3 | 88 | 893 | 9.9 | 3 | 63 | 1,284 | 4.9 |
| Saint Mary's Univ. | 6 | 114 | 2,556 | 4.5 | 7 | 105 | 2,661 | 3.9 |
| St. Francis Xavier Univ. | 6 | 114 | 1,440 | 7.9 | 6 | 91 | 2,453 | 3.7 |
| St. Thomas Univ. | 2 | 7 | 466 | 1.5 | 3 | 30 | 1,399 | 2.1 |
| Univ. de Moncton | 4 | 52 | 1,494 | 3.5 | 5 | 66 | 2,543 | 2.6 |
| Univ. of New Brunswick | 9 | 113 | 3,239 | 3.5 | 9 | 112 | 3,652 | 3.1 |
| Univ. of Prince Edward Island | 5 | 66 | 1,650 | 4.0 | 6 | 91 | 2,474 | 3.7 |

**Table 3**

*Teams and Roster Spots, CWUAA (excluding track & field)*

| | Men | | | | Women | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Teams** | **Roster Spots** | **FT Students** | **Roster Spots/100** | **Teams** | **Roster Spots** | **FT Students** | **Roster Spots/100** |
| Brandon Univ. | 3 | 33 | 784 | 4.2 | 3 | 33 | 2,451 | 1.3 |
| MacEwan Univ. | 4 | 73 | 4,686 | 1.6 | 4 | 73 | 7,645 | 1.0 |
| Mount Royal Univ. | 4 | 73 | 4,434 | 1.6 | 4 | 73 | 6,646 | 1.1 |
| Thompson Rivers Univ. | 4 | 68 | 4,182 | 1.6 | 4 | 68 | 5,111 | 1.3 |
| Trinity Western Univ. | 6 | 80 | - | - | 7 | 105 | - | - |
| Univ. of Alberta | 10 | 161 | 13,683 | 1.2 | 10 | 137 | 16,724 | 0.8 |
| Univ. of British Columbia | 8 | 146 | 17,170 | 0.9 | 9 | 139 | 21,852 | 0.6 |
| Univ. of British Columbia Okanagan | 4 | 57 | - | - | 4 | 57 | - | - |
| Univ. of Calgary | 9 | 156 | 12,297 | 1.3 | 10 | 148 | 14,436 | 1.0 |
| Univ. of Lethbridge | 5 | 59 | 2,761 | 2.1 | 5 | 79 | 4,318 | 1.8 |
| Univ. of Manitoba | 7 | 124 | 10,406 | 1.2 | 7 | 98 | 11,734 | 0.8 |
| Univ. of Northern British Columbia | 2 | 36 | - | - | 2 | 36 | - | - |
| Univ. of Regina | 6 | 110 | 4,715 | 2.3 | 7 | 98 | 7,375 | 1.3 |
| Univ. of Saskatchewan | 8 | 138 | 7,517 | 1.8 | 7 | 89 | 9,567 | 0.9 |
| Univ. of The Fraser Valley | 3 | 50 | 3,044 | 1.6 | 3 | 50 | 4,567 | 1.1 |
| Univ. of Victoria | 5 | 61 | 5,949 | 1.0 | 7 | 102 | 7,271 | 1.4 |
| Univ. of Winnipeg | 2 | 28 | 2,712 | 1.0 | 3 | 50 | 4,282 | 1.2 |

