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Investigating NCAA administrator values in NCAA Division I athletic departments

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The presence of the arms race in intercollegiate athletics has led to extensive spending on major, revenue-producing sports (Knight Commission, 2004, 2010). Despite revealing that only a handful of programs produce profits (NCAA, 2009), administrators continue to embrace a commercial model that has coincided with the elimination of nonrevenue, Olympic sports in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic departments. The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the revenue and nonrevenue program elements that are most highly valued by NCAA Division I athletic administrators (N = 248) to understand athletic department administrative theory and to facilitate an effort to develop strategic measures to counter program discontinuation. The results reveal an athletic organism that has morphed into a divided system with each school mimicking one another in the arms race of expenditures in their revenue sports (Knight Commission, 2010), while maintaining core values in the Olympic sports.

The arms race of intercollegiate athletic expenditures (Knight Commission, 2004) continues to grow as conference realignments, multi-billion dollar television agreements, and superstar *amateur* athletes dominate the headlines (Zagier, 2010). Despite a reality revealing that only a handful of programs produce profits (Fulks, 2009), this empire of commercialism stands as the most visible product of the administrative reward system in intercollegiate athletics. While the empire has risen, many Olympic sport traditions have fallen as nonrevenue programs have been eliminated. These disturbing developments have left many wondering where the priorities of intercollegiate athletics now lie.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the revenue and nonrevenue program elements¹ that are most highly valued by NCAA Division I athletic administrators to broaden the understanding of athletic department administrative theory and to facilitate an effort to develop strategic measures to counter program discontinuation. While developing a greater understanding of administrator values will not in itself curb the discontinuation trend or curtail the arms race, the data provides insight into organizational standards that can help guide coaches and decision makers in resource allocation decisions. Additionally, this research can facilitate

fortification through a deeper understanding of the institutional structures that house nonrevenue sports.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional theory postulates that organizations, like individuals, seek approval or legitimacy from their peers. As such, organizations tend to behave in ways that are consistent with the actions and orientations of the organizations within their institutional sphere. An important element of institutional theory proposes that organizations within the same social system are influenced by one another and tend to imitate one another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Scott, 2001, Scott & Meyer, 1994). University athletic departments within the same conference, for example, are likely to espouse similar core values, offer the same kinds of services, support a similar organizational structure, and prioritize budgets in a similar fashion (Chelladurai, 2005). The process of organizations becoming similar to one another is called institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

As a sub-element to institutional theory, DiMaggio & Powell (1983) suggested three forces that may lead to isomorphism – or institutions resembling one another. One of the forces that is particularly critical to the theoretical foundation of this study is normative isomorphism. The basic premise of normative isomorphism is the idea that all organizations act similarly due to the values and processes adopted by the decision makers. These decision makers, most likely, have been trained and educated within organizations or universities who utilize and promote analogous methods and strategies (Chelladurai, 2005). Many athletic directors, for instance, may have been educated utilizing similar text books, curricula, and career paths through the NCAA system. These values and beliefs that have been engrained in them throughout their training will be reflected in the structures and processes these administrators institute within their respective organizations (Chelladurai, 2005).

As we explore the values of revenue and nonrevenue sports through the eyes of NCAA athletic administrators, this theory provides a very fitting theoretical foundation. Based on previous research it is clear that within intercollegiate athletics, there is an evident dualism in value systems. On one side resides the stated purpose of intercollegiate athletics “to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount” (NCAA, 2010). An often-opposing value system, however, is frequently present with the arms race of expenditures toward the never-ending battle for supremacy, national exposure, and financial rewards (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics [KCIA], 2010).

For most teams at most institutions, these roles can be reconciled. But in high-profile sports, tensions often surface between the core mission of universities and commercial values. These tensions have grown significantly over the past two decades. The pursuit of television contracts and slots in football bowl games, together with the quest to win championship tournaments in basketball, have had a destabilizing influence on athletics programs. Among other worrisome developments, the intensely competitive environment at the top levels of college sports has prompted four rounds of realignment among athletic conferences since 1994; a bidding war for prominent coaches; and escalating expenses across the board (KCIA, 2010, p.3).

