

HOW INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS CONTRIBUTES TO INSTITUTIONAL
VIABILITY AND CULTURE: SMALL PRIVATE COLLEGE PRESIDENTS'
PERSPECTIVES

by

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ABSTRACT

C. REGINA SIMMONS. How Intercollegiate Athletics Contributes to Institutional Viability and Culture: Small Private College Presidents' Perspectives.
(Under the direction of DR. RYAN A. MILLER)

Small, private colleges provide an essential element to the landscape of higher education, offering intimate class sizes and high touch experiences for traditional college populations. Led by an institutional president, who sets strategic initiatives, while working with senior-level staff and faculty to accomplish mission, the president of a small, private college must wear many hats, both to the internal campus and external community. Presidents set the tone for leadership and communication, devise strategic plans and select staff to accomplish those initiatives. With fewer layers of administration, the president of a small, private college also has greater influence on day-to-day operations than their counterparts at larger institutions. Athletics at the small, private college is an important component for enrollment, campus life, and budget. At institutions that do not provide athletic scholarship money, student-athletes account for significant portion of undergraduate populations. NCAA Division III institutions, mostly small, private colleges, incorporate athletics into campus life and position the *student* before the *athlete*. The presidents of these institutions are poised to thoroughly understand how athletics influences the viability and culture of the small, private college landscape. This research was designed as a multiple case study, examining five presidents of small, private colleges. Each president served as a case, and research was conducted through two semi-structured interviews and document collection. Interview transcripts and documents were analyzed as case study reports were devised for each case. Following individual case analysis, cross-case analysis occurred where three overlapping themes emerged: the president's influence over managing tension with faculty, winning builds a foundation for success, and agility is necessary to respond to changes. The implications of the

research project demonstrated that small, private college presidents must make decisions about athletics in alignment with institutional missions and the strategic plan, allowing a strong connection to the organization's culture.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, Al, Rose, Kevin, Amanda, Adahlae, Klayton, and Kaden. You prove to consistently inspire me to be more than I could dream of becoming.

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A journey of this magnitude is not walked alone. I am incredibly grateful to the many people who supported and encouraged me along the way.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Small, private colleges and universities sit on the brink of a crisis. From 2016 through the fall of 2019, 19 small, private, non-profit colleges or universities ceased operations or announced plans to close, primarily due to funding and enrollment issues (Busta, 2019). Moody's (2017) forecasted approximately 1% of private, non-profit institutions closing per year, an average about 15 to 16 institutions, specifically calling attention to about 750 institutions with operating expenses of less than \$100 million. These institutions are tuition dependent, building yearly operating budgets on net tuition revenue paid by students (Chabotar, 2010; Docking & Curton, 2015.) The enrollment and retention of students is critical to the financial survival and success of small, private colleges and universities. The closing of a college leaves a void for the current students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the surrounding community.

Most less-selective, small, private colleges have student-athlete populations as high as one-quarter to one-half of traditional undergraduates (Beaver, 2014, National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2019). At small, private Division III schools, athletics reports through various structures, including the enrollment division, the student affairs division, college operations, or, at times, as a direct report to the institutional president. In addition, the institutional president sits in a position to view the breadth of different functional areas and how athletics integrates into mission, values, and priorities. Few Division III student-athletes have ability to make it "pro," so curricular and extra-curricular opportunities matter for connection, development, and retention (NCAA, 2019). Case study and anecdotal evidence exists that demonstrates the benefit of athletics in enrollment and finance contributions (Beaver, 2014; Hearn et al., 2018; Katz et al.,

2015), but fail to address larger picture of how athletics influences strategic goals, institutional mission, and campus culture at small, private Division III colleges.

Statement of the Problem

At most considerable risk for closure is the small, private college: colleges often nestled into small communities; colleges driven to make a difference for their students by providing an intimate college experience with small class sizes; and colleges that rely heavily on tuition revenue in order to make financial ends meet each year (Beaver, 2014; Docking & Curton, 2015). Small, private colleges are guided by a president, who sets strategic initiatives, while working with senior-level staff and faculty to accomplish the institution's mission (Chu, 1982; Docking & Curton, 2015; Hearn et al., 2018). Hill et al. (2001) called the role of the president *preeminent*, as it relates to their authority and institutional governance in issues associated with academic, financial, personnel, and athletic oversight. As opposed to a state system, which may strategically arrange structure influenced by political party affiliation, athletics reports through various channels at the small, private college. Within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III, athletics reports through various chains of command or, at times, as a direct report to the institutional president.

The NCAA Division III model of athletic competition, without the option or cost of athletic scholarships, attracts many small, private colleges. Approximately 80% of 451 Division III member institutions are small and private, with most being less selective in admissions standards, admitting more than 50% of applicants (Beaver, 2014; Eide, 2018). Accounting for nearly 25% of the total current student enrollment in all Division III institutions, intercollegiate athletics are an enrollment strategy, an engagement opportunity, a learning experience, and a campus life stimuli (Astin, 1984; Beaver, 2014, NCAA, 2019). By limiting offseason practice

times and having shorter playing seasons than the other divisions, Division III attempts to minimize conflicts between academics and athletics (NCAA Division III Manual, 2018). The structure of Division III athletics lends to the development of the identity of the student and the athlete, in hopes of preparing them for a successful transition into post-graduate life. From smaller, regional conferences, resulting in less travel time away from class, to off-season practice limitations, allowing for student-athletes to participate in academic or social endeavors not afforded in other divisions, Division III promotes that a well-rounded collegiate experience, not just in sport activity, is critical for the satisfaction and retention of these student-athletes (NCAA Division III Manual, 2018). Furthermore, the small, private colleges of Division III rely on the recruitment and retention of student-athletes to create sustainable enrollments (Beaver, 2014).

Small, private colleges and universities are annually reliant on net tuition revenue to create a balanced budget (Docking & Curton, 2015). Fluctuating enrollment has left many small, private colleges in a financial crisis. The risk of closure is aggravated by several factors, including higher education costs rising faster than the rate of inflation, projected stagnant high school graduation rates, and increased competition in the varying ways education is being delivered (Carey, 2014; Docking & Curton, 2015; Eide, 2018.) Many Division III institutions are classified as small and private, where roughly 25% to 50% of students compete in varsity-level, intercollegiate athletics (Beaver, 2014; NCAA, 2019). The chance to compete with a sports team could be a deciding factor for some students to choose to attend college. An institution could certainly add sports and increase their enrollment as a result; however, that is a Band-Aid approach to a situation needing surgery. The strategy for how athletics contributes to enrollment, and subsequently budget and student satisfaction, of small, private Division III institutions, starts with the president. Previous and current research robustly examines the role of the student-

athletes, their development, their success, and their failure (Adler & Adler, 1985; Barlow & Hickey, 2014; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Richards & Aires, 1999); however, little research exists to examine how athletics, as a whole, contributes to the enrollment, budget, mission, and overall sustainability of an institution through the lens of institutional presidents.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how institutional presidents perceive the role of athletics in small, private, Division III institutions. Athletics reports through various channels at different institutions; therefore, this research study will focus on the viewpoints and understanding of college presidents. Regional accrediting agencies, athletic conferences, and the NCAA require presidential involvement and oversight of athletics, indicating president should have at least a functioning knowledge of athletics at their institution. While working at the discretion of an institution's board of trustees, college presidents set the agenda for priorities at small, private colleges, and their knowledge of how operations work together is essential to understanding how athletics fits into strategy.

Research Questions

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do presidents of small, private, Division III colleges and universities perceive the role of athletics on their campus?
2. How do institutional presidents view the influence of athletics on institutional mission and strategic goals?

Conceptual Framework Overview

This study's conceptual framework draws on Schein's (1985, 2017) model of organizational culture. Schein (2010) noted that culture and leadership are intertwined, and

leaders are the primary architect of culture within their organization. Leaders must be consistently aware of the culture of the organization; otherwise, that culture will manage the leader. Even at a small college or university, multiple layers of culture compete for presence and power. In an organization, power influences how resources are allocated (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977), and the small, private college relies on external and internal resources. Schein (2017) observed that culture is both a learned phenomenon and challenging to define. For the purpose of this study, organizational culture will be defined as:

The accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. This accumulated learning is a pattern or systems of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness. (Schein, 2017, p. 6)

For the leader, it is critical to understand organizational culture, as culture is a powerful and stabilizing force in an organization (Schein, 2010). Culture defines the assumptions and manner in which work will be accomplished within an organization.

In *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein (2017) outlined three levels in which organizational culture is divided. On the surface level, *artifacts* act as those parts of organizational culture which are easy to see and hard to understand. Beneath artifacts, *espoused beliefs and values* are the strategies, goals, and philosophies that people in an organization use to guide their work consciously. At the center of this model lies *basic underlying assumptions*, those unconscious beliefs, thoughts, or feelings guiding the actions of those within the organization. Culture is not merely what is said, but how values are lived out in a day to day

context. For the purpose of this research study, artifacts will be collected through document analysis. Espoused values are expected to show through mission statements, athletic department goals of recruiting and fundraising, and similar strategic based, values-driven parts of institutional culture. In addition, the commentary provided from presidents will describe the values and beliefs their leadership influences among the members of the institution's community. Finally, this research hopes to unearth the basic underlying assumptions of each college president through an analysis of in-depth interviews with each president and comparison to document analysis. Alignment or conflict through the different layers of organizational culture will be examined through data analysis. Congruence through the three layers would indicate synergy across mission, values, and beliefs, which set the tone for influencing culture on a college campus. A disconnection among the three layers could provide insight into areas needing or experiencing organizational change.

Overview of Research Methodology

Qualitative research focuses on meaning-making, believing the actions of people matter (Willig, 2017). When studying, analyzing, and interpreting the actions of people, qualitative researchers assume they will gain insight to better serve society (Willig, 2017). The story of a college or university is made up of many meaningful chapters. Histories of alumni, buildings, traditions, and more combine to weave the narrative of the institution and its community. The foundation of this research project was based in the understanding, perspectives, and narratives of each institutional president. The depth of the research for this project could not be conveyed through a survey where subjects told of meaning through numeric options. The value of the data these presidents shared relayed their depth of understanding how athletics connected to the different layers of institutional life.

This research project was explored as a multiple case study. Case studies seek to distinguish between the phenomenon being studied and the real-world context of the situation (Yin, 2018). Cases are bounded and defined by specific parameters, while providing a rich and in-depth examination of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2018). Case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence to strengthen the data collection and analysis process (Yin, 2018). For this research project, the president served as the case, and their experience and the institution they led provided the context.

This multiple case study examined five presidents from small, private Division III institutions. The researcher conducted two individual semi-structured interviews with presidential research participants. Interviews were recorded in audio format and transcribed for analysis. Additional data collection included gathering of published and unpublished institutional documents to review. After initial transcription and document review, the researcher explored the data by completing two levels of coding, followed by developing themes from the analysis of significant statements and artifact findings.

Stake (2005) noted the researcher must treat each case as its own entity. For this research project, each president is a case. Also, case studies often rely on supporting documentation and observation to provide a deeper understanding of the situation being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research study was designed as a multiple case study because each president being studied is a bounded case, and the institution provided the setting and context. In addition, document collection and analysis provided an additional layer of data. The president's power and authority influenced campus more than any other position at a small, private college. Additionally, the president served as the connection point for the board of trustees and the faculty, staff, and students of a college. The president set the direction for strategy and

initiatives, guided fulfillment of the mission statement, and was responsible for the leadership of the institution. As such, they were the focal point of this research study. A multiple case study allowed the researcher to examine presidents and their institutions with different missions to see how similarities and differences existed in their use of athletics to affect strategic mission and goals.

Significance of the Study

In 1972, Astin and Lee conducted a study of colleges they characterized as *invisible*. What made those colleges invisible were some of the factors being proposed here: small, private, and less selective. In a review of those colleges in 2013, 28% had closed or ceased to exist in their original format (Tarrant et al., 2018). While Tarrant et al. (2018) saw the results as positive, concern for the survival of the small, private college remains. Predictions of college closings continue to persist, and the colleges most at risk for closure are small, private colleges, which make up roughly 80% of the NCAA's Division III. An investigation into how athletics was used (or not) to create enrollment, financial stability, and student satisfaction could provide valuable information to many institutions. More than 1,200 small, private colleges and universities exist in the United States. While not all of those institutions compete in the NCAA, this study will provide perspectives about how the NCAA Division III guidelines and parameters create a platform to integrate athletics with institutional mission without paying for athletics scholarships. Providing a well-rounded understanding for small, private, NCAA Division III colleges about what works and what does not work for athletics, as an institutional strategy, could be beneficial for colleges who are currently or may soon be facing enrollment and financial difficulties.

Delimitations and Assumptions

Delimitations

One criterion for potential participants was for each president to have led at their current institution for at least 12 months, in order to demonstrate institutional understanding. Upon entry into a new institution, new employees, presidents included, spend some time acclimating to the environment, operations, and specific context of a particular college and university. To provide a depth in description, presidents needed to have had time to adjust to their role and institution. Also, the institution must be classified as small or very small (fewer than 3,000 students in enrollment), private, non-profit, NCAA Division III member, and less selective on an academic level. This study was conducted in 2020, so the perceptions of the presidents interviewed were guided by the success of current and recent enrollment and financial trends.

In March 2020, operational restrictions began to limit higher education in the United States due to the escalation of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The NCAA cancelled national championships, with most athletic conferences following suit to cancel sports operations, for the spring and fall of 2020. Division III cancelled championships for spring and fall 2020 and winter 2020-2021 sports. At the time of writing, intercollegiate sports have slowly started to begin play again. Yet, college presidents, among many others, were inconsistent in their perceptions of the safety for their student-athletes. Though this study did not focus on the pandemic, data collection occurred against this backdrop, and president discussed the pandemic on their colleges' enrollment and operations

Assumptions

This research study was conducted under several assumptions. The researcher assumed that interviewees answered questions honestly and openly. This research was conducted with the

assumption that interviewed presidents had a working knowledge of the primary functions of their institution, including athletics, enrollment, and finances. Based on criteria, the institutions were believed to be primarily reliant on net tuition revenue to build and meet annual budget projections.

Definitions of Terms

The president and the small, private college were the focal point of this research study. Varied definitions have been used to identify some key components within this study; therefore, the following commonly used terms are defined below:

Small: The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2017) described very small institutions as those with less than 1,000 full-time enrollment (FTE) and small institutions with FTE between 1,000 and 2,999. For this study, small referred to institutions with annual enrollment of less than 3,000 FTE undergraduate students.

Small, Private College: The term small, private college was used throughout this research project. The use of small, private college in this study also indicated institutions that are non-profit. Additionally, the terms college and institution were used to cover both colleges and universities.

Less Selective: According to Rasmussen and Rasmussen (2003), roughly 12% of Division III institutions accepted fewer than half of the students who apply. A significant majority of Division III colleges and universities accept more than 50% of applicants to their undergraduate admissions offices. For the purpose of this study, less selective referred to institutions admitting more than 50% of their applicants. Unless noted as elite colleges with highly selective admissions standards, all references to small, private colleges indicated less selective institutions.

NCAA: “The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes” (NCAA, 2019). Other national athletic associations exist serving varying sub-sections of the overall college and university population, including the National Junior Collegiate Athletic Association (NJCAA), the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and National Christian Collegiate Athletic Association (NCCAA).

Division III: Division III is the non-scholarship portion of the NCAA. Student-athletes competing in Division III cannot receive any scholarship money that is directly tied to their participation in intercollegiate sports. Students can receive financial aid based on need and academic merit (NCAA, 2019).

Athletics: Athletics served as an all-encompassing term to include the division of athletics, student-athletes, coaches, teams, and athletic administrators.

Viability: From the biology-focused point of view, viability means the ability to survive and be successful (Viability, 2019).

Culture: Taken from Schein’s definition, culture is the unseen system guiding the behaviors, values, and actions of members of a group that teach new members of the group the “correct way to perceive, thinks, feel, and behave” (Schein, 2017, p. 6).

President: The term president is used to describe the institutional leader at the highest level of authority.

Board of Trustees: Board of Trustees was the common term used to designate the governing board of the private institution. Other descriptions at various institutions include rectors, regents, governors, or directors.

Tuition Dependent: Tuition dependent institutions are defined as institutions that rely on net tuition revenue to account for at least two-thirds of the annual budget (Chabotar, 2010)

Net Tuition Revenue: Net tuition revenue is the amount of money an institution receives in payments from students. For instance, if an institution costs \$30,000 per year, and the student receives \$10,000 a year from the institution in unfunded scholarships and grants, the institutions nets \$20,000 per year. The other \$10,000 is considered a discount unless supported by endowed funds. Net tuition revenue includes Federal Pell Grants, state tuition grants, money received from loans, outside scholarships, tuition payments, and more.

Organization of the Study

This chapter began with stating small, private colleges are at risk for closure due to enrollment and finance pressure, given the shifting landscape of higher education. Outlining the need for examining athletics at the small, private college through the lens of the institution's president, this multiple case study will explore how presidents perceive the role of athletics at their institution. Chapter One also included the research purpose, research questions, significance, delimitations, assumptions, and definitions of key terms relevant to this study.

The remainder of this research study is organized into four additional chapters, followed by references, and appendices. Chapter Two will review literature in relation to this topic by further exploring the concepts of the small, private college, the NCAA, and Division III athletics. The small, private college will be examined through research on structure, financial considerations, enrollment trends, the role of the president, and the ongoing threat of closure for small, private colleges. Existing research on how athletics has been used as a strategy is examined, followed by a more in-depth explanation of the conceptual framework.

After the literature review, Chapter Three will provide details the methodology through which this research project was conducted. The researcher's positionality and role in this study is outlined. Chapter Three also offers specifics on the research design and plans for data analysis. Chapter Four presents the results gathered through the research, with an overview of the cases, individual case description and analysis, and concludes presenting themes developed by a cross-case analysis. Finally, Chapter Five examines the results in light of the research questions, the conceptual framework and reviewed literature. Chapter Five also includes limitations on the research, implications for practice, suggestions for future research, and the researcher's reflection.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Small, private colleges are in peril, as one school after another faces the act or threat of closure (Docking & Curton, 2015). Moody's Investor Services (2017) indicated a previous average of 11 colleges closing each year, and they expect that number to increase. In 2017, Harvard University economist Dr. C. Christensen claimed college closures would dramatically increase within the next decade. His claim was based on the migration of higher education course delivery to online and hybrid methods (Lederman, 2017). In addition, population trends created some dramatic shifts in traditionally aged college students for the next 10 to 15 years (Grawe, 2018). At greatest risk for closure is the small, private college: colleges often nestled into rural or sparsely populated communities, colleges driven to make a difference for their students by providing an intimate experience with small class sizes, and colleges who rely heavily on tuition revenue in order to make budgetary ends meet each year (Docking & Currant, 2015; Eide, 2018). These colleges number into the hundreds and enroll more than a million students (NCES, 2019), and their survival is in doubt.

Many small, private colleges compete in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III level. In fact, approximately 80% of the 451 Division III member institutions are small and private, with most being less selective in admission standards, accepting more than 50% of applicants (Beaver, 2014; Eide, 2018; NCAA, 2019). Division III does not award athletic scholarship money and focuses on the holistic development of both the student and the athlete. Division III athletics has the ability to provide enrollment, financial, and student life enhancements to small, private colleges (Astin, 1984; Beaver, 2014; NCAA, 2019). This chapter will begin with a description of the setting of the small, private, less selective

college in the United States, followed by a contextual examination of Division III athletics. Next, the review of literature examines how Division III athletics influences student recruitment and enrollment, finances, and student satisfaction. Finally, the intersection of these concepts is assessed against the conceptual framework of organizational culture. Table 1 presents the review of literature included in this chapter.

Table 1

Summary of Themes in Literature

Small, Private College and Universities

- Structure (Astin & Lee, 1972; Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Docking & Curton, 2015; Eide, 2018; Hersh, 1999; Hilbun & Mamiseishvili, 2016; Kuh, 2005; Tarrant et al., 2018)
- Financial Considerations (Chabotar, 2010; Chu, 1982; Docking & Curton, 2015; Dorantes & Low, 2016; Eide, 2018; Grawe, 2018; Hilbun & Mamiseishvili, 2016; Kezar, 2001; Lee & Helm, 2013; NACUBO, 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; Zumeta et al., 2015; Zusman, 2005)
- Enrollment Trends (Barlow & Hickey, 2014; Beaver, 2014; Bowen & Levin, 2013; Docking & Curton, 2015; Eide, 2018; Grawe, 2018; Hearn et al., 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019)
- Role of Institutional President (Association of Governing Boards, 2014; Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Chu, 1982; Docking & Curton, 2015; Eckel & Kezar, 2011; Eide, 2018; Hearn et al., 2018; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; NCAA Division III Manual, 2018; NCAA, 2019; Pierce, 2012; Schroeder, 2000; Snyder & Waterstone, 2015; Soares et al., 2018; Stimpert, 2004; Thomason, 2017)
- Threat of Closure (Astin & Lee, 1972; Docking & Curton, 2015; Eide, 2018; Grawe, 2018; Tarrant et al., 2018; Zumeta et al., 2018)

Division III Athletics

- Divisional Differences (Adler & Adler, 1985; Bandre', 2011; Beaver, 2004; Chu, 1982; Emerson, Brooks, & McKenzie, 2009; Hearn et al., 2018; Katz et al., 2015; NCAA, 2019; NCAA Division III Manual, 2018; Rauschnable et al., 2016)
 - Value of Division III Athletics for Student Development (Adler & Adler, 1985; Astin, 1984; Bandre', 2011; Barlow & Hickey, 2014; Brewer et al., 1993; Emerson et al., 2009; Goss et al., 2006; Huml, 2018; Katz et al., 2015; Mignano et al., 2006; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; NCAA Division III Manual, 2018; Paule-Koba & Farr, 2013; Richards & Aires, 1999; Schroeder, 2000; Sturm et al., 2011; Umbach et al., 2006)
-

Division III Athletics as an Institutional Strategy

- Enrollment and Budget (Beaver, 2014; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Emerson et al., 2009; Hearn et al., 2018; Katz et al., 2015; Pauline, 2010; Richards & Aires, 1999; Wright, 2017)
- Student Engagement and Satisfaction (Astin, 1984; Bogue, 2002; Emerson et al., 2009; Hearn et al., 2018; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Paule-Koba & Farr, 2013)
- Role Strain and Conflicts (Adler & Adler, 1991; Astin, 1984; Barlow & Hickey, 2014; Cantor and Prentice, 1996; NCAA Division III Manual, 2018; Richards & Aires, 1999)

Conceptual Framework

- Organizational Culture (Cole & Martin, 2018; Hogan & Coote, 2014; Kezar, 2001; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977; Schein, 1985; Schein 1996; Schein, 2010; Schein, 2017)
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Small, Private Colleges and Universities

Structure

Small, private colleges provide an essential component in the diversity of how higher education is delivered to the masses. More than a million students attend these institutions across the United States because they are attracted to the mission, the small class sizes, and the opportunities for making an immediate impact (Astin & Lee, 1972; Eide, 2018; Tarrant et al., 2018). Docking and Curton (2015) described what many traditional small, private colleges look like: enrollment around 1,000 students, mostly residential, and situated in a small town. In addition, Astin and Lee (1972) noted these colleges as less selective in admissions practices, in relation to SAT and ACT scores, when juxtaposed against the private, elite institutions.

Many small, private colleges are liberal arts institutions, focused on creating a foundational knowledge across the curriculum and teaching students how to think and learn (Hilbun & Mamiseishvili, 2016); however, students and parents believe employers want college graduates to have hard skills and pre-professional training as they enter the labor force (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Docking & Curton, 2015). Small, private colleges must continually evaluate how to balance the tension between remaining true to a liberal arts education while providing

academic offerings to meet the interest of prospective students (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). A critical mass of literature exists praising the value of the liberal arts education (Hersh, 1999, Hilburn & Mamiseishvili, 2016; Kuh, 2005); however, the structure of these small, private, liberal arts colleges cost more money to operate than public institutions (Astin & Lee, 1972; Docking & Curton, 2015; Eide, 2018). Small, private colleges are able to offer an intimate setting with a lower faculty and staff to student ratio, smaller class sizes, and personal attention for both the achiever and the underachiever (Docking & Curton, 2015). Students are known when they do well, and they are not anonymous when they struggle (Eide, 2018; Hersh, 1999). Undergraduates have a chance to make immediate connections with faculty to start on research programs early or make an impact with student involvement as soon as their first year (Eide, 2015; Hersh, 1999, Kuh, 2005); however, what makes the small, private college special also increases the cost.

Financial Considerations

“Money is the life-giving nourishment that every college needs, and when there is no money, there is no college” (Docking & Curton, 2015, p. 4). The Great Recession of 2008-2009 caused a widespread impact to higher education across the United States. Public institutions saw diminished funding from state appropriations, while private colleges and universities struggled to yield needed net tuition revenue, faced reduced endowment income, and saw fundraising dollars and gift income dissipate (Dorantes & Low, 2016; Hilburn & Mamiseishvili, 2016). Because education is primarily the largest discretionary spending component of state budgets (Zusman, 2005), residual impact from the Great Recession continued to show in state appropriations that have not (and may not) return to pre-2008 levels (Zumeta et al., 2015). As the United States population shifts to an older average age, requiring more aid to health care and directed

spending, state contributions to public colleges and universities are expected to be crowded out by other developing needs (Eide, 2018). One constant theme emerging in research is the privatization of public education. As a result of decreased state funding at public institutions, capital campaigns, sponsorships, and creative shared-use plans are becoming commonplace (Zusman, 2005). According to Zumeta et al. (2015), many states expected budgetary shortfalls in the recovery years of the Great Recession. As states struggled to address concerns about budgets and decreased discretionary spending to higher education, both public and private colleges and universities began courting various types of donors and sources of financing.

