A GROUNDED THEORY FOR LEVERAGING COLLEGE ATHLETICS: ESTABLISHING ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AND USING REVENUE AND VISIBILITY TO SUPPORT THE UNIVERSITY MISSION

by

TORIE A. JOHNSON

(Under the Direction of Erik Ness)

ABSTRACT

Intercollegiate athletics is an increasingly pervasive enterprise within American higher education, particularly at universities that choose to compete at the highest NCAA level. Regardless of level, however, the attention dedicated to student-athletes and coaches often dwarfs that given to faculty members and scholars. Also, some research has shown that the ebbs and flows of college team performance might impact student applications and private donations at some institutions. But, despite the inherent relationship between universities and their intercollegiate athletic programs, the two entities have at times appeared to operate independently of one another, causing some to challenge the presidents’ ability to provide effective oversight of these unique programs. In this qualitative study, which included a two-phase research design that relied on document and interview analysis, a grounded theory emerged that explains how presidents, along with their provosts and directors of athletics, position universities to leverage their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs in order to support the university mission.
The Leveraging College Athletics theory is built on the five tenets of *Experience*, *Understanding*, *Appreciation*, *Acceptance*, and *Integration*. It posits that at these universities, administrators often have prior *Experience* at institutions with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs, and this prior experience fosters an enlightened *Understanding* of the operations and goals of the intercollegiate athletic program. With an enlightened understanding, administrators begin to *Appreciate* how the intercollegiate athletic program might benefit the university. While they appreciate the positives associated with the program, they also *Accept* the negative consequences such programs might bring to the institution. Once administrators accept the realities of the high profile intercollegiate athletic program, their aim is to *Integrate* it as much as possible into the university culture in order to support the university mission.

**INDEX WORDS:** Intercollegiate athletics, College athletics, NCAA, Autonomy Five, Power Five, High profile, Leadership, Oversight, President, Provost, Director of Athletics, Leverage, University mission
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2017
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December 2017
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earning an advanced degree cannot be achieved without support – it is simply too much to do by yourself. Thankfully, I continually felt the gentle prodding of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to keep working – reminding me that with Him I could actually earn a doctorate. He also graciously sent a host of family, friends, and mentors to walk with me during this two-year adventure. First, and foremost, my parents, Mike and Martha Johnson, instilled in me the desire to learn, and to never stop learning. They have also spent most of my life reminding me that writing is my God-given gift, and I will never be able to hide it under a bushel. Along with Mom, my aunt, Wanda Johnson, served as an invaluable editor of all 150+ pages of this dissertation. Also, while writing, rewriting, and writing again, I was constantly encouraged by the faculty and leaders at the UGA Institute of Higher Education, particularly Associate Director, Dr. Leslie Gordon. Leslie had an uncanny ability to send a reminder at exactly the right moment and to offer encouragement when we needed it the most.

“We” refers to the 15 students who made up Cohort 4. Each person in that group challenged me to think beyond my usual frame, and allowed me to ask the “dumb question.” (They also humored my aversion to PowerPoint!) I am honored to now call them friends and colleagues. Also in the Institute, Dr. Erik Ness was truly a blessing. Erik served as my major professor, and he jumped into the deep end of the grounded theory qualitative design pool with me. His insights, questions, and advice not only helped me write this dissertation, but more importantly prepared me to defend it before a committee of respected and unapologetically thorough and thoughtful men who only had my best research and career interests at heart.
I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the encouragement I received from longtime friend and mentor, Mr. Greg Sankey. Greg became my first (and to date only) boss after hiring me more than 16 years ago, a bit of a risky move given my lack of experience right out of college. He is now Commissioner of the SEC, and he was instrumental in me being able to participate in a doctoral program while working there full-time. Before meeting Greg, I was a student at Baylor University, and two ladies from there have continued to be my cheerleaders. Dr. Sara Stone is chair of the Baylor Department of Journalism, Public Relations and New Media, and to this day she still checks in on me – just to see how I am doing out there in the world. Ms. Cynthia Chavez is a financial aid counselor at Baylor, and for four years she never failed to find scholarships and grants to help me pay the private school tuition and fees. She even offered advice when I started my master’s degree, years after I had left Waco.

Last, and certainly not least, I must thank my closest friends, who for two years asked me every single day if I had studied yet. Now, I can finally respond with, “No, I haven’t studied today, but I don’t need to anymore.” Without that kind of support from everyone I mentioned, along with others I did not, this doctorate would still be a possibility rather than a reality. To all of you, I am forever grateful.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*Is everything too high profile? Yeah, it probably is. Where there’s money, there’s corruption too often. But, if the leadership is right then it can be a wonderful thing.*

– Bill Battle, Former Director of Athletics, University of Alabama

Intercollegiate athletic programs and the universities they represent are appropriately described as interdependent enterprises led by the same chief executive officer, the president. Accordingly, scholars and stakeholders have long maintained that the president must be attentive to the intercollegiate athletic program to ensure it operates in alignment with the institution’s teaching, research, and service mission, and to preserve his or her own career (Coalition, 2007; Duderstadt, 2006; Gardner, 1960). Consider that on November 9, 2015, the president of the University of Missouri System and the chancellor of the University of Missouri in Columbia (Missouri) campus both stepped down from their positions. The almost simultaneous resignations, and the subsequent voluntary departures of three of the system’s nine curators, were driven in part by Missouri’s football team threatening to boycott a game amidst racial unrest on the campus. According to Kellerman (2015), the forfeiture might have cost the university millions of dollars in revenue. Missouri is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU), a relatively small collection of elite public and private research universities in the United States and Canada, and it enjoys the R1-highest research activity designation in the Carnegie Classification system. However, the fallout from the football team’s actions on the entire university system, which included a 35 percent drop in enrollment in the two years
following the threatened boycott, is an example of what scholars and stakeholders have feared, that the influence of intercollegiate athletics would reach such a level that issues within the program or actions by student-athletes or coaches would humble entire institutions, leaving university and individual reputations in shambles (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015; Brown, 2017; Coalition, 2007; Duderstadt, 2006; Knight Commission, 1991; Thelin, 1996).

It is important to clarify that intercollegiate athletic programs are not significantly influential on every American university campus. Many institutions support programs within the structure of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the highest governing body for college sports in the United States, that do not leave stakeholders wondering if the programs are a threat to the mission and reputation of the university. These types of programs are usually associated with members of the Ivy League, such as Harvard University, Princeton University, and Yale University, or with institutions that do not provide scholarships based on athletic ability to student-athletes, such as Birmingham-Southern College in Alabama, Emory University in Georgia, and Trinity University in Texas (Duderstadt, 2006; Thelin, 1996). However, Bowen and Levin (2003) and Shulman and Bowen (2001) did observe that intercollegiate athletics at the highest NCAA level has impacted these colleges and universities in a myriad of ways.

It is also important to note that although an intercollegiate athletic program is typically described in aggregate, the sports of football and men’s basketball are usually of primary concern to scholars and stakeholders. As such, for the purpose of this investigation, intercollegiate athletics collectively refers to those programs supported by universities that have teams competing at the highest NCAA level (commonly known as NCAA Autonomy Five or NCAA Power Five universities), thereby generating the most revenue from football and men’s basketball, expending the most resources on football and men’s basketball, and who ultimately
face the most internal and external criticism about how their intercollegiate athletic programs operate within the university structure and support the university mission. According to Estler and Nelson (2005), Toma (2003), and others, these types of programs often influence university governance and administration, and that influence has led to tensions in higher education that extend beyond individual campuses to also include government and corporate sectors.

The most prominent calls to decrease the negative influence of intercollegiate athletics have come from the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (Knight Commission) in the 1990s and the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (Coalition) in the 2000s. Although the NCAA Constitution states the president is ultimately responsible for all aspects of an intercollegiate athletic program (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2016), the Knight Commission, a group of stakeholders formed by the Knight Foundation, and the Coalition, a group of faculty senates from nearly 60 universities, have both challenged presidents to provide stronger oversight of intercollegiate athletics in hopes of realigning (or simply aligning) the enterprise with the university mission (Coalition, 2007; Knight Commission, 1991). It does appear that presidents are more engaged with intercollegiate athletics of late, but some scholars and stakeholders have argued that their increased involvement has not decreased the negative influence of these unique programs (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Duderstadt, 2006; Knight Commission, 2009, 2010).

According to Thelin (1996), in the mid to late 1880s, when the first students at the earliest American institutions of higher learning added sports to their list of extracurricular activities, questions swirled about the impact of such behavior on a college campus. Some observers wondered if the students would begin to focus more on athletics than on their academic pursuits or if athletics would become more important than the institution’s attention to
instruction and learning. Today, more than a century later, scholars and stakeholders continue to
debate how intercollegiate athletics might support or detract from the university mission, this
study included. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter includes a description of the problem
associated with this study, a brief summary of the relevant literature, a statement of the purpose
of this investigation, and the chapter concludes by outlining the significance of the study.

Statement of the Problem

The mainstream media attention dedicated to athletics is almost always greater than that
given to academics in America, and this can be appealing for universities hoping to elevate their
academic prestige using intercollegiate athletics. For example, *USA Today* has an entire section
dedicated to sports coverage, but academic stories have no earmarked space in the publication.
Furthermore, both the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Education* have at times
employed full-time journalists who focused on intercollegiate athletics when the publications are
dedicated to academe. According to Duderstadt (2006), Shulman and Bowen (2001), and Toma
(2003), if a university is awarded a highly sought after grant from a prestigious funding agency
or has a faculty member inducted into one of the nation’s top professional academies, the
publicity for those achievements is miniscule compared to the attention given to the head football
coach or a men’s basketball student-athlete. In this context, an alleged NCAA violation or
misbehavior within the intercollegiate athletic program usually lands the university on the front
pages of newspapers.

In addition, the relationship between universities and intercollegiate athletic programs
might subject the university to the ebbs and flows of team performance. For example, when
teams win highly publicized contests such as national championships in football or men’s
basketball, some studies indicate a university may experience an increase in student applications
and private donations, both of which have the potential to support the university mission when thoughtfully managed (Koo & Dittmore, 2014; McEvoy, 2005; Peterson-Horner & Eckstein, 2015; Pope & Pope, 2014; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Walker, 2015). Conversely, if those teams are unsuccessful or beset by scandals, student applications and/or private donations may decline or remain static, which could cause a slide in the university’s academic standing and lead some stakeholders to question its commitment to teaching, research, and service (Toma, 2003).

However, despite the inherent relationship between universities and their intercollegiate athletic programs, the two entities have at times appeared to operate independently of one another, which, whether intentional or unintentional, has damaged some university reputations, cost many of them millions of dollars in revenue, and caused some stakeholders to challenge the presidents’ ability to provide effective oversight of the program (Bass et al., 2015; Davis, 1979; Kelderman, 2015). The reasons for such significant consequences to non-instructional matters seem to be intercollegiate athletics’ increasing influence at universities competing in NCAA Autonomy Five Conferences. At these universities, Bok (2013), a former Harvard President, and Duderstadt (2006), a former University of Michigan President, have argued the influence of intercollegiate athletics has placed undue and unbalanced burden on the president, administrators, and faculty members, ultimately moving the institution away from its mission.

**Literature Addressing the Problem**

There are volumes of scholarly and non-scholarly literature applicable to oversight of intercollegiate athletics and the university mission, and some pieces date to the late 1880s. Regardless of rigor and intent, the literature generally focuses on three groups – external stakeholders, such as television networks and corporate donors; internal stakeholders, such as governing boards and the faculty; and the most prominent university administrators in this area,
directors of athletics and presidents. The literature frequently asks who is in charge of the ever-growing intercollegiate athletics enterprise.

A number of scholars and stakeholders have attempted to answer this question by focusing on those entities that exist outside of the university structure. In an *Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)* monograph, Estler and Nelson (2005) identified the cultural, political, legal, and economic factors associated with intercollegiate athletics. In a *Change* magazine commentary, Weaver (2013) insisted television executives have become powerful influences in decision-making by virtue of the revenue their agreements provide to institutions. However, Inglis (1991) found that directors of athletics and presidents considered conference offices to be the most influential external agencies because although membership is voluntary, conferences establish policies and procedures that must be adhered to by their members.

Internal university stakeholders have also been the subject of investigation and commentary regarding oversight of intercollegiate athletics. Initially, faculty responsibility was the main research focus, and Lawrence, Hendricks, and Ott (2007) found that depending on the level of intercollegiate athletics competition and academic success of the university, faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics varied. Meanwhile, other scholars and stakeholders have challenged university governing boards to be more active in providing mission-driven oversight. Although the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) adopted a statement of responsibilities relative to intercollegiate athletics in 2004, Thelin (2008) argued they should provide more oversight, and Weaver (2013) later decried their lack of leadership.

The two most visible intercollegiate athletic program administrators are the director of athletics, who provides day-to-day management, and the president, who, according to the NCAA, is ultimately responsible for operation of the program. In an *ASHE* report, Thelin and
Wisemann (1989) argued the director of athletics and the president are both responsible for complex enterprises that require them to be adept at public relations and fundraising. They also raised the question of reporting lines between these individuals, an issue later investigated by Chandler (2011) in a dissertation centered on directors of athletics who had been named vice presidents. Other scholarly work involving these two administrators includes studies by Branch (1990) and Seidler, Gerdy, and Cardinal (1998) on their effectiveness and authority.

However, primarily and for nearly a century, the president has been the focal point of research and discussions about oversight of intercollegiate athletics. The Knight Commission (1991) presented the “one-plus-three” model of governance in which one – the president, was directed toward three areas – academic integrity, fiscal integrity, and external certification. In the book *Intercollegiate Athletics and the American University*, Duderstadt (2006) concluded it is the president’s duty to defend the institution in the face of inevitable and strong opposition from a range of constituencies, which Estler and Nelson (2005) said would come from a variety of stakeholders and Kezar (2005) argued is complicated by shifts in the state of higher education.

The evaluation of literature applicable to oversight of intercollegiate athletics revealed scholarly and non-scholarly examinations into the increasing influence of external stakeholders, shifting responsibilities of internal stakeholders, and authority of directors of athletics and presidents. It did not contemplate the role of the provost in this area of university administration, a significant omission given the connections between academics and intercollegiate athletics. Therefore, provosts were included and prominent in this examination. In fact, this study was built upon the perspectives of presidents, provosts, and directors of athletics, among other university leaders, in order to contribute an empirical investigation to an under-researched aspect of higher education administration, specifically oversight of intercollegiate athletics.
Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to devise a grounded theory that explains how presidents, along with their provosts and directors of athletics, position universities to leverage their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs in order to support the university mission. Undergirding this investigation was an understanding that presidents must initially determine the most appropriate ways to leverage these unique enterprises within the university. The qualitative study included a two-phase research design that relied on document and interview analysis, and the research questions outlined below guided this investigation.

1) How do presidents communicate the value of high profile intercollegiate athletic programs to the university community? Almost since the introduction of intercollegiate athletics to the university context, scholars have questioned its ability to further the teaching, research, and service mission of a university (Savage, Bentley, McGovern, & Smiley, 1929). They have also questioned its ability to enhance the university’s reputation given its vulnerability to scandal (Thelin, 1996). However, other scholars have presented intercollegiate athletics as a valuable resource in supporting the institutional mission and in enhancing its visibility and prestige (Toma, 2003).

2) How do presidents establish organizational structures relative to oversight of high profile intercollegiate athletic programs? Oversight of intercollegiate athletics has not been limited to presidents and senior administrators (Frey, 1987). Faculty members have provided useful leadership; and recently, governing boards have been more engaged (Bowen & Levin, 2003). At times in opposition to internal governing bodies, external stakeholders, such as television networks, corporate donors, and conference offices, have been similarly or perhaps even more influential (Estler & Nelson, 2005).
3) **How do presidents and senior administrators orchestrate the use of revenue, visibility, and/or other opportunities afforded by high profile intercollegiate athletic programs?** The influence of television on intercollegiate athletics is broad, but scholars most often point to its revenue and visibility offerings as benefits (Bass et al., 2015; Estler & Nelson, 2005). Television agreements, based primarily on appearances by football and men’s basketball teams, are now the largest revenue stream for intercollegiate athletic programs (C. Smith, 2016; Weaver, 2013). However, institutions often try to use these appearances to deliver messages about the whole university, apart from the intercollegiate athletic program (Harris, 2009; Tobolowsky & Lowery, 2006; Toma, 2003).

**Significance of the Study**

The most high profile intercollegiate athletic programs represent universities that are members of NCAA Autonomy Five Conferences, which include universities in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big 12 Conference (Big 12), Big Ten Conference (Big Ten), Pacific 12 Conference (Pac-12), and Southeastern Conference (SEC). The universities within these conferences are permitted to govern themselves within the NCAA structure because of the stature of their intercollegiate athletic programs, namely their ability to generate billions of dollars in combined revenue and their virtually unmatched public profiles (Hobson & Rich, 2015; NCAA, 2016; C. Smith, 2016). It has also been argued that these institutions often serve as the standard for how “successful” intercollegiate athletic programs should operate; thereby becoming the model for universities at other NCAA levels (Bass et al., 2015, Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Aside from intercollegiate athletics, interestingly, many NCAA Autonomy Five universities are also members of the prestigious AAU, and criticisms of these programs are noteworthy because they represent influential research institutions with
considerable academic reputations. Many of them are also supported by public universities, and some observers have expressed concerns about using public funds to bolster intercollegiate athletic activities that they view as primarily entertainment (Bass et al., 2015; Brand, 2006, April). Accordingly, scholars and stakeholders have questioned how intercollegiate athletics fits into the teaching, research, and service mission of these universities. Duderstadt (2006) and others have placed the responsibility for ensuring the institutional mission is not compromised on the president.

This obligation has led many presidents to focus more on intercollegiate athletics and less on other university matters, at times to the disappointment of administrators and faculty members (Bass et al., 2015; Kezar, 2005). Not surprisingly, history has shown that the president must be attentive to the intercollegiate athletic program to ensure it operates in accordance with the university’s mission, and to preserve his or her own career (Kelderman, 2015; Knapp, 1992; Martin, 2013; Thelin, 1996). As such, identifying how the intercollegiate athletic program supports the university mission is of interest to faculty and administrators; state and federal legislators; current and former students; and current and former intercollegiate athletics officials. And, perhaps, the greatest interest is from presidents themselves who acknowledge that missteps related to intercollegiate athletic program oversight could be the difference between continuing in their position and being terminated (Davis, 1979; Duderstadt, 2006; Knapp, 1992). Therefore, even as presidents focus on what might appear to be non-academic issues, in this empirical investigation I sought to establish a theory that explains how they engage their provosts and directors of athletics in positioning the university to leverage the unique relationship between academia and high profile intercollegiate athletics.
Conclusion

This introductory chapter set the stage for this investigation by first distinguishing high profile intercollegiate athletic programs from those operating at other NCAA levels, and it surmised that as the visibility and revenue associated with high profile athletic programs have increased, so too have the risks for the universities supporting them. Chapter 2 begins with a review of literature that establishes the context in which most high profile intercollegiate athletic programs exist with regard to organizational structures, fiscal operations, and visibility efforts. It continues with an analysis of the literature most relevant to oversight of intercollegiate athletics by a range of stakeholders, specifically presidents. The final section of the chapter describes Toma’s (2010a) Building Organizational Capacity (BOC) Framework, which aligns with the grounded theory that emerged from the research. Chapter 3 outlines the two-phase research design for this qualitative study that featured document analysis and interviews. Chapter 4 includes a summary of key insights from the document analysis and a broad description of the universities included in the study via administrator interviews. Chapter 5 discusses the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, which explains how senior administrators position universities to leverage their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs. Lastly, Chapter 6 begins by addressing the study’s three research questions and then outlines how the BOC Framework corresponds with the new grounded theory. The chapter concludes by highlighting the implications of this research for national and campus policy and practice, and then it describes opportunities for future research. Each chapter begins with a quote from a participant that provides a first-person perspective on that area of the study. Collectively, the six chapters that form this dissertation establish the background, context, and empirical support for the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

I’m not sure that you can really put a tangible figure on it. There’s been study after study after study where it says, “Hey, that doesn’t net out in terms of numbers.” I don’t think you can put a number on passion. I don’t think you can put a number on emotions. I don’t think you can put a number on the way you feel.

– Mitch Barnhart, Director of Athletics, University of Kentucky

Intercollegiate athletics literature has a long history, dating to the late 1800s, and it is incredibly diverse. Alongside empirical scholarship published in the Journal of Higher Education and the ASHE Higher Education Report are articles in discipline-specific, peer reviewed publications like the Journal of Sport Management and the Journal of Intercollegiate Sport. There are opinion pieces by leaders in the field; non-fiction books by university administrators; reports supported by stakeholder groups such as the Knight Commission, the American Council on Education (ACE), and the NCAA; and magazine and newspaper articles in mainstream periodicals such as the New York Times and Forbes magazine. However, with the exception of studies targeting specific aspects of intercollegiate athletics, such as enrollment, graduation, and race and gender equity, there is a void in the empirical literature relative to oversight of the enterprise. Although scholars have frequently focused their attention on presidents, little to no scholarly research has connected provosts and directors of athletics in an investigation. As a result, this literature gap is where I situated this grounded theory qualitative study. It explains how presidents, along with their provosts and directors of athletics, position
universities to leverage their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs in order to support the university mission.

Although the foundation of this investigation was viewpoints from senior administrators, it is important to understand in a general sense the broad historical and contemporary contexts associated with intercollegiate athletics and American colleges and universities. Not surprisingly, intercollegiate athletics began as a student-led, extracurricular activity in 1852 when Harvard and Yale engaged in a rowing competition sponsored by a railroad company (Gilley and Hickey, 1985). There was only limited faculty oversight at that time, but as the revenue potential in the sport of football became apparent, alumni became involved in management of the programs, which eventually led to the institutionalization of intercollegiate athletics (Thelin, 1996). Almost immediately the value of intercollegiate athletics to the university became a fierce debate, and a lingering question continues to be who should be responsible for these rather unwieldy and scandal-prone programs. By the early 1900s scholars and stakeholders had grown so concerned with what appeared to be an abdication of responsibility for oversight of intercollegiate athletics by presidents and the faculty that the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching issued its third bulletin on college sports, *American College Athletics*. In it Savage, Bentley, McGovern, and Smiley (1929) questioned whether higher education, committed first and foremost to intellectual pursuits, should or could sustain something as pervasive and perhaps counter-intuitive as intercollegiate athletics.