Theoretically, education should be the primary purpose of intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2010). The mission statements of university athletic departments throughout the country purport the emphasis on the *student-athlete*. Those who have been trained within the functioning walls of many athletic departments, however, have learned that career success and advancement in intercollegiate athletics is largely dependent on the success of the football and basketball team in addition to the fundraising that is accomplished (Zimbalist, 1999). Each athletic director has been trained, educated, and advanced through this same system with these often conflicting value systems. Institutional theory suggests that these administrators would attempt to seek legitimacy and approval from the administrators within their institutional sphere, institutional isomorphism would suggest the institutions to be similar to one another in terms of their value systems, and normative isomorphism suggests that these similarities are largely due to the value system of the decision makers. With the dualism present at all levels of this theoretical foundation, it is difficult to ascertain how this fits into the overall picture, and specifically how administrators might acknowledge this dualism in the different values placed on their revenue and nonrevenue sport programs.

Athletic directors may strive to espouse the core educational values through the Olympic sports that are often less tainted by the pull of commercialism and corporate model mentality that drives much of the alternative value systems often prevalent in revenue producing sports. Within the big time sports, these core values, while ever-present, seem to often get lost in the search for championships and the national exposure success can bring. Although there is often a pull toward commercialization, there is also a pull toward legitimacy and approval from their university environments. In an era of program discontinuation, stretched budgets, and talk of reform, research into the true value of revenue and nonrevenue sport through the perspective of those who hold the reins within intercollegiate athletic departments is critical.

Conceptual Framework

Sport Discontinuation

The arms race of intercollegiate athletic expenditures (Knight Commission, 2004) continues to grow as conference realignments, multi-billion dollar television agreements, and superstar *amateur* athletes dominate the headlines (Knight Commission 2010; Zagier, 2010). Despite a reality revealing that only a handful of programs produce profits (Fulks, 2009), this empire of commercialism stands as the most visible product of the administrative reward system in intercollegiate athletics. While the empire has risen, many Olympic sport traditions have fallen as nonrevenue programs have been eliminated. Despite the realization of growth in many men's and women's sport programs, the *NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report* (2008) illustrated that there were eight nonrevenue men's sport teams that realized overall reductions in the number of student-athletes offered by their programs from 1981 to 2007. When focusing closer on the report, the data illustrated that the following four men's sport teams have suffered the most extensive losses in student-athlete participation opportunities: wrestling (1687 student-athletes), gymnastics (1043 student-athletes), fencing (788 student-athletes), and rowing (598 student-athletes) (NCAA Sport Sponsorship, 2008). Similarly, the report illustrates similar trends when taking a closer look at the number of programs sponsored within these sports. For example, from 1981 to 2008, the number of men's wrestling programs offered within the NCAA dropped from 363 to 220 (Mike Moyer [Executive Director of NWCA], personal interview,

January 26, 2009; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2008). Thus, the greatest net loss has come from these nonrevenue, Olympic sports.

In today's intercollegiate athletic environment, administrators have the unique challenge of balancing university values while attempting to maximize the revenues realized by their department. In an effort to maintain financial sustainability, several athletic directors have publically stated that the elimination of men's nonrevenue programs is the only way to balance their athletic budgets (Arizona State, 2008; Steinbach, 2007). Despite these claims, Marburger and Hogshead-Makar (2003) have instead argued that the trend to eliminate programs is driven primarily by profit-motivated athletic programs and not by tight budgets. Regardless of the reasoning for program eliminations, with rising costs in men's basketball and football (Marburger & Hogshead-Makar) coupled with state budget deficits and higher education cut-backs, there is a strong possibility that a reduction in institutional support will occur for unprofitable athletic programs (Brady, 2009). Currently, top athletic departments receive over \$800 million in student fees and university subsidization (Gillium, Upton, & Berkowitz, 2010). With this subsidization nearly at an all-time high, it is clear that men's nonrevenue sport teams will be facing declining financial support in future generations (James & Ross, 2004). As the recession in the United States has affected revenue streams of intercollegiate athletic departments at all levels, a new wave of sport cuts has occurred (DeSchrive, 2009; Steinbach, 2007), leaving many Olympic sport stakeholders searching for proactive methods to fortify their programs.