**Table 4**

*Teams and Roster Spots, OUA (excluding track & field)*

| | Men | | | | Women | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Teams | Roster Spots | FT Students | Roster Spots/100 | Teams | Roster Spots | FT Students | Roster Spots/100 |
| Algoma Univ. | 5 | 58 | 826 | 7.0 | 5 | 57 | 756 | 6.1 |
| Brock Univ. | 9 | 113 | 6,564 | 1.7 | 10 | 137 | 8,701 | 1.6 |
| Carleton Univ. | 4 | 107 | 10,178 | 1.1 | 4 | 84 | 11,026 | 0.8 |
| Lakehead Univ. | 5 | 54 | 2,418 | 2.2 | 5 | 44 | 3,339 | 1.3 |
| Laurentian Univ. | 5 | 48 | 2,341 | 2.1 | 5 | 48 | 3,985 | 1.2 |
| McMaster Univ. | 9 | 138 | 13,275 | 1.0 | 9 | 114 | 16,896 | 0.7 |
| Nipissing Univ. | 5 | 80 | 1,110 | 7.2 | 5 | 80 | 2,471 | 3.2 |
| Ontario Tech. Univ. | 4 | 78 | 5,320 | 1.5 | 4 | 64 | 3,853 | 1.7 |
| Queen's Univ. | 6 | 81 | 8,725 | 0.9 | 7 | 114 | 13,088 | 0.9 |
| Royal Military College of Canada | 3 | 59 | 896 | 6.6 | 2 | 36 | 268 | 13.4 |
| Toronto Metropolitan Univ. | 8 | 95 | 12,870 | 0.7 | 8 | 94 | 17,061 | 0.6 |
| Trent Univ. | 4 | 48 | 3,020 | 1.6 | 5 | 73 | 6,132 | 1.2 |
| Univ. of Guelph | 10 | 161 | 8,925 | 1.8 | 11 | 153 | 14,561 | 1.1 |
| Univ. of Ottawa | 6 | 110 | 12,580 | 0.9 | 8 | 123 | 19,676 | 0.6 |
| Univ. of Toronto | 10 | 161 | 29,997 | 0.5 | 10 | 131 | 38,177 | 0.3 |
| Univ. of Waterloo | 9 | 151 | 18,216 | 0.8 | 10 | 144 | 16,154 | 0.9 |
| Univ. of Windsor | 8 | 133 | 4,740 | 2.8 | 7 | 85 | 6,032 | 1.4 |
| Western Univ. | 10 | 161 | 13,359 | 1.2 | 11 | 153 | 17,709 | 0.9 |
| Wilfrid Laurier Univ. | 8 | 137 | 6,844 | 2.0 | 8 | 114 | 8,711 | 1.3 |
| York Univ. | 8 | 138 | 18,854 | 0.7 | 9 | 130 | 23,996 | 0.5 |

**Table 5**

*Teams and Roster Spots, RSEQ (excluding track & field)*

| | Men | | | | Women | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Teams** | **Roster Spots** | **FT Students** | **Roster Spots/100** | **Teams** | **Roster Spots** | **FT Students** | **Roster Spots/100** |
| Bishop's Univ. | 3 | 67 | 1,004 | 6.7 | 4 | 84 | 1,387 | 6.1 |
| Concordia Univ. | 5 | 117 | 1,051 | 1.1 | 5 | 93 | 9,611 | 0.8 |
| McGill Univ. | 7 | 132 | 9,654 | 1.4 | 8 | 123 | 14,481 | 0.8 |
| Univ. de Montréal | 6 | 132 | 13,936 | 0.9 | 6 | 109 | 20,905 | 0.5 |
| Univ. de Sherbrooke | 6 | 109 | 5,276 | 2.1 | 5 | 61 | 6,449 | 0.9 |
| Univ. du Québec à Trois-Rivières | 5 | 70 | 2,307 | 3.0 | 5 | 61 | 4,479 | 1.4 |
| Univ. du Québec à Montréal | 4 | 43 | - | - | 5 | 57 | - | - |
| Univ. Laval | 7 | 123 | 8,617 | 1.4 | 7 | 100 | 12,925 | 0.8 |

## Opportunities for Women to Participate as Sport Leaders

Men, as DAs, hold most of the senior sport leadership positions at U SPORTS universities (see Table 6). Across U SPORTS, they hold 37 of the 55 (67.3%) DA positions. This gender inequity is especially pronounced in the AUS (eight men to two women) and the CWUAA (14 men to three women). The largest conference in U SPORTS (the OUA) boasts a more equitable distribution of DAs (half are women) and the smallest conference (the RSEQ) has a near-equitable distribution of DAs (five men to three women).

