

“Alternative Success Theory”: An examination of what athletics department success means for  
small colleges

by

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to gain a deep understanding of the small college athletics environment by (1) measuring the fit of small college athletics departments into their respective institutions and into Division III athletics and (2) understanding how the small college athletics department operates in a manner for the institution as a whole to remain competitive in the proverbial higher education marketplace. In-depth interviews were conducted with NCAA Division III Athletics Directors, campus administrators (e.g., President, Provost, Vice President for Enrollment Management), and Faculty Athletics Representatives to better understand how university and athletics administrators define athletics program success at small colleges. In all, 33 interviews were conducted across 11 different Division III institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body. A three-pronged theoretical approach (Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, and Strategic Contingency Theory) is utilized to develop an “Alternative Success Theory” to better understand the complex small college athletics environment. Practical and theoretical implications for small-school Athletics Directors, university administrators, and NCAA officials are discussed.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Background of Division III and Operationalizing “Small College” Athletics.....	6
Financial Climate of College Athletics.....	8
Small Colleges and the Higher Education Competitive Marketplace.....	10
Purpose, Implications, Goals, and Research Questions.....	13
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	17
Early History of the Small College.....	18
The Current College Financial Environment.....	20
Tuition Discounts.....	22
Enrollment Management.....	24
The Strategic Plan and its Relation to Mission Attainment.....	28
Agency Theory.....	33
Value Responsibility Budgeting.....	37
Strategic Contingency Theory.....	39
Alumni Satisfaction and Donor Giving.....	41
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	45
Epistemology and Ontology.....	46
The Qualitative Approach.....	48
Research Design, Data Collection, Subject Selection.....	51
Interviews.....	51
Procedures.....	53
Data Analysis.....	59
Reliability and Validity.....	61
Trustworthiness.....	63
Credibility.....	64
Transferability.....	65
Dependability.....	66
Confirmability.....	66
Researcher Positionality.....	67
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	72
Communication Process Between Campus Administrators Regarding Goals For The Athletics Department and Campus-Wide Perceptions of Athletics.....	72
Goal-setting communication.....	72
Campus-wide perceptions of athletics.....	77
Tensions as the Faculty Athletics Representative.....	79
The Financial Climate Surrounding Small College Athletics.....	83
The role of tuition discounting.....	84
The changing small college financial landscape.....	88
Rating the financial stability of the institution and the athletics department...	92

The institution's chance for survival if the athletics department closed.....	94
Athletics Department Strategies for Stability.....	98
Rules about roster sizes or tuition quotas.....	99
Adding new sports to increase enrollment.....	102
The role of athletics department donor giving.....	104
Division III Philosophy Adherence and the Small College Athletics	
Competitive Marketplace.....	107
Athletics department mission alignment with Division III athletics.....	108
How level of a playing field is Division III athletics?.....	111
Steps the athletics department has taken to remain competitive in the small college higher education marketplace.....	117
Describing the small college athletics experience to someone who has no idea what it is about.....	124
Reflections of Athletics Success.....	128
Expectations for winning as part of Athletics Director hiring process.....	129
Factors contributing to firing a coach.....	122
Definitions of athletics success.....	135
Faculty definitions of athletics success.....	136
Administrator definitions of athletics success.....	137
Athletics Director definitions of athletics success.....	141
Conclusion.....	146
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	148
Agency Theory.....	150
Relationship 1: Institution (Principal) – Student (Agent).....	150
Relationships 2 and 3: President/Campus Administration (Principal) ---- Athletics Director (Agent) and Athletics Director (Principal) ---- Coaches (Agent).....	152
Relationship 4: Institution (Principal) – Athletics Department (Agent).....	156
Value Responsibility Budgeting.....	160
Strategic Contingency Theory.....	167
Limitations and Directions for Future Research.....	172
Conclusion.....	174
APPENDICES.....	182
Appendix A.....	182
Appendix B.....	183
Appendix C.....	188
Appendix D.....	189
REFERENCES.....	190
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	200

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1	Literature Review Organization .....	17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 28, 33, 37, 39, 42
Table 2	Institutional Profiles .....	55

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1      Three-pronged theoretical constructs for “Alterative Success Theory” ..... 149

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In a *SB Nation* article investigating why many small colleges are adding football programs while the rest of the country begins to distance themselves from the sport, Demirel (2013) stated, “Each of those players provides Hendrix College (a small Division III liberal arts institution) an influx of the cash it needs to remain relevant in a world where pure liberal arts education is increasingly becoming an endangered species” (para. 13). As evidence, in a span between 2008 and 2012, in order to add more students – and the tuition dollars that come along with the added enrollment – 29 small colleges added football programs to their athletics department (Demirel, 2013). The story of Hendrix College adding football serves as a relevant example for examining the role of athletics in the small college environment.

Hendrix College, founded in 1876, is an undergraduate liberal arts college located in Conway, Arkansas (Scott, 2007). For the 2014-2015 academic year, 1,317 undergraduates attended Hendrix, 369 of which were student-athletes. The football team had a roster of 74 student-athletes (“Office of Postsecondary Education,” 2016). In 2007, Tim Cloyd, the president of Hendrix College at the time, formed a committee to explore the possibility of adding football, a program that had been dormant at the school since 1960 (Ramsey, 2013; Scott, 2007). The decision-making process was expected to take a year, and the committee consisted of faculty and staff, alumni, and students and was to gauge both the financial viability and student interest in adding a football program (Scott, 2007).

Ultimately, the football team was added at Hendrix amid skepticism about financial costs and how a football program would impact campus culture (Ramsey, 2013). A Division III institution, the football team competes in an environment that is “a long way from Woo Pig Sooie” (a reference to geographically nearby Division I University of Arkansas) (Ramsey, 2013,

para. 15). While detailing institutional decisions to add football programs in recent years, Lederman (2008) conveyed,

The colleges that have most commonly added football programs in recent years are not institutions aiming for the upper reaches of NCAA's Division I, but smaller liberal arts colleges seeking either to expand their male enrollments or, in some cases, survive by adding programs that might attract paying students at the non-scholarship Division III level. (para. 14)

President Cloyd was strategic and upfront about exploring the possibility of adding football due to his interest in the institution remaining competitive financially in higher education (Demirel, 2013; Lederman, 2008; Ramsey, 2013). Cloyd endorsed adding the program when noting the institution had been exploring options for adding programs throughout campus that would, "increase our market footprint given the increased competition we're expecting down the road" (as cited in Lederman, 2008, para. 16).

As mentioned previously, a key rationale for adding football was to increase numbers on campus. Hendrix was looking to increase enrollment at the institution, which would in turn increase revenues on campus (Demirel, 2013; Lederman, 2008; Ramsey, 2013). Institutional research indicated that there were academically qualified prospective students who wanted to keep playing football in college. Those students never attended Hendrix because football was not offered (Demirel, 2013; Lederman, 2008; Ramsey, 2013). As the committee explored the viability of adding football to an institution already composed of approximately 25% student-athletes, "a financial impact study showed that the number of tuition-paying students who would enroll at Hendrix for the chance to continue to play football after high school would more than cover the annual costs of staging the program" (Lederman, 2008, para. 18).

At Division III institutions, mean incomes of head football coaches hover around \$65,000 with annual recruiting costs of only \$35,000 (McCollum, 2013). The average total operating expenses at a Division III institution with football is approximately \$3.7 million annually (“NCAA Division III Facts and Figures,” 2013). For a Division III institution without football, the average annual operating expenses are approximately \$2.1 million (“NCAA Division III Facts and Figures,” 2013). At the NCAA Division III level, on average, student-athletes make up 21% of the general student body. The average undergraduate enrollment at Division III institutions is 2,600 students. (“NCAA Recruiting”, 2014). This is in stark contrast to the Division I level where student-athletes comprise only 6% of the student body and where average undergraduate enrollments are close to 13,000 students (“NCAA Recruiting”, 2014).

Nearly all small schools at the Division III level do not generate revenue in the typical sense of television broadcasting rights deals, corporate sponsorships, and ticket revenue (Demirel, 2013; Katz, Pfleeger, Schaeperkoetter, & Bass, 2015; Peale, 2013). One source of “revenue” comes in the form of increased alumni donations. When Hendrix’s committee was gathering its own data, they also discovered that athletics on campus (with football included) could create additional streams of revenue in the form of alumni giving (McCollum, 2013). However, the primary revenue for small college athletics comes in the form of the tuition-dollars from the student-athletes (Demirel, 2013). Many Division III student-athletes do not pay the full cost of attendance (e.g., students, on average, at Hendrix receive approximately a 50% discount off the \$48,000 cost of attendance) (Demirel, 2013). However, even if Hendrix receives half of the total cost from 120 football players, that’s an additional \$3 million per year in generated revenue for the institution (Eifling, 2013). Citing other small Division III colleges with football programs, Eifling (2013) detailed, “Methodist (a school of approximately 2,000 in Fayetteville, North

Carolina) had 214 students in (preseason) football camp! Sticker price there is close to \$40,000 a year. Two-hundred warm bodies is \$8 million in cash, stuffed under helmets and pads” (para. 10).

Although the Hendrix College case study emphasized the potential positive ramifications of adding a football program, it also highlights the potential for campus athletics departments to either add sports other than football or to increase roster sizes of existing sports. Consider two other shorter case studies indicating a strong athletics department presence in overall campus enrollment. In a popular press article examining two small Division III institutions in the Cincinnati metropolitan area (the College of Mount St. Joseph and Thomas More College), Peale (2013) stated “Both schools say (having athletics is) one of the best tools to get students on campus and the college money for tuition. They depend heavily on tuition fees to balance their books every year” (para. 4). In fact, Peale (2013) posited that Mount St. Joseph generates about \$5.3 million from athletics on an annual basis while only spending about \$1 million in athletics operating expenses. The College of Mount Saint Joseph had 405 student-athletes and 1,222 students overall for the 2013-2014 school year (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015). More than one-third of the students at Mount Saint Joseph are student-athletes. At Thomas More College, the numbers are similar; student-athletes make up approximately 34% of the student body (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015). In the minds of some small college decision-makers, having athletics programs is a direct strategy to attract students to the university that may not necessarily otherwise be interested in the college or university; for those institutions, athletics is a recruiting mechanism to increase enrollment (Peale, 2013). Peale (2013) surmised, “At Thomas More and the Mount (Mount Saint Joseph), they aren’t trying to break even on sports. Instead they use it as a tool, just as they would using the marching band or the honors program” (para. 8). In much the same way a prospective band student or prospective honors

program begins to seriously consider a school because of specific programmatic offerings (e.g., the band or honors program), prospective small college students may select the school because of the specific opportunity to participate in Division III athletics at the institution. Thus, the athletics department itself may be a strong recruiting mechanism for the small college.

Hendrix College, the College of Mount St. Joseph, and Thomas More College all provide specific examples of the potential for small college athletics departments to serve a very important role in the small college setting. Understanding such a role serves as the impetus for the general purpose of this dissertation. That is, this study seeks to gain a deep understanding of the small college athletics department's fit into the both the small college environment and the Division III athletics environment and how such institutions operate to remain competitive in the overall higher education marketplace.

Several different factors contribute to the acute financial pressures of small colleges and universities. As (mostly) private institutions, small colleges and universities do not receive government subsidies. Further, Division III institutions receive less than 3% of the NCAA's media rights deal with CBS (Snyder & Waterstone, 2015). With such a lack of external funding (from the government and the NCAA), small colleges and universities have to rely on internal revenue sources, namely in the form of tuition revenue and donor giving, to remain financially solvent. Thus, the idea that athletics could serve as an internal source for such revenue merits further attention and could have potential ramifications for how athletics could define success differently than standard notions of success defined by winning games.