Approaches to Sustainability

As the torrent of program discontinuation began to sweep the nation, the United States General Accounting Office (USGAO) conducted a study examining the differing strategies used by universities to avoid program discontinuation. Within the time period of 1992-2000, the 693 schools that added one or more intercollegiate athletic teams without discontinuing a team "pursued creative strategies to build athletic programs without discontinuing teams" (2001, p.25). These "creative strategies" included several methods of raising revenue and cutting costs. Fundraising efforts included seeking donations, renting athletic facilities, providing overflow parking for city events, and hosting events. Cost containment strategies included recruiting via telephone, replacing full-time faculty positions with a coach, limiting the size of the football roster, and limiting team travel, among other strategies (GAO, 2001). This "creative strategy" conclusion serves as an important source of founding evidence to support the premise that there are ways to combat program elimination.

Weight (2009) explored the potential role of a nonrevenue coach pursuing creative strategies in an effort to help enhance the sustainability of NCAA wrestling programs. In this study researching Division I athletic directors and Division I wrestling coaches, athletic directors reported that coaches can enhance their program's chance of vitality through *complementary entre-lationship promotion*. A program can be strengthened by complementary coaches led by an entrepreneur who continually strives to build indispensable relationships with donors, athletic department administrators, prominent figures, & alumni; is active in fundraising; is promoting their sport; and is promoting the program's public perception. The study concludes that if a coach can build significant demand for his/her program, the supply will be fortified and considerably less likely to get cut.

Building on the concept that a coach can have a pivotal role in the effort to sustain nonrevenue sports, Weight and Cooper (2011) studied athletic directors and wrestling head

coaches of Football Bowl Subdivision schools in order to explore perceptions regarding the criteria utilized in program-termination decisions. Findings suggest that athletic directors utilize budget shortages and the financial strain of the program as primary discontinuation criteria followed by gender equity implications. In contrast, the coaches indicated that gender equity, and regional sport popularity, were the primary reasons for program eliminations. The results illustrate that athletic directors and coaches have significantly different perceptions about the reasons why nonrevenue programs such as men's wrestling are eliminated. Given the potentially significant role a coach can have in the shaping of program priorities and value systems, it is troubling to find such a disparity between athletic director criteria and coach beliefs within a nonrevenue sport. These studies provide foundational support toward a hypothesis that the values of nonrevenue sport may include financial elements. Each study points to the fortification from discontinuation that can occur when demand is evident. This conclusion would also lead to a belief that administrators may place similar values on both revenue and nonrevenue sports.

Significance of Research

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the program elements that are most highly valued by NCAA athletic administrators within revenue and nonrevenue sport programs. A better understanding of the elements deemed most important to administrators can provide insight into the administrative processes and logic that drive administrative decision making within the institutional sphere. Further, a more thorough understanding of the unique nonrevenue elements that are highly valued can facilitate an effort to develop strategic measures to counter program discontinuation. Based on a review of the related literature, the following research questions were created to guide the assessment:

[RQ 1] What do NCAA Division I administrators value most highly within their department sport programs?

[RQ 2] What are the nonrevenue, Olympic program values that NCAA Division I administrators value most within their athletic departments?

[RQ 3] What are the revenue program values that NCAA Division I administrators value most within their athletic departments?

[RQ 4] Are there variations in the program values between revenue and nonrevenue programs?

[RQ 5] Are there variations in the program values when focusing on the divisional affiliation (Football Bowl Series [FBS], Football Championship Subdivision [FCS]) of the institutions?