With respect to head coaches, we have presented here "core" teams as those that are common amongst most U SPORTS universities, include a full-time salaried head coach, and have separate men's and women's coaches. So, these core teams include basketball, football (men), hockey, rugby (women), soccer, and volleyball (and exclude curling and field hockey [women]). We have also presented head coaches of "co-ed" teams. These are teams that are almost always offered to men and women, and are normally coached by the same individual (i.e., very few exceptions exist). These co-ed teams include swimming, track & field, and cross-country.

**Table 6**
*Sport Leadership Positions (Director of Athletics, Head Coach) by U SPORTS Conference (men:women, and by percentage)*

| | AUS | CWUAA | OUA | RSEQ | U SPORTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Director of Athletics | 8:2<br>80.0% men<br>20.0% women | 14:3<br>82.4% men<br>17.6% women | 10:10<br>50.0% men<br>50.0% women | 5:3<br>62.5% men<br>37.5% women | 37:18<br>67.3% men<br>32.7% women |
| Head Coach, Core Men's Teams | 31:0<br>100.0% men<br>0.0% women | 58:0<br>100.0% men<br>0.0% women | 74:0<br>98.6% men<br>1.4% women | 25:0<br>100.0% men<br>0.0% women | 188:0<br>100.0% men<br>0.0% women |
| Head Coach, Core Women's Teams | 28:8<br>75.0% men<br>25.0% women | 41:21<br>66.1% men<br>33.9% women | 44:33<br>57.1% men<br>42.9% women | 20:8<br>71.4% men<br>28.6% women | 133:70<br>65.5% men<br>34.5 % women |
| Head Coach, Co-ed Teams | 20.5:2.5<br>89.1% men<br>10.9% women | 24:5<br>82.8% men<br>17.2% women | 39.5:7.5<br>84.0% men<br>16.0% women | 17:0<br>100.0% men<br>0.0% women | 101:15<br>87.1% men<br>12.9% women |

As might be expected, every core men's team in U SPORTS was head coached by men. However, men also continued to hold most head coaching positions for core women's teams as well. Again, though, the OUA is a stand-out leader amongst the four conferences in this respect. That is, in the OUA, women held 42.9% of these head coaching positions. Certainly, the CWUAA is trending in the right direction with 33.9% of their positions being held by women. However, the AUS and RSEQ fail again here; only 25.0% and 28.6% (respectively) of their women's teams were head coached by women. The co-ed teams were head coached almost entirely by men; in the RSEQ all these teams were coached by men.

A closer consideration of the head coaching opportunities for universities within the four U SPORTS conferences enables one to, again, see which Departments of Athletics (and DAs leading them) are contributing to (and pushing against) this move towards greater gender equity in university head coaching (see Tables 7–10). These data are presented in two manners. First, we offer the numbers of teams that have men and women as head coaches. Second—because many head coaches coach multiple teams (e.g., cross-country and track & field, men's wrestling and women's wresting, etc.) and most universities, resultantly, have fewer head coaches than they do varsity sport teams—we also offer the total number of men and women head coaches at each university.

**Table 7**

*AUS Coaches (all teams), by Team and by on Staff*

| | Teams with Men Head Coaches | Teams with Women Head Coaches | Head Coaches on Staff, Men | Head Coaches on Staff, Women |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acadia Univ. | 10 | 1 | 9 | 1 |
| Cape Breton Univ. | 6 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Dalhousie Univ. | 12 | 2 | 8 | 2 |
| Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland | 8 | 1 | 7 | 0.5 |
| Mount Allison Univ. | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Saint Mary's Univ. | 11 | 2 | 9 | 2 |
| St. Francis Xavier Univ. | 12 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| St. Thomas Univ. | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Univ. de Moncton | 8 | 1 | 6 | 1 |
| Univ. of New Brunswick | 13 | 2 | 9 | 2 |
| Univ. of Prince Edward Island | 11 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| | 99 (89.2%) | 12 (10.8%) | 74 (87.6%) | 10.5 (12.4%) |

