MORE STUDENT OR MORE ATHLETE? A CROSS-SECTIONAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DIVISION I STUDENT-ATHLETE HANDBOOKS

by

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(Under the Direction of James C. Hearn)

ABSTRACT

The intercollegiate athletics enterprise and the educational experiences of student-athletes, particularly those participating in the high profile revenue-generating sports of football and basketball, have been persistent sources of controversy within the setting of American higher education (Michener, 1976; Smith, 1988; Thelin, 1996). In addition to the byzantine NCAA regulatory structure, a growing number of forces exert additional pressures on institutions to ensure a greater balance between academics and athletics. In an attempt to legitimize the scholarly efforts of student-athletes, administrators have established a plethora of distinct student-athlete support services and regulatory policies.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the different approaches administrators used to communicate institutional support and compliance expectations to student-athletes competing at the highest level of college sports. In this examination, the utility of theories of power, bureaucratic theory, organizational control theory, and primarily, neo-institutional theory are explored using a content analysis methodology to

conduct a cross-sectional examination of student-athlete handbooks within the *Power 5* conferences.

A thematic human-coding process was utilized to explore the proportionate content of 59 handbooks issued to student-athletes between 2012-2014 to address the following research questions:

R1. What are the prevailing content themes found in student-athlete handbooks at institutions within the *Power 5* conferences?

R2. To what extent do *Power 5* institutions and conferences vary content within student-athlete handbooks?

R3. What messages do administrators convey within the content of student-athlete handbooks about institutional expectations and the purpose of the higher education experience at *Power 5* institutions?

In the aggregate, the content focused predominantly on the themes of *Athletics* (mean = 32.13%, SD = 9.04%), *Academics* (mean = 25.12%, SD = 9.64%), and *Conduct* (mean = 21.89%, SD = 9.35%), with considerable variation between institutions in substance, language, and style. Additional statistical analysis using a logit transformation of proportions to conduct one-way ANOVAs and one-tailed t-tests to compare institutions based on quality rankings from the 2015 *US News & World Report* revealed that schools ranked in the top 50 placed a larger proportionate emphasis on athletics ($t(57) = 1.597$, $p = .058$) than lower ranked institutions. Further qualitative analysis substantiated broad differentiation between institutions.

INDEX WORDS: Intercollegiate Athletics, Higher Education, Student-Athletes, Handbooks, Student Support Services, Division I, Power 5, Content Analysis, Neo-institutionalism, Isomorphism, Bureaucratic Model

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DEDICATION

For Heather, my wife and eternal source of love, support, and inspiration, and to my girls Emma and Leah who have sacrificed so much to enable me to achieve my goals.

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This degree is the result of the efforts and support of so many important people. I never imagined as a naïve 17 year-old heading off to West Point that my postsecondary education would last for over 20 years and culminate with a doctoral degree. It simply would not have happened without the encouragement and assistance of my family. First, and foremost, my wife Heather has been the primary source of motivation and support throughout this entire process. People think we are crazy for working through PhDs together, but it has been an amazing experience continuing to learn and grow from each other. I know our amazing girls, Emma and Leah, are inspired by the way my wife keeps everything together. It is hard to believe we are finally at this point, but I know this is just another wonderful step in our family's incredible journey.

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I have had the great fortune of having some of the best mentors throughout my Army career and educational journey. I must acknowledge how much their support means to me. Dr. Ken Ravizza has had the most profound impact on my life, and I will

always be grateful to have such an amazing person to access for personal and professional advice. Our friendship means so much, and I will always have an enormous appreciation for the time I get to spend learning and growing from him. Dr. Carl Ohlson was essential in ensuring that I had the opportunity to reach this point in my career. His vision and leadership was instrumental in making West Point's Center for Enhanced Performance a world-class support center, and I am privileged to get to follow in his footsteps. Finally, Dr. Nate Zinsser has been a pillar of expertise stability with the CEP, and I am honored to have learned from him as a cadet and an officer.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> It is quite obvious that intercollegiate football and basketball, as now played, are semi-professional sports in most schools and professional in others. This should be publicly acknowledged; I see nothing to be gained by denying it and much to be lost. My concern is therefore how best to administer a professional entertainment program within the normal guidelines that now operate, and I would wish to hear no complaint that 'Things oughtn't to be this way in a self-respecting institution of higher learning,' because they are that way and our society intends that they remain that way. We are faced with a *fait accompli*, but we can administer it somewhat better than we are doing now.
>
> ~ James A. Michener

Context

The dubious state of major intercollegiate athletics is not a modern predicament. Author James Michener (1976) provided a remarkably apropos description of the status of revenue-generating college sports that preceded this analysis by nearly 40 years. His words reverberate today due to a continual commitment to a model of governance, regulation, and legislation aimed at perpetuating a profit motive seemingly disconnected to the philanthropic spirit of higher education. Rather than depart from the prevailing myth of amateurism in college sports, institutions have gone to great lengths to legitimize the scholarly efforts of student-athletes through the implementation of a myriad of regulations and a spectrum of distinct support services. Yet, the efficacy of these expensive resources has only been scarcely evaluated, and unfortunately, more than occasionally linked to academic impropriety.

There has perhaps never been a time in the history of college sports where the amateur status of student-athletes was more in question. Recently, intercollegiate athletics has experienced a series of significant events that seem likely to change the world of college athletics indelibly. Within the past 12 months, former college athletes successfully sued the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in a number of high profile antitrust cases (Berkowitz, 2014). Additionally, Northwestern University football players legally petitioned for and won unionization rights (Ganim, 2014). In a departure from NCAA legislation that is over four decades old, administrators at several large universities, and even whole athletics conferences, have pledged to buttress student-athlete rights by guaranteeing four-year athletic scholarships within certain sports (Sherman, 2015). Perhaps the most telling sign of imminent change is evidenced by increasing federal involvement such as a potential Presidential commission on the future of college sports (Berkowtiz & Wolken, 2015). All of these major movements in college sports, combined with a shift in NCAA governance that granted greater autonomy to the schools in the most prolific athletic conferences, indicate a genuine possibility that the current form of the NCAA division system may be in jeopardy (Wolverton, 2014a).

One of the central themes within all these phenomena is the question of whether college athletes are actually legitimate students, or if the *student-athlete* moniker is merely a legal artifact created to keep revenue out of the hands of college sport participants. Recent academic transgressions involving multiple student-athletes at the University of North Carolina and Notre Dame, two of America's most prestigious academic institutions, further substantiate the persistent critique about the quality of education student-athletes actually receive (James, 2014; DeSantis, 2014). While

academic integrity in major intercollegiate sport is certainly a contemporary issue for debate, a closer examination of the history of college sports reveals that the scholarly activities of student-athletes have always been subject to dispute (Thelin, 1996).

It is difficult to disregard the prominence and popularity of sport in modern American society. Yet, concern about the ever-expanding college sports enterprise seems to be intensifying as well. Many Americans assume that intercollege athletics are an inherent aspect of the postsecondary education experience. Indeed, chronicles of athletic heroism are often intertwined within the historical narratives of many of the nation's foremost institutions (Toma, 2003). However, in no other country does a highly commercialized athletics industry coexist within the seemingly unrelated domain of tertiary education. Given this distinctive and often contentious union, it is no wonder why the governance of athletics has proven so challenging.

An appraisal of the history of college sports reveals that administrators and ambitious alumni have used athletics as a vehicle for institutional growth since their inception in the mid-nineteenth century (Sack & Staurowski, 1998; Smith, 1988; Thelin, 1996). As the American university structure solidified in the late 1800s, the presence of highly commercialized football and basketball programs became an almost essential feature of American college life (Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004). While faculty shifted their focus toward research and graduate studies, undergraduates found sport to be a more entertaining way to occupy their time (Smith, 1988; Veysey, 1970). According to education historians (Horowitz, 1987; Smith, 1988), there was minimal or loose coupling between the academic curriculum and the labor market when organized sports first appeared on college campuses. Thus, the need to focus on academics was reserved for

students without well-established professional connections. Studious undergraduates were regarded as outsiders, while those who eschewed academics for extracurricular activities were considered the collegiate ideal (Horowitz, 1987).

At the institutional level, administrators resisted centralized governance of higher education as an intrusion on academic freedom. Thus, the college sports enterprise grew within a setting where institutional autonomy was paramount. In such an unconstrained setting, it is of little wonder why college athletes developed the reputation of being less intellectual than the rest of the student body. Throughout the years, administrators attempted to confront the continual condemnation of the academic efforts of college athletes by integrating a range of support services oriented specifically on this population. Unfortunately, there has been little scholarly focus on the breadth and value of these services, particularly in the way they are communicated to student-athletes.

Statement of the Problem

Clearly, most Americans today embrace higher education as an essential vehicle for upward mobility (NCHEMS, 2010). A substantial wage gap exists between baccalaureate degree holders and those without a degree, which has generated a far more competitive environment to gain admission into America's top schools (Leonhardt, 2014). Yet, the presence of student-athletes with lower academic profiles than the rest of the student body continues to stir debate about the legitimacy of highly commercialized college sports within the academy (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). The link between a college degree and the professional labor market is far more obvious now than at the genesis of college sports. Thus, the educational experience of modern student-athletes continues to generate an increasing critical discourse from a number of sources.

Major intercollegiate athletics garners substantial media coverage both promoting and criticizing the endeavor. Yet, sports media pundits are not the only ones speculating about the academic activities of student-athletes. In recent years, the federal government has implemented extensive legislation requiring greater institutional accountability and transparency on athletics. Additionally, numerous education-oriented interest groups have emerged to weigh-in on issues of academic integrity and athletic governance. The National Collegiate Athletic Association exists as the de facto regulatory authority over major college sports, and has responded to the additional scrutiny by creating a series of regulatory programs designed to promote academic success, graduation from college, and matriculation into the labor market (Zimbalist, 1999). However, this legislation has resulted in ambiguous outcomes, especially for student-athletes participating in the revenue-generating sports of football and basketball.

The NCAA maintains a unique position in the strange relationship between athletics and higher education institutions. The organization has successfully established, and struggled to enforce, a unique set of nationally recognized academic criteria for initial eligibility as well as its own distinct metrics to measure the academic performance and persistence of athletes. The NCAA's authority remains idiosyncratic in the postsecondary education setting where institutions have traditionally rejected attempts at national governance. Despite vastly complex NCAA legislation that seems continually in flux, familiar narratives about academic misconduct as well as other transgressions surface on a regular basis.

In an attempt to address the steady stream of improprieties often highlighted in the national media, institutional administrators continue to implement extensive support

services focused directly and exclusively on student-athletes. At some institutions, student-athletes are encouraged to use the support resources available to the general student body; however, at most institutions competing at the highest levels, distinct resources are available for comprehensive student-athlete support. Consequently, services for student-athletes continue to grow as a separate professional field in higher education.

With a mounting body of evidence indicating that student-athletes receive expansive support, at great institutional cost, it seems counterintuitive that the same academic transgressions repeatedly emerge on college campuses (Thamel, 2006). Yet, there has been limited scholarly focus on these support services, and an absence of analysis on the way administrators convey the value of these services to student-athletes. Administrators seem resolved to use athletics as a mechanism to cultivate institutional prestige and attempt to supplement waning revenue streams (Toma & Kramer, 2009). Thus, it is necessary to explore institutional expectations and support, and examine how administrators communicate these messages to student-athletes.

At the onset of this study, three research questions were developed to investigate student-athlete educational experiences using non-intrusive qualitative and quantitative methods to research this topic. As a theoretical conceptualization, theories of power and bureaucratic theory appear to have influenced the development of the extensive rule structures in intercollegiate sports, and organizational control theory helps to describe the communication of these rules. However, the neo-institutional framework provided the primary lens to guide this investigation examining institutional differentiation. Greater information about the data and the sample selection logic is provided within the research

design chapter. In short, this examination focused on the institutions within the five most powerful athletics conferences: the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC, including non-football member, Notre Dame), Southeastern Conference (SEC), Big 10, Big XII, and Pacific-12 (Pac-12). Together, these conferences constitute the *Power 5*. A recent shift in NCAA governance gives institutions in these prominent conferences greater voting autonomy, which arguably makes these 65 schools the most influential in the world of intercollegiate athletics. A more thorough description of the Power 5 structure is provided within Chapter IV in the sample selection section.

Research Questions

The college sports enterprise has often been labeled an arms race, and Power 5 institutions possess the most hegemonic influence. With that in mind, student-athlete handbooks from these conferences were used as the primary data source because they provide a rare opportunity to explore the internal communications between administrators and student-athletes. The overarching goal of this study was to investigate the content administrators emphasized within these communications, specifically, whether administrators gave primacy to academics, athletics, or other themes within their messages to student-athletes. The following research questions guided this analysis:

R1. What are the prevailing content themes found in student-athlete handbooks at institutions within the *Power 5* conferences?

R2. To what extent do *Power 5* institutions and conferences vary content within student-athlete handbooks?

R3. What messages do administrators convey within the content of student-athlete handbooks about institutional expectations and the purpose of the higher education experience at *Power 5* institutions?

Significance and Organization of the Study

The significance of this study rests heavily on the supposition that intercollegiate athletics is an important, yet under-analyzed aspect within the higher education milieu. In an era of declining government subsidization of higher education and expanding costs passed on to consumers, athletics should be an obvious focus for greater scrutiny. There are a number of factors contributing to the lack of research on athletics. It seems that scholars often fail to recognize sport as a legitimate topic for academic discourse. Once again, the shrewd words of Michener (1976) illustrated this point when he stated:

> The critical analysis of school sports has been grossly neglected. Universities whose major moral positions have been dictated by sports have not encouraged their faculties to analyze the problems they create; it is easier to find a good study on the effect of the Flemish language on the children of Antwerp than to discover from articles in learned journals what really goes on in the sports department of the university in which the scholars reside (p. 9).

With that said, athletic administrators are also culpable by making it difficult to conduct scholarly research due to clandestine operations and a persistent rift with the faculty.

On the surface, this analysis focused on how administrators communicate to student-athletes at the most competitive institutions where the greatest amount of funding is available for support resources. While there is a small body of literature that utilized the content analysis methodology to examine communications about athletics within mass media sources, there is a dearth of analysis on the way athletic departments communicate internally. The lack of research on these publications served as justification for the use of student-athlete handbooks as an appropriate source of data. In this study, I also looked for differentiation between institutions to discuss varying emphases communicated to student-athletes. Given the insular nature of athletic

departments, it is indeed curious that an internal publication is widely disseminated on a public medium. Thus, I also used evidence from these handbooks to make some inferential conclusions on the potential uses of these documents. While the analysis is limited to the Power 5 schools, which are arguably the most influential in college sports, it does provide a foundation and greater context for future analyses of student-athlete services given the reasonable possibility that the NCAA division system changes due to the recent shift in governance.

This study followed a six-chapter structure to analyze the content of student-athlete handbooks. In the first chapter, I provide a foundation for studying the largely unexamined world of the student-athlete experience, and offer greater justification to investigate how administrators communicate regulations and institutional support to students-athletes. In the second chapter, the literature review begins with an historical evolution of the college sports governance structure as an essential prologue to the current conditions. I also examined the research specifically relevant to student-athletes and the development of distinct support services for this population. Chapter three focuses on the conceptual framework; wherein, I describe power theories, bureaucratic theory, organizational control theory, and neo-institutionalism as the primary lens to explore variation in the approaches administrators used to communicate with student-athletes. Within chapter four, I provide greater detail and justification for using a thematic content analysis methodology and how it is appropriate for addressing the research questions. Chapter five is a presentation of the data and results as they relate to each research question. Finally, the sixth chapter includes a brief review of the study, as well as implications for future research, implications for practice, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The intent of this review is to examine the existing literature on student-athletes and their current support systems, and to demonstrate the relevant research gaps requiring further inquiry. The first section of this review includes a retrospective synopsis of the intercollegiate athletics literature with a particular focus on the historical development of NCAA governance and academic legislation. Next, I analyze the available research focused specifically on student-athlete experiences. Finally, I discuss the evolution and implementation of student-athlete services.

The Rise of the NCAA

The preponderance of research focused on the early growth of intercollegiate athletics appears mainly in secondary sources. It seems that education researchers initially scoffed at the legitimacy of sport as a scholarly topic (Clotfelter, 2011; Michener, 1976). Alternatively, the clandestine nature of athletic administrations likely prevented scholars from conducting rigorous analyses on the developments within the enterprise. Nonetheless, it is necessary to trace the early literature to ascertain a greater understanding of the contemporary college sports landscape.

While there have been a number of recent comprehensive texts focusing specifically on college sports, some of the most seminal writings on the history of American higher education delve into the growth of college sports as well. For instance, Rudolph (1990) provided important insight about the conflicted role of college football in

the early evolution of the American university. Horowitz (1987) added that at the same time organized athletic events were growing on college campuses, administrators and ambitious faculty attempted to expand the curriculum beyond classical studies. Yet, many students also yearned for a more entertaining undergraduate experience that extended beyond the classroom. Thus, the American college setting provided a fertile laboratory for the development and expansion of highly organized and commercialized sports (Smith, 1988; Thelin, 1996).

Although it had been evolving for nearly two centuries, the modern form of the American university emerged in the latter half of the 1800s (Rudolph, 1990). It is perhaps no coincidence that the rise of intercollegiate athletics occurred during the same period. Like most extracurricular activities, athletics began as student-led efforts aimed at combating the tedium of academic pursuits only vaguely tied to future professional endeavors (Horowitz, 1987; Smith, 1988; Thelin, 2004; Veysey, 1970). For example, the first rowing competitions starting in 1852 between Harvard and Yale were purportedly raucous spectacles lasting weeks at a time, and ambitious alumni seemed to quickly recognize the potential for growth and promotion (Mendenhall, 1993). Veysey (1970) described a growing rift during this same period between the faculty and students as instructors shifted their focus from *in loco parentis* obligations toward advanced research. Without strict oversight from faculty, students often chose to abandon academic requirements to participate in more entertaining inter-institutional athletic competitions.

While not all college students came from the upper crust of society, as is often portrayed within the narratives of early American higher education, those fortunate enough to have an established professional network wasted little time on academic

pursuits. Horowitz (1987) depiction of the collegiate ideal man was one whose foremost proclivity was to partake in activities that promoted personal prestige. Debate clubs, Greek societies, and eventually athletics served as vehicles to cultivate status for aspiring undergraduates whereas focusing on academics was often reserved for only the most desperate pariah (Horowitz, 1987).

America's institutions renowned today for their educational distinction were chiefly responsible for encouraging the rapid expansion of the college sports enterprise. Harvard and Yale once rested directly upon the summit of the college football world. Many credit the great Yale coach Walter Camp, along with the his former player and protégé Amos Alonzo Stagg, who went on to greatness at the University of Chicago, as the two men who played the largest role in the growth of college football (Crowley, Pickle, & Clarkson, 2006; Thelin, 1996; Toma, 2003; Zimbalist, 1999). As the popularity of college sports boomed, it did not take long before football and basketball became inextricably linked to commercialism, and early attempts to regulate these events were met with great resistance from ambitious alumni and administrators fixated on institution building (Smith, 1988; Thelin, 2004).

Near the end of the nineteenth century, it seems the faculty grew weary of extensive academic neglect and misconduct exacerbated by the growth of athletics. Initially, faculty members drove efforts to control the growth of the college sports juggernaut (Crowley et al., 2006). Regional conferences served as the regulatory mechanism to establish rules for participation, but only with limited success. Rarely did these regulations address academic standards for admissions or eligibility. Despite the faculty's growing concern for the conflict between athletics and the academic mission,

the brutality of football finally prompted federal intervention. President Roosevelt famously demanded greater controls over the game after at least 18 young men died during the 1905 season (Thelin, 1996; Watterson, 2000). With his son playing football at Harvard, Roosevelt hosted a meeting between the most established and influential school administrators in the nation to insist that they either constrain the violence or eliminate the sport altogether (Beschloss, 2014). Yet, there appeared to be little discussion at this summit to address the primary contention from the faculty oriented on a greater academic focus for undergraduates.

Although President Roosevelt's intervention had little direct impact on legitimizing the participants of college sports, it helped to establish the first recognized national athletic governance organization that would eventually develop into the NCAA (Crowley et al., 2006). The Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) formed after the presidential forum, and was composed primarily of concerned faculty members (Barr, 2008). Captain Palmer Pierce of the United States Military Academy served as the first president of the IAAUS. It seems no coincidence that Captain Pierce applied a military analogy as he fiercely declared his disdain for the commercialization of college sports when he stated:

> This organization wages no war against the professional athlete, but it does object to such a one posing and playing as an amateur. It smiles on the square, manly, skillful contestant, imbued with love of the contest it wages; it frowns on the more skillful professional who, parading under college colors, is receiving pay in some form or other for his athletics prowess. (Pierce, as cited in Byers, 1998, p. 40)

The IAAUS, which transformed into the NCAA by 1910, was unique in its position as a centralized body governing the activities of higher education institutions. However, despite efforts to control the expansion of the commercial aspects of college sports, the

NCAA proved to have very limited influence for several decades (Crowley et al., 2006; Thelin, 1996).

For the first 30 years of the twentieth century, the college sports enterprise, and the controversy surrounding it, swelled with the help of professionalized coaches, the media, ambitious alumni and administrators, and only superficial governance (Thelin, 1996). While the NCAA attempted to manage the image of college athletics, administrators from member institutions continually voted to protect their own interests. Smith (1988) described the historical evolution of the NCAA as one that virtually reinforced autonomy. While more and more institutions joined the NCAA, the organization served to safeguard administrators' ability to manage their own student admissions and academic eligibility standards. Autonomy was so essential that it was written into the NCAA bylaws, and Smith concluded, "Home rule dominated the NCAA for the first half-century of its existence. The individual colleges agreed collectively to act individually" (p. 207).

After decades of limited constraint, a major call for reform came from the Carnegie Foundation's 1929 *Report on American College Athletics*. *Bulletin Number Twenty-Three*, most commonly known as the *Savage Report*, was an extensive multi-year investigation into the "history, conduct, and values" of college sports in America (Carnegie Foundation, 2014). The *Savage Report*, named after author Howard Savage, detailed the many ills of college athletics, but primarily on the revenue-generating sports of football and basketball. Savage's indictment of college sports focused heavily on academic fraud and excessive commercialism (Thelin, 1996). Unfortunately, the fact that

these two issues remain at the forefront of critiques on athletics today suggests that the *Savage Report* had minimal lasting effect.

If anything, there seems to be agreement amongst historical researchers that the *Savage Report* provided documentation of the growing contempt for athletics within the academy (Gerdy, 1997; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Thelin, 1996; Zimbalist, 1999). Nonetheless, college sports grew in national popularity until World War II, when many athletic programs were forced into hiatus. Interestingly, with most institutions suspending men's athletics to support the war effort, the US Military Academy created a virtual all-star football team to gain national superiority (Roberts, 2011). West Point seemingly used its football program as a vehicle to demonstrate national prominence and prestige during a time of great national insecurity (Thelin, 2004). However, at most schools, World War II provided a brief respite from the growth of athletics, and could have served as an opportunity to reestablish control. While the war could have given the NCAA a chance to reset the priorities within college sports, the NCAA leadership chose a very different strategic direction by obtaining greater authority through the control, manipulation, and expansion of television media rights (Thelin, 1996).

Numerous authors detailed the NCAA's rise to hegemonic control over athletics at the midpoint of the twentieth century (Byers, 1998; Crowley et al., 2006; Thelin, 1996; Zimbalist, 1990). With the influx of returning veterans flooding institutions, higher education emerged as a legitimate conduit into the professional labor market (Horowitz, 1987). Yet, college athletics continued to diverge from the educational mission at many postsecondary institutions. As conferences maintained substantial regulatory authority

over sports after the war, institutions rebuilt their sports programs via unscrupulous recruiting practices and by offering grant-in-aid to athletes (Byers, 1998; Thelin, 1996).

After a number of high profile academic and recruiting scandals, in 1948 the NCAA implemented the Principles for the Conduct of Intercollegiate Athletics, known as the Sanity Code. Brown (1999) added that the Sanity Code focused on the familiar themes of academic integrity, defining amateurism, and recruiting practices. However, rather than actually enforce the ambitious new standards outlined in the Sanity Code, within two years the NCAA membership instead voted to standardize many unsavory practices. While the Sanity Code was short-lived, it demonstrated the NCAA's ability to establish broad limitations on member institutions. Some researchers acknowledge this legislative measure as the fulcrum in intercollegiate athletics governance (Crowley et al., 2006), but it seems more evident that control over media rights gave the NCAA the leverage it needed to enforce regulations (Byers, 1998; Thelin, 1996).

The decision to use a commercial venture to gain regulatory control seems consistent with the primary focus of intercollegiate athletics under the NCAA's first executive director, Walter Byers. Researchers' perspectives on college sports point to Byers' business acumen and lack of educational emphasis as central to the contemporary divide between athletics and academics (Crowley et al., 2006; Sperber, 1990; Zimbalist, 1999). Byers served for nearly 30 years as the director of an organization with a purported core purpose to "govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount" (NCAA, 2014a). Yet, Byers did not initiate a single measure of academic regulation throughout his first 10 years as the director.

Academic Regulation and Reform

In Byers' first decade, he adeptly navigated the NCAA through a precarious era of expansion and critique. In 1951, the American Council on Education (ACE) established a presidential committee that identified college sports as an entertainment business and rallied for a de-emphasis on athletics (Thelin, 1996). However, under Byers' direction, the NCAA found creative ways to maintain the veil of amateurism. In his own autobiographical text, Byers (1998) acknowledged that the NCAA created the term *student-athlete* as a legal expression to protect institutions against workmen's compensation litigation and tax laws. Rather than continually fight against recruiting methods used to entice athletes to institutions with various forms of payment, NCAA member institutions agreed to standardize athletic scholarship regulations in 1956. While this essentially allowed institutions to compensate athletes, it also preserved an air of amateurism by connecting the form of payment to education, thus, permitting institutions to continue to sequester revenue generated from athletics (Thelin, 1996). If education was to be the central concentration for student-athletes, it is curious that it took the NCAA over 50 years from its founding and a full decade into Byers' tenure to implement any academic legislation whatsoever.

The meandering and complex path of academic legislation provides essential context to the spectrum of compliance regulations and support services oriented on student-athletes today. Zimbalist (1999) provided a synopsis of the early legislation aimed at exhibiting only the minimal appearance of legitimacy. The NCAA's first attempt at academic legislation in 1964 was an obscure algorithm used to predict whether an athlete could achieve and maintain a meager 1.6 GPA in college. As insignificant as

the 1.6 rule seemed, it was met with resistance from many institutional administrators, including those at some of America's most academically prestigious institutions.