Method

Survey Instrument

Based on a review of inquiries measuring organizational value systems (Amos & Weathington, 2008; De Clercq, Fontaine, & Anseel, 2008), a 17-item survey instrument was developed and utilized to identify the program values (nonrevenue, Olympic and revenue-producing sports) that are rated most important by senior-level administrators within NCAA athletic departments. However, the specific target of NCAA program values had not been examined directly or indirectly in previous research, and as a result there was a need to address the construct validity of the research instrument. Thus, the current study utilized a panel of experts (four senior-level intercollegiate athletic administrators, two professors, and an expert in research and survey design) to ensure that the instrument's content was sound based on the purpose of the research. Following several rounds of revisions, the survey content was unanimously supported by the panel.

The consultation with the panel of experts brought forth a few key areas to improve the survey instrument. First, a decision was made to include three background questions (e.g., position, conference affiliation, divisional affiliation) to gain an understanding of the NCAA athletic departments choosing to participate in the research. Second, as shown in Table 1, the panel agreed on the inclusion of 11 specific program values to assess the most important elements within nonrevenue, Olympic and revenue-producing sport programs. For the questions relating to the specific program values, the decision was made to include a 6-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree; 6=strongly agree) to examine the senior administrator's responses to program values. In addition, there were three open-ended questions that were included to allow these administrators to expand on their perceptions of the most important nonrevenue, Olympic and revenue-producing program values.

Sample

The survey instrument was distributed via email to each of the NCAA athletic departments featured at the Division I level (342 institutions). The staff directories on each of the related athletic websites were used to identify the head athletic directors at each of the institutions. While the head athletic directors were established as the primary contact, the two highest-ranking administrators were also copied on the invitation to maximize the return rate of the survey. As a precaution to avoid redundancy in athletic department responses, the head athletic director was asked to respond or to have one senior-level administrator (with most appropriate credentials) respond to the survey. Following the distribution (described in next section), the breakdown in respondents was 43.9% head athletic directors and 56.1% senior-level administrators.

Because of the unique nature of the research, the decision was made to break the study into two phases: the nonrevenue, Olympic phase and the revenue-producing phase. During the first phase, the administrators were asked to rate their perceptions of the most important program values within nonrevenue, Olympic sports. One month after the initial invitation, the administrators were contacted with a follow-up email to remind them about the opportunity to participate in the research. Following a two-month lapse of the initial email invitation, a total of 155 (45.3%) NCAA Division I programs had responded to the survey. The email address was collected from the respondent to ensure a reliable sample during the second phase of the research. In the revenue-producing phase, the same administrators were sent invitations to respond to the same program values when focusing on revenue-producing sports. Similar to the first phase, a follow-up email was sent one month later to remind administrators about the survey

participation. Following the same two-month lapse, there were a total of 93 (27.2%) NCAA Division I programs that responded to the research. The discrepancy in the sample was primarily due to the fact that an identical sample (155 respondents from first phase of research) was used to ensure reliability in the data. In addition, it is possible that administrators were also less comfortable responding to the program values when focusing on revenue producing sport programs.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were generated for “cumulative” (all sports) scale items and a *T*-test was conducted for each item to determine the significance of the sample mean to determine significance of the sample mean relative to the scale (see Table 1). Similarly, an identical process was carried out when examining the nonrevenue, Olympic and revenue producing scale items provided by senior-level administrators. Prior to conducting the data analyses, the potential scale response outcomes were discussed with administrators and it was decided that a value of 5 (in between moderate and strong levels of agreement) would be needed for a program element to be considered a critical element within athletic departments. In addition, a comparison of the means was conducted to determine if there were differences in the perceptions of the importance of values when focusing on the nonrevenue, Olympic and revenue producing sport teams (see Table 2). Further, an analysis of variance was conducted to determine the impact of divisional affiliation on the emphasis that administrators place on values within the nonrevenue and revenue sport programs (see Table 3). The Levene’s Test for Equality of Variance was used when comparing the sample means within the related statistical procedures. An alternative “equal variances not assumed” format was used when necessary to account for heterogeneous variances.