Small, private universities, with fewer resources, have been forced to compete in an arena where they are out-staffed and have less name recognition. Skyrocketing student loan debt combined with federal and state inconsistencies in funding resulted in a turbulent cost experience for both students and institutions (Zumeta et al., 2015). In addition, the varied ways in which institutions generated their financing leaves “the financial solvency of the college an ever-pressing problem” (Chu, 1982, p. 60). The financing of both private and public higher education relies on donors, foundations, grants, and other revenue streams. Focus on generating capital has a trickle-down effect reaching even entry-level staff (Lee & Helm, 2013). As more need for financing drives institutional directives, the emphasis on educating students could be placed in jeopardy.

Private colleges rely heavily on net tuition revenue, room, board, and fees in order to make their annual budget (Docking & Currant, 2015; Eide, 2018). For yearly budget purposes, pulling from endowment and annual fundraising fills in the budgetary gap. Many small, private institutions saw sharp declines in enrollment deposits in 2009 (Chabotar, 2010), and future trend predications show a pattern of inconsistent enrollment in private higher education (Grawe, 2018;

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). Stable economic conditions in the late 2010s led to some growth in endowments; however, the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO, 2019) noted more than 40% of their reporting institutions have an endowment of less than \$101 million dollars. In reliable economic times, the endowment can be used to cover budgetary gaps; however, endowment-reliant budgets do not sustain when the economy slows down (Hilbun & Mamiseishvili, 2016).

Discounted rates of tuition at private colleges allowed institutions to offer scholarships and grants to create a price point competitive with public institutions; however, recent data trends showed a negative return, as discounted tuition generates less operating income than needed to cover costs (Eide, 2018). Small, private colleges build annual budgets on projections of enrollment coupled with the average of net tuition revenue. When enrollment expectations are not met, budgetary deficits emerge. Facing budgetary deficits, institutions chose to defer maintenance, replaced a retiring faculty member with adjuncts, or eliminated academic and social programs (Eide, 2018). Those cuts and makeshift repairs diminished the value of the experience for a student at the small, private college, putting their retention at risk. In higher education, rapid change is rare. When dramatic change does occur, it is often the result of a financial crisis (Kezar, 2001). As Docking and Curton (2015) emphasized, enrollment drives the budget.

Enrollment Trends

The Great Recession impacted more than just the size of endowments. Decreased overall birthrates from 2007 through 2013, as a result of the Great Recession, coupled with stagnant to negative immigration trends created a change in the population that will feed into higher education enrollment for at least another decade (Grawe, 2018). The National Center for

Education Statistics (2019) estimated undergraduate enrollment rates to increase by three percent between 2016 and 2027; however, insecurity about declining high school population rates in the Midwest and Northeast created concern about negative enrollment trends in higher education (Eide, 2018). In the years 2013 to 2019, the National Student Clearinghouse (2019) reported an overall decline in higher education enrollment, yet the significant portion of enrollment reduction occurred in the for-profit sector.

The negative birth rate effect of the Great Recession will start to impact colleges and universities reliant on traditionally-aged students in 2025. In the book *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*, Grawe (2018) urged higher educational institutions to understand how the change in population trends is more profound than just the totality of numbers. Beyond birth rates and the number of high school graduates, the landscape of higher education has changed significantly with the integration of online learning. In 2017, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that nearly one-third of all undergraduate enrollment was through distance education.

In recent years, four-year, private, nonprofit colleges saw fluctuations in enrollment numbers. Enrollment for four-year, private colleges experienced negative growth of 0.9% and 1.6% in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Yet, in 2019, four-year, private colleges saw enrollment gains of 3.2% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). When examining those numbers more closely, the size of the institution factors into growth. Four-year, private colleges with enrollment of more than 10,000 students, saw an 8.0% increase in 2019, while the small college with enrollment fewer than 3,000 saw a decline of 0.8% in 2019, along with consecutive years of negative enrollment numbers (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

As Docking and Curton (2015) said, “When enrollment declines, budgets suffer, and when budgets suffer at small privates, the cascading effect is lethal. If money is the ultimate cause of death at small privates..., then poor enrollment is the disease” (p. 12). Small, private colleges feel significant impact of seemingly small shifts in enrollment. Missing enrollment targets for several consecutive years can lead to budget deficits too deep to overcome.

Enrollment of new students aligned with the recruitment of student-athletes, which is why some small, private Division III colleges have the director of athletics report to the vice president for enrollment or admissions. Recruitment and retention of student-athletes, who have a desire to compete athletically and develop academically, created an opportunity for small institutions to grow student enrollment and revenue while remaining true to the academic mission of their institution (Barlow & Hickey, 2014). For smaller, private Division III institutions who struggle to meet enrollment goals, the student-athlete population can create a stabilizing force. In Division III, student-athletes account for a significantly higher percentage of the overall student body than in Divisions I and II (Beaver, 2014). Small, private schools associated with the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), averaged more than 30% of students participating in intercollegiate athletics (Hearn et al., 2018). Division III institutions do not have a roster size limit, and the number of athletes at small, private, Division III schools has grown (Bowen & Levin, 2013; Hearn et al., 2018).

Role of the Institutional President

Small, private colleges are led by the president, who works to set and achieve strategic goals while honoring the institution’s mission, vision, and values (Chu, 1982; Docking & Curton, 2015; Hearn et al., 2018). Public institutions have multiple layers of governance, often entrenched in the political landscape of their state government, whereas the private institution is

led by a president who is appointed by the institution's board of trustees (Fox Garrity, 2015; Pierce, 2012). The president of a small, private college must wear many hats (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). They set the tone for leadership and communication. They devise strategic plans and select staff to accomplish those initiatives. They are fundraisers. They attend campus events and cheer on students. Alumni and community leaders expect them to be visible, approachable, and available. Eckel and Kezar (2011) described the role of the president as this:

The nature of this position requires a single individual to be a leader, academic, planner, mediator, politician, advocate, investment banker, conductor, showman, church elder, supporter, cheerleader, and, of course, manager. These roles, and many more functions—including providing leadership; setting institutional strategy; planning; financing; and ensuring compliance with multiple regulations, laws, and policies (and politics)—are the domain of a campus head. (p. 279)

In recent years, *the Chronicle of Higher Education* asked, “Is being a college president the hardest job in America?” (Thomason, 2017). Constant critiques from media and government provoked that question. With tuition costs rising higher than the rate of inflation, student debt growing in unprecedented ways, and people asking if a college degree is worth it (Stimpert, 2004), challenges and opportunities abound for the president of a small, private college.

The president of a small, private college has the positionality to impact more significant change in a shorter time period than counterparts at larger or public institutions. The leadership style of presidents at a small college influences the culture of an institution. Effective presidents understand the context and the culture in which they are working. While the institutional president may not complete a necessary function for day-to-day university life, they are singularly the most influential person on campus (Kezar & Eckel, 2002).

In the 2017 American College President Study, current and former presidents outlined the importance of innovative leaders in times of change (Soares et al., 2018). Creating institutional culture reliant on making data-driven decisions provided a foundation for presidents to turn a challenging predicament into a success (Soares et al., 2018). Additionally, presidents reported they were able to see opportunities in troubled times when they knew their students deeply and held positive relationships with faculty governing bodies (Soares et al., 2018). Fewer layers exist at a smaller institution, increasing the likelihood that an institution's president can build meaningful relationships with key stakeholders. In doing so, responding to cultural changes or negative situations does not create a chaotic environment, but one prepared to adjust, adapt, or communicate appropriate responses.

At the small, private college, presidents often report to a board of trustees (Eckel & Kezar, 2011; Pierce, 2012). The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB, 2014) described board members as generally proven leaders who are coming from outside of the higher education system; therefore, board members need to understand the culture of the institution and seek strategic governance with campus partners. In reviewing the historical path toward shared governance, Pierce (2012) noted the unique intertwining between the president and the board: the board has ultimate authority for the institution, and tasks the president to set forth strategic initiatives to accomplish the mission of the college. While many institutional presidents operated on a contract, roughly 30% worked at the will and pleasure of the board (Eckel & Kezar, 2011). In a longitudinal study of college presidents from various types of institutions, Birnbaum (1992) noted that most presidents were viewed as effective leaders from the board and the staff, but, for some presidents, tensions with the faculty led to less positive

perceptions. The unique blending of sharing governance exists between the president and the board and the president and the faculty.

As a directive from the NCAA, athletic conferences, and many regional accrediting agencies, college presidents assume responsibility for oversight of athletics at their institutions (NCAA Division III Manual, 2018; Snyder & Waterstone, 2015). At the small, private college, presidents are closely connected to daily operations on campus, positioning them to see how athletics connects to institutional mission and strategic plans. Division III focuses on creating a balance of student-centered activities, with time on sport being limited to allow for academic and other achievements (NCAA, 2019; Schroeder, 2000). Small, private college presidents are able to utilize robust student-athlete achievement as positive connecting points with board members, faculty, alumni, and potential donors.

The presidents of small, private colleges are regularly concerned with creating stable enrollment in the midst of a changing demographics, as their institutions build annual budgets based largely on net tuition revenue derived from enrolling students (Docking & Curton, 2015; Eide, 2018). Without the obligation of paying athletic scholarships, Division III permits the small, private college to utilize sports rosters as an institutional recruitment plan that fits into an overall enrollment strategy. While large roster sizes could create some retention concerns, deliberate recruitment of students who connect to the overall mission of the institution provides student-athletes multiple opportunities for deep involvements on their campus. Small, private college presidents see the interconnectedness of enrollment, budget, and student-athlete experiences, and use that knowledge for strategic planning (Docking & Curton, 2015; Snyder & Waterstone, 2015).

Threat of Closure

Small, private colleges are at risk for closure because they are yearly dependent on the income gained from net tuition revenue and primarily reliant on enrollment from traditionally-aged college students. The risk is also aggravated by the projected declining population rates in the Midwest and Northeast of the United States and the overall shifts in population demographics (Docking & Curton, 2015; Grawe, 2018; Zumeta et al., 2015). The threat of closure for small, private colleges is not new. In a 1972 study sponsored by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, Astin and Lee reviewed a group of 494 colleges they labeled as *invisible colleges*. Astin and Lee (1972) noted they chose the term *invisible* because the term was descriptive rather than evaluative, focused on the obscurity of the institutions, and denoted the lack of care for their well-being by the overall community of higher education. Two of the primary factors denoting a college as invisible were that the institution had a small enrollment and that were academically less-selective. The variables of smaller size and less selective, Astin and Lee believed, were the qualifiers which made them susceptible for inconsistent enrollment and revenue.

Tarrant et al. (2018) reviewed Astin and Lee's (1972) list of invisible colleges and found 80 of the 494 institutions at risk had closed. Furthermore, only 354 were still operating as accredited private, non-profit, four-year institutions by 2013 (Tarrant et al., 2018). Highly selective invisible colleges fared well, with all but one still operating in its original structure (Tarrant et al., 2018), which suggested developing a stronger model of academic selectivity could add value to the perceived higher price point (Eide, 2018). While historical data on the number of college openings and closures remains unclear due to lost and inconsistent records, the invisible colleges were forced to make, at least, superficial changes to remain open (Astin & Lee, 1972). Docking and Curton (2015) reviewed a group of at least 30 colleges who closed

their doors between 2005 and 2015. Those institutions averaged a life-span of 87 years, and roughly 40% of those institutions competed in varsity-level athletics. For the small, private college, sustainability rests in the ability to adapt to student needs and financial situations while offering an educational experience that substantiates value to meet the cost. A college closure not only hurts the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of the institution. The impact ripples through the communities and villages incorporated on the backs of the economic outputs from these small colleges (Docking & Curton, 2015).

Division III Athletics

Divisional Differences

The rise of sport at American colleges and universities sits in a unique, prominent, and unparalleled position compared to education in other nations. As Chu (1982) stated, “only in America has sport become an official responsibility of the educational organization” (p. 53). The brand of interconnectedness between athletics and the institution does not exist in other countries for higher education (Rauschnable et al., 2016). In the United States, however, intercollegiate athletics was seen as a method to unite a higher education population that was growing in diversity (Chu, 1982). In the early 1970s, the NCAA implemented the division classification system to align institutions and create order with how athletic scholarships were awarded (Beaver, 2014; NCAA, 2019) and to account for the growing discrepancies in size between public and private institutions (Katz et al., 2015). Colleges and universities were separated primarily based on institutional mission and size, with Divisions I and II averaging larger institutional enrollment and offering athletic scholarships. Division III would follow the Ivy League college model and award financial aid based on academic merit and financial need, with

no athletic scholarships offered (Beaver, 2014). Division III colleges have a median enrollment of 1,739, while Division I institutions near 10,000 students (NCAA, 2019).

Division III currently consists of 451 member organizations (NCAA, 2019). Roughly 80% of the NCAA Division III institutions are classified as private, and most are less selective. (Beaver, 2014; NCAA, 2019). Within those small, private Division III colleges and universities, as much as 25% to 50% of the undergraduate population participate in varsity level athletics. Beyond the structural considerations of divisional athletics lie the implications on the student-athletes. Recruiting student-athletes is a common need among all colleges and universities fielding intercollegiate athletic competition (Bandre', 2011). For Division I institutions, student-athlete recruitment could mean the difference between winning a championship and not making the post-season. Division I and II coaches are focused on winning (Adler & Adler, 1985), which changes the motivation of the sport from recreation to an occupation for student-athletes. Conversely, many Division III coaches concentrate on recruitment, creating satisfying experiences, fundraising, and retention, with less pressure to focus on the win-loss record (Emerson et al., 2009; Hearn et al., 2018). Division III emphasizes the participant, a look inward to the student, while Division I's athletic competitions are often seen to be spectator-focused (Bandre', 2011; Emerson et al., 2009).

Adler and Adler (1985), in reviewing the highly competitive Division I level, found that most student-athletes began their college career with a positive outlook regarding their academic success; however, many became dissociated with their studies by the end of their first year. In addition, Adler and Adler (1985) found the time on sport for Division I student-athletes decreased available time for individuals to seek involvements outside of athletics, and the impact of their athletic involvement became the primary influencer for their academic experience. In

addition, NCAA Division III student-athletes were more likely to graduate within a four year period than their Division I or II counterparts (NCAA, 2019). The mission for Division III athletics rests in putting the student experience first and encapsulating the time as a student-athlete as a part of the holistic collegiate experience.

Each division of the NCAA is governed by a Presidents Council, comprised of college and university presidents and chancellors (NCAA, 2019). Those councils develop and approve rules and legislation that dictates the specific practices of each division of the NCAA. According to the NCAA Division III Manual (2018), each member institution is responsible for properly administering their athletic program; however, the institutional president or chancellor is named as the responsible party for ensuring compliance and approval for athletic endeavors on their campus.

Value of Division III Athletics for Student Development

The business of college athletics is apparent during events like football bowl games and March Madness; however, those events would not exist, as they do, if the college was not created to provide an education to students. The importance of a college degree is influenced by cultural messages, families, and coaches of student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1985; Brewer et al., 1993). While the tension of athletics and academics exists on all divisional levels of athletic competition, the mission of Division III, in its purest form, creates structure to provide balance between the academic development of a student and the experience for the student-athlete. Barlow and Hickey (2014) contended that the mission of Division III aligned to the mission of the small, private liberal arts college. From shorter playing periods and true off-seasons to more time focused on academics, student-athletes have the margin in their schedules to gain meaningful experience outside of their sport. Participation in college athletics is valued as a part

of the overall college experience, and student-athletes have the time and ability to complete their academic requirements. (Bandre', 2011; Barlow & Hickey, 2014; Katz et al., 2015). As the 2018 NCAA Division III manual stated:

Colleges and universities in Division III place highest priority on the overall quality of the educational experience and on the successful completion of all students' academic programs. They seek to establish and maintain an environment in which a student-athlete's athletic activities are conducted as an integral part of the student-athlete's educational experience, and in which coaches play a significant role as educators. (p. 7)

In a study of incoming Division III student-athletes, Goss et al. (2006) noted two of the top five factors influencing enrollment were the opportunity to play their sport and the relationship with the head coach. Coaches and the athletic experience carry significant influence through the experience of the student-athlete. Coaches want student-athletes to remain academically eligible in order for them to actively contribute to the sport and team. As such, coaches provide significant academic support structure to their student-athletes. On the Division III level, student-athletes are integrated into campus life and have the opportunity to develop as both students and athletes.

A number of research studies exist describing the experience of student-athletes on each divisional level, and most research regarding Division III athletics supports the successful balance student and athlete (Huml, 2018; Mignano et al., 2006; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Paule-Koba & Farr, 2013; Schroder, 2001; Sturm et al., 2011). The National Survey of Student Engagement data show that Division III student-athletes interact with faculty more than peers at Division I or II institutions (Umbach et al., 2006). Umbach et al. (2006) also found that students, regardless of whether they are athletes or not, at small, private institutions are more engaged than

other types of colleges or universities. Richards and Aires (1999) concluded that participation in Division III athletics provided measurable growth for student-athletes and did not impede academic achievement. The Division III student-athlete spends about 30.5 to 36 hours per week on academics (Barlow & Hickey, 2014), which supports the belief that students report a more significant academic challenge at Division III institutions (Umbach et al., 2006). The notion of a true offseason, where time on sport is significantly limited, provides student-athletes opportunities for deep involvement beyond their sport without sacrificing playing time (Schroeder, 2000). In addition, Division III's limitation of time expended on sport allows for students to pursue internships, semesters studying abroad, and other time-intensive activities.

Astin (1984) connected the concept of involvement to the learning components of persistence and effort. Astin noted an active participation, rather than a passive experience, is critical for genuine involvement to happen. For the development of students to occur, meaningful experiences must take place in the academic realm. Student-athletes experience involvement through their sport. In addition, the Division III model provides time, structure, and opportunity for those student-athletes to gain involvement and development in their sport, their academics, and in other areas of campus life. The primary purpose of the educational engagement for student-athletes should not be compromised for the attainment of winning in competition (Emerson et al., 2009).

Division III Athletics as an Institutional Strategy

Colleges and universities have the choice about how they incorporate intercollegiate athletics into their organizational culture. Deliberate decisions about utilizing athletics as a model for increasing and stabilizing enrollment and budget have the potential to add positive value to other facets of campus life (Docking & Curton, 2015).

Enrollment and Budget

The athlete-identity developed in high school could provide a motivation for college enrollment for a student-athlete who might not have considered attending college. The opportunity to continue to play a sport they enjoy could create a pathway to higher education where one might not exist otherwise. As Beaver (2014) summarized Division III does not create a dependency on athletic aid, and the student-athlete has the chance to determine if their student experience is improved or diminished by their participation; however, the simple fact that a chance exists to continue to play their sport creates the enrollment opportunity. Increasingly, today's incoming first-year students view the opportunity of athletic participation as an essential factor in making their college choice (Hearn et al., 2018; Wright, 2017). Small colleges rely heavily and directly on student-athletes to persist (Katz et al., 2015). In the small college setting, athletics is a recruiting tool more than a championship chaser. One reason for the increase in the number of student-athletes on the Division III level is that small college administrators view student-athlete recruitment as a way to alleviate inconsistent enrollment trends (Katz et al., 2015).

Adverse effects exist for athletics as enrollment strategy. When researching the role of athletics and admissions at highly selective colleges and universities, Bowen and Levin (2003) discovered student-athletes received reduced admissions standards while producing inferior academic records than their non-athlete counterparts. At institutions where student-athletes are a more significant percentage of the student population or where student-athletes are not well integrated into campus life, student-athletes and athletics become a dominant sub-culture on campus. (Beaver, 2014; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Richards & Aires, 1999). However, research focused solely on Division III athletic recruits revealed a slightly different view. High school

recruits, who deliberately chose a Division III school, considered their academic concerns more thoroughly than athletic fit (Pauline, 2010). In a survey by the NCAA Division III Presidents Council, 95% of Division III presidents believed that student-athletes should meet the same academic demands as their non-athletic competing peers (Emerson et al., 2009).

Roster sizes are not capped at the Division III level, inviting coaches and enrollment management staff to view recruitment of more student-athletes as a way to generate additional enrollment, and, subsequently, revenue. Understanding the institution's ecosystem is critical to plan for expansion of sports or increasing the percentage of student-athletes. (Hearn et al., 2018; Katz et al., 2015).

When examined carefully in light of specific institutional contexts, intercollegiate athletics can play a major role in smart enrollment strategy and thus can contribute to effective academic and financial management. Acknowledging this reality is important for colleges uncertain of emerging financial and demographic developments. (Hearn et al., 2018, p. 10).

While enrollment and budget, can be positively affected by a focus on recruitment and retention of student-athletes, doing so without strategic vision could become a liability. Little research exists examining how institutions are strategically approaching athletics as a component of viability and resiliency among small, private Division III colleges.

Student Engagement and Satisfaction

Astin's theory of student involvement (1984) purported that exposure to a particular experience does not create involvement. Rather, the program, experience, or event must create some sort of stimulus for learning and engagement to result. Involvement in campus life, Astin contended, is a significant factor to increasing engagement and satisfaction while reducing the

likelihood of dropping out. Bogue (2002) reported that engagement and involvement in a campus community during the college experience helped students persist through hard times, aided in finding satisfaction, and provided students a better chance to graduate. Hearn et al. (2018) reported that participation in intercollegiate sports connects the student to the institution both during their enrollment and in long-term loyalty and support. Engagement for student-athletes does not have to stop at their sport. Student-athletes benefited from interaction with the general student population/non-athlete population and improved their student identity (Navarro & Malvaso, 2015).

Also, for Division III institutions, the audience for sporting events is primarily focused internally, on the participants and college community members, and competitions are not expected to generate revenue (Emerson et al., 2009). When juxtaposed with Division I ticket prices and revenue needs, the participation in Division III athletics focuses on the experience rather than the pressure to produce wins. Games and competition are a source of pleasure and provide intrinsic value to the life of both those competing and those observing (Emerson et al., 2009). Paule-Koba and Farr (2013) found that Division III student-athletes considered the positive support from coaches and camaraderie with teammates as significant influences on their athletic experience. This same study found that Division III student-athletes reported more positive feelings about their athletic experience than their Division I counterparts. Accountability to the team and coaches led student-athletes to report making better decisions in their social life (Paule-Koba & Farr, 2013).

If small, private Division III institutions add roster spots to help increase enrollment, the impact on the individual student-athlete must be considered. More roster spots presumably equal less playing time for some (Hearn et al., 2018). With enrollment driven athletic rosters not all

students get to travel to road games, the marginal players receive less playing time, and junior varsity teams are formed to make amends for lack of varsity-level playing time.

Role Strain and Conflicts

Astin (1984) believed that a student's time is the most valuable resource a college has. Typically, the more time a student spends on a task, the more positive a return they receive; however, too much time on one task can create isolation and a negative return (Adler & Adler, 1991; Astin, 1984). Time and energy, to devote to sport, academics, and other involvements, can be seen as either a limited commodity or an abundant resource (Richards & Aires, 1999). While Division III student-athletes spend less time on sport than Division I or II (Adler & Adler, 1991; Richards & Aires, 1999), Division III student-athletes report their time on sport is significant more time consuming than other campus involvements (Richards & Aires, 1999). In addition, the estimation of Division III student-athletes spending thirty hours or more on academic work each week (Barlow & Hickey, 2014) leaves a student-athlete with little margin in discretionary time.

Cantor and Prentice (1996) believed the time demands of intercollegiate athletics far exceeded the expectations of any other extracurricular activity, thus limiting opportunity for student-athletes while in their playing season. Role strain exists when the expectations placed on the involvement of the student-athlete results in a struggle between the scarcity of resources such as time and energy (Richards & Aires, 1999). The development of a true offseason, where teams are capped at fifteen practices (NCAA Division III Manual, 2018), provides a structural frame to give student-athletes time and space away from their sport. Student-athletes have a choice as to how they want to leverage that margin.