In their study exploring factors contributing to the on-field success of Division III athletics departments, Katz and colleagues (2015) found two types of Division III institutions tend to excel most athletically (as determined by the Learfield Director's Cup standings): those

with large student body populations and highly selective academic institutions. Importantly, Katz et al. (2015) also noted there might be “alternate definitions of success” (p. 115) based on the environmental constraints and responsiveness to the strategies of both other like-minded Division III institutions and the campus administrators at each Division III institution (namely at small, private, liberal arts colleges). The stakes for many of these small schools are arguably higher than simply competing for the on-field success discussed by Katz and colleagues (2015). Thus, I aimed to gain a deep understanding of how small colleges fit into the small college athletics environment, the small college’s integration into Division III athletics as a whole, and how the institution operates in a manner in order to remain competitive in the proverbial higher education marketplace. With an understanding of several case studies and the general purpose of this dissertation, it is important to describe the background of Division III athletics, the rationale for operationalizing the small college athletics environment as Division III institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body, the current financial climate of college athletics, and the history of the small college in order to better contextualize the importance and relevance of this study.

### **The Background of Division III and Operationalizing “Small College” Athletics**

The NCAA divided its member institutions into Divisions I, II, and III in 1973 based primarily on funding of athletics programs, scholarships for student-athletes, and fan interest (“Divisional differences,” 2017; Yost, 2010). At the Division III level, student-athletes cannot receive scholarships based on athletic merit (“Division III facts and figures,” 2017; “Divisional differences,” 2017; Yost, 2010). For some of the more straightforward statistics, consider the following about Division III:

- 450 Division III institutions

- 80% of Division III institutions are private
- 20% of Division III institutions are public
- Student-athletes comprise, on average, 24% of the student body (ranges from two to more than 60%)

Additionally, in terms of undergraduate enrollment, the Division III institution with the lowest undergraduate enrollment has 232 students. The largest Division III institution has 24,991 undergraduate students. The median undergraduate enrollment for all Division III institutions is 1,766, while the average undergraduate enrollment is 2,648 (“Division III facts and figures,” 2017). Finally, several components of the Division III philosophy are especially relevant for the current study. Consider the following statements included in the NCAA’s “Division III Facts and Figures” (2017) publication:

- “Division III athletics departments place special importance on the impact of athletics on the participants rather than the spectators. The student-athlete’s experience is of paramount concern” (p. 2).
- “Division III athletics departments are dedicated to offering broad-based programs with a high number and wide range of athletics participation opportunities for both men and women” (p. 2).
- “Division III features student-athletes who are subject to the same admission standards, academic standards, housing and support services as the general student body” (p. 2).

Contextualizing the background and basic facts and figures of the NCAA Division III level provides rationale for operationalizing the small college athletics environment as Division III institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (“Size and setting classification description,”

2017) was also utilized to operationalize small college athletics. In classifying the size of colleges, the Carnegie Classification details, “Size matters. It is related to institutional structure, complexity, culture, finances, and other factors” (“Size and setting classification description,” 2017, para. 2). “Very small” colleges are classified as institutions with enrollments of less than 1,000 degree-seeking students (includes undergraduate and graduate enrollments). “Small colleges” are institutions with enrollments between 1,000 and 2,999 (Size and setting classification description,” 2017).

In all, utilizing 20% as the cutoff for examining the small college athletics environment was a percentage cutoff point that was determined based on array of factors. Namely, while student-athletes across all Division III institutions comprise 24% of the general student body, many large institutions skew this number. Additionally, Division III median (1,766) and mean (2,648) undergraduate enrollments were used in combination with the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education for “very small” and “small colleges.” Ultimately, for the purposes of this study, the small college athletics environment was operationalized as Division III institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body.

### **Financial Climate of College Athletics**

Much of the public discourse surrounding revenues, expenses, and the overall financial climate of college athletics has intimated concerns about college athletics as “cartels, big business, abuse of power, (and) profits over concerns for students’ well-being” (Smith & Synowka, 2014, p. 32). Although much of this discourse is in relation to Division I athletics, certain features of the Division I financial landscape also relate to small colleges and universities. Specifically, examining athletics department funding from purely a profit standpoint can be misleading because athletics departments function as non-profit entities and also because they

receive revenue from several different types of sources (Hoffer & Pincin, 2016; McEvoy, Morse, & Shapiro, 2013). Further, the allocation of athletics-department revenues may differ across institutions. As emphasized by McEvoy and colleagues (2013), “it is important to differentiate between allocated revenues, such as student fees, which are essentially transfers of funds internally within the larger university institution rather than truly being revenue” (p. 251). Further, inter-institution athletics department subsidies, often in the form of student fees and general funds transferred from the institution to the athletics department, are prevalent in the current NCAA environment (Hoffer & Pincin, 2016).

Several studies have examined the practices of current financial hierarchical structures and strategies for dually increasing student-athlete enrollment and postseason athletics success. Snyder and Waterstone (2015) interviewed changing athletics department practices at two small liberal arts colleges. Their interest in the setting was prompted by the unanimous rejection of the NCAA’s proposal to add a fourth division. They argued that although the proposal was denied, “the institutions were forced to evaluate Division III intercollegiate athletics in their current state and assess its viability going forward in the increasingly complex landscape of higher education” (Snyder & Waterstone, 2015, p. 195). Through interviews with presidents of two institutions that compete in the same athletics conference and through an interview with the same conference’s commissioner, findings indicated a debate about the progressive athletics culture (i.e., adding sports in order to increase enrollment) in small institutions and the related impact of financial concerns in higher education.

It is important to emphasize the role of a small college's chancellor or president in the operations of the athletics department. Because small college athletics departments are typically more fluidly integrated with the overall university (both from a financial and operations standpoint), "the president of the institution exerts significant influence over the daily functioning and long-term planning of the athletics department... Proximity of the president (to the athletic director in the organizational reporting structure) and resulting presidential oversight are key characteristics of Division III and are emphases of the NCAA..." (Snyder & Waterstone, 2015, p. 198). At small institutions faced with increasing costs of higher education, administrators must be intentional in developing ways to transfer costs (Smith & Synowka, 2014; Snyder & Waterstone, 2015). For university presidents at small colleges, the idea that athletics can help a school financially based on student-athlete tuition dollars "represents a polarizing view of athletics at small colleges" (Snyder & Waterstone, 2015, p. 32).

### **Small Colleges and the Higher Education Competitive Marketplace**

While the funding sources of higher education – tuition, donations, legislative appropriations, and interest accrued on previous endowments – differ from typical revenue streams in a truly competitive market, colleges and universities do share one salient characteristic with businesses that operate in a truly competitive market: total costs cannot continually exceed total revenue for extended periods of time if the business (college or university) wishes to survive (Winston, 1999). Further, the dynamics of the sector of higher education indicate multiple, connected markets that vie for consumers (e.g., students, funds, etc.) The notion that large, public institutions may compete for the same students as small, private colleges indicates there are multiplicities of competition in higher education (Dill, 1997). Winston (1999) linked the different markets by explaining an unambiguous similarity between the two. Specifically,

This sustainable excess of production cost over price – the continuing ability of a college to subsidize all of its customers, not just cross-subsidize some at the expense of others or briefly let fall below cost – is a defining economic characteristic of higher education, both public and private. (Winston, 1999, p. 17)

Competitive markets do exist in higher education, but certain inherent characteristics of the organization (e.g., varying government subsidies) impede institutions of higher education from operating in a purely competitive market (Dill, 1997).

As avowed by Barr and McClellan (2010), “the broader fiscal context of higher education sets very real constraints on what can and cannot be done in any institution of higher education” (p. 1). In order for institutions of higher education to identify and capture different revenue streams, they must face challenges related to the increased levels of competition for students and growing apprehension about the rising costs borne by students and their families (Barr & McClellan, 2010). Cost-sharing, the idea that the costs of higher education are shared with the tuition-paying students, has become more prevalent as institutions of higher education face challenges with decreasing government support (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010).

Specifically, governments that once subsidized both public and private (in the form of state-sponsored financial aid grants) institutions of higher education now struggle more with “escalating burdens of seemingly non-discretionary increases in public spending obligation: pensions, the rising costs of elementary and secondary education, health care, public infrastructure, national security, and interest on national debts” (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010, p. 18). As such, macro-level decision-making external to institutions of higher education has impacted administrative policies at the college and university level and has resulted in a shift in which tuition-payers bear rising costs (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010).

Small colleges continue to have a role in the overall setting of institutions of higher education in the United States (Bonvillian & Murphy, 2014; Riddle, Brint, Levi, & Turk-Bicakci, 2005; Westfall, 2006; Zdziarski, 2010). Further, small colleges constitute more than 70% of all colleges and universities in the United States and a quarter of all undergraduates attend small colleges (Westfall, 2006). However, these small – often private, liberal arts – colleges have faced many challenges with their enrollments. Since most small colleges are tuition-driven, even a slight change in enrollment numbers can have a dramatic impact on the institution’s budget (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Bonvillian & Murphy, 2014; DesJardins & Bell, 2006; Riddle et al., 2005; Zdziarski, 2010). Specifically, “one of the most important changes in American higher education over the last 30 years has been the gradual shrinking of the old arts and sciences core of undergraduate education and the expansion of occupational and professional programs” (Riddle et al., 2005, p. 151).

In response to shifts of student interest and changing market conditions (i.e., rising costs associated with higher education), small schools have had to adopt strategies to remain competitive in the higher education marketplace: “innovative initiatives, effective management of institutional resources, adaptation to external social and economic conditions, aggressive leadership ... and the engagement of faculty in the strategic process” (Bonvillian & Murphy, 2014, p. 207). Importantly, Bonvillian and Murphy (2014) emphasized the competitive strategies of these small colleges are not strictly in competition with other like-minded institutions. Rather, the “competition” is the entire higher education marketplace. As such, “by first capitalizing on their own unique characteristics and second, offering a greater variety of professional programs, many small schools are going after students who might have otherwise opted for large universities” (Bonvillian & Murphy, 2014, p. 132).

Consider the specific strategies two small, private colleges have utilized to remain competitive in higher education. The University of the Ozarks, a liberal arts institution in Arkansas with 651 students, announced in December of 2016 that ACT or SAT standardized test scores are no longer a requirement for applicants. This “test-optional” application will still receive full consideration for admission to the university (“U of O adopts test-optional,” 2016). At Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, California, administrators made a bold shift in enrollment management strategies in order to address fledging enrollment. The institution began to cater its admissions marketing and outreach to the growing Hispanic population in California so the institution could be officially designated as a “Hispanic-Serving Institution” (Hoover, 2013; Schnoebelen, 2013). Under this designation given by the U.S. Department of Education to institutions that meet a 25% threshold of Hispanic enrollees, institutions can compete for federal grant funding (Hoover, 2013; Schnoebelen, 2013). For the 2011 fiscal year, Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the United States received more than \$104 million; Notre Dame de Namur received more than \$6 million in 2011 alone and enrollment grew from 1,300 students to more than 2,000 students in a span of six years (Hoover, 2013; Schnoebelen, 2013). Thus, although this dissertation will focus on one specific segment of higher education (small college athletics), research and popular press articles indicate small colleges may use an array of strategies to remain competitive in higher education.

### **Purpose, Implications, Goals, and Research Questions**

The general purpose of this dissertation is to (1) examine small college athletics departments’ fit into the small college environment and into Division III athletics, and (2) how the institution operates in a manner to remain competitive in the higher education marketplace. This study has both practical and theoretical implications for the NCAA, its member institutions,

and current and prospective NCAA student-athletes. From a theoretical standpoint, this dissertation endeavors to develop an explanatory theoretical mechanism for institutional and athletics department priorities in small college athletics. From a practical standpoint, results could provide advice for collaborative efforts for campus administration and Athletics Directors in order to enhance the student-athlete experience while also meeting institutional financial goals. Additionally, findings may deliver information to educate various constituency groups on small college campuses (e.g., athletics department personnel, faculty, staff, students) about the role of athletics on campus.