While President William Maynard Hutchins at the University of Chicago chose to disband its powerhouse football program in favor of an academic focus in 1939, the Ivy League schools continued to participate at the highest level of competition until well after the NCAA gained substantial control (Thelin, 1996). In fact, the University of Pennsylvania was one of the institutions the NCAA successfully wrested control of media rights from in order to establish a more uniform distribution of televised games across the nation (Thelin, 1996). In the 1960s, Ivy League football programs were still some of the most competitive teams in the nation. However, Harvard's President Nathan Pusey protested the NCAA's initial efforts at academic legislation as an encroachment on institutional sovereignty. Consequently, the NCAA banned Harvard and other Ivy League schools from NCAA competition after the 1966 convention due to their failure to comply with NCAA legislation (Rasmuson, 1968). In hindsight, it seems likely that Harvard and the rest of the Ivies were genuinely concerned with the NCAA's growing power, and eventually yielded to a more academic focus by not providing athletic scholarships to students. While some of the most prominent institutions bowed from the athletics arms race, most schools acquiesced to the growing influence of the NCAA.

The rise of television popularity in the 1970s stimulated another decade of growth and controversy in college athletics. Additionally, the demographics within college sports continued to change with further integration of Black athletes at schools across the nation, but most notably in the southern schools that had long resisted desegregation (Hawkins, 2010). Women's athletics also became more formalized and regulated with

the implementation of the Title IX education amendments of 1972 and the formation of the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). Meanwhile, The NCAA held a firm grip on control of men's athletic media revenues, and started to behave more like a cartel by posturing to seize control over women's athletics (Sperber, 1990; Thelin, 1996).

As the NCAA's power grew, it continued to implement only minimal academic legislation. In 1973, NCAA membership discarded the 1.6 Rule in favor of an even more lenient measure. The ensuing 2.0 Rule allowed athletes to participate in college sports as long as they had a 2.0 high school GPA. At approximately the same time, the NCAA started allowing freshmen to participate in varsity athletics in both football and basketball (Thelin, 1996). Ostensibly, the original freshman restriction allowed young athletes the opportunity to acclimate to the college environment before being thrust into the limelight of major athletic competition (Thelin, 1996). As of 1968, freshman in other sports were allowed to participate in varsity competitions, and by 1972 the NCAA eventually bowed to market demands to allow the best revenue-generating athletes to compete as soon as they arrived on campus (Kersey, 2012).

During this same era, the NCAA also quietly introduced a limitation that only allowed schools to offer one-year renewable athletic scholarships (Farrey, 2010). In 1973, the NCAA established that a *full-ride* athletic scholarship was subject to an annual renewal process based heavily on each student's athletic performance, and rarely had anything to do with academic production. Allowing freshman to participate in games ensured that fans and generous boosters would be able to see the best athletes participating in higher stakes competition. Unfortunately, it also hindered the student's

ability to focus on academic endeavors without substantial assistance. With all these additional athletic pressures, institutions slowly began to develop systematic support programs. In a separate section of this review, I discuss the literature related specifically to the development of student-athlete support services, but it was during the 1970s that the field of academic advising moved toward professionalization when the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) held its first national conference in 1975 (Mand & Fletcher, 1986).

Although no further academic legislation would be introduced until the 1980s, it became quite clear that the NCAA was in control over major college sports after it gained authority over women's athletics. The NCAA forced the collapse of the AIAW in 1983 by establishing a male model for national championships. While the NAIA still exists today, it has consistently seen its membership dwindle in favor of NCAA affiliation. The NCAA did lose a key antitrust case in the 1980s, which limited control of media rights, but it nonetheless maintained a stronghold on athletic regulation and student-athlete activities (Crowley et al., 2006; Thelin, 1996). With a firm grasp on college athletics, NCAA leadership could blame no one else for the unhealthy relationship between athletics and scholarship. By the middle of the 1980s, a genuine critical outcry emerged concerning the academic output of student-athletes, and the NCAA responded with a series of academic legislation programs (Funk, 1991; Thelin, 1996).

The NCAA's initial attempts at academic legislation willfully disregarded the wide inconsistency in the quality of America's secondary education institutions and in the rigor of courses taken by recruited athletes while in high school. Therefore, the NCAA supplanted the 1.6/2.0 Rules by initiating Proposition 48 in 1986 as a first attempt to

address the glaring discrepancies in these previous programs (Funk, 1991; Zimbalist, 1999). Proposition 48 required incoming recruited athletes to have a 2.0 GPA in 11 core high school courses and a minimum SAT score of 700 (15 on the ACT) to be eligible for an athletic scholarship. After much resistance from athletic administrators and coaches, the NCAA added a loophole that allowed athletes who failed to meet one of the minimum requirements (often the standardized test score) to receive an athletic scholarship as a *partial-qualifier* (Zimbalist, 1999). These student-athletes could practice with a varsity athletics team during their first year on campus, but were ineligible to participate in games. Within Proposition 48, the NCAA gave institutions the authority to determine if partial-qualifier students made *satisfactory academic progress* during their first academic year. Inevitably, most student-athletes who struggled to meet minimum college entry requirements, which were often well below the academic profile of most entering freshmen, became academically eligible by their second year in college.

Though the 1.6/2.0 Rules remained in place for nearly 20 years, Proposition 48 lasted only four years before the NCAA implemented a new piece of legislation to address concerns about the partial-qualifier loophole. However, critics provided convincing evidence that the NCAA's subsequent regulations also failed to prevent institutions from admitting underprepared recruited athletes (Funk, 1991; Zimbalist, 1999). Under Proposition 42, instituted in 1990, student-athletes who failed to meet the NCAA's minimum academic requirements could not receive an athletic scholarship. Zimbalist (1999) noted that this new program only encouraged the practice of permitting *special admits*, whom often received copious financial aid from institutions as opposed to athletic scholarships, despite being academically underprepared for college. These

practices generated even greater critical outcry that spurned increased academic and political scrutiny of college athletics during the decade to come.

Walter Byers' tenure with the NCAA concluded at the end of the 1980s. Byers ran the NCAA like a business, and he was clearly an authoritarian executive director (Yaeger, 1991). Without a background in higher education administration, or even intercollegiate athletics administration, Byers established a firm wedge between the NCAA and academic administrators from member institutions. Nonetheless, his business savvy helped the NCAA develop into a powerful revenue-generating machine during his reign. Yet, even Byers became a candid critic of student-athlete exploitation by the organization he was largely responsible for developing (Byers, 1998).

At the beginning of the 1990s, the emergence of an outspoken critical body influenced changes in legislation oriented on the academic output and graduation rates of student-athletes. The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics formed in 1989, and published its first extensive critique on major college sports by 1991 (Knight Commission, 2014). Above all, the original Knight Commission report called for greater control over athletics by university presidents. The first Knight Report established the model of "1 + 3" to address some of the major problems in college sports (Knight Commission, 1991; Thelin, 1996). The "1" represented the college president, while the "3" stood for academic integrity, fiscal accountability, and finally a certification process for oversight. The Knight Commission is now one of numerous external organizations with a critical eye focused on intercollegiate athletics, and it continues to produce publications demanding greater transparency into athletic operations and a more

legitimate commitment to academic standards and higher graduation rates for student-athletes (Knight Commission, 2014).

Government interest in the academic conduct and the persistence of student-athletes increased during the 1990s as well. The federal government established a number of legislative measures requiring institutions to disclose critical information about athletes and athletics (Estler & Nelson, 2005). For example, the Student Right to Know Act of 1990 requires institutions to report graduation rates of student-athletes primarily to inform recruits of an institution's history of supporting athletes' persistence toward graduation, and the Higher Education Act of 1992 requires institutions to report athletes' graduation rate information to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (Texas A&M, 2014). Additionally, the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act of 1994 mandated greater fiscal accountability by forcing institutions to report athletics related expenses. While these measures brought greater attention to some of the most relevant issues in intercollegiate athletics, they have clearly not solved the persistent problems related to academics and persistence for revenue-generating athletes.

The additional government interest in student-athlete academic reform may have had some influence as the NCAA initiated two measures that coincided with the federal legislation. Researchers noted that NCAA member institutions passed two propositions in 1991 that should have resulted in greater primacy for academic endeavors (Crowley et al., 2006; Meyer, 2005; Thiss, 2009). Proposition 29 established the necessity for institutions participating at the Division I level to provide academic support and tutoring resources to student-athletes (Meyer, 2005; Thiss, 2009). While the language in NCAA Bylaw 16.3.1.1, which addresses this measure, does not require that institutions make

these services exclusive to athletes, most Division I schools interpreted the regulation this way. Thus, athlete-only services greatly expanded since the passing of Proposition 29. NCAA membership also approved Proposition 30 to limit athletic practice time to 20 hours per week (Crowley et al., 2006). Whether or not these two propositions have resulted in their intended consequences is disputable. Nonetheless, these two initiatives seem to have promoted the expansion of distinct academic support services for athletes, and contributed to the development of other services such as the CHAMPS/Life Skills programs.

After the implementation of the aforementioned federal bills, the NCAA changed academic regulations yet again with the initiation of Proposition 16 in 1996 (Price, 2009). Under Proposition 16, the NCAA added a sliding SAT scale requirement. Moreover, to be eligible for an athletic scholarship, recruited athletes needed to accumulate a 2.0 GPA within 13 core high school courses and score at least 700 on the SAT. This more demanding program received quite a bit of opposition from coaches and administrators, but was also assailed by civil rights activists. Researchers from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) found that only about 75% of all college bound seniors and less than half of all college bound Black students from previous years would have been academically eligible to receive an athletic scholarship under Proposition 16 (NCES, 1995). Price (2009) found that the program influenced a decrease in the number of Black athletes entering postsecondary education as freshman, and the minimum SAT requirement prompted additional litigation against the NCAA.

While the SAT is a widely accepted measure of preparedness for college level academic work, it is not a requirement for admission at many American schools.

Additionally, there is evidence that the test is racially biased (Jaschik, 2010). Thus, several high school athletes from Pennsylvania filed a civil rights lawsuit against the NCAA based on a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the ensuing *Cureton v. NCAA* case, the court actually ruled in favor of the plaintiff. However, the NCAA eventually won a federal appeal on the basis that the NCAA was not subject to the restrictions of the Civil Rights Act because the organization did not receive federal funding (Baker & Connaughton, 2002). Nonetheless, this ruling may have had some influence on the most current NCAA academic program.

Just a few years after the *Cureton* case, the NCAA launched the current form of academic legislation, which reduces the influence of the SAT score. The implementation of the Academic Performance Program (APP) also coincided with a significant change in NCAA leadership. In 2003, for the first time in the organization's history, the NCAA elected a former university president as executive director. Dr. Myles Brand came to the NCAA with a distinguished academic background as a former professor of philosophy and president of both the University of Oregon and Indiana University (Indiana University, 2014). He vowed to ensure academic integrity within the intercollegiate athletics environment, and the complex APP structure seemed as if it would put far greater focus on the academic output of student-athletes. However, the program has also been subject to critique, and even as the requirements become more austere, a growing critical body seems to be gaining momentum for a massive overhaul of the system (Meyer, 2005). Dr. Brand succumbed to cancer before he could see the metrics for the first six-year student-athlete graduation rates under the APP system; however, it is debatable whether he would have been pleased.

To date, the APP is the longest running NCAA academic reform measure since the original 1.6/2.0 Rules, but it has gone through a number of adjustments throughout the years. The program includes measures of academic performance and persistence that are distinct from federal metrics. Additionally, the initial eligibility rules minimize the SAT score requirement (Petr & McArdle, 2012). For example, the current system allows a student with a high school grade point average over 3.55 to score only 400 on the SAT. NCAA researchers claimed that historical evidence indicated that high school GPA was a far better predictor of academic performance and persistence in college than the SAT (Paskus, 2012; Petr & McArdle, 2012). Additionally, the APP is the only NCAA academic legislation program that was actually based on historical analysis of student-athlete academic performance and persistence (Paskus, 2012; Petr & McArdle, 2012). Yet, many critics believe the current system is inherently flawed.

Although the NCAA now penalizes athletics teams that fail to maintain a minimum level of academic proficiency, the penalties are based purely on athletes remaining academically eligible and progressing toward an undergraduate degree within a fixed timeline. Each Division I athletic team is subject to various penalties if they fail to maintain a minimum Academic Progress Rate (APR) score. Within the APR calculation, each scholarship student-athlete has the potential to earn two points during each academic term. They earn a point for their team if they are academically eligible and an additional point if they stay enrolled in school while making satisfactory progress toward a degree (PTD). To determine a team's APR, the total number of points a team earns each year is divided by the total number of points possible. The NCAA has steadily increased the minimum four-year average APR from 900 (90%) to 930 in the

2014-15 season or a two-year average of 940 (NCAA, 2014b). While this is clearly a more complex system than previous iterations of academic legislation, it may encourage student-athletes, and the academic support personnel who assist them, to focus heavily on academic eligibility rather than actualizing scholarly potential.

In a departure from the federal measure of graduation rates, the NCAA does not penalize teams when a student-athlete leaves a school to play professional sports while in *good academic standing*. In fact, if a student-athlete drops out of school to sign a professional contract and later returns to graduate, the team does not lose any APR points and actually earns an additional bonus point for their program because the athlete returned to school and graduated (NCAA, 2014b). In the summer of 2014, the importance of this loophole materialized at Oklahoma State University (Fredrickson, 2014). The OSU football program failed to meet the minimum APR four-year average, and faced a penalty of reduced practice time. However, diligent compliance personnel scoured years of graduation records to save the football program from NCAA penalties. Apparently, a former walk-on player, who had earned a football scholarship in the early 1990s, but never graduated, returned to school on his own volition and graduated in 2012 (Fredrickson, 2014). Under the byzantine rule structure of the APP, this former player unknowingly boosted the Oklahoma State football team's APR score to just above the 930 minimum score and spared them from the loss of practice time penalty.

According to researchers, the 930 APR score translates to a 50% Graduation Success Rate (GSR) (Paskus, 2012; Petr & McArdle, 2012). However, the GSR is also a metric exclusive to the NCAA, and makes comparing graduation rates to non-athletes problematic. Higher education researchers typically use the Federal Graduation Rate

(FGR), which represents the percentage of students who start at a single institution and earn a baccalaureate degree at the same school within six years. Conversely, an institution's GSR does not decrease when a scholarship athlete transfers to another school or leaves school to play professional sports while in satisfactory academic standing. Additionally, the academic performance and persistence of the substantial proportion of non-scholarship athletes does not factor into the GSR or APR whatsoever. Some researchers claim that these exceptions allow for institutions with greater athletic support resources to game the system (Gurney & Southall, 2012)

One of the most compelling arguments against the legitimacy of the APP structure is that it forces student-athletes to choose a major too quickly and make progress toward a degree (PTD) faster than non-athletes (Meyer, 2005). The PTD requirements within the APP states that scholarship athletes must have completed 40% of their bachelor's degree requirements (within a specific major) by the beginning of their third year in college, 60% of their degree requirements by the beginning of their fourth year, and 80% of their degree requirements toward a major by the beginning of their fifth year. The 40-60-80 PTD regulations essentially force scholarship athletes to choose a major early in their academic career and stay with that major or risk being ineligible.

Experts argue that the PTD requirements, coupled with substantial athletic participation time constraints (that often exceed NCAA time regulations) and class-scheduling conflicts, contribute to the phenomena of academic *clustering* (Fountain & Finley, 2009, 2011; Meyer, 2005). Clustering has been a well-documented issue in college athletics, and is discussed in detail within the next section. In short, the phenomenon is described as over 25% of student-athletes from a single team

congregating into the same academic major, which is often less rigorous and less valuable in the labor market (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987; Fountain & Finley, 2009; 2011).

Clearly, the current NCAA academic regulatory program is more complex than the original 1.6/2.0 systems. The structure requires a substantial amount of academic support just to track the academic performance of scholarship athletes, much less actually assist them in their studies. The 2014 NCAA Division 1 manual is 426-pages long, and the separate APP document is an additional 250-page publication (NCAA DI Manual, 2014). To be clear, there are also different academic programs in place at each division of the NCAA. Thus, it becomes even more complicated to manage these regulations when considering that some schools participate at the Division I level in certain sports and at a lower division in others. These manuals change annually, or even twice a year, and require an intimate level of knowledge and continuing education to ensure compliance, which has virtually ensured the expansion of the fields of student-athlete support services and intercollegiate athletics compliance.

After detailing the long and dubious evolution of academic legislation at the NCAA Division I level, it makes sense that student-athlete services have swelled over the years. The academic legislation appears to be designed to keep student-athletes eligible and quickly moving toward a degree, regardless of their actual academic ambitions. Yet, it is necessary to explore the literature specific to student-athlete experiences to glean a more nuanced understanding of this population to determine if there is a need for such extensive regulation and the expansive structures that have evolved to support them. The following section is an exploration of the research focused explicitly on student-athletes.

Student-Athletes in the Academy

The early portrayal of college athletes is broad and often anecdotal. The historical texts on American higher education provided a general description of the college student experience that occasionally included discussion about athletic participation. Nonetheless, it seems naïve to believe the romanticized notion that most early college football, basketball, and even baseball players played college sports merely for the noble opportunity to represent the *alma mater*. As discussed previously, the scant historical literature suggested that the major issues in college sports existed from the beginning (Michener, 1976; Smith, 1988; Thelin, 1996). While this may have been true, it is also inappropriate to consider all contemporary student-athletes as a single homogenous mass of underprepared and intellectually inferior college students. On the contrary, there are indications in current research that, in the aggregate, the academic production of student-athletes is rather similar to other college students. However, there is also evidence of important variation within the student-athlete population. Thus, it is necessary to explore the available literature on the student-athlete population to fully appreciate the breadth and depth of support necessary for this misunderstood student population.

One of the first attempts to examine the experiences of student-athletes surfaced in the early 1980s with a wave of critical scholarly inquiry. Adler and Adler (1985) conducted a multi-year qualitative inquiry on a single Division I men's basketball program. The authors' findings indicated that these student-athletes came into college vastly underprepared and uninformed about the academic rigor of postsecondary education. The researchers concluded that regardless of their academic motivation or

expectations to earn a degree, the players eventually resigned to sport-related demands rather than attempt to overcome their academic shortcomings (Adler & Adler, 1985).

In general, measuring the academic outcomes of college students is a difficult endeavor. The most common and simplistic approach to analyzing academic performance is to examine grade point averages and federal graduation rates. Yet, these two measures fail to consider important differences existing within the college student experience. Pascarella et al. (1999) noted that the GPA metric fails to capture important disparities in course rigor, subjective faculty assessments, pedagogical differences, institutional selectivity, and other factors. Nonetheless, the empirical nature of the GPA and graduation rates appealed to early researchers trying to make comparisons across the college student population.

The qualitative findings of the Adler and Adler (1985) study seemed consistent with the early quantitative literature on student-athletes. Some of the first comparison studies on student-athletes found them to be lesser academically prepared, and had lower grades and graduation rates (Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1985; Sellers, 1992). These same researchers also noted a particularly negative relationship between academic performance and athletic participation for Black student-athletes in revenue-generating sports. Yet, these studies only used descriptive statistics for their comparisons, which failed to control for other important factors.

An analysis by one set of researchers suggested a more ambiguous relationship between athletics and academics (Maloney and McCormick, 1993). In a 4-year study of all athletes at Clemson University, the authors found that student-athletes' background factors, including standardized board scores, were generally lower than non-athletes'.

However, when controlling for these background factors, student-athletes' college grades were comparable to non-athletes. Interestingly, the men's basketball and football players' grades were significantly lower than non-athletes', but with an important in-season effect. Moreover, their grades in the off-season were actually better than those of non-athletes, but they still could not overcome the low marks they received during their athletic season when time demands were at their highest.

In even more nuanced analyses, there was ambiguity about the quality of student-athletes' academic work at some of America's more selective institutions. Researchers found that not only were student-athletes underprepared, but they also underperformed academically in a robust analysis at 30 selective public and private institutions (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). While controlling for common preparation and background variables, student-athletes at these schools still underperformed, but graduated at consistent rates. Meanwhile, another multi-year cross-sectional analysis at two highly selective colleges found no differences between athletes and non-athletes when controlling for predictive background variables (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji; 2004).

Given the negative impact of excessive time burdens, a group of scholars attempted to control for these demands by comparing athletes to other students with similar extra-curricular requirements such as work and other student activities (Hood, Craig, & Ferguson, 1992). The authors found that student-athletes' academic output was no different from non-athletes who participated in activities with comparable time demands. While this was an important finding, it is necessary to note that the time associated with athletic participation has continued to rise despite NCAA regulation. Even in the NCAA's (2010) own analysis, student-athletes reported that time committed

to athletics is more than double the 20 hours per week allowable under current NCAA regulations. Additionally, at the highest level of competition, there is really no off-season as student-athletes strength train and conduct conditioning throughout the year.

The NCAA's analysis (2010) indicated that Division I athletes spend approximately 80 hours a week on the combined activities of sport and academic work, with those in revenue-generating sports reporting the highest time demands related to athletics. The recent ruling in favor of Northwestern Football players' right to unionize legally acknowledged that the time commitment associated with major college football was significantly more than the amount of time dedicated to study (Ganim, 2014). Regardless of the distribution, the collective time commitments of sport and academics dramatically limit any free time available for developmental activities such as internships and studying abroad that many students enjoy while in college.

As mentioned previously, the most current form of academic legislation adds even greater time constraints to the student-athlete experience by requiring them to move at a faster pace than non-athletes (Meyer, 2005). The APP compels student-athletes to pick academic majors early in their college career, and to stay with them or risk becoming ineligible. This system likely contributes to the growing phenomena of academic clustering, defined earlier in this analysis (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987; Fountain & Finley, 2009, 2011). Moreover, student-athletes must pick majors that fit into their already restrictive schedules. Once student-athletes choose an academic major, the NCAA PTD requirements make it very difficult for them to switch without falling outside of the closely monitored progress constraints. Unfortunately, many of these majors tend to be less rigorous and potentially less profitable in the labor market. One

scholar found that clustering fostered indifference toward academics and further increased athlete isolation (Calhoun, 2012). While evidence of clustering is often associated with men's revenue-generating sports with the highest time commitments, a recent analysis showed clustering in women's sports as well (Paule, 2010).

Despite the additional time commitments and the limited exposure to the breadth of academic offerings, it seems student-athletes' academic motivation and engagement may be similar to non-athletes. Gaston-Gayles (2004) research on the impact of motivation found that it was a significant predictor of academic performance for student-athletes. Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) used a large sample from data within the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to compare student-athletes' measures of engagement by using good educational practices. This examination demonstrated that while male student-athlete grades were lower than non-athletes', all-student-athletes perceived a greater level of campus support and reported higher gains in general education and personal development. Gayles and Hu (2009) also found that, in general, student-athletes' engagement was similar to non-athletes, but there were also important distinctions for revenue-generating athletes. In the analysis, the researchers found that male revenue-generating athletes had less interaction with non-athlete students and a lower assessment of cultural attitudes and values.

Meanwhile, Pascarella et al. (1999) found that there was no difference between athletes' and non-athletes' in cognitive development with the exception of men's basketball and football players. This study indicated a negative cognitive effect for revenue-generating athletes that included lower increases in science reasoning, writings skills, and critical thinking skills than non-revenue generating athletes' over the span of

the college experience. The authors postulated that these differences stemmed from the additional time requirements, physical and psychological fatigue, as well as the potential existence of an anti-intellectual culture in revenue-generating college sports.

The perception of anti-intellectualism appears to extend into faculty as well as the general student population. There has been a recent rise in the call for greater faculty involvement in athletics reform (Ridpath, 2008). However, evidence suggests that faculty failed to prevent improprieties from occurring in the past (Thelin, 1996), and may be contributing to some of the issues today. One study identified that faculty negativity was 40% higher towards athletes in the areas of scholarship merit, ability to earn an A, assumption of lower SAT scores, and for receiving unjustified academic support (Engstrom, Sedlacek, McEwen, 1995).

Along with faculty, researchers identified that fellow students also maintained a negative attitude toward athletes. In an analysis that included over 500 Division I athletes at a selective public institution, athletes reported experiencing disparaging remarks from 33% of their instructors and from almost 60% of their student peers (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jenson; 2007). The comments focused on perceptions of low intelligence, lack of academic motivation, and receipt of undue special treatment and benefits. Additionally, in a recent research poll of over 1000 adults, 67% of those surveyed believed that schools with major college athletics place too much emphasis on sports and fewer than 25% believed there was an adequate balance between athletics and academics (Monmouth University, 2015).

Participation in major college athletics is often the culmination of countless hours spent practicing and competing in sports for years prior to stepping onto a college

campus. This amount of commitment can lead to the development of an identity strongly tied to athletics. Steele (1997) found that students primed to acknowledge a racial or gender identity that may have a negative stereotype can lead to inferior outcomes on difficult academic tests. This decrease in performance appears to stem from increased anxiety experienced when there is a risk of confirming the negative stereotype associated with their race or gender (Steele, 1997; Harrison, et al., 2009). Interestingly, the effects of *stereotype threat* appear to extend into the student-athlete population as well. Researchers found that student-athletes, particularly African American students, performed significantly worse on academic tests when they were primed with their student-athlete identity (Stone, Harrison, & Mottley, 2012; Yopk & Prentice, 2005). The notion that student-athletes experience increased anxiety from merely acknowledging their athletic identity provides important insight into their academic underperformance, and may play a role in persistence as well.

Negative perceptions and experiences can lead to feelings of isolation and further exacerbate the growing graduation gap for revenue-generating student-athletes (Watt & Moore, 2001). Despite federal legislation, numerous attempts at NCAA reform, and a growing wave of attention from external groups, there has been limited improvement of revenue-generating athletes' graduation rates. Consistent with other analyses, student-athletes' appear to collectively graduate at rates equal to or better than their non-athlete counterparts (NCAA, 2011). Yet, that does not seem to be the case for revenue-generating athletes. Interestingly, the graduation gap is even higher for revenue-generating athletes at more selective schools, which traditionally produce higher graduation rates in general (Rishe, 2003). Also, Ferris, Finster, and McDonald (2004)

found the graduation gap to be growing at schools with more successful athletics teams. The College Sport Research Institute (CSRI), which created the Adjusted Graduation Gap metric to allow for consistent comparisons between athletes and non-athletes, has further buttressed these findings (CSRI, 2013, 2014). The CSRI's researchers indicated that the graduation gap is indeed growing between non-athletes and men's basketball and football players, and is even greater for Black revenue-generating athletes.

The substantial time constraints associated with competing in Division I intercollegiate athletics appears to create a unique and insular experience for all athletes, but researchers suggested it does not have the same effect on the scholarly endeavors of all athletes (Lanter & Hawkins, 2013). With the expansion of services oriented on nearly every niche population on campus, it seems logical that institutions would be interested in offering support specifically tailored to student-athletes. That trend is evident at most schools that participate in NCAA sports, and it is an NCAA requirement at the Division I level.