Decades later in 1960, Gardner articulated one particular benefit of intercollegiate athletics, a sense of community that might not develop from other university-sponsored activities such as concerts and theater performances. Even while describing this advantage, however, he recognized an underlying tension between academia and intercollegiate athletics, and as a result,
Gardner (1960) stressed the importance of strong university oversight. Later, Thelin (1996) observed that the value of intercollegiate athletics, a “peculiar institution” within the university, is still unclear despite its prominence. More recently, Bowen and Levin (2003) described an “academic-athletic divide,” and they said it is virtually impossible to pinpoint when intercollegiate athletics began to separate from the educational mission of the institution, but the divide muddles the position of the intercollegiate athletic program on campus. Benford (2007) went a step further, suggesting an “edutainment” industry in which higher education and intercollegiate athletics have formed an alliance that undermines university aspirations and damages reputations by marrying two opposing missions – education and entertainment.

Whether or not academia and intercollegiate athletics have opposing missions has also been debated. Scholars and stakeholders have cautioned those who posit that intercollegiate athletics is nothing like higher education. For example, Bass, Schaeperkoetter, and Bunds (2015) and Toma (2003, 2010b) compared university aspirations to intercollegiate athletic program aspirations, arguing the pursuit of higher *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, for example, is similar to the pursuit of higher *Associated Press* Top 25 football rankings. Similarly, Simon (2008) compared the way the faculty organize the curriculum and the way recruiters identify prospective students (non-athletes) to the coaching process and the recruitment of student-athletes. Duderstadt (2006) made a similar argument when he compared special admissions requests in intercollegiate athletics to such requests in highly competitive music programs. In addition, Toma (2010b) said the competition for top faculty researchers is similar to the competition for top coaches. However, Duderstadt (2006) noted that a university does not rely on the open marketplace to set faculty salaries, a practice that is common in intercollegiate athletics.
From Savage et al. (1929) to Toma (2010b), scholars and stakeholders have sent a clear message about the potential dangers of pervasive high profile intercollegiate athletic programs on individual universities and all of higher education. However, some aspects of these unique programs, specifically their fiscal operations and their visibility potential, urge administrators to focus on strategic management of intercollegiate athletics rather than decreasing its influence. To illustrate and for background, the first section of this chapter provides a brief overview of revenue and expense realities in high profile intercollegiate athletics; it is followed by a section that highlights the benefits and detriments of increased intercollegiate athletic program visibility; and finally, the third section describes organizational structures in intercollegiate athletics. The fourth section of this chapter is dedicated to literature focusing on oversight of intercollegiate athletics by external stakeholders, such as television networks and corporate donors; and internal stakeholders, such as governing boards and the faculty. Next, this chapter provides an in-depth analysis of literature centered on the duty of the director of athletics and the duty of the president in oversight of intercollegiate athletic programs. Lastly, the chapter briefly outlines Toma’s (2010a) Building Organizational Capacity (BOC) Framework, which, although centered on higher education management broadly, corresponds with the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics that emerged from the study. Collectively, this chapter provides an appropriate context in which to consider the challenges senior administrators face when attempting to align high profile intercollegiate athletic programs with university missions.

**Fiscal Operations in Intercollegiate Athletics**

Intercollegiate athletics at the highest NCAA level generates billions of dollars from a variety of sources. Yet, fiscal operations are points of tension within the university since program expenses generally exceed revenue, and most institutions (other than the types considered
throughout this study) must provide subsidies to offset the deficits (Bass et al., 2015; Fulks, 2015; Hobson & Rich, 2015; C. Smith, 2016). Shulman and Bowen (2001) explained it succinctly when they said, “It is extremely difficult to conclude that college sports is, by any normal definition, a good business” (p. 256). It has been argued, however, that intercollegiate athletics is not a business at all. Instead, it is an enterprise working to balance its budget. For example, Suggs (2009) applied Howard Bowen’s notion that universities do not make decisions based on profit maximization, but rather on increasing revenue and prestige, to intercollegiate athletics since a university’s commitment to its program might escalate despite declining profits. Such practices seem to imply that if intercollegiate athletics was in fact a business, then administrators would likely make decisions differently.

In addition to the “business/not-a-business” debates are those challenging how program revenue is spent, beside back on intercollegiate athletics. For example, when intercollegiate athletic programs transfer or earmark revenue for non-intercollegiate athletic program purposes it is difficult to determine exactly what is being used for academics (e.g., faculty salaries) and what is in essence still supporting intercollegiate athletics (e.g., student-athlete scholarships). In one report, Wolverton and Kambhampati (2016) said that out of 205 programs, just 40 transferred revenue back to academics, and of those 40, only 10 transferred more revenue than the institutional subsidies they had received. Tellingly, each of the 10 universities found to be contributing to academics was a member of an NCAA Autonomy Five Conference.

In his regular report for the NCAA, Fulks (2015) determined that high profile intercollegiate athletic programs experienced a 10-year median increase in both revenue (94 percent) and expenses (120 percent), and the revenue increases for NCAA Autonomy Five universities were more than $80 million. Similarly, journalists Hobson and Rich (2015) and C.
Smith (2016) determined that NCAA Autonomy Five institutions have increased revenue significantly since 2004, more than two billion dollars combined, but they invest nearly all of the revenue back into the program. (Significant for this study, they found that 10 of the 13 public universities in the SEC operated at a profit in 2014, up from seven institutions a decade earlier.) Fulks (2015) noted the three main sources of intercollegiate athletic program revenue were ticket sales, donations, and distributions from the NCAA and/or conference offices, which are primarily television agreement payouts. The three main expense categories were compensation, student-athlete scholarships, and facilities, and intercollegiate athletic program expenses grew faster than university expenses, except in a few unique circumstances such as the University of Alabama (Alabama).

In the New York Times, Drape (2015) reported on how intercollegiate athletic program success impacted the University of Alabama. He surmised that the football team’s wins, four national championships in eight seasons, were a significant reason the university increased fundraising for capital improvements and for scholarships for out-of-state students; increased its enrollment selectivity (a known marker for elevating a university’s standing in certain rankings); and increased intercollegiate athletic program revenue given back to the university for academic scholarships and faculty salaries. Much of the increased revenue at Alabama and other similar high profile intercollegiate athletic programs comes from commercial endeavors since escalating expenses often make corporate entities valuable partners for universities that strive to increase revenue rather than reduce costs (Bass et al., 2015; Knight Commission, 2001, 2010).

Contrary to many scholars and stakeholders, former NCAA President Myles Brand argued such commercialization is not only appropriate in intercollegiate athletics, but valuable. He said commercial activity within intercollegiate athletics is similar to commercial activity
within most, if not all, universities. Although Brand (2006, April) was clear in stating the nature of commercialization in intercollegiate athletics should align with the university mission, Kezar (2005) cautioned higher education stakeholders when she said, “Big-time college athletics, an area where commercialization has gone so far as to distort the purpose of this activity at Division I schools, should serve as a warning to all of higher education” (p. 25).

Based on the revenue potential and expense realities associated with high profile intercollegiate athletics, it is easy to understand why presidents might take an active hand in fiscal operations of the program. For example, ensuring the intercollegiate athletic program is a support rather than a drain on university resources is understandably a worthwhile goal for a president, along with determining how to best utilize the revenue now available to the institution.

**Visibility Opportunities in Intercollegiate Athletics**

Visibility, namely through football and men’s basketball games broadcast on television and coverage of those games and the entire intercollegiate athletic program in the mainstream media, is often identified as a benefit of intercollegiate athletics for a university (Brand, 2005, January; Davis, 1979; Duderstadt, 2006; Knapp, 1992; Martin, 2013; Moore, 1992). However, scholars and stakeholders acknowledge the potential negative consequences associated with visibility since increased attention often brings increased scrutiny. Despite the risks, universities at various NCAA levels have tried to maximize the visibility opportunities afforded to them by their intercollegiate athletic programs to increase their brand awareness and/or to improve their academic reputation, attempting to take advantage of the adage, “perception is reality” (Bass et al., 2015; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Toma, 2003).

In 2003, Toma published *Football U.*, an investigation into visibility efforts used by universities relative to their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs. His study consisted of
interviews with administrators engaged in external relations at NCAA Autonomy Five universities. Toma (2003) observed that intercollegiate athletics draws external constituents to campus, literally and figuratively; it enables those constituents to associate something positive with the institution; and it creates comparisons with other universities. Interestingly, he argued intercollegiate athletics also helps to distinguish between otherwise similar institutions. For example, the University of Michigan is a lot like Ohio State University in terms of the campus, academic prowess, and offerings, but a Wolverine is nothing like a Buckeye. However, in his conclusion, Toma (2003) described the pitfalls of using intercollegiate athletics for external affairs, including the messenger overshadowing the message and the disconnection between intercollegiate athletics and the university mission. He summarized that high profile intercollegiate athletic programs can be image-building tools, but they must be used for that purpose with caution (Toma, 2003).

In a more specific examination, Lifschitz, Sauder, and Stevens (2014) explained why universities invest heavily in football while articulating the complexities of status in American higher education. According to the scholars, “U.S. higher education may officially be an academic endeavor, but it is hardly exclusively so” (Lifschitz et al., 2014, p. 205). As such, they argued, factors other than academics may impact the academic reputation of a university. Also, although the academic status of a university may be different from its intercollegiate athletic program status, the two often influence each other, making them somewhat interdependent.

In an example of top-down brand awareness mandates, Clark, Apostolopoulou, Branvold, and Synokwa (2009) described the challenge for Robert Morris University (not an NCAA Autonomy Five university) in using its intercollegiate athletic program to improve the university’s image, as instructed by the governing board and senior administrators. These
scholars noted the university’s strategic plan had two of five components that focused on intercollegiate athletics for branding purposes, and they said some leaders felt intercollegiate athletics had previously been underutilized for that purpose. The two primary ways universities utilize intercollegiate athletics for brand awareness are in logo designs and television public service announcements. In their study, Watkins and Gonzenbach (2013) found that academic logos were associated with competence while intercollegiate athletic program logos, of the same university, were associated with excitement. This difference created brand inconsistencies for stakeholders, and now some institutions have opted for one university logo instead of an academic logo and an intercollegiate athletic program logo. Harris (2009) and Tobolowsky and Lowery (2006) studied 30-second television public service announcements that aired during televised football bowl games, and they discovered that this messaging was largely ineffective in distinguishing between universities since the announcements were quite similar, which appears to weaken the argument about the value of intercollegiate athletics visibility to a university.

Because of the unique visibility opportunities a university might have at its disposal as a result of its high profile intercollegiate athletic program, it is easy to understand why presidents might take an active hand in outlining the institutional message to be delivered in connection with intercollegiate athletics. For example, ensuring a 30-second television public service announcement that airs during a football game communicates how the university meets its teaching, research, and service mission could be vitally important.

**Organizational Structures in Intercollegiate Athletics**

In the earliest years, intercollegiate athletic programs were managed by a head football coach turned director of athletics who was expected to generate revenue to fund his program, and Duderstadt (2006) said these powerful individuals were rarely engaged within the university
structure, and the programs they led were permitted to drift away from the university mission. Although most directors of athletics are no longer former head football coaches, all of them are still expected to generate revenue from external sources, a practice that according to Frey (1994) has made it virtually impossible to properly situate the intercollegiate athletic program within the university structure. In his view, intercollegiate athletic programs have in some ways become more powerful than their institutions. “Athletic departments are allowed to operate like no other department on campus. They can go over budget, break rules, and lose games regularly without having to be accountable in the same manner as are other departments” (Frey, 1994, p. 119).

Perhaps not surprisingly, some intercollegiate athletic programs have separated from the university altogether by establishing an independent athletic association or foundation. These quasi-internal bodies are rarely oriented within the university organizational structure, and they afford the intercollegiate athletic program great flexibility with regard to fiscal operations. However, Thelin and Wisemann (1989) provided caution to those who espouse this oversight approach. They described the potential legal ramifications of separate associations or foundations that could be treated as corporations under the law given their obvious separation from the university, a largely tax exempt entity. However, other organizational structures, perhaps best understood after examining the reporting lines of directors of athletics, have been suggested. Thelin and Wisemann (1989) offered several concepts, including acknowledging revenue generation as the primary function of intercollegiate athletics and thus having the director of athletics report to the university vice president for development. These scholars also suggested that if intercollegiate athletics is primarily an extracurricular activity, it should be subject to the office of student affairs. Lastly, Thelin and Wisemann (1989) also suggested intercollegiate athletics as an educational endeavor should be under the purview of the provost.
These and other approaches relative to organization of intercollegiate athletics have been used by universities to provide better oversight of the enterprise and to decrease the scandals that have plagued it. Gilley and Hickey (1985) argued that exemplary intercollegiate athletic programs free of widespread or longstanding corruption have clear organizational structures and the president is the central figure in administration of the program, as opposed to the director of athletics. More recently, Cunningham and Rivera (2001) said most intercollegiate athletic programs have either a Simple Structure in which decision-making is relatively centralized and administrators may have varied responsibilities or an Enabling Structure where decisions can be made at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. According to these scholars, one measure of a program’s effectiveness – athletic achievement – is highest in programs with decentralized decision-making structures. Interestingly, a second measure of effectiveness – educational attainment of student-athletes – may not even be impacted by the organizational structure.

Based on the evolution of intercollegiate athletics within higher education, it is easy to understand why presidents might take an active hand in organizing some aspects of the university relative to the intercollegiate athletic program. For example, whether or not the intercollegiate athletic program is legally a separate association or foundation may be significant, and whether or not the director of athletics reports to the president may make a practical and/or symbolic statement for the university.

**Administrative Oversight of Intercollegiate Athletics**

Oversight of intercollegiate athletics within the university context is a contentious subject. Estler and Nelson (2005), Thelin (1996), and others have argued that no single group has complete responsibility for the enterprise. Instead a combination of stakeholders, both external and internal to the university, has significant input and influence. However, Frey (1987), along
with Bok (2013), said all stakeholders should be wary of trying to control intercollegiate athletics since the American university was built on autonomy, and expecting control within a university setting, even of intercollegiate athletics, is counterintuitive. Furthermore, after examining the limited amount of available empirical data on leadership in intercollegiate athletics at the time, Frey (1987) determined, in a sobering observation, “Presidents want change, but they love athletics too much to want drastic change” (p. 57). Thelin (2002) echoed that sentiment when he said presidents and intercollegiate athletic program administrators have been complicit in the corruption and commercialization of intercollegiate athletics. He added that the faculty and academic administrators continue to be frustrated by decision-making processes used in intercollegiate athletics that seem to run counter to accepted university protocol (Estler & Nelson, 2005; T. Feezell, 2015).

**External Stakeholder Oversight of Intercollegiate Athletics**

Considering individuals outside of the university, Estler and Nelson (2005) argued in an *ASHE* monograph investigation that external stakeholders and cultural norms often hold at least as much, and at times more, influence on intercollegiate athletics decision-making as university administrators. Similar to T. Feezell (2015) and Thelin (2002), they described cultural, political, legal, and economic factors that have in their observation made it difficult for traditional internal stakeholders such as governing boards, faculty members, and presidents to sustain and lead in intercollegiate athletics reform. Estler and Nelson (2005) used an example from the University of Maine (not an NCAA Autonomy Five university) to highlight the challenge senior administrators faced when highly publicized issues surfaced within the intercollegiate athletic program. Alleged NCAA violations came to light one year after the institution won an NCAA Championship and saw enrollment and donation spikes, increases that according to Koo and Dittmore (2014),
McEvoy (2005), and Peterson-Horner and Eckstein (2014), could have been anticipated. Ultimately, Estler and Nelson (2005) reported that at Maine, “The academic culture over previous years demanded that we not talk too much about athletics because such talk would appear to draw even more attention to a nonacademic aspect of the university that far more easily gained public attention than did more central research, teaching, and service” (p. 3).

In *Change*, Weaver (2013) asked in her commentary, who is in control of intercollegiate athletics given the increased importance of television in generating revenue and visibility for the university? She pointed to a 2012 AGB report on intercollegiate athletics and decried the lack of oversight by these bodies. She also mentioned the pushback presidents often receive from external stakeholders, despite being identified in NCAA policy as the ultimate authority over intercollegiate athletics for the university (NCAA, 2016). Weaver’s (2013) description of intercollegiate athletics perhaps being too much for presidents to handle was reminiscent of observations by Davis (1979), Estler and Nelson (2005), and Thelin and Wisemann (1989). However, former Ohio State University President Gordon Gee said it another way, “Out of my 32 years, I will tell you this very pointedly: That [alleged NCAA violations in the sport of football] was probably the most difficult issue that I’ve dealt with. Because it involved so much public commentary, so much press, so much pressure internal and external. It involved the brand of the university. It involved issues that were more complex than I really fully understood” (Weaver, 2013, p. 19).

Inglis (1991) had a different aim in her study of Canadian institutions. Although she sought to determine how administrators viewed their own influence in strategic, administrative, and marketing areas of intercollegiate athletics, like Estler and Nelson (2005) she questioned how presidents and directors of athletics viewed the influence of external stakeholders such as
national governing bodies, conference offices, alumni, and corporations. “The more we understand the influence in and around the athletic programs, the better the athletic administrators and other university personnel will be prepared to guide the programs in the desired directions” (Inglis, 1991, p. 31). Ultimately, Inglis (1991) found that presidents and directors of athletics ranked conference offices as the most influential external body, likely the result of those voluntary membership organizations establishing policies that directly impact the university. Interestingly, the alumni and corporate donors were both ranked low in the study, which Inglis acknowledged could change in the future. It is worth noting that there might have also been a different outcome in this area if the study had been conducted in the United States given the increasing reliance on commercial activities to generate revenue (Brand, 2006, April).

**Internal Stakeholder Oversight of Intercollegiate Athletics**

Historically universities have been primarily influenced by stakeholders who are closely linked to the institution such as governing boards and the faculty. With regard to intercollegiate athletics, questions about governing board responsibility for oversight of the enterprise have increased as scholars and stakeholders ponder this group’s role. Thelin (2008) argued the burden of oversight of intercollegiate athletics should shift from presidents to governing boards given the boards’ responsibilities for leadership of the entire university, which includes the intercollegiate athletic program. Four years before Thelin’s suggestion, however, the AGB adopted a statement of responsibilities for intercollegiate athletics, which was later modified with input from the NCAA in 2007. The AGB listed eight areas for governing board engagement with intercollegiate athletics – general oversight; presidential leadership; intercollegiate athletic program mission; fiscal responsibility; academics and student-athlete welfare; compliance; personnel; and communications (Association of Governing Boards, 2009). In 2012, with support
from the Knight Commission, the AGB conducted a survey of 140 presidents to determine if its recommendations were being implemented. The study found deficiencies in board policies on intercollegiate athletics; delegation of authority and responsibility to the president; financial responsibility; student-athlete welfare; and compensation of athletics personnel (Association of Governing Boards, 2012). In response, Legon and Casteen (2012) in *Trusteeship*, which is published for AGB members, provided three recommendations for governing boards related to intercollegiate athletics. They argued the governing board is ultimately accountable for intercollegiate athletics policy and oversight and should fulfill this fiduciary responsibility; the board should act decisively to uphold the integrity of the intercollegiate athletic program and its alignment with the mission of the institution; and the board must increase its span of knowledge by educating itself about its policy role and oversight of intercollegiate athletics. The AGB’s position was, and continues to be, that the stakes for intercollegiate athletics are too high for board members to ignore or to discount.

Perhaps due to the tradition of the faculty establishing the academic direction of a university or the shared governance structure in higher education, the faculty is often mentioned as a responsible party in intercollegiate athletics (Brand, 2005, February; Duderstadt, 2006). In their survey for the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (Coalition), a reform-minded group of faculty senates, Lawrence et al. (2007) found that depending on the level of intercollegiate athletics competition and academic success of the university, faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics varied. If the intercollegiate athletic program had appeared in football bowl games or in the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament, faculty members were more likely to believe the program was self-sufficient and less worthy of their attention (Lawrence, Hendricks, & Ott, 2007). These findings are logical if the faculty perspective is that
intercollegiate athletics is largely separate from the university, but they are concerning if the faculty view is that intercollegiate athletics should be aligned with the university and its mission.

Although not still typically functioning as a member of the faculty, the provost represents a similar academic voice within university administration. Yet, other than occasional mentions of provosts in reform recommendations, there is virtually no research literature dedicated to this important institutional leader with regard to intercollegiate athletics. However, in the *Provosts Handbook: The Role of the Chief Academic Officer*, VanderZwaag and Green (2015) presented four observations regarding intercollegiate athletics and two recommendations for chief academic officers. Their observations were that intercollegiate athletics has a legitimate place in higher education; intercollegiate athletics help shape campus culture; there is confusion about the role of intercollegiate athletics in the university; and provosts should establish a clear academic and educational rationale for supporting intercollegiate athletics. The companion VanderZwaag and Green (2015) recommendations were for provosts to establish quality intercollegiate athletic program management and to preserve intercollegiate athletics’ educational integrity, a perspective shared by the Coalition (2007) and the Knight Commission (1991). They also challenged provosts to keep the faculty engaged with intercollegiate athletics, arguing the chief academic officer is best positioned to address concerns expressed by these stakeholders.

**Duty of the Director of Athletics in Oversight of Intercollegiate Athletics**

In addition to external and other internal stakeholders, it is important to consider the people who lead these programs, the directors of athletics. As the scope of intercollegiate athletics has increased, so too have expectations for these administrators, so much so that most directors of athletics now report directly to the president (Sanders, 2004). They have been researched in some detail, but the scholarly investigations center on leadership styles, pathways
to becoming a director of athletics, educational credentials, and matters related to race and
gender equity. Examinations into their interactions with other university administrators are few,
but some scholars have contributed literature that is valuable to this study. In 1977, Hanford
argued in his commentary that directors of athletics should be empowered to lead their programs
as they see fit, provided their leadership aligns with the university mission, which should be
established by the president. Nearly 30 years later in his book on intercollegiate athletics,
Duderstadt (2006) provided an overview of the director of athletics position in his explanation of
intercollegiate athletic program governance. He described an increasingly complicated
responsibility that has evolved from a position held by retired coaches to one being pursued by
individuals with formal training in sport administration and business. Duderstadt (2006) argued,
however, that this practice, though understandable, should be treated with caution. “Beyond an
understanding of competitive athletic and business acumen, an athletic director should have both
experience in and appreciation for the fundamental activity of a university, education”
(Duderstadt, 2006, p. 112).

Thelin and Wisemann (1989) argued the director of athletics is similar to the president in
that both leaders are responsible for a complex enterprise that requires them to be adept at public
relations and fundraising, among other skills. They also pondered the implications of a director
of athletics reporting to the president instead of a vice president in charge of an area such as
academic affairs or student affairs, claiming this structure accentuates the divide between
academics and intercollegiate athletics. However, Thelin and Wisemann (1989) noted the risks
that could arise when a president is not aware of the actions of the director of athletics. “Athletics
may be the most visible activity a university offers, and no president wants an athletics director
acting alone” (Thelin & Wisemann, 1989, p. 92). Finally, the scholars did suggest having the
director of athletics serve as a vice president who reports to the president as an approach to better align the intercollegiate athletic program with the university mission. This idea has since come to fruition at many universities, and it was examined by Chandler in his 2011 dissertation.