**Table 8**

*CWUAA Coaches (all teams), by Team and by on Staff*

| | Teams with Men Head Coaches | Teams with Women Head Coaches | Head Coaches on Staff, Men | Head Coaches on Staff, Women |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brandon Univ. | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| MacEwan Univ. | 6 | 2 | 6 | 2 |
| Mount Royal Univ. | 7 | 1 | 7 | 1 |
| Thompson Rivers Univ. | 8 | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Trinity Western Univ. | 12 | 1 | 9 | 1 |
| Univ. of Alberta | 18 | 2 | 13 | 2 |
| Univ. of British Columbia | 15 | 2 | 11 | 2 |
| Univ. of British Columbia Okanagan | 6 | 2 | 6 | 1 |
| Univ. of Calgary | 12 | 7 | 10 | 4 |
| Univ. of Lethbridge | 10 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Univ. of Manitoba | 12 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Univ. of Northern British Columbia | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Univ. of Regina | 10 | 3 | 6 | 3 |
| Univ. of Saskatchewan | 14 | 1 | 10 | 1 |
| Univ. of The Fraser Valley | 5 | 1 | 5 | 1 |
| Univ. of Victoria | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| Univ. of Winnipeg | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| | 150 (82.9%) | 31 (17.1%) | 114 (80.1%) | 27 (19.9%) |

**Table 9**

*OUA Coaches (all teams), by Team and by on Staff*

| | Teams with Men Coaches | Teams with Women Coaches | Head Coaches on Staff, Men | Head Coaches on Staff, Women |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Algoma Univ. | 10 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Brock Univ. | 17 | 2 | 12 | 2 |
| Carleton Univ. | 7 | 1 | 7 | 1 |
| Lakehead Univ. | 9 | 1 | 5 | 1 |
| Laurentian Univ. | 10 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| McMaster Univ. | 11 | 7 | 10 | 4 |
| Nipissing Univ. | 9 | 1 | 8 | 1 |
| Ontario Tech. Univ. | 6 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Queen's Univ. | 12 | 1 | 10 | 1 |
| Royal Military College of Canada | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Toronto Metropolitan Univ. | 11 | 3 | 8 | 3 |
| Trent Univ. | 9 | 0 | 8 | 1 |
| Univ. of Guelph | 16 | 5 | 12 | 4 |
| Univ. of Ottawa | 11 | 3 | 7 | 3 |
| Univ. of Toronto | 12 | 6 | 9 | 5 |
| Univ. of Waterloo | 12 | 7 | 10.5 | 5.5 |
| Univ. of Windsor | 13 | 2 | 9 | 2 |
| Western Univ. | 15 | 6 | 11 | 5 |
| Wilfrid Laurier Univ. | 13 | 3 | 9 | 2 |
| York Univ. | 14 | 3 | 9 | 3 |
| | 221 (80.0%) | 54 (20.0%) | 167.5 (78.3%) | 46.5 (21.7%) |

**Table 10**

*RSEQ Coaches (all teams), by Team and by on Staff*

| | Teams with Men Head Coaches | Teams with Women Head Coaches | Head Coaches on Staff, Men | Head Coaches on Staff, Women |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bishop's Univ. | 7 | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Concordia Univ. | 7 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| McGill Univ. | 13 | 2 | 9 | 2 |
| Univ. de Montréal | 11 | 1 | 9 | 1 |
| Univ. de Sherbrooke | 10 | 1 | 7 | 1 |
| Univ. du Québec à Trois-Rivières | 9.3 | 0.6 | 6.3 | 0.6 |
| Univ. du Québec à Montréal | 9 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Univ. Laval | 14 | 0 | 11 | 0 |
| | 80.3 (91.3%) | 7.6 (8.7%) | 60.3 (88.7%) | 7.6 (11.3%) |

While most universities are wanting for women head coaches, it is a concerning observation that several universities have only one, or not even one, woman head coach. Most concerning, to us, are the larger universities with multiple women's teams without a single woman head coach. Within the AUS, this includes St. Francis Xavier University and University of Prince Edward Island (both with six women's teams). Within the CWUAA, this includes Thompson Rivers University (with four women's teams) and University of Lethbridge (with five women's teams). Within the OUA, this includes Algoma University, Laurentian University, and Trent University (all with five women's teams). Within the RSEQ, this includes Bishop's University (with four women's teams), Université du Québec à Montréal (with five women's teams), and Université Laval (with seven women's teams).