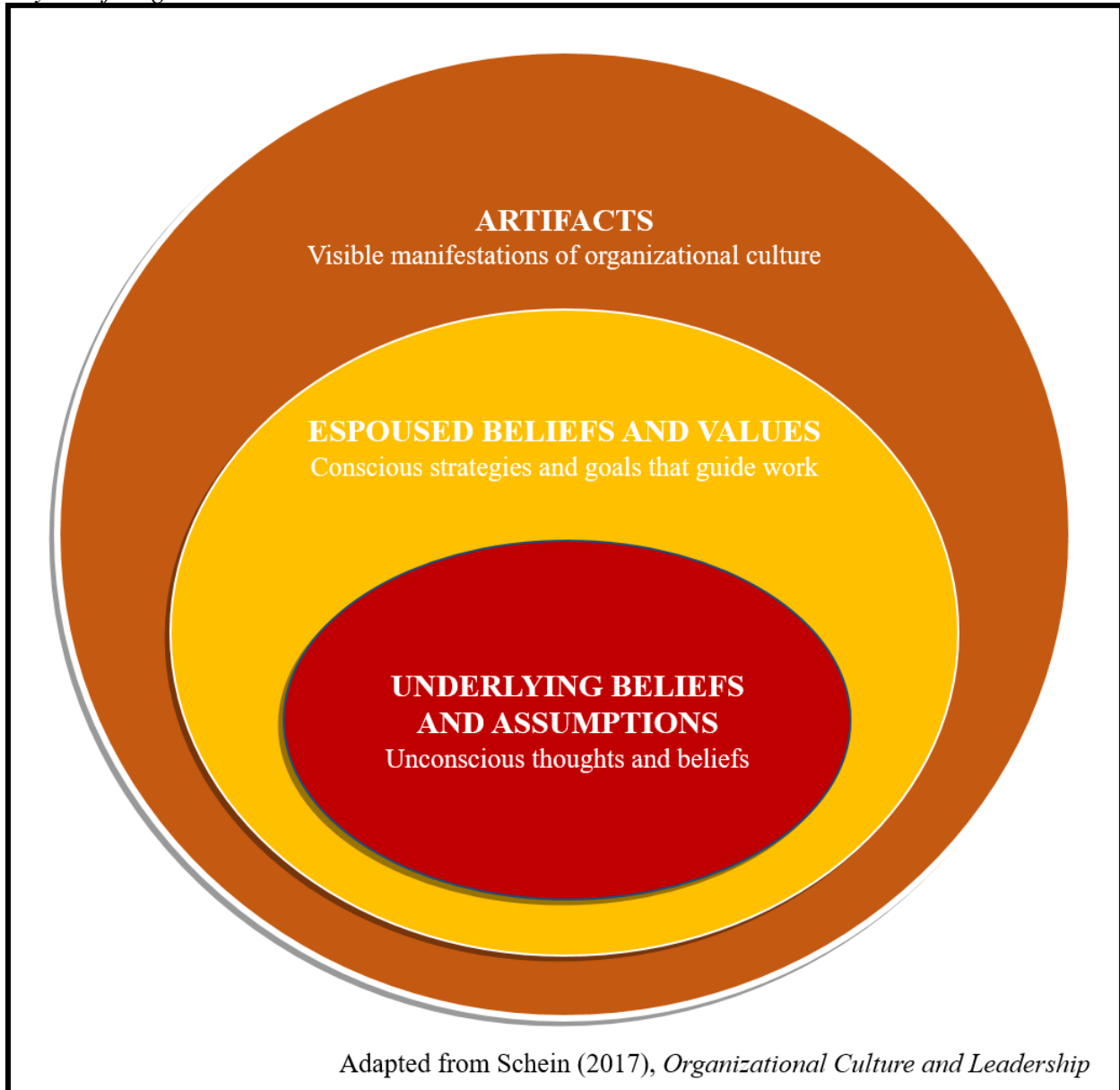
Conceptual Framework

This research study was examined against the concept of organizational culture. As Schein (2010) noted, culture defines leadership, and leaders must become aware of the culture of the organization; otherwise, that culture will manage the leader. Understanding organizational culture is critical to the success of the leader (Schein, 2010). Even at a small college or universities, multiple layers of culture compete for presence and power. In an organization, power influences how resources are allocated (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977), and the small, private college or university is quite dependent on securing those external resources. In the 1980s, culture moved from being a concept and descriptive term to being connected to progress and improvement in organizations (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Schein, 1985). Culture defines the assumptions and manner in which work will be accomplished within an organization, and leaders must understand culture to understand the organization (Schein, 2010). Culture in organizations is, in one definition, “taken-for-granted, shared, tacit ways of perceiving, thinking, and reacting” and “is one of the most powerful and stable forces operating in organizations” (Schein, 1996, p. 231). Schein’s definition of culture evolved to include the external influences requiring internal assimilation in problem solving situations (Schein, 2010, 2017). Further development led Schein (2017) to add and emphasize that culture is a product of a group’s accumulated shared learning through their shared experiences.

In *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein (2017) outlined three levels in which organizational culture is divided. On a surface level, *artifacts* act as those parts of organizational culture which are easy to see and hard to understand. Beneath artifacts, *espoused beliefs and values* are the strategies, goals, and philosophies that people in an organization use to consciously guide their work. At the center of this model rests *basic underlying assumptions*,

those unconscious beliefs, thoughts, or feelings guiding the actions of those within the organization. Figure 1 represents the layering of the three elements of organizational culture.

Figure 1
Layers of Organizational Culture



Schein noted that the culture is often thought of as a behavioral output, but, over time, organizational culture will influence the thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of team members.

Culture implies stability, a breadth and depth of assumptions tied to beliefs and behaviors, and integration to tie the organization together (Schein, 2017).

Schein (2017) observed the culture of an organization is influenced by external environments and managing internal integration from the external influences. Key stakeholders influence the operations of an organization, and those organizations face challenges to reach consensus on mission and strategy, goals, means, measurement, and reparation strategies (Schein, 2017). He developed this idea further:

Studies of effective organizations have always shown that successful performance and effective learning hinge on not separating these two dimensions, thinking instead in terms of ‘socio-technical systems,’ in which the external and internal are at least aligned if not integrated. (Schein, 2017, p. 8)

In addition, members of the organization must adapt to and integrate varying internal elements that are relationship driven. Schein’s focus on internal integration was people-centric, understanding that relationship building can drive group formation and productivity.

In examining how Schein’s theory of organizational culture influences innovation, Hogan and Coote (2014) noted that the distinct layers of organizational culture can mediate how an organization adapts to innovative methods of change. Most notably, Hogan and Coote found that when an organization sought to elicit a culture of innovation, the layers of organizational culture had to reflect the atmosphere of innovation. Where disconnected experiences existed between artifacts and espoused beliefs and values, there was a lack of innovation. Cole and Martin (2018) researched how the three layers of organizational culture influenced the success of an athletic team. They found that the flatter the organizational structure, the more likely leadership was able to create alignment in culture from artifacts to espoused values and into underlying assumptions.

Smaller colleges tend to have fewer layers of structure than more the more complex larger institutions, positioning the president to influence cultural alignment with mission and strategy.

Summary

Small, private colleges are at risk for closure because they are yearly dependent on the income gained from net tuition revenue. The risk has been aggravated by the projection that college closures will only increase as the diversity of the college student population changes and the delivery methods for instruction move away from traditional higher education. Less selective institutions struggle to prove the value of their price point when state universities offer more options for a lower cost. Many Division III institutions are classified as small and private, where significant portions of the undergraduate population participate in intercollegiate athletics (Beaver, 2014; NCAA, 2019). If competing on a team and continued participation in their sport was not an option, how many of those student-athletes would still choose those colleges? How many would not choose to attend a four-year college at all?

This chapter outlined research that proved the benefit of athletics in enrollment and finance contributions, but the research failed to address larger picture of how athletics contributes to the viability and culture of small, private NCAA Division III colleges and universities. Gaps in research exists limiting knowledge of how athletics influences strategic goals and institutional mission. An institution could certainly add sports and increase their enrollment as a result; however, institutional leadership must examine if this approach creates a long-term gain or a temporary fix. While the literature robustly examined the impacts on the student-athletes, a present need exists in understanding how athletics fits into the strategic imperative of the small, private college. Those decisions, largely, rests in the hands of institutional presidents who set the strategy. This study sought to examine how institutional

presidents perceive and strategically direct the role of athletics in contributing to the viability and culture of the small, private Division III institution. Utilizing the lens of organizational culture, the perceptions of presidents will be analyzed to understand the importance of athletics in relationship to the viability and culture of the small, private college.

Next, Chapter Three will review the research methodology used in this project. The chapter begins with a description of the role of the researcher, epistemological stance, and a positionality statement. From there, Chapter Three will outline the research design, sampling strategy, and ethical consideration. Data collection techniques and sources will follow, with a data analysis procedure section describing coding processes. Finally, Chapter Three will define the process for trustworthiness in data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Small, private colleges deliver education to more than a million of students in valuable yet different ways from other colleges and universities. From small class sizes to the ability to make an immediate impact within campus life, small, private colleges present an important diversity in how higher education is delivered in the United States (Astin & Lee, 1972; Docking & Curton, 2015). As public and private colleges continue to compete for a shrinking pool of traditionally aged students (Grawe, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), the small, private college must examine its methods for recruiting and retaining students who can pay the price of tuition. Many less selective colleges are enrollment, not endowment driven, meaning they are annually dependent on the tuition paid from enrolled students (Docking & Curton, 2015; Eide, 2018). Division III of the NCAA does not allow for the awarding of athletic scholarship, which appeals to the financial situations of many small, private colleges. Student-athlete populations comprise a critical mass of the undergraduate enrollment at these small, private Division III institutions (Beaver, 2014; NCAA, 2019).

In small, private colleges, fewer layers of organizational structure exist, resulting in executive-level staff being aware of the daily functions of the institution. Athletics also reports through various lines at different institutions, through the enrollment division, through student affairs, operations, business and finance, or even as a direct report to the institutional president. The president of a small, private college has oversight of institutional functions and vision for the college or university; therefore, this study examined the perceptions of presidents of small, private, Division III colleges to answer:

- How do presidents of small, private, Division III colleges and universities perceive the role of athletics on their campus?
- How do institutional presidents view the influence of athletics on mission and strategic goals?

This chapter begins with a review of the research design and a statement on the epistemological stance of the researcher. Following a review of the researcher's role and positionality, this chapter presents an explanation of ethical considerations, outlines sampling strategies to recruit research participants, and provides an overview the data collection process. Finally, the data analysis process will be detailed, and trustworthiness measures will be discussed.

Role of the Researcher

This research project was conducted individually. As the principal, and only, investigator, I identified possible participants, arranged interviews, conducted data collection, analyzed the data, and wrote the findings. I used a transcription service due to the timeliness and volume of interview data collected.

Epistemology

The epistemological stance of the researcher allows readers to understand the lens through which knowledge is perceived, defined, and known (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) described how philosophical beliefs of knowing are applied through interpretive frameworks. Constructivism, also known as social constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2018) or interpretivism (Mertens, 2015), relies on the belief that people build meaning out of their experiences in the world. Within constructivism, researchers believe that people ascribe subjective meaning to their experiences. Those meanings are often developed through an

individual's interaction with others and through the context in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Constructivism acknowledges that researchers are not impartial, removed observers from the data collection process; instead, constructivism "means that [the researcher's] values shape the very facts that they can identify" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). When first exposed to the concepts of epistemology, I quickly associated with constructivism. I believe people are significantly impacted by the context of their environments, and those environments influence how they understand their experiences and reality. I make meaning out of my experiences as a manner in which to process the extent of their importance.

As I have continued through the process of researching and examining why I believe and behave the way I do, I am also drawn to the pragmatic position. As a practitioner in higher education, I value the practical application of research. Creswell and Poth (2018) align pragmatism as focused on outcomes. For pragmatists, multiple options and systems exist, and the researcher should aim to choose the methods that most properly suit their research purposes. Pragmatists are focused on conducting research in the manner that best speaks to the research problem being addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My pragmatic approach focused on the need to understand solutions for problems I face in working at the small, private college. Within the context of this research study, the pragmatic position drew me to interpret measurable actions and outcomes of the case participants to be used in other collegiate settings.

Positionality

I am a white, middle-class female, coming from the majority cultural groups in most measurable demographics. As the younger of two children, from a married, two-parent household, I grew up in the southeast of the United States as a super competitive, though not exceptionally talented, athlete. My interests in examining the role of athletics at small, private

Division III institutions evolved from my work experience. I was not a college student-athlete. With the exception of college intramurals, my competitive career ended in high school. I have worked in student affairs at Division I, II, and III colleges and universities for over 17 years, with the majority of my time focused at two different small, private Division III colleges. While working at Division I and II institutions, I observed student-athletes sacrifice other involvements to meet the demands of their athletic commitment. The competitive nature of sports, and the camaraderie which ensues from the team, drew my research interest to college athletics. Early in my career, I read a book chapter from E. G. Bogue (2002), asserting students connected to an institution are more likely to persist, more likely to find satisfaction, and more likely to graduate. Bogue's point has lived, quietly but ever-present, in the back of my mind as I have started research into the value of intercollegiate athletics. The connections to teammates and coaches is a critical part of the student-athlete's life. My research evolved to understand how a college president could leverage the draw to competition and camaraderie to improve the stability and viability and culture of their institution.

My interest in studying how athletics influences the small, private Division III institution was driven by my work with student-athletes, the coaches of their sports, and the desire to understand why college athletics matter. Some of my best friends worked as college coaches on the Division I, II, and III levels, and we regularly engaged in conversations about the intertwining of college athletics, academic success, and student engagement. As a student and an educator, I was also aware of the financial and organizational struggle for small, private colleges. My experience led me to believe that a robust and well-rounded college experience informed a student about their passion, which leads to a more meaningful student experience and post-college life. In examining how athletics influenced the mission and values of a small, private

Division III school, I also understand the negative perceptions of athletics as an enrollment and retention strategy. Too many recruits for one team equals dominant sub-cultures or, individually, frustration with not enough playing time.

My office staff intentionally worked with coaches to help balance time commitments and manage conflicts for the student-athletes. I regularly worked first-hand with students, and I have witnessed student-athletes at their best in winning a national championship, being honored for their sportsmanship, acceptance into medical school, and being the first in their family to graduate college. Conversely, I have seen student-athletes in the low moments of conduct violations, tension with teammates and coaches, injuries, and struggling to manage their commitments to academics and their sport. Student-athletes spend considerable time on their sport, and coaches devote well more than 40 hours per week to support those student-athletes.

I have also witnessed the power and position of the college president at a small, private college. I have witnessed a previous president have to lay off a dozen employees due to budget constraints, and I was empowered by a different president to examine and change the way staff critically worked to deliver services to students. Presidents can set the tone for culture and direct vision and mission, and I recognize the importance of getting the faculty and staff in alignment to achieve an institution's strategic goals.

My pathway into working in higher education was not intentional. I studied communications for my bachelor's degree and immediately transitioned into my master's degree in business administration. My educational background in business developed my mindset towards understanding the budget and finance side of college operations. Finally, I continued to reflect on my position through this research, with mindfulness towards the biases I might possess for and against the role of athletics at the small, private college.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research seeks to understand the experiences of participants and to construct meaning of those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Under the umbrella of qualitative research, the research design of case study answers the “how” and “why” questions of contemporary situations, where the researcher has little to no control of the actions of the participants (Yin, 2018). Described as “iterative, yet linear approach” (Yin, 2018, p. 1), case study examines the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and the context in which the phenomenon exists.

This research was explored as a multiple case study. Case studies are first and foremost a *case* to be examined and fully understood (Stake, 2005). Cases are bounded, defined by specific parameters, and provide a rich and in-depth examination of the situation in its real-world context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described case study design as an inductive strategy with the researcher serving as the primary data instrument to collect and analyze data. Also, case studies often rely on supporting documentation and observation to provide a deeper understanding of the situation being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case studies feature “the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis, and... relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 2018, p. 15).

Stake (2005) noted the researcher must treat each case as its own entity. For this research project, each president was a case and the institution provided context for the research. The president of the small, private college sits in a leading role, positioned to directly influence every area of college life. Because athletics reported through varied avenues at different institution, the

president's position yielded the most consistent understanding of how athletics influenced institutional life. While each college and university held varied missions and practices for operations, the president's purview of operations remained fairly consistent. As such, the president, and not the institution, was the case.

Yin (2018) considered single and multiple case study to be variants within the same framework. Multiple case study data is often considered more robust and compelling (Yin, 2018). Multiple case study was the appropriate design for this study because each president was a bounded case. Multiple case studies allowed the researcher to examine presidents from different backgrounds and institutions to see how similarities and differences existed in their use of athletics to affect strategic mission and goals.

Interviews with institutional presidents served as the primary instrument for data collection. Data collection was supplemented by document collection, consisting of public information and non-published reports. This research project hinged on the perceptions of college and university presidents; thus, interviews were critical to understand how athletics influenced institution viability and impacted campus culture. In addition, the scope of the role of the president of the small, private college placed them in a position to understand how athletics influenced issues of enrollment, budget, and student experience. The president sat in a role of authority to share institutional data that might not be public but supported their perceptions. The collection of documents served as artifacts for the case studies. Document analysis provided context for president's perspectives and added dimensions of research to seek alignment or incongruity with interview analysis.

Sampling

This study interviewed five college presidents, using both purposive and snowball sampling strategies (Goodman, 1961; Patton, 2002). College presidents were the primary research subject because they were responsible for setting strategic mission and goals, and they held operational oversight of the institution. Fewer organizational layers existed at small, private colleges, allowing for college presidents to have impact and knowledge of day-to-day operations. Their unique position allowed the college president to understand the interconnectedness of athletics with various departments and divisions across campus. Leveraging previous relationships with college presidents, the researcher purposively requested participation from five presidents. Two presidents agreed to participate. Two declined participation, and one failed to respond.

While purposive sampling was the first and primary means, snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961; Patton, 2002) allowed for the first participants to provide recommendations for other possible participants. The benefit of snowball sampling in this research project was that a direct referral from one college president to another improved the likelihood of response from the participant. In addition, a direct referral laid the foundation for the participant to trust the researcher with sensitive information. Research participants were solicited through email requests and personal connections of the researcher. Through the first two participants, three additional presidents were identified as potential participants. Through email, new participants were recruited and agreed to participate in the research project.

One criteria for potential college presidents was for each president to have led at their current institution for at least 12 months, in order to demonstrate institutional understanding. Also, the institution must have been classified as small or very small (less than 3,000 students in

enrollment), private, non-profit, NCAA Division III member, and less-selective on an academic level. In total, over 250 colleges fit these parameters (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; NCAA Division III Manual, 2018). The number of institutions fitting the criteria (small, private, non-profit, and Division III) were more prevalent in the Midwest and Northeast regions of the United States, with the Southeast having a critical amount as well (Nation Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). This study initially aimed to interview presidents from different geographical regions of the United States; however, the limitations imposed as a result of COVID-19 restricted the researcher to participants from the Southeastern United States.

Ethical Considerations

Patton (2015) asserted that the trustworthiness of the data is directly related to the credibility of the researcher. In addition to obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval before conducting research, this researcher understood that ethical considerations must be tended to before, during, and after the data collection phase (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each participant authorized consent to record interviews and participated in a voluntary capacity. Participants were not compensated. Participants were coded with pseudonyms to protect their identity and the name of their institution. In addition, this researcher offered transparency to participants. The researcher did not assess any conflicts of interest. Finally, the researcher did not use current or previous places of employment to eliminate the projection of personal feelings and perceptions into that case.

While each president assumed a risk by trusting the researcher to provide a cloak of anonymity, each participant also had the chance to contribute in a research project that may benefit their institution. The risk incurred by the president, for themselves and their institutions, was not taken lightly by the researcher; however, an understanding of how athletics can be used

as a strategy to help with enrollment, budget, and student satisfaction for the small, private college could provide strategies to similar institutions that might be struggling with enrollment and budget challenges. As mentioned earlier, small, private colleges deliver higher education to a significant segment of the student population. Small, private colleges are positioned to connect with students who want and need smaller classes and more direct contact with faculty and staff. Some students and parents feel as though they or their student could get lost or not be successful at a large institution; thus, the structure of the small, private provided an engaging enrollment opportunity.

Should a breach of confidentiality have occurred, the researcher would have openly notified participants in a timely manner. To address concerns of data security, all transcripts were stored within double password-protected digital document storage. Only the principal investigator had access to the document storage.

Data Collection Techniques and Sources

Yin (2018) noted that the researcher needed sufficient access to the data in order to provide potential answers to the research questions. For this multiple case study research project, data was primarily collected through two semi-structured interviews conducted for approximately 90 minutes. In addition to interviews, various documents were collected, including published and non-published reports. Presidents were provided an outline of interview questions prior to the interview. Due to safety concerns and travel restrictions, interviews took place over video chat platforms of Zoom or WebEx. Interviews were recorded in audio format for transcription purposes. In addition, the researcher used networking to solicit participants, which helped to build rapport with the presidents prior to the interviews.

The researcher utilized a transcription service while soliciting a non-disclosure agreement from the service provider. Following that, the researcher reviewed and edited the transcript for errors or words that were not able to be transcribed. This allowed this researcher to re-engage with the transcript. Both levels of transcription occurred within two weeks of the interview.

In addition to interviews, document review and analysis added another layer to the data collection plan. Supporting documents, including enrollment reports, finance reports, retention statistics, and student-athlete data were collected. The researcher secured public documents, such as student handbooks, mission statements, and enrollment data, through institutional publications and federal reports. Non-public informational documents were solicited from the president during the interview. These types of documents included student-athlete recruitment goals, retention strategies, board reports, internal memos, and budget plans.

Each layer of data collection, from interviews to document analysis, added depth to the richness of the case. From a research design and data collection point of view,

A case study copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis, and as another result relies on multiple sources of evidence, data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. (Yin, 2018, p. 15)

Case studies require rich and descriptive data in order to be able to answer the contextually distinct situation that answers the research questions. Conducting two in-depth interviews and document analysis created a case with varied collection methods to create a rich and thick portfolio of data.

Instrumentation

Data collection occurred in two deliberate forms for this research study: interviews and document review. Interviews provided a rich dialogue of how the president perceived the role of athletics at their institution. Yin (2018) described interviews as one of the most important sources of evidence within a case study. Layering document analysis provided depth into understanding how Schein's (2010) three layers of culture complement or contradict the president's perceptions.

Interviews are micro exchanges with people that can provide a more substantial, macro, understanding of the situation being studied (Brinkman, 2018). The intensive interview relies on research participants who have first-hand knowledge of the topic, is based on the participant's experiences, and adapts to follow up on answers that lead to more fully answer the research questions (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher must also be aware that the interview is an interpretation of the subject's perception of their experience, where the researcher must be aware of bias and reflexivity from the participant (Yin, 2018).

Interview protocols were developed by the researcher to provide a foundation of consistency among the cases being studied. An outline of interview questions was sent to participants, via email, one week prior to the interview. The second interview provided time and space to follow up on answers from the first interview, and typically occurred two weeks after the first interview. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, with open-ended questions that aimed to generate content which provided the option for probing follow-up questions. The first interview included questions of the participant's background, the structure of their current institution, and the role of athletics at that college. The first interview then went on to probe the president's perceptions on how athletics influences enrollment and finances. The second

interview began with a summary of the first interview. Then, the second interview focused on how the president engaged with faculty and the board of trustees, specifically regarding decision making and perceptions of athletics. In addition, the participants answered questions about how athletics influenced student satisfaction, retention, and campus culture.

Interviews were conducted for a purpose, to produce knowledge, and to generate descriptions to answer the “how” and “why” questions (Brinkman, 2018). The protocols for the first and second interviews are included in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. The interviews were audio recorded to allow the researcher to engage in active listening to the participant’s answers, which generated follow-up questions.

In addition to interviews, data collection was guided by document gathering. Document collection is stable, specific, and unobtrusive (Yin, 2018). Documents were first cataloged and labeled with the pseudonym given to the case. This included published documents collected through internet searches and research into the institution. In addition, unpublished documents provided by the president or institution were included. The protocol for collecting and catalogs documents is included in Appendix C. The analysis process for documents is discussed in the next section.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data collection is the precursor to data analysis. As Wolcott (1994) observed, the challenge is not how to get the data, but what to do with the data once the researcher has it. The analysis phase of research included developing description of the data, analyzing the data, and interpreting the data (Wolcott, 1994). The following steps were utilized to produce high-quality data analysis: attend to all of the evidence, investigate all plausible rival interpretations, address

the most significant aspects, and demonstrate familiarity with the prevailing thinking and discourse about this topic (Yin, 2018).

Individual case study reports were written after completing the data collection of each case. Case study report protocol was considered before embarking on data collection, to focus the researcher on pursuing the collection of relevant data. Yin (2018) reminded researchers to have an adaptive posture to the protocol. Case study reports included pseudonyms for the president, a brief overview of the institution's setting, and a summary of documents collected. A vignette was developed for each case, and as such, each case study report included a description about the case and surrounding relevant information (Yin, 2018).

Interview transcription happened following case interviews. Audio files were shared with a transcription service and converted into Microsoft Word files. The transcriber identified illegible words for the researcher to review. The researcher reviewed the transcript, while listening to the audio file, to clarify and refine points of confusion. The researcher printed hard copies of transcripts for the first full read. Transcripts were reviewed first for overall content. Following the first read, the researcher began to highlight quotations that connected to the research questions, noting generalized codes in the margins. Coding occurred in a two-step process (Tracy, 2013). Primary codes answered the "what" related to the research questions. These first-level codes helped to focus attention on the action of what was being described. Following the initial reading of a transcript, primary codes and associated quotations were transferred into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, labelled as a coding workbook for each case. In addition, documents were analyzed and coded in a similar fashion for each case. Text within documents was highlighted and labelled with a primary codes. Similarly, those codes were transferred to the coding workbook, and noted as data collected from document analysis.

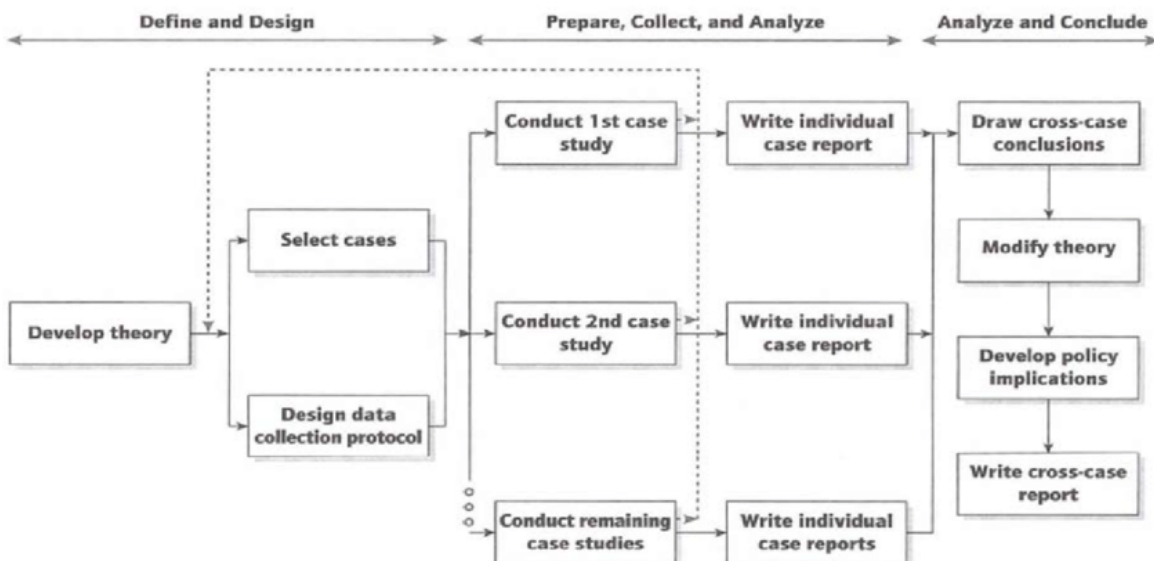
The second level of coding relied on organizing and synthesizing primary codes into secondary codes, grouping codes together based on shared ideas (Tracy, 2013). After eliminating redundancy in coding, unique codes and associated quotes were grouped into second level codes. Second level codes were then assessed, developed, and grouped into topics to represent overarching themes for each case.