The purpose of Chandler’s (2011) study was to investigate how the Executive Leadership model of the director of athletics also serving as a vice president was understood by those in the position and what impact the model had on operations of the intercollegiate athletic program. The findings from the qualitative examination were presented as themes/sub-themes, which included the director of athletics “being at the table,” having a new perspective, and being in a position to help connect the intercollegiate athletic program to the university. Generally, Chandler (2011) found that the Executive Leadership model was viewed favorably by directors of athletics and vice presidents. In addition, he noted that to some participants, the vice president title helped justify a direct reporting line to the president. In a related dissertation, Sanders (2004) examined the reporting lines of directors of athletics, finding that the majority of NCAA Division I directors of athletics report to the president, and they were satisfied with this reporting structure. Other scholars moved beyond satisfaction in their research to evaluating authority and effectiveness relative to presidents and directors of athletics.

In 1990, Branch surveyed directors of athletics to determine their perceptions of their own effectiveness, and similar to Hanford (1977), he concluded the director of athletics was ultimately responsible for his or her own program. He found that effective intercollegiate athletic programs had leaders who were predisposed to being more task driven than relationship driven, something he attributed to a win-at-all-costs mentality. In addition, Branch (1990) said directors of athletics often attributed their program’s effectiveness to something other than their own leadership. In a study involving presidents, Seidler et al. (1998) examined the perceptions of
directors of athletics and presidents regarding director of athletics authority, and they found that in four of six areas—goals and philosophy; budget and finance; personnel procedures; and academic standards and integrity—the two leaders had similar views. However, there were differences in the areas of institutional control and recruiting. With regard to institutional control, directors of athletics perceived they had more control than the presidents believed they had relinquished and less authority in recruiting. Another study including both presidents and directors of athletics was Hoffman’s report to the Knight Commission in 2012 related to the tenure of presidents, directors of athletics, and head football coaches.

Hoffman (2012) implied that the sport of football drives the entire intercollegiate athletic program, and as a result, the head football coach and the director of athletics are most salient for investigation. However, she still assigned the president a place of prominence in the study. After evaluating the Intercollegiate Athletics Leadership Database, Hoffman (2012) found that at universities in NCAA Autonomy Five Conferences, the tenure of the director of athletics (8.5 years) was slightly longer than that of the president (8.0) and head football coach (7.1 years). The turnover rate was relatively unchanged for presidents, but more frequent for directors of athletics and head football coaches when considering the establishment of the Bowl Championship Series, the precursor to the College Football Playoff. According to Hoffman (2012), the shortening tenure of these three leaders is likely to impact approaches to long-term oversight of intercollegiate athletic programs.

**Duty of the President in Oversight of Intercollegiate Athletics**

The matter of presidential responsibility for intercollegiate athletics is complex, and scholars and stakeholders have at different times in history presented the president as a figurehead, hands on administrator, and strong-willed combatant as it relates to engagement with
intercollegiate athletics (Davis, 1979; Duderstadt, 2006; Knapp, 1992; Martin, 2013). As such, the duty of this administrator with regard to intercollegiate athletics is worthy of careful consideration, beginning with the overall state of higher education. In addition, this section will also include a discussion of the Knight Commission, considerations by former NCAA President Myles Brand, first-hand presidential commentaries, and empirical research into presidential engagement with intercollegiate athletics.

Presidential Leadership in Contemporary American Higher Education

In “Presidents Leading: The Dynamics and Complexities of Campus Leadership,” Eckel and Kezar (2011) provided an overview of the duty of the president, including evolution of the position, demographic profile of those serving in the position, and the most common pathways to the position. In several instances, the authors listed intercollegiate athletics as something for which the president is responsible. Also, in their commentary, Eckel and Kezar (2011) described multi-faceted presidential obligations that include ceremonial activities such as commencement, ribbon cuttings, and attendance at intercollegiate athletics contests. Writing individually, Kezar (2005) mentioned challenges in higher education that derive from a shift in priorities from serving the public good and preparing individuals to be productive citizens to catering to corporations and career planning for graduates. She examined the impact of such changes on university governance, and regarding presidents she said, “Within this corporatized environment, presidential leadership has also suffered over the years. Presidents spend the majority of their time fundraising and developing entrepreneurial activities; their previous role as intellectual and moral leaders for their communities and for the nation has waned” (Kezar, 2005, p. 27).

Similarly, in the book Portraits in Leadership: Six Extraordinary University Presidents, Padilla (2006) described a five-part university structure that includes governance, external
development, internal support, student affairs, and academics. In evaluating development, he mentioned the amount of time presidents spend on fundraising at intercollegiate athletics events and the issues that arise when intercollegiate athletic program scandals threaten the university, two concerns also echoed by former Louisiana State University Chancellor Michael Martin (2013) and Weaver (2013). Consistent with the work of Toma (2003) and others, Padilla (2006) said that at institutions with a high profile intercollegiate athletic program, its presence is an important part of the campus and local community, but it must be managed with caution.

Scholars and stakeholders seem to agree that presidents pay more attention to matters that impact revenue and visibility than they do to general institutional administration (Bass et al., 2015; Duderstadt, 2006; Kezar, 2005; Padilla, 2006). Therefore, because of the opportunities in those areas presented by intercollegiate athletics, many presidents have focused increasingly on that aspect of the university, which was troubling for Bok (2013), who concluded the university is no longer an appropriate home for intercollegiate athletics since it forces presidents to spend significant amounts of time away from what should be their primary university responsibilities. In contrast, Duderstadt (2006), former University of Georgia President Charles Knapp (1992), and Martin (2013) all said the revenue and visibility of intercollegiate athletics make increased presidential involvement imperative. The Knight Commission (1991) went even further in its observation, arguing the potential damage from intercollegiate athletics to the integrity of all of higher education makes presidential oversight indispensable.

Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics

One goal of the Knight Commission, a group of intercollegiate athletics stakeholders first convened by the Knight Foundation in 1989, was to provide tools and resources to empower presidents to make decisions that might reform intercollegiate athletics. The first outcome of
their work was a report entitled *Keeping Faith with the Student-Athlete: A New Model for Intercollegiate Athletics*, and it included the “one-plus-three” model of governance in which one, the president, was directed toward the three areas of academic integrity, fiscal integrity, and external certification (Knight Commission, 1991). The presidential component spoke to the individual being in charge, and being known to be in charge, as mandated by the governing board. Academic integrity recommendations spoke to student-athlete eligibility and progress toward graduation. The fiscal recommendations challenged the role of external donors and coaches’ compensation packages negotiated outside of the university. Finally, with regard to external review, the Knight Commission (1991) recommended universities adopt a statement of principles that could become the foundation for appropriate operations of the intercollegiate athletic program within the university context.

In 2001, one decade after issuing its initial report, a reconvened Knight Commission delivered a second evaluation of intercollegiate athletics. The report, entitled *A Call to Action: Reconnecting College Sports and Higher Education*, was part status update and part additional recommendations. The tone of the report was decidedly less optimistic than the first, but it was similarly focused on the role of the president and the importance of intercollegiate athletics to all of higher education, both positively and negatively. In its second iteration, the Knight Commission recommended a new “one-plus-three” model in which a coalition of presidents would work toward an agenda of academic reform, de-escalation of the so-called intercollegiate athletics arms race, and reduction in the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics (Knight Commission, 2001). The new model still placed the president in the central leadership position, although as a group instead of individually. In addition, the first two foci carried through from the 1991 Knight Commission report, academic integrity and fiscal integrity. The third focus,
commercialization, was new and presumably was included because commissioners believed the issue had become more salient in higher education. According to the Knight Commission (2001) and others, commercialization is the increased involvement of corporate entities in intercollegiate athletics, such as naming a football stadium after Kroger. It also refers to contracts between the intercollegiate athletic program, or its leaders, and companies like Nike or Gatorade, practices that have become commonplace in intercollegiate athletics on many NCAA levels.

In 2010, 20 years after its landmark report, the Knight Commission provided a third look at the intercollegiate athletics landscape and made new recommendations in *Restoring the Balance: Dollars, Values, and the Future of College Sports*. In this report the commissioners argued universities should not spend more money on student-athletes than on students who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics, and they expressed concerns with inconsistencies in financial data collection. The primary challenges to stakeholders in the third document were to require greater transparency and to better report financial data for intercollegiate athletics. The Knight Commission’s work, including studies conducted by others on specific aspects of the “one-plus-three” model, has been influential and many of its suggestions have been adopted by the NCAA (Association of Governing Boards, 2009; Knight Commission, 2010; R. Smith, 2003). Perhaps it is fitting that many of its recommendations were implemented under the leadership of former NCAA President Myles Brand.

**First University President to Lead the NCAA – Myles Brand**

As the first university president to serve as President of the NCAA, Brand began advocating for increased presidential oversight of intercollegiate athletics when he took office in 2002. (Brand served the NCAA for seven years before passing away in 2009.) In one of his regular presidential commentaries in the *NCAA News*, the NCAA’s monthly newspaper-style
publication, Brand (2005, January) simultaneously thanked and challenged presidents for their reform efforts. He credited their leadership in changing the NCAA’s academic landscape, and he described challenges related to commercialization and alignment with the university mission. Brand (2005, January) expressed concern with the drift toward intercollegiate athletics as entertainment, a sentiment shared by Benford (2007), Duderstadt (2006), Hoffman (2013), and Padilla (2006), among others. Like many of his presidential predecessors, Brand (2005, January) explained that the visibility of intercollegiate athletics can be both positive and negative for a university, and he concluded his commentary with a challenge, “As stewards of their universities – and of intercollegiate athletics as an integrated part of those universities – presidents have the obligation to see the larger picture” (Brand, 2005, January, p. 6).

A year later, Brand (2006) argued intercollegiate athletics is an integral part of a university’s mission and it should be fully integrated into its structure. He said intercollegiate athletics has been undervalued in academia, and the Standard View – intercollegiate athletics as a non-educational, ancillary function that must not be subsidized – should be replaced by the Integrated View – intercollegiate athletics as a part of a university’s mission with close similarities to other areas such as the performing arts. Brand’s commentary in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* led to numerous rebuttals, including Corlett (2013) and R. Feezell (2015).

Corlett (2013) contended that Brand’s distinction between a Standard View and an Integrated View was insufficient given the economic crisis universities faced after the country’s 2008 economic downturn. Accordingly, he presented the Fiscal Responsibility View in which the existence of intercollegiate athletic programs, similar to other campus components such as academic departments; faculty and administrator positions; and capital improvements, should be measured against the need to be fiscally responsible with public funds, which had also been
argued by Duderstadt (2006) and Suggs (2009). Furthermore, if the goal of self-sufficiency, which Brand (2006) said eluded most intercollegiate athletic programs, could not be attained without public funds, Corlett (2013) concluded the program should be discontinued. It is worth noting that Corlett (2013) also said any opportunity for intercollegiate athletic programs to generate revenue to support the university mission was minimal and unsustainable.

On the other hand, but still in contrast to Brand (2006), R. Feezell (2015) supported the Standard View, saying it was a reasonable perspective given the mission of most universities. From his position, the Standard View was a viable lens through which the value of intercollegiate athletics could be evaluated. In a response of sorts to both sides, Breivik (2015) concluded that neither point of view was completely correct. He agreed with Brand (2006) that student-athletes are not entirely dissimilar from student-musicians, but he added that while athletic activity might be important for a student’s development, it is not in the traditional sense a contributor to the educational mission of a university (Breivik, 2015).

Interestingly, as Corlett (2013) and R. Feezell (2015) challenged Brand’s positions, the AGB opened its pointed responsibilities statement with this acknowledgement, “The Board of Directors of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges gratefully acknowledges National Collegiate Athletic Association President Myles Brand for his support of this policy statement. Through his leadership of the NCAA, Myles has championed both the welfare and academic success of student-athletes and the sound management of intercollegiate athletic programs. His practical understanding of the value of governing boards and institution presidents working together to lead and oversee intercollegiate athletics is central to the AGB statement and to our mutual commitment to student-athletes. Myles’ unwavering dedication has served to strengthen all of higher education” (Association of Governing Boards, 2009).
Presidential Perspectives on Intercollegiate Athletics

Commentaries on administration of intercollegiate athletic programs are littered with pieces by university presidents. Brand (2006), former University of New Mexico President William Davis (1979), Knapp (1992), Martin (2013), and former Indiana State University President John Moore (1992) all published journal articles explaining their views on the importance of presidential oversight of intercollegiate athletics. While some presidents argued intercollegiate athletics no longer has a place on the university campus, others extolled its benefits. Bok (2013) explained that today’s American university has many goals, including economic development, which on many campuses includes intercollegiate athletics. Duderstadt (2006) described societal challenges that are expressed in the context of intercollegiate athletics, the same argument made by Beyer and Hannah (2000). He assigned ultimate authority for integrity in the intercollegiate athletic program to the president, but he also said it is important for the president and director of athletics to have a relationship built on trust and consistency in expectations. In the final chapters of his book, Duderstadt (2006) presented a laundry list of reform proposals for intercollegiate athletics, all of which focused on integrating intercollegiate athletics into the university context. Several proposals were reminiscent of the Knight Commission’s work, as well as commentaries by individual scholars such as Bok (2013) and Odenkirk (1981). Specifically with regard to fiscal management, Duderstadt (2006) argued the intercollegiate athletic program should face the same expectations for fiscal management and cost containment as the university.

While acknowledging these and other concerns, most presidents agreed intercollegiate athletics is not likely to be separated from the university, and the revenue and visibility it affords the institution are invaluable. Consequently, presidential responsibility for oversight of
intercollegiate athletics is increasingly important. Davis (1979) said the president must oversee intercollegiate athletics, not be its director of athletics, but be the person in charge to whom the director of athletics reports. He acknowledged increasing revenue and visibility make this difficult, and decades later, presidents such as Duderstadt (2006), Knapp (1992), Martin (2013), and Moore (1992) made similar assertions. Davis (1979) acknowledged that presidents might be terminated if they are disconnected from the intercollegiate athletic program, and he suggested the presidential hiring process include discussions of intercollegiate athletics. In a more recent commentary, Moore (1992) agreed governing boards should clarify the president’s responsibility for intercollegiate athletics before naming someone to the position.

In response to the initial Knight Commission report issued in 1991, several presidents offered their perspectives on the state of intercollegiate athletics, two of which were published in the same issue of *New Directions for Institutional Research*. Moore (1992) agreed the Knight Commission’s “one-plus-three” model was a viable framework to help presidents increase accountability for intercollegiate athletics. He did state, however, that responsibility for intercollegiate athletics does not rest solely with the president, but instead involves everyone at a university. In the same journal issue, Knapp (1992) said there are challenges at all levels of intercollegiate athletics, but the attention is magnified at the NCAA’s highest level. Furthermore, he contended intercollegiate athletics is subject to increased scrutiny in three specific areas—student-athlete recruitment and admission; academic performance; and conduct of coaches and student-athletes. As such, Knapp (1992) said the president must ensure the individuals responsible for those aspects of the university work toward common goals, and he concluded by saying it is the president’s responsibility to establish the expectation that the university and the intercollegiate athletic program will operate cohesively.
In a recent article, Martin (2013) reflected on the blessings and curses of intercollegiate athletics, or more specifically of high profile football teams. His blessings included opportunities to increase diversity; increased visibility; and the created sense of community. His curses related to impacts on other areas of the university; “the tail wagging the dog;” and interestingly, increased visibility. To combat the curses, Martin (2013) suggested greater involvement by organizations like ACE and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), and including intercollegiate athletics in a university’s external accreditation process, an approach espoused earlier by Hanford (1977) and the Knight Commission (1991).

**Empirical Research into Presidential Engagement with Intercollegiate Athletics**

To complement the commentaries by presidents themselves, there are surprisingly few research studies that directly contribute to this investigation into chief executive officer oversight of intercollegiate athletics. In a wide-ranging examination, R. Smith (2003) said presidents had to be more attentive to intercollegiate athletics to preserve the academic and fiscal integrity of the enterprise, which began in earnest with the establishment of the NCAA Presidents Commission in 1984. (The Presidents Commission was rendered moot approximately ten years later when presidents were incorporated into the NCAA governance structure.) However, he concluded that other than the NCAA principle of institutional control, which is how the NCAA describes management of an intercollegiate athletic program by university administrators at various levels, including the chief executive officer, presidential involvement on campus has not kept pace with national engagement (R. Smith, 2003). Focusing on a specific intercollegiate athletics issue, Covell and Barr (2001) examined presidential involvement in debates about NCAA initial eligibility for competition standards for student-athletes. Generally, they argued that there were other issues presidents could have taken ownership of in the 1980s and 1990s, but
student-athlete eligibility rose to the forefront because many viewed it as “academic,” and something presidents could address as experts. Other matters, such as agents and donors, were viewed as “sports” issues that required an intercollegiate athletics-oriented leader. Davis (1979) and Weaver (2013) made similar claims when they said presidents sometimes struggle to manage issues that fall outside of their typical, academic training, like the influence of celebrity coaches.

In light of the Penn State University child abuse tragedy that tarnished the reputation of longtime, celebrity head football coach Joe Paterno and led to criminal charges being filed against the university’s president and director of athletics, Hoffman (2013) sought to uncover the difficulties of presidential leadership at universities with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs. She relied on Knight Commission reports and surveys conducted by ACE and Inside Higher Education that described presidents’ perspectives on oversight of intercollegiate athletics. Hoffman (2013) argued the entertainment and market-driven context to win-at-all-costs constrained decision-making, and in higher education, presidents “navigate ambiguity in four distinct areas – ambiguity of purpose, power, the experience, and success,” each of which is exacerbated in NCAA Autonomy Five environments (p. 12). Specifically, Hoffman (2013) contended the purpose of intercollegiate athletics is unclear – to educate or to win – and as a result success is difficult to define. She added that unlike other industries such as business or the military, the president’s power may be called into question by celebrity coaches, governing boards, and alumni, an observation also made by Duderstadt (2006) and Padilla (2006).

Challenging the assumption that presidential involvement in intercollegiate athletics has increased, Turner (2015) argued presidential authority has waned. Also relying on reports from the Knight Commission and an Inside Higher Education survey, he contended presidents are compromised by a conflict of interest between their personal and professional duties related to
intercollegiate athletics. He attributed the conflicts of interest primarily to finances, explaining some head coaches earn more than the president and fundraising has become a central component of the president’s job. For Turner (2015), these and other financially-related factors changed the framework of intercollegiate athletics and thus its relationship to the president. He surmised then that scholars should pay less attention to identifying conflicts of interest, which are inevitable, and more attention to how presidents make decisions in light of the conflicts.

Similarly, T. Feezell (2015) challenged the notion that presidents have increased authority over intercollegiate athletics. He argued instead that decisions are being crafted by intercollegiate athletics administrators and passed through the presidents, which if accurate calls into question the true nature of a president’s oversight of the intercollegiate athletic program.

**Building Organizational Capacity Framework and Intercollegiate Athletics**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Creswell (2014), the theoretical framework in many scholarly investigations is the underlying structure of a study. It draws upon concepts, terms, and theories that emerge from the relevant literature, and it thereby guides all aspects of a study, including its research design, sample selection, purpose statement, etc. By contrast, in a grounded theory design, the theoretical framework is more accurately described as a set of applicable principles or ideas that do not restrict the investigation. Instead, the framework simply but importantly provides a lens through which the study findings might be considered. I was introduced to Toma’s (2010a) Building Organizational Capacity (BOC) Framework following development of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, and I observed that many facets of the BOC Framework aligned with the grounded theory that had emerged from this study. The remainder of this chapter briefly describes the BOC Framework, and its alignment with the Leveraging College Athletics theory is presented in the final chapter of this dissertation.
In *Strategic Management in Higher Education: Building Organizational Capacity*, Toma (2010a) presented a web of eight elements that taken together enable higher education administrators to assess the ability of their organizations to meet stated and/or implied goals – the BOC Framework. The elements all relate to one another and may be connected with strong links or somewhat disjointed due to weak links. According to Toma (2010a), the most successful management initiatives will have strong connections between each element before the initiative is implemented. As such, the BOC Framework is arguably most useful as an evaluation tool to determine the position an organization occupies before implementing a new initiative or preparing for organizational change. Stated differently, one might ask, “Does the organization have the capacity to implement the new initiative such that it will be successful, and if not, where are weaknesses that should be strengthened prior to implementation?” The BOC Framework could also be used by administrators as an on-going checklist of sorts for decision-making and strategic planning. The eight interconnected elements in the BOC Framework are purposes, structure, governance, policies, processes, information, infrastructure, and culture.

The purposes element describes the reason or reasons an organization exists and what the organization hopes to accomplish. Toma (2010a) argued that without purposes, an organization’s ability to meet its aspirations is greatly diminished. He went on to say the purposes element is broader than the mission and/or vision statements that are often written but rarely lived by organizations. Furthermore, Toma (2010a) added that in order to be engrained within the organization, purposes must resonate with a range of stakeholders, including internal groups such as faculty and staff and external groups such as alumni and the public. Structure is the way an organization is configured to do its work, and it is easily understood as the lines and boxes on an organizational chart. However, Toma (2010a) argued that in addition to the vertical hierarchical
structures, there are often horizontal structures within organizations that may be less formal but still widely understood and respected by those within the organization, regardless of the official organizational chart.

Governance explains who makes decisions within the organization, from the uppermost positions to those further down the organizational chart. This element is perhaps more complicated in higher education than in other industries since the tradition of shared governance establishes authority in non-hierarchical ways. Ultimately, however, Toma (2010a) identified possible decision-makers at many levels beyond the governing board and senior administrators.

Policies are the formal and informal rules within an organization. They may be written and codified or simply understood by stakeholders, and in those circumstances, those policies may also be described as practices. As Toma (2010a) explained, it is not unusual for written policies to conflict with unwritten or informal policies.

Processes are an outgrowth of policies in the BOC Framework. They may be written or unwritten and formal or informal, and they connote the action and activities that takes place within an organization. Toma (2010a) described processes as the bridge between policies and outcomes, meaning if a relevant and appropriate policy is not acted upon, the desired outcome is not likely be achieved. Information includes any fact or figure that is gathered and disseminated to inform or support decision-making. Although not directly stated by Toma (2010a), it is likely that in addition to identifying the actual information that is needed to help make decisions, it is also important to identify who should receive the information, how, and when. (As an aside, communication is not an element within the BOC Framework, but it is an important component relative to dissemination of information.)
Toma (2010a) described infrastructure as the resources within an organization that are available to achieve a goal. These include human, financial, technological, and physical assets. For example, an organization might wish to implement an online learning community, but it might lack the technology to support the unique needs of that endeavor, or the personnel with the applicable expertise. Lastly, culture, which Toma (2010a) said often aligns with purposes, contemplates the character of the organization, and there will likely be multiple cultures within an organization and those cultures will evolve over time. According to Toma (2010a), the organizational culture is displayed in its customs and language, and it has forms that are observed in symbols and narratives that reinforce meanings.