In addition to the general purpose and implications of this dissertation, four specific goals underlie this study. First, it is a critical, holistic examination of small college athletics programmatic decision-making and how such strategies are integrated with overall university goals. As will be detailed throughout the literature review, existing research on higher education practices examines strategic enrollment management practices at small colleges, but the specific role of small college athletics has not been deeply explored outside of popular press articles. The second specific goal of this dissertation is to explore how existing theories could improve our understanding of the interaction between small college athletics decision-making and the university's priorities. Third, this study endeavors to develop an "Alternative Success Theory" to explain how small colleges define athletics success, which could lead to a redefining of normalized definitions of success. The fourth goal of this examination of small college athletics relates closely with the third goal of this study. Specifically, by developing an "Alternative Success Theory", I hope to answer the various calls for more sport-specific theories in order to legitimize sport management as its own academic discipline (Chalip, 2006; Doherty, 2013; Fink, 2013). As emphasized by Chalip (2006),

If the study of sport management is to position itself as a distinctive discipline, then it must take seriously the possibility that there are distinctive aspects to the management of sport. In other words, if sport management is to be anything more than the mere application of general management principles to the sport context, then there must be something about sport that renders distinctive concerns, foci, or procedures when sport is managed. (p. 3)

If sport management is to be accepted as its own discipline, its theories must also have implications for public services, schools, social services, economic development, local businesses, and the media (Chalip, 2006). As such, not only does the development of a sport-specific “Alternative Success Theory” have micro-level implications for sport management theoretically and practically, it also can have macro-level implications for the overall academic institutions and the economic underpinnings of small colleges and universities.

In addition to theoretical contributions, this study will provide information about the small college athletics environment for practitioners to use as a resource. Decision-makers (university administrators and Athletics Directors) that are responsible for developing and implementing policy regarding admission standards, enrollment goals, tuition allocations, facility development, salaries and benefits of athletics department staff, among others, could utilize findings from this study to inform their own decisions. Furthermore, this study will also have implications for two deeply intertwined entities: student-athletes and the universities. Gaining a better understanding of how Athletics Directors and university administrators define success will guide institutional policy that will affect the decisions of prospective student-athletes who are considering attending small colleges and universities.

Overall, the following research questions underlie the current study:

*Research Questions:*

*RQ1: How does the small college athletics department fit into both the Division III and higher education competitive marketplace?*

*RQ2: How is athletics department success defined and operationalized in the small college athletics environment?*

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As elucidated previously, throughout this study, I will explore how small college athletics departments fit not only into the small college environment but also into the Division III athletics environment. In order to best understand the current landscape of small college athletics, I will detail a wide range of concepts, that when combined, not only help to contextualize the current state of small college athletics but also provide an overall framework for examining the presence of alternative forms of success for small college athletics departments. Due to the multitude of topics covered in this chapter, I will utilize a brief chart to organize the layout of this literature review and will refer to it throughout.

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
Early history of the small college
The current college financial environment
Tuition discounts
Enrollment management
The strategic plan and its relation to mission attainment
Agency Theory
Value Responsibility Budgeting
Strategic Contingency Theory
Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

I will begin by providing details on the early history of the small college and will then discuss the myriad factors that contribute to the current college financial environment. Specifically, I will explain the role of tuition discounts in the small college environment. I will then detail how tuition discounting is related to Strategic Enrollment Management and specific strategies to maintain (or increase) the overall net revenue at small colleges. Therein, I discuss the intersection between the college's overarching strategic plan and athletics department

programming and the role of athletics in serving as an enrollment driver for the small college. By then discussing how strategic financial planning should be tied to the mission statements of stakeholders (e.g., the university and the NCAA), I address some of the programmatic issues facing university and athletics administrators. To best situate the balance of financial and mission statement goals, I describe the role of Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, and Strategic Contingency Theory within the context of higher education. Noting the financial implications of current student enrollment with future alumni giving, I provide a foundation for rationalizing the role of small college athletics in increasing alumni financial support as an additional revenue source. In all, the current landscape of small college athletics is quite complex. With a better understanding of each of the concepts that contextualize small college athletics, we can examine how university and athletics administrators define athletics program success and what implications such definitions of success have on small college programmatic decision-making.

### **Early History of the Small College**

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
<b>Early history of the small college</b>
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Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

As far back as when colleges were established in the Colonial Era, they depended on funding from a variety of sources in order to be financially solvent (Cohen, 2007; Thelin, 2011). Gifts came from church groups, donors, government entities, bridge tolls, surcharges on tobacco and lottery winnings, and in the form of land donations (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Cohen, 2007; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011; Westfall, 2006). While funding originated from numerous sources, none of the earlier colleges were well-endowed. As such, “the pattern of trying to raise money continually, or spending all that could be raised, and of living in genteel poverty continued well into the future of practically all the colleges in the nation” (Cohen, 2007, p. 46). Importantly, although the survival of these early American institutions was tenuous at best, students paid very little tuition. The tuition was subsidized by the aforementioned funding sources in addition to low-paid faculty members (Cohen, 2007).

The establishment of colleges and universities saw great growth in the 1800s as a result of general westward expansion and because of cheap land (Westfall, 2006). As asserted by Westfall (2006), “the history of small colleges is really the history of American higher education prior to the mid-1940s” (p. 7). Prior to World War II, nearly all colleges had enrollments of less than 5,000 students and while many of those institutions continued to grow, most small colleges that continue to this day were established in the 1800s (Westfall, 2006). Further, most of these institutions were initially religiously-affiliated as a result of church donations serving as a fraction of overall university revenue (Cohen, 2007). As detailed previously, the current pattern of trying to raise money for the university from various sources dates back to the earliest colleges and universities (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Cohen, 2007; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011; Westfall, 2006). A minor shift in generating revenue began in the early 1900s when universities began to advertise to attract students and their related tuition dollars (Bok, 2009). As early as the early

1900s, the University of Pennsylvania created a “Bureau of Publicity” and the University of Chicago began advertising, each university with the intent of attracting students and increasing the visibility of the university (Bok, 2009).

### **The Current College Financial Environment**

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
Early history of the small college
<b>The current college financial environment</b>
Tuition discounts
Enrollment management
The strategic plan and its relation to mission attainment
Agency Theory
Value Responsibility Budgeting
Strategic Contingency Theory
Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

While detailing institutional budgetary issues in higher education, Zdziarski (2010) asserted that one of the most distinct differences between large public institutions and small private colleges (besides the obvious differences such as number of enrollees and the physical size of the campus) is how tuition is set. Tuition, “in concept, should reflect the actual cost to provide a student an education at a particular institution, yet any link between tuition and the cost of providing a student an education at a public institution is tenuous at best” (Zdziarski, 2010, p. 21). For these large public universities, out-of-state tuition should be a reflection of the true cost of education at the institution. Then, in-state tuition is the true cost of education minus the state’s subsidization (Zdziarski, 2000). However, campus administrators cannot make such budgetary decisions internally; the state’s higher education agency or legislature must approve such decisions (Barr & McClellan, 2000; Zdziarski, 2010). As such, tuition rates arguably are set by a political process that may indeed have little to do with the true cost of an education and instead

with projections of overall state revenues that would seemingly fall outside the purview of postsecondary education (Zdziarski, 2010).

In stark contrast, the control of setting tuition levels is much more localized at private institutions (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Bok, 2009; DesJardins & Bell, 2006; Hillman, 2012; Massa & Parker, 2007; Zdziarski, 2010). At enrollment-institutions (typically small, private colleges), “the loss of even twenty students (and their tuition dollars) at such institutions can mean the difference between institutional fiscal failure and success” (Barr & McClellan, 2010, p. 8). At private institutions, while the final tuition amounts are approved by a board of trustees, those who send the suggestions to the board “work together to articulate costs, develop revenue projections, identify risks and put together a tuition recommendation for the president” (Zdziarski, 2010, p. 22). Although building the projections is a complex process, the level of internal, institutional control is exceedingly higher than at public institutions. Further, fiscal policies at private schools more easily allow for transfers of funds at an internal level (e.g., between different campus departments) because such transfers typically are not as externally scrutinized from a bureaucratic standpoint in comparison to public institutions (Zdziarski, 2010). In all, at small colleges, slight changes in enrollment numbers can have a dramatic impact on campus revenues (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Zdziarski, 2010). Further, at small colleges and universities, even slight changes in budgetary policies can also have ramifications on the financial solvency of the overall institution (Zdziarski, 2010). In order to develop a deep understanding of small college athletics, it is first important to continue to provide context for the small college environment in general by detailing the role of tuition discounts and enrollment management.

## Tuition Discounts

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
Early history of the small college
The current college financial environment
<b>Tuition discounts</b>
Enrollment management
The strategic plan and its relation to mission attainment
Agency Theory
Value Responsibility Budgeting
Strategic Contingency Theory
Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

Tuition discounting has been defined as “the practice of awarding institutionally-funded financial aid in the form of non-repayable grants and scholarships to students” (Hillman, 2012, p. 264). Tuition discounting has become an increasingly popular strategy and has contributed to campus strategies at “enrollment-driven” institutions to focus on more complex strategies aimed at maximizing net tuition (Hillman, 2012; Hossler, 2000). By decreasing the “sticker shock,” tuition discounting makes strategic efforts to attract students that can best contribute to net tuition goals at the institution (Hillman, 2012). As such, “many institutions are becoming strategic in their use of tuition discounts so that aided students not only enhance institutional prestige but they can also enhance institutional revenue goals” (Hillman, 2012, p. 264). In the first half of the 1980s, tuition discounts at private institutions rarely exceeded 10 to 15 percent of the total tuition rates; in the early 2000s, it was not unprecedented to have discount rates nearing 30 percent of the overall tuition. Such a trend has continued so much so that Hillman (2012) avowed that in higher education overall, tuition discounts have been the fastest growing strategy related to an institution’s budget.

In determining such discount rates, institutions have to be aware of the associated price elasticity, or “the notion of what the market will bear” (Bontrager, 2004, p. 12). Simply raising tuition without a deft understanding of prospective students’ willingness to pay could result in lower enrollment and decreased net revenue (Bontrager, 2004). Tuition discounting has also been called “the Robin Hood strategy” or “financial aid leveraging” (Hossler, 2000). In the Robin Hood approach, tuition is raised so that the institution can provide increased institutional financial aid to desired students while also relying on full-pays to offset some of the aforementioned tuition discounts. Leveraging financial aid packages, and related tuition discounts, exert a strong influence on prospective students’ ultimate matriculation decision (Hossler, 2000; Hillman, 2012). Again, while overall enrollment is important, focusing on net tuition based on tuition discounts and leveraging financial aid have represented a shift in the economic strategies of small colleges (Bontrager, 2004; Hossler, 2000). Further, because of the more isolated control of private institutions to set their tuition rates (in comparison to public institutions), private colleges can be more responsive to price elasticity and are also increasingly more inclined to take part in discounting strategies that have shown to impact overall financial solvency of the institution (Bontrager, 2004; Hillman, 2012). The literature indicates that tuition discounting plays a fundamental role in the financial stability of enrollment-driven institutions. Since the small college athletics environment inherently implies that many of the institutions are tuition-driven, it is important to understand the role of tuition-discounting in general before the data in this study seeks to uncover the role of tuition discounting specifically as it relates to the small college athletics environment. Such a goal was an underlying factor in developing interview guide questions to examine the role of the athletics department financially in the overall institution and how such a role impacts staffing internal to the athletics department.