The research on intercollegiate athletes' revealed an inconsistent experience within the student-athlete population. While many student-athletes tended to be as academically successful and persist toward graduation at rates equal to or better than their non-athlete counterparts, athletes in revenue-generating sports do not appear to achieve the same level of success. These inconsistencies within the student-athlete population further complicate creating, communicating, and enforcing a consistent regulatory structure and the provision of specialized support.

For decades, coaches and administrators who benefit from the existing governance structure, along with sports fans who want to maintain the college traditions

from previous generations, have muted the critical voice against the current model of athletics governance. While many of the contemporary developments in college sports governance have occurred too recently to be covered in peer-reviewed literature, it is necessary to at least mention some of the current dynamics in student-athlete experiences. The ruling in favor of Northwestern football players' efforts to unionize has the potential to be a monumentally influential event in the development of intercollegiate sports governance (Ganim, 2014). Even though Northwestern is a private institution, it seem likely that all Division I schools will need to consider legislation about compensating athletes if the ruling is upheld. Just months after the Northwestern ruling, a federal judge ruled in favor of former UCLA basketball star Ed O'Bannon in his case against the NCAA and EA Sports who continued to profit off of his image well after his playing days were over (Berkowitz, 2014). Clearly, there will be reverberations throughout NCAA athletics based on the final rulings of these pivotal cases.

A critical mass from within the academy and political pressure are emerging in earnest based on the findings from the highly publicized academic scandal at the prestigious University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. The flawed NCAA and state investigations at UNC compounded the salience of the aforementioned O'Bannon and Northwestern court cases. The UNC case apparently involved hundreds of student-athletes taking classes with little or no academic requirements over a period of 18 years (James, 2014). These combined issues may have finally piqued enough political interest to encourage congressional or even presidential involvement in athletic reform. With critical organizations such as the Drake Group bringing even greater attention to the ills of college sports, it seems that there is indeed a shift toward genuine concern for student-

athletes and their academic pursuits. It is therefore necessary to examine the available literature specifically oriented on student-athlete services to glean a better understanding of their development, and what role they play in enhancing the student-athlete education experience.

Student-Athlete Services

Consistent with the literature on intercollegiate athletics governance, prior to the 1980s there was scare scholarly inquiry focused on support for student-athletes. Thus, it is quite difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of their development other than from secondary sources and recent dissertations. In a dissertation focused on support for junior college athletes, one author identified that the first record of student-athlete support came at Princeton University as early as the 1920s (New York Times, 1920; Thiss, 2009). This lone reference seems to be an anomaly as there is very little indication of another institution implementing such a deliberate program for several more decades. Nonetheless, a broad range of services available to athletes is now prevalent at the NCAA Division I level. The following section is a review of the available literature on the development and growth of these services, which provides greater context to understand the modern landscape.

The first evidence of systemic support to student-athletes emerged in the 1950s when some institutions started to provide academic assistance using athletic coaches and supportive faculty members. Thelin (1996) noted the implementation of a *brain coach* at the University of Texas to assist athletes having academic difficulties. The University of Notre Dame claims it was the first institution to provide a systematic program of academic support to athletes as early as the mid-1950s (Notre Dame Website, 2014). By

1964, Notre Dame opened the Office of the Academic Advisor for Athletes, perhaps not coincidentally, the same year the NCAA implemented the 1.6 Rule. The University of Washington seems to contest Notre Dame's pioneer claim in a statement on its website asserting "The University of Washington developed the first-ever student-athlete academic service program in 1970 under the leadership of Gertrude Peoples. Every other program in the country was developed after that time and used the University's program as a business model" (University of Washington, 2014). Based on these examples, the origin of student-athlete academic support remains a rather confusing narrative. Nonetheless, it seems clear today that professional specialization focused narrowly on the student-athlete population has grown considerably.

Regardless of where it began, the field of athletic academic advising formalized after practitioners established a professional organization in the 1970s. The first national meeting of athletic academic advisors took place in 1975, and the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) was created a year later (N4A, 2015). Initially, there was little consistency in the supervision of these advisory personnel at NCAA institutions (Mand & Fletcher; 1986). Some schools, like Notre Dame, placed athletic support personnel under the administrative control of the academic community, but that was not a consistent approach throughout the country. By 1986, two-thirds of the Division I advisors at the N4A national conference reported that their supervisor was an athletic administrator. Additionally, over 75% stated that they worked within an athletic department facility. It also appears that the academic credentials of athletic advisors were consistent with other professional fields. Moreover, 87% of the advisors held at least a master's degree, and over a quarter of the advisors held a doctorate (Mand & Fletcher,

1986). For a field that seemingly developed slowly over the first century of intercollegiate athletic competition, athletic advising quickly grew into a more robust and distinct professional field as student-athlete academic reform gained momentum.

While there have been numerous calls for institutional presidents to establish greater control over athletics, there has been little consensus about where all these athletic support personnel should be situated within the university (Funk, 1991; Gerdy, 1997; Knight Commission, 1991). Some institutions still maintain the preponderance of athletic support under the control of the chief academic officer/provost, while others place them under the control of an athletic administrator. This is a precarious position indeed. Funk (1991) described it appropriately when he stated "[Advisors] are often caught in a no-man's land between the academic and athletic – not jock enough or coach enough to have real power in the athletic department, and viewed with suspicion by the faculty as someone tainted by the athletic monster" (p. 127). Furthermore, Funk contended that the overwhelming emphasis on keeping revenue-generating athletes eligible prevents advisors from taking a more individual approach. In response, one author suggested elevating the authority of student-athlete academic coordinators to give them greater autonomy to make decisions independent of athletic directors and coaches (Gerdy, 1997).

Currently, there is little consistency across institutions for the oversight of these services. After a major academic scandal in the 1990s involving men's basketball players at the University of Minnesota, it seemed a trend would emerge to shift control of these services back to the academic community (Dohrmann, 1999; Wolverton, 2014b). However, today there is still wide disparity between programs across the nation. One

investigative article from 2008 demonstrated the inconsistency within the Big 10 conference. The author reported that about one-third of Big 10 student-athlete academic support service offices reported directly to an academic administrator, one-third reported directly to an athletic administrator, and one-third reported to both (mLive.com, 2008). More recently, an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* epitomized the lack of agreement on these reporting structures. The piece included drastically differing opinions by two former presidents of the N4A about the need for the reporting structures to remain strictly under academic control (Wolverton, 2014b).

Regardless of the reporting structure, the literature on student-athlete experiences seems to support a need for distinct student-athlete support services (Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984). Much of the original research on distinct student-athlete services focused on academic support. Specifically, academic advising, tutoring, monitoring, and designated study time were deemed essential to meet the specialized needs of underprepared student-athletes (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993; Gurney, Robinson, & Fygetakis, 1983; Pope & Miller, 1996; Sloan, 2005). Hurley and Cunningham (1984) even recommended that systematic academic support begin when the student-athlete ventured onto campus for a recruiting trip. While some researchers acknowledged the need for additional institutional assistance in the domains of athletics and academics, it seems that support has expanded to assist in other components of student-athletes' lives (Gibson & Creamer, 1987).

The growth and expansion of services for athletes has also received some considerable attention. Petitpas, Buntrock, Van Raalte, and Brewer (1995) described the role of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) in helping to

build a broader skillset for athletic counselors. An ACES publication suggested advisement in physiology and movement science, drug and alcohol education, and human development in addition to a core curriculum of performance enhancement, career development, goal setting, time management, stress management, and other essential competencies (Nejedlo, Arredondo, & Benjamin, 1985). Some researcher's findings indicated a need for additional support resources on career and education planning when they found that student-athletes lagged behind their non-athlete peers in terms of transitioning from athletics into a profession (Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Furthermore, researchers felt that student-athletes would benefit from mental, emotional, and personal goal support from personnel with a contextualized understanding of the unique demands placed on athletes (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993; Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1996; Hurley & Cunningham, 1984; Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, and Waters, 1981).

As a spectrum of services developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and the NCAA attracted greater scrutiny for failing to promote student-athlete success, a more holistic approach to services emerged at the Division I level. Ward (1999) thoroughly detailed the historical evolution of the CHAMPS/Life Skills program from its beginnings in 1992. The CHAMPS/Life Skills program is the product of two different programs, but neither is a requisite within NCAA rules even though they exist on most Division I campuses. The 2014 NCAA Division I manual (2014) includes bylaw 16.3.1.2 (effective since 2000) stating that Division I institutions must have a Life Skills program on its campus. However, just as bylaw 16.3.1.1 does not require distinct academic support resources for athletes, the Life Skills bylaw does not specify the amount of resources that

institutions allocate to this program nor that the program must be distinct from the resources available to the rest of the student body (NCAA DI Manual, 2014).

It is important to note that even within the Division I level, there are some distinctions between institutions with football programs, and these differences seem to influence the extent of student-athlete support resources. At the Division I level, football programs are designated as either Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) or Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) teams. Along with a different playoff system to determine the national champion, FBS schools are able to provide a greater amount of scholarships to football players. Specifically, FBS schools grant 85 football scholarships as opposed to 63 at the FCS level (NCAA, 2015). Evidently, these additional scholarship athletes, and greater athletic competition expectations, influence institutions to invest in more support resources.

In 2009, the NCAA initiated a comprehensive review of academic support personnel at the Division I level, but the full results of this analysis are yet to be published (Kearns, 2009). In a presentation detailing the preliminary findings of the study, the author suggested great disparity within the resources available to student-athletes even within a single NCAA division. For example, while nearly 88% of all Division I institutions had a distinct student-athlete support facility, only 66% of schools participating at the FCS level had a computer lab compared to 89% of FBS schools. Besides greater physical resources, FBS schools averaged nearly 14 personnel for academic support while FCS schools averaged less than four personnel, which did not include paid tutors support. FBS schools averaged approximately 57 paid tutors who

worked about 268 total hours, while FCS schools only paid an average of 20 tutors each year for a mean of 46 hours.

Obviously, these disparities in resources also come with great variations in cost. The median budget for these services, not including additional physical facilities costs, were approximately $655,000 per year at FBS schools compared to only $140,000 at FCS institutions. An author from the New York Times estimated the cost of the facility at the University of Georgia to be around $7 million on top of the annual expenses to pay employees and tutors (Thamel, 2006). It is important to consider that these additional expenses are dedicated explicitly for a very small percentage of the general student population at Division I institutions.

Despite the substantial investment and growth in these services, very little research actually focused on their effectiveness. Recently, one group of researchers found a positive correlation between athletes' satisfaction with academic support and increased self-efficacy in career decision-making skills (Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, & Fletcher, 2013). On the other hand, despite the substantial investment in robust academic resources, authors of a scholarly thesis found no significant differences between large and small institutions in Academic Progress Rate (APR) and Graduation Success Rate (GSR) with disparate resources for support (Butterworth & Rich, 2013). One researcher conducted a comparative analysis of support services, but it focused exclusively on the breadth of services available within one *mid-major* conference (Lambertson, 1998).

The lack of research on student-athlete experiences and support at the highest level of intercollegiate athletics justifies additional attention. Such a complex and dynamic issue can be approached through multiple research paradigms, theoretical

perspectives, and research methods. Merriam (2009) contended that the development of a conceptual framework is an essential consideration for producing a cogent analysis. Although qualitative researchers often integrate a grounded approach, the evidence from the literature suggested the appropriateness of a sociological lens for this analysis. The following chapter includes a discussion on the different sociological perspectives that influenced the design of this study.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The brazen antagonist to the intercollegiate athletics enterprise might argue that an analysis of student-athlete support and governance is fundamentally superfluous because highly commercialized college sports are entirely unnecessary. However, just as Michener's (1976) quote so aptly suggested at the onset of this study, college sports appear to be an inextricable fixture within the American postsecondary education setting, and it is perhaps futile to lament against their existence. Toma (2003) even suggested they are an essential part of the American postsecondary experience, which is widely regarded as one of the best in the world. Yet, athletics are certainly subject to greater critique, particularly with regard to the legitimacy of student-athletes' educational experiences.

As illuminated within the previous chapters of this analysis, it is possible to examine student-athlete experiences through a variety of conceptual perspectives including sociological, economic, psychological, and student development frameworks. Arguably, the complex issues surrounding major college athletics would benefit from an analysis through any of these lenses. The evidence within the literature depicts an environment somewhat disconnected from the university at large. Moreover, athletic administrators must negotiate the competing value systems of a profit-oriented business model, while fulfilling the educational and developmental needs of student-athletes. Meanwhile, student-athletes are required to function both as students within a highly

demanding academic environment as well as full-time employees in a highly regulated, physically demanding occupation while being compensated primarily with the opportunity to receive an education. This enigmatic arrangement belies a rational-actor model, and requires a number of theoretical constructs to assist in interpreting the relationship between administrators and student-athletes. Yet, understanding this relationship, and the role of the NCAA within it, is essential to an analysis of communications between administrators and student-athletes. The following chapter includes a description of the potentially useful conceptualizations of power theory, bureaucratic theory, organizational control theory, and neo-institutional theory.

Power Theory

Prior to discussing the applicability of a specific theoretical model, it is necessary to explore the applicability of *theories of power* in the perplexing world of intercollegiate athletics. Within the review of literature, there are references to the shifting of power throughout the development of college sports. Initially, students expressed their own power, or agency, through the creation and coordination of athletic events with rival institutions (Horowitz; 1987; Smith, 1988). Faculty attempted to intercede, but administrators and coaches eventually prevailed to take control of athletic competitions, along with the revenues generated from them (Thelin, 1996). Ultimately, institutions yielded to the centralized power of the NCAA, but the power struggle between these agents seems persistent.

Understanding that these power dynamics exist is central to making some sense of the complex rule structure currently in place. Dahl (1957) provided an explanation of power that is useful within this context. He described power not as something to be

possessed, but as a relationship between people where one has the authority to manipulate the behaviors of others in a way that would not have occurred otherwise (Dahl, 1957; Mumby, 1988). This definition provides some insight into the governance of college sports, and the extensive rule structures designed to control the behaviors of administrators, coaches, and student-athletes. However, the power dynamics in intercollegiate athletics expand beyond individual decision-making, so Dahl's interpretation is perhaps incomplete. Lukes (1974) added to the discussion on power with the notion that individuals can have power by virtue of their position within "socially structured and culturally patterned behaviors of groups and practices of institutions" (p. 22). This interpretation extends power to establish and maintain accepted standards for behavior from the individual to the organization (Mumby, 1988).

These conceptualizations of power contribute to a better understanding of the relationships between actors within the intercollegiate athletics milieu, but it is also necessary to consider the motivations behind decision-making processes. Pfeffer (1981) contended that power within organizations is a function of politics, which gives rise to the potential for conflict. Moreover, he suggested that interdependence between actors, incongruous goal orientations, and resource scarcity are all necessary to create the conditions to exercise power. When these conditions exist, power becomes legitimized or institutionalized in a way that not only reinforces the existing diffusion of power within the organization, but also the excepted practices and procedures (Pfeffer, 1981). Pfeffer's notion that power is institutionalized within the structure of organizations is consistent within a bureaucratic organizational model (Weber, 1952). In his discussions on the bureaucratic model, Perrow (1986) added that "Organizations generate power;

control and use of that power are vital organizational issues" (p. 11). If power does lie within the structure of an organization, it is appropriate to explore how bureaucratic theory may be useful within the context or intercollegiate athletics.

Bureaucratic Theory

Organizational theorist Max Weber's (1952; 1968) *bureaucratic theory* described the benefits of standardization across a given professional field. There exists the potential for great efficiency within organizations with a well-established hierarchy of authority and clearly defined role distinctions. Organizations seeking to maximize efficiency, such as non-profit academic institutions, might find such an organizational structure attractive. While Weber considered his model to be a means to create an organizational structure conducive to maximizing efficiency, its confining nature is not ideal for encouraging organizational members to develop beyond their current role. Nonetheless, this critique has failed to discourage many organizations from continuing to implement a bureaucratic organizational framework.

Weber's (1952; 1968) model is part of a larger school of thought known as the classical theory of management. Within this body of concepts, members of an organization are depersonalized and considered cogs in a machine designed to operate as efficiently as possible. Managers or administrators often use financial incentives as the primary means to motivate employees to comply and maximize their performance within a given role. While student-athletes are not paid in the form of a salary, the longstanding argument is the substantial cost of a college education is a more than adequate form of compensation. In a bureaucratic structure, rules are prominent and extensive. These rules are enforced via a *rational-legal* authority as established by the organizational

structure (Perrow, 1986; Weber, 1947). Administrators then need to communicate these extensive rules to the constituents within the organization.

The most efficient way to communicate a voluminous rule structure to a large body of subordinate organizations and the people within them is often through policy guides not unlike the NCAA manuals. Likewise, within a bureaucratic organization, administrators might use handbooks as a medium to communicate and ensure compliance from student-athletes. Although Weber (1952; 1968) extolled the bureaucratic model for creating efficiency within public organizations, he also assailed the potential constraining effects of this structure using the ominous reference to an *iron cage*. Within this analogy, the bars of the cage are a symbolic representation of the rules and tightly confining role structures that force members within the organization to comply, but perhaps keep them from growing and developing. This is indeed a dilemma for the administrator attempting to communicate the need for order, efficiency, and compliance to developing young adults.

Perrow (1986) defends an overt array of regulations as necessary for clearly establishing organizational expectations. Moreover, even when rules are not explicit, organizations tend to have acceptable normative behaviors that promote better decision-making and efficiency. While a lack of extensive regulations is often associated with greater autonomy, Brown (1960) suggested that such a structure may actually have unintended effects. He elicited this point with the statement "The absence of written policy leaves him in a position where any decision he takes, however apparently trivial, may infringe [upon] an unstated policy and produce a reprimand" (Brown, as cited in Perrow, p. 22).

While bureaucratic theory provides utility in explaining the highly regulated structure of college sports, the environment includes some incongruity that makes it less than complete for this analysis (Weber, 1952; 1968). A key to the success of the Weberian bureaucracy is a single prevailing rationality within an organization that is inherently focused on efficiently meeting market demands and maximizing revenue. As detailed within the previous sections, if there is such a thing as a singular rationality within any organization, it is certainly not present within the intercollegiate athletics setting. Even when administrators may attempt to bound the reality of participants, the growing body of critics continues to shed light on the hypocrisies of major college sports. In reality, it seems college athletics and academic institutions are indeed quite inefficient. Some argue that athletics serve as a distraction for students with a primary purpose to earn an education (Sperber, 1990). Thus, bureaucratic theory is helpful, but insufficient in explaining the governing structure and compliance efforts within athletics departments, but it does provide essential context. If there is value in a thorough and elaborate rule structure in organizations, it is necessary to examine how power and organizational expectations are communicated within organizations.

Organizational Control Theory

The notion that organizational leaders might seek to manipulate the behaviors of subordinates through broad hierarchical control measures is consistent within the literature on power and bureaucratic theories. Some researchers contend that an extensive system of rules actually helps prevent an organization from repeating the same mistakes in the future (Perrow, 1986). Given that these rules are often expressed within forms of written communication, and this analysis focused on textual documents, it was

necessary to consider the applicability of communication theories within this investigation. Therefore, there are some particularly relevant aspects of *organizational control theory* in the larger body of communication theories, which seemed useful for this analysis (Gossett, 2012).

Communications can be verbal, non-verbal, symbolic, textual, intentional or unintentional, and multidirectional. Consequently, the many theories of communication are broad and meandering (Littlejohn, 2002). The focus of this analysis on textual documents narrowed the applicable scope to written communication theory. Craig (1999) asserted that communication helps to construct human experiences; thus, reality and rationality are formed through the interpretations of communications. Mumby (1988) helped bridge the theoretical gap between power, organizational structure, and communication. He described communication as a mechanism to exercise power. Those who are in power are able to frame rationality within the organization for those within it. This *bounded rationality* is then necessary to establish common expectations and a *universalism* in organizational goals (Perrow, 1986).

Within the notion of a bounded rationality in hierarchical organizations, those at the top of organizational power structures may attempt to constrain reality to manipulate the behaviors of subordinate members, which is foundational organizational control theory (Gossett, 2012). In such an environment, a written medium might be the preferred communication modality to establish a historical and open record, and hence a form of contract between leadership and organizational members (Zaremba, 2010). Within some conceptualizations of organizational control theory, written documents describing organizational expectations are thorough, explicit, public, and unidirectional.

Conversely, some organizational control theorists have introduced an alternative line of research that departs from the authoritative perspectives, which proves useful in this investigation as well (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). The notion of *concertive control* emerged in the era when business experts urged organizations to flatten lines of communication and decision-making processes to enhance organizational performance (Barker, 1993; Drucker, 1988). Organizations with a concertive control structure encourage everyone to participate in the process of enforcing organizational goals and objectives. In such an environment, the communications between leadership and subordinates diverges in tone, rhetoric, and style from the authoritative model. Yet, some research suggested that such a participatory environment can be even more effective in gaining organizational compliance (Barker, 1993).

Power theory, bureaucratic theory, and organizational control theory are all useful conceptualizations, but one additional theoretical lens seemed most applicable for this analysis. The following section is a discussion of neo-institutional theory, which includes necessary considerations of some of the unique aspects of the intercollegiate athletics environment.

Neo-Institutional Theory

Due largely to the influence of the NCAA as the centralized regulatory authority, a blueprint has emerged across institutions for the provision of student-athlete support, but there is less clarity about the desired outcomes of such services. The uniformity of services is indeed curious considering that athletics are one of the most visible ways institutions can differentiate themselves from competitors (Toma, 2003; Toma & Kramer, 2009). The replication of processes in a field with ambiguous goals is consistent within

neo-institutional theory. As the primary theoretical conceptualization for this analysis, it seemed necessary to be more deliberate in describing the application of this theory to the context of intercollegiate athletics and the research questions guiding this analysis. Thus, the following section includes a more robust description of neo-institutional theory and the forces influencing isomorphism in student-athlete support.

According to Powell and DiMaggio (1991), neo-institutionalism is borne of the skepticism in traditional organizational models to explain why organizations do not function based on a singular rationality. Correspondingly, the growth of intercollegiate athletics and the tangential development of student-athlete service professions fail to agree with a rational-actor or structural-functionalist model. The neo-institutional perspective provides vital insight into the irrationality inherent to the athletics enterprise within the American higher education setting. Specifically, the concept helps to explain how a consistent organizational structure has emerged across institutions as a byproduct of numerous internal and external forces rather than from competitive market demands.

The college sports landscape is one of competing rationalities (Baxter & Lambert, 1991). Moreover, athletic administrators and coaches are prone to use an instrumental rationality, which emphasizes revenue generation and enhancing institutional prestige (Toma & Kramer, 2009). Conversely, institutional administrators and faculty may be more likely to favor a values-based rationality, which promotes intellectual development and personal growth. The student-athlete support professions rest squarely in the middle of these competing rationalities, and therefore require a conceptualization that departs from a purely bureaucratic form (Funk, 1991).

Within the construct of neo-institutionalism is the idea that organizations seek to legitimize their functions through adherence to largely ceremonial functions rather than seek efficiency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Moreover, DiMaggio and Powell argued that "Organizational forms, structural components, and rules, not specific organizations, are institutionalized…Institutionalization tends to reduce variety, operating across organizations to override diversity in local environments" (p. 14). These ceremonial functions emerge from powerful myths within a given profession rather than from real market-driven concerns (Meyer & Rowen, 1977). The notion that influential myths have helped to establish the structure of the current intercollegiate athletic environment seems particularly appropriate (McCormick & McCormick, 2006; Sperber, 1990).

Other researchers have used the neo-institutional framework to describe the competing rationalities in intercollegiate athletics. Baxter and Lambert (1991) suggested the prevailing myth associated with intercollegiate athletics is that student-athletes are amateurs in the purest form who participate in sport merely for altruistic purposes, rather than monetary gain. Student-athletes' persistent pursuit for compensation is evidence that this assertion is genuinely fictitious. In fact, there are a number of myths associated with college sports that are relevant to this inquiry. For example, it seems the idea that athletics are at all linked to institutional missions is quite contestable. Additionally, the widely held notion that athletics are profitable is easily refuted by the data demonstrating that very few schools actually turn a profit from athletics (Clotfelter, 2011; Sperber, 1990; Zimbalist, 1999). Nonetheless, institutions around the country demonstrate

remarkable similarity in the structural form of athletic departments and the desire to grow in capacity, regardless of the real market demands.

Consistency or variation across institutions is a central focus within this examination of communications to student-athletes. It is likely that many of the services offered to student-athletes are uniform across institutions, but these services may be in response to structures, regulations, and policies established upon myths and not legitimate demand. For instance, it seems that NCAA academic regulations are based upon the notion that all college athletes struggle to maintain academic eligibility. Yet, the research demonstrated that most student-athletes' academic performance is consistent with non-athletes; with the important exception of revenue-generating athletes (NCAA, 2011). Consequently, the academic legislation that is central to influencing the support structure may be unnecessary for most student-athletes.

The NCAA legislation on student-athlete academic performance is articulated explicitly to standardize expectations across all institutions competing at the same level. Yet, the regulatory language is vague enough for institutions to determine the appropriate level of resources to allocate for student-athlete support, which is disparate across Division I institutions with widely varying budgets (Kearns, 2009). The schools at the peak of athletic prowess often boast the largest athletics budgets, and maintain a competitive advantage within the current division system. Hence, the evidence suggests that irrational myths influenced the development of intercollegiate athletic departmental structures, policies, and regulations.

For the purpose of this study, the concept of *isomorphism* helps explain why there appears to be a consistent approach to student-athlete support. Hawley (1968) first used

the term isomorphism to describe how organizations within the same environment, or professional field, resemble each other based on consistent constraining forces. Isomorphism is either competitive or institutional in nature (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer, 1979; Fennell, 1980). Competitive forces are likely to instigate isomorphism when organizations function within a free market system (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). While intercollegiate athletics often follow a profit-based business model, they function within the constraints of a non-profit financial structure. Therefore, in this environment other forces exist to create a similar organizational structure. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) described the powerful effects of coercive forces, normative pressures, and mimetic processes that influence institutional isomorphism across organizations. The following passages detail how these forces exist in the context of intercollegiate athletics.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) submitted that "Coercive isomorphism results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which the organizations function" (p. 150). Other education researchers have used the neo-institutional framework to develop a useful model to examine these forces (Estler & Nelson, 2005). Within the Model of Environmental-Institutional Interaction, the authors acknowledged the impact of economic, legal and regulatory, social and cultural, and structural contexts (Estler & Nelson, 2005). Coercive forces stem from all four of these domains in the provision of services to athletes.

Perhaps, it is then appropriate to expound upon the forces in the Environmental-Institutional Interaction Model to demonstrate the relevance of this theory. Clearly, the NCAA is seen as the primary governance organization specific to Division I athletics.