Schein's (2017) theory of organizational culture informed the conceptual framework of this research project. Data was analyzed to attend to the three levels of organizational culture proposed by Schein: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying beliefs and assumptions. For the purposes of this research study, artifacts were collected through document analysis from each president studied. Espoused beliefs and values were expected to show through mission statements, athletic department goals of recruiting and fundraising, and similar strategic based, values-driven parts of institutional culture. Elements of espoused values were be collected through published and non-published document analysis and interview analysis. Finally, the researcher worked to unearth the basic underlying assumptions of each college or university president through in-depth interviews with each participant. As values became assumptions that developed and evolved over time, the researcher paid close attention to discovering the subtle information participants shared that wove into cultural traditions. During the coding process, the researcher noted data that connects to the conceptual framework of the research study. Through the coding process, the researcher worked to develop themes and categories. This was a highly

inductive process, meaning the researcher worked raw data into abstract concepts and themes that sought to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As noted in Figure 1, individual case reports were written following the completion of

Figure 1. Multiple-Case Study Procedure



Source: Yin, 2018

each case. The researcher completed all data collection before writing any case reports; however, the researcher analyzed data for one case and wrote that case report before moving on to the next case. Drawing on convergent evidence, each subsequent case report provided information for the next case (Yin, 2018). Yin went on to note:

Both the individual case studies and the multiple-case results can and should indicate how and why a particular proposition was demonstrated (or not demonstrated). Across case studies, the report should indicate the extent of replication logic and why certain cases were predicted to have certain results, whereas other cases, if any, were predicted to have contrasting results. (p. 57)

Following the development of case reports of all of the participants, the whole of the data was analyzed while focused on the conceptual propositions (Yin, 2018). Within the analysis process

for examining the whole of the cases, this study employed explanation building as an analytical technique. Explanation building is a type of pattern matching, describing the “how” and “why” sequences of actions or outcomes have occurred (Yin, 2018). This type of analysis suited this multiple-case study well because the research sought to understand how and why the studied presidents perceived the use of athletics at their institution.

Data Quality

In qualitative research, the search for trustworthiness and credibility of the research is of the utmost importance. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described how external reviewers of the research are ready to denounce the dependability of qualitative research due to the subjective nature of data collection and analysis; therefore, the researcher must deploy multiple strategies to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As a foundation for seeking credibility and dependability among the data collection and analysis, this study utilized triangulation of multiple sources of evidence. Yin (2018) urged utilizing several sources of data collection to provide the in-depth and rich analysis a case needs, while also allowing information to converge or diverge, yielding further inquiry. Following first interviews, the researcher summarized specific themes with the participants and outlined areas to examine for the follow-up interview. In addition, this study employed member checks (Creswell, 1994) to provide a chance for the participant to confirm or provide additional context to interviews.

Furthermore to provide additional means of trustworthiness, the researcher tracked the process of coding to allow for dependability and confirmability audits (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Tracking this process allowed the researcher the chance to retrace their process of developing themes. This provided the researcher the structured pattern to understand where their

interpretation aligned or diverged from the data at hand. A chain of evidence was maintained to prevent losing data and to allow the researcher to show the process of translating data into a finding (Yin, 2018). Finally, the researcher collected data to the point of saturation. In all cases, participants felt that athletics added value to their institution, with four of the five cases sharing significant overlap in theme. The remaining president led an institution that served a niche population, where the role of athletics was limited on campus. The researcher perceived data saturation occurred during the interviews with the fifth participant, as no new themes emerged.

Summary

This chapter outlined the method and design of a multiple case study research project to examine how the presidents of various small, private Division III college presidents perceive the role of athletics at their institution. Through semi-structured interviews with college presidents and document collection the researcher aimed to collect substantial and descriptive data to provide full context of the cases. How does each participant perceive the use of athletics as a component of enrollment, budget, and student satisfaction? This chapter described the process for data analysis through transcription, coding, and development of themes. Finally, the researcher discussed methods for developing trustworthiness with the data collection and analysis within the research.

Chapter Four will review the results and findings of the research. Descriptions of cases, presented through pseudonyms, will provide a thick and rich description of the collected data. Emergent themes from in the data will be presented as the collected data seeks to answer the research questions. Following the presentation of individual case reports, data was analyzed across the cases and the summary of shared themes is shared.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, the results of data collection and analysis of this multiple case study are presented. The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of small, private college presidents regarding the influence of athletics on institutional viability and culture. Five small, private college presidents were studied to understand their perceptions of the following questions:

3. How do presidents of small, private, Division III colleges and universities perceive the role of athletics on their campus?
4. How do institutional presidents view the influence of athletics on institutional mission and strategic goals?

The chapter will begin with an overview of the participants. Following the summary of participants, individual case analysis are presented. Each case was constructed of two interviews with the participant and included data analysis of published and unpublished documents. Cases were analyzed individually for emerging themes. Following individual case analysis, a case description was written, and, then, the thematic analysis was developed. After individual case analysis, the data were examined across all cases to assess areas of uniformity and incongruence. A cross-case analysis is offered after the individual cases. This chapter concludes with the summary of the findings from the data analysis.

The Cases

This study examined five presidents from four different states, all within the Southeastern United States. Each president led a small, private college that operated athletics through Division

III of the NCAA. Only one participant had previous experience as a president prior to their current presidential appointment. Table 2 charts elements of presidential history.

Table 2

Case Study Participant History

	Martin	Ford	Williams	Johns	Adams
College Student-Athlete	No	No	No	Yes	No
High School Student-Athlete	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
First Generation College Student	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Athletics as Direct Report	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
NCAA Leadership Exp.	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Athletic Conf. Leadership Exp.	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Previous work in Faculty	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Each participants earned at least three degrees, with four earning doctorates. Two presidents rose through the ranks of faculty; two ascended through student affairs and other administrative positions; one president served in ministry for more than 20 years and then worked in enrollment and student services for a short time. Two presidents had athletics reporting directly to them; three presidents positioned athletics to report through vice presidents of finance, operations, and college programs. Finally, the average tenure of presidency for participants was 14.5 years, a significantly higher time than the national average of 6.5 years (Soares et al., 2017).

Table 3 outlines the cases, noting the pseudonym for the participant, their tenure at their institution, distinctive features of the college, and the themes developed from data analysis for the case.

Table 3

Overview of Case Study Participants and Themes

Case Name	Current Presidency	Distinctive Features of Institution	Themes
------------------	---------------------------	--	---------------

Martin	8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment of 2,500, with approximately 1,250 traditional undergraduates • Historic connection to service and faith • 50% of undergraduate students participate in varsity level sports • 19 NCAA Division III sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hope is not a Strategy • Creating Profound Experiences • Athletics Adds Value
Ford	12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment of 1,500 with 1,000 as traditional undergraduates • Increasing diversity of student body, focused on marginalized populations • 50% of undergraduate students participate in varsity level sports • 16 NCAA Division III sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Thinking is More Than a Strategic Plan • The Caretaker of Dreams • Athletics Requires a Comprehensive Approach
Williams	15 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate enrollment of roughly 1,100 • Focused on a missions of faith, service, and wisdom • Drives enrollment through cohort recruitment • 50% of undergraduate students participate in varsity level sports • 18 NCAA Division III Sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Athletic Cohort Model • The Mission is Central • Athletics Creates a Healthier Culture
Johns	7 years (More than 20 years in total)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment of less than 1,000 • Focused on experiential education • Historic mission connected to the arts • 50% of undergraduate students participate in varsity level sports • 19 NCAA Division III sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Drives Decision Making • Mission and Culture Must Align with Athletics • Small, Private Colleges Need Student-Athletes
Adams	10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment of nearly 2,000, with 1,700 as traditional undergraduates • Serves a niche segment of higher education • All students participate in personal coaching and mentoring program • More than 95% of students participate in study abroad, undergraduate research, or internships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is about Growing • Understanding What Athletics Is and Is Not • The Strategic Plan is a Covenant with the Board

- Roughly 10% of undergraduate students participate in varsity level sports
- 10 NCAA Division III sports

The first case presented is President Martin, who ascended into the presidency through the faculty path of professor, department chair, dean, and provost. Describing himself as the opposite of athletic, Martin also held the responsibility for chairing the Presidents Council for the institution's athletic conference during the time of data collection. Next, President Ford is an enthusiastic college president who previously served as a vice president for student affairs and dean of students. An avid fan of college sporting events, Ford also represented her conference on the NCAA Division III's Presidents Council. Following Ford, President Williams is introduced. President Williams spent more than 20 years as a parish minister. After a four year stint in college administration at a small, private college, Williams became a college president who embraced utilizing athletics to increase his institution's enrollment. Next, President Johns described his perceptions of leading colleges that were struggling with enrollment and finances. Johns worked in various areas of college administration before his first presidential position. Now, in his third presidential appointment, his perceptions were guided by decades of top-level leadership and a passion for the small, private college. Finally, President Adams led a college that serves a niche population. Holding faculty positions, including provost, at various larger colleges and universities, Adams knew she only wanted to be president at her alma mater. While Adams perceived athletics as important, she also was keenly aware of how the mission of the institution held athletics in more restricted role than the other cases studied. The cases include introductions of the participant, their background, presidential experience, and the themes developed from data analysis.

Case: President Martin

President Martin served as the president of a small, private Division III college located in the Southeast United States. President Martin led the institution for more than 8 years and created steady enrollment growth through focusing on academic program development, the addition of sports, and enhancing residential opportunities.

Martin's Background

President Martin grew up in the Southeast United States. With three older brothers who became college professors, President Martin saw a trajectory into academic life from an early age. President Martin claimed no affiliation to being an athlete, recounting the one tennis lesson he took as a teenager. He was a fine arts major at a small, private college in the Southeast. He earned a master's degree in Europe before pursuing a PhD at a large, public institution in the Midwest. President Martin spent his entire professional career at one institution. He initially accepted a one-year faculty appointment, which became a tenured faculty position in the fine arts at a small, private college in the Southeast. After some time, he moved into leadership positions of division chair and, then, dean of the college of arts and sciences. President Martin declared his intentions for moving into leadership was to ensure that the fine arts were fairly represented when issues of budget and finances were being discussed. President Martin assumed the role of provost during his mentor's tenure as president.

Martin's Presidential Experience

Following a short-term president, President Martin was appointed to the leadership of his institution. He stated that he never had a desire to be the president of a college, yet felt as though he was successful during his tenure. He credited his mentor, who was the president of the institution for more than 15 years, for laying the groundwork of entrepreneurial thinking for

college operations. President Martin took advantage of leadership development opportunities from national and regional agencies. President Martin believed in hiring and developing a talented leadership team, getting out of the way, and trusting them to do the work.

Athletics reported directly to President Martin, and he met regularly with athletic leadership. Fielding 19 NCAA Division III sports teams, over 50% of undergraduates participated in athletics. Additionally, President Martin served as the chair of the president's council for his institution's athletic conference during the course of the data collection. Also worth noting, his term as leading the athletic conference coincided with the COVID-19 global pandemic, which led to different levels of restrictions for gatherings, permitted activities, and regulation by the NCAA and state mandates. Martin participated in two semi-structured interviews, which were coded and analyzed for themes. In addition, institutional documents were included in the data analysis. Documents included handbooks, mission statement, institutional values, the college's strategic plan, athletic department documents, and enrollment patterns. Through the data analysis, the following themes developed: "hope is not a strategy;" creating profound experiences; and athletics adds value.

Martin Theme 1: "Hope is not a Strategy"

A college's continued success relies on thoughtful planning and vision from a president. President Martin's experience of rising from faculty into presidential leadership at the same institution provided him with deep understanding of the college's culture. Confident in his leadership and guidance of his current institution, Martin noted that undergraduate enrollment increased by 50% during his tenure as president. He credited those gains to knowing the institution, leading in ways that protected the culture of the institution, and keeping focused on the future. Martin's approach to thoughtful planning was summed up when he said, "Hope is not

a strategy.” Too often, Martin felt, that colleges would hope that things would get better without engaging in honest assessment of strengths and liabilities of the institution. He viewed the mission and values of the college as sacred. While decisions were grounded through the mission and values, all functional areas of the college were reviewed for relevance and sustainability.

His leadership team systematically evaluated academic majors for relatability and demand, and Martin urged faculty from academic areas that had a low number of majors to revive the program or retire it. In addition to regular curricular evaluation, President Martin viewed a robust residential population as a way to build a strong foundation for a stable enrollment and budget. He also strategically added sports in an effort to remain relevant, grow enrollment, and find financial stability. Martin perceived that the landscape of higher education constantly evolved and changed. His vision for his institution’s continued relevance did not rely on “just hoping that things are going to get better or that enrollments are going to pick up next year.” President Martin leveraged his institutional knowledge and leadership skills to grow enrollment and put his institution on a stable financial foundation.

Martin believed his best approach to leadership was to surround himself with the most talented people in their areas of expertise and to stay out of the way. He held steadfast to his convictions of supporting his staff well, and empowered them to act in meaningful and deliberate ways. Martin was equally quick to assert that he worked for the institution, not individuals, and was not guided into making decisions that would compromise the future benefit of the college. He added:

I’m responsible for ultimately making a decision, but you can never have too many data points on which to make a decision. The more data points you have, the more informed

the decision is likely to be. And that's why I liked surrounding myself with really good people.

Martin, who spent his faculty career as an instructor in and advocate for the fine arts, showed acute ability to understand the measurements that led to a successful presidency. He could cite enrollment growth by percentage over his years as a leader, tracking growth back to decisions made in previous years to yield that increase. He discussed faculty and coaches who possessed unique fundraising ability that the institution leveraged for program development. In addition, Martin valued a conservative approach to budgeting, noting “my mantra is you tighten your belt during good times so that you don't have to during bad times.” Speaking on athletics, Martin noted, “Budgeting for athletics is not based on the numbers of student-athletes in the sports. We have a system in place where next year's budget is going to be this year's budget unless you can demonstrate a need for increase.” Different from other presidents in this study, Martin did not use bench goals as recruitment targets for coaches. Instead, he urged coaches to recruit to the needs of their programs, and often they recruited more student-athletes than Martin imagined his target numbers would have been.

Martin Theme 2: Creating Profound Experiences

Perhaps, in a comment that would be controversial to other academics, President Martin said that he did not think the curriculum of a college made that institution unique. He felt as though most history majors, for example, at most colleges took many of the same classes. Instead, Martin stated, programs that added value created a unique college experience for a student. He called it the chance to create profound experiences:

I think the D3 athletic experience is part of that added value. I know it is. But I also think it is things like our experiential learning program that I introduced. And, society has

found a wonderful way of minimizing opportunities for profound experiences and profound experiences can happen anywhere. They can happen in a classroom. They can happen in an advising session with the student advisor, they can happen on an athletic field or playing court. They can happen on the stage of a theatre production, but we're in the business of trying to help students have profound experiences.

Martin perceived the value of athletics as a high impact practice, and athletics accounted for roughly 50% of the undergraduate population. Martin was equally convinced that athletics was not the only high impact practice on campus. He worked to develop and maintain a strong fine arts program, and those majors maintained healthy enrollment. While Martin spoke of the importance of athletics, the college's press releases shone more light on the academic and artistic success of the institution. Fine arts students produced campus performances to add value to student life, and Martin did not see a strong crossover between fine arts majors with the student-athlete population.

Martin viewed connectivity and inclusion to be benefits of these profound experiences. "Affinity groups generally bear more fruit long-term, not only in giving to the institution, but just then connected with the institution." In addition, Martin discussed the relationships student-athletes established through their college experience. He noted relationships with coaches, other student-athletes, trainers, and athletic personnel were critical to the progress, retention, and graduation of student-athletes. Martin discussed how athletics created profound experiences by enriching campus life. He recalled a time when some business majors were disappointed by the student turnout at home basketball games. They took it upon themselves to create a basketball fan network among business majors. As they continued to show up and cheer for the basketball teams, more and more students joined. Martin remarked that these students out cheered the

cheerleading squad. Students leveraged their academic network to enrich student life through an athletic event.

For all of his love and appreciation for the value of athletics, President Martin was quick to declare he did not support the addition of football at his institution. He recognized that football could add numbers to enrollment, but Martin knew that football would not fare well at his institution. He commented, “Football doesn’t fit into our culture. And even amongst the board, I think there is an overwhelming majority of agreement on the board that football would completely undermine the success that we have experienced in our athletic programs.” Martin felt that football dominates the landscape of a college, “It takes away the attention, most of the financial resources, and the rest of the student-athletes are just sort of holding up the bag or the bowl, saying ‘please sir may I have another bowl of porridge.’” In addition, Martin expressed concern over traumatic brain injury for football players and the effect to campus culture. Martin believed that other sports and activities, like lacrosse and Greek letter organizations, both of which have colored pasts on college campuses, could be implemented within a college in a manner that adds meaningful experiences and provides value to the campus; however, Martin continued to express that he could not find a way to support football.

Martin Theme 3: Athletics Adds Value

President Martin labeled athletics as “the most important co-curricular activity” his institution provided. According to the athletic mission statement, “intercollegiate athletics are an integral part of the college’s overall educational program and contribute to the complete development of its students.” In addition to the experience the student-athletes have within their sport, Martin was adamant to acknowledge the academic success of the student-athletes:

And part of that student experience we haven't discussed is academic progress. And I'm real proud of the fact that every one of our athletic teams had an average GPA, spring semester, of 3.0 or higher. And that's something that I track regularly, and the student life committee of the board of trustees watches that regularly.

Martin noted the importance of coaches in the educational experience. He thought coaches were often overlooked for the value they add to the student-athlete's academic life. While coaches were critical for recruiting and enrolling student-athletes, many coaches also employed strategies to help student-athletes be present in class, engage actively in academic programs, and ultimately, graduate.

Martin met regularly with the athletic director, who reported directly to him, and the associate athletic directors. He noted that, "I enjoy working with the folks in athletics so much and the programs are so important to the success of the institution that I really would never want to abdicate being hands-on involved as I am now." Through his regular meetings with athletic leadership, Martin would assess the overall success of the athletic department when measured against institutional values and the athletic mission. One measurement of success was viewing how well students were retaining through programs. Retention could be attributed to a variety of things, including roster size, playing time, winning versus losing, and the experience a coach created for the team members. When considering student-athlete satisfaction, Martin stated, "So roster size is probably the area that I would consider to be the greatest challenge to a student-athlete's satisfaction. And, of course, nobody wants to be part of a losing program." The mission statement of the athletic department reinforced Martin's comments about prioritizing educational experience to be complementary to that of the athletic pursuit. The athletic department viewed its

role to provide direction and motivation for students to grow in academic, athletic, and social pursuits.

Martin Summary

President Martin engaged his campus from a confident position of understanding the mission, values, and culture. He thoughtfully planned and implemented practices to grow and, then, stabilize enrollment to make his institution viable for future decades. Martin utilized the ability of athletics to recruit and retain student-athletes as a foundation for enrollment growth. Recognizing the importance for a student to have profound and meaningful experiences, Martin acknowledged the role that athletics added in this arena. Coaches and athletic administrators were intricately involved in creating meaningful experiences, and they are too often overlooked or underappreciated for their role. Ultimately, President Martin saw athletics as a high value investment, yielding strong returns for student enrollment, budget, and overall student experience.

Case: President Ford

President Ford presided over a small, private Division III college located in the Southeast United States. She has been the president for more than 12 years, and this was her first presidential appointment. During her leadership, her institution focused on innovative measures to drive student enrollment and engagement.

Ford's Background

President Ford was a first generation college student. Self-admittedly, she was an average high school student who did not get in to her first choice college. As the child of a coach, she was a high school student-athlete, but transitioned to being a supportive fan when in college. President Ford attended a small, private college in the Midwest for her bachelor's degree, where

she found opportunities for engagement through student life and flourished academically. Following her undergraduate degree, she earned a master's degree at a large, public, research institution. Immediately following her master's degree, President Ford accepted a job as the dean of students at a small, private college in the Southeast. During her tenure as dean of students, she was tasked to help fix other functional areas that were poorly performing, including enrollment and financial aid. In time, she was promoted to executive vice president. President Ford was encouraged by her institution's president to pursue a doctorate, eventually earning a doctorate in higher education from an Ivy League institution.

Ford's Presidential Experience

President Ford sees herself as a utility player, able to adapt to the challenges around her. She focuses on strategic thinking, not just strategic planning, as a president. In her tenure as president, she nurtured strong community involvement, focused on building relationships across the campus, and implemented a mission to produce students who were facilitators for constructive change in their communities. She invited first year students to her house for small group dinners on an annual basis. President Ford believed in surrounding herself with a strong leadership team and trusted them to do their jobs well.

Athletics reported directly to President Ford. President Ford's institution offered 16 varsity level Division III sports. In addition, they competed at a high level in other non-traditional, non-conference supported sports. Each athletic team had a faculty representative. Nearly 50% of undergraduate students competed in varsity level athletic sports. Additionally, President Ford served on the NCAA Division III President's Council. Ford participated in two semi-structured interviews. In addition, institutional documents were collected and analyzed. Documents collected included strategic plans, enrollment and retention reports, athletic

handbooks, NCAA reports, and press releases. Through interview and document analysis, President Ford articulated several central points: strategic thinking is more than a strategic plan; the caretaker of dreams; and athletics requires a comprehensive approach.

Ford Theme 1: Strategic Thinking is More Than a Strategic Plan

President Ford was attracted to the value of the small, private college through her undergraduate experience. While she saw many presidents of small, private colleges ascend through as faculty or through the ministry, Ford brought her experience in various operational areas of the college to create her leadership philosophy. As a leader, Ford recognized her strength was to bring the best out of people. She valued building a strong leadership team, saying “I know the importance of surrounding myself with a lot of talent.” She built an environment of trust, clear expectations, and consistent communication about the institution’s purpose. Early in her presidency, Ford was asked about her strategic plans for the institution. She responded by focusing on listening to all constituent areas to understand varying needs and desires.

Shrugging off the phrase strategic plan in favor of strategic thinking, President Ford aligned the strategic thinking of the institution to serve as its vision. Strategic thinking is active. To her, a plan sat in a drawer and gathered dust. Ford challenged her leadership team to develop the habit of integrating strategic thinking into daily and weekly habits. She remarked, “I think the biggest way that you help people think strategically and not just get focused on a plan is making certain one that the planning that's happening is ongoing.” Ford noted how critical consistent communication was to cultivating strategic thinking across and throughout her institution. Whether to correct a path of decision making or to reinforce the culture of strategic thinking, Ford said that she felt like she regularly repeated herself. “You have to, because until other people are saying it, they're not hearing it. People aren't receiving the message.” Ford’s relational

approach to leadership and her desire to offer extensive trust to her leadership team enabled her to be a regular active listener. This made her keenly aware of times when the values, vision, and mission did not connect to all levels of the college. Ford knew the importance of her planned strategy weaving through all offices and layers of college life, and spent significant time focused to ensure the message was consistent.

At the time of data collection, Ford launched her third distinct strategic plan. She crafted a dynamic plan that empowered vice president to take the lead in one of four areas. Athletics had a seat at the table in each of those areas. While Ford posited athletics and student-athletes as integral to the operations and sustainability of her institution, the strategic plan does not speak of athletics in any direct manner. Instead, Ford noted how athletics integrates into all areas of the college's strategic plan. For instance, consider the financial portion of the plan: The athletic director worked with the development office to identify how athletics planned and executed fundraising opportunities, both for targeted giving to teams and unrestricted giving to the institution.

As she reflected directly on the nature of athletics, Ford noted that athletics was the reason they recruited so many students to a small, private college. Even as she led her institution to conservative fiscal action and innovation in academic experiences, Ford saw how critical athletics remained to her institution:

But without athletics, let's say we got word that in two years we could not have any athletics, we would really have to pivot to being a completely different institution. I'm not sure. I'm really not sure how we could be viable.

With more than 50% of students participating in athletics, Ford wondered if the institution could attract and retain similar numbers of students if athletics was not part of the campus involvement and culture.

Ford's experience included decision making for the institution at the athletic conference and in serving on the NCAA Presidents Council. Her work with the Presidents Council helped her to critically and strategically think about the issues impacting athletics and student-athletes. From considerations on eligibility and the payment for an athlete's likeness to policy and governmental interference, Ford said she gained significant appreciation for the structure of the NCAA. College presidents regularly examined what matters are most pressing and require guidance from the overarching organization. On a more regular basis, Ford noted that she interacts with athletics daily. Sometimes, it was meeting with a head coach for a final interview. Other times, Ford attended many home sporting events, and met regularly with her athletic director. More recently, participation in athletic conference subcommittees and regular conference meetings grew in importance.

Ford Theme 2: The "Caretaker of Dreams"

President Ford found a home in the small, private college. From that experience, she created a student-centric vision and leadership philosophy. While being student-centered, she was also knowledgeable and well versed to lead in different functional areas of the college. Her varied experiences positioned her to see the how the college can change the future for a student:

I often say we're caretakers of dreams. Because so many of our students have been underdogs, they're discovering their dreams for the first time. And then it's the beautiful part we get to help them develop and live out those dreams.

This philosophy, holding up the dreams of the students, guided the leadership and vision President Ford gave her institution. In reflecting of the importance of athletics, she remarked, “I think having been a product of smaller, private, higher education, athletics has been such an integral part of the student life experience.” Ford believed that athletics created a great sense of belonging, where every student-athlete is part of a group.