## Enrollment Management

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
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<b>Enrollment management</b>
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Agency Theory
Value Responsibility Budgeting
Strategic Contingency Theory
Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

The trend to adopt tuition discounting practices in the early 1980s mirrored the development of more broad-based enrollment management strategies (Hillman, 2012; Hossler, 1984; Hossler, 2000). The concept of enrollment management, also known as strategic enrollment management (SEM) was first conceptualized in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time, Jack McGuire, a Boston College faculty member with a recent role shift into administration, “started to use the term *enrollment management* to describe a synergistic approach to influencing college enrollments he was putting into place at Boston College” (Hossler, 2000, p. 77). In its earliest iterations, enrollment management focused on admission rates, and while loosely associated with financial aid, the predictive models of financial aid and enrollment management were rudimentary in comparison to more modern enrollment management strategies (DesJardins & Bell, 2006; Hossler, 2000).

Hossler (1984; 1986; 1990; 1996; 2000; 2004; 2006) has served as a leading researcher on the impact of enrollment management strategies on the financial solvency of the overall university. Bean and Hossler (1990) defined enrollment management as “organizational concepts

and a systematic set of activities designed to enable educational institutions to exert more influence over student enrollments” (p. 5). As such, at smaller, private institutions in which the tuition-dollars of the students are relied upon heavily for operating revenues, tuition management and enrollment management are intimately intertwined (Hossler, 2006). Unambiguously, “institutions may desire to achieve a variety of enrollment management objectives through the strategic use of tuition discounts, but these efforts are ultimately conditioned by the financial benefits and costs associated with aiding students” (Hillman, 2012, p. 264).

In describing best strategies and practices for strategic enrollment management, Bontrager (2004) detailed specific core components of effective enrollment management policies. Specifically, the following were identified: establishing clear goals in line with the institution’s mission, determining and achieving optimum enrollment, generating added net revenue, effective financial planning, using data to inform policy-making, improving service to external (prospective and former students) and internal (current students, faculty, and staff) stakeholders (Bontrager, 2004). The value of such intricate programs is highly valuable (Bontrager, 2004; DesJardins & Bell, 2006). As such, while some institutions may have internal enrollment management offices (sometimes housed in an office of institutional research), others contract with external consultant groups to develop best practices for enrollment management (Hossler, 2000). DesJardins and Bell (2006) added further emphasis by saying,

The support that institutional researchers provide to the enrollment management functions of their institution is highly valuable. As institutions of higher education compete for financial resources, administrators are relying more heavily on institutional researchers.... (they) are also key support personnel in determining how institutions can allocate their resources more efficiently and effectively. (p. 59)

In coordination with the office of financial aid and office of admissions, the enrollment management team (either the office of institutional research or an external consultant group) compiles data on an array of demographic and financial variables of prospective, current, and former students (Hossler, 2000). The enrollment management officers then identify two to three different strategies to best reach enrollment and financial goals. After coordinating with the financial aid office to ensure such strategies are realistic, the enrollment management team reports to higher administration to give final recommendations for campus-based financial aid (tuition discounts) for the following matriculation year (Hossler, 2000).

Although it seems to be relatively fluid to closely associate enrollment management practices with financial aid allocations, it is important to emphasize that enrollment management is closely related to overall campus budgets and to university-wide net revenue goals (Bontrager 2004; DesJardins & Bell, 2006; Hillman, 2012; Hossler, 2000). Importantly, enrollment management strategies can also reduce costs associated with recruiting and retention. Specifically, if enrollment management can more efficiently target prospective students that meet the objectives of the institution, the college can spend less money on over-reaching in their recruiting efforts and attempting to retain students who may not have been a good fit for the institution (Bontrager, 2004). Bontrager (2004) captured such concepts by differentiating between “net revenue” and “student enrollment management net revenue goals”. Net revenue was defined as follows:

$$\text{Total tuition revenue} - \text{recruitment and retention costs} = \text{net revenue}$$

SEM net revenue goals was defined as:

Stable or increased tuition revenue – reduced recruitment and retention costs = added net revenue.

Hossler (2000) similarly articulated such notions by saying,

Enrollment management is not only an organizational strategy to achieve enrollment goals. It can also be a tool to achieve other important goals... The effects of new student enrollments and campus-based aid programs on net tuition revenue have a pronounced effect on the economic health and vitality of colleges and universities. Hence, enrollment management is not only part of an enrollment strategy, it has also become a budgeting strategy. (p. 78)

As discussed previously, price elasticity – what the market will bear – impacts policies regarding tuition discounting policies (Bontrager, 2004). Further, various principles related to economic theory impact an institution’s tuition discounting and overall enrollment management practices. Specifically, ideas such as human capital, utility maximization, and price and demand underlie strategic enrollment management (DesJardins & Bell, 2006). Those institutions that do not have a firm understanding of the underlying economics of enrollment management and do not engage in enrollment management practices are often at a distinct competitive disadvantage (Hossler, 2000).

DesJardins and Bell (2006) detailed how human capital and a utility maximization framework can intersect to have both micro-level (student) and macro-level (the overall institution) implications for enrollment management. As emphasized by DesJardins and Bell (2006), “embedded in human capital theory is the notion that individuals are rational actors and attempt to maximize their well-being or ‘utility’” (p. 60). Further, economic projection models take into account such attempts to maximize well-being and caution against thinking that finances are the sole factors leading to maximizing utility in a college decision. The rate of return of a college education (and the specific college choice) may include financial factors, social

factors, academic factors, and other preferences of the students (DesJardins & Bell, 2006). At the macro-level, institutions of higher education make strategic decisions about enrollment management based on expected utilities generated by such strategies. Taking into account the interactive dynamic between the macro-level institution and the micro-level student-base, DesJardins and Bell (2006) asserted, “economics can help us better understand the behavior of individuals and IHEs (institutions of higher education) alike, but it is the aggregation of these actors and their actions that comprises the educational market” (p. 60). The increased emphasis on enrollment management practices in small colleges seemingly necessitates enrollment management officers to utilize different factions of campus – potentially including the athletics department – to factor into plans to meet enrollment goals.

### **The Strategic Plan and its Relation to Mission Attainment**

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
Early history of the small college
The current college financial environment
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Enrollment management
<b>The strategic plan and its relation to mission attainment</b>
Agency Theory
Value Responsibility Budgeting
Strategic Contingency Theory
Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

Enrollment management practices can serve as an intricate and valuable component of an institution’s overall strategic plan. As such, sound research needs to underlie enrollment management and such programming should be evaluated on a continuous basis (Hossler, 2000). Specifically, “strategic decisions about pricing and institutional positioning, as well as tactical

decisions about marketing activities and financial aid packages, can be improved through the use of sound research and evaluation” (Hossler, 2000, p. 79). Enrollment management practices have changed the dynamic of strategic planning in higher education. By modifying recruitment and retention practices to dually increase net tuition revenue and reduce institutional costs, the overall financial solvency of a college or university can be dramatically impacted (Bontrager, 2004). However, such programming cannot be static. Because of a competitive higher education marketplace, institutions must continue to adapt in order to remain competitive and financially solvent (Bonvillian & Murphy, 2014). As emphasized by Massa and Parker (2007), “new models of educational competition complicate the marketplace, challenging the college to plan well and execute flawlessly. Access and financial aid strategies remain imperative... Visibility, reputation, and institutional permanence challenge the college to new levels of creativity and engagement” (p. 97).

In detailing the intricacies of enrollment management strategies, Bontrager (2004) encouraged practitioners to look to the college’s mission to serve as a guide for programmatic decisions. Specifically, “it is the mission that provides direction to the way the institution portrays itself in the higher education marketplace” (Bontrager, 2004, p. 10). Contrarily, Bok (2009) believed that the mission in an institution often runs counter to revenue-generating preferences by maintaining, “Having lost sight of any clear mission beyond a vague commitment to ‘excellence’, our sprawling universities are charged with creating a vacuum into which material pursuits have rushed in unimpeded” (p. 5). Taking into consideration these two seemingly disparate opinions about mission attainment in higher education, it is important to look at the extant literature on mission attainment in higher education and any related ethical misgivings about policies that may or may not align with said mission.

Scholars have argued that mission statements for institutions of higher education are often vague, abstract, and difficult to tangibly measure (Bowers, 2013; Camelia & Marius, 2013; Delucchi, 2000; Fugazzotto, 2009). Specifically, the link between converting mission or value statements into strategic, outcome-based measurements seems rather abstract. Dissenters argue that colleges and universities have mission statements simply because other colleges and universities have mission statements (Delucchi, 2000; Fugazzotto, 2009). Bowers (2013) lamented,

What is the role of mission and vision statements, particularly within higher education? Some think they are a compilation of slogans with an admixture of ‘ambiguous’ buzzwords that can mean all sorts of contradictory things depending on the stakeholder’s point of view. In this case their role is little more than ceremonial – though it does provide senior staff with plenty latitude to do what they want. (p. 65)

In detailing why mission statements could exist, several researchers have argued for the role of mission statements in order for the institution to gain legitimacy and to best adapt to the environment (Camelia & Marius, 2013; Fugazzotto, 2009). Camelia and Marius (2013) avowed, “Mission statements are believed to be long and complex, becoming too common to indicate what the institution really wishes to achieve” (p. 65).

Delucchi (2000) sought to examine the role of mission statements in the specific setting of liberal arts colleges. Again, the idea was discussed that college mission statements are often abstract and difficult to measure. In the specific realm of liberal arts colleges and universities, it is argued that “there are no agreed upon methods of pedagogy and standards of assessment” (Delucchi, 2000, p. 159). Such a disconnect between mission and outcomes can make it difficult for administrators to create programming that tangibly links the mission statement and outcomes.

Specifically, “rather than reflecting the ‘real’ motives that compel colleges to act, mission statements highlight the repertoire of accepted rationales for higher education” (Delucchi, 2000, p. 160). No matter if one views mission statements as vague and impractical or if one views them as a core component of an institution’s strategic plan, there is a general consensus that colleges and universities do have mission statements and administrators spend time into their development (Bowers, 2013).

Before specifying the ways in which mission statements can contribute to the institution’s strategic plan, it is first important to briefly clarify that ambiguous mission statements can have a practical role in colleges and universities. Bowers (2013) argued that the ambiguity that is often present in mission statements makes it such that organizational leaders have latitude in implementing mission statement objectives. That is, the measures of an ambiguous mission statement are malleable enough so that staff members can develop programming beneficial to their own interests that could still arguably fall under the parameters of the vague mission statement (Bowers, 2013). While such an environment could seemingly be beneficial for different segments of campus, capitalizing on the vagueness of a mission statement can cause conflicts between different factions of campus (Delucchi, 2000). For example,

A range of meanings can be attributed to a mission statement, depending on the perceptions of faculty, administrators, applicants, regents, and the public. For example, faculty emphasis on academic excellence may conflict with student-life professionals’ desire to promote the nonacademic aspects of college life. At denominational colleges, religiosity may dominate the concerns of regents, whereas administrators may opt to loosen denominational ties in order to appeal to a more diverse student population.

Clearly, claims will be evaluated according to the interests of various constituencies.

(Delucchi, 2000, pp. 159-160)

The presence of different stakeholders impacted by a mission statement arguably makes it even more important to have a mission statement that directly ties into the institution's strategic plan (Camelia & Marius, 2013; Fugazzotto, 2009; Ozdem, 2011). By stating "who the organization wants to be and whom it serves," mission statements should "guide the whole process of strategic planning" (Ozdem, 2011, p. 2011). Those in charge of mission statements – the institution's leadership – hold the ultimate responsibility for developing mission statements in line with the college's strategic plan (Camelia & Marius, 2013; Fugazzotto, 2009). To a lesser – but still extremely important – extent, the employees of the institution have a responsibility to implement the mission statement in their daily operations (Camelia & Marius, 2013; Ozdem, 2011).