Within Estler and Nelson's (2005) model, the athletic governance organizations, including the NCAA and NAIA, are within the structural context, yet these are not the only structural coercive forces. A number of other concerned organizations have the ability to exert pressure on institutions to conform to a standardized form. The Association of Governing Boards (AGB) has published a document focused on the oversight of intercollegiate athletics. Additionally, the Knight Commission, Carnegie Foundation, and the American Council on Education (ACE) have all shown a vested interest in reestablishing the priorities in college sports. Likewise, faculty athletic councils, the Faculty Athletic Representative Association (FARA), 1AFAR, and the faculty-senate based Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) have demonstrated the ability to influence athletics as well. There are other external organizations such as the Drake Group, the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES), the National Consortium for Academics and Sport (NCAS), the Collegiate Sport Research Institute (CSRI), and the Center for Leadership in Athletics (CLA) that have all weighed-in on the ethical conduct of athletics.

Coercive forces are evident within the legal and regulatory context as well. Beyond NCAA governance, the federal government has influenced the conduct of athletics through legislation. Federal measures including Title IX, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as more recent bills such as the Student Right to Know Act, The Higher Education Act of 1992, and the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act have all had a substantial effect on the contemporary intercollegiate athletics landscape. Branch (2014) submitted there is current bipartisan support in Congress for major reform in college sports. At a 2014 US Senate Committee meeting entitled *Promoting the Well-Being and*

Academic Success of College Athletes, Committee Chair Jay Rockefeller (D-West Virginia) stated emphatically "We have jurisdiction over sports…All sports. And we have the ability to subpoena" (Branch, 2014). Fellow committee member Senator Dean Heller (R-Nevada) added, "We do have jurisdiction in this Congress over the NCAA" (Branch, 2014). Clearly, the suggestion that President Obama may be interested in creating a commission to promote federal reform demonstrates significant interest in structural change as well (Berkowtiz & Wolken, 2015).

Some of the legal forces oriented on tax law and the distribution of revenue bleeds into the economic context of college sports as well. These economic influences also include corporate sponsorships, internal budgeting measures, commercialized marketing practices, media rights, and donor relationships (Estler & Nelson, 2005). The economic forces are some of the most contentious within the social and cultural considerations influencing intercollegiate sports. Prevailing national attitudes about the importance of college sports have obviously influenced their continued presence on college campuses. Despite the philanthropic nature of higher education, many institutions have become more entrepreneurial as state subsidies diminish (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Within a capitalist economy, it is more acceptable to allow the intercollegiate athletics enterprise to grow when viewed through this perspective. In summary, all four contexts within Estler & Nelson's (2005) model seem to support the concept of coercive isomorphism.

The extent of coercive forces in college athletics provides reason enough to accept the concept of institutional isomorphism, but it is also important to examine the existence of mimetic processes specific to student-athlete support and governance. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), organizations replicate similar organizations within a

common professional field when there are ambiguous goals related to their output. Organizations respond to the uncertainty surrounding their functions by conforming to the functions of similar institutions as a means to demonstrate legitimacy, even when those functions may not be necessary or fiscally responsible. The precarious position of student-athlete support personnel situated between the athletic and academic sides of an institution is indicative of the ambiguous goals of their work (Funk, 1991). The evidence of numerous cases of misconduct involving these support professionals suggests that they struggle in their conflicting roles to promote the educational mission of the institution or simply do whatever it takes to ensure athletes are eligible and able to generate revenue.

The existence of student-athlete handbooks appears to be a mimetic process because there is no regulatory requirement to publish such a document. The fact that they are commonly available online suggests that administrators may be attempting to demonstrate a legitimate commitment to the education and well-being of student-athletes. It is also possible to consider that advertising these services to potential recruits and their parents is actually part of the competition for scarce human resources. Evidence of the influence of mimetic processes within the handbooks would be demonstrated by consistency in thematic content and similarities in style, structure, and language.

In order for mimetic processes to propagate throughout a professional field, there must be a network of communications between institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Estler & Nelson, 2005). Professional networks are an indication of normative forces that may also influence isomorphism. Normative pressures to conform to common practices emerge when there are both formal and informal education structures within a professional field. Formal education includes the expectation that individuals within the

field obtain a certain level of education specific to the professional field. Mand and Fletcher (1986) indicated in their early examination of academic advisors that nearly 90% of advisors had graduate degrees, and over 70% of them came from the fields of education, physical education, or psychology. Kearns (2009) later inquiry found that over 80% of current advisors have at least a Master's degree. As early as 1981, Springfield College established a graduate degree program specifically focused on athletic counseling (Petitpas, Buntrock, Van Raalte, & Brewer; 1995). Currently, many institutions offer advanced degrees in kinesiology, sport management, athletic administration and policy, athletic counseling, and a number of other related programs.

It appears there is a formal education structure, but there is also evidence of a less formal education structure promoting institutional isomorphism. For example, the N4A is a prominent example of an intermediary organization that helps to diffuse policy and best practices throughout the profession of athletic academic advising. The existence of professional organizations further supports the idea of normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Through these organizations, professionals within the field exchange ideas via national and regional conferences and professional literature such as best practices documents and peer-reviewed journal articles.

The standardization of practices also occurs by hiring employees with professional certifications and employment histories from similar organizations. Both the N4A and National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) have established individual certifications for athletic advisors, and the N4A now has a programmatic certification and a professional development institute. There appears to be considerable evidence of coercive forces, mimetic processes, and normative pressures in the field of

student-athlete support and more broadly in intercollegiate athletics. Thus, the neo-institutional framework seemed most appropriate for this analysis.

Summary

Clearly, this analysis leaned heavily on the assertions within neo-institutional theory. However, it was necessary to build a broader theoretical conceptualization based on the other frameworks that influenced this more contemporary theory. This included a discussion on power theories, which aided in describing the existing power dynamics in college sports governance. These shifting dynamics have produced a hierarchical organizational model influenced greatly by the NCAA's extensive regulatory structure, which is consistent with bureaucratic theory. Within the bureaucratic model and theories of organizational control, these robust rules are often communicated via a detailed and systematic delineation of organizational expectations within written publications. Yet, there are some divergent perspectives within organizational control theory that allow for a more participatory communication approach, while still promoting compliance.

While the theories of power, bureaucracy, and organizational control are useful in explaining some of the functions of the growing body of professional fields, only neo-institutional theory considers the influence of competing rationalities within the college sports enterprise. Thus, neo-institutional theorists contributed to this analysis by describing how powerful environmental forces can affect the creation of largely symbolic functions that look remarkably similar across organizations. Due to all these prominent forces, it was posited that there would be notable consistency within the handbooks across institutions.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH DESIGN

The theoretical conceptualizations in this inquiry aided in designing a methodological approach to address each of the research questions. The first question was exploratory in nature, and prompted an examination of the manifestation of the extensive rule structures governing student-athlete behaviors and educational experiences. The first research question queried:

R1. What are the prevailing content themes found in student-athlete handbooks at institutions within the *Power 5* conferences?

Homogeneity in the thematic structure of these handbooks would support the concept of isomorphism within the intercollegiate athletics environment. Thus, it was appropriate to consider a qualitative approach to answer the first question.

A quantitative analysis component also aided in investigating the degree to which institutions focused on each theme, and how the proportionate content compared to other institutions within the sample. The second research question asked:

R2. To what extent do *Power 5* institutions and conferences vary content within student-athlete handbooks?

This question required an approach that provided some evidence of the magnitude of variation existing within the study sample. Given the primary construct of neo-institutionalism, it was theorized that there would be very little variation due to the presence of influential constraining forces.

Finally, there was a need to consider the differences in context, language, and style within these documents. In other words, this analysis not only focused on investigating *what* content themes were in the handbooks and to what extent each institution focused on those themes, but just as importantly *how* institutions differentiated communications to student-athletes. The final question probed:

R3. What messages do administrators convey within the content of student-athlete handbooks about institutional expectations and the purpose of the higher education experience at *Power 5* institutions?

This question required a traditional qualitative approach to explore and describe how institutions vary messages beyond the proportionate distribution of content. The following chapter discusses how the theoretical conceptualizations influenced the research design, and the resulting research methodology for this study.

Research Strategy

The theoretical conceptualization described in the preceding chapter was essential in guiding this content analysis of student-athlete handbooks. Researchers have noted that sociological issues in higher education are quite appropriate for a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Krippendorff (2013) contended that some researchers make the unnecessary distinction between qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Because this investigation involves the reading and interpretation of textual documents, it is inherently qualitative in nature. Yet, a content analysis design allows the researcher to integrate statistical analysis as well as traditional qualitative methods, which are both appealing approaches to answer the research questions posed at the onset of this study.

As described within the previous chapter, isomorphism is evidenced by standardized practices within a professional field. A positivist approach to content

analysis urges the researcher to examine statistical variation within a study sample. This perspective is consistent with the early conceptualizations of content analysis as firmly objective and systematic (Berelson, 1952). However, contemporary approaches not only include quantitative analysis of manifest content, but also inferential processes that involve developing the antecedents of messages, their intended audience, the impact of the messages, and even the analyst's interpretation (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990). The following chapter is a discussion about the content analysis design used in this study, the rationale behind the sample selection, the process of collecting and analyzing the data, and the methods used to enhance trustworthiness.

Sample Selection

In any qualitative inquiry, the sample selection process is an important step in framing the study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In most qualitative designs, sampling is not random in nature, as the researcher is often hoping to explore a specific phenomenon. Such is the case with this investigation. The Power 5 conferences are comprised of very similar institutions with comparable educational missions, but also with regard to their ambitions for athletic success. Institutions competing within these conferences have demonstrated the intention to invest the greatest amount of resources to ensure athletic achievement, which includes at least academic and career-development support to student-athletes. With this in mind, the process of selecting these schools, which represent approximately half of all Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions, was criterion-based and purposive in nature.

The conference structure in intercollegiate athletics adds yet another layer of complexity to an already convoluted process of governance. Throughout the first century

of college football, athletic conference alignment stemmed from proximity and institutional type. Moreover, institutions affiliated with and competed against similar schools within the same general area of the country (Sweitzer, 2009). However, that system appears to be collapsing as institutions give primacy to athletic prominence over traditional rivalries and geography. Within the last decade, over 20 Division I FBS institutions have realigned into different football conferences as a means to remain competitive for the opportunity to play for a national championship. In August of 2014, the NCAA approved a controversial change in the governance structure that provides greater autonomy in regulatory voting to the five most prominent athletic conferences (Bennett, 2014). This important shift may indeed signal a substantial change in major college athletics.

Prior to delving into the methodology, it is necessary to discuss what the Power 5 conference structure means in terms of NCAA policy decision-making. Before the recent change in governance, representatives from each NCAA member institution maintained an equal voting share at their respective level of competition. Under the previous system, the schools with greater resources dedicated to athletics did not necessarily have any advantage in governance decision-making. However, under the new structure, schools within the Power 5 conferences now possess greater voting autonomy (Trahan, 2015).

Representatives from the Power 5 schools can now create new regulations distinct from other Division I schools. While the other Division I institutions have the ability to adopt the initiatives approved by the Power 5, such as paying student-athletes the full cost-of-attendance, these schools are not obligated to do so nor do they have the power to vote against Power 5 legislation (Trahan, 2015). It is also important to note that the

Power 5 structure includes a small contingent of student-athletes with voting authority. Specifically, each member institution gets a single vote, and each conference includes an additional three votes placed by student-athlete representatives. Because each Power 5 conference has at least ten teams, the influence of the student-athlete votes remains somewhat marginal.

While the Power 5 schools do represent the most competitive athletic programs in the nation, there is still dispute about the efficacy of this modern governance development. It appears that most schools will struggle to keep up with the institutions dedicating even more resources, even though athletics programs already lose money at the vast majority of institutions. In response to this recent shift, the leadership from Drake Group almost immediately condemned the move as a way to place even greater emphasis on college sports (Porto & Gurney, 2014).

Rather than limit this examination to only a few case studies, the content analysis methodology provides an opportunity to investigate a broader sample size, which may prove more useful to the higher education community as a whole. The timeliness of this study is important as well. The changing landscape of NCAA governance seems ripe for immediate analysis. Schools within the Power 5 conferences rest atop the revenue-generating college sports enterprise, and the recent NCAA governance change may prove to be the fulcrum that tips college sports more toward an acknowledged profit-oriented model. Additionally, in the event that the Power 5 conference schools vote to significantly modify academic and athletic eligibility requirements for student-athletes, a current cross-sectional analysis of these institutions provides a foundation to analyze how new policies may change athletics in the future. Therefore, this analysis focused on the

student-athlete handbooks at the 65 institutions currently within the Power 5 conferences including Notre Dame, which participates in the Atlantic Coast Conference in all sports but football (Bennett, 2014).

The Power 5 sample for this study provided the ability to bound the analysis to a manageable and stable size due to the continually growing number of Division I programs. Currently, there are 128 schools participating in Division I FBS football, and another 124 Division I FCS schools. The number of Division I football programs continues to increase every year, although this year the University of Alabama – Birmingham made the very rare and controversial move to eliminate football altogether. UAB was only the second school to eliminate Division I football in 20 years (Solomon, 2014). During that same period, at least 20 schools have moved up to the FBS level and many more into Division I. In addition to the 252 schools participating in Division I football, there are currently another 96 Division I non-football schools participating in basketball in addition to many other schools participating at the Division I level in other sports such as hockey. Due to the volatility of schools moving up to the Division I level, it was more feasible and timely to focus solely on the Power 5 schools.

Focusing exclusively on Power 5 institutions also resulted in a more logical comparison between institutions. At the Division I level, there is great variation between institutional types, sizes, and even institutional missions. Yet, that variation is less for the schools within the Power 5 conferences. Moreover, the Carnegie Foundation classifies all Power 5 institutions as a research university (RU), and all schools but TCU are either high research (H) or very high research (VH) producing institutions (Carnegie

Classification, 2015). The following section focuses more specifically on the data collection process used for this analysis.

Sample Collection

While there is no regulatory requirement to do so, almost every institution participating at the Division I level seems to publish some form of a student-athlete handbook. These handbooks provided a large, consistent, and bounded source of data that was attainable across a large sample of institutions. Up until this point, there has been no research focused on what information these documents contain, and how the content varies across institutions. Thus, the handbooks provided a coherent medium to create a *physical distinction* in the sampling units for this analysis (Krippendorff, 2013).

As a cross-sectional study, the selection criteria narrowed the sample to the most recent handbook from each institution published by the Power 5 institutions between the years of 2012-2014. Because Power 5 legislative changes do not go into effect until 2015, it was reasonable to assume that handbooks within this range were not influenced by the recent change in governance. Within the sample of 65 Power 5 schools, the majority of current handbooks were openly available. Actual collection of these handbooks was a rather straightforward process of downloading a portable document format (PDF) file directly from an institution's athletics website. All Power 5 schools have an athletics website that is distinct from the institution's primary website. Interestingly, none of the handbooks were posted on the institutions' primary website. In the event that an institution had multiple handbooks attached to their website, the most recent book was used for this analysis.

Upon initial collection, approximately 74% (46/65) of the current Power 5 handbooks were readily available for download. For missing or outdated handbooks, I contacted a representative from the institution's athletic department initially by email and then by phone if necessary. This request process yielded an additional 10 handbooks. Representatives from another three institutions responded that although their handbooks were dated outside of the criteria boundaries, they were still used by the athletic department. Therefore, these three books were included within the analysis as well.

Three institutions used digital mediums that were inconsistent with the other handbooks. Rather than a single digital file or hardcopy handbook, they included different formats such as videos and links to other handbooks, policy guides, and NCAA websites. Thus, it was inappropriate to include these institutions in the analysis. Two institutions did not respond to requests for handbooks. Finally, one institutional representative stated he believed the book had lost its utility, and therefore the institution did not produce a standalone handbook. The date and the proportions of thematic content from each institution are listed within a group of tables in Appendix A. The final sample for the study totaled n = 59 (91% of 65).

Analysis

Because textual documents served as the primary source of data in this study, the use of empirically grounded and systematic methods to analyze and infer meaning from these documents was consistent with the ideological foundations of the content analysis methodology (Berelson, 1952; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990; Wyatt, 2011). Content analysis often involves a large amount of data, and therefore researchers tend to incorporate the assistance of some

form of computer-aided analysis software. These programs vary in capabilities, but in general, they allow the researcher to create a coding structure that helps in reducing the amount of data to quantifiable units. Prior to reducing the data, content analysts must decide what is to be analyzed and how it will be measured. Krippendorff (2013) described this foundational step in content analysis as *unitizing.*

Content analysts tend to focus on manifest content because it is easily quantifiable, and therefore promotes a more consistent and repeatable coding procedure (Neuendorf, 2002). Unfortunately, by focusing narrowly and explicitly on word counts or even phrase frequency, the researcher must sacrifice a great amount context. The structure of student-athlete handbooks made the manifest approach problematic. For example, if the coding process used word frequencies related to the theme of academics, a computer-aided query would likely identify and count the word *student* within that theme. However, since the term *student-athlete* is used persistently throughout these handbooks, and across a number of different contexts, a computer-aided coding process could fail to capture important contextual distinctions throughout the documents. These thematic differences were central to this analysis, so using such an overtly positivist method would likely sacrifice the validity of the investigation in favor of greater reliability. With the focus on thematic differentiation, this study called for a thematic content analysis methodology using a human-coding process incorporating the NVivo qualitative analysis software program (Neuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990).

Krippendorff (2013) noted that thematic coding often provides richer information, with a great amount of potential within applied research studies. Although he acknowledged the challenges of creating a repeatable thematic study, Krippendorff

suggested they could be addressed via a deliberate and thorough coder-training process and test-retest procedures. Furthermore, the thematic coding design was essential to not only quantify the information being communicated within these handbooks, but also analyze how that information varied across institutions. The challenge then became how to operationalize the themes into coding units that would allow for statistical analysis (Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2002).

The primary theoretical frame heavily influenced the rationale behind this investigation. I hypothesized that based on the extensive regulations of college athletics and the other environmental forces influencing homogeneity, there would be little variation in these handbooks. After all, the consistent use of handbooks across institutions was in itself evidence of isomorphic behavior. As stated at the beginning of this investigation, the overarching goal was to explore the primary emphases of the handbooks, specifically, whether administrators focused more on academics, athletics, or some other theme. Before coding the entirety of each handbook, I used a qualitative approach to develop both *a priori* and emergent themes, and then developed a unitizing process to ensure the ability to statistically analyze the data to look for differentiation between institutions. Thus, a qualitative approach was most appropriate to address the first question:

R1. What are the prevailing content themes found in student-athlete handbooks at institutions within the *Power 5* conferences?

The initial analysis began with the two *a priori* themes of academics and athletics. However, the content analysis methodology requires themes to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive (Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2003). Given the principal goal of this study to identify how much administrators focused on academics versus athletics within these

documents, material outside of the two *a priori* themes could have been placed in a *catch-all* category (Neuendorf, 2002). However, the handbooks clearly contained a substantial amount of other information that did not fall into either of the *a priori* categories. Therefore, before coding all the documents, I coded a smaller subset to generate some additional themes to capture all of the relevant content (Neuendorf, 2003). This process proved essential in identifying the primary themes across all the institutions, and for developing the definitions described within the codebooks in Appendix B (Neuendorf, 2002).

The subset included three average-sized (mean of sample $\bar{x}$ = 64 pages) handbooks from each conference, for a total of 15, which was just over 25% of the study sample. I conducted a deep reading of each handbook in the subset, while taking notes about the different components of each book (Neuendorf, 2003). From the initial examination, I created a list of content categories, and began to narrow these categories into primary themes. This qualitative open-coding approach, identified by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) as a *conventional* approach, functioned as the method of analysis for addressing the first research question focused on identifying the primary content themes.

A total of 88 separate categories materialized from the initial analysis of the subset and grew to 113 after open-coding all of the handbooks. These categories then needed to be reduced into broader themes. After identifying all the categories, the two *a priori* themes of academics and athletics remained, but now included a substantial categorical list of relevant content defined within the codebook. The open-coding process produced four additional emergent themes. The final six themes were

Academics, Athletics, Conduct, Welfare and Personal Development, Pride, and Tools, which are described in greater detail within the results section.

After identifying the themes, it was then necessary to integrate a methodological approach that included a statistical analysis of the words associated within a specific theme without losing the context to address the second research question:

R2. To what extent do *Power 5* institutions and conferences vary content within student-athlete handbooks?

Using the NVivo software program to conduct a human-coding process preserves the contextual nuances of content, but also allows the researcher to calculate the proportion of each theme contained within each handbook. In this analysis, all textual information in the handbooks was categorized within a theme based on the robust definition of each theme outlined within the codebook in Appendix B (Neuendorf, 2002). Content analysis requires that each theme or category essentially function as a mutually exclusive variable (Krippendorff, 2013). Thus, each sentence or bullet statement was assigned to one, and only one, theme. Word counts serve as the most precise metric of analysis for textual information, so words were used as the final unit of measure (Neuendorf, 2002).

Krippendorff (2013) referred to the coding process as *recording*. The recording process involved using NVivo to highlight all text with the 59 handbooks using a human-coding approach, and assigning each sentence or bullet statement to a specific theme. This was a more laborious process than a computer-assisted method, but ultimately it was necessary to capture the contextual nuances that a computer query might fail to recognize.

The variation in the size of handbooks was substantial, and therefore required a proportion formula to make valid comparisons across institutions (Marsh, 2006). The

average size of a handbook was just over 64 pages, but the standard deviation was nearly 30 pages; indicating substantial variation within the sample. For example, Texas A&M University had the smallest handbook at just 20 pages and 6,012 words, while Florida State's handbook was the longest at 180 pages and Washington State's the most verbose at 58,351 words.

Some of the handbooks also included a daily calendar/planner. When this was the case, the calendar was removed from the handbook and not included in the statistical analysis or page count. However, in the unique case of Florida State's handbook, the calendar was included because the pages contained relevant textual content rather than just blank space. The divergence in size, as well as the structure of the handbooks required an analytic method to standardize the comparison. Thus, proportions were more appropriate to examine variation. For each theme, the total words coded under a theme were divided by the total words in the handbook to establish a proportion of each theme within a given book. Because all words were coded in each handbook, the thematic proportions summed to 100% for each institution. These proportions could then be compared statistically across institutions to identify variation between institutions in the Power 5 conferences. In exploring variation between individual institutions, descriptive statistics such as the sample means and standard deviations provided the opportunity to make some inferential conclusions. Additionally, because the institutions were already grouped based on self-selection into conferences, it made sense to compare the data in terms of groups as well.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical technique was appropriate to look for statistical differences between conferences. The ANOVA is suitable when

comparing the means of a variable for three or more groups (Casella, 2008). The technique ANOVA requires three assumptions for the test to be reliable. First, variable residuals for each group must follow a normal distribution. Next, the samples must be independent. Finally, the population variances need to be equal. The calculation of an ANOVA produces an F-statistic, which is the ratio of the variance of the grouped means compared to the variance within the samples. A larger F-statistic suggests that the sample means are different from the population mean. Thus, it can be determined with varying degrees of certainty whether one group statistically differs from the others. If that is the case, the researcher can then conduct a post hoc test to see which group means are different from other groups. For this study, the Tukey post hoc test was used to conduct pairwise comparisons.

Given the assumptions of an ANOVA, there was potential that the findings from the ANOVAs resulted in a Type I error due to some heterogeneity in the variances and non-normality within some of the thematic distributions. Thus, it was necessary to incorporate a technique to address these issues. Transformation is the process of applying a mathematical function to data that may violate these assumptions (Casella, 2008). When dealing with proportions, the logit transformation is commonly used to address skewing and stabilize variances (Warton & Hui, 2000). Therefore, I conducted another series of ANOVAs to look for statistical differences between the groups after performing a logit transformation of the data using the formula $f(p) = \ln^*p/(1-p)$, where p is the proportion.

Although the conference structure produced natural groups for comparison, I also included an additional layer of analysis to examine differentiation between thematic

emphases. After conducting ANOVA tests across institutions, the data suggested it might also be worthwhile to examine differentiation based on institutional quality. Because all institutions in the sample were relatively similar, making distinctions in quality was somewhat challenging. Institutional ranking systems are a source of controversy in higher education, but in general, they can serve as a mechanism to compare the relative quality of institutions. In the rankings of American schools, the *US News and World Report* (USN&WR) system arguably holds the greatest prominence amongst the different ranking systems (Toma, 2012).

Researchers have demonstrated that institutions are inherently interested in enhancing institutional prestige, and rankings are one of the most visible means to do so. These appraisals have become so important throughout the years, that some institutions have unfortunately exhibited a willingness to exaggerate numbers within key ranking metrics in order to increase the institution's national rank (Pope, 2012). All the Power 5 institutions hold similar classifications by the Carnegie Foundation, and the USN&WR ranking structure uses a common set of variables and weights to grade and rank all of these institutions against each other (USN&WR Rankings, 2014). Thus, the USN&WR ranking system seemed to be a suitable method to reformat the sample institutions. Another option would have been to use the Barron's selectivity rating. However, the most recent data from this system is from 2008, and all of the schools within the sample are relatively selective. Therefore, I selected the USN&WR as a way to regroup the data.

The quality structure provided another way to examine the proportion data to make some additional inferences. Because the institutions are quite similar, it seemed unnecessary to create an overly complex grouping system. Therefore, the sample was

split into two groups of *very high quality* (VHQ) and *high quality* (HQ) for this additional layer of analysis. The VHQ group consisted of the 18 institutions (30% of the sample) that were ranked within the top 50 of the USN&WR national university rankings, while the remaining 41 institutions were placed in the high quality (HQ) group. Appendix C displays the sample institutions by quality group. After regrouping the sample by quality, I conducted a one-tailed t-test test to look for significant differences. Because there were only two groups, there was no need to run a post hoc analysis to determine which group was significantly different from another.

A quantitative content analysis methodology using only words frequencies and statistical analysis is insufficient in a content analysis study (Krippendorff, 2013). Early forms of content analysis seemed to stop with an empirical scrutiny of manifest content (Berelson, 1952). However, this investigation adopted Krippendorff's (2013) view of content analysis where the quantification of text is only a step in the analysis process. He is critical of visual representations of frequencies such as word clouds. Commenting on the utility of such a device, Krippendorff added "Although frequencies are often celebrated for their precision and simplicity, they should not be granted any special scientific significance" (p. 190).

Beyond purely objective analysis, Holsti (1969) urged the researcher to describe the characteristics of the text to include what messages are being conveyed, how they are being expressed, and who is telling them to whom. Krippendorff (2013) extended this requirement to include the researcher's own conceptualizations of messages in the vein of ethnographic research. The third research question in this study attends to the content

beyond the overt by exploring the messages using qualitative evidence. The question states:

R3. What messages do administrators convey within the content of student-athlete handbooks about institutional expectations and the purpose of the higher education experience at *Power 5* institutions?