Furthermore, the atmosphere of inclusion allowed athletics to positively impact the campus community. “Athletics adds so much vitality, spirit. I'm just, as I think about the average student, that's not an athlete. I think [athletics] gives them a source of pride.” Ford acknowledged that she heard occasional complaints about the college being too focused on athletics; however, she believed the benefits athletics provided to the institution outweighed the costs. She felt most students were really proud of the athletic program. Supported by the athletic department’s mission statement, student-athletes were driven to make a difference in the local community by volunteering with local organizations, where the college was invested in developing long-term relationships between sports teams and community partners. Ford remarked,

We have a very deep rooted investment in helping our students go out and be catalyst for positive change, whether they're leading, whether they're serving it's about how they can go and really influence positive change, where as you are extremely relational driven we are very known for strong community engagement.

Ford noted that students must engage around the mission of the institution in order for them to find fulfillment at the institution. Her leadership set the tone to create the opportunities for involvement, and it filtered down into different areas of the college. The athletic director used both the values of community involvement and inclusion for the coaches and student-athletes.

Athletics also operated under a one team philosophy, noting that no one team deserves preferential treatment over another.

President Ford compared athletics to the front door of the college. For many of the college's students, athletics attracted them, engaged them, and kept them. The triangle of recruitment, enrollment, and retention is necessary for the viability of an enrollment driven small, private college. Ford saw athletics as integral to maintaining consistency for both the number of students enrolling each year and the net tuition revenue generated to fund the budget. While she did not spend a lot of time discussing the financial side of tuition revenue, Ford was as focused on the financial health of her institution as she was on the wellbeing of the students it served. An overall analysis of the institution's website and press releases shows a pattern of athletics serving as a complement to the overall mission of the institution, yet Ford described athletics as "the very fabric of the entire institution." Through this thought, Ford reiterated the chance to help students achieve their dreams. For many of those student-athletes, those dreams included being a college student-athlete.

Where athletics was the front door to the institution, it also became the point of connection. Athletics recruited a student, but then a faculty member could spark their intrigue into a subject where they never before had interest. Ford regularly invited students to her home for dinner with her family, and she recounted this story told to her:

There was this football player [at a recent dinner]. And he says, this is the most loving place I've ever been a part of. And I said, you're the first student in 13 years that used the word loving. Tell me why, where is that word coming from? How do you feel loved? And he said on the field, and he talked about his coaches. He talked about the

upperclassmen teammates. And, then, when he went into the classroom, he talked about a professor. For the first time, he said, I like being in a classroom.

Athletics created a sense of community for this student, and the student found a purpose in his classes. Recognizing the interconnectedness of those experiences motivated Ford to continue to lead her institution to care for the dreams of its students.

Ford Theme 3: Athletics Requires a Comprehensive Approach

Ford perceived the institution needed to embrace a comprehensive approach in leveraging athletics to develop students in the classroom, on the field, in the community, and prepare them for the years beyond their time as a student. She embraced athletics as a big draw for many of the institution's students. Ford recognized that athletics, along with other high touch involvements like theatre, served to recruit students, enhance their experience while at the college, and develop their overall preparedness for life after college. Beyond that development, Ford appreciated the community that student-athletes encountered, as she saw that community enrich the overall student experience.

President Ford recounted a letter she received from a parent of an international student. The letter expressed the father's gratitude for how the institution had so genuinely welcomed his son into the college's community, and his son felt as though he belonged to the family. The father named coaches and administrators who went out of their way to help the student know he belonged. "When you ask them what they love most about [our college] and they are student-athletes, often times they will immediately go to, I know I belong. I have a family." Coaches significantly influenced the sense of belonging. Coaches must balance the expansion of roster size and constraint of playing time to create positive experiences for students.

Ford recognized the level of influence coaches have on the experience of their student-athletes, and, at one point, referenced a lot of hand-holding with a team who had a bad coaching experience and several coaching changes in just a couple of years. A coach's ability to reflect the values of the institution and seek students who are the right fit to those values established their skill at recruiting. Ford believed every student-athlete is part of a group. "And the influence that coaches have on that group feeds the culture. It either reinforces it or it detracts from it." Regular accountability for coaches was critical for retention efforts where half of the enrollment was comprised of student-athletes. Ford relied on coaches to provide leadership and clear expectations to the teams. She saw student-athletes as the group most able to role model institutional values of inclusion and learning. Athletic teams were expected to excel in the classroom and on the field.

Ford spoke of how athletics may be the alluring force for many of her students, and she recognized how many of those students found a sense of pride in carrying the title of college athlete. Yet, she also drew a direction connection to how those same students found engagement in the classroom:

So, you know, it's a way that we get to help student-athletes greatest joys and passion just stay alive for them. And then what's so special is, oh, by the way, this other really beautiful thing starts to happen in a classroom. And nothing thrills me more.

Ford acknowledged that not everyone at the institution was supportive of athletics as a major draw for student enrollment. She also saw the ends, student engagement and development, justified the means.

Ford Summary

President Ford brought a positive attitude and an atmosphere of hope to her leadership. She was a strategic thinker who valued putting the student experience at the center of her mission. Her background of rising through the area of student affairs guided her instincts to carve out time for meaningful experiences with students. Ford was keenly aware of the annual dependency on steady enrollment figures to create a reasonable budget. She focused thinking to the future for academic and student engagement experiences that would attract students to her institution.

Ford centered the athletic experience without making it the mission or the strategic plan of the college; however, she doubted the viability of the institution if athletics was limited or eliminated in the future. Some of her doubts stemmed from the current conditions: higher education enrollment's changing demographics, the COVID-19 pandemic, and questions about the value of higher education. She also saw the small, private college as the place for many students to discover their dreams and find a community ready to help them feel included.

Case: President Williams

President Williams was the president of a small, private Division III college in the Southeast United States. He led his institution for more than 15 years, and this was his only presidential appointment. Enrollment almost doubled in Williams' tenure as president.

Williams' Background

President Williams grew up on college campuses as the child of a professor and college administrator. Williams stated that he absorbed the DNA of the small, private college through his youth, and he saw strong connections between the church and small, private colleges. President Williams was a high school athlete and an avid college intramural player, but he was not a

college student-athlete. He attended a large, public university in the Southeast for his bachelor's degree, followed by a master's degree at an Ivy League institution. Williams also, later, earned another master's degree at an elite private institution. His first vocation was as a parish minister, where he served for more than 20 years. A number of people prevailed on President Williams that he had a knack for college administration. He accepted an appointment at a small, private college in the Southeast to lead admissions and church relations. Quickly, his portfolio grew to include many of the functions of student services. After four years of work at his first college, he was nominated for and selected as the president of his current institution.

Williams' Presidential Experience

President Williams felt as though he instinctively understood a lot about the operations of a small, private college because of his childhood and father's experience. In addition, his experience as a minister connected to the missional foundation of a college of the church. President Williams believed in building a strong leadership team and worked to build consensus among constituents. He felt as though he best led from the middle, but took charge from out front when the situation called for it. President Williams built a strong leadership team. His leadership team operated with a high level of trust, enabling and empowering them to function efficiently and communicate effectively.

Athletics reported to the chief financial officer, who then reported to the president. President Williams viewed athletics as a cohort model, with the marching band and cheerleaders as cohorts and extensions of athletics. President Williams believed athletics to be an integral part of the liberal arts education. Offering 18 varsity level, NCAA Division III sports, more than 50% of undergraduates participated as student-athletes.

In addition to two semi-structured interviews, documents were collected and analyzed. Documents included strategic plans, mission statement, previous speeches, press releases, and athletics documents. Data analysis of President Williams' interviews and documents produced an alignment of themes: the athletic cohort model; the mission is central; and athletics creates a healthier culture.

Williams Theme 1: The Athletic Cohort Model

President Williams was a catalyst to grow enrollment and stabilize finances through his presidency. When assuming the role, his institution struggled to make ends meet. Enrollment was inconsistent, a previous president was not transparent with the board of trustees about financial matters, and the institution needed help to survive. Over his long tenure as the president, Williams saw enrollment nearly double. During that time, the institution added 10 sports and created a cohort based enrollment program. President Williams clearly asserted "our enrollment health is dependent upon athletics", and "athletics drives our financial model." Williams did not shy away from crediting athletics as a means to grow enrollment. In fact, he positioned the focus as a result of the location of his institution and the benefit that teams as peer groups provide for inclusion and connectivity. Within the strategic plan, Williams expressed how the college planned to sustain enrollment through cohort-based recruitment programs. The primary cohorts revolved around athletic teams, the marching band, and cheerleaders; the latter two which were created to support the football experience. Additional cohorts existed, including some with an acute academic or arts focus.

At the time of data collection, President Williams attributed more than 70% of incoming students to cohorts directly involved with athletics or the supportive cohorts of cheerleading and marching band. Football and the marching band dominated the numbers, as these groups each

total more than 100 students. When he communicated with potential donors or alumni, Williams said football was the conversation starter. He was able to lead a fundraising initiative to build a stadium for football and lacrosse. On football Saturdays, Williams lauded hosting anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 alumni, parents, students, and community members at the game, and the stadium only has about 3,000 seats. He spoke to football creating a culture of excitement on the weekends, and leveraged that excitement to engage potential donors for ongoing fundraising efforts.

Williams Theme 2: The Mission is Central

The mission of the institution drives the culture of the college. President Williams perceived that his leadership created a unique culture, one that leveraged cohort based recruitment model to yield a predictable and sustainable enrollment and retention. As he reflected on his leadership style, he said “If the people you lead can say, gee, that was a great idea we had, wasn’t it? Then, you’ve done your job.” Williams valued leading from the middle, as a way to build and cultivate followers, thus creating impactful change. He did not lead from a position of fear or simply through transactional approaches. Rather, Williams created a culture of trust and empowered people to act with authority.

And so I think being a parish minister, you know, I’m constantly saying to my staff you know, how does this reflect the mission of the college? You know, how does this, how do we, how does the decision we’re going to make, help us extend our advance, our strategic plan? You know, in other words, what’s our scripture here?

This enabled Williams to build a leadership team of trust and talent. He gave significant freedom to his leadership team to act and keep him informed. For example, athletics reported through the vice president who oversaw operations on campus. Williams perceived that particular vice

president possessed instinctive knowledge about athletics acted as an enrollment driver and budget stabilizer. In turn, the trust of that relationship enabled Williams to receive the guidance from the vice president about critical athletic decisions.

Williams strongly connected the foundation of the college to faith. As such, faith is the guiding point in the college's mission statement. Additionally, the mission focused on wisdom, exploring a rigorous academic program, and service, an extension of faith into the community. Williams' previous experience as a minister positioned him to shape the mission of the college around the importance of understanding calling and vocation. Reflecting on the mission, Williams said:

We doubled down on being a residential liberal arts college of the church. And we believe that there is a niche of students who cannot and will not succeed at a large public. We are going to help you think about the most important question in life, which is, "What am I called to be?"

The athletic department mission statement extended that sentiment by emphasizing student-athletes' achievements in competition were enhanced by striving for academic greatness in the liberal arts setting. Speaking on the integration of institutional mission, athletics, and academics, Williams stated:

And as we've had a chance to hire new faculty, I have the final interview with a new faculty hire. And when, when at the end, I talk about institutional mission, I talk about athletics as an avenue into the institution for a number of students who otherwise would not come here and otherwise would not have the opportunity for an excellent liberal arts education. That's kind of the way I interpret it. So we probably have now five full-time faculty who were at the institution before I came. So basically I've hired every faculty

member here. And so I've been able to, we've been able to build a culture of support among the faculty for student-athletes.

Longevity allowed Williams to enhance the church-related mission of the institution while also giving him the power to set the tone for athletics creating the foundation for enrollment increases.

Williams set the tone for an administration centered model of operations by creating a weekday schedule that protected times for three important arenas of campus life: academics, athletics, and chapel. The academic schedule took a three-hour break each weekday afternoon in a time set aside for athletic practices. Coaches were confined to that time area for practice, though games and travel occurred outside of that time frame. Williams commented that faculty appreciated this practice window because the faculty and student-athletes both know that class time and practice time were equally protected. Prior to this schedule, student-athletes often had a hard time of balancing a major with several afternoon labs and regularly attending practice. In addition, Williams spoke of protecting time for weekly chapel. He reported that significant portions of student-athletes were regularly involved in chapel services, and that he had to guard chapel from both coaches and faculty. Williams regularly engaged with faculty and coaches about the importance of creating an infrastructure that supported the different pursuits of the student, particularly when those efforts aligned with the institution's mission.

Williams Theme 3: Athletics Creates a Healthier Culture

While President Williams held the mission central to his decision making and leadership at the institution, his comments also connected how student-athletes created a healthier culture on campus. Williams saw the gains through varied areas of teams excelling in athletic

performance, the overall health of student body, student-athletes' increasing involvement in campus life, and the significant role that coaches play in the lives of many students.

Winning prevailed as a common expectation for Williams and his administration. He believed that winning created positive dynamics throughout campus, and he set clear expectations for coaches. Analysis through coaches' win-loss records demonstrated patience with new coaches, giving them a chance to develop and establish a culture that aligns with the college's mission and values. Williams thread the narrative of winning through sports to include success in alumni involvement, student life experience, and fundraising. He also firmly believed that winning yielded more stable recruitment and enrollment, which, in turn, produced predictable budgets.

As athletics grew, President Williams recognized the improvement to the overall health of the campus community. Students were engaged in more routine fitness, showed accountability to teams and coaches, documented less binge drinking, and students demanded healthier food choices. Additionally, Williams perceived that many of the athletic teams functioned similar to sororities and fraternities, striving to build supportive peer communities. In turn, those groups showed up to different events on campus and supported other peer groups. President Williams saw the athletic teams as setting the tone for creating inclusive experiences that brought the campus community together.

Coaches were critical to motivate their student-athletes to engage in campus life and cultural activities. Coaches communicated to students that attending and supporting peers was mutually beneficial, as there was reciprocity among peers in being present and creating positive community. Williams also acknowledged that at times, the camaraderie among teams resulted in both positive and negative influence on campus. He spoke of a women's sport team that excelled

in the classroom and struggled to abide by campus policies. Recognizing the desire for student-athletes to be role models, the institution adopted an athletic honor code to guide the actions of student-athletes. The adoption of this honor code emphasized Williams' notion that student-athletes carried significant influence on campus, and he wanted to guide that in a positive direction. Williams recognized the role of the coach to create a culture that accurately reflects the mission of the institution and the values of the athletic department within each sports team.

President Williams repeatedly credited coaches for their leadership in the lives of the student-athletes. Coaches must understand "athletics has to be integrated into every aspect of the college." This led coaches to balance time on sport and athletic development, academic experience, and mentoring student-athletes to get involved in campus life. Coaches created a mentally healthy team culture, where students want to spend time with each other. Williams also commented on the direct connection between a coach's influence and the playing experience of a student-athlete. He remarked, "We're constantly saying if we want to impact the culture of the campus or a segment of the campus, that our strongest advocates are our coaches." The leadership of coaches and athletic department staff must communicate and live out the mission of the institution for true cultural alignment to happen.

Williams Summary

President Williams used his experience as a pastor to help connect mission to the daily operations of the college. He was steadfast in supporting athletics as a critical resource for the small, private college. Athletic recruitment drove the cohort based enrollment model, and budgets were predictable even through turbulent economic times. Williams saw positive benefits flowing to areas of campus life, including the health of the students and their support of each

other. He recognized his leadership sets the tone for this and did not apologize for creating a campus culture where athletics was central to the life and operations of the college.

Case: President Johns

President Johns led a small, private Division III college located in the Southeastern United States. He previously presided over two other small, private colleges, and served as a president for more than 20 years. During the tenure of a previous presidency, Johns served as a member of the NCAA Division III Presidents Council, the governing authority for Division III. President Johns had a proven track record in fundraising and increasing enrollment through data-driven decisions. President Johns served his current institution for more than seven years.

Johns' Background

President Johns was a first generation college student, who grew up in a military family regularly moving around the United States. He attended a small, private college in the Southeast as a student-athlete and was the president of student government in his senior year. After finishing his undergraduate career, President Johns attended an Ivy League university for a master's degree. President Johns earned an additional master's degree at a large, public research institution, followed by a PhD at an elite, private university. President Johns worked in campus ministry, residence life, and counseling, before assuming a leadership role in fundraising. President Johns held several vice presidency roles at three different institutions before being nominated and selected for his first presidential post.

Johns' Presidential Experience

President Johns served as the president of three different institutions located in the Southeast and Midwest. In all three instances, he entered into the presidency of a small, private college showing signs of enrollment struggles. When President Johns assumed leadership of his

current college, the institution struggled with budget deficits, deferred maintenance, and poor retention. Working with enrollment officers and key administrators, President Johns quickly identified critical areas for strategic improvement. Garnering resounding support from the college's board of trustees, President Johns led significant strategic changes to campus life, including a major restructuring of the institution's athletic model.

At his current institution, athletics reported to the chief operating officer, who then reported to the president. Nearly 50% of undergraduates were student-athletes competing across 19 Division III sports. The institution had a casual culture and focused on experiential education. At the time of data collection, the institution reached its largest enrollment in its time as a four-year institution.

President Johns supplied unpublished board reports and athletic recruitment goals. In addition, document collection included newspaper articles, website analysis, strategic plans, enrollment numbers, handbooks, and NCAA reporting data. The analysis of collected data, including interviews with President Johns and documents, revealed three primary themes: data drives decision making; mission and culture must align with athletics; and small, private colleges need student-athletes.¹

Johns Theme 1: Data Drives Decision Making

Before arriving to his current institution and without applying for the open presidency position, President Johns was asked to review the metrics for enrollment and budget as a favor to a friend who sat on the institution's board of trustees. The friend knew Johns was in his second

¹ President Johns served as the foundation for a book chapter to be published in June 2021. The chapter was included in the *Handbook of Research on the Changing Role of College and University Leadership*, edited by Miller and Gearhart. The chapter, entitled from the Playing Field to the Executive Office, examined the role of the president utilizing athletics to influence the viability of the small, private college.

college presidency at an institution with similar demographics. Johns possessed a proven record for helping struggling colleges find growth and stabilization in overall enrollment and finances. At that point in time, the college participated in an athletic model that allowed for the awarding of athletic scholarships. Athletic scholarships were unfunded, meaning all athletic scholarship money was strictly a discount on tuition and not backed by any endowed or donated funds. Johns assessed the institutions enrollment and finances, and said, “You are giving all of your financial aid money away to half of your students [athletes] and your admissions counselors have no control to over half of your financial aid.” In addition, President Johns saw a retention rate of 48% from a student’s first to second year. Coupled with overall declining enrollment patterns, Johns reported that the data painted a clear picture: the institution need to recruit more students, spread its financial aid across more students, and retain the enrolled students. Johns demonstrated a keen understanding of the immediate needs of the institution, the board members appreciated his insight, and he was offered the presidency.

Prior to his appointment as the president of his current institution, President Johns was the president of a small, private Division III college in a different region of the country. In that role, President Johns served on the NCAA Advisory Council for three years, and then, the NCAA Division III Presidents Council for three years. He brought a distinct understanding of the Division III philosophy and value. Division III does not offer any athletic scholarship; therefore, financial aid awards are driven in accordance with a focus from admissions on merit and need. Johns believed his current institution needed to shift to Division III of the NCAA, but he also felt he needed to solidify some other enrollment and budgetary concerns before pushing that agenda.

President Johns realized that his current institution could not afford to continue to pay the cost of unfunded athletic scholarships. In an unpublished presentation to board of trustees, he

offered several visual aids of data-driven charts and assessments to demonstrate the vast difference of cost in educating athletes on scholarship versus non-athletes. The data also highlighted the median range for cost of attendance, where, ideally, most students would fall within. While offering athletic scholarships, the college needed to average four non-student-athletes to pay for the cost of attendance of one student-athlete on scholarship. At that time, roughly 50% of the undergraduate students were student-athletes. The college's needed enrollment goals to be able to positively fund athletic scholarships were not realistic. Upon seeing this data, the board of trustees voted to immediately begin the application for realignment to NCAA Division III athletics.

In addition, President Johns spoke of using data to identify immediate needs among the student body. He focused his reliance on data to make informed decisions:

Making data-driven decisions is an art and a science. You have got to have the science for the data. But, you need the art to figure it out. I'm not going to be confined by the data, but we can certainly be informed by it.

He demonstrated his capability to utilize metrics at the college to determine its ideal enrollment based on the current infrastructure. If enrollment rises significantly above the target, the college will not have the housing, dining hall, or classroom spaces to support the student population without adding the cost of constructing new buildings and residence halls. Johns anticipated a negative return, in regards to retention, with pushing the institution significantly above its desired capacity. Beyond the target number of students, Johns' use of data-driven decisions showed up in the college's strategic plan, where every outcome was accompanied by a metric for evaluating success.

President Johns acknowledged that most data points of the college are highlighted by enrollment, a balance of net tuition revenue and discount rate, and the budget. He recognized that not all students cost the same, as an English major and nursing major require different resources for their curriculum experiences. Likewise, a student-athlete, even without athletic scholarships on the Division III level, costs more than a non-student-athlete. Budgets have to account for travel, gear, paying officials, and staffing; however, when athletics can draw nearly 50% of student enrollment, President Johns believed athletics was an investment that yielded strong enrollment and budgetary influence throughout the college.

Johns Theme 2: Mission and Culture Must Align with Athletics

The president of an institution exerts significant control in directing mission and strategic plans. President Johns believed a president must invest time and effort to gain an understanding of how college athletics integrates within the institution. When examining the decision making behind the addition of football as a varsity sport in the years prior to his presidential appointment, Johns noted that the team was quickly able to reach a roster of nearly 100 student-athletes; however, the institution failed to retain 50% of those football players from one year to the next. The college made a hasty decision to add football to bolster enrollment without preparation to support the endeavor with facilities. Johns polled the football team to gain an understanding of why there was such a large retention loss. One of the first complaints from the football players was the lack of a weight room on campus. Johns was able to identify a couple of donors for a quick, targeted fundraising campaign, and the college was able to build a weight room within his first year. Subsequent years saw increased alumni attendance at football home games and increased giving to improve athletic facilities.

Another struggle for retention of student-athletes was recruiting student-athletes who were the right fit for the institution. Many coaches recruited from far outside of the region, leaving students arriving to a perceived culture shock. Located in a sparsely populated area of the Southeastern United States, the college was positioned differently than the more urban areas of the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. In addition, similar to most small, private colleges, Johns led a traditional liberal arts institution, requiring students to couple a general education curriculum that samples from across the spectrum of academic disciplines with a focused major course of study. The emphasis of the institution, through analysis of the strategic plan, press releases, and website analysis, was on the experiential nature of learning. That learning happened in formal academic settings and through out-of-class experiences like athletics. Johns reported a need to align the recruiting mission of the athletic coaches to the mission of the institution in order to create better retention among student-athletes.

President Johns held a clear vision and mission for the entire institution. Openly communicated through the institution's vision and strategic plan, Johns articulated how athletics fits within the mission instead of becoming the mission. When considering the connection of mission to athletics on a broader level, President Johns focused on creating a collaborative atmosphere, where faculty and staff are working to educate students in alignment to institutional mission. Johns' previous experience gave him confidence that restructuring the athletic model and refocusing the enrollment strategy would yield more financial stability for his institution. That stability would yield positive results that would filter into the different arenas of campus life, including academics, athletics, and student life.

He also conveyed the importance of developing and entrusting a quality leadership team to enact his vision. Specifically, President Johns said, "you need people who tell you the truth,

who are subject matter experts in their field. And, your job is to help them to get out of their silos and understand the college and understand the bigger picture.” President Johns trusted his leadership team and athletic director to keep him informed of operational matters that needed his attention or expertise. Empowering them allowed President Johns to focus his attention on areas where only he can lead.

President Johns represented his institution as the decision maker for the college at the athletic conference level. Through interactions with other college presidents in conference or NCAA meetings, President Johns remarked, “I’ve seen it happen where there was an appreciation, but not an understanding of athletics and how it can fit into the Division III model.” President Johns noted that the path to presidency might influence the initial understanding of the connection between institutional mission and the integration of athletics; however, he emphasized that the president must spend time understanding how decision making and interpretation of those decisions will flow down to impact staff and students. In his third presidential appointments at a small, private colleges, President Johns understood the functionality of the position, and he perceived how he set the tone for the day-to-day operations on campus. From supporting the laid back culture of its geographical setting with a relaxed dress code to guiding faculty to appreciate the student-athlete balance when teams are travelling during a test, Johns led his institution to understand the importance of athletics and student-athletes.

Johns Theme 3: Small, Private Colleges Need Student-Athletes

President Johns believed athletics on the Division III level as instrumental to the success of the small, private college, and he clearly articulated this sentiment: “Athletics is critically important to the small, private college.” He stated that his institution had more student-athletes at the time of data collection than when they offered athletic scholarships. The college utilized

athletics to recruit more students from within close proximity for enrollment, given families' desire to attend athletic events. And, President Johns saw enrollment and retention rates steadily improve.

Smaller, private colleges that are less selective by admissions standards tend to be known as regional institutions. President Johns recognized his institution's recent disconnection with the local high school students and, particularly, the local high school student-athletes. He implored athletic administration to consider recruiting the local student-athletes. As President Johns stated,

Families will pay you to let their kids play [their sport] because it's over after the end of high school if they don't get a Division I or II scholarship. It is a loss for the family. It's a loss for the student. More kids are coming to [our college] from local high schools because we're paying attention to them now. And, their families are coming to the games, and we have more people in the stands.

In addition, President Johns believed the increase of student-athletes at the institution reflected the competitiveness and team belonging that athletics created.

Student-athletes integrated into all areas of campus life, creating a community where student-athletes and non-student-athletes had the same opportunities for deep academic and co-curricular involvement. President Johns shared from his personal college days of being a student-athlete and finding meaningful involvement in extra-curricular opportunities. He balanced his sport and an in-depth experience within student government. President Johns reflected on how he observed student-athletes find dynamic involvement in leadership roles within the college, noting "our student-athletes are more engaged in student leadership roles, more engaged in community service, and our retention numbers with student-athletes are better." Additionally, Johns proudly

recognized that the student-athletes had higher grade point averages than those not participating in varsity level athletics.