Especially relevant in this study is the fact that intercollegiate athletic programs often represent pervasive subcultures within universities. These enterprises, which also have their own purposes, structure, governance, policies, processes, information, and infrastructure, are led by directors of athletics who are expected to marry the subculture of the intercollegiate athletic program with the overarching culture of the institution, to the satisfaction of the president.

**Conclusion**

The value of intercollegiate athletics competition is not often challenged in scholarly or non-scholarly discussions. There is agreement that it has the ability to positively impact a university, but the potential negative consequences fuel debates about its role within a university. Scholars and stakeholders either contend intercollegiate athletics is an imperfect contributor to the university mission that should be supported or they argue it is a corrupt enterprise that should be removed. Some have even argued that intercollegiate athletics is a non-educational form of entertainment that need not be subsidized by universities. Accordingly, the commentaries and empirical investigations revealed concerns and mixed research findings.
When examining presidents’ perspectives on intercollegiate athletics, the literature provided remarkably similar responses, regardless of decade, university size, or program level. Generally, scholars and stakeholders had the following insights – intercollegiate athletics is not likely to be divorced from American higher education, making reform necessary, and presidents must be adept at managing intercollegiate athletics within the university context, given its tendency to overshadow other institutional activities. However, managing intercollegiate athletics has been complicated by the increased involvement of external bodies like conference offices, corporations, and television networks. These entities are largely independent of the university organizational structure, but they have caused internal stakeholders to question the institution’s decision-making processes.

As such, it would appear that administrators have decided not only to support intercollegiate athletics, but to devise mechanisms to manage it so that the program bolsters the university, specifically with its organizational structures, which might help mitigate scandals within the program; fiscal operations, which often provide valuable revenue streams; and visibility efforts, which could enable the university to attract “the best and brightest” students and faculty. Therefore, as the interest in and scrutiny of intercollegiate athletics increases, the debate about its influence on the university is heightened, particularly as it relates to presidential responsibility for campus-wide adherence to the university mission.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

Athletics gets more publicity than most parts of the university although we’re smaller. The program doesn’t compare in terms of complexities to the university and academics in general. Honestly, I don’t know how presidents sleep at night.

— Greg McGarity, Director of Athletics, University of Georgia

Despite the inherent relationship between universities and their intercollegiate athletic programs, including being led by the same president, the two entities have at times appeared to operate independently of one another, particularly at the NCAA’s highest level. This situation, whether intentional or unintentional, has damaged some university reputations and caused some presidents to resign or to be fired (Duderstadt, 2006; Thelin, 1996). For example, the president of the University of Missouri System and the chancellor of the University of Missouri in Columbia campus both resigned on the same day, within hours of each other. The resignations, along with those of several members of the system’s board of curators, were driven in part by the financial implications surrounding a threatened boycott by the football team (Kelderman, 2015). Two years later, administrators at Missouri were still grappling with steep declines in enrollment that many associate with the highly publicized football-related incident (Brown, 2017). The situation there reiterated to some scholars and stakeholders that the influence of high profile intercollegiate athletics has become so significant that actions by student-athletes have the ability to alter the course of an entire institution and to call into question its administrators’ commitment to the teaching, research, and service mission (Bass et al., 2015; Knight Commission, 1991).
The highest level of intercollegiate athletic competition involves members of NCAA Autonomy Five (or NCAA Power Five) Conferences, and it includes universities in the ACC, Big 12, Big Ten, Pac-12, and SEC. These conferences govern themselves within the NCAA structure because of the scope of their intercollegiate athletic programs, namely their ability to generate revenue and their high profiles. For better or for worse, the universities within these conferences have become the model for how successful intercollegiate athletic programs operate (Bass et al., 2015; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Toma, 2003). In addition to their intercollegiate athletic program similarities, many NCAA Autonomy Five universities are also members of the AAU, and criticisms of these intercollegiate athletic programs are noteworthy because they frequently represent influential research institutions with considerable academic reputations. Furthermore, concerns expressed by scholars and stakeholders about the use of public funds at public universities for entertainment and partnerships with corporations have merit since the majority of NCAA Autonomy Five universities are also public institutions (Bass et al., 2015; Brand, 2006, April). Finally, NCAA Autonomy Five universities are more likely to receive media attention for an intercollegiate athletic program scandal, or success, than for a research breakthrough or faculty accomplishments (Duderstadt, 2006; Knapp, 1992; Toma, 2003).

Given these realities and the related impact on all of higher education, it is important to explain how presidents, along with their provosts and directors of athletics, position universities to leverage their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs in order to support the university mission, which was the aim of this investigation. Undergirding it was an understanding that presidents must initially determine the most appropriate ways to leverage these unique enterprises within the university, and following are the research questions that guided this study:
1) *How do presidents communicate the value of high profile intercollegiate athletic programs to the university community?*

2) *How do presidents establish organizational structures relative to oversight of high profile intercollegiate athletic programs?*

3) *How do presidents and senior administrators orchestrate the use of revenue, visibility, and/or other opportunities afforded by high profile intercollegiate athletic programs?*

**Grounded Theory Qualitative Research Design**

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the goal of qualitative research is to gain deep insights into how participants understand and make sense of the world and of their experiences in that world. As such, qualitative research is often conducted from a social constructivist worldview where the researcher seeks to understand how participants have constructed reality based on their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, in qualitative research the researcher is the data collection instrument during an inductive process in which themes, concepts, and/or theories are derived from researcher interpretations of data. For this study, I used a grounded theory qualitative research design from the social constructivist worldview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2014). It was my contention that this approach would provide the greatest opportunity to glean first-hand perspectives from senior administrators, namely presidents, provosts, and directors of athletics, who would share in their own words the experiences that influence how they understand and lead intercollegiate athletic programs. A substantive theory about leveraging the opportunities afforded universities by their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs did emerge from those perspectives. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) said a substantive theory is specific and practically useful, and this type of empirically-based theory was previously nonexistent in explaining
oversight of high profile intercollegiate athletic programs. As a result, I expect this theory derived from senior administrators who oversee these unique programs will be a useful tool for a variety of internal and external stakeholders.

I conducted this grounded theory study in two phases. The first phase was an analysis of documents from 18 public research universities in NCAA Autonomy Five Conferences, an evaluation that provided a valuable context for framing this investigation within the highest realm of intercollegiate athletics. In addition, insights from the document analysis helped me identify four of those universities for deeper exploration, which occurred via interviews with 16 administrators, such as presidents, provosts, and directors of athletics, from those institutions. This two-phase design allowed for broad document analysis that shaped a more intentional consideration of universities that, under the presidents’ guidance, appear to have positioned themselves to leverage the opportunities afforded by their intercollegiate athletic programs.

**Purposefully Sampling Documents and Participants**

Consistent with qualitative research design, I used purposeful sampling to identify research subjects, both documents and participants. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), purposeful sampling allows the researcher to gather data from documents that are most salient to the study, and from participants who are most familiar with the subject matter. This technique is preferred in qualitative research because the sample represents expertise, as defined by the researcher, rather than generalities (Creswell, 2014).

Although this study was only concerned with NCAA Autonomy Five universities, and not all of intercollegiate athletics or even other NCAA levels, it was virtually impossible to analyze documents and conduct interviews with administrators from all 65 applicable universities in the allotted timeframe. Therefore, I focused on universities from NCAA
Autonomy Five Conferences in the southeast region, which include the ACC, Big 12, and SEC. I selected the southeast region because those universities have some of the largest revenue-generating intercollegiate athletic programs and receive some of the largest revenue distributions from their conference offices (Fulks, 2015; Hobson & Rich, 2015; C. Smith, 2016). They are subject to the majority of media and stakeholder scrutiny, but because of the success of their teams and their conference affiliations, the intercollegiate athletic programs need only minimal subsidies from their universities to operate. Consequently, these institutions have the most at stake with regard to aligning intercollegiate athletics with the university mission (Bass et al., 2015; Duderstadt, 2006; Knapp, 1992; Knight Commission, 1991; Moore, 1992; Toma, 2003).

As previously described, this study was conducted in two phases, and each phase involved purposeful sampling. The first purposeful sample was of documents from 18 public research universities in the southeast region. The selected institutions included all 13 public universities in the SEC (the NCAA Autonomy Five Conference with the largest reported revenue distribution and the most intercollegiate athletic programs believed to be self-sufficient) and five universities located in states with SEC institutions (see Appendix A for the list of universities included in the document analysis). Specifically, Texas A&M University is a member of the SEC and both the University of Texas and Texas Tech University are members of the Big 12. The University of Florida is a member of the SEC while Florida State University is a member of the ACC. The Georgia Institute of Technology is an ACC university, but the University of Georgia is a member of the SEC. Finally, the University of South Carolina is a member of the SEC while Clemson University is an ACC institution. I selected these five non-SEC universities because their proximity to SEC institutions often leads to comparisons.
I used information gathered from the document analysis phase to aid in the purposeful selection of four of those universities for additional exploration via interviews with senior administrators serving those institutions (see Appendix B for the list of study participants). I selected the four universities after uncovering intentional efforts by the intercollegiate athletic program to support the institution, such as endowing professorships and funding bond debt for capital improvements. I also found examples of how these universities interact with the intercollegiate athletic program, such as including the director of athletics on the cabinet/executive committee, committing revenue generated from intercollegiate athletics to academic enhancement, and using the intercollegiate athletic program logo brand for academic units. With regard to administrators from these universities, I interviewed the president because of his responsibility for leadership of the entire university. Then, I interviewed several provosts and directors of athletics because of their professional proximity to the president and their responsibilities for oversight of academics and intercollegiate athletics, respectively. Other study participants were faculty athletics representatives and university public relations administrators. Combined, I interviewed 16 administrators, four from each university.

The essence of this investigation was perspectives from presidents and those who work closely with presidents on the use of intercollegiate athletics in support of the university mission. As such, the only criterion for the purposeful interview selection was that the participant be a current or former senior university administrator. Participants were given the opportunity to remain anonymous, and only one individual asked not to be identified. To accommodate this request, I did not directly quote this individual.
Data Collection from Documents and Participants

In the first phase of this study, I collected and analyzed data from a range of public documents from several southeastern public research universities. I purposefully selected the categories of documents based on their relevance to the study research questions, and those categories are presented below in Table 3.1. Documents applicable to understanding presidential oversight of intercollegiate athletics included position descriptions and announcements, to determine if intercollegiate athletics was listed as a responsibility area; the president’s recent state of the university address, to determine if intercollegiate athletics was mentioned; and the Twitter social media platform, to determine how often presidents shared in social media matters related to intercollegiate athletics. (I limited my social media analysis to Twitter because of the popularity of the platform and the ease with which the user is able to share [i.e., retweet] messages originating from another source.)

Documents applicable to understanding the value of the intercollegiate athletic program to the university included websites, to identify the placement of links directing users to the intercollegiate athletic program; and institutional mission statements and strategic plans, to determine if intercollegiate athletics was included. Documents applicable to understanding organizational structures relative to the intercollegiate athletic program included websites, to determine how intercollegiate athletic program leadership was described, including if there was a separate local governing body (e.g., athletic association); and organizational charts, to determine reporting expectations and titles for provosts and directors of athletics, and to learn if the director of athletics was a member of the cabinet/executive committee.

Documents applicable to the use of intercollegiate athletic program revenue included annual reports, to determine if intercollegiate athletics revenue was allocated to academic areas;
press releases announcing the use of intercollegiate athletics revenue for academic purposes and conference office revenue distributions to member universities; and websites, to identify corporate donors to the university and/or the intercollegiate athletic program. Finally, documents applicable to the use of intercollegiate athletic program visibility included university brand style guidelines, to understand university expectations relative to the intercollegiate athletic program logo; television public service announcements, to identify how intercollegiate athletics was incorporated; and online front pages of local and regional newspapers, to determine if intercollegiate athletics was presented as general news. Some documents yielded useful data for more than one area under investigation, such as websites.

Table 3.1. Categories of Documents Reviewed During Document Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presidential Oversight</th>
<th>Value of the Athletic Program</th>
<th>Organizational Structures</th>
<th>Revenue Opportunities</th>
<th>Visibility Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position Descriptions</td>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Annual Reports</td>
<td>Brand Style Guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Official Addresses</td>
<td>Mission Statements</td>
<td>Organizational Charts</td>
<td>Press Releases</td>
<td>Public Service Announcements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter Social Media</td>
<td>Strategic Plans</td>
<td>Cabinet / Executive Committee</td>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Newspaper Websites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Websites refer to the main university website and the intercollegiate athletics website.

In the second phase of this study, I selected four universities for deeper exploration, based in part on the discovery that the universities had publically described how the intercollegiate athletic program supports the institution. These universities were the University of Alabama, the University of Arkansas, the University of Georgia, and University of Kentucky. Among these institutions I found support for academic buildings, endowed professorships, contributions to presidential initiatives, etc. Accordingly, I interviewed several senior
administrators from each university. One of the most popular data gathering techniques in qualitative research is the research interview. Unlike interviews conducted for mainstream media publications, a research interview is a structured discussion with a specific purpose where the researcher is seeking specific information from the participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Research interviews range from highly structured, which is best understood as a sort of verbal survey, to unstructured, which is characterized by the researcher in essence having a conversation with the participant.

For this study, I gathered data from semistructured interviews using an interview protocol guide, which evolved as data were collected (see Appendix C for the interview protocol guide). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the semistructured protocol features both structured and unstructured questions that allow for interview flexibility. The guide is meant to ensure areas applicable to the study are explored, but there is no fixed wording or order to the questions. In this study, the questions were relatively open-ended so participants might provide in-depth feedback that could not otherwise be extracted from a highly structured design. I asked follow-up and clarifying questions where needed and appropriate, and I conducted in-person interviews that I digitally recorded. I interviewed most participants in their on-campus offices, but some took place in a hotel conference room. The interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes each, and I conducted between one and three interviews each day.

**Constant Comparative Data Analysis for Grounded Theory Development**

Creswell (2014) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) said in the constant comparative method of data analysis for grounded theory design, researchers use an inductive to deductive approach to compare pieces of data to formulate categories or codes, which are then compared to each other in a repetitive process until themes are identified. Those themes are eventually formed into
a theory that is grounded in the research. They went on to describe the integrated nature of data collection and analysis where the two processes happen simultaneously. In accordance with these methods, I analyzed document and interview data while I collected them, comparing interview findings to those observed in the documents and vice versa, until codes become apparent, and a grounded theory emerged. Approximately 30 codes emerged from the interview data, and I was able to group nearly all codes into one or more of the five tenets that comprise the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics (see Appendix D for the data analysis code sheet).

As described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), data analysis and collection occurred as follows with regard to documents. First, using an open coding technique, I highlighted and noted non-electronic documents (e.g., speeches, organizational charts, job descriptions, etc). Next, I drafted analytic memos for each document category to record initial observations and thoughts on emerging findings. I modified this coding technique for electronic documents (e.g., websites, Twitter accounts, logos, etc.), but I still included my initial findings in the analytic memos.

For interview data, I drafted a brief memo of my initial thoughts and observations as soon after each interview as possible, including noting several one or two-word highlights from the conversation. I also reviewed my handwritten notes following each interview and highlighted important words and phrases for later analysis. I used a service to transcribe the interviews, and I open coded and analyzed the transcriptions as soon as possible. Next, I updated the initial analytic memo for each transcript to record additional observations and findings. Throughout the interview phase, I used axial coding to identify codes within the three primary administrator groups and among the administrators. For example, I noted if presidents had similar perspectives to each other and if they had similar perspectives to provosts and/or directors of athletics.
The dataset for this study included a variety of hard copy and electronic files that were applicable to the 18 universities in the document sample as well as interview transcripts from 16 administrators from four of those purposely selected institutions. To organize the data for analysis, I devised a system using Microsoft Office Suite software, specifically Word and Excel.

**Building Trustworthiness with Triangulation**

One of the main challenges qualitative researchers face is skepticism about the trustworthiness of their results. Scholars and reviewers sometimes find it difficult to accept that a study is valid and/or reliable given its lack of numeric data and formulaic design. In order to address this challenge, I included triangulation in the research design by analyzing different types of data and data from different sources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Primarily, I compared participant interviews to documents. However, I also interviewed presidents, who were the central focus of the study, and compared their feedback to feedback I received from provosts, directors of athletics, and other senior administrators. Furthermore, I also conducted member checks by seeking input from one participant from each area included in the study. I provided an early draft of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics to one president, provost, and director of athletics, along with one public relations administrator and faculty athletics representative. Finally, to aid in promoting validity and reliability, I maintained an audit trail that provided a detailed, written account of procedures and key decision points throughout the study.

Despite these measures and like all research, this investigation was not without limitations. First, the study was based in significant part on interviews with administrators at several large public research universities, and these participants might not have in all circumstances fully focused on the interview for the duration of the conversation. Furthermore, they are used to being interviewed and are therefore adept at providing surface-level responses to
controversial or challenging questions. Also, as with any interview, there is a risk associated with truthfulness of and transparency in the information provided by the participants, although some of this limitation was mitigated by the document analysis. In addition, I conducted this study in the spring and summer months, when both the football and basketball seasons had concluded, with the exception of a few basketball teams advancing to the NCAA Final Four. If I had conducted the study during the fall and winter months, the influence of intercollegiate athletics might have been more pronounced.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), generalizability in qualitative research is likewise difficult to assure since the method is not usually intended to apply to the broadest population, but rather to obtain an in-depth understanding of the sample under investigation. Although this principle was applicable to this grounded theory study, some measure of generalization is anticipated since the purposeful sample included NCAA Autonomy Five universities, and the findings could conceivably be applied to other NCAA Autonomy Five universities. It is not appropriate, however, to generalize the findings to other NCAA levels.

**Acknowledging Researcher Bias**

At the time of this investigation I was executive director of SECU, the Academic Initiative of the SEC, and I was fascinated by what appeared to be shifts in how presidents provided oversight to high profile intercollegiate athletic programs. I reported regularly to SEC presidents and SEC provosts on SECU activities, which were designed to promote the academic achievements of SEC universities while supporting the teaching, research, and service mission. My involvement with directors of athletics was minimal, but I had loose associations with some individuals in those roles. My pre-existing relationships with these administrators were both positive and negative for this study. The connections I had with participants made gaining access
less difficult, but those same connections at times led to a more casual interview in which participants viewed me as a colleague rather than a researcher. Although not ideal, the more casual interview possibly created an environment in which participants were more comfortable than usual discussing their perspectives on intercollegiate athletics. Ultimately, I am confident that my familiarity with the environment, I had worked in intercollegiate athletics for more than 15 years, and the participants enhanced rather than detracted from the research.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this empirical investigation was to devise a substantive theory that explains how presidents, along with provosts and directors of athletics, position universities to leverage high profile intercollegiate athletics in order to support the university mission. This is an important topic for examination since academia and intercollegiate athletics are not likely to be divorced within the context of American higher education, and the latter often overshadows the former. By relying on the perspectives of those charged with oversight of these unique enterprises, the emergent theory is fully grounded in data gathered from the individuals whose decisions ultimately shape the entire university community.
We’re fortunate here at Alabama that we have the resources to be able to do things that I wasn’t able to do at other universities because there just weren’t enough resources. Most universities are struggling to survive, and fortunately that’s not our problem. We’re trying to build a sustainable model because we’re growing so fast. It’s more of how do we keep up and how do we sustain what we’ve got at the highest level, and it’s a problem a lot of people would like to have. That’s a great problem.

– Linda Bonnin, Vice President for Strategic Communications, University of Alabama

Universities are complex organizations with hundreds if not thousands of components. It is virtually impossible to completely grasp the inner workings of these complicated enterprises, and although the aim of this study was not to delve into those inner workings, it was important to broadly examine academics and athletics in this context in order to uncover how the university and the intercollegiate athletic program coexist within the higher education environment. To understand the interdependent relationship between these two entities, it was necessary to consider an array of information, and accordingly I built this study on two data collection phases, the first of which focused on documents from 18 public research universities in the southeast region of the United States, and the second focused on interviews with several senior administrators from four of those universities. Ultimately, I formulated the findings from the documents and interviews into the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics. As such, the first section of this chapter outlines insights derived from the document analysis in five areas that were vital to contextually framing this study. And these insights are a general overview of the key similarities and differences between the 18 universities, rather than an in-depth report on
specific elements from each institution. The second section of this chapter considers the four universities included in the interview phase of the investigation, and similarly it offers a broad contextual summary of the facts and figures that situate these universities and their intercollegiate athletic programs within higher education.

**Broad Overview of Universities Included in Document Analysis Phase**

The document analysis included all 13 public universities in the SEC and five universities located in states with SEC institutions since their proximity often leads to comparisons. I selected the categories of documents to evaluate based on their relevance to this study, and those documents included, but were not limited to presidential state of the university addresses; university and intercollegiate athletic program websites and mission statements; institutional organizational charts; university press releases and media articles; university brand style guidelines; and television public service announcements. The document analysis revealed that the institutions appeared to have similarly positioned themselves to leverage their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs, and the remainder of this section highlights those findings relative to presidential oversight, the value of the intercollegiate athletic program, organizational structures, revenue, and visibility.

**Presidential Oversight of Intercollegiate Athletics**

I considered presidential oversight of the intercollegiate athletic program primarily through position descriptions, public addresses, and Twitter social media activity. The NCAA has established that presidents are the final authority on all matters related to the intercollegiate athletic program (NCAA, 2016), and although it was difficult to locate position descriptions or job announcements for these administrators, the documents I did find usually included intercollegiate athletics as an area for which the president is responsible. In accordance with their
formal obligations, presidents traditionally deliver regular, official addresses to the university and extended campus community. Although it was not unusual for a president to mention intercollegiate athletics in a state of the university speech or other similar remarks, the mentions were most often about the academic and athletic success of student-athletes. It was unusual for a president to speak of the intercollegiate athletic program as a whole or as a contributor to the university. In one unusual instance, however, the University of Texas at Austin president said in his remarks he was ready for Longhorn football. In another, the Texas A&M University state of the university address began with a video vignette of a student-athlete who later introduced the president, but other than thanking the young man, the president did not otherwise mention intercollegiate athletics in the address.

Important to presidential oversight today is social media, and most presidents were active on the Twitter platform. They tended to post congratulatory tweets to the intercollegiate athletic program and shared messages from the main intercollegiate athletic program or individual team accounts. Some presidents restricted their Twitter activity about intercollegiate athletics to academic achievement, such as a student-athlete receiving an academic award. In one unusual instance, however, the University of Florida president served as the Twitter correspondent for an intercollegiate athletics women’s gymnastics meet.