In addressing the final research question, I used the themes identified from the primary themes to create a profile of student-athlete handbooks. This template provided the opportunity to discuss the similarities between institutions as suggested by neo-institutional theory as well as the differences between messages that were more prevalent than initially hypothesized. In the end, the qualitative evidence from the handbooks helped to elicit the major differences between institutional approaches.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a potential source of controversy in any study, but perhaps more so in qualitative work due to the inherent subjectivity of the analysis. Reliability in content analysis refers to the idea that the researcher may introduce "pollutants, distortions, and biases" into analysis, and therefore must integrate analytic techniques to ensure the study can be duplicated by another researcher (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 276). As a qualitative methodology, content analysis includes a great deal of subjectivity. However, it can also be argued that subjectivity also exists in purely quantitative studies where the researcher chooses dependent and control variables. In content analysis, the researcher must acknowledge where these subjectivities exist and introduce accepted measures to reduce their impact and ensure both reliability and validity within the research design.

The concept of reliability focuses on procedural consistency and repeatability of procedures, while validity orients on examining what was intended to be studied within an analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). Just because a researcher integrates reliable, or repeatable, techniques and methods does not mean that the analysis is valid. Both of these concepts are interrelated, and needed to be addressed for this study. I selected a thematic human-coded content analysis methodology because I could preserve the nuance and context that ensured validity of the study, even though it would require greater coder-training for repeatability in future analyses. It simply was not acceptable to sacrifice validity in favor of using a more objective approach such as a computer-assisted coding process. A computer-assisted approach would have failed to maintain the same contextual richness as the human-coding process. Furthermore, Nacos et al. (1991) found that with deliberate coder-training program, human-coding procedures were more reliable than computer-assisted methods even when the programs were specifically designed to scan documents for words and word contexts.

My personal experience working as a student-athlete support professional for approximately 10 years adds additional support to the trustworthiness of this analysis. However, it was not enough to rely on my own expertise to ensure validity and reliability (Krippendorff, 2013). Upon developing the primary codes, peer-reviews and meetings with committee members assisted in validating the themes. The peer-review process proved to be essential in guiding this analysis as well. Peers consisted of two other doctoral students familiar with qualitative methodologies. One of these students had also conducted extensive research on intercollegiate athletics, and the other currently works as an athletic academic advisor at a Power 5 institution. I also met with two post-doctoral

researchers with a proclivity for qualitative methods. These interactions helped to structure the themes to ensure mutual exclusivity.

With multiple researchers, coding consistency is a substantial challenge. However, with a single coder there was no need for extensive coder training. Neuendorf (2002) conceded that even a single coder has a tendency to *drift* from coding definitions. To mitigate this potential reliability threat, I continually revisited and refined the codebook definitions. All the coding definitions were discussed with peers to ensure sound logic, and coding was conducted with the codebook definitions on the computer screen adjacent to the NVivo window displaying the handbook so I could continually refer to the definitions. Furthermore, I conducted test-retest procedures throughout the investigation to ensure consistency. After coding all the handbooks within a conference, I recoded two of the handbooks from that conference (total of 10 recoded handbooks). NVivo includes a function to examine inter-coder agreement for the same source coded by different users. Therefore, I created a *ghost* user for retest procedures. In the retests, all themes had greater than 90% inter-coder agreement.

Reliability was certainly a concern for this study. As the lone researcher in a thematic content analysis study, there was a greater threat that the results of the study would be difficult to replicate. However, this threat is mitigated by establishing clear coding guidelines and definitions of terms (Krippendorff, 2013; Neuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990). Therefore, Appendix B provides the coding definitions and instructions for this study. The reliability measures integrated within this study greatly enhanced the trustworthiness of the design and subsequent results. The following chapter summarizes the results of this analysis.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The research questions provide a logical framework for discussing the results of this study. The results chapter begins with a discussion of the primary themes identified within the student-athlete handbooks. The first section includes a description of each theme, and how they were defined for further analysis. The first question is addressed from the aggregate perspective. Moreover, the themes and coding processes are described in generalities to demonstrate how the themes materialized within the sample, but do not provide specific detail with salient examples from each theme until the third research question is addressed later in the chapter. The discussion on second research question stems from the statistical analysis portion of the study. This section includes a summary of the descriptive statistics as well as the results of the ANOVA tests between conferences and t-tests using the ranking structure described in the previous chapter. Finally, qualitative evidence from each theme assists in attending to the final research question of this analysis.

R1. What are the prevailing content themes found in student-athlete handbooks at institutions within the *Power 5* conferences?

Upon the initial exploration of the handbooks, it was quite clear that there was wide variation in handbook sizes and styles. Nonetheless, it was important to identify if there were consistent topical patterns across the sample. As noted in the previous chapters, the content focusing on academics and athletics was central to this

investigation. Yet, there was also relevant subject matter that emerged from the coding process. The following section is a discussion of the characteristics of each theme.

Academics

It was evident throughout this study that academics were one of the key areas of focus within the handbooks. The myriad academic rules, regulations, and reporting requirements established by the NCAA elicited the need for administrators to communicate greater insight into the unique academic obligations of student-athletes. Additionally, the literature on student-athletes' academic experiences alluded to the challenges they might face in the academic environment as well as information about the extensive services available. Given the interest at the beginning of this study to investigate the emphasis on academic issues, this theme included the most liberal coding definition.

Essentially, the academic theme incorporated any information related to student-athlete academic experiences while in college including graduate school opportunities. Within the handbooks, academics information focused on admissions requirements, enrollment, credit hours, grading policies, class attendance, and academic progress toward degree. Additionally, there was consistently a wealth of discussion on academic support such as tutor programs, advisors, learning resources, and physical resources including computer labs, study rooms, and other facilities. Academics themed information also focused on academic awards, recognition, and academic misconduct. The handbooks included varying levels of detail about post-graduate education and scholarship opportunities. All of these topics were some of the easier and most logical

messages to categorize within the academic theme. However, there were also categories that became more challenging to isolate from the other themes.

Discussions about funding were particularly complicated. Within the handbooks, sections covering scholarships and other funding streams were consistently intertwined with information oriented on athletic experiences. Consequently, messages focused on funding were differentiated based on their primary theme. Athletic scholarship information was, therefore, more appropriate within the athletics theme. Yet, there was still an abundance of funding information within the academics theme. It included federal and state education financial support as well as supplemental funding from the NCAA or the institution for emergencies and additional academic resources.

In developing the academic coding structure, it became clear that the discussions in the student-athlete handbooks were divergent from some of the things that might be found in an institution's general student handbook. For example, there were often details about the requirements for student-athletes transferring to different institutions. For a typical student, this is a fairly straightforward administrative process handled primarily by an academic counselor and the registrar. Consequently, one might think that messages about transferring in a student-athlete handbook would be primarily an academic issue. However, this was not the case. Rarely did the topic of transfer requirements focus heavily on academic issues. Rather, administrators used this topic to highlight the multitude of rules necessary for a student-athlete to leave one institution to participation in athletics at another institution. Thus, without considering the context of the discussion, messages about transferring provide a good example of an area that would have been

difficult to code using an automated method of analysis. The table at the end of each thematic description is intended to provide a succinct summary of each theme.

Table 5.1: *Academic Theme Summary*

Theme	Basic Description	What to Include	What not to Include
Academics	*Sentences and bullet statements oriented on academic issues, experiences, resources, conduct and misconduct, and forms of support (facilities and personnel)*	• Admissions • Grades and APR Calculations • Academic Resources • Registration • Academic Major • Class Attendance • Academic Integrity • Funding (except Athletic Scholarships)	• Athletic Scholarship Funding • Transfer Policies (Focused on Athletic Eligibility)

See Appendix B for a complete definition

Athletics

The second *a priori* theme used in this analysis focused on messages related predominantly on athletics. It seemed quite apparent that discussions about athletics would also appear regularly throughout these handbooks. This theme also included some topics that were clearly focused on athletics such as messages focused on amateurism, years of athletic eligibility, practice hours, outside competitions, traveling to athletic events, NCAA regulations for competition, athletic team rules, and strength and conditioning activities. While these subjects seemed distinctly focused on athletics, there were also messages that were more ambiguous.

Upon examination of the handbooks, some of the topics that might not initially seem oriented on athletics were actually tied to the elaborate rule structures governing athletic participation. For example, nearly all of the handbooks included some discussion on gambling. On the surface, the topic of gambling might seem like a legal issue or more related to general misconduct. However, the messages on gambling were consistently

tied to NCAA regulations about point-shaving, game-fixing, or betting on athletic competitions, not more innocuous gambling activities such as buying lottery tickets or playing slot machines in Las Vegas.

The gambling discussions often transitioned into messages about receiving bribes and accepting monetary awards based on athletic performance, which in some cases led to discussions about registering vehicles on campus. Without greater contextual awareness, vehicle registration might seem completely unrelated to gambling and athletic eligibility. For a non-athlete, the trivial process of registering a vehicle on campus fails to generate substantial concern amongst administrators. However, for athletes it is evidently a compliance requirement for them to register their vehicle with the athletic department. In a number of handbooks, institutions even stipulated that student-athletes register a borrowed vehicle if they had it in their possession for more than 48 hours. Apparently, these regulations exist because vehicles are often used as a bribe or a form of prohibited gift or compensation. Researchers would not likely associate athletic participation with something as banal as vehicle registration, but such is the case in the peculiar world of major college sports.

While student-athlete conduct became one of the emergent themes within this analysis, a distinction was necessary to delineate athletic-related conduct issues and general forms of misconduct. In the case of gambling, the messages around this issue were consistently entangled with athletic participation. In other cases, a topic was so convoluted that it required a contingent coding structure to decide how to place content from a single topic within different themes. The discussions on medical support provide a prominent example of this issue. Often medical support was tightly associated with

athletic participation, and therefore much of the medical support information fell under athletics. These discussions usually involved treatment from athletic trainers who work for athletic departments and only treat student-athletes. However, some of the medical discussion also included details about how to receive medical support for severe illnesses, life threatening diseases, and even pregnancy. Thus, it was necessary to unpack some of these messages and place them within numerous coding themes.

Although the topic of substance abuse usually referenced NCAA rules, the substantial messages around this subject were often focused on general conduct rather than narrowly on athletics. This content oriented on a range of substances from performance enhancing drugs to illicit street drugs. Given the large amount of discussion focused on substance abuse, coding this information under athletics would have markedly increased the proportion athletics material. Yet, substance abuse messages seemed less oriented on athletics and more focused on general misconduct. Therefore, the distinction between athletic transgressions and general misconduct led to the creation of the first emergent theme entitled *Conduct*, which is detailed in the section following Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: *Athletic Theme Summary*

Theme	Basic Description	What to Include	What not to Include
Athletics	*Sentences and bullet statements oriented on athletic rules of participation, athletic compliance, coaching, forms of competitions, physical training, medical readiness, and athletic support (facilities and personnel)*	• Athletic Scholarships • Amateurism • Recruiting • Media Interactions • Team Rules • Competition Misconduct • Gambling and Monetary Awards • Over-the-Counter Supplements	• Substance Abuse • Emergency or Treatment of Illness or Disease • APR Calculations and Academic Issues • Character Development

See Appendix B for a complete definition

Conduct

The combined proportions of academic and athletic content only accounted for a little more than half (57%) of the information within the handbooks. Thus, it was appropriate to create additional themes to capture the other messages administrators were communicating in these documents. The most prominent emergent theme from this analysis was oriented on student-athlete conduct.

The first two themes tended to be neutral in their content; featuring both developmental and positive messages along with misconduct and disciplinary issues related to those themes. In the case of the conduct theme, the majority of the information was negative in nature. The conduct theme covered discussion about activities that were illegal or against institutional rules and policies. For example, this topic included passages about vandalism or the improper use of university equipment. Additionally, the conduct theme incorporated content focused on disciplinary proceedings, appeals, and the use of legal or ombudsman services.

Although occasionally administrators restricted messages about hazing and bullying to the athletics context, most of this content was broader in nature. This type of behavior also has larger social and legal repercussions beyond the athletics context, so it was necessary to include this information within the conduct theme. However, some topics were not as clearly defined. Discussions about housing provided an example of a subject that warranted greater delineation. Housing messages often contained information about athletic scholarship funding or about general housing accommodations, but occasionally the message was oriented on damage to housing or inappropriate behavior in housing, and therefore was more of a conduct issue.

The most prevalent topics within the conduct theme focused on respect for others, discrimination policies, and generally unacceptable behavior. This included subjects such as sexual harassment and sexual assault. These are major issues of concern in athletics departments, on college campuses in general, and within American society. These topics were mentioned within all 59 handbooks, regardless of the handbook length. In some of the larger books, there was substantial discussion about these topics that provided extensive guidance on acceptable relationships and sexual behavior. These often focused explicitly on policy, and with a tone of prevention. Moreover, the messages were generally structured to define what *not* to do and how *not* to interact with people, and often provided the disciplinary consequences of inappropriate behavior.

If a sentence or statement focused on the victim by discussing reporting procedures, counseling assistance, or law enforcement assistance, it fell under the welfare and personal development theme. Additionally, when a statement or sentence was developmental in nature, and focused on promoting admirable character traits, it was a welfare message. To make these distinctions clearer, the next section describes the conceptualization for the emergent *Welfare and Personal Development* theme.

Table 5.3: *Conduct Theme Summary*

Theme	Basic Description	What to Include	What not to Include
Conduct	*Sentences and bullet statements focused on conduct policies, legal issues, behaviors related to misconduct, disciplinary proceedings, and corrective actions.*	• Sexual Harassment and Assault Policies • Illegal Activities • Substance Abuse • Discipline and Misconduct Appeals • Discrimination • Social Media Policies	• Victim's Rights and Advocacy • Gambling and Improper Gifts • Constructive Developmental Statements

See Appendix B for a complete definition

Welfare and Personal Development

Given the negative nature of the messages within the conduct theme, it seemed necessary to parcel out content that was developmental in nature. Institutions took different approaches in communicating the need to be good citizens and members of the campus community. Thus, it was important to distinguish between messages that were prohibitive and messages that focused on personal growth. There is a difference between communicating institutional expectations about how to be a good person versus focusing exclusively lamentable behaviors. Administrators used different communication strategies to convey these messages, and these messages provided some insight into the power relationships within athletic departments. Thus, it was fitting to distinguish between the different tones of these messages.

Many handbooks included discussions of the welfare and development of student-athletes outside of the academic and athletic contexts, and even beyond the undergraduate experience. These messages were normally embedded within the messages about Life Skills programs. The *welfare and personal development* theme was designed to capture these messages. Although the welfare theme proved to be smaller in proportion than the other three themes identified thus far, it was also the most broadly defined theme. It included information about student welfare that is likely to appear in a typical student handbook such as career preparation and transition, developmental student activities, housing accommodations, dining and nutritional information (not related to athletics nutrition), medical support, and insurance requirements for general illnesses. Most topics related to the Life Skills programs and the student-athlete advisory council (SAAC) fell

within this theme. These types of discussions demonstrated a genuine concern for student-athletes development beyond their contribution to athletics.

In some cases, a whole statement under a controversial topic such as discrimination could be considered prohibitive in nature. Yet, in other messages, administrators integrated statements about creating a positive campus culture and an inclusive environment that was conducive to growth for everyone. One of the more interesting contextual distinctions within the welfare theme surfaced in discussions about student-athlete employment. This topic included information focused on career development, resume preparation, interview rehearsals, and professionally developmental activities such as work internships. However, the discussions oriented on student-athletes working at the same time they were participating in intercollegiate athletics were quite intriguing.

Evidently, there are extensive NCAA restrictions associated with student-athlete employment, and much of the employment discussion focused on these limitations rather than on career preparation. For example, the messages often directed athletes to get permission from the athletic department or coaches to work outside of the university. They also clearly stipulated compensation rules. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of these messages was oriented on athletes charging for lessons in their respective sports. Student-athletes are greatly restricted in advertising these lessons, and they are not permitted to use the name of the institution they play for nor even their own image. These types of limitations are exclusive to student-athletes, and unquestionably have an impact on their educational experience.

The welfare theme was necessary to consider the different messages administrators conveyed to student-athletes, and helped in exploring power dynamics and variations in tone. Specific examples of these differences are discussed later in the chapter when addressing the third research question. Although this particular theme was a smaller proportion of content, it was an essential component of the qualitative element of this analysis. It forced me to consider differentiation in communication strategies, which was a critical step in connecting the analysis to the theoretical conceptualization.

Table 5.4: *Welfare and Personal Development Theme Summary*

Theme	Basic Description	What to Include	What not to Include
Welfare and Personal Development	*Sentences and bullet statements about student experiences, general health and welfare, career prep, character growth, and values*	• Positive Developmental Statements • Life Skills and SAAC • General Health • Leadership and Admirable Character Traits	• Physical Health Related to Athletics • Employment Restrictions Due to Athletic Participation • Misconduct

See Appendix B for a complete definition

Pride

The first four themes identified in this analysis covered the vast majority of the information within the handbooks (91%). However, the remaining information still contained elements worthy of further delineation. If these documents existed solely to communicate rules and regulations to student-athletes, there would be no additional need to further analyze their content. Yet, it was evident that some administrators used these publications to describe organizational culture and history, and to help inculcate student-athletes into the institution. Thus, it was necessary to create a distinct theme entitled *Pride* for broader visionary messages about ideologies, cultures, and institutional expectations that spanned across multiple contexts.

A number of handbooks included a personalized note from at least one administrator, often an athletic administrator, welcoming the student-athlete to the institution and providing insight into the organizational culture. Occasionally, the handbooks included notes from a senior institutional administrator, or from the president of the student-athlete advisory council. Often these communications were quite positive, enthusiastic, and encouraging. They consistently included messages about personal growth, academic excellence, and athletic success. Similarly, context-spanning messages often appeared when institutions provided mission and vision statements in the handbook. These types of messages belied categorization under the previously established themes. Hence, an additional theme was necessary to capture them.

In addition to inspirational messages crossing multiple contexts were descriptions of institutional traditions. These statements seemed to be a genuine attempt to connect the student-athlete to the campus community. They also served to help the student-athlete understand that they are a member of a larger organization that has a place in the history of the institution. Information that focused on institutional history and traditions included the institutions alma mater or the lyrics to fight songs. Often, mission statements, vision statements, and creeds included a broader introductory message as well as a list of contextually specific statements. When this was the case, each statement was coded under the context that was most appropriate. The *Pride* theme was usually quite small in proportion, but it was inherently different from the other themes. While these statements were generally quite small, identifying and delineating these distinct messages further demonstrated differentiation within the handbooks.

Table 5.5: *Pride Theme Summary*

Theme	Basic Description	What to Include	What not to Include
Pride	*Sentences and bullet statements focused on context-spanning messages, history and tradition, and notes from administrators focused on multiple themes.*	• Mission and Vision Statements Spanning Multiple Contexts • Institutional History • School Pride and Traditions	• Athletic Accomplishments • Varsity and Alumni Club Activities • Individual Character Development Statements

See Appendix B for a complete definition

Tools

Even with all the distinctions within the other themes, there was still textual material within the handbooks that remained uncategorized. Thus, it was necessary to include this material in one final category. This theme was titled *Tools* because it included information that might be useful to a student-athlete, but was not necessarily pertinent to this investigation.

The tools theme contained somewhat inconsequential information such as directory information, campus guides, maps, and listings of resources without detailed explanation. The tools information was generally straightforward. However, some topics seemed negligible at first, but required later required reconsideration. Such was the case for the vehicle registration issue that proved to be more complex than originally anticipated. Despite some of these complexities, the tools theme generally served as a way to capture less-relevant information to ensure that all textual data was coded into a single theme, which allowed for further quantitative analysis of the proportions. The following section focuses on answering the second research question based on the results from the statistical analysis of proportions.

Table 5.6: *Tools Theme Summary*

Theme	Basic Description	What to Include	What not to Include
Tools	*Administrative and less relevant information including directory lists without explanation of the resources, campus maps, and broad email requirements.*	• Phone and Address Directory Information • Maps and Campus Guides • Parking Information • Bike and General Vehicle Policies	• Vehicle Registration Information Related to Athletic Compliance • Online Communication and Social Media Policies

See Appendix B for a complete definition

R2. To what extent do *Power 5* institutions and conferences vary content within student-athlete handbooks?

The second research question prompted an exploration of the proportionate differentiation of content using the systematic coding process. This analysis provided some interesting and unexpected results. Prior to examining the differences in thematic proportions, it was immediately obvious that the handbooks varied in terms of the sheer amount of content contained in each book. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a substantial spread between the institutions in the size of each handbook, as well as the distribution of thematic content. Table 5.7 displays the considerable range within the sizes of each handbook as well as the word density.

Table 5.7: *Descriptive Statistics for Handbooks*

Conference	n	Page # Mean	Page # SD	Word Min	Word Max	Word Mean	Word STD
ACC	**14**	**65.54**	**41.17**	**10,947**	**43,581**	**26,348**	**9,010**
Big XII	**9**	**57.22**	**23.63**	**16,035**	**42,705**	**27,733**	**10,604**
Pac-12	**11**	**80.82**	**28.32**	**18,902**	**58,351**	**33,491**	**12,604**
SEC	**12**	**56.58**	**23.90**	**6,012**	**34,620**	**22,835**	**8,607**
Big 10	**13**	**61.31**	**22.26**	**12,250**	**41,045**	**27,100**	**8,845**
Sample	**59**	**64.39**	**29.67**	**6,012 (min)**	**58,351 (max)**	**27,342**	**10,148**

Note: SD = Standard Deviation

What immediately stands out in Table 5.7 is the size of the sample standard deviation at over 29 pages, which suggests a wide disparity between the handbook

lengths. The ACC provided the largest dispersion in page length with a standard deviation of over 41 pages; however, this was influenced by Florida State's 180-page handbook, which was the only document to include a planner with written content. Nonetheless, given the initial premise that the handbooks would be relatively similar based on the forces described within the neo-institutional and bureaucratic frameworks, the physical differences indicated some divergent approaches. There was also variation in the amount of textual content. The largest handbook in the sample contained over 10 times the amount of words as the smallest, and the sample standard deviation of over 10,000 words again suggested inconsistency in communication strategies.

The physical differences in handbooks showed some unexpected differences, but the main purpose of this question was to look at different thematic emphases. While the tables in Appendix A summarize the distribution of thematic content for each institution, it was sufficient for this analysis to explore the relative differences between conferences. Table 5.8 shows the aggregated percentages of thematic emphasis between conferences.

Table 5.8: *Thematic Mean Percentages and Standard Deviations by Conference*

Conference	n	Mean % Academic	Mean % Athletic	Mean % Conduct	Mean % Welfare	Mean % Pride	Mean% Tools
ACC	**14**	**20.41%**	**39.40%**	**22.94%**	**11.19%**	**1.95%**	**4.08%**
		(6.71%)	*(4.96%)*	*(8.55%)*	*(4.33%)*	*(1.02%)*	*(3.05%)*
Big XII	**9**	**23.16%**	**33.54%**	**25.11%**	**11.55%**	**2.72%**	**3.93%**
		(8.38%)	*(10.48%)*	*(9.54%)*	*(4.21%)*	*(2.24%)*	*(2.14%)*
Pac-12	**11**	**26.99%**	**27.96%**	**20.48%**	**14.63%**	**4.04%**	**5.90%**
		(10.39%)	*(9.80%)*	*(8.64%)*	*(3.90%)*	*(3.10%)*	*(3.77%)*
SEC	**12**	**26.18%**	**28.65%**	**21.69%**	**13.26%**	**3.77%**	**6.45%**
		(8.44%)	*(8.08%)*	*(10.04%)*	*(4.75%)*	*(2.64%)*	*(4.54%)*
Big 10	**13**	**28.98%**	**30.08%**	**19.89%**	**11.16%**	**3.26%**	**6.64%**
		(12.23%)	*(7.73%)*	*(10.63%)*	*(4.15%)*	*(1.70%)*	*(3.48%)*
Sample Mean		**25.12%**	**32.13%**	**21.89%**	**12.30%**	**3.11%**	**5.44%**
Sample SD		*(9.64%)*	*(9.04%)*	*(9.35%)*	*(4.36%)*	*(2.26%)*	*(3.60%)*

Note: Mean percentages are in bold and standard deviations displayed in parentheses

What stands out in Table 5.8 is that the academic content was not the dominant theme in any of the conferences, and it was actually not even the second most emphasized theme within the ACC and Big XII. Throughout all five conferences, athletically themed messages were the largest proportion of content. While this was an interesting finding, it was perhaps not necessarily surprising. Given the extensive NCAA rule structure and any additional institution-specific rules related to athletics, it was not unexpected to find that handbooks published by athletic departments gave primacy to athletics-related information.

What was a little more surprising from this analysis was the spread of thematic content, which was again demonstrated by large standard deviations. The three most prominent themes of athletics, academics, and conduct all had standard deviations greater than 9% in the aggregate. This suggested that institutions varied fairly substantially in their distribution of content in these three areas when compared to other institutions within the same conference as well as within the sample as a whole. The other three themes of welfare, tools, and pride all have standard deviations less than half of the three most prominent themes.

In general, the themes of academics, conduct, and athletics demonstrated the largest variation along with the largest proportions. Yet, one statistic stood out among the others when comparing across conferences. Table 5.8 shows that the ACC institutions tended to emphasize athletics more than the other conferences. To explore if there was any statistically significant difference, I conducted one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests between all 5 conferences for each theme area. Table 5.9 displays the resulting data from the one-way ANOVAs.

Table 5.9: *One-Way ANOVA Tests between Power 5 Conferences*

Theme		Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Academics	Between Groups	4	.0590	.0147	1.6575	.1734
	Error	54	.4804	.0089		
	Total	58	.5394			
Athletics	Between Groups	4	.1149	.0287	4.3143	**.0042***
	Error	54	.3595	.0067		
	Total	58	.4744			
Conduct	Between Groups	4	.0183	.0046	.5043	.7325
	Error	54	.4889	.0091		
	Total	58	.5072			
Welfare	Between Groups	4	.0110	.0027	1.4932	.2172
	Error	54	.0994	.0018		
	Total	58	.1104			
Pride	Between Groups	4	.0035	.0009	1.8199	.1384
	Error	54	.0261	.0005		
	Total	58	.0296			
Tools	Between Groups	4	.0080	.0020	1.6025	.1870
	Error	54	.0672	.0012		
	Total	58	.0752			

p < 0.01*

The results from ANOVA and Tukey HSD post hoc tests indicated that the mean proportion of the ACC athletics theme was statistically different from the Pac-12 ($p<.01$), the SEC ($p<.05$), and the Big 10 ($p<.05$). It was indeed curious to find that one conference placed greater emphasis on athletics, despite the presence of similar environmental forces. To avoid making a Type I error based on heterogeneous variances and some skewing, the data were transformed with a logit transformation process as described in the previous chapter. Table 5.10 below shows the results from the second ANOVA test.