President Johns acknowledged the arguments against Division III athletics. Some critics said the games would not be competitive; however, his current institution was not very competitive when Johns ascended into leadership. In a three-year span, the football team won four games. The non-competitiveness of the teams hurt student life on campus, and the college was giving athletic scholarships to student-athletes who would not get similar scholarships from comparison schools. Johns observed the necessity to get coaches to understand and align student-athlete recruitment with the college's mission. Winning percentage is not enough. Recruiting the student who connects with the mission of the institution matters. President Johns believed when the coaches recruit to fit the institution, student-athletes are more satisfied with their whole collegiate experience, and they persist through the hard times. With better retention, teams stood a better chance of winning. Johns spoke of being significantly more competitive once his institution moved to Division III. Increased winning across sports improved engagement in campus life for students, faculty, and staff.

President Johns was quick to appreciate the importance of coaches. He wanted coaches to see themselves as part of the educational experience. They should be role models and teachers. Coaches carry many roles beyond practice and games in the Division III model: recruiter, mentor, teacher, accountability partner, counselor, and more. Johns saw them as an integral part of the recruitment, retention, and graduation path for students:

And so athletics helps create a healthy environment. Coaches have a lot more controls, not the right word, but influence might be a better word on their students than most faculty, than even student life staff, because they're with them every day. And [coaches]

hold a lot of things that the student wants, like playing time. And, also, if you get good coaches who understand that they're also teachers, I think it just enhances the whole of student life and the whole student experience.

Coaches have the chance to add to the educational experience by creating structure, holding team members accountability for their actions, and, creating connections to the team and the institution in unique ways.

President Johns recognized the benefit the student-athletes brought to campus life beyond involvement in their sports, where athletics complements the campus experience. This notion was reinforced by the student-athlete handbook, which focused on developing well-rounded learners who excelled in all areas of campus life. At the small college, students are known by faculty and staff, and Johns knew student-athletes campus involvement increased the value of the small, private college. He described attending a theatre performance on campus, where he saw five student-athletes in acting roles, two of whom were football players. President Johns noted that in NCAA Division I and II, when the off-season is as devoted to your sport as when you are in season, this would not be possible. He appreciated the diversity of experience for the student-athletes at the Division III level, where time on sport is extremely limited in off season. Historically, the institution's mission connected closely to the arts. President Johns reflected on how the alignment to Division III gave his student-athletes a chance to continue competing in a sport they love, while honoring the college's mission of embracing the arts. He finds the two to be complementary rather than competitive.

Johns Summary

President Johns brought a wealth of experience into leading a struggling small, private college. His use of data to drive decision making created an impetus for a significant change in

the athletic model on campus. With that change years behind him, Johns realized the benefit of growing enrollment, increased alumni activity, and campus improvements for all students. As he focused his institution on embracing its mission and understanding the values of the college, athletics was able to recruit students who were a better fit for the institution. Ultimately, he felt his decisions positioned the institution on stable ground for enrollment, finances, and future viability.

Case: President Adams

President Adams was the president of a small, private Division III college in the Southeast United States. At the time of data collection, Adams was in her tenth year of presidency, and her college served a specific niche of the higher education population.

Adams' Background

President Adams earned her bachelor's degree from a small, private college in the Southeast United States. She received a master's degree from a regional public institution in the Southeast and a PhD from a large, public, research university in the Midwest. President Adams worked in a tenured faculty role at two large public universities in the Southeast. Additionally, she led in areas of assessment, academic support, and accreditation reviews. President Adams assumed the role of provost at a medium sized, private university in the Mid-Atlantic, with responsibility to oversee academic and student affairs.

While an average high school athlete, President Adams described herself as a great supporter who earned a lot of bench time. She parlayed her high school experience into being a great fan of intercollegiate athletics. Because of her work in leading academic support at a Division I institution, Adams viewed student-athletes as individuals and not just some unnamed entity.

Adams' Presidential Experience

President Adams stated that she felt as though she is naturally a number two in command, but would only assume the presidency role for her alma mater. She firmly believed that her alma mater did a great job in shaping the identity and strengths of its student body. Committed to the liberal arts foundation while preparing students for professional preparation, President Adams led initiatives to increase experiential learning initiatives. More than 95% of undergraduate students participated in high impact activities like internships, study abroad, or undergraduate research.

President Adams viewed leadership as a study and practice that is regularly being shaped. She valued operating from an authentic position that elicited trust in the team working around her. Athletics reported to the vice president for college programs, and Adams viewed athletics to be in line with other co-curricular involvements. Accounting for roughly 10% of its undergraduate enrollment, ten varsity level sports were supported through the institution. This case report examined the analysis of two semi-structured interviews and documents. Documents included athletic reports, handbooks, strategic plans, and mission and vision statements. Through the analysis, the data from President Adams revealed the following themes: education is about growing; understanding what athletics is and is not, and the strategic plan is a covenant with the board.

Adams Theme 1: Education is about Growing

President Adams believed that education “is all about growing.” A student’s development, both in and out of the classroom, carried significant correlation to the educational experience. A well rounded approach to learning allowed the student to pursue academic excellence, a value of the college. The development of intellectual curiosity and personal

development created a yearning for lifelong learning. President Adams believed the values and mission of the institution produced graduates who regularly competed for premiere jobs and graduate schools.

For Adams, leadership was not a stagnant characteristic trait. Rather, she felt leadership grows and evolves within a person. She commented that she realized “that [leadership] is something you can study and learn. You can practice it in a variety of settings and you can shape not only what you want to be known for, but how to do it better.” Through her experience as faculty and, then, an administrator, Adams found herself better suited as a second in command. She valued constantly learning and understanding, and she demonstrated the ability to articulate her strengths and weaknesses in a thoughtful manner. Adams brought that self-awareness into her leadership and crafted a program that guided the onboarding and development of all students. She reflected on the limitations she experiences as a president to not be able to share all of the information behind every decision she made. While she understood those limitations, Adams also noted that faculty have, at times, said “I don’t know why we’re going in this direction. I don’t understand what we’re doing, but I trust her.” Trust was a critical element of Adams’ leadership for her institution.

Reporting through the college’s area responsible for college programs, Adams viewed athletics as a student organization, albeit a large and complex one. Having worked at several Division I institutions, Adams carefully understood the dynamic of academics and athletics. She viewed Division I institutions with robust athletic programs to have many aspects of college life determined by those athletic cultures. As an alumni of the institution she leads, a Division III college, Adams heard from faculty who saw no value in investing in athletics. As an institution, her college was more focused on the dynamic student experiences of studying abroad,

undergraduate research, and internships that supplement the academic experience. Adams noted that she was mindful to be supportive and complimentary of the faculty, going on to add “they control the curriculum, they control the research, they control why students come here.” Adams believed the academic experience generated the attraction for many students who attended her institution. For a long time, many of the faculty were anti-athletics; however, some faculty came to see the value of Division III athletics where the student experience was valued above the athletic experience. Even still, Adams commented “many of them don't come to games. They have no interest. I mean, that is just not what their thing is, but they're not resistant about it anymore.” Adams reminded the faculty that the college's student-athletes were some of the best academic performers, student-athletes retained at a higher rate, graduated at a higher rate, and she felt that helped to reduce some of the tension.

Her institution operated with a specific mission serving only a niche population, limiting its scope for enrollment. Adams felt that the mission remained central to its operations. Most recently, she perceived her conversations with future students and their families were centered on the value of college. Adams commented that too many first generation students believed that college was not an option because the expenses were too high. Adams shared with families about how college educated people were more likely to volunteer in their communities, have better overall health, and make more money. In addition, Adams saw coaches having these same conversations with prospective students. In many cases, coaches were leveraging recruiting networks to make college a reality for someone who never dreamed it was possible. Adams spoke of how intimate the relationship between player and coach could become: “They know what's going on behind the scenes. They know about their [love life], parents, home life, food insecurity, the grades, they know lots about them. And they're such good partners with our

student success coaches.” Coaches drove home the educational mission of the institution, and they created moments to teach student-athletes important life skills.

Adams Themes 2: Understanding What Athletics Is and Is Not

President Adams perceived the importance and value of athletics, even though student-athletes account for only about 10% of the student body. From an enrollment point of view, some of the student-athletes were the brightest students, and some had the ability to pay the highest rates of tuition. Athletics empowered the coaches and admissions officers to recruit a more diverse student body. Adams stated athletics increased the geographical footprint of her institution. In some sports, athletic opportunities attracted students from a strong socio-economic background, which made a significant difference in the budget. Adams viewed green field sports, like lacrosse, field hockey, and golf, as strong benefits to the institution’s financial position.

Adams also saw how athletics developed student-athletes into student leaders. She commented, “Athletics is about everyone being a part of a team. And, every team player is being a team leader.” Adams viewed the development of both team and leader as important. Leadership development had the ability to flow out of athletics and into campus life. Students who took initiative to seek chances for improvement or gaps that needed to be filled in student life were more likely to initiate change. Additionally, being a part of a team helped create an atmosphere of belonging. As student-athletes felt more included, they had the chance to create more inclusive environment beyond just their team. Additionally, Adams commented on the overall benefit of a college athletic program:

Very rarely do you see a four year college, that doesn't have an athletic program, and they have it because it builds good leaders. It attracts strong academic stars. It creates school

spirit and as a result, there's a greater synergy among students. There is a focus on good sportsmanship and competition and the realities of winning and losing. And those are all great life lessons. We say it is an investment that is worth those benefits that it delivers.

President Adams understood the value of athletics for student-athletes, and also saw the advantage it spreads to the campus. President Adams, however, hesitated to purport athletics as more than a student involvement opportunity.

While Adams recognized the important role athletics contributes for enrollment and budget, she unapologetically viewed athletics as just another part of the overall experience. “People like athletics here, but it's not a defining component of our culture in ways that it is at Division I institutions,” she stated. President Adams tempered her perspective about athletics as the primary draw for all of the college’s student-athletes, noting it depended on the sport. In reflecting on how graduates view their athletic experience, Adams commented:

The alumni loved the college and they would not single out athletics. They, they would single out athletics as something they enjoyed doing or went to, as they would any other club organization, or being part of a major or something like that. But it's not about tailgating. It's not about the championship season. It's not about those kinds of things.

And that's one of the reasons it's different.

Adams credited that difference to the overall mission and vision of the institution. Where ceremony and symbolism abounded at the college, none of the traditions revolved around athletics. In addition, the athletic mission statement outlined creating reasonable expectations for winning and athletic performance while focusing more on the overall development of the student-athletes.

For President Adams, athletics was already positioned as an auxiliary activity, one that yielded good student-athletes but did not dominate campus life. The long-standing traditions of her institution, of which she was an alumni, carried more significance in connecting the mission to the daily lives of the students, faculty, and staff. She also, at times, seemed to lament how little support the athletic teams received on campus.

I wish attending games were a bigger part of our culture. I've decided what I really ought to do is just say, "I'm going to be at the game Thursday night. If you have any beefs about [the college] that you want to tell me about, come and sit with me." I think I'd do really well at getting more people to the games.

Feeling that she could not create an atmosphere where she chose to attend athletic events more regularly than other campus

President Adams represented her institution as the decision maker at the athletic conference level. Adams was clear to identify that she sought the input of her athletic director for decision making, but the president has the final say. Adams spent her undergraduate years at this institution and stated this was the only presidential appointment she would consider. She deeply knew the culture of the institution, and she understood the holistic nature of the liberal arts college. Ultimately, Adams demonstrated a desire to preserve the traditions and culture of her institution and knew how to leverage athletics for what it is and what it is not.

Adams Theme 3: The Strategic Plan is a Covenant with the Board

Built from a grassroots initiative of having conversations with all constituent levels, the strategic plan was a continual working focus for Adams, her leadership team, and, she believed, the entire college. The strategic plan was regularly communicated to all of campus. Adams felt that the plan was sewn into the fabric of the college, claiming, "So we have six [categories] in

our strategic plan. I guarantee you everybody on campus, except maybe those in their first year can recite them to you in the order that we talk about them.” Adams considered the strategic plan from the institutional view, and she entrusted her leadership team to spread and cultivate the plan throughout the various structures of the institution.

President Adams perceived the institution’s mission, vision and values as living elements of the institution that influenced the strategic plan. She stated, “Your strategic plan is reflective of your vision and mission, but it informs your budget.” After all, Adams believed that a budget was just a plan expressed in number. Athletics was never singled out in the mission, vision, values, or strategic plan, supporting Adams’ claim that athletics does not sit in a preeminent position at her institution.

As President Adams reflected on leadership and decision making, she noted that the strategic plan was her covenant with the board of trustees. She commented on a mentor who taught her about managing the board before they could manage her. Adams recognized the unique relationship the position of president has with the board. Adams was responsible to the board, and the faculty and staff of the college were responsible to her. She did not answer the request to have faculty or student representation sit on the board, as she would not allow board members to sit in the classroom or direct faculty research. Viewing the strategic plan as the covenant kept the document alive and relevant to Adams and her institution.

Trust remained a critical element for Adams’ relationships with her board and the faculty. She scheduled meetings with the faculty directly after board meetings, saying “there’s nothing I’d say to the faculty that I haven’t already said to the board.” Adams did not speak with a hubristic tone, noting the challenges she has faced. A positive working relationship with board

members provoked a confidence in Adams to pursue her strategic plan as a critical foundation for the experiences of the faculty, staff, and students of the institution.

Adams Summary

President Adams' previous experience as a faculty member with significant work in assessment and accreditation shone through her leadership and communication. She was an intentional leader who recognized that the culture of her institution was tied to the mission, vision, and traditions that produced graduates of distinction. Adams viewed athletics as a utility and support structure within the overall operations of her college. As a fan of sports, she appreciated the efforts and experiences of the student-athletes. She saw the value to enrollment and finance that many of the college's student-athletes brought. Finally, President Adams believed that athletics was important, but her institution was not reliant upon athletics for survival.

Cross-Case Analysis

Each of the case study participants shared perceptions of how athletics influenced the viability and culture of their institution. While not all of the themes presented in this section were collectively believed by all of the participants, most presidents held similar views. For each participant, understanding of their institution's mission and values impacted how they communicated ideas and plans. Each case study participant stated that athletics was valuable and provided essential contributions to the institution, particularly in the areas of enrollment and tuition revenue. These participants centered enrollment, and subsequently finances, as ever present foci in their leadership.

In four of the five cases, student-athletes comprised roughly 50% of undergraduate enrollment. The remaining case, President Adams, saw athletics as an auxiliary, co-curricular

involvement, and student-athletes accounted for only 10% of enrollment. For that case, Adams, an alumni and experienced faculty member, placed the academic curriculum as central to the college's mission and culture. In three of the cases, Martin, Ford, and Johns, athletics was complementary to mission and held an important place in campus life. Presidents discussed leveraging athletic to bolster enrollment and diversifying overall student experiences to continue to remain relevant into the future. Those presidents expressed the ability to control the influence of athletics on campus culture. In the remaining case, Williams, athletics was the leading force in campus life. The president positioned athletics to drive enrollment, and created para-athletic affinity groups to support the athletic culture on campus. The strategic plan placed the recruitment and retention of student-athletes in a prominent position. Beyond all participants believing athletics to be an important institutional operation, the cross-case analysis revealed several thematic areas to explore more deeply: the president's influence over managing the tension with faculty; winning builds a foundation for success; and agility is necessary to respond to changes. Table 4 illustrates the themes, subthemes and a brief description.

Table 4
Cross-Case Analysis Theme Chart

Theme	Sub-themes	Description
The President's Influence over Managing Tension with Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension in Finances • Missed Class Time • Presidential Frustration 	<i>The President's Influence in Managing Tension with Faculty</i> focused on the dynamic and tension created between academic and athletic operations of the college.
Winning Builds a Foundation for Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yields Recruitment and Retention • Goes Beyond Athletics • Coalition Building to Win 	<i>Winning Builds a Foundation for Success</i> described the notion of winning that wove through all of the cases. Winning in athletic completion was important, and participants discussed winning beyond the field of play.

Agility is Necessary to Respond to Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning versus Reacting • Vision and the Board of Trustees • Recognizing the Need for Diversity in Activities and Involvement 	<i>Agile to Respond to Changes</i> illustrated how presidents cannot put all of their eggs in one basket. While investing in athletics yielded growth for enrollment and financial stability, a diversified plan for the future is needed to remain relevant to changing external demands.
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Cross-Case Analysis Theme 1: The President's Influence over Managing Tension with Faculty

The academy created a unique structure of shared governance. In these cases, each president reported to the board of trustees, and the employees of the college reported to the president. The faculty, who are included as employees of the college, exert control over the curriculum and areas of research. President Williams stated, "I know that shared governance is the hallmark of American higher education." Each president discussed, sometimes at length, the tension that they had to manage between faculty and athletics. In four of the five cases, presidents described examples telling a faculty member that they [the faculty] would not change the importance of athletics for the campus. Each participant discussed time when faculty would circumvent the reporting structure to seek time and leverage with the president. Consistently, presidents would reroute faculty through the chief academic officer, as each participant noted they did not want to participate in side conversations or address athletics as an institutional priority in individual meetings faculty members. Most of the presidents commented on regular meetings with faculty senates and leadership as the means to share strategic decisions for the institution. For each participant, this approach aligned with their leadership throughout the college. Presidents reported they realized the tension between athletics and faculty in how much time, attention, and money athletics received, in missed classed time for athletic competitions,

and with individual faculty members who made it challenging on student-athletes to be successful.

Tension in Finances

President Adams, who was mindful to not say cross words about the faculty, recalled times of faculty pushback on athletic spending. Even when she noted that athletic participation did not earn a student-athlete scholarship money, faculty said “I don't care what division you are. You know, money is still being spent on athletics instead of instruction.” Each president recognized the cost to field athletics accounted for money dedicated to coaches, equipment, travel, and overhead costs. Yet, each president was able to communicate the tangible and intangible benefits those student-athletes brought to the college.

President Martin’s thoughtful planning leveraged athletics to grow the enrollment during his first eight years by nearly 50% of undergraduate enrollment. A few years into that plan, Martin made the strategic decision to convert assistant coaches for sports teams from graduate assistants to full time positions. One rationale for this decision was graduate assistants turned over in positions every 14 months. The constant turnover lead to disconnection in the student-athlete recruiting process and loss of momentum for team dynamics. Martin commented on receiving “a lot of flak from the academic side of the house” for that investment. He defended the decision because the upfront investment in salaries and benefits was quickly realized through increased enrollments from the recruiting efforts of those coaches. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many colleges were cutting sports or furloughing coaches, Martin pushed back against board members who wanted to consider those cost saving measures. He commented, “I could save \$150,000 if I let all of our assistant coaches go, but we'd probably lose \$1.5 million in tuition revenue. That's a byproduct because [the coaches] recruit so heavily.” Martin’s saw

temporary and long-term value added by the coaches, and he recognized their contribution to the overall enrollment growth and financial stability for his institution.

President Adams sought to manage the tension over spending by using a donor to fund the first two years of a new sport. The sport, believed to be able to recruit students who paid tuition well above the discount rate, was perceived to benefit overall net tuition revenue within just a few years. By having a donor fund the salaries of coaches, recruitment costs, and operating costs for the sport for two years, Adams believed herself better positioned to present the cost-benefit of the additional sport to the campus community. Her approach hoped to avoid any perception that financial resources were being reallocated with the addition of a new sport, and she believed the student-athletes for that sport would yield more tuition revenue in a short amount of time.

From President Martin's comment about \$150,000 of coach's salaries equals \$1.5 million in tuition revenue to Johns noting that athletics brings in a more diverse student body than the college's curricular pursuits, each president remarked that athletics was worth the financial investment. They also each lamented the time they have to spend with individual faculty members to justify those expenditures.

Missed Class Time

As Division III limits off season practices, still many presidents heard complaints from faculty about missed class time. Ford said, "What faculty get frustrated by are so many afternoon practices and its conflict with certain programs, like nursing, labs, those kinds of things." To address the dynamic between class-time and practice-time, Williams implemented a protected practice time that did not conflict with academic time and Ford designated a faculty representative to work with each athletic team.

President Ford recounted a story about sitting down with the athletic director and the dean of the nursing program. Ford told the two leaders that they had to figure out a way for a nursing student also to be able to be a student-athlete. While it was challenging, they were able to hear each other's sides and develop a path for nursing majors to be student-athletes as well. Nursing's clinical time demands are more significant than many of the traditional liberal arts majors, but the tension between academics and athletics was felt beyond the nursing faculty. As a way to develop a comprehensive approach to academic and campus life for student-athletes, each athletic team was assigned a faculty athletic mentor. This faculty member engaged regularly with the coaches and student-athletes for one team. They helped the team navigate communicating over missed class time or arising conflicts within the classroom. In turn, Ford believed the faculty gain a better perspective of the multiple roles student-athletes juggle, and she saw the faculty become advocates for student-athletes.

President Johns noted how the realignment in athletics to Division III changed the perspectives of faculty for the better. Division III allowed the small, private college to incorporate athletics into the institutional mission rather than athletics becoming the mission. When discussing the fit of his current college within the Division III philosophy, Johns commented,

The faculty just love Division III because academics are not sacrificed and students have limited off-season play. Tell me the downside of Division III for a small, private college.

It's super competitive and the games are fun to watch.

With the realignment to Division III, Johns recounted how tensions eased as student-athletes missed fewer classes and had the chance for meaningful academic and co-curricular involvements.

Presidents also noted hearing about faculty who were less supportive to allow a student to make up a test or assignments when that student-athlete was travelling to compete in a game or match. Three of the five presidents, Johns, Williams, and Martin, discussed having to direct faculty to allow for make-up tests if a student missed for an officially sanctioned college event. Martin stated his institution formed a policy to protect the student-athletes to allow for make-up assignments, and he communicated this to new faculty during their orientation. Martin went to comment: “Our athletic [department] has a very rigorous program for making sure the students are successful in classes.” Many coaches implemented support structures to help student-athletes achieve academically success. Presidents also stopped short of asking for special privileges for student-athletes. Where policies were implemented to allow for make-up exams, those policies applied to the entire student body.

Presidential Frustration

In all cases, the presidents spoke of hearing faculty members complain about athletics. In some cases, faculty believed student-athletes were not smart enough for the academic rigor of the institution. In other cases, faculty felt athletics received more attention than the academic pursuits of the institution. President Ford noted, “In my career at small privates, athletics is what brings so many of our students to us. And I can remember as a young professional hearing faculty members complain about, ‘oh, this is such a problem.’” Ford’s recollection was that faculty questioned the academic ability of a student who chose the institution because of athletic motives.

In addition to hearing complaints, most of the presidents recalled times when they had to redirect a faculty member who did not want to act justly toward a student-athlete. President Martin recalled, “I’ve had one or two conversations over the years with faculty members where

I've said, 'if this is an issue that you want to go to the mat over, I'm sorry to tell you that you're going to lose.'" President Johns, with more than two decades of presidential leadership, furthered this point, "if somebody comes out of [the faculty] and thinks they're going to make a massive change in the role of athletics, they're in for a rude awakening." Four of the five cases noted that they included conversations with new faculty about the value of athletics and the impact of student-athletes on enrollment and budget.

Where student-athletes comprise more than 50% of the student body, President Williams reflected on the dynamic created with faculty and the athletic culture. He spoke of some faculty who did not think student-athletes were smart enough to perform well in the classroom. Williams described a few faculty members who had a hard time of understanding the mindset of student-athletes, where the classroom might not be the student's primary focus. Careful to draw the line of not asking for preferential treatment, Williams also impressed upon the faculty that athletics is important for institutional sustainability.

President Williams grew up on college campuses. He stated that he strongly believed that the chief academic officer oversees the faculty; however, Williams also commented about faculty,

Sometimes you've got to clear out some underbrush in order to make progress and, you know, I had to clear up some underbrush here at all in all parts of [the faculty]. There are some faculty members who don't treat athletes very well in the classroom.

Williams, who stated that he has hired most of the faculty who taught at his institution, said, "I think the faculty increasingly understand who their clientele is and they know that their wellbeing and livelihood and their families are dependent on their being able to, to work with that student." During Williams' overall tenure as president his institution's enrollment grew and

the budget stabilized through the utility of athletics, and he leaned heavily into the role of athletics at his institution.

Theme 1 Summary

Where a college fields athletic teams and competition, tensions and dynamic with faculty persist. Faculty want students to chase intellectual gains during their college experience. At times, when those pursuits were compromised due to co-curricular involvement, faculty expressed concerns to college leadership. Each president discussed how athletics attracted students who would never have considered college as an option. The participants each shared the perception that creating opportunities for diverse enrollment reasons benefitted both the institutions and society.

Cross-Case Analysis Theme 2: Winning Builds a Foundation for Success

For small, private Division III colleges, student-athletes accounted for approximately 25% to 50% of undergraduate enrollment. Most of the participants in this research study commented on the correlation of student-athlete enrollment with the continued desire for competition. President Johns remarked that student-athletes yearned for competition so much that their families would pay the increased tuition rate of a small, private college if it meant to be able to continue their athletic career. As those student-athletes wanted to be able to claim to be a college athlete, many realized their college experience will be the final chapter of their competitive athletic career. All of the participants discussed the success of teams in the context of winning.

Yields Recruitment and Retention

When contrasted with consistent losing athletic programs, several of the participants noted how valuable winning athletic teams were to the institution. Presidents Johns and Adams

both noted the negative impact to campus culture when teams were not competitive. Johns focused on how a consistent losing football program limited recruitment and retention. Adams, whose institution relied on athletics the least of all studied participants, recognized the importance of winning. When a team was winning, it helped the campus spirit and publicity. Equally, a team that lost regularly “hurts you in ways that winning elevates you.” Presidents were quick to boast of winning programs and could easily recount teams that recently won conference titles.