Results

Descriptive statistics identified the “cumulative” program values (all sports combined) that NCAA Division I administrators rated as having the highest level of importance within their coinciding athletic departments. In addition to the means and standard deviations, the research utilized a one-sample *T*-Test ($\mu \geq 5$) to examine each of the program values included in the research. As illustrated in Table 1, there were six program values that were significantly higher than 5 at the $p = .001$ level: conduct (competition) $t(247) = 138.99, p < .001$, conduct (social) $t(246) = 136.76, p < .001$, academic achievement $t(247) = 132.06, p < .001$, athletic success $t(247) = 104.67, p < .001$, personal relationships $t(244) = 88.08, p < .001$, community involvement $t(245) = 93.62, p < .001$. The remaining results for the nonrevenue and revenue sport programs are discussed in the following sections.

Table 1

Cumulative NCAA Division I Administrator's Responses to Sport Program Values (All Sports)

Olympic Program Values	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Conduct (Competition) <i>Proper behavior exhibited by coaches/student-athletes during competition.</i>	*5.76	.650
Conduct (Social) <i>Proper behavior exhibited by coaches/student-athletes outside of competition.</i>	*5.72	.657
Academic Achievement <i>High levels of individual and team success in the classroom.</i>	*5.67	.676
Athletic Success <i>High levels of individual/team success in sport competition.</i>	*5.43	.817
Personal Relationships <i>Strong relationships between administrators and members of coaching staff.</i>	*5.19	.922
Community Involvement <i>Strong team presence in local community service initiatives.</i>	*5.11	.855
Fundraising <i>Development of external funds to supplement team's operating budget.</i>	4.87	1.157
Fan Support <i>Strong team support by fans in surrounding geographical region.</i>	4.72	1.022
Revenue Production <i>Development of positive revenue streams at team athletic competitions.</i>	4.10	1.640
Enrollment <i>Increase in university enrollment from student-athlete participation on team.</i>	3.74	1.470
Program Cost <i>Low cost to fund the annual operating budget of sport team.</i>	3.65	1.402

Note. The scale ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6)

* $p < .001$ ($\mu \geq 5$)

Olympic and Revenue Program Values

In response to Research Questions two, three, and four, the program values were examined based on sport type (nonrevenue and revenue) to determine the areas that were deemed most important to NCAA Division I administrators (see Table 2). When focusing on the revenue sport program values, the data illustrated that administrators rated the following subscale items

as statistically significant ($\mu \geq 5$) in the research: conduct (competition) $t(91) = 10.25, p < .001$, athletic success $t(92) = 7.12, p < .001$, academic achievement $t(92) = 8.25, p < .001$, conduct (social) $t(91) = 10.40, p < .001$, fan support $t(90) = 3.75, p < .001$, fundraising $t(90) = 3.66, p < .001$, and revenue production $t(89) = 3.05, p < .001$. In addition, when focusing on the nonrevenue, Olympic values, the results showed that administrators rated five subscale items as statistically significant: conduct (competition) $t(153) = 15.20, p < .001$, conduct (social) $t(154) = 13.68, p < .001$, academic achievement $t(154) = 13.40, p < .001$, athletic success $t(154) = 5.11, p < .001$, and personal relationships $t(154) = 2.50, p < .001$.

Table 2

NCAA Division I Administrator Perceptions of Sport Program Values ('Nonrevenue', 'Olympic' Versus 'Revenue Producing')

Program Values	"Revenue-Producing" Sport Programs		"Nonrevenue", "Olympic" Sport Programs	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Achievement	5.66*	.665	5.73*	.667
Athletic Success	5.67*	.771	5.30*	.869
Community Involvement	5.08	.769	5.12	.896
Conduct (Competition)	5.67*	.630	5.80*	.650
Conduct (Social)	5.65*	.601	5.75*	.659
Enrollment	3.83	1.392	3.69	1.506
Fan Support	5.37*	.950	4.30	.884
Fundraising	5.35*	.923	4.57	1.216
Personal Relationships	5.16	.782	5.19*	1.011
Program Cost	3.63	1.433	3.67	1.387
Revenue Production	5.33*	1.038	3.34	1.496

Note. The scale ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6).