Table 5.10: *One-Way ANOVA Tests between Power 5 Conferences (after transformation)*

Theme		Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Academics	Between Groups	4	1.6277	.4069	1.7432	.1540
	Error	54	12.6055	.2334		
	Total	58	14.2332			
Athletics	Between Groups	4	2.7538	.6885	3.6303	**.0108***
	Error	54	10.2405	.1896		
	Total	58	12.9943			
Conduct	Between Groups	4	1.0811	.2703	.5985	.6654
	Error	54	23.9354	.4516		
	Total	58	25.0165			
Welfare	Between Groups	4	1.1293	.2823	1.2232	.3118
	Error	54	12.4631	.2308		
	Total	58	13.5923			
Pride	Between Groups	4	4.9379	1.2345	1.5533	.2001
	Error	54	42.9170	.7948		
	Total	58	47.8549			
Tools	Between Groups	4	5.2932	1.3233	1.6636	.1719
	Error	54	42.9551	.7955		
	Total	58	48.2483			

$p < 0.05$*

Even after transforming the data, there was a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the mean proportion of athletic-themed information in the ACC compared to the group mean and some of the other conferences. The Tukey post hoc tests showed the transformed ACC mean to be significantly higher than the Pac-12 ($p < .05$) and the SEC ($p < .05$). This finding indicated the need to conduct some deeper analysis to examine what might be influencing this distinction.

As noted previously, all of the schools in the sample fall under the same Carnegie Classification as a *RU (Research University)* and *National Universities* within the *US News & World Report*. All of these institutions are well-resourced and relatively selective. Even with these similarities, it was worth exploring variation based on institutional quality. Using the USN&WR ranking structure provided the opportunity to remove the institutions from the somewhat arbitrary conference configuration, and

regroup the institutions based on quality. The regrouping process revealed some notable characteristics about the ACC institutions. The majority of the ACC schools are ranked quite high in the USN&WR 2015 rankings; with all but one institution ranked in the top 100 of all *National Universities*. More specifically, half of the ACC schools used in this analysis were ranked in the USN&WR top 50 (more than any other conference), and an additional ACC school that was not included in the sample was also in the top 15. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to examine differentiation based on institutional quality.

Table 5.11 shows that the VHQ group had a higher proportion of athletic content and lower academic and conduct proportions than the than the HQ group. Specifically, the VHQ group's conduct theme mean percentage was only 1.20% lower than the HQ group's, and academic theme was 3.02% lower than the HQ group. There could be a number of explanations for a reduced emphasis on academic information from the VHQ institutions. One perspective is that these institutions recruit a higher quality of student; even within the student-athlete population. In other words, athletic administrators could feel that the reputation of the institution precludes the need to spend more time communicating academic expectations to the student-athlete in the handbooks. This concept, along with others, is explored in the discussion section of the final chapter.

Table 5.11: *Thematic Mean Percentages and Standard Deviations by Quality Group*

Group	N	Mean % Academic	Mean % Athletic	Mean % Conduct	Mean % Welfare	Mean% Pride	Mean % Tools
Very High Quality (VHQ)	**18**	**23.02%** *(9.53%)*	**35.09%** *(8.40%)*	**21.05%** *(8.53%)*	**12.39%** *(3.83%)*	**3.08%** *(1.83%)*	**5.37%** *(3.08%)*
High Quality (HQ)	**41**	**26.04%** *(9.67%)*	**30.84%** *(9.11%)*	**22.25%** *(9.77%)*	**12.26%** *(4.62%)*	**3.13%** *(2.44%)*	**5.48%** *(3.84%)*
Sample Mean		**25.12%**	**32.13%**	**21.89%**	**12.30%**	**3.11%**	**5.44%**
Sample SD		*(9.64%)*	*(9.04%)*	*(9.35%)*	*(4.36%)*	*(2.26%)*	*(3.60%)*

Note: Mean percentages are in bold and standard deviations displayed in parenthesis

Table 5.12 displays the results of the one-tailed t-tests between the quality groups. Although the standard deviations between groups were quite similar, the logit transformation process was again integrated to address skewing. The athletic theme t-test ($t(57) = 1.5972$, $p = .0579$) confirmed a that the VHQ group had a significantly higher proportion of proportion of athletic content, with an acceptable degree of significance.

Table 5.12: *One-Tailed t-tests between Quality Groups (after logit transformation)*

Theme	df	t-value	Significance
Academics	57	1.2860	.1018
Athletics	57	1.5972	**.0579****
Conduct	57	0.0620	.4754
Welfare	57	0.2463	.4032
Pride	57	.9044	.1848
Tools	57	.3708	.3561
p < 0.10**			

The preceding statistical analysis was intended to explore differentiation in the proportion of thematic content communicated to student-athletes within the handbooks, but there was little expectation in identifying quantitative variation. I hypothesized homogenous size and content within the sample, but also envisioned substantial similarity in rhetoric and style. Indeed, there were some unanticipated statistical differences, but this analysis alone failed to bring to life the important contextual variations within the sample. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to expound upon the considerable divergence between these handbooks through a traditional qualitative approach. The final section of the results chapter attends to the third research question using qualitative evidence to discuss the different messages and communication strategies demonstrated within these handbooks.

R3. What messages do administrators convey within the content of student-athlete handbooks about institutional expectations and the purpose of the higher education experience at *Power 5* institutions?

During the process of developing the primary themes and coding definitions for this analysis, it became clear that institutions varied not only in their emphasis of different themes, but also in the style and tone of these communications. The statistical analysis helped to shed some light on these differences. Yet, while there were some differences in proportions of themes between the conferences and quality groups, there were more nuanced differences in the descriptions of institutional expectations. With those distinctions in mind, it seemed suitable to demonstrate contextual variation by providing salient examples of these differences within the thematic elements. In the final section of this chapter, the themes provide a logical framework for discussing variation in communication approaches.

Academics

Within the literature on student-athlete academic experiences, there was evidence that the student-athlete population did not perform as well academically as non-athletes (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). However, in the aggregate, the majority of student-athletes seem to achieve similar academic outcomes, with the exception of revenue-generating student-athletes. Consequently, it appeared administrators attempted to address these divergent student populations. In fact, there was evidence that demonstrated different target audiences for these handbooks across institutions. While some handbooks spoke directly to the student-athletes, others appeared to have an even broader intent. Additionally, some of the academic information seemed more oriented towards student-athletes with less ambitious academic goals. This section includes some examples of different approaches to discussing academic support and expectations.

A statement from the University of Georgia stood out as an attempt to justify the need for additional academic support. The handbook reads:

> It is an obligation of the institution in one special area - academic assistance - to treat the student-athlete unlike most other students. Because of the abnormal time demands placed upon the student-athlete, the institution must provide a special program of academic support, including counseling and tutoring, to each student-athlete participating in the programs (UGA Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 11) .

This message seems perhaps unnecessary if the handbook was intended to reach current students. Moreover, it appears curious to justify the need for additional academic support to student-athletes who are already experiencing the demands of intercollegiate athletics. The University of Nebraska even went so far as to describe how their services were validated by an external agency when it declared:

> Recent compliance reviews of the athletic/academic unit have been completed. The Gender Equity and Sports Management consultants from Andrus, Daniel & McCulloch gave the athletic/academic unit a rating of "excellent." The report prepared by Sport Services Inc. gave the athletic/academic unit a grade of A+ (Nebraska Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 15).

Statements such as Georgia's and Nebraska's suggested these handbooks might actually be used to communicate an institutional commitment to academic support to wary critics or concerned parents and guardians.

Further evidence of messages communicating to parents emerged in references to FERPA rights, such as the following example from the University of Southern California:

> Parents who wish to gain access to information from the education records of their son or daughter will not be provided the information unless the student has granted access through OASIS or has completed the appropriate release form authorizing the university to release specific information from their education records to approved individuals (USC Student-Athlete Handbook, p.54).

The University of Maryland handbook even explicitly declared a desire to communicate more broadly in the following statement:

> The 2014-2015 Student-Athlete Handbook has been prepared for a wide audience but more specifically for University of Maryland student-athletes to become better acquainted with various policies and procedures as established by the University, the Big Ten Conference, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (Maryland Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 8).

While there is nothing necessarily wrong with communicating to parents through this medium, the varying audience orientation did provide some insight into why these handbooks are different in appearance and language.

There was also substantial variation in the messages about academic expectations. In general, they all discussed the need for student-athletes to remain academically eligible and earn a degree. However, those messages should be superfluous unless there was an underlying assumption that some student-athletes might be tempted to prioritize athletics over academics. The University of Arkansas handbook appears to, perhaps unintentionally, narrow the student-athlete's academic attainment expectations to the minimal level in the statement "The Athletic Department believes firmly that the foremost goal of every student-athlete is to graduate. To that end, we provide our student-athletes with the necessary resources to achieve that goal" (Arkansas Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 13). While this may be a well-intended comment to ensure that student-athletes focus on their academic requirements, it also suggests that graduating from college might not be a primary goal of student-athletes. On the contrary, most student-athletes not only attain an undergraduate degree at rates even higher than non-athletes, but also go on to study at the graduate level even while participating in college sports (NCAA, 2011). The University of Illinois messaging contrasts with that of

Arkansas with a more ambitious and innovative approach to student-athlete development in the statement:

> Commitment to Academic Excellence - In order to promote and support the academic progress of student-athletes toward intellectual development and academic excellence towards the goal of graduation, the lllini Life Skills Program offers the following support…Academic Services has partnered with The Game Theory Group to provide a comprehensive development program called, the Game Plan, to prepare student-athletes for their professional careers. All freshmen student-athletes complete an I Start Strong Assessment in their fall semester to help them: recognize their strengths and interests and align their choices of classes, majors, and career choices. The Game Plan curriculum also provides course modules on time management and study skills for freshmen student-athletes. Athletic academic counselors can access the student application exercises in order to provide feedback and support to individual student-athletes as they complete their assigned modules (Illinois Student-Athlete Handbook, pp. 17-18).

While it is not appropriate to assume that Arkansas' academic support to student-athletes is inferior to Illinois' based on these two statements, they do communicate different messages about the purpose of academic endeavors. While Arkansas' handbook clearly defined graduation as *the* measure of success, the Illinois' statement implied that student-athletes have the power to create their own scholarly journey to actualize their potential, which could very well extend beyond undergraduate experiences.

The handbooks within the sample included different approaches to communicating the importance of academics, but in some cases, they provided mixed messages about institutional academic expectations. Many of the handbooks described the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate (APR) calculation and Progress-Toward-Degree (PTD) requirements in great detail because these metrics are unique to student-athletes. Additionally, some of the handbooks also included an explanation of how to calculate the

grade point average based on the institutional grading system. Curiously, the examples of GPAs tended to be relatively low.

Table 5.13 shows GPA calculations within the 13 handbooks that provided an example. In an analysis of GPAs across the United States, undergraduates often achieved greater than a 3.00 on a 4.00 scale (Rojstaczer & Healy, 2010). While the schools in the VHQ group provided generally higher examples in the handbooks, most of the examples from both groups were lower than a 3.00, which suggests the authors could be more concerned with promoting academic eligibility instead of academic excellence.

Table 5.13: *Example Calculated Grade Point Averages*

Institution	Conference	Calculated GPA Example	Page Number
Wake Forest	**ACC**	**2.428**	**Page 13**
Penn State	**Big 10**	**2.630**	**Page 51**
Wisconsin	**Big 10**	**2.857**	**Page 20**
Florida	**SEC**	**2.920**	**Page 23**
Vanderbilt	**SEC**	**3.093**	**Page 11**
Illinois	**Big 10**	**3.550**	**Page 25**
Ole Miss	**SEC**	**2.000**	**Page 36**
Purdue	**Big 10**	**2.150**	**Page 8**
Iowa	**Big 10**	**2.07, 2.66, 1.522****	**Page 26**
Florida State	**ACC**	**2.307**	**Page 131**
TCU	**Big XII**	**2.310**	**Page 29**
Kansas State	**Big XII**	**2.357**	**Page 8**
Ohio State	**Big 10**	**3.071, 2.207***	**Page 27**

**Ohio State showed the GPA decrease from 3.071 to a 2.207 due to an incomplete*
***Iowa showed three example GPA calculations*
Note: Institutions above the line are in the Very High Quality group, and institutions below the line are in the High Quality group.

Along with different academic messages, institutions varied the amount of academic content as well. The University of Iowa included a robust discussion on academics that was more than half of the 59-page handbook, including a full section focused on study skills. Meanwhile, the University of Washington limited academic

discussion to just a couple of pages of the entire book. It is inappropriate to assume that handbooks are the only way administrators communicate to student-athletes, and, therefore, these examples fail to prove that one academic support program is superior to another. However, these examples do demonstrate that schools were more individualistic within this medium than hypothesized. Furthermore, there was evidence to suggest that administrators struggle in communicating to the dichotomous student-athlete population. While there were plenty of messages about actualizing academic potential and achieving excellence, there was also a substantial amount of focus on maintaining eligibility. Yet, rather than use a single formulaic communication strategy across all these institutions, there was ample variation between handbooks. This variation continued within the content focused on athletics as well, which is discussed in the next section.

Athletics

As demonstrated in the statistical analysis of content, the largest proportion of the handbooks focused on athletics-oriented material, but very little of that information actually discussed athletic competitions. Assuredly, there were a number of messages extolling the benefits of participating in college sports such as this one from Stanford that stated "We will teach - By encouraging our student-athletes to capture all the joy, power and extraordinary personal growth that comes to those who compete and support athletic excellence" (Stanford Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 6). However, much of the content coded under the athletic theme centered on discussions about scholarships and expenses. Perhaps, the most controversial aspect of this content oriented on the contractual basis of these scholarships. Nearly every handbook provided information about the one-year renewable nature of an athletic scholarship. This issue is one of the most fervently

contested topics within major college sports, and deserves some discussion for this study (Sherman, 2015).

In 2012, the NCAA lifted a ban on four-year scholarships that lasted nearly 40 years (Farrey, 2010; Sherman, 2015). However, even after the legislation passed to allow multi-year scholarships, few student-athletes actually benefitted from this shift. After all, it does not make much business sense to offer a guaranteed athletic contract to an unproven athletic commodity. Yet, it seems more a philanthropic arrangement, consistent with the educational mission of universities, to provide some security to student-athletes who are also seeking to get an education under unique constraints.

Recent changes based on the new NCAA governance structure, as well as environmental pressures, appear to have influenced a philosophical shift. Starting in 2015, Power 5 schools will start providing full cost-of-attendance scholarships, and guaranteeing four-year scholarships in certain sports, if not all of them (Sherman, 2015). Other athletic conferences, such as Conference USA, have also committed to provide more secure scholarship funding, likely as an attempt to keep up with the Power 5 institutions in recruiting (Watson, 2015). However, this historic vote took place after the handbooks in this sample were published. Thus, the scholarship information within these handbooks often focused on the annually renewable structure. These messages provided some divergent perspectives about the relationship between athletic performance and scholarship funding.

The authors often provided information about how a student-athlete might lose a scholarship. A general pattern emerged across institutions describing the types of scenarios that could result in a scholarship not being renewed by the institution. The

following passage from the University of Kansas is representative of a rather formal description of athletic grant-in-aid renewal policies:

> Athletically related grants-in-aid are awarded on an annual basis and are limited to required educational expenses, such as tuition, fees, room, board and use of required course-related books. Financial aid provided to student-athletes is not considered a "reimbursement for services performed" and cannot, on the basis of athletic performance, be gradated or discontinued during the period of its award. However, athletically related aid may be reduced or canceled according to NCAA Bylaw 15.3.4 Reduction and Cancellation During Period of Award (see Policy 502B, Student-Athletes: Eligibility, in this Manual). Any modification to the original grant must be approved by the Director of Athletics, or his/her designee, under the conditions or situations specified in the NCAA Manual, Bylaw 15.3.5 Renewals and Non-renewals and communicated to the student-athlete in writing with full explanation of the appeals process (Kansas Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 22).

The Kansas handbook used authoritative legal terminology to describe the rights of student-athletes with regard to the athletic scholarship, but it does make it clear that athletic performance will not be a basis for losing a scholarship. However, that was not the case with all institutions.

While many handbooks were consistent in form and content to the Kansas example, at least one other institution took a different approach. In recent years, the University of Louisville has made a very clear institutional choice to pursue athletic excellence. Just over 10 years ago, the institution competed as a *mid-major* within Conference USA. Most of Louisville's athletic programs were rather mediocre, but now they regularly compete for conference and even national championships within a Power 5 conference. During the 2013-2014 academic year, Louisville's football team finished the season ranked in the top 15 in the nation, their men's basketball team ended the season ranked in the top 10 after losing in the *Sweet 16* of the NCAA tournament, and their baseball team also finished in the top 10 and made it all the way to the College World

Series. Louisville now consistently ranks in the top 30 schools in the Learfield Director's Cup competition for the best overall athletic program in the nation, which is a considerable contrast to just over a decade ago when they regularly failed to break the top 100. This substantial improvement in athletics, particularly in revenue-generating sports, was certainly not an accident. Consequently, it is not surprising that Louisville would include the following statement about the renewable nature of athletic scholarships:

> In the event a student-athlete's athletic financial aid is cancelled or reduced during the period of award or it is not renewed, or reduced for the following year, the UofL's financial aid authority will notify the student-athlete in writing of the opportunity for a hearing. UofL has established reasonable procedures for promptly hearing such a request and shall not delegate the responsibility for conducting the hearing to individuals employed by the athletics department or its faculty athletics committee. The written notification of the opportunity for a hearing includes UofL's established policies and procedures for conducting the required hearing, including the deadline by which a student-athlete must request such a hearing. Note: Most UofL financial aid awards are awarded on a one-year basis ***and can be non-renewed for any reason*** [emphasis added] (Louisville Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 15).

The Kansas handbook implied that NCAA rules prohibit institutions from considering athletic performance as a factor in cancelling a scholarship. However, Louisville's handbook explicitly stated that grant-in-aid may not be renewed for any reason. The reality lies somewhere in the middle. While the NCAA limits institutions from cancelling a one-year scholarship based on athletic performance, coaches and administrators maintain the authority to terminate an athletic scholarship through the annually renewable structure (NCAA DI Manual, 2014). The contrasting statements within these handbooks are consistent with the concept of bounding reality through messages of organizational authority and power. While Louisville's approach was

distinctive, it was not shocking to find from an institution that has demonstrated a willingness to give primacy to athletic success. However, these divergent statements provide some evidence that institutions used different messages in these handbooks to frame the college experience and athletic expectations of student-athletes.

The extensive discussions on athletic scholarships in student-athlete handbooks might be surprising to those outside of the intercollegiate athletic environment. The oft-used term *full-ride* insinuates that student-athletes who receive an athletic scholarship have all their college expenses covered by the institution once they sign a letter of intent. Yet, that has not been the case for many years. Athletes are limited in what they can receive funding for, and it often does not cover the full cost of attending an institution. While the cost-of-attendance issue has received some significant attention recently, one of the most startling findings throughout the handbooks was focused on medical and insurance coverage.

Critics of major college sports often assail the enterprise for failing to provide lifelong medical coverage for athletes who are severely injured during athletic competitions (Emmert, 2014). Given the violent nature of certain sports, participating in highly competitive athletics has always involved an elevated risk of serious injury. Yet, the NCAA has cleverly constructed the legal structure to ensure institutions are not liable for long-term medical coverage (Byers, 1998). However, the presumption that institutions are primarily responsible for covering the expenses related to injuries incurred while playing is also unfounded. Within the handbooks, many institutions were deliberate in explaining the limitations on medical coverage.

The handbooks often contained lengthy discussions about the need for student-athletes to establish primary insurance coverage prior to participating. Evidently, even when a student-athlete is injured while competing in major college sports, their insurance (or their parent's insurance) functions as the primary coverage. Statements like the following from Oklahoma State's handbook are reflective of the types of messages found throughout the handbooks:

> The athletics department is the secondary provider of funds to pay medical costs associated with athletic injuries and illness (i.e., Oklahoma State University Athletics Department will be responsible for medical costs not covered by the student- athlete's own insurance). Coverage applies only to injuries and/or illness arising from practice and/or play. NCAA rules do not permit the university to bear financial responsibility for injuries and/or illness not associated with practice and/or play. Consultation with the Sports Medicine staff during treatment of an injury or illness is imperative. Coordination of all medical care must be through the Sports Medicine staff. Unauthorized, outside medical expenses are the student-athlete's own responsibility (Oklahoma State Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 32).

This statement, and many others like it, established that institutions are only responsible for medical expenses in excess of the student's primary coverage. Additionally, the institutions are absolved of that responsibility once a student-athlete is no longer affiliated with the institution. Thus, college athletes are left to manage the considerable expenses related to long-term medical care that often comes with playing college sports. This kind of insight into the real cost of being a college athlete provides support for the paradigm-shifting changes proposed by the most outspoken critics, but the monetary and physical costs are not the only ways in which student-athletes' experiences diverge from other students. The following section on conduct highlights some of the other unique restrictions communicated to this population.

Conduct

The extensive rule structure controlling student-athletes' lives creates an environment where they often feel isolated and subjugated (Calhoun, 2012; Watt & Moore, 2001). Because so many aspects of a college athlete's life are constrained by the extensive rules and policies, truly reflective of the *iron cage* analogy, these handbooks often served as a primary medium to communicate the unique limits on the student-athlete experience. Many of these controls were discussed explicitly throughout the handbooks. The following section includes some examples of these messages.

As described previously, the conduct theme was the first emergent coding category because the handbooks often contained a generous amount of information focused on the limitations of student-athlete behavior. In addition to federal and state laws, as well as institution-specific regulations, the student-athlete must somehow be aware and accountable to the vast NCAA and athletic department rules. In some cases, institutions attempted to put the onus on student-athletes to know and comply by the rules by including a contract-like form that required a signature from the student-athlete.

The following example from the University of South Carolina demonstrated an attempt to ensure compliance by actually including a form for the student-athlete to sign as a contract. The handbook reads, "I hereby acknowledge receipt of the 2014-2015 University of South Carolina Athletics Handbook and agree to read and be familiar with its contents, and abide by the rules and regulations put forth in it" (South Carolina Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 5). Similarly, Louisville's handbook included this ominous statement on a page requiring the student-athlete's signature: "In the event of a disciplinary incident, the handbook is considered the student- athlete's first notice"

(Louisville Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 2). These kinds of statements provide some insight into the power relationships communicated through these handbooks, and clearly demonstrate a systematic attempt at control.

A number of other schools used a somewhat more collaborative approach within the handbooks. At least eight institutions used the exact phrase "ask before you act," and others used similar expressions. This approach demonstrated some degree of acknowledgment that student-athletes might encounter a situation where they did not fully understand their obligations under the byzantine rule structures. Thus, the student-athlete was implored to ask compliance representatives from the athletic department for permission to act. The problem with such a broad and vague statement is that it still puts the burden back on the student-athlete. If a student-athlete fails to understand the expansive rules, and does not ask for permission to act, then the student-athlete is to blame for any transgressions. Unfortunately, the comprehensive nature of the rule structure makes it unlikely that a student-athlete will always ask before acting.

The following statement from the Vanderbilt handbook was included both at the beginning and at the end of their compliance section:

> NOTE: Athletics Department policies, Conference and NCAA regulations are subject to change after the printing of this handbook. Student-athletes are responsible for being in compliance with all rules and regulations and will be informed as such changes occur. Updates will also be made electronically to the Student-Athlete Handbook as necessary and made available (Vanderbilt Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 28 & p. 34).

This particular message seemed noteworthy not only in that it was stated more than once within the handbook, but also because the university had a two-year old handbook posted on its website. Given that the NCAA used three iterations of the Division I manual between June 2014 and January 2015, it seems ironic for an institution to acknowledge

the volatility NCAA rules in a redundant proclamation and commit to update the website as rules changed, but neglect to post a newer handbook to their website.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one of the topical areas included in just about every handbook focused on substance abuse. The substance abuse messages demonstrated the extent control student-athletes have placed over their everyday lives. Certainly, one might expect to see restrictions on illicit street drugs and steroids, and in today's environment it was not surprising to see warnings about certain prescription drugs that tend to get abused for recreation or performance enhancing benefits. However, the messages about limitations on legal supplements indicated that just about everything related to a student-athlete's body is subject to control. Twenty-four different handbooks specified that caffeine intake was regulated, and several of those handbooks even further quantified that urine concentrations could not exceed 15 micrograms/ml of caffeine. Additionally, while Florida and Washington State included green tea on their list of impermissible substances, USC and UCLA both incorporated green tea on a proposed shopping list to help improve the immune system. The extent of these regulations makes statements like "ask before you act" seem less plausible.

Even using a critical lens to view these messages, some of the information within the conduct theme is justifiable given the audience of developing young adults. For example, the high incidence of sexual assault and harassment on college campuses warrants some unambiguous statements about expectations of appropriate behavior. Additionally, messages prohibiting discrimination are certainly valid areas to introduce within such a document. However, some statements may be more effective than others. Rather than simply restating a list of policies, the Wisconsin handbook authors discussed

conduct and discipline from a student-athlete's perspective by posing the question "Why have a separate policy for student-athletes?" Then, the handbook provided a list of relevant reasons student-athletes have unique restrictions within the response:

> Status as a student-athlete creates special responsibilities as a representative of the university…A separate policy, outside of UWS 17 and in addition to the team rules, is necessary because allegations of student-athlete misconduct generally receive more public attention than those involving regular students in two senses: the allegations are likely to result in more publicity and will become known to more people (Wisconsin Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 67).

The statement goes on to provide additional justifications that might help student-athletes understand why they are subject to greater scrutiny.

Admittedly, an extensive listing of rules is not very interesting to read. When institutions attempt to include every regulation within a single document, they risk student-athletes ignoring the handbook altogether. In one of the clearest examples of mimetic isomorphism, both Duke and Wake Forest included almost identical introductory messages within their relatively diminutive handbooks acknowledging the limits of their content. Rather than suggest the book was comprehensive, Wake Forest guided student-athletes to other sources of information and support in the following statement.

> This handbook is designed to provide varsity athletes with information concerning policies of Wake Forest University and the Wake Forest Department of Athletics. It is not intended as a substitute for other important university publications such as the Bulletin of Wake Forest University or the Wake Forest Student Handbook. Therefore, it does not duplicate much of the information contained in those publications. This handbook is a supplement to other sources of information and should be regarded and used as such…It is most important to remember that help of all kinds is available. If answers are not found within this Handbook, check with a University faculty advisor, resident advisor, or the Associate Athletic Director for Student-Athlete Academic Counseling of the Department of Athletics for assistance. Student-athletes are encouraged to take advantage of the wide variety of services available to them at Wake Forest University (Wake Forest Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 4).