## Discussion

Since Norman et al.'s (2021) last consideration of sport leadership and participant opportunities for women in U SPORTS, over five years ago, not much has changed. Certainly, our investigation has revealed that the current situation in Canadian universities remains bleak, and that the hashtag #USportsSoMale unfortunately seems to remain appropriate. Notwithstanding these sorts of discouraging observations, we do recognize some localized (by conference and university) encouraging observations too. In some of these other institutions, achieving gender equity seems to be a bona fide ambition—if one sees, as we do, providing equitable opportunities for women to participate in U SPORTS as sport leaders and student-athletes as evidence of such ambition.

In almost every university, there are more proportional roster spots for men than there are for women. As mentioned, though many universities may have similar proportional roster spots for men and women, in only five (of 56) universities are there more proportional roster spots for women. Such a disproportionate favoring of opportunities for men cannot be due to chance. Nor can it be deemed negligible. For example, though many of these universities' "similar" proportional roster spots may seem promising, they still represent very real differences in opportunity. For example, as a whole, U SPORTS's 1.5 roster spots for every 100 men are 50% higher than its 1.0 roster spots for every 100 women. Only the OUA, with 1.1 roster spots for every 100 men and 0.9 roster spots for every 100 women, can claim any sort of semblance of equity. All three other conferences ought to recognize that they are demonstrably behind their OUA counterpart with respect to proportional roster spots for women. We speculate that the OUA's near-equitable roster spots may be due to their strong commitment to EDI. Based on information on their website, they have been active and dedicated to improving gender equity (e.g., through specialized committees) and recognize the importance of redressing inequities. And, at a more micro level, immediate attention and action are needed at some universities (i.e., particularly Acadia University, Mount Allison University, St. Francis Xavier University, Brandon University, Nipissing University, and Université de Sherbrooke) to redress their especially poor proportional roster spots for their women students. We

note again that the proportional roster spots we offer here differ from Norman et al.'s (2021) for reasons previously outlined. (We did not include non-U SPORTS teams' roster spots, roster spots above those afforded by U SPORTS for national championships, or roster spots for track & field.) But the observation remains that there are almost always more proportional roster spots afforded to men than to women.

The numbers of men's and women's teams at U SPORTS universities deserves some attention here too. As mentioned, U SPORTS has one more women's sport than it does men's sports. Due to the large rosters on men's football teams, this inequality in the number of teams was meant to provide more *equal* numbers of competition opportunities for women. So, given this, coupled with the observation that almost every university in Canada has more women than men as students, it is odd that so many universities would offer equal numbers of men's and women's teams. Of course, the more pronounced the difference between men and women students, the greater this issue becomes. Why do universities with student populations with, say 60%–70% women, continue to offer equal numbers of U SPORTS varsity sport teams? The six AUS universities, six CWUAA universities, eight OUA universities, and two RSEQ universities with an additional women's team (University of Victoria has two additional women's teams) might be looked to as exemplars with respect to being responsive to calls for more gender equitable opportunities for sport participation. The sport offerings at the three Canadian universities with more men's teams than women's teams, despite having fewer men students than women students (i.e., University of Saskatchewan, University of Windsor, Université de Sherbrooke), needs immediate attention.

To these observations and responses related to proportional roster spots and teams, we recognize some might make mention of the many other non-U SPORTS opportunities available, particularly at OUA and RSEQ universities. But, to this we offer two points to consider. First, previous research has indicated that the inequity in roster spots is greater when these additional teams are considered (see Normal et al., 2021). Second, we believe that adding roster spots and/or teams for women in non-U SPORTS sports/teams is not an appropriate strategy for achieving greater equity in sport. That is, by adding what amounts to "second tier" teams and roster spots, nothing is being done to afford women more opportunities within Canada's highest and most recognizable interuniversity sport system.