* $p < .01$ ($\mu \geq 5$)

Further analysis demonstrated the variation in administrator's perceptions of program values when focusing on the comparison of subscale items for nonrevenue and revenue sport teams. In particular, the investigation revealed that NCAA Division I administrators rated the following commercial program values as having a more important emphasis in revenue sports than in nonrevenue sports: (1) fan support $t(244) = 8.172, p < .01$, fundraising fan support $t(244) = 5.329, p < .01$, and revenue production $t(242) = 10.985, p < .01$. Similarly, the administrators also rated athletics $t(246) = 2.144, p < .01$ as significantly more important in revenue sports than in nonrevenue sports.

Variations in "Inner Divisional" Responses (FBS versus Non-FBS)

In response to Research Question five, analysis of variance was utilized to determine whether or not there were statistically significant differences in administrator's responses to nonrevenue and revenue program values when focusing on the FBS affiliation (FBS [$n = 126$]; Non-FBS [$n = 122$]) of the athletic department. As shown in Table 3, the results illustrated that FBS affiliation had a significant influence on the level of importance for the following program values when focusing on nonrevenue and revenue sports: athletics $F(3,247) = 4.45, p < .01$, fan support $F(3,245) = 31.47, p < .01$, fundraising $F(3,243) = 9.24, p < .01$, and revenue production $F(3,243) = 42.75, p < .01$. In particular, the data supported the notion that commercial program values (e.g., fundraising, revenue production) were most important in revenue sports at the FBS level. For example, when focusing on fan support, the results illustrated that FBS administrators placed a significantly higher value on attracting fans in revenue sports than Non-FBS administrators in nonrevenue and revenue sports. The remaining differences in commercial program values are provided in Table 3.

Table 3

*Influence of Divisional Affiliation on Administrator Perceptions of Program Values
(Nonrevenue vs. Revenue Producing)*

Factor	F	p	Mean Difference
Athletics	2.848*	.005	
FBS (Revenue) v. Non-FBS (Nonrevenue)		.004	.510*
Academics	1.756	.156	
Community Involvement	0.094	.963	
Conduct (Competition)	0.973	.406	
Conduct (Social)	0.883	.451	
Enrollment	2.391	.069	
Fan Support	31.469*	.000	
FBS (Revenue) v. Non-FBS (Revenue)		.009	.578*
FBS (Revenue) v. FBS (Nonrevenue)		.000	1.236*
FBS (Revenue) v. Non-FBS (Nonrevenue)		.000	1.443*
Non-FBS (Revenue) v. FBS (Nonrevenue)		.000	.657*
Non-FBS (Revenue) v. Non-FBS (Nonrevenue)		.000	.863*
Fundraising	9.238*	.000	
FBS (Revenue) v. FBS (Nonrevenue)		.001	.817*
FBS (Revenue) v. Non-FBS (Nonrevenue)		.004	.716*
Non-FBS (Revenue) v. FBS (Nonrevenue)		.001	.809*
Non-FBS (Revenue) v. Non-FBS (Nonrevenue)		.004	.707*
Personal Relationships	0.641	.979	
Program Costs	1.078	.359	
Revenue Production	42.747*	.000	
FBS (Revenue) v. FBS (Nonrevenue)		.000	2.321*
FBS (Revenue) v. Non-FBS (Nonrevenue)		.000	2.259*
Non-FBS (Revenue) v. FBS (Nonrevenue)		.000	1.654*
Non-FBS (Revenue) v. Non-FBS (Nonrevenue)		.000	1.592*

Note. The scale ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6). The sample

breakdown for the table were the following: FBS ($n = 126$); Non-FBS ($n = 122$).