Designing a mission statement that is in accordance with the institution's strategic plan involves "assessing the stakeholders' expectations, while considering the institution's current position and resources" (Camellia & Marius, 2013, p. 656). The institution's management has the responsibility to have a strategic plan that contributes to the institution's solvency and legitimacy within the overall environment (Camelia & Marius, 2013; Fugazzotto, 2009). Such planning inherently relies on a long-term and future-oriented approach (Ozdem, 2011).

Acknowledging the at-times tenuous relationship that can exist between those who believe mission statements are ambiguous and vague and those who believe they are directly related to specific strategic institutional policy-making, "the fact that they (mission statements) are being used by education institutions everywhere, and also the attention paid to the mission concept by the literature supports the idea that there is more to missions than a simple succession of words

and phrases” (Camelia & Marius, 2013, p. 658). As such, aligning a mission statement with the institution’s strategic plan can have a direct impact on the institution’s place in the competitive market of higher education (Camelia & Marius, 2013).

As emphasized by Camelia and Marius (2013), an institution’s strategic plan dually has an influence on and is influenced by different factions of campus. Therefore, one leading goal of this study is to examine the effect of the institution’s strategic plan on the small college athletics environment, how those plans are operationalized, and how such plans impact the fit of the small college athletics department into the competitive marketplaces of higher education and Division III athletics.

### **Agency Theory**

With an understanding of many of the topics that help to provide context of the small college environment – before data collection works to developing a deep understanding of the small college athletics environment – it is paramount to detail the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Three specific theoretical constructs – Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, and Strategic Contingency Theory – serve as a three-pronged theoretical approach for examining the small college athletics environment.

Table 1

<i>Literature review organization</i>	Topic
	Early history of the small college
	The current college financial environment
	Tuition discounts
	Enrollment management
	The strategic plan and its relation to mission attainment
	<b>Agency Theory</b>
	Value Responsibility Budgeting
	Strategic Contingency Theory
	Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

Agency Theory, with its foundations in economics, finance, and organizational behavior in corporate settings, endeavors to explain the most profitable relationship that can exist between a principal and an agent (Johnes, 1999; Liefner, 2003; Massy, 1996; Olson, 2000). Olson (2000) emphasized, “In its broadest sense, an agency relationship exists whenever one person or entity does something on behalf of another” (p. 280). The one handing down the action or parameters for action is the principal. The one acting out the mandates is the agent (Olson, 2000). Specifically, Agency Theory outlines the payment and budget allocation structure that motivates the agent to work according to the desires of the principal in such a manner that the agent does not attempt to divert resources for his or her own personal gain (Olson, 2000; Massy, 1996; Liefner, 2003; Johnes, 1999). In essence, Agency Theory models behavior so as to address conflicts that may arise if and when the principal and the agent have conflicting goals (Johnes, 2000).

In the corporate, for-profit setting, the owners serve as the principals and the managers serve as the agents (Olson, 2000). In the most traditional Agency Theory research, the principals fund the organization and typically rely on the agents to carry out the actual day-to-day operations of the organization. The owners, theoretically, receive the profits after accounting for the salaries of the agents and the expenses associated with the operations of the organization (Olson, 2000). Scholars also emphasize that individuals in an organization are self-serving. Because of this, under the tenets of Agency Theory, principals often rely on performance-based budgeting and performance-based salary structures to combat any temptations for the agent to divert resources away from the directives handed down by the principals (Liefner, 2003; Olson, 2000).

While Agency Theory was initially conceptualized based on the for-profit sector and is based on the utilization of performance-based incentives that aid in increased profit margins, there are logical arguments for the application of Agency Theory in the non-profit and not-for-profit sector (Liefner, 2003; Olson, 2000; Massy). In their seminal work on “the theory of the firm”, Jensen and Meckling (1976) said, “The problem of inducing an agent to behave as if he were maximizing the principal’s welfare is quite general. It exists in all organizations and in all cooperative efforts – at every level of management in firms, in universities” (as cited in Olson, 2000, p. 280). However, it is also important to discuss the distinctions that differentiate the for-profit Agency Theory framework from the non-profit Agency Theory framework. In the non-profit and not-for-profit sector, such as the university setting, the traditional principal-as-owner relationship does not exist. That is, save for for-profit universities such as Walden University or the University of Phoenix (Salzberg, 2015), any profits after accounting for expenses, are not disbursed to shareholders or company owners. Ironically, however, while universities do not exist to make money, they need it for their own survival (Massy, 2009).

Despite these primary distinctions, the applicability of Agency Theory in the higher education setting is relevant for two primary reasons. First, there is still the risk for the agent to change behavior that may not be in accordance with the directives or goals of the principals (Olson, 2000). Secondly, because of decreased government funding for higher education, the increased presence of for-profit universities, and the expansion of cheaper junior college offerings, leaders at traditional colleges and universities face unprecedented competition for funding to keep the university open (Liefner, 2003; Massy, 2009; Olson, 2000). These factors, when combined, lead to the continued use of performance-based budgeting and salary appropriations in the university setting because “In a HES (Higher Education System) without

private funding or performance-based budget allocation, the institution bears the risk of unsuccessful projects because it guarantees funding and salaries regardless of performance” (Olson, 2000, p. 478).

It is also important to convey that the agency-principal relationship is not for the exclusive use at the macro level (Liefner, 2003). In a higher education system, the principal could be the President, dean, department chair, or faculty. The agency can be the individuals, groups, departments, or factions of the university that vie for funding (Liefner, 2003; Olson, 2000). In many instances, an individual or an entity may serve as a principal in one setting and an agent in another setting (Olson, 2000). The demand for tuition dollars and associated fees, donor gifts, research grants, salaries, or contracts with external entities drives the actions of many university departments and faculty and staff members (Liefner, 2003) and may be one of the underlying reasons for performance and tenure review processes (Olson, 2000). Olson (2000) emphasized this notion by saying, “Corresponding ways of performance-based budgeting can be observed within universities. The creation of incentives to work hard and according to the principal’s assignments goes hand in hand with this form of funding” (p. 478).

While it is true that the competitive funding environment in higher education can certainly drive the budgeting structure, Agency Theory solely focuses on situations in which all of the principal’s goals are related to profit margins. It does not take into account good faith differences in opinion in which the faculty, administration, and governing boards have differing opinions related to the mission and financial viability of the university (Massy, 1996). Massy stressed,

The quintessential example of this is the increased diversion of funds to research...

Institutions as well as faculty tend to value research over teaching; the pursuit of prestige

is seen to benefit the entire institution even when education is explicitly chartered as the primary mission” (p. 75).

The tenets of Agency Theory will be utilized to gain a deep understanding of the small college athletics environment.

### **Value Responsibility Budgeting**

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
Early history of the small college
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Agency Theory
<b>Value Responsibility Budgeting</b>
Strategic Contingency Theory
Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

With the unique circumstances of the non-profit university sector in mind – namely the at-times conflicting goals of education and financial viability – Massy (1996) endeavored to create a model for higher education resource allocation that takes into account the tenets of Agency Theory but also incorporates the unique challenges facing non-profit colleges and universities (Johnes, 1999; Massy, 1996; Massy, 2009; Newton, 2000; Vonasek, 2011). When introducing his Value Responsibility Budgeting (VRB) model, he said,

As the name implies, Value Responsibility Budgeting tries to strike a balance between market-driven discipline, as in revenue responsibility budgeting, and an institution’s intrinsic values. Like performance responsibility budgeting, VRB relies heavily upon the quality of academic plans in relation to institutional mission and on accomplishment in

relation to the plan. The implementation of VRB can be adapted to emphasize intrinsic values more or less heavily in relation to market forces. (Massy, 1996, p. 13)

Also known as responsibility center management, value center management, decentralized budgeting, activity-based budgeting, and cost center budgeting (Vonasek, 2011), VRB takes into account both market forces and intrinsic values when allocating budgets from principals to agents in any university setting (Massy, 1996; Massy, 2009; Newton, 2000). It merges a model solely focused on profit margins (that fails to take into account the educational missions of universities) with a model solely focused on following the educational mission of the institution. Such a model fails to adhere to policies that will keep the institution financially solvent (Massy, 1996; Massy, 2009). Ultimately, VRB relies on allocating resources based dually on its mission and the market environment (Massy, 2009). Although mission-driven decisions and profit-driven decisions seemingly contradict each other, Massy vowed that when strategized correctly, market power and mission attainment increase the other. A simple example illustrating these ideas is that a university with a better reputation for reaching its mission will create competition for admittance into the university. Students will pay more for a better education. The university can then reinvest surplus funds back into the university, dually capitalizing on the market and strengthening the mission of the university (Massy, 2009). As with Agency Theory, the core components of Value Responsibility Budgeting will be used to examine the small college athletics environment. Namely, the possibility of a mutually beneficial (financially and mission-driven) relationship between the small college athletics department, the overall institution, and Division III athletics will be thoroughly explored.

## Strategic Contingency Theory

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
Early history of the small college
The current college financial environment
Tuition discounts
Enrollment management
The strategic plan and its relation to mission attainment
Agency Theory
Value Responsibility Budgeting
<b>Strategic Contingency Theory</b>
Alumni satisfaction and donor giving

Strategic Contingency Theory relies on the idea that an organization makes decisions based on economic and market conditions. In short, the organization's primary goal is to survive while adapting to the changing landscape in which they operate. It is appropriate for this study because small college athletics success may be largely measured by how the athletics department contributes to the survival of the overall college or university. Restated, Strategic Contingency Theory is founded on the premise that an organization is an open system and it must adapt to its environment if it is to survive (Daft, Richard, Weick, & Karl, 1984; Duncan, 1972; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). One of the primary factors in this survival process is dealing with uncertainty and contingencies (Duncan, 1972; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Contingencies may include the economic environment, national culture, and speed of technological change (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). In addressing how an organization makes policy changes in response to environmental circumstances, Lawrence & Lorsch (1969) asserted, "We will be seeking an answer to the fundamental question, 'What kind of organization does it take to deal with various economic and market conditions?'" (p. 1).

Strategic Contingency Theory was used to develop the general purpose of this study because its underlying tenet is that an organization must adapt to a changing environment in order to survive. Peale (2013) contended that small colleges use athletics to drive up both enrollment and tuition dollars from the student-athletes that are not on athletics scholarship (Division III). These schools, he argued, rely on the money generated from athletics to survive (Peale, 2013). For the faction of small colleges and universities that are public institutions, they must also grapple with the recent sharp decline in funding from state governments (Douglas-Gabriel, 2015; Sherter, 2013).

Duncan (1972) defined the environment as, “The totality of physical and social factors that are taken directly into consideration in the decision-making behavior of individuals in the organization” (p. 314). The specific boundaries of the organization set the internal and external organizational environment (Duncan, 1972). Internal factors may include personnel, the hierarchy of the personnel, and the specific organization of the personnel into units/departments (Duncan, 1972). Importantly, the organization makes decisions in line with the several different environmental dimensions. Duncan (1972) argued there are two primary dimensions: (1) simple/complex dimension (number of competitors in the environment, homogeneity/heterogeneity of competitors) and (2) the static-dynamic dimension (the frequency and intensity of change the organization undergoes). Organizations seek out environments that satisfy both stability and viability (Dess & Beard, 1984). Daft and Weick (1984) implored, “Organizations must develop information processing mechanisms capable of detecting trends, events, competitors, markets, and technological developments relevant to their survival” (p. 285).