Across U SPORTS, opportunities for women to lead as universities' DAs are greater than they were in 2016–2017 (Norman et al., 2021). Though women occupied about 20% of these positions for the first 20 years of the century, the 2021–2022 academic/athletic year saw women holding 18 of these 55 positions (32.7%; one university's DA position was vacant). But only two conferences can really claim any credit for this advancement; two others have made no improvements, whatsoever, in this area. So, with 32.7% of these positions now being held by women, attention might be placed upon U SPORTS conferences and universities within them that are contributing to (and pushing against) this move towards greater gender equity. Certainly, it is plainly obvious that U SPORTS's largest conference, the OUA, is the stand-alone leader in this regard—where women currently hold half of these DA po-

sitions. The RSEQ is nearly equitable in this area, while the AUS and the CWUAA, unfortunately, have only five women DAs across their 27 universities.

Coaching opportunities for women, as was the case for DA opportunities for women, were greatest in the OUA. For example, with respect to women's teams in the OUA, 11 of 18 basketball teams were coached by women, eight of 14 hockey teams were coached by women, and five of 12 rugby teams were coached by women. There is only one instance of women coaching such near equitable or equitable percentages of women's (or co-ed) teams. That is, the only other exception is CWUAA women's basketball (eight of 17 with women coaching). Clearly, despite the OUA's leadership in this regard, there is little to celebrate here. Additionally, the absence of women head coaching any of the men's core teams and very few of the co-ed minor teams is in-line with similar findings from the NCAA over a decade ago (Kamphoff et al., 2010). That women continue to be underrepresented as head coaches needs attention and action. The evidence of an overall lack of women in these leadership positions as head coaches speaks to the continued patterns of gender discrimination faced by women sport coaches identified by others (e.g., see LaVoi & Silva-Breen, 2022).

Like Williams (2013), we believe equity in sport "does not necessarily mean equal participant numbers or equal recognition for men's and women's sports" (Williams, 2013, p. 22). But, with respect to sport leadership opportunities (as DAs and head coaches), we do believe a more ideal environment ought to see near equal numbers of women and men. Our gender equity "agenda" aside, we also know that other benefits likely abound. For example, women university student-athletes coached by women are much more likely to remain in subsequent coaching roles themselves (Wasend & LaVoi, 2019). Given our ardent agreement with the proportionality principle, we do believe an equitable U SPORTS would have an equitable number of teams and roster spots for women. In practice, this would mean more women's teams than men's teams at most Canadian universities and many more gross roster spots (so that proportional roster spots were even).

There are clearly some systemic failures here. U SPORTS, its four conferences, and many individual universities must face and address these. Certainly, some of the macro-systems here (e.g., U SPORTS and the four conferences) may make some concerted efforts to redress the gender inequities that remain. But, individual universities, as micro-systems themselves, have some work to do. And, in the absence of such individual institutional efforts, they ought to be forced to, at least, face the findings found within this examination. That is, calling attention to this gender inequity as and micro-level systemic failure necessarily names and shames some of the worst institutions.

Considering our findings, we also recognize possibilities for ongoing and continued research, for ourselves and/or like-minded colleagues. While our own examination of the current state of gender (in)equity within Canadian interuniversity varsity has been presented in an almost-entirely descriptive manner, future research might purposefully and explicitly consider accompanying micro- and macro-level factors (as have Burton & Lavoi [2016] and Fink [2015]). Additionally, future re-

search might also consider available additional data to determine explanatory and predictive relationships of several important variables (e.g., Cunningham & Nite [2020] with respect to LGBT inclusiveness). Certainly, such research—particularly within the Canadian U SPORTS context—is warranted and wanting.

## Possibilities for U SPORTS and Universities' Senior Administrators

This analysis provided herein is most necessary to continue to challenge institutionalized gender inequities within U SPORTS, its four affiliated conferences, and the 56 universities within them. Therefore, we offer the following suggestions for action and attention, by various stakeholders.

Norman et al.'s (2021) recommendations for policy change still stand. U SPORTS should create policies with proportionality as a primary point of consideration. More specifically, existing and future gender equity policies ought to be (re) written to attend to the proportionality principle. These policies should be overarching and be mandated within each of the four conferences. As noted in the introduction, U SPORTS should adhere to the Federal Government's commitment to gender equity (see Canadian Heritage, 2009)—reaffirmed in 2021 when Canadian Heritage set a goal for the nation to achieve "gender equality in sport at every level by 2035" (para. 1). We argue this can be achieved with proportionality.