Several of the presidents set deliberate goals for winning expectations for the athletic teams. Winning was an expectation from Williams’ perspective. His position was not a win at all costs one, but he laid out clear expectations. Winning was very important. His reasoning was “the more you win, the better student and the better athlete you recruit.” He went on,

We tell our coaches when we hire them that we expect them to have to maintain a .500 record except in football and basketball. And, we tell [football and basketball] they need to do better than that. And we tell them in football that we expect conference championships because we know we can do it and we have done it.

Williams thread the narrative of winning through football to include success in alumni involvement, student life experience, and fundraising. He also firmly believed that winning yielded more stable recruitment and enrollment.

President Ford also recognized how winning generated better recruiting and enrollment. More stable enrollment equaled a better financial position for the institution. Stable budgets and an increasing fundraising platform led to improvements in athletic facilities and better branded gear for student-athletes. President Ford reflected on winning and success, “You hate to say it's important, but we play the game because we want to win. And, we don't need to be embarrassed

about that.” Additionally, Ford recognized many student-athletes want to continue to play their sport because they were not ready to stop at the end of high school. She coupled that with noting that she expected her teams to be competitive. If teams fail to be competitive, then the experience of those student-athletes suffered and campus morale could fall.

President Martin considered winning in light of how it impacted the holistic experience of the student-athletes. He stated:

I do believe that if the team isn't doing well, at least when viewed over a longer period of time, that's not a good experience for the students. Student-athlete experience is at the heart and soul of Division III, in my opinion. And, if you've got to make a hard decision about personnel in order to ensure that the student-athlete experience is a positive one, you just have to do that.

Martin did not emphasize winning with a short-term vision, but rather viewed the importance over time.

Goes Beyond Athletics

Student-athletes achieved better statistics in academic success and persistence to graduation. Each participant excitedly shared that student-athletes compiled higher grade point averages than non-student-athlete counterparts. President Adams often used the academic and campus involvement success of student-athletes to counter arguments against the investment in athletics. President Williams commented, “the more you win the better, my experience has been, the more you win, the better student, you recruit, the better athlete.”

President Ford repeatedly talked about winning, but the focus was in the totality of the student experience. At one point, Ford noted:

We want to be able to boast winning. But where do we win? We win in the community. We win in the classroom. We win as role models and as leaders. And so I think we just have a very comprehensive approach to athletics. We set a target of an average grade point average of 3.0. We want to be in the top three of our conference. Those are two major benchmarks. So, winning is important.

President Ford believed that winning yielded retention, but also viewed winning and retention's correlation through the lens of achieving success in all areas of campus life. Ford articulated that creating a winning culture on campus wound through campus life and into community involvement. Many of the presidents also noted the winning programs created better relationships with alumni and improved fundraising.

Coalition Building to Win

On a different note, each president represented their institution as the decision maker at the athletic conference level. Given their time in presidential leadership, each president had years of experience in understanding the impact of decision making on the conference level. Recounting a decision about whether to permit an institution for conference membership that refused to play on Sundays, President Adams lamented losing a vote. She appreciated the institution's rationale for that stance; however, Adams saw the impact of increasing missed class time for her student-athletes, and she adamantly opposed the decision. Presidents Martin, Williams, and Johns spoke of the politics intertwined into athletic conference governance, where coalition building was critical to advance a president's agenda. Most of the presidents noted how they regularly engage in the "meeting outside of the meeting." Martin articulated that his charge was not just to win in a vote, but to represent the interests of his college in a manner that served his college well. Most of the presidents articulated wanting to achieve a planned agenda when

engaging in athletic conference level decisions. Winning was influencing the outcome of the decision that created the best situation for their institution.

President Williams focused his attention on athletic influence on the conference, state, and national level. Estimating that, in some weeks, athletics accounted for up to half of his working time, Williams stressed most of that time was in being very involved in his institution's athletic conference, commenting "[I] have continued to be very active just in main decision making at the policy level, in our athletic conference right now. I work a lot behind the scenes." While formal meetings only comprised a portion of the time, Williams stressed the importance of building coalitions with presidents at other athletics conference colleges.

President Williams believed many college presidents fail to engage meaningfully with their athletic director about conference decisions. As the presidents voted on conference-wide policies, they need to weigh the impact to athletics and the entirety of the institution. Based on observing presidents at conference meetings, Williams feared many are unduly influenced by conference commissioner or a persuasive coach. He stressed the importance of presidential decision making at the conference level for matters that affect the entire institution. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic cancelled NCAA championships for the spring and fall 2020 semesters. While his athletic director was focused on the possibility of conference championships, President Williams understood enrollment and retention were critically connected to the chance to play sports in some way, shape, or form. Yet, his institution was stressed by the increased financial cost of having the test most, if not all, athletes multiple times per week; therefore, Williams wanted the conference leadership to pull together to collectively petition different entities for financial support and resources for testing. Williams understood that

his unique position for the college gave him the authority to leverage his influence for the benefit of the institution as a whole.

Theme 2 Summary

Most of the participants agreed on the importance of winning, and the theme of winning filtered through their comments and into the athletic mission statements and strategic plans. In only one case, President Adams, was winning not a prominent theme through the interviews or examined documents. Even the athletic mission statement at that institution implied an athletic pursuit of good over great. In the remaining cases, presidents perceived winning as a significant influence to matters of campus life. Whether winning was a strong focus, or, for President Adams, an incidental benefit, the presidents' perceptions wove through the culture of their organization in consistent fashion.

Cross-Case Analysis Theme 3: Agility is Necessary to Respond to Changes

Describing an athlete as agile indicates their ability to move quickly and easily. If used regarding an organization, that movement is characterized by adaptability. Colleges and universities are not well known for their ability to change quickly; however, the participants recognized the need to position their organizations as forward thinking and not resting on previous successes. Leading their institutions to understand that success in enrollment and finances could not solely rest on athletics was a common sentiment.

President Ford commented that she was unsure how her institution would continue to remain viable if athletics was not available to help recruit and enroll students, signifying the importance of athletics. She went on to note that the college would have to pivot, in some major ways, to remain relevant and attractive to incoming students. Participation in collegiate athletics served as both a recruitment tool and a connection point to the institution for student-athletes.

For the participants who grew and stabilized their undergraduate enrollment through increasing the number of sports offered and the number of student-athletes on those teams, most commented that athletics helped them grow but could not be the only plan for sustained relevance in the landscape of private higher education. Participants noted the need for agility in decision making and implementing plans that adjusted to operational disturbances and changes to campus climate. Specifically, the presidents observed the necessity to plan versus react, the importance of the vision and board of trustees, and the need to diversify student activities and involvements.

Planning versus Reacting

Assessment is a required practice of an accredited institution, and some of the participants communicated how they use strategic planning and assessment to determine their plans for the short-term, intermediate, and long-term futures of the college. President Adams wove constant assessment into the strategic plan:

So we had a real mechanism for not only initiating the conversation, but to circle back and say what worked, what didn't work? And that to me is that sort of the heart of education is when you can say, this is our intention, this is what actually happened.

Working her strategic plan into the daily life of the institution, Adams positioned the institution ready to adapt to the changes of the external environment.

President Martin felt, too often, other institutions operated out of fear, were in survival mode, or simply just hoped things would work out. Reflecting on the future of small, private colleges, Martin commented:

I just read that perhaps as many as 50% of all private independent institutions could either close over the next decade or two or perhaps be gobbled up and acquired by a

larger institutions. And, that shocked me really to my very core. It sure did. It got my attention.

He went on to note that institutions of less than 1,000 students were most vulnerable. Focused on creating a solid undergraduate population, Martin saw the need to continually assess the value of his institution's practices, commenting "organisms that don't evolve are doomed to extinction." Martin regularly prompted his leadership team to evaluate majors and programs for relevance, intending to stay ahead of deadened demand.

Martin concentrated on the financial well-being of institution. He knew his institution's reliance on graduate students was risky, as many of the graduate students enrolled in order to receive financial incentives from the state. If that incentive was removed, graduate enrollment would decrease significantly. When assuming the presidency, the institution had more graduate students than undergraduates, and Martin described this as, "the tail wagging the dog." As such, Martin looked to athletics and traditional undergraduate enrollment to create a firm enrollment and financial foundation for the undergraduate experience. Having found success in increased enrollment over the first eight years of his president, Martin reflected, "So moving forward now, we can't depend just as heavily on athletics to help us reach our enrollment goals." He believed that his institution was better position to recruit non-student-athletes because they used the athletic recruitment to bolster academic and student life aspects of campus. Deliberate and thoughtful planning guided Martin's leadership of his institution to find success by knowing that "complacency is a terminal disease," and constant assessment and action will make a college relevant into the future.

Ford believed the president cannot afford to take a step back. They must be out in front, crafting a vision to lead their institution for short-term and long-term impacts. Her leadership

communicated this directly to her institution: “I think that it's more critical and incumbent upon all of us to make certain that we're pivoting in major new ways.” While the institution’s mission and values rooted them, Ford knew the vision should cast bold pursuits for the institution. This positioned the institution to remain relevant through turbulent and unpredictable events.

Ford challenged her leadership team to regularly ask the question of “what has to change organizationally, or with our internal processes, to move the needle?” She directly correlated the strategic thinking model, which is how they acted on the strategic plan, into performance reviews. As such, Ford saw her institution constantly aware of opportunities to create forward thinking to help them remain relevant in the future.

As other small, private colleges struggled to maintain consistent enrollment numbers and predictable budgets, President Williams believed his institution found a path to success for years to come. His focus integrated understanding the mission and culture of the institution with understanding the draw to compete in collegiate athletics. Williams said “we've built a financially sustainable institution that has a strong academics and a strong relationship with the church, you know, around it. Couldn't have done it though without Division III.” As Williams described the benefit for utilizing athletics as a recruitment strategy, he also regularly reflected on the institution’s need to keep the mission in focus through all of its endeavors.

President Johns told the story of the rush addition of football by his predecessor. The decision was reactionary as a means to grow enrollment and help the struggling budget. There was a distinct cultural divide between faculty and athletics, with faculty concerned about compromising academic integrity for the sake of enrollment numbers. When the college added football, they quickly brought in 100 student-athletes to the team, but, during the first few years, they also lost 130 non-student-athletes. “Football changed the culture. Some of the students

weren't academically ready or campus wasn't what they expected," Johns reported. But to remove the sport, and the 100 student-athletes, would remove almost 20% of the institution's student body that time. Without those students, the college would have ceased to operate. Johns supported football as a sport offering, but also noted that the addition of a sport must align with the institution's mission and vision. If it did not, implementation would fracture the community and culture of the institution.

Vision and the Board of Trustees

All of the participants stressed the need to build a strong relationship with their board of trustees while keeping the board out of the weeds of daily operations of college life. Presidents Adams, Williams, and Martin discussed the relationship with board chairs, reporting the best board chairs wanted to be informed about budget and high-level concerns but did not seek to micromanage institutional processes. President Williams recounted hearing "your board of trustees will either be your best friends or your worst enemies. Make sure they are your best friends." President Ford described demystifying the board members to her leadership team and described them as collaborative partners with experience to help leadership think outside of the box.

President Johns, with his experience in working with several boards through three presidencies, stressed the importance of the board and the president sharing a vision for the institution. With high level policy decisions resting between the board and the president, Johns recognized the board needed to have members who loved the institution and could help the institution move in the direction of the vision. President Adams commented on the need to have board members who understood the academy, and that individuals could not force business models on an educational institution. While each president had a story about a board member

who would want to overstep boundaries for involvement, the participants articulated that the relationships with their boards were healthy. When they had strong relationships with the board and board chair, the president received a wide berth of authority and power to interpret decisions and leverage their experience to benefit the institution. As the participants were able to achieve measurements of success, whether by stabilizing budget, increased enrollment, or fundraising growth, their leverage within the institution grew. The confidence provided by the board was closely aligned to measures of success, most notably budget and enrollment.

When able to operate with the confidence of the board, the presidents discussed their ability to direct their college through good times and challenges. Changing demands, from academic interests to parental influence, emphasized the need for presidents to be able to act decisively. President Adams described having faculty members say that they might not know why she made a decision but they trusted her that it was the right decision. President Martin was careful to reign in the role of the leader, knowing that his decisions had to align with the mission and values of his institution in order for the decisions to be effective. As the participants described their growth in leadership over time, they demonstrated the ability to understand their strengths as they complemented the culture of the institution. They understood the times when they could stretch the mission and when they need to walk a tighter line. The president had to create an environment that was capable of adaptation and agility. When influencing the culture of their institution, trust from the board and, then, how well that trust filtered down into the faculty, staff, and students was critical. When synergy was present through levels of organizational culture allowed presidents to drive the mission into beliefs and underlying assumptions that guided the actions of the campus community.

Recognizing the Need for Diversity in Activities and Involvement

The COVID-19 global pandemic halted college sports for more than one playing season, and participants were quick to realize how much this altered life on campus. In addition, many of the participants' institutions lauded their students' involvement in high impact practices like internships and study abroad programs, both of which were compromised by the limitations imposed due to COVID-19. Participants realized that the small, private college is better positioned to quickly adapt to the external demands created by the evolving and changing landscape of higher education.

President Williams, who leaned into athletics the most of the participants, recognized the desire for student and community connection. He commented,

The biggest thing we are missing this fall is, is we don't have any weekend events. So, I mean, we don't have several thousand people on our football stadium for five weekends.

We don't have a homecoming this year, and that's all built around football.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the student government petitioned the administration to create outdoor fitness options for students. Coaches led socially distanced group exercises, and President Williams allocated funding to building additional outdoor recreational areas. President Martin urged athletic leadership to find a way to participate in competition before the athletic conference decided upon how they would operate.

Presidents recognized the importance of athletics, but they also boasted of areas where student involvement positively impacted campus life outside of athletics. President Adams knew the traditions of the institution were more significant than athletic events. President Johns recounted how student-athletes had the time and desire to participate in theatre productions.

Theme 3 Summary

As the president grew aware of the agility needed to sustain relevance amid changing interests and disruptions, they also knew the small, private college was positioned to adapt more quickly than larger counterparts. Reacting, rather than focused planning for the future, limits the scope of action for a president to effect change. Strategic planning and thoughtful responses led presidents to create agile organizations, ready to adapt to external pressure. Presidents also noted that they could not rest in the accomplishment of previous successes, instead needing to be ever ready for what is coming both in the next year and the next decade.

Summary

The position of the president empowered participants to act with authority on institutional matters and work closely with boards of trustees for major changes to campus life. These presidents viewed athletics as important, and in some cases critical, to the operations, culture, and sustainability of their institutions. Presidents recognized, and at times addressed, the tension that athletics created with the academic operations of a college. Many of the participants emphasized the importance of winning, and they stressed that winning happens in all areas of campus life with student-athletes. Finally, presidents leveraged their experiences to understand how the position their institution ready to adapt to the challenges and disruptions facing colleges.

This chapter summarized the findings of a multiple case study focused on understanding the importance of athletics on the viability and culture of a small, private Division III college. The research study was completed through two semi-structured interviews with five college presidents and an examination of institutional documents. Individual case analysis was presented before the cross-case analysis. In the next and final chapter, findings are discussed in relation to the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the previously reviewed literature.

Limitations for this research project are shared. The researcher will, then, present implications for practice and policy and suggestions for future research. Finally, the next chapter concludes with a reflection by the researcher.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of the research and an overview of the findings based on the research presented in the previous chapter. The findings are then reviewed in relation to the research questions, the conceptual framework of Schein's organizational culture (2010, 2017), and the literature reviewed from chapter two. Limitations of the research study are offered. Next, the researcher presents suggestions for practice and policy and future research related to the topic of presidential perspectives on how athletics influences the viability and culture of a small, private college. Finally, the researcher provides reflections and conclusions from the multiple case study.

Summary of Study

College presidents operate with an extreme amount of authority and power to guide their institutions. The president of a small, private college is positioned to influence the day-to-day activities and has direct impact on the strategic planning of their institution. They are held responsible for the oversight of athletics by regulatory agencies, including accrediting bodies and national athletic governance associations. In many situations, the president is the primary decision maker for their institution within their athletic conference. The president of a small, private college was best positioned to understand and influence the role of athletics in relation to institutional viability and culture. This research project sought to understand how athletics influenced the viability and impacted the campus culture of a small, private college through the perspective the college president. Designed as a multiple case study, each president represented a case. The cases were studied to understand their perceptions on the following questions:

1. How do presidents of small, private, Division III colleges and universities perceive the role of athletics on their campus?
2. How do institutional presidents view the influence of athletics on institutional mission and strategic goals?

This study framed the research through Schein's (2017) work on organizational culture. While the perceptions of the presidents were the focal point of this research study, the small, private college was the common denominator. Small, private colleges faced continuing threats to survival. As such, college presidents were asked to consider how athletics influences the viability and impacted campus culture of their institutions. All of them claimed athletics was important, but their reliance on athletics varied between cases.

Discussion of Findings

Findings Related to Research Questions

The research questions of the study positioned the president's perceptions as the focal point. At the small, private college, the president exerts significant influence over the mission, vision, values, and strategy of the institution. If the research question had asked "do athletics matter?" then the simple answer from the participants would have been yes; however, the extent of the importance varied between participants.

RQ 1: How do presidents of small, private, Division III colleges and universities perceive the role of athletics on their campus?

Each participant viewed athletics as a meaningful contributor to student enrollment, retention, and, as a result, to the budget of the institution. Division III's structure of no athletic scholarship money allowed the presidents to leverage athletics as a booster to enrollment and budget without having to provide unfunded athletic scholarships. They also appreciated coaches

as support networks, working to align the educational and co-curricular involvements of their student-athletes. The participants also agreed upon the tension expressed between the academic and athletic arms of campus life.

Across the cases, presidents perceived athletics bolstered enrollment, creating a stabilizing force for the presidents who leveraged athletics to drive their undergraduate numbers. When coaches were responsible for targeted recruitment goals, presidents felt confident in achieving yearly class enrollment totals. In addition, the participants shared that some sports were able to recruit students from higher income demographics, reducing the discount rate. Presidents appreciated that while athletics might be the draw for some student-athletes, the academic development of those same students was equally important. Each participant discussed challenges in mediating tensions and conflicts between athletics and academics. Most shared experiences of having to challenge an individual faculty member who failed to appreciate the contribution of athletics.

In addition, the participants shared that athletics benefitted the campus by adding activities for people to attend while also creating connection points for student-athletes. From the accountability to coaches to the mentoring from team captains, participants told stories about how student-athletes served as campus leaders and influenced the culture among students. Participants believed that winning enhanced campus life and strengthened the position to recruit and retain students. Winning also extended from the field to other areas of campus life for student-athletes. Presidents expected teams to be leaders in the classroom and in their surrounding communities. Participants also held unique perceptions about how athletics influenced campus life.

President Adams led a small, private college that served a niche market of higher education. In an institution of nearly 2,000 students, only 10% were student-athletes. The institution was driven by tradition. Athletics had never been a powerful force in campus life, thus it never entered the realm of traditions at the institution. Neither President Adams, nor her predecessors, sought to make athletics a larger part of campus life. Adams perceived athletics to influence enrollment and budget to a degree, even working to add several varsity level sports in recent years; however, she positioned athletics as a campus involvement that did not elevate in importance above clubs and organizations.

Juxtaposed against Adams, President Williams viewed the influence of athletics as critical and central to campus life and college operations. He touted the role of athletics as a unifying force on campus. Given the number of students enrolled to play sports or support the athletic teams (e.g., band and cheerleaders), Williams wove athletics into the essence of the student experience at his institution. While he led from the middle, he also surrounded himself with people who shared his vision for leveraging athletics to grow enrollment and influence campus culture.

President Johns, the most experienced participant, significantly increased enrollment and stabilized a floundering financial situation at his institution. His previous experience as a president gave him confidence to know when and how to make drastic changes to his institution. Student-athletes were critical to the success of his institution, as they accounted for roughly half of enrollment. Johns articulated how Division III athletics created a complementary involvement model to the academic pursuit of a student-athlete. He spoke of ensuring that newly hired faculty and staff understood their role in the holistic education of the students.

President Martin recalled athletics as a way to create meaningful experiences on campus and knew he could use athletics as a way to increase enrollment and stabilize college finances. Martin also recognized where athletics needed to yield to other institutional matters. He saw athletics as a high impact activity and recognized the importance of coaches as educators and accountability for student-athletes. Martin worked directly with the athletic director as a way to remain constantly involved and knowledgeable about the short and long term needs and challenges facing athletics.

President Ford held the student experience central to her decision making. Over half of the students at her institution competed in athletics on campus, and she was still considering the addition of other sports. Ford believed that athletics inspired students. She felt the institution was positioned to allow students to experience the pleasure of continued participation in athletics while reaping the benefit of additional coaching, mentoring, community development, and learning skill sets to use in the workforce. Ford placed her athletic director in a prominent position of influence on campus, and they had deliberate and measureable objectives for academic achievement and team success.

In summary, the participants held athletic in high esteem, with positive perceptions about the value added to the institution and to student-athletes. Participants recognized student-athletes as leaders in the classroom and around campus. They saw coaches as partners in education. They leveraged student-athlete recruitment to build strong enrollment patterns, yielding a better financial foundation. Each experienced pushback and tension with some faculty members over perceptions of athletics ranking as more important than academics; however, the participants also acknowledge faculty who were overwhelmingly supportive of student-athletes. Overall, each president perceived athletics to be a positive influence on campus.

RQ 2: How do institutional presidents view the influence of athletics on institutional mission and strategic goals?

In the majority of cases presented in this research study, athletics served as a complementary operation to the institutional mission and strategic goals. The mission drove athletics, not the other way around. In four of the five cases, student-athletes accounted for roughly 50% of the undergraduate enrollment. While the presidents did not perceive that athletics drove their mission, nearly half of their students shared a common involvement. The volume of student-athletes enrolled at those institutions created a reliance on athletics for enrollment and budget.

Given their tenure of experience, the participants understood the institution's mission and built strategic plans to align the institution's mission to the president's vision. Many of the presidents focused on generating varied streams of enrollment paths, including athletics; however, they recognized the need to diversify and not rely solely on athletics. Several of the participants noted the practice of regularly assessing programs, determining which were successful and retiring those that drained resources. The need for agility in college operations was evident as presidents discussed pivoting to adapt to turbulent times and external forces beyond their control.

Participants worked closely with the chairs of their boards of trustees to craft the vision and strategic plan while honoring the mission of the institution. They trusted board members to utilize their expertise to both hold the president accountable for the operations of the college while forecasting where the institution needed to adapt in the future. In addition, the participants recognized how their work at their athletic conferences influenced life on campus for the faculty, staff, and students. Presidents represented their institution as the decision maker for governance

that impacted athletic operations. They attempted to sway decisions in manners that supported their institution's mission and planning. Overall, participants recognized that mission and strategic plans wove into the culture created and nurtured on campus. They crafted environments that allowed athletics to support the mission and planning of the institution without defining it. Individually, the participants shared their unique positionality.

President Adams acknowledged the significant benefit student-athletes added to campus for academic achievement, demographic diversity, and the ability to pay higher rates of tuition. The recent addition of several sports to increase net tuition revenue demonstrated the importance of athletics from the financial perspective to Adams. Yet, athletics did not influence the strategic mission, vision, and values of Adams or her institution. The mission of the college served a niche population and the traditions of that college run deeper than athletics could infiltrate. While Adams wanted more faculty and staff to attend sporting events to support their student-athletes, she acknowledge that this institution's academic mission and specific traditions determined involvement on campus.

President Williams strategically planned enrollment around a cohort model, which focused on the importance of athletic teams and student-athlete recruitment. Williams created protected time for academics, athletics, and chapel. He defended the protected time against competing forces, aligning the influence of athletics with that of academics on an operational level. Williams, long connected to the church-related mission of the institution, spoke of mission and goals as he encouraged their students to find their calling in life. Williams did speak of future enrollment diversification, but showed no signs of slowing down on athletic recruitment.

President Johns saw athletics as a co-curricular involvement that supported the mission of the college. He decisively spoke of hiring coaches who understood how to recruit student-

athletes who fit the mission and values of the school. While competitive, they were not chasing trophies, but pursuing a well-rounded college experience.

President Martin foresaw that athletics enabled the growth of their undergraduate population, but could not be relied upon for exponential future increases. He recognized the need to expand strategic planning while constantly reviewing internal operations and programs to remain solvent. Martin discussed the need to diversify methods of recruiting students, undergraduate and graduate alike, because circumstantial changes could create significant ripples through the enrollment and budgetary areas of his institution. Martin decisively saw football as the antithesis to what Division III athletics represents, deeming it to dominate the athletic culture and becoming the focal point of the college. Martin focused on the college's mission and strategic planning when valuing the role of athletics on campus, never willing to sacrifice either for the sake of one sport.

President Ford focused on her institution's use of strategic thinking as an avenue to keep planning in the front of their minds. Focused in four areas, Ford's strategic plan allowed athletics to have a seat in each arena. If the goal was attentive to diversifying enrollment platforms, athletics would present ideas about how the addition of a specific sport might yield student-athletes to help fill the need. While Ford was relationally driven, she also presented robust examples about leveraging different methods of involvement from all areas of campus to engage student-athletes into the mission of the college.

In summary, all of the participants communicated how athletics added value to campus, both in enrollment, financial, and student life components. Through varying degrees of incorporation, presidents understood when and how to utilize athletics as a strategic tool. Their

perceptions of how to use athletics to achieve a desired outcome connected deeply to their level of understanding and ability to influence institutional culture and mission.

Findings in Light of Conceptual Framework

Organizational Culture

Schein's work on organizational culture (2010, 2017) provided three layers of culture by which to analyze congruence. Presented like a sphere, the outermost level, artifacts, reflect the products and tangible elements created by the members of the organization. Schein (2017) called this "visible and feelable" (p. 17) areas of the organization. The middle layer, espoused beliefs and values, are the ideologies of an organization. It is how members of the organization rationalize their actions, and it reflects ideals, goals, and values. The innermost level, basic underlying assumptions, "have become so taken for granted that you find little variation within a social unit" (Schein, 2017, p. 21). Schein also noted that the basic underlying assumptions create effective alignment when the espoused beliefs and values are repeatedly and successfully implemented within an organization.