Discussion

A Divided System

The primary underpinning of institutional theory is that an organization tends to emulate the other organizations in the sphere of organizational association (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This implementation has been seen in action within the arms race in intercollegiate athletics, and it is seen in the value placed on sport programs researched within this study. The clear agreement the athletic directors demonstrated in valuing social and competitive conduct followed by academic and athletic success supports the theory of institutional isomorphism. In an era where the educational mission of intercollegiate athletics is in question (Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2005; 2007), many proclaim the educational mission to be lost. The findings reveal the educational values (including conduct and academic achievement) within intercollegiate athletics to be quite strong – significantly valued in all divisional affiliations. Thus, the data seems to support the notion that a divided system may exist at the Division I level. Each school mimicking one another in the arms race of expenditures in their revenue sports with significant emphasis placed on fan support, fundraising, and revenue production (KCIA, 2010), while maintaining untainted core values in the Olympic sports. What our data supports is institutional isomorphism with divided purposes within athletic departments.

Why did the athletic administrators respond unquestionably that academics are of maximal importance? Normative isomorphism postulates that the similarity between organizations within an institutional system is largely due to the thoughts and values of the administrators. These administrators were most likely trained and rewarded similarly throughout their educational and professional journey through the NCAA system with the often conflicting value systems including education, amateurism, and commercial success (Chelladurai, 2005). The financial pull is not so evident within the Olympic sports, so these programs may present relief to administrators striving to align the stated purpose and actual purpose of their athletic departments. The pure values of intercollegiate athletics can be unfalteringly focused upon within these programs. If nonrevenue coaches are aware of this divide between the push for academic institutional values, and the pull of the arms race, coaches can strive to facilitate the assimilation of university value systems with athletic department value systems, and therefore strive to uphold the true mission of intercollegiate athletics - through academic success.

The research also demonstrates unified program elements across the divisions in both forms of conduct (competition and social), academics, and community involvement. The strong agreement in these specific areas supports the notion of institutional isomorphism among NCAA athletic departments. This unified emphasis on solid conduct and education represents program elements that line up with departmental and university value systems.

While the research seems to support the notion that administrators embrace solid core principles, a clear divide exists between revenue and nonrevenue sports when commercial elements are valued. Revenue production, fundraising, and fan support are all significantly more important to administrators within their revenue sports. This supports the literature exploring the arms race and increased commercialism in athletics (Knight Commission, 2010; Zagier, 2010), but does not necessarily confirm the early literature related to program discontinuation and

efforts to achieve nonrevenue sport fortification through entrepreneurial efforts (Weight, 2009; Weight & Cooper, 2009; USGAO, 2001).

With a lack of solid financial return on investment (ROI) in these nonrevenue, Olympic sports, the data seems to support the notion that administrators embrace the commercial potential of sports that have a track record of offering revenue streams. This doesn't necessarily mean, however, that previous research indicating fortification through the creation of demand (Weight, 2009; Weight & Cooper, 2009) is incorrect. Although this study reveals an administrator value system de-emphasizing the importance of nonrevenue program financial returns, this may simply be a side effect of the institutional sphere and the isomorphism in belief systems that have developed. What the results may more clearly indicate is that administrators do not perceive financial potential within the nonrevenue sports. This strongly supports the views of institutional isomorphism and the warped sense of reality held by many administrators that the football and basketball teams are the answer to their financial ailments.

The current reality is that the vast majority of revenue sports lose significant amounts of money (Knight Commission, 2010; NCAA, 2009), yet administrators continue to value the untapped revenue potential of these sports – hanging on to the belief system that has been engrained in them through intercollegiate athletic administrative isomorphism. In future generations, if nonrevenue sports are able to demonstrate financial viability, perhaps these instilled delusions shared within intercollegiate athletics will be remedied – and through that effort, nonrevenue sports will gain a measure of fortification. With an indicated lack of emphasis on financial objectives within the Olympic sports, administrators may view these programs as avenues to embrace the educational nature of intercollegiate sport, without the often conflicting commercial pressures. This engrained (and generally true) reality poses a competitive disadvantage for nonrevenue sports. If financial potential of a program is not on the radar of an administrator, financial pressures will lead administrators to cut programs that do not contribute to the department's bottom line. Again, with unified agreement across all NCAA DI divisions, this result reinforces the existence of institutional isomorphism within athletic departments at the intercollegiate level.