U SPORTS also needs to recognize the significant inequities for women in leadership roles in each conference (DAs and head coaches). The OUA should be celebrated and considered an exemplar for creating meaningful change and improving opportunities for women in these leadership roles. U SPORTS ought to be concerned with the gender imbalance in its leadership roles and should work with conferences and universities' DAs to create more opportunities for women through education and a strong commitment for gender equity.

Given that improvements in gender equity have taken two decades for substantial change to occur, we recommend that universities' senior administrators (i.e., university presidents) play more of a role in leading policy and action for gender equity. This may be considered problematic for some as it removes some governance and decision making from U SPORTS (and, perhaps, from DAs) and shifts these responsibilities to individual universities. However, the current system is not working and has been too slow to change. University presidents must be called upon to account, and to act.

Universities' senior administrators must recognize the gender inequity in Departments of Athletics across the country (and within their own universities). In the last decade, Canadian universities have undergone various initiatives to increase EDI (in curriculum, in faculty complements, in research, etc.). We argue that this commitment to EDI must be extended to varsity sport and women (athletes, coaches, and DAs). Campbell (2021) argues,

> thus, while EDI education underscores that bias is not blameworthy, its effectiveness depends on communicating to participants' [sic] their responsibility for future conduct, once aware of their own implicit preferences and biases. (p. 56)

Being committed to gender equity in interuniversity varsity sport also requires senior administrators to understand, value, and appreciate university sport. When considering EDI practices and policies in universities, we argue that university sport and gender equity need to be part of that commitment. Finally, Canadian university presidents ought to also be part of this shift by demanding a commitment to improving gender equity within their Departments of Athletics. Such an effort might include purposeful leadership and/or mentorship related to working with their DAs, particularly for those presidents who have DAs who currently lead programs characterized by flagrant gender inequity. Given the lack of gender equity laws for university sport in Canada, it is most necessary to complete these investigations and to hold those in positions of power accountable.

Moreover, it is equally important that U SPORTS women athletes have a voice and are empowered to be part of the change. As UN Women (2020) offer, "women and girls must be equally participants and leaders in the process of building back better, so their gains are not lost, and a better future for all becomes a reality, where women and girls can participate in, work with, govern and enjoy sport on an equal playing field" (p. 6).

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## Notes

1. Club sport teams may or may not be sanctioned by four regional conferences. For example, in the AUS and CWUAA conference universities, students may compete on badminton, men's rugby, lacrosse, and baseball club sport teams (amongst others), though none of these sports' competitions fall within defined AUS or CWUAA conference structures (e.g., they do not have AUS/CWUAA competitions and championships). Alternatively, within the OUA and RSEQ conference universities, students may compete on golf, tennis, figure skating, and squash club sport and/or non-U SPORTS varsity teams (again, amongst others), and most of these sports' competitions do fall within defined OUA and RSEQ structures (e.g., they have OUA/RSEQ competitions and championships).

2. U SPORTS (2016–present) has a 115-year history that has seen its name change three times. Previously, U SPORTS was Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS; 2001–2016), Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union (CIAU; 1961–2001), and Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union Central (CIAU Central; 1906–1955).

3. These roster spots do *not* include track & field, where universities are not allocated pre-determined roster spots; they are based on student-athletes' performance at conference championship meets. Also, though the U SPORTS's women's hockey playing regulations indicated that there are 23 roster spots, the men's hockey playing regulations did not list this. So, we have used 23 roster spots for men's hockey as well.

4. Though full-time undergraduate and graduate students may play on U SPORTS teams, we recognize that most student-athletes are U SPORTS participants as full-time undergraduate students. So, the proportional roster spots offered here are relative to full-time undergraduate students. These values would be lower (for men and women) if full-time graduate students were also included.

5. This was done within a two-month period, from April to May 2022. Certainly, some staffing changes of coaches and DAs may have occurred during and after this bounded period.

6. Excluding those unaccounted for from Trinity Western University, University of British Columbia Okanagan, University of Northern British Columbia, and Université du Québec à Montréal.

7. The lone three universities with more men than women are all in the OUA: Ontario Tech University, Royal Military College of Canada, University of Waterloo.