Value of Intercollegiate Athletics

I considered the value of the intercollegiate athletic program to the university primarily through its treatment on the university’s main website and in the university mission statement and strategic plan. Without exception, universities did not include intercollegiate athletics in their mission statements. These statements instead centered on the traditional areas of teaching, research, and service. I did anticipate this omission since several scholars and stakeholders had
questioned how intercollegiate athletics could be nonexistent in university missions but central to its operations. Most university strategic plans also omitted intercollegiate athletics. The few institutions that did mention the program focused on one of two ideas – intercollegiate athletics as a way to increase visibility and revenue or as a way to provide the “ideal collegiate experience” for any student. Interestingly, if someone were to review only the mission statements and strategic plans for most of these universities, the person would have little to no knowledge of the existence, let alone value, of the intercollegiate athletic program to the institution. The same was not true of the main university websites, however.

Although most university websites prominently gave users access to the intercollegiate athletic program, they were not overt in their imagery or language. Instead, the mentions and visuals were subtle and often confined to areas such as traditions or general university information. There were some main home page feature stories about intercollegiate athletics, but in a large measure those were driven by timing and the nature of the story. For example, during this study the University of South Carolina and Mississippi State University (Starkville) competed in the NCAA Women’s Basketball Final Four, and both university websites had several stories dedicated to the teams’ successes. Interestingly, it was not uncommon for intercollegiate athletic contests to be included on the main university calendar or for a university write-up to mention a history of intercollegiate athletic program success. Regarding the intercollegiate athletic program websites, about half of the websites linked back to the university from an upper banner location on the main menu while the other half of the websites relied on an icon-style link at the bottom of the page.

Organizational Structures of Intercollegiate Athletics

I considered organizational structures within the intercollegiate athletic program primarily through organizational charts, reporting lines, and committees. I noted that most
structures were longstanding, with the exception of the increasingly common phenomenon of directors of athletics also being named vice presidents, and one example of a university recently dissolving its athletic association in favor of an athletics committee. Organizational matters revealed the most commonalties across all universities. First, at every institution the director of athletics reports to the president. Based on the pervasiveness of the programs and the earlier review of literature, this was an expected finding. However, in a surprising discovery, not all directors of athletics appear to be members of the university cabinet/executive committee. In most instances, it was easy to discern the director of athletics’ participation in this group based on the “Administration” page of the university website or the organizational chart. However, regardless of reporting lines and cabinet/executive committee membership, only a few directors of athletics also serve as university vice presidents.

A second commonality across most universities was the presence of an intercollegiate athletics committee or council. These governing entities are not an NCAA mandate, but are common, and the ways in which the groups are structured and their degree of influence varied. Some committees/councils are closely aligned with the faculty senate and others are associated with the university governing board. The president is permitted to appoint representatives in some cases, but not all, and the director of athletics is not always a member, even in an ex officio capacity. Regardless of structure, these committees/councils are technically all advisory.

**Revenue of Intercollegiate Athletics**

I initially considered revenue from the intercollegiate athletic program through annual university financial reports, but I later expanded my review to include media articles and press releases. The purpose of this investigation was not to uncover the financial implications of high profile intercollegiate athletics, an area already receiving a significant amount of research and
attention. Furthermore, the aim was not to examine how much money intercollegiate athletic programs transfer back to their universities, another area of frequent investigation. Instead, the focus was on specific and tangible ways the intercollegiate athletic program supports the university, likely the result of behind-the-scenes collaboration among university administrators. I discovered this type of information is not often included in a university’s annual financial report. Instead, I found that searches for press releases and media articles were more likely to yield this kind of data, such as support for faculty positions and scholarships for students who are not student-athletes. Interestingly, the chancellor at the University of Arkansas mentioned the importance of the intercollegiate athletic program’s self sufficiency in the cover letter to the university financial report, but this was highly unusual. The institutional financial reports did typically include intercollegiate athletics as a self-sufficient auxiliary function, representing the lion’s share of revenue and expenses in that category. Lastly, there were some instances in which information specific to financial operations of the intercollegiate athletic program was excluded from the university report and instructions were given on how a person might otherwise access it.

Visibility of Intercollegiate Athletics

I considered visibility within the intercollegiate athletic program primarily through logo branding and 30-second television public service announcements, and visibility opportunities were highlighted in the document analysis. For example, the president of Clemson University said in his official address that the intercollegiate athletic program gave the university’s “Tiger Paw” logo greater visibility following the football team’s national championship win (i.e., College Football Playoff). And most university brand style guidelines acknowledged the intercollegiate athletic program logo is often more recognized than the academic logo to the general public. Accordingly, I found some universities have one unified logo for academics and
intercollegiate athletics, which lends credibility to the arguments that intercollegiate athletics is an integrated component of the university and that the visibility that comes through the intercollegiate athletic program is shared by the entire institution. Other universities have separate logos but in some circumstances they permit student groups and alumni to use the intercollegiate athletic program logo. In fact, the dominant logo image on some university websites was the athletic logo and not the academic logo. Then, there were some institutions that have separate logos and were direct in stating that no other units may use the intercollegiate athletic program logo without the program’s permission. At Florida State University, the brand style guidelines explained that the intercollegiate athletic program logo represents the values and mission of that program, which could be interpreted to mean the values and mission of the university are different.

Beside logos, I also viewed the universities’ 30-second television public service announcements, and some institutions included intercollegiate athletics prominently while others were more subtle in their incorporation. A few universities did not include intercollegiate athletic program imagery at all. It is important to note some of the announcements were parts of multi-year campaigns, and although the version I evaluated might not have included intercollegiate athletics, the previous or next announcement might feature the program. It was also instructive for visibility to review home pages of local and regional media outlets, which varied in their coverage of intercollegiate athletics. Generally, the video and photo viewers on newspapers’ online home pages were likely to prominently feature the local athletic programs. Since I conducted this study after both football and basketball seasons concluded it was not surprising that few intercollegiate athletic program stories were presented as news. Regardless, publications in smaller markets were more likely to feature the local institution than newspapers in larger
media markets such as the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. I also noted there were a few academically-focused articles on local and regional newspaper home pages, and they paled in comparison to the intercollegiate athletic program coverage.

Generally, the document analysis phase of this investigation highlighted integrative environments with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs and universities. However, document evaluation alone was not the crux of the investigation. The central aspect of this study was interviews with senior administrators from four of the original 18 universities. I identified the four institutions for additional consideration after learning, via several documents, about intentional efforts by the intercollegiate athletic program to support the university mission, such as endowing professorships and funding bond debt for capital improvements, all under the direction of and with the support of the president, provost, and director of athletics.

**Broad Overview of Universities Included in Interview Phase**

When gathering data to uncover perspectives on high profile intercollegiate athletic programs from administrators, it is difficult to separate the administrator from the university he or she is serving. The administrators’ views are understandably shaded by that particular place and that particular time. As such, for this investigation, it was crucial to establish a campus context for administrators before considering their contributions to the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics. Therefore, the remainder of this section offers a brief overview of the universities where the study participants serve, and these overviews help frame the data collected from the documents and the administrators. These overviews also mention a significant event in the history of the university relative to the intercollegiate athletic program that affects current interactions between the two enterprises. It is important to note this study was not designed to be an in-depth analysis of these four universities. Instead, it was designed to create
an opportunity for a range of scholars and stakeholders to better understand from senior
administrators how intercollegiate athletic programs are leveraged in order to support the
teaching, research, and service mission of institutions. To that end, administrators from the
University of Alabama (Alabama), University of Arkansas (Arkansas), University of Georgia
(Georgia), and University of Kentucky (Kentucky) agreed to participate in this study, and
following is a general overview of each university at the time of its inclusion in this study in
2017. (The majority of information included in each overview was gleaned from documents like
the university’s main website and the intercollegiate athletic program website.)

University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa, Ala.)

The University of Alabama (http://www.ua.edu), opened in 1831, is described as the
state’s flagship institution, and it is located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, a community of
approximately 96,000. The university enrollment is approximately 37,000, and it has been
identified as one of the fastest growing universities in the nation, increasing by nearly 15,000
students in the last decade (Chronicle, 2016). In addition to enrollment, Alabama has also seen a
change in the makeup of its student body, specifically a decline in in-state enrollment (43 percent
from the state of Alabama) and an increase in out-of-state enrollment (53 percent from elsewhere
in the United States). This escalation in enrollment has been a significant event in the recent
history of the university, garnering media coverage in the New York Times and Washington Post,
among other national publications. Furthermore, the former president who orchestrated this
transformation was vocal in connecting the growth to the institutional visibility made possible by
the university’s intercollegiate athletic program, specifically the football team. Alabama is a part
of the University of Alabama System, which governs two other research universities in the state
– University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB) and University of Alabama in Huntsville. The
The president of the University of Alabama reports to the chancellor of the system who reports to the system board of trustees. According to its website, the University of Alabama’s mission is to “advance the intellectual and social condition of the people of the state, the nation and the world through the creation, translation and dissemination of knowledge with an emphasis on quality programs in the areas of teaching, research and service” (University of Alabama, 2017, July).

The University of Alabama supports a high profile intercollegiate athletic program that competes in the SEC, a charter member since 1933. The Crimson Tide (http://www.rolltide.com) teams have a history and tradition of athletic success, having won more than 25 NCAA Championships in several sports and including 16 in football. On the conference level, Alabama has won more than 100 SEC titles. The intercollegiate athletic program is made up of approximately 525 students-athletes who compete in 18 sports. The average grade point average for an Alabama student-athlete is 3.16 and more than 120 student-athletes earned their degrees during the 2015-2016 academic year. According to journalists Berkowitz and Schnaars (2017) in USA Today, the Alabama intercollegiate athletic program reports more than $164 million in revenue and $145.2 million in expenses. The intercollegiate athletic program does not collect a student fee to augment its revenue, and the mission of the program is to “recruit and develop student-athletes to compete at the highest levels in intercollegiate athletics; educate and prepare student-athletes to compete at the highest levels in life after graduation; and accomplish all this with honor and integrity” (University of Alabama, 2017, June).

Relative to presidential oversight, the University of Alabama intercollegiate athletic program reports to the president. It is the only campus “department” with a direct reporting line to the chief executive officer, which aligns it primarily with advancement, student affairs, and strategic communications, among other top-level units. Alabama’s director of athletics is a
member of the president’s cabinet, which meets twice monthly, but does not have a vice president title. The current director of athletics was recently named, and the former director of athletics is currently serving as special assistant to the president. Organizationally, Alabama has a standing intercollegiate athletics committee that is charged with providing leadership to the program. The committee is chaired by the university’s faculty athletics representative, and it is made up of a combination of faculty members, students, alumni, community members, and intercollegiate athletics administrators. Committee members are appointed by the president and the committee reports to the president.

In terms of visibility of the intercollegiate athletic program, the University of Alabama website (http://www.ua.edu) provides the program with a place of prominence. It features an “Athletics” tab that is alongside “Research,” “Academics,” “Admissions,” “Campus Life,” etc. in an upper banner. The “Athletics” tab also includes links to a range of sporting activities such as club sports and intramurals, along with the intercollegiate athletic program. Most public relations-type elements for the university include prominent intercollegiate athletic program visuals. For example, in the university’s 30-second television public service announcement, the opening video shot is of the football stadium, and there are several video clips of intercollegiate athletic competitions, mostly football, throughout. The university launched a branding campaign – Where Legends are Made – and it debuted during a football game in September 2016. Also related to visibility, the university’s logo brands include a secondary treatment built around the “Stylized A,” which by itself is also used as the secondary logo for the intercollegiate athletic program, and encircled with a band as the primary, exclusive logo for athletics (see Figure 4.1). These treatments are explained in the university brand style guidelines.
The current senior administrators at the University of Alabama include President Dr. Stuart Bell, who was named to the position in 2015 following three years at Louisiana State University as provost. Bell also worked at Alabama as a faculty member and administrator for 16 years. The provost at Alabama is Dr. Kevin Whitaker, who was named to the position in 2016 after serving in an interim capacity. Whitaker also served the university as the faculty athletics representative and has been at Alabama for 30 years. The director of athletics is Mr. Greg Byrne, who was named in 2017 after serving in the same role at the University of Arizona. Some but not all of these administrators were interviewed for this study, along with other administrators not listed here.

University of Arkansas (Fayetteville, Ark.)

The University of Arkansas (http://www.uark.edu), founded in 1871, is the state’s land grant institution, and it is located in Fayetteville, Arkansas, a community of approximately 83,000. The university enrollment is approximately 27,000, and it was listed as the 10th fastest growing public doctoral institution in the nation by the Chronicle of Higher Education in 2016. Interestingly, an online letter from the chancellor of the campus regarding the importance of institutional branding connected intercollegiate athletics to increasing university enrollment. Arkansas is a part of the University of Arkansas System, which governs four other research universities in the state – University of Arkansas at Little Rock, University of Arkansas at

Note. University of Alabama logo brands feature the “Capstone A” (left), a word mark (center), and the primary intercollegiate athletic program mark (right).
Monticello, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, and University of Arkansas at Fort Smith – as well as several community colleges and institutes. The chancellor of the University of Arkansas reports to the president of the system who reports to the system board of trustees. According to its website, the University of Arkansas’ mission is to “provide an internationally competitive education for undergraduate and graduate students in a wide spectrum of disciplines; contribute new knowledge, economic development, basic and applied research and creative activity; and provide service to academic/professional disciplines and society, all aimed at fulfilling its public land-grant mission to serve [the state of] Arkansas and beyond as a partner, resource, and catalyst” (University of Arkansas, 2017, July).

The University of Arkansas supports a high profile intercollegiate athletic program that competes in the SEC since 1992. The Razorbacks (http://www.arkansasrazorbacks.com) have a rich athletic history, particularly in the sports of track and field and cross country where the university has won 19 SEC Triple Crowns (i.e., cross country, indoor track and field, and outdoor track and field championships in the same season) between its men’s and women’s teams. Nationally, Arkansas won one football championship in 1964 and one men’s basketball championship in 1994. The intercollegiate athletic program supports approximately 450 student-athletes in 19 sports. The cumulative grade point average for the intercollegiate athletic program is 3.25 and approximately 100 student-athletes have qualified for the university’s fall or spring commencement ceremony during each of the last three years. The academic success of Arkansas’ student-athletes has been a significant change for the intercollegiate athletic program and its relationship to the university, which, according to several study participants, previously focused more on student-athlete eligibility to compete and winning than on graduation and student-athlete success. According to journalists Berkowitz and Schnaars (2017) in USA Today, the
Arkansas intercollegiate athletic program reports nearly $125 million in revenue and $105.6 million in expenses. The intercollegiate athletic program does not collect a student fee to augment its revenue, and the mission of the program is to “develop student-athletes academically, athletically, and socially to their fullest potential through intercollegiate athletics” (University of Arkansas, 2017, June).

Relative to presidential oversight and organizational structures, the University of Arkansas intercollegiate athletic program reports directly to the chancellor through the director of athletics, who also serves as a vice chancellor for the university and sits on the chancellor’s executive committee, which meets weekly. The university has an athletics oversight committee that operates under the campus faculty senate. The committee is made of up faculty members, including the institution’s faculty athletics representative, a student and two intercollegiate athletic program administrators in ex-officio capacities. The committee’s focus is on maintaining academic integrity within the intercollegiate athletic program.

In terms of visibility, the University of Arkansas only includes three short intercollegiate athletic program clips in its 30-second television public service announcement, and otherwise it focuses on research and teaching. The university has two distinctive logo brands, and the university brand style guidelines specifically state that the intercollegiate athletic program logo may not be used for academic purposes, and consent must be obtained from the intercollegiate athletic program prior to use by anyone outside of the program (see Figure 4.2). On the university website (http://www.uark.edu), no sports imagery is easily found, but the site’s page load error message is a modified image of cheerleaders at a football game. An “Athletics” tab is placed high on the website, and it directs users to the intercollegiate athletic program and recreational sport opportunities. The Arkansas chancellor is active on Twitter and tweets about
intercollegiate athletic program events and accomplishments. The main university Twitter
account, however, only occasionally shares intercollegiate athletically-related accomplishments.

![University of Arkansas Logo Brands](image)

*Note. University of Arkansas logo brands feature the primary university mark (left) and the Razorback spirit mark (right), which is used exclusively by the intercollegiate athletic program.*

Figure 4.2. *University of Arkansas Logo Brands*

The current senior administrators at the University of Arkansas include Chancellor Dr. Joe Steinmetz, who was named to the position in 2016 following seven years at Ohio State University. The provost at Arkansas is Dr. Jim Coleman, who was named to the position in 2017 after serving in the same role at Northern Arizona University. The director of athletics is Mr. Jeff Long, who has been at the university for nearly a decade. Each of these administrators was interviewed for this study, along with other administrators not listed here.

**University of Georgia (Athens, Ga.)**

The University of Georgia (http://www.uga.edu), chartered in 1785, is the state’s land grant institution and it is located in Athens, Georgia, a community of approximately 110,000. Georgia was the first state-charted university in the United States, and it is ranked No. 16 by the *U.S. News & World Report*. The university enrollment is approximately 36,000. Georgia is a part of the University of System of Georgia, which governs all public colleges and universities in the state. The president of the University of Georgia reports to the chancellor of the system who reports to the system board of regents. According to its website, the University of Georgia’s mission is in part to “prepare the university community and the state for full participation in the
global society of the twenty-first century. Through its programs and practices, Georgia also seeks to foster the understanding of and respect for cultural differences necessary for an enlightened and educated citizenry. It further provides for cultural, ethnic, gender, and racial diversity in the faculty, staff, and student body” (University of Georgia, 2017, July).

The University of Georgia supports a high profile intercollegiate athletic program that competes in the SEC, a charter member since 1933. The Bulldogs (http://www.georgiadogs.com) have a tradition of athletic success, having won more than 40 NCAA Championships in its history, including two in football and 10 in women’s gymnastics. On the conference level, Georgia has won more than 100 SEC titles, and globally it has produced more than 80 Olympians. The intercollegiate athletic program supports more than 500 students-athletes in 21 sports. The cumulative grade point average for the intercollegiate athletic program for the spring 2017 semester was 3.13, the highest in the program’s history, and nearly 100 student-athletes earned their degrees during the 2016-2017 academic year. According to journalists Berkowitz and Schnaars (2017) in USA Today, the Georgia intercollegiate athletic program reports nearly $124 million in revenue and $116.6 million in expenses. The intercollegiate athletic program receives approximately $3 million per year from a student fee, and the mission of the program is to “offer nationally competitive intercollegiate athletic programs which reflect the interests of students and faculty, the SEC, and the people of [the state of] Georgia and of the nation who support these activities. These programs provide a worthwhile experience for Georgia student-athletes by teaching them the basic principles of amateur competition, competitive integrity, fair play, and good sportsmanship” (University Georgia, 2017, June).

When considering organization and presidential oversight, the University of Georgia is somewhat unique. Georgia’s intercollegiate athletic program is incorporated as an athletic
association with a dotted reporting line to the president, who serves as chair of the association’s board of directors. In addition, the Georgia provost sits as vice chair of the association’s board. Georgia’s director of athletics, who has an endowed position, reports to the president and is a member of the president’s cabinet, which meets approximately twice per semester. (Most intercollegiate athletic program operations are facilitated through the association board.) In addition, Georgia’s faculty athletics representative also has a direct reporting line to the president, the result of a 2003 incident in which the university was sanctioned after the NCAA found evidence of academic fraud involving the men’s basketball program.

When considering visibility of the intercollegiate athletic program, the University of Georgia 30-second television public service announcement features intercollegiate athletics and academics, highlighting preparation by a Georgia swimmer for the Olympic Games. Relative to the media, the program is heavily covered by a subsidiary of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, DawgNation. Georgia has two distinctive logo brands, and the university brand style guidelines explain that many institutions have different logos for academics and intercollegiate athletics, and many restrict the use of the intercollegiate athletic program logo for academic purposes (see Figure 4.3). The university website (http://www.uga.edu) does not rely on intercollegiate athletics imagery, but the “Quick Facts” page does include achievements in intercollegiate athletics. The “Athletics” tab on the upper main banner is at the far end of the row and links directly to the intercollegiate athletic program.
The current senior administrators at the University of Georgia include President Jere Morehead, who was named to the position in 2013 after having served the university as provost. Morehead has spent the entirety of his academic career, 30 years, at Georgia. The provost at Georgia is Dr. Pam Whitten, who was named to the position in 2014 after serving as Dean of the College of Communication Arts and Sciences at Michigan State University. The director of athletics is Mr. Greg McGarity, who grew up in Athens and is a Georgia graduate. He was named director of athletics in 2010 after serving at the University of Florida. Some but not all of these administrators were interviewed for this study, along with others not listed here.

**University of Kentucky (Lexington, Ky.)**

The University of Kentucky (http://www.uky.edu), established in 1865, is the state’s land grant institution, and it is located in Lexington, Kentucky, a community of approximately 310,000. The university enrollment is approximately 30,000. Kentucky is governed by a board of trustees that has responsibility for that institution only, and the president of the University of Kentucky reports to the board of trustees. According to its website, Kentucky’s mission is in part to “improve people’s lives through excellence in education, research and creative work, service and health care. As [the state of] Kentucky’s flagship institution, the university plays a critical leadership role by promoting diversity, inclusion, economic development and human well-
being.” Also, Kentucky “facilitates learning, informed by scholarship and research; expands knowledge through research, scholarship and creative activity; and serves a global community by disseminating, sharing and applying knowledge” (University of Kentucky, 2017, July). Lexington is home to the University of Kentucky HealthCare System, making Kentucky the only institution in this study with a medical school on its campus.

The University of Kentucky supports a high profile intercollegiate athletic program that competes in the SEC, a charter member since 1933. The Wildcats (http://www.ukathletics.com) have a history and tradition of athletic success, particularly in men’s basketball, having won eight NCAA Championships and 30 SEC Tournament Championships. The intercollegiate athletic program supports approximately 500 students-athletes in 21 sports, including a men’s soccer team and a rifle team that do not compete in the SEC. The cumulative grade point average for the intercollegiate athletic program has been above 3.00 for the past five years and approximately 100 student-athletes graduated in 2016-2017. According to journalists Berkowitz and Schnaars (2017) in USA Today, the Kentucky intercollegiate athletic program reports nearly $132 million in revenue and $127.2 million in expenses. The intercollegiate athletic program receives approximately $375,000 annually from a student fee, which according to study participants will be phased out within the next two years. The intercollegiate athletic program does not publish an official mission statement, but it just concluded its 15x15x15 initiative, which aimed to have Kentucky ranked in the nation’s top 15 intercollegiate athletic programs and win 15 SEC or NCAA Championships by 2015, all three of which were achieved (University of Kentucky, 2017, June).

In terms of organization and presidential oversight, the University of Kentucky director of athletics reports to the president and is a member of the president’s council, which meets
twice per month. The director of athletics also works closely with the university’s executive vice president for finance and administration. The university dissolved its athletic association several years ago and put in its place an athletics committee that operates under the board of trustees. Committee members are appointed by the chair of the board and the university president.