Practical Implications

Building upon the theoretical generalizations drawn in this study, many practical implications for administrators and coaches arise. From a broad perspective, the existence of a “unified” set of NCAA program values (e.g., conduct, academic achievement, athletic success, personal relationships, and community involvement) gives coaches a sound understanding of the program elements that are consistently being emphasized across the board within Division I athletic departments. Similarly, it provides nonrevenue, Olympic advocate groups (e.g., National Wrestling Coaches Association [NWCA]) with the information necessary to create educational programs designed to enhance the sustainability of programs across the United States. Ultimately, this provides coaches with an opportunity to maximize their program efficiency by focusing on the elements that are most valued by administrators.

As nonrevenue, Olympic advocate groups and coaches move forward, it is important that they realize that value systems exist within their NCAA athletic department. Our research indicates that this institutional value system extends well beyond athletic success. Instead, there are a variety of critical program values that Olympic coaches must embrace if they are going to enhance their chances for sustainability within their athletic department. Thus, with this in mind,

it would be wise for coaches to invest in broad-based initiatives that allow them to maximize “fit” within their coinciding athletic departments – which may often mean raising the program profile and fan base to satisfy financial pressures yet unpaired with a potential discontinuation decision. The understanding of these value systems and subsequent decisions often made within the institutional sphere of intercollegiate athletics, offers the opportunity for coaches and program stakeholders to highlight elements that will minimize chances of program elimination in future years.

Conclusions

This examination of the nonrevenue and revenue program values reinforces the postulation that institutional isomorphism exists among NCAA Division I athletic departments. For advocate groups and coaches, this data can provide a unique opportunity to improve the positioning of their program by embracing the values exhibited in the research and realizing the resource allocation reality within their departments. With this in mind, however, there are some limitations in the study that should be mentioned. Given the isomorphism discussed, one may wonder how ingrained the educational purpose of intercollegiate athletics has been programmed into athletic administrators. Given this, perhaps some of the values given great esteem by the athletic directors are simply a manifestation of conditioned rhetoric rather than the true values felt. An examination into resource allocation decisions based on values would be a worthwhile study to investigate whether program values are tied to program value. As intercollegiate athletic reform is studied, the theoretical divide within athletic departments is an important element to address in discussions.

Prior to discussing some of the remaining implications, it is important to mention some of the limitations in the research. First, with an emphasis on the Division I level, the results are not necessarily applicable to other NCAA athletic departments. Second, with the varying response rates within the sample, the study is not representative of the athletic departments that did not participate in the research. Additionally, with an emphasis on athletic director perceptions, the research did not identify the program values that coaches feel are valued most within their athletic departments. Through this type of analysis, researchers could identify whether or not coaches understand the value systems that will allow them to enhance their sustainability in future years. In addition to providing a foundation to develop educational programs, a study of this nature could also help develop an understanding of the communication systems that exist in athletic departments. Another limitation of the current research is that it focused on the program values featured only within Division I athletic departments. With a segmented emphasis on alternative NCAA affiliations or conference program values, coaches could have a strengthened understanding of the elements most deserving of their limited time. These areas of emphasis could provide additional data to support the concept of institutional isomorphism within NCAA athletic departments. These areas should be addressed in future research.

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Footnotes

¹ For the purposes of the article, revenue sports are made up of the programs (men's basketball and men's football) featured in athletic departments with the "potential" to generate revenue because of their high profile status (Howard & Crompton, 2003). In contrast, the nonrevenue sports are the remaining lower profile "Olympic" sport programs that are not generally seen as entities with revenue-generating potential (James & Ross, 2004).

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