It seems apparent from the wide variation in size and messaging that administrators wrestled with identifying the right tone and extent of information. Consistent within a bureaucratic hierarchical model, it makes sense to list as many rules and regulations as possible so that everyone in the organization has a clear understanding of boundaries and roles, and that approach was reflected within many of handbooks. However, other administrators also integrated content not directly tied to policies and limitations. It was a more novel strategy to mix statements of prohibitive behavior with developmental messages about what is the desired conduct of a student-athlete. The Welfare and Personal Development theme included these types of messages.

Welfare and Personal Development

With an extensive amount of content using threatening language, it was refreshing to encounter messages that promoted general welfare and encouraged student-athletes to grow both during and beyond their undergraduate experience. The most common areas to find such statements were within the sections describing Life Skills programs. These programs are designed to help student-athletes consider their futures beyond athletics, so it makes sense that many of these messages have a developmental tone. However, the Welfare and Personal Development theme also included more complex topical subjects such as pregnancy and eating disorders. The following section describes some examples of the different approaches focused on developmental messages.

On occasion, institutions deliberately acknowledged that college life is different for student-athletes. The Life Skills programs have been designed specifically to encourage the growth of student-athletes who miss many of the typical undergraduate

experiences that promote development in non-athletes. This statement from the University of Arizona handbook addresses these issues directly:

> ICA staff must realize and recognize the special demands and/or pressures that student-athletes face in order to assist in their development. These may include but are not limited to: limited free time, competitive pressures, visibility, fear of injury, pressures to take performance enhancing drugs, social pressures, travel schedules, the need to follow orders to achieve athletic excellence, and stress created by the pressures to succeed academically and athletically. These demands, particularly the time demands, lead to a lack of experimentation and exploratory behavior at a time when both are critical to the personal, social, moral, and intellectual development of the individual (Arizona Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 24).

By recognizing the specific demands and sacrifices of student-athletes, it sends a message that the institution is not only interested in what the student-athlete can do on the athletic fields, but also what kind of person they will become. These messages speak more to the holistic purpose of higher education rather than simply academic and athletic components.

Occasionally, administrators used the handbooks to provide insight into robust developmental programs created specifically for student-athletes. The evidence from the literature demonstrated the insular nature of the student-athlete experience. However, there was evidence of an effort to promote greater agency for student-athletes. One of the mechanisms designed to give student-athletes greater influence is the student-athlete advisory council (SACC). SAAC representatives serve the larger student-athlete community by functioning as their voice to communicate to administrators, faculty, and other students. The NCAA mandates that all Division I schools have a SAAC, and many institutions recognized the council in various ways within the handbook.

Some athletic administrators used the handbooks to highlight programs that mirror or even rival the opportunities available to the general student body. It is an important step for administrators to recognize the unique needs of student-athletes, and a few of the handbooks described specialized projects available at their respective institutions. One of the initiatives that stood out described an innovated and contemporary approach at the University of Florida to empower student-athletes. In the following statement, they describe the use a modern form of communication to develop numerous aspects of the Florida student-athlete:

> The Gator Grind is a student-athlete led blog and website project that shares the student-athlete experience at UF as well as gives a platform to those student-athletes interested in journalism, telecommunications, marketing, advertising, design or English a chance to work on their craft while engaging a captive audience. The Gator Grind was spurred out of a Student-Athlete Advisory Committee initiative to increase the voices of the student-athlete.

These kinds of programs may indeed exist at many of the Power 5 institutions, but only a select few actually described them within the handbooks.

It was even more interesting to see that some institutions further personalized the programs in attempt to generate greater loyalty to the organization. Evidence of such attempts was present in the form of branding efforts. While this content analysis focused on explorations of written material, it was impossible not to notice some of the images like these from the University of Texas and Michigan State University:

Michigan State also detailed a unique educational and developmental experience for their students that included the description an intriguing program exposing athletes to number of developmental experiences:

> Michigan State University offers a unique educational opportunity for college students who consider themselves athletes. The program defines 'college athlete' as anyone who currently participates on any sanctioned university intramural sports team, any varsity student-athlete (scholarship/walk-on) or any sports enthusiast who competed in sports at the high school level. The program offers a solid rigorous academic program together with high-level sports training and an opportunity for integration with local Australian students. Students attend classes, study, train, and compete with Australians for five weeks in Australia. The program fosters international competition and cross-cultural understanding. This program is five weeks in length and is conducted in two different locations in Australia (Sydney and Cairns) both offering different cultural experiences (Michigan State University, p. 19).

These types of innovative programs offer a strong counter-argument to critics who suggest that all student-athletes fail to receive the same level of development as non-athletes. Clearly, student-athlete experiences are different, but programs like these suggest there is an opportunity to supplement the education of student-athletes with unique learning opportunities.

The UCLA handbook further personalized their student-athletic athletic council by calling it the Bruin Athlete Council rather than refer to it more generically as the SAAC. UCLA's handbook also included an extensive amount of information focused on development beyond the undergraduate experience. In fact, nearly half of UCLA's handbook focused on academics, and content oriented on welfare and personal development exceeded both the proportion of athletics and conduct themes. Their unique approach included a great deal of information describing the development of character

traits such as teamwork and leadership within the Wooden Academy. The statement below describes some of the efforts within UCLA's developmental program:

> The Wooden Academy is a leadership development program designed to educate and support Bruin student-athlete leaders. The pillars of the Wooden Academy are teamwork, leadership and character. The program was named after legendary Coach John Wooden, and strives to teach the principles of his Pyramid of Success. We believe that these skills will assist student- athletes in their pursuit to be successful leaders and teammates at UCLA, and as they prepare to be champions in life. Student-athletes have the opportunity to participate in the Wooden Academy each year by attending seminars to learn practical leadership lessons from coaches, administrators and Bruin alumni.
>
> - Leadership Development Program (LDP): The LDP is designed to teach freshmen and transfers the skills they need to lead themselves and effectively work with others. Our goal is to create a strong network of future Bruin leaders. Freshmen and transfers are required to attend three (one per quarter) sessions in their first year.
> - Wooden Academy Seminars: These seminars are designed to address leadership, personal and professional development topics that are relevant to the student-athlete experience. All student-athletes are required to attend two Wooden Academy Seminars per academic year (UCLA Student-Athlete Handbook, pp. 47-48).

If all the Power 5 schools have similar programs, they did not all use the handbook to describe or advertise these programs, which suggested less isomorphism than predicted. The next section also discusses how only some institutions communicated institutional support through messages of pride.

Pride

In general, the pride theme resulted in the smallest proportion of content, but this category still deserves some discussion. It was within these types of messages where institutional communication approaches really diverged. They often provided insight into the culture of the institution, which is typically absent from policy manuals. While some administrators chose to focus primarily on the types of behaviors to avoid in order

maintain eligibility, others made eloquent and powerful statements that could inspire not just student-athletes, but everyone within the organization.

One approach to acknowledging the accomplishments of student-athletes within the handbooks was a general description of the process of earning a varsity letter. Some institutions made no mention of such achievements. Many institutions simply listed the awards that coincided with each time an athlete received a varsity letter such as receiving a letterman's jacket for the first award or a watch for multiple achievements. Other institutions such as Stanford and a few others took the more bureaucratic approach by providing specific details about the exact participation requirements necessary to earn a varsity letter within each intercollegiate sport. Yet, there were other examples that included rousing statements about why it is important to celebrate success. This example from the University of Maryland epitomizes such a message:

> Whether it is grades, promotion and tenure, or graduation, our university is committed to the principle that the rewards it bestows should be granted on the basis of adherence to community standards. These celebrations are the time when the campus recognizes those who have excelled in meeting these standards and the campus's ultimate goal – acquiring and advancing knowledge. In sponsoring intercollegiate athletics, the University provides opportunities for students not only to achieve excellence in sports, but also to attain the life skills associated with participation in sports that will benefit them personally and professionally. It is entirely appropriate that we as a community enthusiastically support their efforts. In doing so, we gain a source of campus unity and an appreciation of the commitment of student-athletes to achieving personal excellence. Maryland sportsmanship implies, and perhaps requires, that we support our teams as they strive for excellence in their sport (Maryland Student-Athlete Handbook, pp. 34-45).

This message goes beyond simply communicating compliance information and rules. It provides the reader with a sense that this organization has nobler ambitions. It suggests that administrators at Maryland are not simply promoting a business enterprise, nor are they responding to the numerous forces that influence organizational behavior in

intercollegiate athletics. They are communicating a genuine desire to develop the whole student-athlete, which seems to synchronize well with the institutional mission. It is impossible and inappropriate to conclude whether the Maryland athletic department actually maintains a culture consistent with this message based solely on the evidence from the handbook, but the attempt to communicate such an admirable ideology probably does not hurt in promoting compliance either.

It was particularly interesting to see different attempts to including a code of conduct within the handbooks. Even with some of the best intentions, some of these statements fail to inspire. This message from the Clemson handbook reads as if it was an administrator attempting to write from a student's perspective:

> As a valued member of the Clemson Athletic Department, I will use my talents to attain a quality education and earn a degree. Although time commitments are demanding during the athletic season, I will remain academically eligible, attend class, inform professors of expected absences due to official athletic events, maintain academic honesty, and make maximum use of Vickery Hall and its programs.
>
> As a member of Clemson University's athletics family, I will responsibly represent, with integrity, the values, traditions, and people of Clemson University. As a Clemson University student-athlete, I will display good sportsmanship, know and follow NCAA and ACC guidelines, obey team rules and policies, and always give 100 percent effort to positively represent Clemson University on the field, in the classroom, and in my daily life (Clemson Student-Athlete Handbook, p. 6)

While this statement is probably harmless, it falls short in really having the influence that might stimulate student-athletes to change their behaviors.

The handbook from Arizona State University provides an example of one that consistently integrated pride messages throughout, and it seems like it was genuinely a participative project. The appearance of the document is different than most in that it looks like a professionally constructed college viewbook. It includes attractive graphics

influenced by the ASU Sun Devil colors and logos, and there are pictures on nearly every page. The pictures feature student-athletes thriving in a number of different contexts including athletics, academics, professional development, and community service. The majority of the handbooks are very conservative, and many are restricted to black and white print. Others, such as Louisiana State University, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Wisconsin have a glossier professional look. However, what stands out about ASU's is the use of inspiring statements that seem as if they were actually created by student-athletes. One of the first pages in the document includes a creed stating:

Live the Sun Devils Way
Sun Devils
Win
Compete With Passion & Character
Are Relentless
Serve Each Other & Their Community
Are Family
Are Sun Devils for Life
(Arizona State Student Athlete Handbook, p. 4)

Not only do these statements communicate a sense of communal expectations, but also the messages were consistent throughout the handbook. The academic section of the book included the statement "Sun devils are relentless in their pursuit of academic excellence" (p. 56). Arizona State's handbook integrated much of the same information as the other institutions, but they did it in a way that promoted commitment by perhaps including student-athletes in the process of developing the document.

Although the pride theme was the smallest quantitative portion of the content, it helped reveal the substantial differences within the handbooks. The final theme, titled *tools*, served as a mechanism to capture any remaining textual information within the documents, and really does not require a thorough description. The evidence presented in

the preceding chapter suggested both qualitatively and quantitatively that there were both consistencies within the documents that support the idea of isomorphism, but also a great amount of variation that could be considered contradictory to the conceptualization of neo-institutionalism. Administrators consistently expressed a commitment to perpetuate and reinforce the vast rule structure that may very well be based upon irrational myths and efforts at legitimation. However, rather than rely on a uniform approach to communicate these requirements and replicate a standard model, many institutions used individualized strategies to communicate institutional expectations. The final chapter of this study includes a discussion about the broader implications of this analysis.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The evidence presented in the preceding chapter demonstrated some expected as well as some unanticipated findings from within the Power 5 student-athlete handbooks. It is therefore appropriate to revisit the impetus behind the study to ensure the research questions posed at the onset have been appropriately addressed. The final chapter includes a review of the study, a discussion of the implications relevant to research and to practice, and some conclusions about the analysis.

Review of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate differentiation in the messages communicated within student-athlete handbooks. The issues that motivated this examination are not new, but they are nonetheless contemporarily relevant. For over a century, the educational experiences of college athletes have been the subject of much dispute (Funk, 1991; Michener, 1976, Thelin, 1996; Sperber, 1991). Yet, the consistent critiques of excessive commercialization and academic misconduct are perhaps even more prevalent today in the intercollegiate athletics setting than they were a hundred years ago. A growing number of critics have drawn greater attention to these issues, but there is still an insufficient body of research focused on intercollegiate athletics.

The previous literature on student-athletes provided a convoluted depiction of their college experiences and academic achievement. While some researchers identified a lack of scholarly production (Adler & Adler, 1985; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1985;

Sellers, 1992; Schulman & Bowen, 2001), others found that this population had similar academic outcomes as non-athletes (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji; 2004; Maloney and McCormick, 1993; NCAA, 2011;). Yet, the greatest amount of trepidation is rightfully focused on revenue-generating athletes, who continue to struggle to achieve the same academic success as non-athletes or other student-athletes in non-revenue generating sports (NCAA, 2011). Due to a growing concern for the welfare of student-athletes, governance measures have been introduced to ensure they receive a legitimate college education. Additionally, athletic departments now include myriad support professionals to provide student-athletes additional resources to succeed. Unfortunately, the efficacy of these extensive regulations remains in doubt, and athletic support personnel have been linked to academic transgressions in a number of recent high profile cases (Gurney & Southall, 2012).

It remains quite difficult for researchers to gain access to student-athletes. The time demands placed on student-athletes are extensive, and athletic departments tend to be very protective. With that in mind, the intent of this study was to investigate a large sample of institutions in order to explore student-athlete experiences and support. Therefore, the non-intrusive analysis of student-athlete handbooks, which were often publicly available, provided a rare glimpse into the world of student-athlete experiences at institutions throughout the nation.

This investigation was heavily influenced by sociological organizational theories, particularly the Weberian bureaucratic model (Weber, 1947; 1952; 1968) and the neo-institutional framework (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Focusing specifically on the institutions within the Power 5 conferences bounded the study, and resulted in a sample

of institutions with similar resources and athletic ambitions. Thus, these institutions provided a logical sample for comparison. The timing of the study is also germane, as these institutions now have the power to create new legislation that will potentially result in a distinct subset of institutions competing at the most competitive level of intercollegiate athletics.

The following research questions were posed at the onset of this analysis to address a void in the research on institutional communications to student-athletes:

R1. What are the prevailing content themes found in student-athlete handbooks at institutions within the *Power 5* conferences?

R2. To what extent do *Power 5* institutions and conferences vary content within student-athlete handbooks?

R3. What messages do administrators convey within the content of student-athlete handbooks about institutional expectations and the purpose of the higher education experience at *Power 5* institutions?

Using a content analysis methodology, both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to address these questions. The analysis provided results that diverged from a theoretically based preliminary supposition of homogeneity within the handbooks. There was some evidence of mimetic isomorphism, and the consistent practice of creating a handbook is supportive of the notion that the institutions adopt similar practices across the field of student-athlete support professions. However, quantitative analysis provided evidence that there was significant variation between handbooks within the sample, and that some of the highest ranked schools in the sample focused a greater proportion of content on athletics. Additional qualitative analysis substantiated broad variation differences in the handbooks as well. The following section is a discussion about the key findings stemming from the results identified within the results chapter.

Discussion

Presented here is a discussion focusing on the five key conclusions gleaned from the evidence within this analysis.

1. Variation between handbooks. Perhaps the most significant finding in this analysis was the magnitude of differentiation between handbooks buttressed by statistical and qualitative evidence. While there were a number of examples of handbooks that followed a very structured format, there were notably differing approaches to these documents across the sample. The theoretical conceptualization developed at the onset of this study suggested that the handbooks would look generally the same. The bureaucratic model, which still influences organizational structures today, advocates for a deliberate delineation of the rules, roles, and a hierarchical structure within a policy manual (Weber, 1947; 1952; 1968). Yet, this conceptualization fails to consider the potential of competing rationalities. Thus, neo-institutionalism was a more appropriate framework to apply to this analysis due to the multiple rationalities and the prevailing myths influencing organizational behavior in intercollegiate athletics (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Through the neo-institutional perspective, it was conceivable that athletics departments would include content in the handbooks in addition to regulations and policies that legitimized the functions of the extensive support resources available to student-athletes. Regardless of the actual content, both of these lenses suggested that the form and function of student-athlete handbooks would be similar across institutions, but that was not the case.

The differences in size, thematic content, and style all suggested a more individualistic approach to communicating with student-athletes than anticipated. The

statistical evidence showed higher ranked schools communicated differently to student-athletes than lower ranked schools, at least in terms of the proportions of thematic content. Perhaps, these differences exist because institutions with a higher academic reputation are more likely to attract students with a higher academic profile, even within the student-athlete population. Therefore, these institutions may find it less necessary to include extensive discussions on academic expectations. Furthermore, these institutions face greater challenges athletically, because their academic standards are higher than some of the other Power 5 schools. Rather than isomorphism stemming from homogenizing forces from all the Power 5 athletics institutions, there may be greater influence to integrate legitimating functions from other highly ranked schools. Thus, in considering the appropriateness of neo-institutionalism, it may be necessary to use a quality measure to make distinctions between institutions, instead of the NCAA and conference structure. Additionally, these influences may change if the Power 5 conferences move toward a professional model for athletics.

2. Pervasive control. Another one of the most notable findings in this investigation emerged while exploring the different themes within the handbooks. It became quickly evident how broad and abundant the rules are that govern student-athletes, and it would be virtually impossible for them to be aware of all of them. Essentially, NCAA and institutional regulations influence every aspect of their lives. They are directed where to live, where to eat, how to eat, how to train, how to learn, how to compete, who to interact with, who not to interact with, how to speak to the media, how to communicate on social media, what they can drive, what they accept as a gift, what they must pay for, how they can generate income, and the list goes on. It is no

wonder why there is great concern for a lack of cognitive and social development, because so much of their lives are controlled by regulations.

These young adults simply do not have the same opportunities to grow and develop unless administrators make a deliberate effort to include developmental programs to supplement their college experiences. This issue is even more concerning for student-athletes who arrive on campus from a challenging socioeconomic background and lesser prepared to perform college level academic. In the handbooks that focused narrowly on delineating the rules, it was impossible to determine if the student-athletes could have an experience that would result in the kind of development that a future employer would covet. While a lack of discussion on student support in a handbook does not mean that these institutions do not have developmental programs, it would seem appropriate to advertise these programs to promote awareness and maximize their benefit. Furthermore, an explicit delineation of the rules does not always result in compliance. On the contrary, such an environment can actually decrease an athlete's locus of control, which often has negative clinical and performance psychological effects, and might decrease feelings of commitment (Barker, 1993; Kimball, 2004). While some institutions used this medium to communicate institutional authority and power, others chose a concertive approach that may actually be more conducive to compliance efforts.

3. Restrictions in funding. Another important finding within the evidence was that a *full-ride* scholarship fails to cover many potential expenses, including substantial medical costs. Many institutions used the handbooks to explain the extensive limitations placed on scholarship funding. If student-athletes were fully aware of these restrictions prior to accepting a scholarship, there would be little need to describe them in the

handbook. However, all of the messages about scholarship restrictions suggested that the funding constraints may not be made explicit to student-athletes until after they have made a commitment to an institution.

This analysis preceded the governance changes that provided Power 5 schools the ability to increase cost-of-attendance funding to student-athletes. Therefore, the handbook messages focused on the annual renewable structure of athletic scholarships. It was quite surprising to read the discussions about employment. Only a limited number of handbooks encouraged student-athletes to work while they were a member of an athletic team, which included employment opportunities on campus or in summer internships. Yet, most institutions seemed to discourage athletes from working by only discussing the limitations on employment.

Given that scholarships fail to cover the full-cost of attendance, student-athletes are required have their own insurance that serves as the primary coverage for all medical expenses, and athletes are discouraged from working, it is of little wonder why there is so much discussion about paying athletes. It will be interesting to see how this dialogue changes in the coming years as full cost-of-attendance scholarships become the norm. For those opposed to paying college athletes, these handbooks provided a revealing look into the limitations of grant-in-aid.

4. Divergent educational experiences. What was also apparent in analyzing these handbooks was that the student-athlete experience is becoming increasingly distinct from the typical student. In response to the substantial time commitments required from athletics, it seems as if athletic departments are growing to become an institution within the institution. They have robust student service departments that run tangential to the

institution's, and provide services that either replicate or function semi-autonomously from an institution's services. This appears to be the case beyond just academic support. While academic support programs may have been the first element of student-athlete services, they now are one of many different components that include nutritional, medical, psychological, legal, social, financial, and career development services. It appears that faculty are perhaps the only element of the post-secondary experience that athletic departments have not contracted independent of the institutions they are associated with.

5. Dynamic governance. The rapidly changing environment in major college athletics makes it quite difficult for administrators to keep up with evolving regulations. Even within handbooks published at the beginning of 2014 fall semester, there was critical information that was already out of date by the spring of 2015. NCAA officials typically publish one Division I manual each academic-year. In October 2014, they published the Division I manual for the 2014-2015 academic-year. However, due to the changes emerging from the Power 5 transition, the NCAA published a new Division I manual in January of 2015. Therefore, if administrators authored their student-athlete handbooks as new student-athletes entered institutions in the summer of 2014, they were likely based on a policy manual that had already been updated multiple times.

These policy dynamics also made it difficult to research a topic related to intercollegiate athletics. Perhaps this has always been one of the challenges of researching college sports, but it seemed as if there was a new NCAA ruling or shift in legislation every week that may have lasting effects on the governance structure of intercollegiate athletics. Given these shifting dynamics, it would seem very difficult for

even professional athletics compliance personnel to keep up with enforcement, much less student-athletes who already have to squeeze a college education in between athletics commitments. These changes likely result in a number of NCAA violations based on ignorance rather than intentional deviance. In a stable environment, it would be difficult to have a genuine understanding of all the regulations, but the fluid setting makes it nearly impossible.

Implications for Research

This analysis integrated a method of exploring communications that has been used on other documents from the postsecondary education setting such as college viewbooks (Morphew & Hartley, 2008). However, this examination focused on the intercollegiate athletics context, which generally receives less research attention than other aspects of higher education. The design of this study was a unique approach to use a non-intrusive methodology to evaluate student-athlete experiences, but there is great potential to further develop the findings from this analysis.

One of the more obvious approaches to expand upon this study would be to increase the size of the sample beyond the Power 5 institutions. The similarities between these institutions made the sample logically consistent within the theoretical conceptualization in that these schools have demonstrated similar academic and athletic ambitions. However, it would be interesting to introduce institutions with disparate resources as well as even greater diversity in selectivity. This type of institutional differentiation might help to illuminate whether the findings oriented on institutional quality remain significant when schools of even higher and lower selectivity at the

Division I level are introduced into the analysis, or perhaps even a comparative analysis of handbooks from NCAA Division II and III institutions.

There appears to be a dearth of content analysis studies focusing on athletic department communications. This is a flexible methodology that might provide some greater insight into an aspect of higher education that is generally not prone to share information. There are other sources of data such as athletics websites, media guides, and compliance documents that have not been exploited. Additionally, it is possible to use a different approach to content analysis based on varying epistemological ideologies. To preserve the contextual nature of the content, a thematic human-coding procedure was used for this examination. However, a study that focuses on the images publicized on athletic department websites or an analysis using word frequencies narrowed to manifest content might also provide greater insight into the intercollegiate athletics setting.

While this study explored student-athlete handbooks, just about every institution in America publishes a handbook for the general student body. The most current analysis of general student handbooks appears to be over fifty years old (White, 1958). A current examination and comparison of student handbooks and student-athlete handbooks might provide even more enlightening data for contrasting the increasingly divergent experiences of student-athletes and non-athletes.

Recent changes in governance suggest that the Power 5 structure may create a different level within the NCAA, or these schools could break off from the NCAA system altogether (Tucker, 2014). There is a continuum of possibilities for the future evolution of college sports, but it seems evident that stability is not a realistic expectation. Given that the environment is in flux, a longitudinal approach to this analysis seems

suitable. Policy changes can function as nature experiments. Because this study used data that preceded the shift to the Power 5 structure, it would be intriguing to gauge how the Power 5 transformation impacts the way administrators communicate with student-athletes, and whether those communications become more dichotomized if revenue-generating athletes have even more distinct academic and athletic requirements.

Another appropriate line of research prompted by this study could be focused directly on the student-athlete. This study examined what administrators told student-athletes, but there is no research addressing what information student-athletes feel they need within the handbooks. Institutions rarely provide researchers the opportunity to use student-athletes in research studies. However, there is potential to gain valuable information from this population after they complete their athletic eligibility. The NCAA requires institutions to conduct exit interviews with student-athletes after they complete their athletic eligibility or if they leave an institution. These surveys may provide an opportunity for researchers to integrate questions about the value of the handbooks, and what information proved most useful. It is then important to link this additional research back to those who might be able to use it most. The following section focuses on the implications of this study for practice and policy.

Implications for Practice

This study provides utility to practitioners and policymakers who face the significant challenges of ensuring the legitimacy of student-athletes' postsecondary education experiences. This analysis identified that institutions use these publications to communicate to different audiences using a wide range of messages. At a minimum, the topical categories identified across the sample might serve as a form of menu for

administrators to choose content that they may not have considered for inclusion, but might be relevant for their student-athletes. Beyond the overt content, there is more for practitioners to consider about the findings in this analysis.

These handbooks have numerous potential applications as a communication medium. Perhaps the primary purpose of student-athlete handbooks is for administrators to convey information to student-athletes. Some institutions used a hierarchical approach to delineate regulations, and some used a more collaborative approach to gain compliance. Occasionally, administrators put the heavy onus on student-athletes to know and abide by regulations. These authoritative messages indicated an attempt to transfer responsibility to the student and absolve the administrator from accountability. However, there was also evidence that these handbooks were oriented towards an audience beyond current student-athletes. In other words, the handbooks could function as a recruiting tool directed toward prospective student-athletes or their parents. An additional use could be as a functional tool when the content is integrated into a daily planner.

The point in listing all of these potential applications is that whatever form and function the handbook takes, it should be a deliberate administrator decision rather a mimetic function. The publication of a student-athlete handbook is one of the few practices that is not required or regulated by the NCAA. The structure, form, content, and tone of the handbook are all institutionally driven. This gives the administrator a unique level of freedom to customize the communication to the needs of the organization. If administrators wish to use the document to establish and affirm existing power dynamics, that is clearly an option. However, it also a choice for practitioners to create a handbook that is valuable, and something that will be utilized by the intended audience.