Regarding visibility, the University of Kentucky’s 30-second television public service announcement focuses on one student’s story and his relationship with a faculty member. The student is a baseball student-athlete, and therefore the public service announcement gives more than a subtle nod to the connection between academics and intercollegiate athletics. The university brand style guidelines describe a recent move to one unifying logo that includes intercollegiate athletics and the university health system, a significant shift for the institution (see Figure 4.4). The unified logo is a refreshed version of the traditional intercollegiate athletic program logo, meaning the university recently instituted one brand for the institution, the medical system and intercollegiate athletics, and the chosen brand was the widely familiar intercollegiate athletic program logo. Online, an “Athletics” tab has a prominent position at the top of the Kentucky website, along with other key areas, and it includes additional activities like club sports and intramurals. In addition, there are also direct links to key intercollegiate athletic program matters such as ticketing and licensing.

![University of Kentucky Logo Brands](image)

*Note.* The University of Kentucky logo brand features the “Interlocking UK” as the primary university mark (left) and the intercollegiate athletic program mark (right). It is also used by UK HealthCare.

Figure 4.4. *University of Kentucky Logo Brands*
The current senior administrators at the University of Kentucky include President Dr. Eli Capilouto, who was named to the position in 2011 after serving as provost at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The Kentucky provost is Dr. Tim Tracy, who was named to the position in 2015 after serving as interim provost and Dean of the Kentucky College of Pharmacy. The director of athletics is Mr. Mitch Barnhart, who is the longest serving director of athletics in the SEC, having been at Kentucky for more than 15 years. Each of these administrators was interviewed for this study, along with other administrators not listed here.

**Conclusion**

In order to understand the perspectives of senior university administrators relative to intercollegiate athletics, it is vital that the contexts in which the administrators serve are outlined. Based on the documents I analyzed early in the investigation and the interviews I conducted with several individuals, I found the four universities included in this study have much in common, including being led by relatively new administrators; identifying themselves as the state’s flagship institutions; and supporting intercollegiate athletic programs that annually generate more than $120 million in revenue. These institutions are also different when one considers the size of the communities in which they are located; the nature of their governing boards; and the national championship prowess of their intercollegiate athletic programs. Ultimately, I used the data collected from administrators at these universities, along with various documents, to develop the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics.
CHAPTER 5
LEVERAGING COLLEGE ATHLETICS

I believe that quality across all units of the university leverages all the other units. So, when we have a strong brand in athletics, or healthcare, or our opera program – you name it – it mutually benefits all units.

– Dr. Eli Capilouto, President, University of Kentucky

The goal of qualitative research is to gain deep insights into how individuals understand and make sense of the world and of their experiences in that world (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I used a grounded theory design to glean first-hand perspectives from senior university administrators, namely presidents, provosts, and directors of athletics, to ascertain how they position universities to leverage their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs in order to support the institutional mission. In addition, I systematically reviewed relevant documents from 18 institutions to deepen the analysis. A substantive theory developed from this investigation, which according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) is specific and practically useful. Such an empirically-based theory was previously nonexistent in explaining oversight of high profile intercollegiate athletic programs.

Based on the data collected from documents and several administrators at universities supporting some of the most visible intercollegiate athletic programs in the United States, the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics emerged, and it is built on the five tenets of Experience, Understanding, Appreciation, Acceptance, and Integration (see Figure 5.1).
Note. The grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics diagram depicts each of the theory’s five tenets.

Figure 5.1. *Grounded Theory of Leveraging College Athletics*

This substantive theory explains that at these universities, the senior-most administrators tend to have prior *Experience* at institutions with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs, and this prior experience fosters an enlightened *Understanding* of operations and goals of the intercollegiate athletic program. With an enlightened understanding, administrators begin to *Appreciate* how the intercollegiate athletic program might be beneficial to the university. While administrators appreciate the positives associated with the intercollegiate athletic program, they also *Accept* the negative consequences such high profile programs might bring to the institution. Once senior administrators accept the realities of the high profile intercollegiate athletic program, their aim is to *Integrate* it as much as possible into the university culture in order to support the university mission. These five tenets together form the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, and this chapter includes a section dedicated to each tenet of this new, empirically-based theory.
Prior Experience with High Profile Intercollegiate Athletic Programs

The first and foundational tenet in the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics is *Experience*, specifically the administrators’ professional experience at universities with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs and personal experience with college sports (see Figure 5.2). It is important to recognize an individual does not often become the president, provost, or director of athletics at an institution with a high profile intercollegiate athletic program without collecting a range of experiences in university administration, and because such programs tend to exist in the context of large, public research universities, to lead in those institutions is to have risen through the higher education system. Therefore, as an example, it is unlikely that someone would be named president of a state flagship university without having been at another, similar university in an administrative capacity of significance.

In this study, 15 of the 16 participants had prior experience at a university with a high profile intercollegiate athletic program, and the one participant who did not, Kentucky President Eli Capilouto, had served as provost at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), which
is a renowned research institution. (Capilouto did however earn his undergraduate degree from the University of Alabama, which was included in this study.) When acknowledging his experience shortcomings during the search process, Capilouto said he explained to a somewhat concerned search committee that at UAB he had responsibility for a robust research enterprise which was complex, required compliance, and if something went wrong, garnered media attention – much like high profile intercollegiate athletics. Capilouto went on to tell the search committee that although he had not been the decision-maker relative to intercollegiate athletics at UAB, there were in his estimation similarities between the research enterprise there and intercollegiate athletics at Kentucky. Accordingly, he was convinced that many of the lessons he learned as a provost who was responsible for research could be applied as a president responsible for intercollegiate athletics.

Beside Capilouto, the other study participants had each worked in an administrative capacity of significance at universities with high profile intercollegiate programs. Among the presidents, Alabama’s Stuart Bell, Georgia’s Jere Morehead, and Arkansas’ Joe Steinmetz had each served as provost at such an institution, and Arkansas’ David Gearhart was responsible for development. Among the provosts, three of the four had served as deans of colleges. Alabama’s Kevin Whitaker never served as a dean but spent nearly two years as interim provost before being named to the position permanently. As an aside, although Arkansas Provost Jim Coleman had previously served as a dean, it was not at a university with a high profile intercollegiate athletic program. His experience at such an institution was serving as vice president for research at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Coleman was also a unique study participant in that he had worked at Rice University, an academically selective institution that is highly competitive in NCAA Division I baseball, and at Virginia Commonwealth University during VCU’s
unexpected NCAA Men’s Final Four appearance in 2011. Neither Rice nor Virginia Commonwealth is an NCAA Autonomy Five university, but both have experienced national success in intercollegiate athletics. Three of the four directors of athletics included in this study had prior experience with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs, which was to be expected given the stature of the conference competition. Like the earlier example of a president, it is unlikely that someone would be named director of athletics at an SEC-type institution without having experience with high profile intercollegiate athletics. The one director of athletics who did not have prior experience with such a program, Alabama’s Bill Battle, was hired from the business sector. Battle founded the Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC), served as its chief executive officer until 2002, and he said he did not want to be a director of athletics.

I never wanted to be an athletic director. Being an athletic director is a grind. It’s all day every day. It’s meeting after meeting after meeting after meeting. It is fighting fires all over the place. You got 300 staff members to manage, 18 sports, 525 student-athletes and something good and bad is happening every day with all those people. You have to be on the front lines trying to manage and prevent bad things from happening and maximizing what you hope will be the good things that happen.

Although Battle was unique in that he did not have professional experience at a university with a high profile intercollegiate athletic program, he was one of several study participants with personal experience with college sports. Battle, along with Arkansas Director of Athletics Jeff Long, Georgia Director of Athletics Greg McGarity, and Kentucky Provost Tim Tracy, is a former student-athlete, in his case a football player for the University of Alabama. Both Long and Tracy said their participation in intercollegiate athletics, despite competing at the lowest level within the NCAA (Division III), enhanced their collegiate experience, and it instilled in
them the importance of higher education, something they now try to impart to students. In addition to the experience of actually being a student-athlete, several study participants described the experience of being a general sports fan, which was a somewhat surprising discovery. Georgia Faculty Athletics Representative David Shipley described his introduction to high profile intercollegiate athletics in this way:

I grew up in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, on a Big Ten [Conference] campus. My dad was on the athletic board of the U of I when I was a teenager. This has been an aspect of my life since I first started to like sports as a 10-year old boy. So, it’s a part of my DNA you could say.

Shipley was not alone in this sentiment as Alabama’s Vice President for Strategic Communications described similar experiences and feelings relative to intercollegiate athletics. Linda Bonnin said, “I’ve met people in my life who don’t know sports, and don’t get sports. They don’t watch sports, don’t appreciate sports, and I think, how are you alive, because I was raised on sports.”

In addition to having served at universities with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs, it was also evident that many administrators in this study had experience, both professional and personal, at the actual university included in this study. For example, Alabama President Bell began his career there as a faculty member in 1986 before returning as the president, and Kentucky’s Executive Director of Public Relations, Jay Blanton, graduated from the university and was in his second administrative stint there during this investigation. Although Kentucky Director of Athletics Mitch Barnhart did not attend the university, he has been in his role for nearly 15 years, making him the longest tenured director of athletics in the SEC.
Director of Athletics Long is second among the public SEC institutions with nearly a decade of service to Arkansas.)

There was one participant in particular who seemed to embody the first tenet of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, Georgia President Morehead. Morehead has spent the entirety of his academic career at the University of Georgia, his alma mater. Notably, he served the university as general counsel, vice president for instruction, and provost prior to being named president. Morehead was also the university’s faculty athletics representative and served on the athletic association board of directors. (Georgia’s intercollegiate athletic program is officially an association with its own board of directors, chaired by the president and vice chaired by the provost.) He is the first Georgia graduate to serve as its president in three decades, and he acknowledged the unique position he holds as a graduate who became president.

I’ve always been a fan of the University of Georgia because as a graduate of the institution who then came back to be a faculty member I had an unusual connection with the institution. I suppose I started first as someone who was a big supporter of the institution and someone who was always attending basketball games, football games, and tennis matches, anything I could fit into my schedule as a faculty member. … I love what intercollegiate athletics means for the institution as well as our conference. I’m always going to be at the front line cheering on the Georgia Bulldogs and being supportive.

Morehead’s experience at the University of Georgia is somewhat unique, but his experience as an administrator in the context of this study was common. Like other study participants Morehead served the university in a variety of capacities before becoming a senior administrator. He had professional experience with intercollegiate athletics as a member of the athletic association board of directors and faculty athletics representative, and he had personal
experience as a sports fan. Nearly all of the study participants had a relatively similar biography and resume. Each person had years of service to not only higher education generally, which was to be expected given the positions they held, but to these universities specifically. According to the participants, their experiences not only prepared them for the highest administrative posts, but they also gave them insights into the intercollegiate athletic program to which others are not privy, which makes Experience a central discovery in this investigation.

Figure 5.3. *Grounded Theory of Leveraging College Athletics: Understanding*

**Enlightened Understanding of High Profile Intercollegiate Athletic Programs**

The second tenet in the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics is Understanding, specifically administrators’ enlightened understanding of how the intercollegiate athletic program operates and what it aims to accomplish within the context of the university and in the lives of student-athletes (see Figure 5.3). There were varying degrees of understanding among the study participants. As expected, the directors of athletics were intimately aware of the operations and goals of the intercollegiate athletic program, including how it relates to the
university. The presidents’ level of understanding seemed sufficient given their duty to provide broad oversight of the program. The presidents indicated they understood the key areas related to high profile intercollegiate athletics such as visibility, finances, and risk/reward, but they delegate the specific details to their directors of athletics and other university administrators. In the end, the provosts emerged as the least knowledgeable group of study participants, and Alabama Provost Whitaker described it this way:

My perspective [on intercollegiate athletics] was probably limited [before I became provost]. It was probably one of – bewilderment is probably too strong of a word, but I can’t think of a better word at the moment. It was just, “Hey, it sounds great. I don’t really understand it. It seems to be a big enterprise. I don’t understand it.” Personally, I don’t think I had any negative thoughts about it. It was just, “That’s really big.” And here at Alabama of course football and gymnastics and softball have been big. But, I just did not fully understand it.

Like Whitaker, most provosts move into that administrative position from the faculty ranks, and the participants in this study were consistent in explaining that faculty members generally have a limited understanding of intercollegiate athletics, unless an individual serves in a specific capacity associated with the program, such as being the faculty athletics representative, a role Whitaker held prior to becoming provost. Interestingly, participants universally agreed the faculty need not have an administrative responsibility relative to oversight of intercollegiate athletics, except for their involvement in shared governance and in setting the academic standards and curriculum of the university, which applies to all students, including student-athletes. However, participants agreed faculty members who serve have the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding into how the intercollegiate athletic program benefits the university,
and this was articulated by both Georgia Faculty Athletics Representative Shipley and Kentucky Provost Tracy. Shipley said he knew of several once-skeptical faculty members who changed their perspectives on intercollegiate athletics after working on a university committee connected to the program or engaging more closely with student-athletes, and Tracy elaborated on that opinion when he said, “I think the ones who have gotten the opportunity to see things from a lens similar to the one that I’ve gotten to see it through, they have an enlightened opinion.”

In this study intercollegiate athletics was understood to be an integral part of the university, so much so that all five presidents remarked that intercollegiate athletics was discussed to varying degrees and at different levels of their presidential interview processes. In other words, this component of the institution was viewed as being important enough to warrant conversations by search committees and governing boards. Intercollegiate athletics was also mentioned to varying degrees in the job descriptions and position announcements I reviewed during document analysis. Arkansas Chancellor Steinmetz, the newest president in the study, said it was interesting to him that he was asked early in the interview process about intercollegiate athletics by a governing board that is responsible for the entire University of Arkansas System, not just the Fayetteville campus. He also shared an anecdote when he explained that as provost at Ohio State University he was well aware of what was happening in intercollegiate athletics because academic matters in that program reported to his office. But, now as president, he is further removed and somewhat less involved with intercollegiate athletics. Alabama President Bell went further in his observation and said it would be difficult for a president to succeed at Alabama without understanding the importance of intercollegiate athletics to the university and many of its internal and external stakeholders.
If you were to come in with a vision or an attitude that this [intercollegiate athletics] is something that we shouldn’t value, I think that would be a challenge at an institution like Alabama. I don’t think you would ever make it if you believed in that; it would be hard to be a part of this environment.

It was apparent that study participants also thought it was important to understand how the intercollegiate athletic program relates to other aspects of the university. There were several comparisons to the universities’ performing arts programs as well as contextualizing intercollegiate athletics within the university. For example, Kentucky President Capilouto said the University of Kentucky HealthCare enterprise is a one and a half to two billion dollar annual operation while intercollegiate athletics is only about a $100 million effort. Anecdotally, he also mentioned how preparations of the university debate team for national competitions during spring break are similar to the basketball teams’ preparations for the NCAA Tournaments, which are held at the same time of the academic year. In a similar vein, Alabama Provost Whitaker implied that many of the criticisms of intercollegiate athletics, such as it being commercial entertainment or exploitative of student-athletes, are often based on misunderstandings.

If you really peel it away … And I keep changing it from football to band. Change it from football to theatre. Change it from sports to dance. The questions become silly, but yet they are questions that get asked all the time. I think the faculty should support the students, just like when a student invites me to come see them dance, “Come see me play.” I think we lose that, especially in football and basketball. … I need to go watch my student play football. Yeah, I’m there with 100,000 other people, but I’m supporting him.

Whitaker went on to say part of his responsibility as provost, now that he has a clearer view himself, is to help others internal and external to the university understand how the
intercollegiate athletic program fits into the overall operations and mission of the institution. He was not alone in taking a measure of ownership in this area. Kentucky Provost Tracy said universities have failed to articulate the value of intercollegiate athletics to the university beyond the “dollars and cents,” and as provost he has a platform to improve understanding, in part to counter the negative messages presented in the media. In addition to Whitaker and Tracy, several other study participants explained the importance of understanding the mission of the intercollegiate athletic program and how it aligns with the university. For example, though retired as director of athletics and currently serving as a special assistant to the president, Alabama’s Battle was still able to quote the mission of the intercollegiate athletic program, and his performance appraisal, which he shared voluntarily, listed the university mission ahead of the intercollegiate athletic program mission. His counterpart, Arkansas Director of Athletics Long, put it another way:

I think it’s incredibly important that the leadership of the institution knows what the athletic director and what the athletic department stand for and what it won’t stand for. When I have a discussion on campus, there isn’t a question about honesty and integrity and that we are trying to do it the right way. Sometimes it’s hard to know what the right way is but they know we are trying to do it the right way.

The importance of “doing things the right way” was mentioned in one respect or another by each study participant. The presidents talked about the importance of communicating to alumni, donors, fans, and faculty that winning at any cost would not be tolerated by the university. The provosts expressed similar sentiments, though they tended to focus more on doing things the right way in terms of academic integrity relative to student-athletes. The directors of athletics articulated the importance of operating a program that is compliant with
university and NCAA rules. In addition to these administrators, others included in the study also mentioned the culture of compliance and integrity within the intercollegiate athletic program that is often dismissed by cynics and skeptics. In all, the study participants were quick to identify the most common misunderstandings relative to intercollegiate athletics, such as the financial self-sufficiency of the programs and the academic prowess of the student-athletes, but several also acknowledged their own shallow understandings prior to becoming senior administrators, which makes Understanding a central discovery in this investigation.

**Figure 5.4. Grounded Theory of Leveraging College Athletics: Appreciation**

**Appreciation of Opportunities with High Profile Intercollegiate Athletic Programs**

The third tenet in the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics is *Appreciation*, specifically recognizing and appreciating the myriad of opportunities a high profile intercollegiate athletic program might bring to a university (see Figure 5.4). Corroborating insights from document analysis, the study participants described a range of such opportunities, but there was consistency around the ideas of intercollegiate athletics providing financial support.
to the institution, enhancing visibility of the institution, fostering student success, and being a way to bring people together. It is important to remember the four universities in this study generated more than $500 million dollars in combined revenue in one year, and they are in essence self-sufficient.

**Intercollegiate Athletics Financially Supporting the University**

In describing financial opportunities, all study participants expressed gratitude that the intercollegiate athletic programs are “in the black” and therefore do not need much or any financial support from the university to operate. The administrators described intercollegiate athletic programs that endow professorships for faculty members and scholarships for students who are not student-athletes. There were also the highly-publicized examples of annual revenue transfers to the university from the intercollegiate athletic program. These transfers were often for services rendered such as those provided by the university physical plant or the cost of scholarships for student-athletes. However, the revenue transfers described by participants were also just as likely to be monies for use at the president’s discretion. Georgia Director of Athletics McGarity said when the Georgia intercollegiate athletic program provides financial support to the university his only request is that the decision on how to use the funds “makes the intercollegiate athletic program look good.”

The University of Kentucky and the University of Arkansas had one significant financial investment in common. Throughout interviews with administrators from these two institutions it was apparent that the intercollegiate athletic program’s financial provision for academic buildings was groundbreaking in terms of support to the university. At Kentucky, the program provided approximately $65 million toward a bond for an academic science building that required approval from the state of Kentucky legislature. In 2012 it was the first investment of its
kind by an intercollegiate athletic program for an academic facility. However, three years later in 2015 Arkansas dedicated Champions Hall, a classroom building on the Fayetteville campus that was funded in part by the intercollegiate athletic program, and named accordingly. Kentucky’s Executive Director of Public Relations, Blanton, observed:

Not only are they [the intercollegiate athletic program] financially self-sustaining, but they give back to the institution. … Not only that $65 million for the investment in the academic science building, but millions of dollars every year for scholarships – academic scholarships. We get $500,000 a year in commercial inventory from TV and radio spots. We couldn’t buy that.

**Intercollegiate Athletics Enhancing Visibility of the University**

The ability to promote the university through television and radio public service announcements associated with intercollegiate athletics was a consistent comment from study participants. In fact, Alabama Provost Whitaker said there is no way to put a true value on the publicity for the university that comes as a result of the intercollegiate athletic program, and that publicity would be lost if the programs were less successful. As expected, the communicators in this study talked at length about the importance of maximizing the visibility opportunities derived from intercollegiate athletics, whether that related to how the university’s 30-second television public service announcements were directed or to balancing messaging about athletics with messaging about the university. These administrators were honest however in their assessments of the challenges associated with high visibility, namely that stakeholders who are interested in intercollegiate athletics are not likely to focus on the “rest of the story,” so a measure of creativity is necessary to capture and hold their attention during a football or basketball game. Furthermore, several participants, including Alabama President Bell, explained
the importance of name recognition during the recruiting process. Bell said before enrollment and admissions officers are able to identify a prospective student (non-athlete), a university has a market advantage if the student has already heard something, even if it is primarily related to intercollegiate athletics, about the university. Kentucky’s Blanton echoed his sentiment in explaining the recruiting approach of a former dean of a renowned college at Kentucky.

They’re a top six program nationally. They recruit students all over the country, and he would say, “When I’m in California the logo they know is that one, the “Interlocking UK.” So, when I’m recruiting students it’s a direct benefit.”

Also from Kentucky, Director of Athletics Barnhart provided a broader perspective in his assessment of the program’s responsibility to the university in matters of visibility.

We’re trying to find ways to help, and not the least of which is we want to make sure that we carry the university’s good name forward. We put it out there so when people see the University of Kentucky, they go, “Boy, that’s a pretty special place.” And so we try and brand the university in a way that brings honor to it.

**Intercollegiate Athletics Fostering Student Success**

Intercollegiate athletics as a benefit to students, both those who participate as student-athletes and those who do not, was a universal comment from participants in this study. Each person mentioned at least once the importance of highlighting the academic success of student-athletes. But, in addition to academic success, which was expected, several administrators also discussed the totality of the collegiate experience that the university is able to provide as a result of the intercollegiate athletic program. For example, Alabama President Bell and others said intercollegiate athletics creates extracurricular opportunities for students through activities like marching band, which is funded in large part by the intercollegiate athletic program. Beside
extracurricular activities, several participants talked specifically about academic achievement and the unfortunate reality that although most student-athletes are highly successful students, they are rarely recognized for their academic accomplishments. Instead, according to some participants, the academic failures of a few are generalized to the entire enterprise, which in their estimation limits appreciation for just how difficult it is for student-athletes at NCAA Autonomy Five universities to succeed academically and athletically. Surprisingly, Kentucky Provost Tracy went further in his assessment when he connected the academic mission of the university to intercollegiate athletics.

We believe that there are Four Pillars for Student Success in the University of Kentucky – Academic Success, Financial Stability, Belonging and Engagement, and Wellness, both physical and emotional. I would argue that athletics in largest part is belonging and engagement, not only for the students who are also athletes, because we know that they have higher retention rates and higher graduation rates because they’re part of an affinity group. ... But it also creates a belonging and engagement for the other students who enjoy watching those activities. The student who stays here on the weekend for our football game versus going home is more engaged in the university and more likely to feel like they belong.