Small-college athletics departments operate on the complex side of Duncan’s (1972) simple/complex dimension in their NCAA membership environment and their college/university

environment. However, small-college athletics departments also may make decisions similar to other Division III colleges with low enrollments and high numbers of student-athletes (for this study, colleges with student-athletes that make up 20% or more of the student body population). Thus, components of the interview guide questions address Duncan's (1972) static-dynamic dimension. Specifically, understanding how university and athletics administrators define athletics program success at small colleges and the implications of these alternative definitions of success on the operations of the athletics departments will be explored (RQ2). Therefore, Katz and colleagues' (2015) assertion that there may be "alternate definitions of success" (p. 115) combined with the theoretical underpinnings of Strategic Contingency Theory could help explain the decision-making of small college athletics departments and lead us to an "Alternative Success Theory." Determining the specifics of such an "Alternative Success Theory" requires a further examination of the how small college Athletics Directors and college/university administrators define and operationalize athletics program success.

### **Alumni Satisfaction and Donor Giving**

After contextualizing the small college environment by detailing the early history of the small college, the current college financial environment, tuition discounts, enrollment management, and the strategic plan, the three-fold theoretical framework for this study (Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, Strategic Contingency Theory) was described. As was emphasized when discussing Value Responsibility Budgeting, resources can be augmented by dually achieving goals for mission-attainment and market sustainability (Massy, 2009). With that important idea, this final part of this chapter details several specific ways in which there could be a mutually beneficial relationship in small college athletics for mission attainment and institutional financial goals. In order to provide a foundation for examining potential revenue

from the athletics department in the form of student-athlete tuition dollars and student-athlete alumni fundraising, the final part of this chapter details alumni satisfaction and donor giving. Importantly, these ideas could potentially be mutually beneficial for revenue generation and for institutional, athletics department, and Division III mission attainment goals.

Table 1

*Literature review organization*

Topic
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Strategic Contingency Theory
<b>Alumni satisfaction and donor giving</b>

A true profit-maximizing framework for colleges and universities may be slightly inaccurate based on previous discussions of mission attainment. However, the underlying idea that revenue should exceed cost still exists in higher education (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002). Further, contrary to a typical firm in which excess revenues are distributed to shareholders, in non-profit higher education institutions, excess revenues are redistributed within the institution (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002). Thus, the management of all revenue sources, including tuition revenues and donor revenues, is imperative for the overall financial solvency of the institution. Discussing the specific role of revenue from alumni donations, Leslie and Ramey (1988) asserted,

At any given college or university, the key question is... how the particular characteristics of the institution, along with the bilateral relationships between the

institution and its various donors, affect the contribution made to that institution. Because characteristics and relationships are often controllable by the institution, an understanding of the gift-giving relationship between donors and individual institutions could be very useful in developing effective fundraising strategies.” (p. 117)

Important in their rationale is the idea that, to a great extent, the institution controls its own programmatic offerings. As such, understanding how program offerings could not only impact matriculation, but also impact alumni donations, could be extremely important for increasing an institutions two primary revenue sources of tuition dollars and alumni donations.

Through several different studies, researchers have indicated that involvement at the institution as an undergraduate was associated with giving as an alumnus (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Clotfelter, 2003; Leslie & Ramey, 1988; Weerts & Ronca, 2009; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). In a 23-year longitudinal study of donor tendencies at a small liberal arts college, Wunnava and Lauze (2001) found that playing a varsity sport as an undergraduate served as a key determinant of alumni giving. Taylor and Martin (1995) discussed the idea that involvement in a university club or organization was shown to be associated with high donor levels. This general idea of the association between student involvement and alumni giving was echoed when Holmes (2009) reiterated, “undergraduate activity participation generally increases the propensity to donate whether as an athlete, an artist or performer, a campus leader or a fraternity or sorority member” (p. 25).

In the same way the competitive marketplace in higher education differs slightly from standard pure market competition (e.g., because of governing regulations), the rationale for donating to non-profit institutions of higher education varies slightly in comparison to other charitable non-profit entities (Leslie & Ramey, 1988). Specifically, alumni-institution relations

are more likely to include close social and emotional ties that include relatively subjective feelings of satisfaction (Clotfelter, 2003; Leslie & Ramey, 1988). As emphasized by Clotfelter (2003), “satisfaction with one’s undergraduate experience is a mark of approval that would be expected to induce feelings of gratitude and a desire to enhance the institution’s chances of future good influences” (p. 114). Aligning with this notion of general involvement with athletics and emotional ties to the university, it is important that campus fundraisers make efforts to keep in contact with alumni (Weerts & Ronca, 2009). In relation to whether athlete alumni giving could serve as a rationale for varsity sport offerings, Weerts and Ronca (2009) declared, “the importance of athletics as a pivotal decision point should prompt further research about the connection between giving and athletics” (p. 114). As elucidated throughout this literature review, the current landscape of small college athletics is intimately intertwined with the landscape of the overall college. As such, athletics department programming can have implications from an enrollment and financial standpoint for the institution at-large. Tuition discounts, strategic enrollment management, and mission attainment goals combine to provide context for examining not only how the small college athletics department fits into the overall institution and into Division III athletics but also how the small college athletics department may help institutional goals for remaining competitive in the higher education marketplace.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As has been discussed throughout the first two chapters, the underlying purpose of this dissertation is to understand the small college athletics department's fit into both the small college athletics environment and Division III athletics environment and how the small college as an institution operates in order to remain competitive in the proverbial higher education marketplace. In this chapter, I will detail the specific research design, data collection, and data analysis undertaken in this study. Before outlining such approaches, it is first important to explain the foundations of research, relevant paradigms, and the varying epistemological and ontological approaches that underlie research processes.

Research, at its core, "is a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge" (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 4). Gratton and Jones (2004) described five important stages of the research process:

1. Pre-data collection. The researcher develops the research question(s), purposes of the study, and possible theoretical frameworks for the research.
2. Methodological design. Developing data collection strategies.
3. Data collection. The process of collecting the data according to the aforementioned methodological design.
4. Analysis of the data. This stage involves determining if any previously established theoretical frameworks or hypothesized results align with the collected data.
5. Reporting of findings and communicating the relevance of such findings to a broader audience.

When combined, each of these stages forms the overall research process. Further, as elucidated by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), "the net that contains the researcher's epistemological,

ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm” (p. 13). Thus, this dissertation applies each of Gratton and Jones’ (2004) five stages of the research process while adhering to the specific paradigm that I believe best addresses the research questions driving this study. In order to best understand the specific paradigm of the current study, it is vital to understand the varying epistemological and ontological approaches and which of those specific approaches underlie this examination of alternate definitions of small college athletics success.

### **Epistemology and Ontology**

Broadly speaking, ontology is the “study of the philosophy of knowledge” and epistemology is “the philosophical study of how such knowledge is acquired” (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 14). Incorporated in such epistemological and ontological views are general assumptions about the world and attitudes about worldviews that frame a researcher’s methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Historically, research in the social sciences has utilized a wide array of research paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is relevant to detail several specific paradigms – namely positivism, postpositivism, interpretivism, and constructivism – in order to understand the rationale for the paradigm utilized in this study.

Positivists hold that there is one true reality that can be pursued and discovered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As emphasized by Johnson and Christensen (2008), “Positivism is the idea that only what we can empirically observe is important and that science is the only true source of knowledge” (p. 391). Positivists believe sound science involves approaches that avoid subjectivity because knowledge, if pursued correctly, is tangible (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this positivist approach, certain advantages do exist; the researcher has control over the measurement through experimental design in a quest to assess cause and effect and claims the findings as proof of the studied phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln,

2011; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In sport management, the positivist approach dominated research from the discipline's infancy; however, other approaches have become more widespread (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

When discussing alternatives to the positivism approach, Gratton and Jones (2004) emphasized,

The key argument of those rejecting the positivist approach is that sport is a social phenomenon, that is those who participate in, watch or manage sports are acted upon by a number of external social forces, but also have free will to respond to such forces in an active way, and are not inanimate objects, whose behavior can be understood in terms of causal relationships. (p. 19)

Such ideas form the interpretative approach, the idea that meanings of the world exist because of human interpretation (Andrews, Mason, & Silk, 2006). The interpretivist paradigm is used to examine a phenomenon from the participant's viewpoint whereas a positivist endeavors to deduce relationships between X and Y from measurements. Detractors of interpretivism argue that interpreting participant's thoughts and feelings involves levels of subjectivity that threaten reliability and validity (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Other alternatives to positivism – such as critical theory, realism, critical interpretivism, and constructivism – have emerged in addition to the broad scope of interpretivism. Critical theory emphasizes the role of history as it relates to societal structures. In the realism approach, the researcher believes that a true reality can be discovered and incorporates tenets of both positivism and interpretivism. Critical interpretivism combines aspects of ethnography, comparison, sociology, and investigation (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

In the current study, constructivism served as the paradigmatic preference underpinning the examination of alternative definitions of small college athletics success. In constructivism, it is assumed that there are multiple realities, the participant and the researcher subjectively co-create understandings, and meanings are constructed by participants and observers in the natural world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Said differently, “Constructivism is rooted in the assumption that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and they develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (Andrew et al., 2011, p. 10). Further, understanding the world is framed, in part, on historical, social, and cultural perspectives and such understanding is influenced by an individual’s interaction with a broader community (Andrew et al., 2011). In constructivism, research is most often associated with inductive, qualitative studies. In inductive research, the researcher develops a theory based on data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In comparison, positivists rely on quantitative, deductive approach; ideas are developed from existing theory and then tested through the collection of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). With an understanding of the tenets the varying epistemological and ontological paradigms, is it important to describe the tenets of qualitative research in order to contextualize the data collection procedures for this dissertation.

### **The Qualitative Approach**

In this study, I drew upon qualitative techniques and strategies to examine how Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and faculty define athletics success at small colleges. Qualitative research “is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Further, qualitative research is done in an attempt to discover variables and qualitative researchers often develop their research questions in a way that qualitative

methodologies represent the best approach to answer such complex questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Restated, because this study sought to better understand the complex questions about the small college athletics environment, qualitative methodologies were arguably most appropriate for such an endeavor. As mentioned previously, assumptions about knowledge underlie the constructivism paradigm. In addition, assumptions motivate the use of qualitative approaches (Andrews et al., 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). While positivists assume there is one true objective, measureable reality, qualitative researchers embody a different approach. Specifically,

The results of qualitative research offer a more complex, and arguably, therefore, more accurate picture of social interactions, which can be complex and ambiguous. Therefore, well-designed qualitative studies can have very strong internal validity. That is they can claim to describe the research setting quite accurately, perhaps more so than deductive studies which sacrifice accuracy at the level of the individual case in order to make broad generalizations. (Andrews et al., 2006, p. 147)

Although the results of qualitative approaches limit the ability to generalize findings or to infer cause and effect, advocates of qualitative approaches assert the ability to understand phenomena outweigh some of the inherent drawbacks of qualitative methodologies (Andrews et al., 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Sound qualitative data necessitates the use of rich, thick descriptions and explanations of specific processes within the studied context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, while the generalizability of qualitative studies is compromised in comparison to quantitative positivist approaches, Miles and Huberman (1994) avowed that qualitative studies offer a sense of “undesirability.” Said differently, “Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far

more convincing to a reader, another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner – than pages of summarized numbers” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1).

Such notions relate prominently to the current study in that findings have the potential to have very real implications for research, policymakers, and practitioners alike. From a research perspective, developing sport-specific theory answers the calls to develop theories that build the legitimacy of sport management as its own academic discipline (Chalip, 2006; Costa, 2005; Doherty, 2012; Fink, 2013). Implications for policymakers and practitioners are deeply intertwined. At the small college level, the varying groups of policymakers – NCAA administrators, college chancellors and presidents, and Athletics Directors – are both the policymakers and practitioners. As such, gaining an understanding not only of how athletics success is measured at the small college level but also of how such measurements impact university-wide policymaking has implications for the myriad stakeholders involved in the small college athletics environment.