As suggested previously, it would be interesting to develop a greater sense of what student-athletes thought about the handbooks. It is possible that many practitioners and student-athletes have little awareness of other design possibilities, especially if their context is limited to only one or two institutions. It might be a fruitful project to take advantage of the talents within the student-athlete population, and use a collaborative approach to create a handbook that provides the greatest utility. It is conceivable that the current generation of tech-savvy students might break away from the paradigm of the textual document, and integrate different modes of communication. At a minimum, such a project might result in greater commitment, which is arguably the prime intent.

This analysis focused on the practitioner and student level. In some ways, this study was critical of the policy-heavy environment controlling so much about student-athlete's college experiences. The extent of variation that can emerge within the highly regulated intercollegiate athletics setting was indeed surprising. Even within the Power 5 sample, there were institutions that made the deliberate decision to discontinue the use of the handbook altogether because administrators felt the document had lost its utility.

There were also examples of the handbook as a rulebook, which were tedious and full of legal jargon. It is easy to imagine student-athletes, who struggle to keep up with extensive reading assignments from classes, tagging a protracted policy manual within the meme *tl;dr* (an initialism for *too long; didn't read)*. A more effective approach might be to solicit feedback from student-athletes in annual surveys and provide feedback to administrators about the effectiveness of their content. Perhaps, with some input from student-athletes, these documents can be a more effective mechanism for communicating a set of shared expectations within athletic departments.

Conclusion

Thelin's (1996) reference to athletics as a *peculiar institution* remains relevant for such a strange arrangement. The intercollegiate athletic enterprise does not seem to fit well into the postsecondary education setting, but as Michener (1976) astutely identified many years ago, it is indeed difficult to imagine American institutions without them. The variation in the handbooks offered evidence of the complexities within the strained relationship between postsecondary education and major college sports. There is clearly no universal formula to balance the educational and developmental needs of all student-athletes, while simultaneously pushing them to actualize their athletic potential.

The NCAA has established so many regulations that it seems student-athletes lack the time and freedom necessary to make the life-choices that are essential to promoting maturity and cognitive development. This analysis showed that institutions used different communication strategies to help student-athletes navigate this journey. There was an element within the sample that used the handbooks as an opportunity to build a virtual iron cage of rules and regulations to ensure compliance and maintain the existing power structure. There was also evidence that suggested some administrators used these books to reproduce the myth of amateurism and legitimize the functions of the growing body of athletic support specialists. However, others used the handbook as a vehicle to engage and inspire student-athletes to learn and thrive in all aspects of their experience. It was in these concertive examples where it was possible to believe, at least a little, that the mystifying union between college sports and higher education can somehow deliver a unique, but nonetheless rewarding postsecondary educational experience.

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APPENDIX A

THEME PERCENTAGE MEANS BY INSTITUTION

Table A.1: *ACC Thematic Mean Percentages by Institution*

School	Year	Page #	% Academic	% Athletic	% Conduct	% Welfare	% Pride	% Tools
Boston College	**13-14**	**29.00**	**15.14%**	**43.26%**	**25.40%**	**13.05%**	**1.69%**	**1.26%**
Clemson	**14-15**	**67.00**	**18.97%**	**41.24%**	**24.23%**	**12.30%**	**3.17%**	**0.09%**
Florida State	**14-15**	**180.00**	**35.62%**	**38.50%**	**9.24%**	**8.49%**	**2.84%**	**5.31%**
Louisville	**14-15**	**38.00**	**19.94%**	**39.80%**	**17.49%**	**19.47%**	**0.79%**	**2.38%**
NC State	**14-15**	**46.00**	**20.28%**	**28.75%**	**34.89%**	**9.18%**	**1.71%**	**5.19%**
Syracuse	**14-15**	**52.00**	**17.90%**	**42.63%**	**25.36%**	**10.77%**	**0.91%**	**2.44%**
Wake Forest	**14-15**	**29.00**	**27.57%**	**43.88%**	**15.69%**	**7.33%**	**1.92%**	**3.60%**
Duke	**11-12**	**36.00**	**20.75%**	**31.41%**	**39.52%**	**3.21%**	**4.43%**	**0.69%**
North Carolina	**12-13**	**62.00**	**22.83%**	**33.10%**	**28.06%**	**9.66%**	**1.49%**	**4.85%**
Pittsburgh	**14-15**	**116.00**	**30.37%**	**42.33%**	**14.52%**	**5.76%**	**1.85%**	**5.17%**
Virginia	**14-15**	**95.00**	**13.06%**	**45.25%**	**18.27%**	**14.63%**	**1.32%**	**7.45%**
Virginia Tech	**13-14**	**72.00**	**15.10%**	**39.09%**	**28.71%**	**14.34%**	**0.75%**	**2.01%**
Miami	**14-15**	**46.00**	**14.33%**	**39.77%**	**26.13%**	**12.23%**	**2.63%**	**4.91%**
Notre Dame	**12-13**	**51.00**	**13.92%**	**42.62%**	**13.67%**	**16.26%**	**1.80%**	**11.73%**
Mean		**65.64**	**20.41%**	**39.40%**	**22.94%**	**11.19%**	**1.95%**	**4.08%**
Mean STD		***(41.17)***	***(6.71%)***	***(4.96%)***	***(8.55%)***	***(4.33%)***	***(1.02%)***	***(3.05%)***

Table A.2: *Big XII Thematic Mean Percentages by Institution*

School	Year	Page #	% Academic	% Athletic	% Conduct	% Welfare	% Pride	% Tools
Baylor	**10-11**	**38.00**	**20.46%**	**39.01%**	**21.05%**	**11.14%**	**4.19%**	**4.14%**
Iowa State	**14-15**	**52.00**	**17.05%**	**20.86%**	**38.39%**	**19.61%**	**1.84%**	**2.25%**
Kansas	**14-15**	**63.00**	**21.95%**	**43.48%**	**22.12%**	**10.26%**	**0.53%**	**1.65%**
Kansas State	**14-15**	**53.00**	**27.88%**	**21.73%**	**35.01%**	**10.50%**	**2.09%**	**2.78%**
Oklahoma	**14-15**	**112.00**	**27.17%**	**18.62%**	**29.04%**	**9.59%**	**7.26%**	**8.32%**
Oklahoma St.	**14-15**	**41.00**	**17.76%**	**36.07%**	**28.67%**	**11.39%**	**2.14%**	**3.97%**
TCU	**14-15**	**36.00**	**18.37%**	**43.51%**	**21.80%**	**12.12%**	**1.88%**	**2.32%**
Texas	**14-15**	**72.00**	**15.48%**	**34.07%**	**24.46%**	**15.27%**	**4.47%**	**6.25%**
Texas Tech	**14-15**	**48.00**	**42.29%**	**44.50%**	**5.39%**	**4.05%**	**0.04%**	**3.72%**
Mean		**57.22**	**23.16%**	**33.54%**	**25.11%**	**11.55%**	**2.72%**	**3.93%**
Mean STD		***(23.63)***	***(8.38%)***	***(10.48%)***	***(9.54%)***	***(4.21%)***	***(2.24%)***	***(2.14%)***

Table A.3: *Pac-12 Thematic Mean Percentages by Institution*

School	Year	Page #	% Academic	% Athletic	% Conduct	% Welfare	% Pride	% Tools
Cal	**14-15**	**60.00**	**17.32%**	**39.87%**	**17.90%**	**12.02%**	**9.25%**	**3.63%**
Oregon State	**13-14**	**55.00**	**19.68%**	**30.65%**	**26.37%**	**11.46%**	**1.99%**	**9.85%**
Stanford	**13-14**	**75.00**	**22.28%**	**43.82%**	**10.86%**	**15.15%**	**2.88%**	**5.01%**
Washington	**13-14**	**62.00**	**11.03%**	**37.50%**	**34.04%**	**11.96%**	**2.91%**	**2.55%**
Washington St.	**14-15**	**139.00**	**28.58%**	**32.61%**	**13.70%**	**20.68%**	**3.56%**	**0.87%**
Arizona	**13-14**	**129.00**	**24.46%**	**18.05%**	**31.36%**	**12.42%**	**8.67%**	**5.03%**
Arizona St.	**14-15**	**94.00**	**24.53%**	**24.64%**	**12.46%**	**18.88%**	**7.98%**	**11.51%**
Colorado	**14-15**	**64.00**	**32.09%**	**17.48%**	**21.52%**	**15.99%**	**0.57%**	**12.35%**
UCLA	**14-15**	**75.00**	**45.48%**	**14.18%**	**15.93%**	**17.89%**	**2.59%**	**3.94%**
USC	**14-15**	**70.00**	**43.46%**	**21.80%**	**11.11%**	**16.94%**	**3.17%**	**3.52%**
Utah	**14-15**	**66.00**	**27.93%**	**27.00%**	**30.02%**	**7.50%**	**0.86%**	**6.69%**
Mean		**80.82**	**26.99%**	**27.96%**	**20.48%**	**14.63%**	**4.04%**	**5.90%**
Mean STD		***(28.32)***	***(10.39%)***	***(9.80%)***	***(8.64%)***	***(3.90%)***	***(3.10%)***	***(3.77%)***

Table A.4: *SEC Thematic Mean Percentages by Institution*

School	Year	Page #	% Academic	% Athletic	% Conduct	% Welfare	% Pride	% Tools
Florida	**14-15**	**84.00**	**19.78%**	**27.41%**	**33.24%**	**12.60%**	**2.74%**	**4.23%**
Georgia	**14-15**	**49.00**	**26.07%**	**24.38%**	**38.35%**	**8.48%**	**1.11%**	**1.61%**
Kentucky	**14-15**	**102.00**	**26.85%**	**26.37%**	**13.04%**	**15.29%**	**2.27%**	**16.17%**
Missouri	**14-15**	**70.00**	**14.96%**	**33.11%**	**26.65%**	**15.28%**	**4.96%**	**5.05%**
South Carolina	**14-15**	**51.00**	**30.94%**	**24.44%**	**18.53%**	**11.87%**	**7.11%**	**7.12%**
Tennessee	**14-15**	**24.00**	**40.86%**	**28.22%**	**9.55%**	**10.82%**	**9.96%**	**0.60%**
Vanderbilt	**12-13**	**54.00**	**23.22%**	**36.37%**	**11.85%**	**16.75%**	**2.33%**	**9.48%**
Alabama	**13-14**	**51.00**	**25.70%**	**33.74%**	**10.62%**	**19.05%**	**2.65%**	**8.24%**
Arkansas	**13-14**	**80.00**	**18.79%**	**33.97%**	**25.77%**	**15.19%**	**1.76%**	**4.52%**
LSU	**14-15**	**43.00**	**25.36%**	**36.59%**	**21.46%**	**9.56%**	**2.90%**	**4.13%**
Texas A&M	**13-14**	**20.00**	**19.19%**	**7.05%**	**34.96%**	**20.58%**	**5.57%**	**12.64%**
Ole Miss	**10-11**	**51.00**	**42.45%**	**32.18%**	**16.26%**	**3.64%**	**1.82%**	**3.64%**
Mean		**56.58**	**26.18%**	**28.65%**	**21.69%**	**13.26%**	**3.77%**	**6.45%**
Mean STD		***(23.90)***	***(8.44%)***	***(8.08%)***	***(10.04%)***	***(4.75%)***	***(2.64%)***	***(4.54%)***

Table A.5: *Big 10 Thematic Mean Percentages by Institution*

School	Year	Page #	% Academic	% Athletic	% Conduct	% Welfare	% Pride	% Tools
Indiana	**14-15**	**79.00**	**17.25%**	**31.86%**	**29.44%**	**18.75%**	**0.54%**	**2.15%**
Maryland	**14-15**	**62.00**	**25.72%**	**22.11%**	**40.76%**	**4.74%**	**3.14%**	**3.53%**
Michigan State	**14-15**	**44.00**	**31.07%**	**27.92%**	**15.04%**	**13.35%**	**4.69%**	**7.92%**
Ohio State	**14-15**	**86.00**	**16.11%**	**22.91%**	**34.98%**	**11.15%**	**2.27%**	**12.59%**
Penn State	**14-15**	**83.00**	**20.50%**	**33.87%**	**19.63%**	**9.25%**	**5.27%**	**11.48%**
Rutgers	**14-15**	**65.00**	**22.09%**	**39.60%**	**21.19%**	**10.97%**	**2.02%**	**4.12%**
Illinois	**14-15**	**53.00**	**28.55%**	**37.12%**	**15.27%**	**9.93%**	**2.48%**	**6.64%**
Iowa	**14-15**	**56.00**	**56.56%**	**17.54%**	**9.26%**	**13.22%**	**0.69%**	**2.73%**
Minnesota	**14-15**	**52.00**	**44.68%**	**20.58%**	**11.86%**	**11.04%**	**6.36%**	**5.48%**
Nebraska	**14-15**	**52.00**	**16.60%**	**35.00%**	**17.19%**	**15.07%**	**3.99%**	**12.14%**
Northwestern	**14-15**	**37.00**	**25.27%**	**33.62%**	**16.95%**	**14.99%**	**3.33%**	**5.84%**
Purdue	**13-14**	**23.00**	**42.48%**	**42.13%**	**1.69%**	**3.45%**	**4.42%**	**5.82%**
Wisconsin	**14-15**	**105.00**	**29.79%**	**26.76%**	**25.32%**	**9.11%**	**3.17%**	**5.85%**
Mean		**61.31**	**28.98%**	**30.08%**	**19.89%**	**11.16%**	**3.26%**	**6.64%**
Mean STD		***(22.26)***	***(12.23%)***	***(7.73%)***	***(10.63%)***	***(4.15%)***	***(1.70%)***	***(3.48%)***

APPENDIX B

THEMATIC CODEBOOK AND DEFINITIONS

Coding Instructions

When coding the handbook, all text must be coded with one, and only one theme. Thus, each theme functions as a mutually exclusive variable. Sentences and bullet statements are not to be broken up into multiple themes, but a paragraph may include multiple themes. The researcher needs to interpret the primary theme of the statement or sentence based on the theme that is most appropriate for the context of the statement. The definition of each theme is covered in the followings sections, which include the different categories coded under each theme.

1. Theme Name: Academic

Theme Description: Most information focusing on academics. If a whole paragraph, a group of sentences, or a single sentence/bullet statement focuses on academic issues (as elaborated below), all of the words within that statement are coded under the academic theme. In this analysis, the context of the statement is critical. However, this theme is the most liberal in its interpretation of academic content. Clearly, grades, discussion about academic eligibility, and academic resources are appropriate within this theme. In addition to the clear academic content, this theme includes sources of funding (other than athletic scholarships), academic appeals processes, text book funding (even when from an athletic funding source), as well as additional funding from athletics not tied to athletic performance (post eligibility, NCAA and institutional special funds, outside funding, etc.). The list below provides extensive information regarding the coding categories within each theme.

Recording Units: Full sentences or full bullet statements that focus primarily on Academics.

Unit of Analysis – Number of words coded within the Academic theme.

Theme includes the following handbook items:

1) Anything with an academic focus
2) Admissions
3) Enrollment requirements (university and NCAA)
4) Academic integrity and misconduct (other misconduct goes under conduct or athletic)
5) Academic Support
    i. Tutors, learning disabilities, academic advisors, counselors, faculty

6) Academic resources – computers, library, study table, networks
7) Financial aid related to academics – Any aid besides athletic scholarship
    i. Federal and state aid
    ii. Student athlete opportunity fund
    iii. Exhausted eligibility and degree completion aid from athletic dept. (additional without playing anymore)
    iv. Additional aid after medical disqualification
    v. In-state and tuition reciprocity
8) Disciplinary sanctions related to academics
9) Appeals Processes related to academics
10) Grades – GPA, APR, academic eligibility (includes GPA calculations)
11) Academic Awards
12) Scholarships Awards (not athletic aid) and post graduate scholarships
13) Degrees – PTD, undergrad, graduate studies
14) Class attendance
15) Learning
16) FAR
17) Registration and Add/Drop
18) Academic advising
19) Academic student experiences (academic programs, study abroad, etc.)
20) Major
21) Summer school
22) Online and distance course policies
23) Textbooks
24) Correspondence courses
25) Misconduct related to academics
26) Transferring credits (not athletic transfers)

2. Theme Name: Athletics

Theme Description: Information focusing on athletic compliance, competition, participation, and eligibility. There are, however, certain content categories that are not as intuitive. For example, discussions about employment focus heavily on the things that athletes are not allowed to participate in order to maintain eligibility. Additionally, much of the information on medical support is coded under athletics because of the general context of the discussion: Keeping athletes fit for competition. Additionally, the insurance information can get murky. If it is focused on what the athletic department will cover and what they will not cover, medical (sports medicine) information is coded under athletics. If it is focused on general wellness and lifelong health, then it is coded under the Welfare theme. Gambling also goes under athletics due to its focus on sports betting and receipt of benefits.

Recording Units: Full sentences or full bullet statements that focus primarily on Athletics.

Unit of Analysis – Number of words coded within the Athletic theme.

Theme includes the following handbook items:

1) Athletic participation (countable hours, practice, outside competition, eligibility not related to academics)
2) Disciplinary sanctions, appeals and grievances related to athletics
3) Amateurism
4) Nutrition and dining (training table and legal supplements) related to athletics
5) Medical support for athletics (athletic and competition related)
    i. Athletic trainer support and rehab
    ii. Physicals, concussions, and injuries related to athletics
    iii. Insurance related to athletics
    iv. Body composition (if athletics focused – if not, welfare)
    v. Dental (competition), eyesight (competition), pregnancy (competition)
    vi. Initial and exit physicals
6) Strength and conditioning
7) Athletic supplements
8) NCAA policies and compliance
9) Athletic scholarships, annual renewal of athletic scholarships, finances related to athletics (stipends, housing, not books – goes in academic), and appeals related to athletic scholarships
10) Jewelry (wearing of jewelry during competition)
11) Media, sport communication, and video services
12) Tickets admission to sporting events
13) Gambling/inappropriate benefits/awards/bribery
14) Boosters
15) Housing – athletic scholarship related
16) Endorsements
17) Recruit hosting (except general misconduct goes under conduct)
18) Athletic team issues
19) Transfers
20) Employment – This goes under athletics because this discussion is nearly always focused on compliance and limitations of employment. No other students face these limitations, and this is based purely on the involvement with athletics.
21) Career in professional sports and dealing with agents
22) Varsity club and Alumni club (if career networking, then it goes in welfare)
23) Intramurals
24) Weather impacting athletics
25) Specific acts of unsportsmanlike behavior and associated penalties
26) Athletic team rules
27) Laundry
28) Compliance with vehicle registration

3. Theme Name: Conduct

Theme Description: The conduct theme focuses heavily on acts of misconduct. If the context of the message is oriented on positive/developmental statements, then they are coded under Welfare and Personal Development. If the content of the message is focused on what *not* to do and how *not* to be (outside of athletics and academics) then it goes in the conduct theme. Nearly all discussions related to substance abuse (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and performance enhancing drugs banned by the NCAA) is coded within the conduct theme. All social media discussions are also coded under the conduct theme due to the focus on misconduct.

Recording Units: Full sentences or full bullet statements that focus primarily on policy and misconduct.

Unit of Analysis – Number of words coded within the Conduct theme.

Theme includes the following handbook items:

1) General misconduct issues - Does occasionally include a few statements under academic (i.e. looking at pornography on computers)
2) Appeals and grievances related to general misconduct
3) Disciplinary sanctions related to general misconduct
4) Almost all substance abuse - drug, alcohol, and tobacco
    i. Even safe harbor amnesty programs
    ii. Even education programming
    iii. Illegal use of prescriptions
    iv. Banned substances
    v. Does not include legal supplements (goes under athletics)
5) Social media
6) Sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual misconduct
7) Procedural policy oriented information (if it simply discusses policy and what not to do, it is a conduct issue – if it focuses on how to be developmentally, then it goes in the Welfare theme)
8) Legal and ombudsman services related to conduct issues
9) Background check policy
10) Housing misconduct
11) Discrimination (if it couched as inclusive or positive in nature, it goes within the welfare theme)
12) Suspensions/expulsions (not academic or athletic)
13) Hazing and bullying
14) Demonstrating

4. Theme Name: Welfare and Personal Development

Theme Description: This theme is focused on content that is health sustaining, character building, or developmental in nature. It is designed to capture messages that focus on how to be instead of what not to do. Additionally, a key distinction in this theme is the orientation of the message. Moreover, if the message is directed to help an individual (resources for a victim of hazing or sexual assault), then it is coded under welfare and development. This theme also includes information about personal health and well-being that are not captured in the other categories (not athletics or misconduct related) such as immunizations, disease management, and pregnancy issues not related to athletic competition. Developmental activities that are scholarly in nature are coded under academics, but character and lifelong (including career) messages are coded within the Welfare theme.

Recording Units: Full sentences or full bullet statements that focus primarily on Welfare and Personal Development.

Unit of Analysis – Number of words coded within the Welfare and Personal Development theme.

Theme includes the following handbook items:

1) Safety and general welfare (not misconduct)
2) Career development - Career working in sports (not playing professional sports) and work internships
3) Character development
4) Medical (non-competition)
    i. General medical (not competition) - after hours, emergency room, prescriptions (general not illegal use)
    ii. Dental (not competition), eyesight (not competition), pregnancy (non-competition related messages)
    iii. Eating disorders (not athletics related – could be split between athletics and wellness)
    iv. Sickle Cell and other severe illnesses, diseases, or disorders (meningitis, AIDS, ADHD, etc.)
    v. Insurance not covered and disability insurance
    vi. Counseling (not academic) – clinical and sport/performance psychology
    vii. Second opinions
    viii. Confidentiality
5) General finance issues
6) Housing – general (not related to athletics funding)
7) Nutrition and dining – general (not athletics related)
8) Campus and community relations (not academic)
9) Sportsmanship – (character building)
10) Networking
11) Leadership

12) Life Skills/CHAMPS (not academic)
13) Responsibility and accountability
14) Crisis management
15) SAAC (Student Athlete Advisory Council)
16) Personal values
17) Diversity, inclusion, cultural and religious awareness and services (policy descriptions = conduct)
18) Exit interviews
19) Cultural awareness
20) International student welfare
21) Student life and experiences
22) Tax information
23) FERPA, student rights, Buckley, HIPPA
24) Victim or reporting of sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, hazing, etc.
25) LGBTQI support and awareness
26) Employment if it is not related to athletics limitations
27) Severe weather plan
28) Research on student-athletes

5. Theme Name: Pride

Theme Description: This theme is designed to capture messages that span across the other themes and contexts. They are lofty and visionary in nature, and generally stem from personal communications (AD, University President, etc.) as well as mission statements. If it is a single passage with blended themes that discuss multiple noble themes, it gets coded under the Pride. While most of this content appears at the beginning or end of the handbooks, there are some passages leading into sections that are overarching and positive in nature. These statements are also coded within under Pride.

Recording Units: Full sentences or full bullet statements that focus primarily on Pride.

Unit of Analysis – Number of words coded within the Pride theme.

Theme includes the following handbook items:

1) Lofty messages that span across themes
2) Creeds
3) Mission and vision statements (initial message coded as pride. If it includes multiple sub-statements in different categories, they are coded according to category)
4) Heritage and tradition
5) Notable alumni
6) Letters from administrators
7) Powerful quotations designed to inspire

6. Theme Name: Tools

Theme Description: The tools theme is designed to catch the content that is more administrative in nature in order to ensure 100% coding of each handbook. The tools theme includes content such as directory information, tables of contents, general student issues (parking, bike policies, student ID issues, campus guides/maps, etc.). If the information is more in-depth and specific, such as an explanation of campus resources for victims of sexual abuse, then it goes in the Welfare theme. This theme captures lists of trivial items and small sections of very general information.

Recording Units: Full sentences or full bullet statements that focus primarily on Tools.

Unit of Analysis – Number of words coded within the Tools theme.

Theme includes the following handbook items:

1) Calendar
2) Map and campus guide
3) Planner
4) Staff directory – Any list of personnel and phone numbers (with the exception of SACC student membership)
5) Student ID
6) Email account information
7) Parking
8) Lists of campus resources (without a specific explanation or context)
9) Vehicle registration – General (not related to athletic compliance)
10) Bikes, Segways, skateboards, etc.

APPENDIX C

USN&WR POWER 5 RANKING GROUPS

Table C.1: *Very High Quality (VHQ) Group*

School	Power 5 Ranking	2014 US News & World Report Ranking	Conference
Stanford	**1**	**4**	**Pac-12**
Duke	**2**	**8**	**ACC**
Northwestern	**3**	**13**	**Big 10**
Notre Dame	**4**	**16**	**ACC**
Vanderbilt	**5**	**16**	**SEC**
Cal – Berkeley	**6**	**20**	**Pac-12**
UCLA	**7**	**23**	**Pac-12**
Virginia	**8**	**23**	**ACC**
USC	**9**	**25**	**Pac-12**
Wake Forest	**10**	**27**	**ACC**
UNC	**12**	**30**	**ACC**
Boston College	**13**	**31**	**ACC**
Illinois	**15**	**42**	**Big 10**
Wisconsin	**16**	**47**	**Big 10**
Penn State	**17**	**48**	**Big 10**
Florida	**18**	**48**	**SEC**
Miami	**19**	**48**	**ACC**
Washington	**20**	**48**	**Pac-12**

Table C.2: *High Quality (HQ) Group*

School	Power 5 Ranking	2014 US News & World Report Ranking	Conference
Texas	21	53	Big XII
Ohio State	22	54	Big 10
Syracuse	23	58	ACC
Clemson	24	62	ACC
Purdue	25	62	Big 10
Georgia	26	62	SEC
Maryland	27	62	ACC
Pitt	28	62	ACC
Texas A&M	29	68	SEC
Rutgers	30	70	Big 10
Baylor	31	71	Big XII
Iowa	32	71	Big 10
Minnesota	33	71	Big 10
Virginia Tech	34	71	ACC
Indiana	35	76	Big 10
TCU	36	76	Big XII
Michigan State	37	85	Big 10
Alabama	38	88	SEC
Colorado	39	88	Pac-12
Florida State	40	95	ACC
NC State	41	95	ACC
Missouri	42	99	SEC
Nebraska	43	99	Big 10
Iowa State	45	106	Big XII
Kansas	46	106	Big XII
Oklahoma	47	106	Big XII
Tennessee	49	106	SEC
South Carolina	50	113	SEC
Arizona	51	121	Pac-12
Arizona State	52	129	Pac-12
LSU	53	129	SEC
Kentucky	54	129	SEC
Utah	55	129	Pac-12
Arkansas	56	135	SEC
Oregon State	57	138	Pac-12
Washington State	58	138	Pac-12
Kansas State	59	142	Big XII
Oklahoma State	60	145	Big XII
Mississippi (Ole Miss)	61	149	SEC
Texas Tech	63	156	Big XII
Louisville	64	161	ACC