College presidents are equally important to the external and internal audiences of their college; therefore, the commentary of their perceptions shed light into where their answers aligned with the news outputs of their institutions. Each president knew their institution, reciting mission statements, values, strategic plans, and enrollment data without any reference material. After all, they utilized those same elements to recruit donors or engage with alumni. As the participants spoke of institutional culture, their comments often reflected the nature through which athletics reflected mission and influences campus life.

Within this study, the development and implementation of strategic plans by each president seemed to tie the layers of culture together. President Adams commented that faculty,

staff, and students at her institution knew the primary elements of their strategic plan. Her plan was influenced by the mission. Additionally, she sought feedback in small-sized meetings with all constituent groups on campus before finalizing the plan. Ultimately, the strategic plan aligned the differing layers of culture to create a platform that served as a mantra and guided decision making on all levels of leadership. Similarly, President Ford spoke of centralizing the mission and the strategic plan, and then communicating the plan until it became engrained in the culture.

Football appeared to be a contentious subject for Presidents Adams and Martin. Neither's institution has a football team. Both spoke of football as a financial and attention drain for athletics. Conversely, Presidents Williams, Johns, and Ford sensed football added a unifying spirit to campus. Adams and Martin were faculty, while the others ascended through administration. Martin was passionate defending his institution's longstanding tradition not to host football. He said he would gladly bus students to a large Division I school with a successful football program as an annual event. Martin felt that was a better financial investment than supporting the cost of a football program. Claiming football did not fit the culture of his institution, where it separated student populations rather than uniting them, Martin's personal convictions were reflected throughout the culture of the institution. From a different position, President Johns acknowledged that football was implemented in a rushed manner before his arrival. Intended to increase a struggling enrollment, the manner in which football was introduced hurt institutional culture. Johns commented that student-athletes were recruited as a number and not because they were a good fit for the institution. Similarly, football became the dominant subculture on campus, accounting for nearly 20% of student enrollment when Johns arrived. This resulted in other students, who were not athletes, leaving the college. Johns described a mismanagement of a shortsighted attempt to grow enrollment at the cost of violating

the campus mission, reflecting incongruence through the three layers of culture. His work as president included repairing relationships across faculty, staff, students, and alumni, and he reestablished the historic mission of the institution. Even through his perceptions of the improper implementation of football, Johns defends football as a benefit to enrollment, budget, and campus life.

President Williams demonstrated the influence a president can have on developing and sustaining a culture where all three layers align. His longevity as the leader of his institution allowed for him to have oversight in hiring most of the faculty and staff at the institution. In addition, Williams discussed his ability to leverage the geographical location of his institution to build the culture of athletic importance. From creating a schedule that separated academic and athletic practice time to seeing how athletics changed their student body to be healthier, Williams engaged athletics in most areas of campus life. Williams built a small leadership team that shared his vision. His work flattened the operational structure of the institution, resulting in a dynamic influence through the campus culture (Cole & Martin, 2018; Hogan & Coote, 2014). Williams briefly discussed some diversification for additional plans to grow enrollment, including graduate programs; however, the focus for strategic planning and operations kept athletics central.

Schein (2017) examined culture as deeper than behaviors. Culture more acutely presents to an organization by how members think, feel, and perceive. President Martin spoke with pride about how he and his team developed the values of the college, and how they used those values to guide their work. More than the mission statement and strategic plan, Martin's values wove into the culture of the institution. Describing distinctly different student groups on campus, the student-athletes and the fine art majors, he noted little to no crossover in involvement. Yet,

Martin, believed the values of the institution significantly served both populations well while allowing their unique involvements and contributions to campus life. Martin described how both groups felt supported, encouraged, and challenged within their areas of focus. For Martin, the values of the campus created the unifying force within his institution. A deeper study of the students could demonstrate if or how those individual groups would see the value in the other groups and articulate how they align to the values of the institution.

Organizational culture is understood not through what people wear or say but how they feel, think, and behave (Schein, 2017). This research study sought to understand how athletics influenced the viability and impacted the campus culture of a college through the perceptions of the president of that institution. In most organizations, the leader is the most powerful person in the organization and they are tasked to manage the culture of the institution (Schein, 1996). Studying the president of a college created a unique challenge to understand where their message differed from the experience of others within the institution. In many ways, the presidents presented commentary that aligned through the layers of artifacts, beliefs, and assumptions. At other times, a disconnectedness between the layers seemed to emerge through recognition from the president or, in some cases, through comments that did not align to other answers or institutional documents. President Adams commented that she wish more students, faculty, and staff attended athletic events, even though she recognized that game attendance was not a defining part of campus culture. President Johns recognized how the rushed implementation of football compromised the integrity of the college's mission and has to work to repair fallout from that decision. Ultimately, individual experience and strengths, which impacted their influence in developing and sustaining organizational culture.

Findings Related to Reviewed Literature

Several elements of the findings connected back to previous research explored in chapter two's review of literature. Specifically, participants spoke on the president's continual need to focus on enrollment and finances at a small, private college, the need to make data-driven decisions, the importance of student satisfaction, and the desire to create dynamic student experiences.

Enrollment and Finance

Financial solvency and stable enrollment were critical foci for the presidents who participated in this study. In three of the five cases, Johns, Williams, and Martin, the president came into office needing to grow the enrollment in order for the institution to survive. In each of those cases, the president felt that public, four-year institutions were participating in practices that hurt the future potential enrollment for small, private colleges. Johns and Martin referenced the privatization of public colleges (Eide, 2018; Zusman, 2005), noting the creation of honors colleges at large public universities and the growth of tuition discounting at public institutions. State discretionary spending for education fluctuates the budgets for public higher education, resulting in a need to create adaptive practices (Docking & Curton, 2015; Zumeta et al., 2015). Where tuition discounting was a practice for small, private colleges to attract potential students, the small, private college cannot compete at scale with the large, public universities. The participants in this study recognized the need to create multiple avenues for recruitment of students to maintain or grow enrollment and stabilize their budget.

While some of the presidents spoke of varied avenues for future recruitment of students, all of their strategic plans included tactics to diversify and grow enrollment and revenue. None of the participants directly discussed the predicted drop in enrollment forecasted for the mid to late

2020s (Grawe, 2018); however, the COVID-19 pandemic influenced a change in the higher education demographics which likely influenced their shortsighted answers.

Data-Driven Decisions

With all of the hats a college president wears, from strategist to fundraiser to cheerleader (Eckel & Kezar, 2011), they cannot be guided by their feelings. The participants commented on creating specific measurements for success, often utilizing the strategic plan to keep those measurements at the forefront. Beyond easily measured statistics like enrollment, budget, and retention rates, presidents included strategic conversations with constituent groups to triangulate if organization members were staying on mission or deviating. Developing opportunities to meet with faculty, staff, and students created positive relationships that carried valued through challenging times (Soares et al., 2018). Soares et al. (2018) went on to note that presidents who created a culture based on making data driven decisions led those president to be positioned to turn a challenge into an opportunity. President Johns conducted a robust evaluation of his campus to determine capacity in the classrooms, residence halls, and dining hall. In doing so, he presented a target number for enrollment that he shared with the entire campus. When, a few years later, they reached that number, Johns had already created next step plans for renovation and building. The steady growth of enrollment positioned Johns' institution to recruit foundation grants and a capital campaign to fund their needed expansion that accompanied the enrollment growth.

Meaningful Experiences

Division III of the NCAA touts the focus on the student first and the athlete as a complementary experience to the overall college education for a student-athlete (NCAA, 2019). Where other divisions award athletic scholarships, changing the focus from recreation to a job

(Adler & Adler, 1985), Division III provides a chance for meaningful experiences to happen beyond the field or court of play (Schroder, 2000). President Martin stated that he did not believe his institution's curriculum set them apart from other institutions, but he believed their programs that created profound and significant involvements were what enhance student experience and student satisfaction. Whether a deep dive into research with a faculty member or a chance to spend a semester studying abroad, the presidents all spoke of student-athletes as having the chance for these life-altering meaningful experiences (Docking & Curton, 2015). Astin (1984) noted that involvement occurs when students are actively engaged, and Division III allows for meaningful involvement to happen in the classroom, with their sport, and in other significant experiences.

Satisfaction: Importance of Winning

Closely tied to creating meaningful experiences, presidents felt the need to ensure student satisfaction. For student-athletes, presidents measured this in areas of roster size, playing time, and the importance of winning. Several of the participants, Ford and Williams, articulated expectations to athletic directors and coaches with regard to winning. This countered research (Emerson et al., 2009; Hearn et al., 2018) that focused Division III athletics on creating satisfying student experiencing rather than the win-loss record; however, those presidents saw winning as related to student satisfaction. President Johns recounted a prolonged season of losing for his institution's sports teams, and commented on how it limited the ability of a coach to recruit. Coaches and teammates are cited as primary influences for support among student-athletes (Paule-Koba & Farr, 2013). Winning, or at least being competitive, enabled coaches to create a more supportive environment and creates a positive campus life activity for other students to support (Emerson et al., 2009). In each case, when discussing winning, the presidents

were not chasing trophies and championships simply for glory or pride. It was always related back to publicity, increased exposure for their institution, and the chance to grow enrollment.

Threat of Closure

At the time of research, none of the presidents indicated their institution was struggling with enrollment or finances, yet they also recognized enrollment and finances had to remain at the forefront of planning. The research for this project was conducted in the fall of 2020, a semester where enrollment at colleges came with complete uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic that significantly limited intercollegiate sports competitions and forced some enrollment into online classes. Each president reported enrollment figures that were either at target or within a few percentage points of their goal for fall 2020. The ability of the presidents to lead their institutions to plan and implement strategies that can withstand a major disturbance to college operations indicated their institutions understand the impending threat of closure facing small, private colleges (Docking & Curton, 2015; Eide, 2018). President Martin referenced reading that as many as 80% of small, private college could close or merge with other institutions within the next 20 years, and he determined his college would not be one of them. Similar to the institutions studied by Astin and Lee (1972) in *The Invisible Colleges* and revisited by Tarrant et al. (2018), the presidents studied here recognized the threat their colleges regularly faced. All were located in non-urban areas and had enrollment of less than 2,000 FTE. Participants recognized the need to develop a vision that created agility for the college to pivot and withstand disruptions to strategic plans. The threat of closure for a non-selective college will not likely go away, but the president of the institution can keep the mission and strategies focused on how to remain relevant and stable into the future.

Limitations

Limitations in research must be recognized and discussed because a perfect research study is not possible (Mertens, 2015). This study relied on the researcher's ability to interview institutional presidents, then quickly gain trust and build rapport with the participants. Trust is critical to move past expected responses and get to the point where the research participants feel comfortable in their ability to share vulnerable information. Predictable answers and non-descriptive data could provide a superficial account of the case, which does not meet the standards for rigor within research. Warren (2012) wrote that "rapport rather than coolness became the truth-eliciting strategy" (p. 136). To develop trust with presidents quickly, and to create an environment in which they trust the researcher to venture beyond the prescribed answers, the researcher utilized networking with presidents currently known to help lay groundwork to be a trustworthy source.

Contributing to the challenge of building rapport and developing a robust collection of data was the COVID-19 global pandemic. Initial arrangements for in person interviews and a day of job shadowing were eliminated for the safety of presidents, their students, and changing state controls for out-of-state visitors. COVID-19 also limited the operations of athletics on college campuses. During the pandemic, the NCAA eliminated national level championships for nearly a year. Athletic conferences and institutional presidents weighed the benefit and cost of competing. Many small, private college presidents lamented the cost to test student-athletes on a regular basis and implored state governments to help finance COVID-19 testing. While supporting the need for a safe and healthy environment for competition, presidents remarked that they simply did not have the margin for that increased costs in their operating budgets. Finally, COVID-19 made an impact to the overall landscape of higher education. Initial reports indicated a

significant number of students withdrew or delayed enrollment because of restrictions for student experience on campus, and small, private colleges felt the effects of this in enrollment. Outcomes are yet unknown as to how enrollment will rebound after campus life can return to full activity; however, COVID-19 limited the ability to collect data in person and limited operations for the campuses of the participants in this study.

Another limitation presented was the self-selection of participants. Purposive sampling was initially used to recruit participants. Of five potential participants initially solicited for participation, only two agreed. Two potential participants declined given the time constraints of their position and the demands on their time. Additionally, one potential participant never responded. Following purposive sampling, snowball sampling was utilized as initial participants recommended other participants. Another potential limitation in data collection and participants could be that the researcher never connected with presidents who were in the midst of struggling with enrollment, or that self-selection of participants eliminated those presidents. Whereas the criteria for participants included having led their institution for more than one year, this study's participants each had at least seven years of leadership at their current institution. That longevity provided time for understanding culture and mission, developing strategic plans, and a chance to implement practices benefitting the institution. Should data collection have included a case where time in presidency was short, then the data may lean in a different direction.

Finally, this multiple case study was also limited by the intensity of case study research. Direct observation was planned to be used as an element of the research design; however, COVID-19 created campus and interstate travel restrictions. In person observation was determined to provide more of a risk than a benefit for this study; however, soliciting published and unpublished documents for analysis allowed data collection beyond the interviews.

Additionally, including five cases helped to ensure research results provided a robust and comprehensive overview of the president's perception regarding the role athletics plays in the viability and culture of the small, private Division III institution.

Implications

For Practice and Policy

College presidents set the strategy to guide internal operations and external relationships for their institution. One immediate way to apply this research into practice is for institutional presidents is to work with senior leadership to align how athletics connects to institutional mission and strategic planning. Specifically, presidents and their senior leadership team need to set an agenda for how athletics influences strategies of enrollment and budget, including bench minimums and retention strategies for student-athletes. When team rosters are particularly large, coaches need the ability and budget space to develop engagement opportunities through junior varsity team competition or similar experiences. Coordination with the college's admissions team, if athletics reports through another organizational arm, is critical to ensure efficiency from recruitment to enrollment. Utilizing faculty representatives to each sports team could help reduce tension if that is a present concern for a college president. Insight from participants about strategies were included in case reports in chapter four and could provide inspiration for a president or senior leader about how to leverage athletics as a way that complements their institution's mission and values.

When athletics reports indirectly, the president needs to engage with athletic leadership to understand the implications of conference and national policy decisions that impact the operations of athletics. President Williams spoke of interpreting decisions down to the institution. While the president's scope for decision making should keep the institution central,

they need to understand the impact as it trickles down from interpretations into practice.

President Johns reported that president's council of his institution's athletic conference makes decisions that have to be implemented conference-wide. He stated that communication with his athletic director and chief operating officer before those decision making meetings was critical to understand the full impact of the policy. The president's position is to ensure that athletics rests within the institution's mission.

Division III of the NCAA has roughly 450 member institutions, larger than Division I or Division II. The popularity of Division III is driven by the fact that athletics scholarships are not awarded, reducing the financial strain of athletic operations to the overall budget. Small, private colleges from other national athletic organizations, like the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) or United States Collegiate Athletic Association (USCAA), could consider realigning their athletic program to NCAA Division III to utilize the structures and practices describe by the cases in this study. Annual Division III membership dues are roughly \$1,000, eliminating the financial impediment; however, there is a strict four to five year realignment process that prevents teams from qualifying for post season play immediately.

Finally, presidents must examine the addition and contraction of sports offered at their institution. A critical assessment of financial impact of each team could determine if the sport is helping or hurting the institution's budget. Some sports, often called green-field sports including field hockey, tennis, and golf, have smaller rosters but yield students who can afford to pay a tuition rate with less need-based aid. Other sports with high operating costs and repeatedly small recruitment numbers may need different leadership or not be a sustainable team. President Johns reported on contracting a few sports where they could not find enough student-athletes to field the team who also fit within the institution's mission. He was careful to assess that his institution

no longer just sought a student as a number for enrollment, but wanted to engage with students who connected to the mission of the college. President Ford noted her athletic director is tasked, as an element of the strategic plan, to think forward about developing additional sports to increase and diversify enrollment. Presidents must consider the enrollment landscape for sport offerings for three to five years in future planning.

For Research

This research study examined how five different presidents perceived the role of athletics related to institutional viability and culture. While case studies allow the researcher to take a deep dive into the real world context of the case, the case was constrained by the research parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2018). One recommendation for future research would be to expand the perspective to seek how faculty, staff, students, and alumni perceive the role of athletics as related to institutional mission and strategy. Suggested additional participants would include the athletic director, a few experienced coaches, some senior student-athletes, tenured faculty members, and related staff. Alumni, both student-athletes and non-student-athletes, could provide interesting historical accounts to demonstrate the evolution of the role and importance of athletics. Interviewing a variety of people would redirect the case to be more about the institution than the president. It would better showcase how athletics influences culture through the thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of organizational members (Schein, 2017).

Additionally, this research focused on participants who led colleges in the Southeast United States. To create broader implications, suggested research would include following similar methodology with more participants from different geographical regions of the United States. The Midwest and Northeast have concentrated amounts of small, private colleges and

face different demographic patterns than the Southeast. Birthrates below the rate of replacement and declining high school graduation rates forecasted enrollment challenges for non-elite colleges (Grawe, 2018). Similarly, the studied participants led in rural or non-urban areas. An examination of leading a small, private college in an urban area would provide an understanding of how the surrounding environment could impact the role of athletics for student experience.

This research examined two presidents who grew into leadership through the faculty ranks, two through staff avenues, and one who mostly worked outside of higher education. A deliberate focus with a broader based of participants who ascended into the presidency through academics, outside of the academy, and through administration would provide insight for how and why athletics is utilized in connection with mission and strategic decisions.

Lastly, future research could examine the tension of football at the small, private college. Roughly half of Division III institutions field football teams (NCAA, 2018), and three of the five participants were strong supporters of football as an enrollment tool and a unifying force for campus involvement. The other two saw football as a drain on resources and a liability for the institution's mission. A research study might examine the polarizing effects of football, the value of football for enrollment and budget, and the impact football has on campus life.

Reflection

Throughout this research project, I believed that the plight of the small, private college should become a critical focus of the larger higher education ecosystem. The participants spoke of their institutions creating safe spaces for first generation students and utilizing athletics to create a network of support. That support system gave regular, personalized attention that a scaled-up, large, public institution could not provide. President Allen spoke of faculty perceiving student-athletes as not primarily focused on the educational pursuit, and she kindly reminded

faculty that the student-athletes were some of their brightest students, graduating with better grades and at higher rates than their counterparts. If the student-athlete has to meet the same curricular requirements as all students, why should their motives for enrollment matter?

Chu (1982) rightfully acknowledged that the United States has uniquely connected education and sport. For Division I institutions, where athletics generates revenue, sports equal contracts for television rights, merchandising, and increased media attention. For Division III institutions, the impact for revenue was directly correlated to how athletics influenced the enrollment of student-athletes and the institution's annual budget. To some, connecting education and sport muddled the purpose of education; however, the NCAA has attempted to utilize sport as an accountability measure for student-athletes to move toward degree completion. The perseverance required to earn a four year degree is challenging, and athletics can help to motivate a student-athlete toward completion.

As we conducted our interviews through computer-based video conferencing, I worried that I might struggle to fully comprehend both the verbal and non-verbal side of the interview. Each president appeared fully present and provided answers that seemed to dive past the prescribed narrative. When I chose to study how athletics would be perceived at the small, private college, COVID-19 did not exist. Before I solicited my first participant, the NCAA had cancelled national basketball tournaments and spring championships. Not long after that, colleges reported furloughing coaches or cutting sports because of forecasted lost revenue. I asked the participants to consider their answers outside of the constraints of operating a college in the midst of a global pandemic. While they were able to do so, I found it challenging to view their answers outside of the pandemic. One president told me that the NCAA national office is struggling financially because of lost television revenue. The COVID-19 pandemic forced

leadership of longstanding organizations, including colleges and the NCAA, to contemplate a future without intercollegiate athletic competition. The short-term outcomes are dire, leading one to believe the long-term implications of limiting college sports would drastically change the landscape of higher education.

Conclusion

This research study proposed to answer the question of how the presidents of small, private colleges viewed the importance of athletics to institutional viability and culture. More deeply, how would those presidents perceive the influence of athletics on institutional mission and strategic goals? After studying five presidents, each their own case, they made it clear that athletics is critical to the small, private college. If the small, private college could no longer field sports and the competitive culture of athletics disappeared, so too would many of the small, private colleges. A few would remain, particularly those with strong endowments and those able to scale the cost of attendance coupled with a dynamic learning and co-curricular experience. Lost would be the chance for some students who need more personal attention or the chance to play their sport to spark their enrollment. This study presented five cases, and the overlapping themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis examined how the president influenced the dynamics between academics and athletics, winning built foundations for success for the presidents and the institutions, and the president exerted control over the narrative that guides their college.

The study benefited from connecting with presidents who had significant time in leadership at their institution. They knew the ethos of their environment, and they understood how dependent their institution could be on athletics. Their tenure as president spoke to continued success in measures of financial stability and relevance into the future. Each president

reflected on their relationship with board of trustee members, noting the importance of managing the board and keeping them out of the weeds of operational decision making. The presidents displayed a confidence in decision making that either maintained or created stability within their institution.

This study adds to the small but growing volume of data on small, private colleges that are enrollment not endowment driven. As Astin and Lee (1972) labeled colleges like these invisible, a single college's closure might not garner much attention; however, compounding effects of the small, private college closures or mergers with large public institutions could hurt the diversified landscape of higher education. The small, private college is an important element in the higher education ecosystem, and athletics might just be the operational element needed to be leveraged for its survival.

Summary

This chapter discussed the data analysis of this study within the areas of the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the previously reviewed literature. Limitations, including developing trust from a college president and the global pandemic's effect on travel, were examined. The chapter then explored how this research could impact policy and practice for small, private colleges. Suggestions for future research were presented, followed by a reflection from the researcher. Finally, the chapter closed with conclusions from the research regarding this study and the future of the small, private college's relationship with athletics.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Interview Protocol, First Interview

Dissertation Study for “How intercollegiate athletics contributes to institutional viability: a small private college president's perspective.”

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only my dissertation chair and I will be privy to the recordings. In addition, I need you to sign a consent form. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

*Contingency Plan. Though in person data collection is most desired, an alternative plan for research has been determined. Should in-person data collection not be possible, a series of two interviews through audio and visual means would take place. These interviews would be recorded for both audio and video. This would eliminate the shadowing portion of the previous research plan.

This interview is scheduled to last no longer than 90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Can we get started?

Introduction

You have been selected to speak because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal of perspective on the role of intercollegiate athletics on the Division III level. This research project as a whole focuses on how athletics contributes to the viability of a small, private college.

Interviewee Background

How long have you been ...

_____ in your present position?

_____ at this institution?

Planned Questions:

Warming Up

- Can you start by telling me a little about yourself?
- Will you please describe your path into college/university administration?
- What factors shape your leadership philosophy?
- Have you had any previous, direct experience in working with student-athletes, college athletics, or were you a student-athlete?

- Can you describe your experience in working with athletics?

Structure of the College/University

- Will you describe the structure (major departments/divisions and reporting structure) of this college/university?
 - Can you describe the mission of your institution? What makes you unique?
 - How does athletics fit into the reporting structure? What factors help decide the reporting structure for athletics?
- What are the critical areas of the university that currently require your focus and attention?
 - How do you lead through these areas or issues?

Role of Athletics

What are your overall perceptions about the role of athletics at your institution?

- Will you describe the connection of athletics to institutional mission?
- How does athletics fit or create conflict with the academic expectations for students?

Athletics as a(n)...

- Enrollment Strategy:
 - Can you describe the extent to which athletics is a component of enrollment?
 - How have sports offering impacted recruitment or enrollment?
 - How does student-athlete recruitment connect to the admissions/enrollment process? If so, please describe.
- Effect on Finances:
 - How do you perceive alumni to connect giving to athletic achievement?
 - Given that your student-athletes comprise XX% of your undergraduate student body, what are your perceptions about how important or unimportant student-athlete enrollment is?
 - How does athletics influence budgeting strategies for your institution?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol, Second Interview

Dissertation Study for “How intercollegiate athletics contributes to institutional viability: a small private college president's perspective.”

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only my dissertation chair and I will be privy to the recordings. In addition, I need you to sign a consent form. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

*Contingency Plan. Though in person data collection is most desired, an alternative plan for research has been determined. Should in-person data collection not be possible, a series of two interviews through audio and visual means would take place. These interviews would be recorded for both audio and video. This would eliminate the shadowing portion of the previous research plan.

This interview is scheduled to last about 90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Can we get started?

Introduction

Thank you for spending time with me, and allowing me to shadow you for a day. I'd like to spend a little bit of time following up our first interview with a few more questions.

Planned Questions:

- Can you describe how your day-to-day functions are influenced by the presence of athletics on campus?
 - How much time do you spend on athletic related matters in a typical week?
- Athletics as a Satisfaction/Retention Component:
 - What is your perception of how satisfied student-athletes are with their athletic experience?
 - How does roster size seem to impact satisfaction and retention of student-athletes?
 - How critical is athletics as a component of student life on campus?
- How is your institutional culture impacted and influenced by college athletics?
- How do you engage with faculty regarding decision making? How do faculty view/perceive athletics in regards to institutional mission?

- What role does the Board of Trustees play in your working life? How are they involved in decision making?
- What are your perceptions about the future of athletics at your institution? Do you foresee any major changes on the horizon?
- Is there anything else that would be important for me to know?

Appendix C

Document Analysis Protocol

Adapted from Bowen (2009) and O'Leary (2014)

1. Identify and gather relevant texts.
 - a. Is the document public or non-published/private?
2. Make copies of original text for annotation.
3. Assign pseudonym to document.
 - a. Consider other ethical issues.
4. Assess authenticity of document.
 - a. Strategies for ensuring credibility.
5. Explore document's purpose.
 - a. Identify and address biases.
6. Explore background information relevant to document.
7. Ask questions about the document.
8. Explore content.
 - a. Track annotation, coding, etc.