In all, qualitative research allows for deep, rich understandings of complex phenomena. The current study aligns with Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) declaration that, “to understand experience, that experience must be located within and (cannot) be divorced from the large events in a social, political, cultural, racial, gender-related, informational, and technological framework and therefore these are essential aspects of our (qualitative) analyses” (p. 8). To understand the small college athletics experience and how success is measured at such institutions, that experience must be contextualized. The current issues surrounding higher education in general, the financial climate of higher education and college athletics, mission and goals of small college athletics departments and the institution at large combined with matching institutional and athletics programming to current and prospective student-athlete interests

inherently encapsulate a complex phenomena – defining small college athletics success – that simply cannot be confined to measuring one, true, positivist reality. Rather, the current small college athletics environment necessitates a constructivist paradigm – one that assumes that reality is constructed by involved constituency groups – in order to understand the complexity of small college athletics success and how such success impacts the NCAA, the institution at-large, athletics administrators, and the coaches and student-athletes themselves.

### **Research Design, Data Collection, Subject Selection.**

An understanding of the foundations of research, its paradigms, and the differing epistemological and ontological approaches that underlie the research process provide rationale for the particular methodological approaches for the current study. Specifically, a constructivist, qualitative approach underlies the overall research process to examine possible alternative definitions of small college athletics success and implications of such definitions on programmatic decision-making. The specific research design, data collection, and data analysis align with such constructivist paradigmatic predilections.

**Interviews.** In qualitative research, interviewing is a common form of data collection and involves collecting data that addresses the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of a phenomena (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Further, one-on-one interviews are the most common type of interview in the social sciences (Andrews et al., 2006). There are three different types of one-on-one interviews: (1) the structured interview, (2) the semi-structured interview, and (3) the unstructured interview (Gratton & Jones, 2004). A structured interview is, in simple terms, an oral questionnaire in which the researcher reads a rigid set of questions and the interviewee responds. A semi-structured interview involves the researcher adhering to a specific set of questions but allows the interviewer to ask subsidiary or follow-up questions based on interviewee responses. Specifically,

“semi-structured interviews allow the emergence of important themes that may not emerge from a more structured format. This enables the subjects to reveal insights into their attitudes and behavior that may not readily be apparent” (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 143). In an unstructured interview, the third type of interview, the researcher has a very general idea of the topics to be covered in the interview but the interviewee tends to guide the interview. As in a semi-structured interview, the researcher has the ability to develop questions based on the direction of the interview. However, there is risk involved in this type of interview in that the interview may cover a wide-range of topics that may not be covered with other interviewees in the same study. As such, it could be difficult to gain data over consistent topic arrays from subject to subject (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

In selecting interview subjects, it is important that the interviewees are knowledgeable about the phenomena being investigated (Andrew et al., 2011; Gratton & Jones, 2004). Andrew, Pedersen, and McEvoy (2011) emphasized, “interviewing requires human subjects who have knowledge of a particular phenomenon being investigated and are willing to discuss that phenomenon in detail, making the identification of a sample of subjects critical to the success of the research project” (p. 93). An interviewee who is considered an expert on a topic has been called an informant (Andrew et al., 2011; Gratton & Jones, 2004). By selecting key informants using the key informant technique, “individuals are chosen on the basis of specific knowledge that they possess, for example they may have a particular role or responsibility within an organization” (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 104).

In addition to selecting appropriate subjects for the interview, it is also important to develop rapport with the interviewees and to determine the appropriate number of subjects to interview. Conducting the interviews in a face-to-face format is an essential strategy for

developing rapport with the interviewee (Andrews et al., 2006). In qualitative research, there is no definitive number of subjects that should be established prior to data collection. Rather, the researcher should aim to achieve data saturation. Gratton and Jones (2004) defined data saturation as “the stage in fieldwork where any further data collection will not provide any different information from what you have, that is you are not learning anything new” (p. 153).

In all, interviews allow participants to reveal expert information about a phenomena, to talk about their own personal experiences, and to elaborate on emerging themes that may not have been previously known to the researcher (Gratton & Jones, 2004). As with all methodological approaches, there are some known drawbacks of the interview approach. Gratton and Jones (2004) detailed the primary concerns associated with interviewing. First, participants may feel that have to provide the ‘right’ answers instead of conveying their true thoughts on the subject at hand. In such situations, it is even more important to establish good rapport so the interviewee does not feel pressured to give a particular answer. Second, “asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first” (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 143). Further, although interviews involve asking participants about their experiences, the researcher relies on the subject to accurately recall their experiences. Lastly, as with all qualitative approaches, there is subjectivity in the interpretation of the data (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

**Procedures.** In the current study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and Faculty Athletics Representatives at 11 Division III institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body. The Office of Postsecondary Education’s Equity in Athletics Database (“Office of Postsecondary Education,” 2016) was used to find Division III institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body. Further, institutions were targeted where data could be collected at

multiple institutions during a weeks-long data collection loop at institutions within a 15-hour drive of the lead author's campus.

In all, three interviews were conducted at each of the 11 institutions for a total of 33 interviews. At each school, the Athletics Director was initially contacted via email (See Appendix A for a sample initial email sent to Athletics Directors) and asked if he/she would be willing to coordinate on-one-one on-campus interviews between myself and (1) the Athletics Director, (2) a high-level campus administrator, and (3) the Faculty Athletics Representative (at two institutions, the Faculty Athletics Representatives were unavailable so the Athletics Director coordinated interviews with a faculty member who was familiar with the operations and priorities of the athletics department). In all, 41 schools were contacted, with 11 Athletics Directors responding with an interest in coordinating interviews at their institution. Ultimately, data was collected at institutions from the following seven states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved.

After agreeing to coordinate the interviews, the Athletics Director was given autonomy to select which campus administrator would be best (and available) to respond to questions about the role of the athletics department in the overall institution. Interviews at each institution were conducted over the course of one day. I would initially meet the Athletics Director in his/her office. Then, with some variation in order, I would conduct interviews with the Athletics Director, campus administrator, and Faculty Athletics Representative. Each of the interviews was conducted in the office of the interviewee, or a conference room near the interviewee's office. At some point throughout the day, I was given a tour (nearly always by the Athletics Director) of the athletics department and campus.

A basic profile of each of the eleven institutions is included below. Data ranges are included where appropriate in order to maintain the anonymity of each institution. All institutions are private institutions.

**Table 2**

*Institutional profiles*

School	Enrollment Range (Undergrad. Only) *	Student-Athlete Range *	% Student-Athletes *	Tuition and Fees (does not include Room and Board) **	2015-2016 Learfield Directors' Cup Final Standing Range ***	Endowment (in millions) & School Admissions Selectivity **
1	1,000 – 1,500	400-500	30-35%	\$40,000 - \$45,000	100-125	\$75-100, More selective
2	2,000 – 2,500	500-600	25-30%	\$45,000 - \$50,000	1-50	\$625-650, More selective
3	500 – 1,000	200-300	20-25%	\$20,000 - \$25,000	No points earned	Not reported, selective
4	1,500 – 2,000	400-500	25-30%	\$50,000 - \$55,000	50-75	\$200-225, more selective
5	500 – 1,000	200-300	45-50%	\$25,000 - \$30,000	No points earned	\$1-25, selective
6	2,000 – 2,500	800-900	40-45%	\$25,000 - \$30,000	1-50	\$100-125, selective
7	1,000 – 1,500	300-400	30-35%	\$25,000 - \$30,000	200-225	\$75-100, selective
8	1,000 – 1,500	300-400	40-45%	\$25,000 - \$30,000	300-325	\$25-50, less selective
9	1,500 – 2,000	600-700	40-45%	\$35,000- \$40,000	1-50	\$50-75, more selective
10	500 – 1,000	200-300	25-30%	\$20,000- \$25,000	175-200	\$50-75, selective
11	1,000 – 1,500	300-400	35-40%	\$20,000- \$25,000	No points earned	Not reported, less selective

\* denotes data from Equity in Athletics Database (“Office of Postsecondary Education,” 2016)

\*\* denotes data from US News and World Report

\*\*\* denotes data from Learfield Directors' Cup

I used purposeful sampling for subject selection. Maxwell (2013) described purposeful sampling by detailing:

In this strategy, particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can't be gotten as well from other sources... Selecting those times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with information that you need to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative selection decisions. (p. 97).

The Office of Postsecondary Education's Equity in Athletics Data Analysis Cutting Tool ("Office of Postsecondary Education," 2016) was utilized to find Division III institutions where student-athletes make up 20% or more of the general student body population. Athletics Directors were then contacted via email to request access for the in-person interviews on campus at a date that would be convenient for them.

Interviews were conducted in person due to the value of face-to-face interaction as it relates to building rapport for the interview (Andrews et al., 2006; Gratton & Jones, 2004). Further, conducting the interviews in a face-to-face setting (rather than via email or telephone) arguably led to a richer data set based on Morgan and Symon's (2004) assertion, "in electronic interviewing the relationship is in many ways 'disembodied' – distanced by time and space – and decontextualized" (p. 28). Further, Andrew and colleagues (2011) indicated that in an interview, "it is essential for interviewers to establish and maintain trust and rapport between themselves and respondents" (p. 94). Upon arrival at each of the institutions, nearly all of the interviewees were curious as to why I was in the area (oftentimes, hundreds of miles away from my own campus). When I would tell them I was in the area solely for research purposes, all were impressed – and some flabbergasted – that I would travel so far to conduct interviews. Since

these conversations were typically soon after introducing myself, I found it really helped to make the interviewees more willing to share throughout their interviews. Further, interviewees were simply more open and willing to share since they were in their own comfort zone. Interviews took place where and when they wanted – typically either in their own offices or a nearby conference room – with little inconvenience to them other than simply allocating some time out of their schedules. Lastly, interviews were intentionally conducted in the summer months, when both school and athletics competitions were not filling their schedules. Thus, conducting face-to-face interviews was valuable for a multitude of factors, namely that it was easier to develop rapport, interviews were conducted in their comfort zone and a time convenient for them, and interviewees knew how much their input was valued because the researcher traveled hundreds – sometimes thousands – of miles round-trip to conduct interviews at their institution.

An interview guide (Andrews et al., 2006) was developed for the interviews. Using an interview guide for the semi-structured interview approach has several distinct benefits. Specifically, there is flexibility to develop new questions based on interviewee responses within the interview. Further, “the open-ended questions allow the participant to provide the most appropriate responses to particular questions, reflecting the diverse way in which different individuals view the social world” (Andrews et al., 2006, p. 108). The interview guide was developed utilizing the literature presented in Chapter Two as well as the two leading research questions. Specifically, research questions sought to examine definitions of athletics department success, the role of athletics on campus, the college financial environment as it relates to the athletics department, tuition discounts and enrollment management, athletics department donor giving and fundraising, and institutional and Division III mission attainment. For a full list of the interview guides for the Athletics Director, Faculty Athletics Representative, and campus

administrator, see Appendix B. Interview guide questions are listed below as well. Notes are indicated in parenthesis for questions asked of one specific subset of interviewees (e.g., Athletics Director, Faculty Athletics Representative, or campus administrator).