**Intercollegiate Athletics Bringing People Together**

The final universally mentioned opportunity provided by intercollegiate athletics was perhaps the most salient among participants. Each administrator talked about the value of the intercollegiate athletic program in bringing people back to campus and creating a sense of pride and spirit among stakeholders. Whether it was Steinmetz describing intercollegiate athletics as a “convener,” or Blanton calling it a “connective bond,” or Gearhart’s “social glue” analogy,
participants agreed intercollegiate athletics creates a moment for the campus community, locally and globally, that would not otherwise be possible considering the size of the universities.

Georgia President Morehead stated it this way:

I think it [intercollegiate athletics] is a way to bring everyone together on Saturdays in Athens in the fall. There is nothing more uniting than a home football game, and people are enthusiastic. They are excited. They drive long distances to come to Athens. They love being a part of that experience, and there’s nothing more rewarding for me than being president of the University of Georgia when our fan base and our alumni come together to experience something that means so much for so many individuals.

Some study participants went further in their interpretation of intercollegiate athletics bringing people together. A few administrators highlighted the social and culture implications of intercollegiate athletics. Kentucky President Capilouto said he increasingly appreciates anything that is uniting rather than divisive, including intercollegiate athletics. Arkansas Director of Athletics Long, among others, described those instances in which obtaining a college degree, sometimes made possible in large part by participation in intercollegiate athletics, changes not only the students’ life, but the life of the student’s entire family, for generations. And Arkansas Provost Coleman shared an anecdote from his experience growing up as a fan of the National Football League’s Pittsburgh Steelers that he sees borne out in intercollegiate athletics.

What’s really cool about Pittsburgh is you could talk to anybody across social, economic, racial lines about professional sports teams and you’re immediately connected. It’s one of the very cool things about Pittsburgh. You can have the most elite socioeconomic status person and the homeless connecting over the Steelers. And you know, college athletics
does that too. It allows the professors and the janitors and the community to all actually connect around a common thing they care about, and then that starts other conversations.

The conversations about intercollegiate athletics are not always easy as the enterprise has been accused of exploiting the student-athletes and inappropriately mixing education and entertainment. The participants in this study did not deny these allegations, but instead chose to focus on the opportunities that intercollegiate athletics provides. Therefore, *Appreciation* of intercollegiate athletics was a significant discovery in this investigation.

![Grounded Theory of Leveraging College Athletics: Acceptance](image)

*Note.* The grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics diagram depicts the four tenets of *Experience*, *Understanding*, *Appreciation*, and *Acceptance*.

**Acceptance of Consequences of High Profile Intercollegiate Athletic Programs**

The fourth tenet in the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics is *Acceptance*, specifically the willingness of administrators to accept the potential negative consequences associated with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs (see Figure 5.5). Although study participants articulated several opportunities associated with intercollegiate athletics that they appreciated, they also acknowledged that not everything relative to intercollegiate athletics is
positive, and therefore managing risks is important. Kentucky Director of Athletics Barnhart said, “I think that there’re two or three things that can really put a university at risk and athletics is one of them.” Interestingly, in some cases, study participants even agreed with the common criticisms that intercollegiate athletics is commercial entertainment and skyrocketing expenses have unnecessarily outpaced revenue. However, they accepted these realities while offering counter arguments. For example, Alabama Provost Whitaker said intercollegiate athletics is entertainment, but universities did not create the sports as entertainment phenomenon. He explained, “The fact is, there are millions of people across the country that are willing to attend these events or watch it on TV. It just kind of happened, and it is entertaining.” Kentucky Provost Tracy agreed intercollegiate athletics might be entertainment, but he added there are other activities supported by a university that rely on students that might also be entertaining. He said, “There will be people who say Opera Theater is pure [entertainment]. But didn’t we still charge them to come? We did. And, we charged them to cover the cost of the performance.”

Aside from entertainment comments, study participants also accepted that high profile intercollegiate athletic programs do not align with the original intent of college sports. To these administrators, the aim of college sports was to serve as a convener and the social glue of a university. And after observing current practices, they described high profile intercollegiate athletics as being “out of whack.” Both Georgia President Morehead and former Arkansas Chancellor Gearhart decried the impact of television agreements and the so-called intercollegiate athletics arms race, along with escalating coaches’ salaries. Morehead said it is unfortunate that NCAA Autonomy Five Conferences have not been able to work together to control spending, but he added he is generally pleased with how Georgia operates in the highly competitive
intercollegiate athletics environment. This and similar comments by other study participants about the competitive environment of intercollegiate athletics was an unexpected finding.

Like Morehead, administrators explained that many of their concerns could not be addressed unilaterally and instead require cooperation from a range of stakeholders. For example, issues related to coaches’ salaries were tempered by acceptance of the legal ramifications of attempting to cap earnings. Some participants described this in terms of market, and a university having to meet the market demand for coaches. Ironically, Gearhart said he believed his director of athletics would only pay what was absolutely necessary to hire a quality coach, and “not a penny more.” On this subject, Georgia Faculty Athletics Representative Shipley provided an interesting perspective.

For the most part, I think athletics has observed the guidelines for raises et cetera that are impacting everybody else on campus. That is, if it’s a two-percent pool for the general faculty and staff, that’s all it will be for most people in athletics. Of course, for a coach you have to meet the market if you can.

Another reality accepted by participants in this study is the tension that can exist between the academic enterprise and the intercollegiate athletic enterprise within a university. Although there may be many contentious points, the most frequently mentioned during this investigation stemmed from perceived financial inequities. However, the fact that the universities in this study do not subsidize the intercollegiate athletic program was described by several participants as a logical reason for there to be fewer complaints in comparison to other universities. Regardless, Arkansas Provost Coleman seemed disturbed in his description of the intercollegiate athletic program being able to provide a world-class academic support facility for its 450 student-athletes while the academic support facility for the remainder of the student body, approximately 27,000,
resides in the basement of a dormitory. And from a similar perspective, Shipley described jealousy on campus when faculty members find themselves “in a building with a leaky roof and mold growing in the ground floor” while a new intercollegiate athletic program facility is being built. However, he admitted that dichotomy is not unique to Georgia. Ultimately and summarily, Alabama Provost Whitaker was blunt when he said, “Whenever there are a lot of zeros, people automatically assume it’s bad.”

In addition to finances, comments about the negative visibility associated with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs were frequent. Although participants were quick to point to the positives of being on television or radio, they also communicated the challenges in controlling the message from the university and working with media who would rather report shortcomings than successes. Although this was mentioned by most study participants, administrators from Georgia were most candid. A case in point is an online publication, a subsidiary of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution called DawgNation, that has been increasingly critical of the university and the intercollegiate athletic program to the extent that Director of Athletics McGarity said at times he feels the need to defend the program, and President Morehead said he has asked the intercollegiate athletic program to “think more strategically about how we aggressively and positively impact the message that gets out there.” As expected, the communicators in this study felt compelled to change the narratives that sometimes surround their universities, but other participants agreed with them. For example, Shipley said, “They’re [mainstream media] always picking up on scandal or why the coach was fired, but not if we get two more NCAA postgraduate scholarships. That ought to be front page news, but no, it’s not going to be. It won’t be.” But, Alabama President Bell offered a vastly different sentiment, “I’m
just so pleased with by and large the coverage that we get from the media. I’m very pleased with
the response from our supporters and our alums for our programs.”

Although not all study participants expressed Bell’s level of satisfaction with how the
university or intercollegiate athletic program is portrayed in the media, they all agreed that they
would not want to change the circumstances surrounding intercollegiate athletics. In particular
administrators would not want the intercollegiate athletic program to have a lower profile.
Alabama’s strategic communicator, Bonnin, said, “The good outweighs the bad every single
day,” and Kentucky Provost Tracy said the intercollegiate athletic program is run “the right
way,” so the fact that it is high profile is an asset. Kentucky’s Executive Director of Public
Relations, Blanton, added that although there are days when things happen in intercollegiate
athletics that bleed over to the whole university that also happens in the reverse.

The only study participants who would at times prefer to have a lower profile
intercollegiate athletic program admitted it was because of the potential negative or inaccurate
media coverage. For example, when former student-athletes who allegedly commit crimes are
still connected to the university in the media headline despite no longer being enrolled at the
institution, the administrators expressed frustration. In addition, when current student-athletes
make poor decisions that result in relatively minor penalties, they said it is front-page news, but
those same infractions by other students go unknown to the public. Other than these types of
examples, participants were adamant that having a high profile intercollegiate athletic program is
preferred to the alternative, and Arkansas Director of Athletics Long provided an anecdote.

I’ve been at institutions where you had to work extremely hard to get people interested in
your program, interested in what you are doing not only athletically, but behind the
scenes with what you are doing academically. What you are doing in the community.
What you are doing to help change young people’s lives. To me, the passion of high visibility gives me an audience so I can share all of these wonderful things about intercollegiate athletics and what they do for people far beyond just wins and losses. I’ve been at those places where it’s been all the time and effort to get somebody to pay attention, and that’s no fun.

According to participants, there are both positives and negatives associated with intercollegiate athletics, and a program need not be labeled as high profile in order to end up on the front page of the newspaper. In fact, several mentioned a desire to learn from the challenges other institutions have faced. Many of them talked about the NCAA academic fraud case involving the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and others used the child abuse tragedy at Penn State as an example of the risks a high profile program in particular can bring to a university when it is not managed effectively by a range of university administrators. However, from their perspectives, the rewards associated with a high profile program generally outweighed the risks. To that end, Acceptance of the good and bad associated with intercollegiate athletics was a significant discovery in this investigation.

Note. The grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics diagram depicts each of the theory’s five tenets.

Figure 5.1. Grounded Theory of Leveraging College Athletics
Integration of High Profile Intercollegiate Athletic Programs
to Support the University Mission

The fifth and final tenet in the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics is Integration, specifically how administrators connect the intercollegiate athletic program to the university mission (see Figure 5.1). High profile intercollegiate athletic programs have not always been viewed or treated as integral parts of the university, and some study participants described the gradual cultural shifts on the national and campus levels that led to more cohesiveness between the two enterprises. Former Arkansas Chancellor Gearhart mentioned the influence of former NCAA President Myles Brand in clarifying the overall responsibility of the president for the intercollegiate athletic program, stating Brand should be credited with giving authority to the presidents instead of the directors of athletics or governing boards. Interestingly, all presidents in this study indicated they were ultimately responsible for the intercollegiate athletic program, and they had each established (or maintained) that the director of athletics would report to the president, which was also outlined in the organizational charts I reviewed during document analysis. The related observation in this study was that the directors of athletics are also members of the university cabinet/executive committee and thereby have access to information relevant to the entire university. For Arkansas Director of Athletics Long, such participation led to the intercollegiate athletic program helping meet a critical university need.

The first nanoscience [building] deal was from me sitting at the executive team table knowing that they needed this, knowing that they didn’t have the funding, knowing that they were searching – desperately is probably too strong of a word – but searching for a revenue source. At that time we had the first wave of College Football Playoff money coming, and I knew we were going to end up contributing some of those funds to
campus, but I didn’t know how or the specifics. So I suggested that maybe we make a commitment from athletics to fund the debt bond payments for the 30 years of the bond, and it was well received. Gearhart was thrilled and it solved a need for the campus.

In addition to providing an opportunity to learn about important university matters such as Long described, study participants also indicated the symbolic significance of the director of athletics being integrated into the university governing structure. Current Arkansas Chancellor Steinmetz said that structure puts intercollegiate athletics on the same plane as other units on campus, not above or below, but on the same level. Alabama President Bell added he views the director of athletics as a vice president, although the position does not have a vice president title at Alabama, and he has the same expectations for the director of athletics as the vice president for research, student affairs, academic affairs, etc. He explained it this way:

The whole idea is that our vice presidents and our director of athletics are able to knit together the opportunities and activities that we have ongoing so that we can leverage what is occurring in athletics. And likewise, athletics is able to leverage other things that are occurring on our campus.

Participants in this study revealed the directors of athletics meet regularly, ranging from weekly to bi-weekly, with only the president, in addition to “as-needed” conversations. In keeping with societal shifts, both directors of athletics and presidents confirmed communication by text message in addition to scheduled meetings. All study participants iterated the importance of communication between administrators in ensuring the intercollegiate athletic program remains connected to the university. Both Blanton (Kentucky’s Executive Director of Public Relations) and Bonnin (Alabama’s Vice President for Strategic Communications) said it is not unusual for them to receive a phone call from the director of athletics giving advanced notice of
pending activity within the intercollegiate athletic program that might impact the university, such as a coaching change or compliance allegation. Also, Blanton described joint press conferences on university-wide matters of importance, such as the future of Rupp Arena, which is owned by the city of Lexington but is home to the multi-year NCAA Champion Men’s Basketball Team. More recently, the Kentucky intercollegiate athletic program and university worked together to announce a groundbreaking partnership with Kroger that has implications for both enterprises. Blanton explained there was a bigger picture motive to the location of the press conference.

I think it’s telling, under Mitch’s [Barnhart] leadership and Dr. Capilouto, that we did the roll out of that news conference in the lobby of the science building that athletics helped fund. I think we were trying to make a very intentional statement about these kinds of partnerships and how we see them in the larger context of the university. Athletics funded $65 million dollars of that $112 million science building, which at the time was an unheard of kind of investment in the country. They both very much wanted to go back to that spot.

Inherent in interviews with all study participants, in addition to the importance of communication, was the result of the communication, namely collaboration. The administrators described working relationships that are productive and respectful. There were several examples of joint projects, such as press conferences and capital improvements, but participants also described informal partnerships. For example, Kentucky Provost Tracy described being asked regularly to speak about the university experience to parents and prospective students attending a basketball camp conducted by the head men’s basketball coach. And in an unexpected comment, Tracy wondered if the academic side of the university reaches out to the intercollegiate athletic program enough for support, compared to how often athletics seeks help from academics. In a
response of sorts, Arkansas Provost Coleman talked about wanting to learn from the intercollegiate athletic program how it attracts and retains a diverse pool of academic advisors. Meanwhile, former Alabama Director of Athletics Battle said he actively looked for opportunities to collaborate with academic units on campus, and he encouraged intercollegiate athletic program staff and coaches to engage and interact with faculty and academic staff. Battle implied that such interactions were important in articulating the position of the intercollegiate athletic program within the university context.

Battle’s perspective was shared by almost all study participants as most of them described an intercollegiate athletic program that sees itself as a component of the university. For example, after the first meeting with the director of athletics and other program administrators Alabama’s Bonnin said, “I knew everything was going to be great because they see themselves as part of a whole. They know they’re not the whole, and they really see themselves as part of the university.” Arkansas Director of Athletics Long was more direct in his observation.

I think part of our culture change was communicating that we were a part of the university, not a standalone entity outside, or in many cases above, the university. No, we exist as part of the university. We are only here because of the university, and our role is to enhance the university. So, that was another culture change that we had with staff and coaches and really on campus because they many times viewed us as some external piece that really didn’t connect with campus.

In addition to Long’s observation, perhaps the most direct comments regarding the intercollegiate athletic program being integrated into the university came from discussions about revenue. As expected, several of the universities were either in the midst of a capital campaign or recently completed a significant development project. Unexpectedly however, several directors
of athletics spoke openly about the importance of intercollegiate athletics in these endeavors. Georgia’s McGarity said, “But at the end of the day, the Terry [College of Business] money, the athletic money, it all goes in one big pot called the University of Georgia.” Then he added:

We’re just another department over here. We’re no more important than chemistry, the College of Environmental Sciences [sic], Grady journalism, or Terry College. We’re just another department. We just have more eyes on us and our own section of the newspaper. But we try to fully integrate into the university and committees. How we are viewed is very critical, and it’s essential to me that we are viewed as playing well with others. We’re not entitled. We’re not sitting over here doing crazy things.

The concern that the intercollegiate athletic program might be doing crazy things was not unexpected given the challenges identified by study participants and a range of scholars and stakeholders. However, the acknowledgment by administrators, including directors of athletics, of the importance of dispelling this and other myths was unexpected, making Integration of the intercollegiate athletic program a significant discovery in this investigation.

**Conclusion**

The five tenets of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics describe how senior administrators position the university to leverage the intercollegiate athletic program when those programs are high profile and increasingly pervasive (see Figure 5.1). Based on data collected from document analysis and a range of participants, I have established that at NCAA Autonomy Five universities, administrators tend to have prior Experience at other institutions with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs, and this experience fosters an enlightened Understanding about the program. With an enlightened understanding, administrators begin to Appreciate how the intercollegiate athletic program might support the university. While they
appreciate the positives associated with the intercollegiate program, they also Accept the negative consequences. Once administrators accept the realities of the intercollegiate athletic program, their aim is to Integrate it into the campus culture to support the university mission.

And for Georgia President Jere Morehead, the accomplishments of both enterprises are personal. I take great pride in our success as an institution – reaching new heights of excellence academically as well as our success athletically. Both of them are very important to me. I have a hope, as well as an expectation, that before I finish my presidency we will not only reach new heights of excellence academically, which we have, but that we will also win national championships in football and many of our other sports. If I can finish my presidency seeing a national football championship as well as much greater success in our basketball programs and our other athletic programs, with hopefully some national championships in those programs as well – while we set new records of academic achievement – that will mean that my career as president was a successful one.

Along with perspectives like Morehead’s, evidence of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics includes, but is not limited to, academic and athletic administrators who communicate regularly and seek out opportunities for collaboration and support between the academic and athletic enterprises, and presidents who establish formal and informal organizational structures that include both academic and athletic leaders. The grounded theory also includes attention to visibility opportunities built on the intercollegiate athletic program and intentionality in using resources generated by the program. Collectively, these activities produce an environment that by and large embraces and leverages the high profile intercollegiate athletic program with relatively few directives from the president. Ultimately, the leveraging of the intercollegiate athletic program to support the university mission is an organic activity.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I think those institutions should not give their athletic programs a pass simply because they are now providing resources to the campus. They should actually hold them to an even higher regard.

– Jeff Long, Vice Chancellor and Director of Athletics, University of Arkansas

Intercollegiate athletics is an increasingly visible and pervasive enterprise within some American universities. The unique programs that generate hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue are grouped together within the NCAA, and some believe they set the standard for how successful intercollegiate athletic programs should operate. Interestingly, many of the universities supporting these programs are members of the prestigious AAU and have considerable academic reputations and research portfolios. Furthermore, at these universities, former presidents Bok (2013) and Duderstadt (2006), among others, have argued the influence of intercollegiate athletics has placed a heavy burden on the president, administrators, and the faculty, ultimately moving the institution away from its core mission, and intercollegiate athletics away from its original purpose. According to Thelin (1996), when students added sports to their list of extracurricular activities, alongside debate and drama for example, questions swirled about the impact of such behavior on campus. Some observers wondered if the students would focus more on athletics than on their studies or if athletics would become more important than the institution’s attention to teaching and learning. Today, more than a century later, scholars and stakeholders continue to ponder how intercollegiate athletics might support or detract from the university mission. And the fallout from the Missouri football team’s actions on the entire
university system in 2015 is one example of what these individuals have feared, that issues within the intercollegiate athletic program could have the ability to humble entire institutions.

With this longstanding debate as a backdrop, the purpose of this investigation was to devise a grounded theory that explains how presidents, along with their provosts, directors of athletics, and other senior administrators, position universities to leverage their high profile intercollegiate athletic programs in order to support the university mission. This study used perspectives from the senior-most administrators at some of the most high profile universities to identify how leaders work together to ensure academics and intercollegiate athletics complement one another and thereby benefit the entire campus community. I conducted this investigation in two phases – documents and interviews. I reviewed documents from 18 public research universities in three of the five NCAA Autonomy Five Conferences, and the insights I gleaned from the document analysis helped me identify four of those universities to include in the interview phase. The two-phase design allowed for a broad document evaluation that then shaped interviews with study participants, which when combined led to the development of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics.

According to the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, administrators tend to have prior Experience at institutions with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs, and this experience gives them an enlightened Understanding of the intercollegiate athletic program’s operations. With that understanding, administrators begin to Appreciate how the intercollegiate athletic program might be beneficial to the university. While they appreciate the positives associated with the intercollegiate athletic program, they also Accept the negative consequences such high profile programs might bring to the institution. Once senior administrators accept the
realities of the high profile intercollegiate athletic program, their aim is to *Integrate* it as much as possible into the university culture in order to support the university mission.

**Grounded Theory of Leveraging College Athletics and the Research Questions**

The five tenets of *Experience, Understanding, Appreciation, Acceptance*, and *Integration* together form the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, and this theory does address the three research questions that guided this study. The remainder of this section offers a few examples of how the research data applied to each question.

1) **How do presidents communicate the value of high profile intercollegiate athletic programs to the university community?**

Determining whether or not a high profile intercollegiate athletic program is valuable to a university is an inexact science and varies based on the perspective of the individual. Almost since the introduction of intercollegiate athletics in the 1800s, some scholars have questioned its ability to support the university and to enhance its reputation (Savage et al., 1929; Thelin, 1996). However, others have argued intercollegiate athletics can be a resource in supporting the institutional mission and in enhancing its visibility and prestige, thereby making it an asset (Toma, 2003). Based on the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, it is clear that administrators at NCAA Autonomy Five universities have deemed it to be valuable, and that message is communicated in various ways by the president, and other senior administrators, both directly and indirectly.

In this study, the presidents rarely verbally communicated the value of the intercollegiate athletic program to the university in formal or informal meetings with provosts, directors of athletics, or other administrators. In fact, participants could not easily recall conversations about the importance of the program that involved the president. Instead, they described
conversations about other aspects of the university, such as academic affairs or development, dominating cabinet/executive committee meetings. However, participants explained that if there was something newsworthy happening relative to the intercollegiate athletic program, whether positive or negative, the president would communicate this to them.

Although verbal communication about the importance of intercollegiate athletics was relatively rare in internal meetings, document analysis revealed some verbal communication in official speeches. Nearly all presidents who delivered a university-wide address mentioned accomplishments in intercollegiate athletics. Interestingly, the presidents’ most direct communication relative to the value of the intercollegiate athletic program was evident in matters related to organizational structures, which was appropriately the second research question in this study.

2) **How do presidents establish organizational structures relative to oversight of high profile intercollegiate athletic programs?**

Oversight of intercollegiate athletics has not been limited to presidents and senior administrators (Frey, 1987). Faculty members have historically provided a measure of leadership and governing boards are now more engaged (Bowen & Levin, 2003). At times in opposition to internal structures, external stakeholders, such as television networks, corporate donors, and conference offices, have also been influential (Estler & Nelson, 2005). However, given their responsibility for day-to-day leadership of the university, presidents, provosts, and directors of athletics bear the brunt of responsibility for the intercollegiate athletic program. Based on the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, it is clear that presidents have taken care to ensure the institution’s organizational structures are designed to
support these highly visible enterprises, specifically with regard to university leadership
teams and campus-wide committees.

The document analysis revealed and participants confirmed that nearly all 18 presidents
have established that the intercollegiate athletic program reports to the president, along with
other campus units like research and student affairs. Also, the director of athletics typically
has a seat at the cabinet/executive committee table. By situating intercollegiate athletics
alongside other prominent campus units through direct reporting lines, the presidents
demonstrate its significance to the university. Furthermore, some directors of athletics are
vice presidents within the university and are held to the same expectations as other vice
presidents. In addition to reporting lines and cabinet/executive committees, other
organizational structures of significance relate to university committees.

Nearly all 18 institutions in this study have a committee designed to provide oversight of
the intercollegiate athletic program. These committees have a diverse participation, including
those comprised only of faculty and university leaders to those with community membership.
Some committees report regularly to the president, and others do not, but all serve in an
advisory role meant to provide guidance, most often to the president, on a range of issues,
some of which were contemplated in the third research question in this study.

3) How do presidents and senior administrators orchestrate the use of revenue, visibility,
and/or other opportunities afforded by high profile intercollegiate athletic programs?

The influence of television on intercollegiate athletics is broad, but scholars and
stakeholders most often point to its revenue and visibility offerings as benefits (Bass et al.,
2015; Estler & Nelson, 2005). Television agreements, based primarily on appearances by
football and men’s basketball teams, are now the largest revenue stream for intercollegiate
athletic programs (C. Smith, 2016; Weaver, 2013). However, institutions typically use these appearances to deliver messages about the whole university, apart from the intercollegiate athletic program (Harris, 2009; Tobolowsky & Lowery, 2006; Toma, 2003). In addition to revenue and visibility, other opportunities uncovered by the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics include intercollegiate athletics appealing to key university stakeholders and helping improve student success and graduation rates.

Presidents in this study were hands-on relative to revenue opportunities, often working in concert with directors of athletics on large projects, such as academic facilities to be used by the entire student population that are funded to some extent by the intercollegiate athletic program. They also encouraged the program to financially support scholarships for non-student-athletes and endowed professorships. As it related to visibility, presidents were generally less involved, but they approved of intercollegiate athletics being featured on main university websites and in 30-second television public service announcements. They also accepted that intercollegiate athletics might bolster academic fundraising, therefore at times inviting potential donors to a hospitality suite in the football stadium or basketball arena if doing so was believed to be important to the donor. Often, these guests might be important constituents such as legislators or governing board members who are potential allies for future university initiatives. Finally, presidents acknowledged the positive influence of intercollegiate athletics on students, as evidenced by the academic success of student-athletes and the higher graduation rates among this segment of the student population. Participants also described the possibility of increased retention of students who are not student-athletes as a result of the community created around an intercollegiate athletic program.
These three research questions allowed for a comprehensive examination of oversight of intercollegiate athletics at the highest levels, and by guiding this qualitative study, they informed the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics that emerged from the investigation. In addition, the theory itself aligns with Toma’s (2010a) Building Organizational Capacity (BOC) Framework, to which I was introduced near the end of the theory development process. There are several facets of the BOC Framework that correspond with the Leveraging College Athletics theory, which is important because the grounded theory is a new contribution to scholarship in the area of athletics administration, and according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), identifying connections between new and existing theories is valuable in all research, but particularly in qualitative analysis. Therefore, upon learning about the BOC Framework, it was not difficult to ascertain its alignment with the Leveraging College Athletics theory. As such, the next section of this chapter describes several key connections between Toma’s (2010a) BOC Framework and the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics.

**Grounded Theory of Leveraging College Athletics and Building Organizational Capacity**

The BOC Framework is a strategic management tool that may be used to determine if an organization is prepared to achieve a new goal or implement a new initiative, such as better leveraging of its intercollegiate athletic program. The grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics describes how a university might accomplish this goal in the broadest, philosophical sense. It includes five tenets (i.e., *Experience, Understanding, Appreciation, Acceptance,* and *Integration*) that correspond with the eight elements of the BOC Framework, particularly the tenets of *Understanding* and *Integration*.

First, Toma’s (2010a) purposes element aligns with the *Understanding* and *Integration* tenets of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics. These tenets consider the
importance of the mission of the intercollegiate athletic program and the university, including how the two are related, and the purposes element begins with the idea of organizational mission and vision. Pertinent for this investigation, several study participants iterated the usefulness of a clear mission and/or vision and most annual reports for the intercollegiate athletic program prominently featured these statements. Second, structure and governance within the BOC Framework align with the Integration tenet. Toma (2010a) said these elements explain how an organization is configured to do its business, and with regard to intercollegiate athletics, it relates to directors of athletics who report to the president and are members of the cabinet/executive committee, sitting alongside administrators in research, development, student affairs, and academic affairs. Several study participants described the importance of these reporting structures in positioning the intercollegiate program within the university, including as a symbol of its connection to the institution.

Third, Toma’s (2010a) policies and processes elements correlate with the Understanding tenet, which describes the value of administrators knowing how the intercollegiate athletic program operates in order to appropriately leverage it to the benefit of the university. For example, several provosts in this study described the “Ah-Ha” moments they experienced after receiving such details about the intercollegiate athletic program, and likewise several directors of athletics explained the usefulness of them knowing more about campus operations. Fourth, information within the BOC Framework correlates closely with the Integration tenet, which is built largely on communication as a means to collaboration between the academic enterprise and the athletic enterprise. In addition, for Toma (2010a), the dissemination of information (i.e., communication) is crucial to succeed in strategic management, and in this study both academic
and intercollegiate athletic administrators articulated the importance of communication between leaders in achieving institutional goals.

Fifth, the BOC Framework element of infrastructure corresponds with *Appreciation* in the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics. According to Toma (2010a), infrastructure considers the resources available to achieve a goal, and with regard to intercollegiate athletics, revenue and visibility resources generated by the program are used for institutional purposes. Accordingly, all study participants identified these resources as being significant in helping the university fulfill its mission. Finally, the BOC Framework element of culture connects with both the *Experience* and *Acceptance* tenets of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics. *Experience* describes administrators’ familiarity with the culture of higher education generally and the universities they serve specifically, which enables them to see how the intercollegiate athletic program might support the institution. *Acceptance* considers the negative culture that sometimes surrounds intercollegiate athletics, which evidenced by this investigation is something administrators acknowledge and chose to work within rather than to reform.

In summary, Toma’s (2010a) BOC Framework highlights what is necessary for a university to succeed in implementing a new initiative or navigating organizational change. It may also serve as a checklist for administrators relative to decision-making. The BOC Framework aligns with the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics as its eight elements correspond with the five grounded theory tenets, and when considered together, this new substantive theory has implications for faculty and administrators; state and federal legislators; current and former students; and current and former intercollegiate athletics officials.

**Grounded Theory of Leveraging College Athletics Implications and Future Research**

Intercollegiate athletics has been a part of American higher education for more than a century. It began as an extracurricular activity organized by student groups with some faculty
guidance and little administrator oversight, and has evolved into a highly visible enterprise within most, if not all colleges and universities (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). The amount of emphasis placed on intercollegiate athletics by a college or university varies greatly depending on the level of competition (e.g., NCAA Autonomy Five versus NCAA Division III) and the perspectives of the senior administrators at the institution. Also, the level of interest in the program from both internal and external stakeholders escalates in tandem with program success. In other words, the more successful an intercollegiate athletic program becomes, the more interest it will generate, which in turn increases the potential for negative publicity. At the universities in this study, the intercollegiate athletic programs are highly and historically successful, and they have become increasingly pervasive within the institution.

It is unlikely that the influence of these high profile programs on the universities that support them will decrease, despite decades of attempts by entities like the Knight Commission and the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics. As a result, these universities are largely led by administrators, particularly presidents, who view the intercollegiate athletic program as an asset, despite the potential negative consequences associated with the enterprise. For some of these leaders, the risks of intercollegiate athletics to the university, and their own careers, are outweighed by the rewards. For example, Georgia President Jere Morehead said he will deem his presidency successful if both the academic and athletic enterprises “reach new heights of excellence,” which includes national championships in all sports, but particularly football.

Implications for National and Campus Policy and Practice

Importantly for scholars and stakeholders, Morehead connects the success of his presidency to the intercollegiate athletic program, and although no other presidents were as direct with their comments in this study, other former presidents such as Bok (2013) and Duderstadt
have expressed similar sentiments. As such, Morehead’s parallel has important implications for oversight of high profile intercollegiate athletics, particularly at universities within NCAA Autonomy Five Conferences. At these universities, serving as a senior administrator is to have a measure of responsibility for the intercollegiate athletic program, and this has meaning for national and campus-level oversight and hiring practices.

Nationally, the NCAA has already established the ultimate authority of the president relative to the intercollegiate athletic program, and day-to-day responsibility is assigned to the director of athletics. However, no duty is contemplated for provosts within NCAA policies, and not surprisingly in this study, the chief academic officers were the least informed group of administrators about the intercollegiate athletic program, despite the frequently mentioned connections between student success and intercollegiate athletics. More involvement by provosts could allow for stronger relationships between academic operations in intercollegiate athletics and the university, perhaps minimizing academically-related scandals that generate negative publicity for the institution. On the campus level, there are implications for governing boards and search committees when evaluating and hiring senior administrators, particularly presidents. Athletics oversight might be improved if hiring entities considered the impact of the senior-most leaders having prior experience with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs. Also, it is logical to deduce from the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics that administrators with first-hand knowledge of these unique programs will in turn hire other administrators with similar experience, thereby creating cabinet/executive committees that aim to integrate the intercollegiate athletic program into the university in order to support the mission.

In addition to oversight and hiring, another implication of this study highlights how the intercollegiate athletic program is viewed by administrators, and thereby viewed by internal and
external stakeholders. Several study participants said many of the questions directed at intercollegiate athletics become “silly” when someone sees the program akin to other performing aspects of the university such as debate, theatre, or opera, which was also argued by Brand (2006). For example, scholars and stakeholders rarely question a student majoring in dance, but contemplating a student majoring in athletics is taboo.

Opportunities for Future Research Relative to Oversight of Intercollegiate Athletics

This study presents several opportunities for future research into oversight of intercollegiate athletics, not the least of which is expanding the research sample to include more NCAA Autonomy Five universities, specifically private institutions and those public institutions that are more selective in their admissions. Additional research might also include universities at lower levels within the NCAA structure, particularly those in Division I. Given the diversity of intercollegiate athletic programs, understanding the perspectives of administrators at other competitive levels would be useful, and such a study could employ the same two-phase research design as this investigation. However, it would be important to note the use of revenue and/or visibility opportunities at those levels would probably be less prominent. In addition, this investigation focused on presidents, provosts, and directors of athletics, but future research might highlight governing boards and so-called celebrity head coaches. Similarly, other research might consider the role of special assistants to the president, a position often held by a former and influential director of athletics or head coach. These individuals have varying duties relative to oversight of intercollegiate athletics, particularly at the highest NCAA level, but their views could provide further context for the presidents, provosts, and directors of athletics already included in a growing body of research.
Lastly and in a different vein, the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics could be applied to other types of universities and intercollegiate athletic programs. This theory emerged from the data collected from several high profile programs at prominent research universities. However, its applicability to different programs and universities is unknown. Therefore, future research might seek to determine its relevance in these environments, which as stated is important for national and campus policies. It is important to note, however that in such an investigation the opportunities provided by the intercollegiate athletic program would likely extend beyond revenue and visibility, but the study participants’ perspectives might be similar.

Conclusion

Intercollegiate athletics is a unique enterprise within higher education. No other country in the world has attempted to pair competitive sports with the academic environment. Initially, American universities simply tried to keep pace with students’ desires to have a range of extracurricular activities available to them, but as the activities became more complex, specifically the sport of football, administrators become more involved in providing oversight. Today, some of the most highly-respected universities in the world support intercollegiate athletic programs that bring unprecedented amounts of revenue and visibility to the institution. However, in exchange for revenue and visibility, administrators at these universities are regularly faced with criticisms of commercialism and academic deficiencies. Most administrators have responded to such critiques by first acknowledging a measure of truth therein, but then touting the success of the student-athletes, which is made possible by the revenue the programs generate, and is particularly important as other university funding sources decline.

The aim of this qualitative study was to uncover a theory outlining how administrators at universities supporting high profile intercollegiate athletic programs leverage them to benefit the
institution, and the investigation was fruitful. Based on the document analysis from 18 universities and responses from 16 study participants, the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics emerged, and it explains that senior administrators often have Experience with high profile intercollegiate athletic programs, and this experience improves their Understanding of how the program operates. Eventually, administrators begin to Appreciate how the program benefits the university, and they Accept the potential negative consequences associated with it. Ultimately the administrators work to Integrate the program into the campus culture in order to support the university mission.

In addition to the grounded theory, it was apparent from this investigation that senior administrators were extremely proud of the intercollegiate athletic program generally and how it supports the institution specifically, despite well-documented and well-publicized challenges. Also, athletic administrators expressed a genuine desire for their programs to be viewed as an integral part of the university. Perhaps most salient was the realization that presidents rarely discussed the importance of leveraging the assets associated with intercollegiate athletics. Instead, there was an unspoken agreement that such activity was appropriate and expected.

Finally, oversight of intercollegiate athletics is a complicated matter, and despite the empirical foundation of the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics, it cannot be summarily explained. Oversight of intercollegiate athletics involves a litany of internal and external stakeholders and has a remarkably complex history. But, to now have a new substantive theory that speaks to this particular aspect of higher education administration is important for improving leadership of high profile intercollegiate athletics within the university context.
REFERENCES


doi:10.1177/0038040714533353


National Collegiate Athletic Association (2016). *2016-17, August Division I Manual*. Indianapolis, IN.


APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITIES INCLUDED IN DOCUMENT PHASE OF ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>AAU</th>
<th>NCAA Conference</th>
<th>NCAA Mascot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Alabama</td>
<td>Tuscaloosa, Ala.</td>
<td>Higher Research</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
<td>Fayetteville, Ark.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auburn University</td>
<td>Auburn, Ala.</td>
<td>Higher Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clemson University</td>
<td>Clemson, S.C.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>ACC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Florida</td>
<td>Gainesville, Fla.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida State University</td>
<td>Tallahassee, Fla.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>ACC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
<td>Athens, Ga.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Atlanta, Ga.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>ACC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
<td>Lexington, Ky.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana State University</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, La.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Mississippi</td>
<td>Oxford, Ms.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi State University</td>
<td>Starkville, Ms.</td>
<td>Higher Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Missouri</td>
<td>Columbia, Mo.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of South Carolina</td>
<td>Columbia, S.C.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Tennessee</td>
<td>Knoxville, Tenn.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas</td>
<td>Austin, Tex.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Big 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University</td>
<td>College Station, Tex.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Tech University</td>
<td>Lubbock, Tex.</td>
<td>Highest Research</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Big 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Carnegie Category describes research activity, and considered alongside AAU membership provides a useful description of the academic prowess of a university.
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED IN INTERVIEW PHASE OF ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mitch Barnhart</td>
<td>Director of Athletics</td>
<td>15 Years</td>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Battle</td>
<td>Former Director of Athletics</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>University of Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart Bell</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>University of Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay Blanton</td>
<td>Executive Director of Public Relations</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Bonnin</td>
<td>Vice President for Strategic Communications</td>
<td>1.5 Years</td>
<td>University of Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli Capilouto</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>6 Years</td>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Coleman</td>
<td>Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost</td>
<td>6 Months</td>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Gearhart</td>
<td>Former Chancellor</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Long</td>
<td>Vice Chancellor and Director of Athletics</td>
<td>9 Years</td>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg McGarity</td>
<td>J. Reid Parker Director of Athletics</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jere Morehead</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Shipley</td>
<td>Faculty Athletics Representative</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Steinmetz</td>
<td>Chancellor</td>
<td>1 Year</td>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Tracy</td>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Whitaker</td>
<td>Executive Vice President and Provost</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>University of Alabama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. An additional senior administrator from the University of Georgia was interviewed but declined to be identified.
APPENDIX C

GROUNDED THEORY OF LEVERAGING COLLEGE ATHLETICS

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL GUIDE

The open-ended questions below served as the foundation for each semistructured interview conducted during the grounded theory investigation. In each interview, additional follow-up and clarifying questions were also asked and answered.

Presidents

1. What was your perspective on intercollegiate athletics, particularly at the highest levels, before you became president? What is it now?

2. Do you recall anyone talking with you about oversight of intercollegiate athletics during the search and selection process?

3. How would you describe your responsibility for oversight of intercollegiate athletics?

4. How would you describe your interactions with your director of athletics?

5. What are the advantages/disadvantages of having the director of athletics report to you?

6. What role do you see a provost having in oversight of intercollegiate athletics, if any?

7. What have you tried to communicate to the campus community about intercollegiate athletics?

8. How have you tried to orchestrate how intercollegiate athletics revenue is used for the good of the university?

9. How have you tried to orchestrate how intercollegiate athletics visibility is used for the good of the university?
10. Some people, including university presidents, have said intercollegiate athletics is solely entertainment and should not be supported by a university. In what way do you agree or disagree with that perspective?

11. What do you think the role of intercollegiate athletics should be within the university?

12. Have you ever wished the intercollegiate athletic program had a lower profile? Why?

13. What do you wish people understood better about intercollegiate athletics and higher education?

14. Why do you do this work?

15. Nationally, Myles Brand was the first president to serve as president of the NCAA, how would you describe his impact on presidential leadership of intercollegiate athletics?

16. Is there anyone else you would suggest I speak with on this subject? And, may I reach out to you again if I need to clarify anything or have further questions?

**Provosts**

1. What was your perspective on intercollegiate athletics, particularly at the highest levels, before you became provost? What is it now?

2. In what ways have you been asked to be involved with intercollegiate athletics, and did you feel like that was an appropriate level or kind of engagement for a provost?

3. What message, if any, have you received from your president about leveraging the intercollegiate athletic program for the good of the university?

4. Some people, including faculty and presidents, have said intercollegiate athletics is solely entertainment and should not be supported by a university. In what way do you agree or disagree with that perspective?
5. One criticism of intercollegiate athletics is its focus on winning, often at the expense of academics. How, if at all, have you addressed this criticism with the faculty and others?

6. What do you think the role of intercollegiate athletics should be within the university?

7. What do you think the role of faculty should be relative to intercollegiate athletics?

8. How would you describe your interactions with athletics administrators at the university, specifically the director of athletics?

9. How does your office engage with the intercollegiate athletic program academic office?

10. Have you ever wished the intercollegiate athletic program had a lower profile? Why?

11. What do you wish people understood better about intercollegiate athletics and higher education?

12. What processes or procedures, if any, have you borrowed from intercollegiate athletics?

13. Why do you do this work?

14. Is there anyone else you would suggest I speak with on this subject? And, may I reach out to you again if I need to clarify anything or have further questions?

**Directors of Athletics**

1. How would you describe your interactions with the president?

2. What advantages or disadvantages do you see from reporting directly to the president?

3. What message, if any, have you received from your president about leveraging the intercollegiate athletic program for the good of the university?

4. How would you describe your interactions with the provost?

5. What do you think the role of intercollegiate athletics should be within the university?
6. What factors do you consider when determining if or how revenue generated from intercollegiate athletics might support non-intercollegiate athletic university needs?

7. What factors do you consider when determining if or how intercollegiate athletic program visibility opportunities might support the university?

8. Have you ever wished the intercollegiate athletic program had a lower profile? Why?

9. What processes or procedures, if any, have you borrowed from academics?

10. What do you wish people understood better about intercollegiate athletics and higher education?

11. Why do you do this work?

12. Is there anyone else you would suggest I speak with on this subject? And, may I reach out to you again if I need to clarify anything or have further questions?

**Communications/Public Relations Administrators**

1. What do you think the role of intercollegiate athletics should be within the university?

2. What message, if any, have you received from your president about leveraging the intercollegiate athletic program for the good of the university?

3. Can you give me a few examples of how you have been intentional about using the visibility of the intercollegiate athletic program to support to the university mission?

4. How would you describe your interactions with the director of athletics?

5. How would you describe the interactions between your office and the intercollegiate athletics communications office?

6. What processes or procedures, if any, have you borrowed from intercollegiate athletics? Has intercollegiate athletics borrowed any of your processes or procedures?
7. Have you ever wished the intercollegiate athletic program had a lower profile? Why?

8. What do you wish people understood better about intercollegiate athletics and higher education?

9. Why do you do this work?

10. Is there anyone else you would suggest I speak with on this subject? And, may I reach out to you again if I need to clarify anything or have further questions?

**Faculty Athletics Representatives**

1. What do you think the role of intercollegiate athletics should be within the university?

2. What message, if any, have you received from your president about leveraging the intercollegiate athletic program for the good of the university?

3. How do you work with the president on matters related to intercollegiate athletics?

4. How do you work with the provost on matters related to intercollegiate athletics?

5. How do you interact with intercollegiate athletics administrators, specifically the director of athletics?

6. How do you think the faculty should be engaged with intercollegiate athletics?

7. Have you ever wished the intercollegiate athletic program had a lower profile? Why?

8. What do you wish people understood better about intercollegiate athletics and higher education?

9. Why do you do this work?

10. Is there anyone else you would suggest I speak with on this subject? And, may I reach out to you again if I need to clarify anything or have further questions?
APPENDIX D

GROUNDED THEORY OF LEVERAGING COLLEGE ATHLETICS

DATA ANALYSIS CODE SHEET

Approximately 30 codes emerged from the investigation interview data, and nearly all codes were grouped into one or more of the five tenets that comprise the grounded theory of Leveraging College Athletics. (Codes in quotations were in-vivo comments from participants.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory Tenet</th>
<th>Incorporated Codes</th>
<th>Researcher Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Experience included being a former student-athlete and leadership was highlighted by several participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sports Fan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Campus Culture</td>
<td>Integrity/accountability was an unexpected code to emerge, along with mission (athletics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrity/Accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mission (Athletics)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding Athletics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>Appreciating Athletics</td>
<td>“In the Black” and “The Zeros” both referred to fiscal operations, and they focused on how intercollegiate athletics is able to support academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Brings People Together/Spirit”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“In the Black”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pride</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The Zeros”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visibility (Positive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>“Out of Whack” and “The Zeros” both referred to fiscal operations, and they focused on the tension between academics and intercollegiate athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Messaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Out of Whack”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visibility (Negative)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The Zeros”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Athletic/Academic Expertise</td>
<td>This tenet included the most codes, and therefore it was the most encompassing of all tenets in the theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletics Support of Academics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Have it all Here”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mission (University)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Part of a Whole”</td>
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<td>Perspective</td>
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