1. When you applied for/interviewed for the Athletics Director positions, what were the expectations placed on you for department-wide on-court, on-field athletics success? (Athletics Director only)
2. When looking back on an a school year, what goes into you judging whether the athletics program was successful or not?
3. What types of schools do you feel like your institution is in competition with for student-athletes?
4. If the athletics department ceased to exist, what sort of impact would that have on the university's chance for survival?
5. What conversations have occurred related to adding sports to increase enrollment?
6. What are your rules about roster sizes or tuition quotas?
7. Could you describe the communication process between you and university administration regarding goals for the athletics department? (Athletics Director only)
8. What factors contribute to you firing a coach? (Athletics Director only)
9. What steps has the athletics department taken to remain competitive in the small college (athletics) higher education marketplace?
10. What role does tuition-discounting play in your school's financial aid packages?
11. What is the overall mission of your athletics department? In what specific ways is money allocated to achieve the mission?
12. How does the athletics department mission align with the overall college/university? With Division III athletics?
13. How has the financial climate of your athletics department changed in the time since you became Athletics Director (Faculty Athletics Representative, campus administrator)? How about the financial climate of the university?
14. In your opinion, how has the financial climate of small college athletics (specifically, DIII) changed in the time since you became Athletics Director (Faculty Athletics Representative, campus administrator)?

15. What are the biggest positives of your institution that coaches use to recruit student-athletes?
16. What do you feel like are the biggest drawbacks of your university that your coaches have to overcome when recruiting?
17. In what ways are the student-athletes representative of the student body as a whole?
18. How would you describe the small college athletics experience to someone who has no idea what it's about?
19. If you had to place your athletics department/your school on a stability scale from 1 (extremely unstable) to 10 (extremely stable), where would your school fall and why?
20. What sort of role does alumni giving play in the overall revenues of your institution? Are there any sort of specific directives or statistics kept on former student-athlete alumni donations?
21. How do you feel like university administrators view the athletics department?
22. How level of a playing field do you believe Division III athletics is?
23. Could you briefly describe your responsibilities as they relates to the athletics department (Faculty Athletics Representative, campus administrator)?
24. Have you ever felt like there have been situations where you have been put in a tough situation serving as a liaison between athletics and academics (Faculty Athletics Representative only)?

Before data collection, IRB approval was obtained (See Appendix C). Prior to each interview, oral consent IRB procedures were utilized (See Appendix D).

**Data Analysis.** The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and then coded, the key process in data reduction and analysis (Gratton & Jones, 2004). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). For the specific coding process, I utilized both the constant comparison approach and also Gratton and Jones’ (2004) suggested four-part coding framework. In the constant comparison approach, the researcher analyzes data by comparing each piece of data with the other pieces of data to look for similarities and

differences. When detailing the constant comparison approach, Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasized, “this type of comparison is essential to all analysis because it allows the researcher to differentiate one category/theme from another and to identify properties and dimensions specific to that category/theme” (p. 73).

The first stage of Gratton and Jones’ (2004) four-part coding framework is open coding. In this stage, “the data is carefully read, all statements relating to the research question are identified, and each is assigned a code, or a category and ... each relevant statement is organized under its appropriate code” (p. 220). A master coding document was developed in which I had each of the interview questions and each of the interviewee responses available for open coding. Stage two involves axial coding (Gratton & Jones, 2004). In this stage, the researcher re-reads the data based on the codes established in stage one and further groups the data into the codes. The researcher can also develop further codes during this stage.

In stage three, the researcher, “should become more analytical, and look for patterns and explanation in the codes” (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 220). In this stage, I looked for themes in the codes by analyzing the data in reference to the conceptual categories and theoretical framework that initially guided the study (e.g., Agency Theory, Strategic Contingency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, Strategic Enrollment Management, and mission attainment). The last stage of Gratton and Jones’ (2004) four-part coding framework is “selective coding.” This stage “involves reading through the raw data for cases that illustrate the analysis, or explain the concepts” (p. 220). In this stage, I was able to assess the viability of the previously hypothesized “Alternative Success Theory.”

In all, the four-part coding framework served as a guide for analyzing the interview data and for developing an Alternative Success Theory for small college athletics. As Maxwell (2013)

emphasized, “creating substantive (theoretical) categories is particularly important for capturing ideas that don’t fit into existing organizational or theoretical categories; such substantive ideas may get lost, or never developed, unless they can be captured in such categories” (p. 108). Based on data analysis, findings are grouped according to theme. Results are collectively summarized and representative quotes are utilized to illustrate the findings. The use of representative quotes follows Gratton and Jones’ (2004) recommendations of “using quotes in this way can enrich your report, and bring your findings to life, often making the report much more readable” (p. 223).

**Reliability and Validity.** Throughout the research process undertaken in this dissertation, the five reliability and verification strategies for qualitative research developed by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) were utilized. The five specific strategies are (1) methodological coherence, (2) appropriate sample, (3) collecting and analyzing data concurrently, (4) thinking theoretically, (5) and theory development. In the first strategy of methodological coherence, Morse and colleagues (2002) accentuated that “the interdependence of qualitative research demands that the question match the method, which matches the data and the analytic procedures” (p. 18). In the current study, I intentionally chose to interview Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and Faculty Athletics Representatives because I felt that their level of expertise regarding small college athletics programming closely aligned with my overarching goal to examine how small college athletics success is defined. Such intentionality also aligns with the second reliability and verification strategy – appropriate sample. In this strategy, it is important to have participants “who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). Data saturation is also encouraged as part of this verification strategy. As elucidated previously, data collection continued until data saturation was achieved. The third reliability and validity verification strategy is to collect and analyze data concurrently as “this

spacing and the iterative interaction between data and analysis is the essence of attaining reliability and validity” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). By utilizing the constant comparative approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) for coding in addition to Gratton and Jones’ (2004) four-part coding framework, I was able to collect and analyze the data concurrently. The fourth reliability and validity verification strategy is to think theoretically, which “requires macro-micro perspectives, inching forward without making cognitive leaps, constantly checking and rechecking, and building a solid foundation” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). The assessment of alternative definitions of athletics success at small colleges was a deliberate, intentional process that involved moving forward with the hypothesized theory only after – and while – continually checking and rechecking frameworks (e.g., Strategic Contingency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, Agency Theory). The fifth reliability and validity verification strategy is theory development. Theory must be developed “as an outcome of the research process, rather than being adopted as a framework to move the analysis along” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). The very core of the hypothesized Alternative Success Theory is that development of the theory is only possible as an outcome of the data collection, data analysis, and overall research process. In all, Morse and colleagues (2002) avowed,

Together, all of these verification strategies incrementally and interactively contribute to and build reliability and validity, thus ensuring rigor. Thus, the rigor of qualitative inquiry should thus be beyond question, beyond challenge, and provide pragmatic scientific evidence that must be integrated into our developing knowledge base. (p. 19)

**Trustworthiness.** Although the aforementioned reliability and verification strategies for qualitative research (Morse et al., 2002) were utilized throughout this study, other efforts were made to address the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Shenton (2004) acknowledged some resistance to the prototypical forms of reliability and validity in qualitative research by asserting, “The trustworthiness of qualitative research generally is often questioned by positivists, perhaps because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work” (p. 63). Guba (1981) proposed four criteria of trustworthy qualitative research that will be discussed in detail throughout this section; his ideas have been accepted by many researchers seeking to address trustworthiness Shenton (2004). Guba’s (1981) four concepts were developed to correspond to criteria utilized more frequently by positivist researchers. Specifically, credibility is used in preference to internal validity, transferability instead of external validity and generalizability, dependability instead of reliability, and confirmability instead of objectivity (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004).

This section will proceed by using Guba’s (1981) and Shenton’s (2004) work to define the four trustworthiness aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. While Guba’s work has been widely accepted (Shenton, 2004), he focused more on naturalistic qualitative research. Shenton (2004) has since used Guba’s concepts and applied them more broadly to qualitative research. As such, Shenton’s recommended provisions for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be discussed in relation to specific steps undertaken in this study.

**Credibility.** The qualitative research equivalent concept of internal validity is credibility, in which the researcher works to ensure that the findings are truly representative of reality (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) detailed many “provisions may be made by researchers to promote confidence that they have accurately recorded the phenomena under scrutiny” (p. 64). I employed six of the specific strategies for credibility: (1) adoption of well established research methods, (2) early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations, (3) background, qualifications, and experience of the investigator (4) triangulation, (5) frequent debriefing sessions with project manager, and (6) thick description of the studied phenomenon (Shenton, 2004). As discussed previously while detailing the interviews and procedures undertaken in this study, the semi-structured interview aligns with Shenton’s urging for utilizing established research methods. I had early familiarity with the culture of the participating organizations, based both on previous research (see Katz et al., 2015; Schaeperkoetter, Bass, & Gordon, 2015) and based on my own researcher positionality (see following section). Such experience also aligns with Shenton’s recommendation to have a researcher that has the background and experience to study the phenomena in question. Further, Shenton (2004) advocated for the use of triangulation, one form of which,

may involve the use of a wide range of informants. This is one way of triangulating via data sources. Here individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behavior of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people... Where appropriate, site triangulation may be achieved by the participation of informants within several organizations so as to reduce the effect on the study of a particular local factors peculiar

to one institution. Where similar results emerge at different sites, findings may have greater credibility in the eyes of the reader” (p. 64).

This was a very specific strategy employed in this study, both in the form of interviewing Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and Faculty Athletics Representatives and also in conducting interviews at 11 different institutions. As will be detailed in depth throughout Chapter Four and Chapter Five, similar results did tend to emerge at different sites, which in turn can help to enhance greater credibility. The fifth utilized recommendation from Shenton (2004) for ensuring credibility is frequent debriefing sessions with the project manager. Throughout the study, the primary investigator communicated frequently with the study supervisor, who also had previous research experience with the small college athletics environment. These collaborative sessions – and others with the full committee – ultimately led to several changes in methodological development and structuring of the analysis of the data. Most notably, it was through these debriefing sessions that the aforementioned triangulation approach – interviewing three different types of campus personnel at eleven different institutions – was developed. The last provision utilized in this study to help ensure credibility is thick description of the studied phenomena. As will become evident throughout Chapter Four and Chapter Five, rich, thick description allows the readers to “determine the extent to which the overall findings ‘ring true’” (p. 64).

***Transferability.*** Transferability is akin to generalizability (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) detailed,

In positivist work, the concern often lies in demonstrating that the results of the work at hand can be applied to a wider population... (In qualitative research), it is also important that sufficient thick description of the phenomenon under investigation is provided to

allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations. (Shenton, 2004, p. 69)

In order to take steps toward transferability, Guba (1981) encourages the use of a purposive sample. By not using a sample that is representative but rather purposefully selecting a group specifically knowledgeable about a particular situation (in this case, small college athletics), it can “maximize the range of information uncovered” (Guba, 1981, p. 86). Similar to provisions for credibility, rich, thick description is also important for transferability (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Such descriptive data allows for others to test the degree of fittingness of the studied data to their own situations (Guba, 1981).

***Dependability.*** In positivist inquiries, the researcher utilizes techniques to ensure reliability – that if the same methods were repeated in the same contexts, similar results would follow (Shenton, 2004). In qualitative research, in order to address dependability, “the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Throughout this section, I have sought to describe the details of planning the interviews and interview guides as well as information about how the data was actually gathered, all in line with Shenton’s (2004).

strategies for dependability.

***Confirmability.*** According to Shenton (2004), “The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator’s comparable concern to objectivity” (p. 72). Again, as with credibility, triangulation is extremely vital for confirmability and the overall importance of trustworthiness. Triangulation, thick description, and specific details regarding data collection are all paramount to ensure the study’s findings are due to the data itself and not because of the own predilections

of the researcher(s). I endeavored to utilize triangulation, thick description throughout the results section, and specific information about data procedures and data collection to help address confirmability. In all, the combination of utilized strategies for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were utilized in an effort to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the qualitative approach undertaken in this study of the small college athletics environment.

### **Researcher Positionality**

When discussing the role of researcher positionality, Misener and Doherty (2009) stated, “researcher positionality acknowledges the impact of the researchers’ background, assumptions and relationships with... subject matter to provide more thoughtful and critical representation of ourselves within our research” (p. 466). In sport management specifically, researcher experience can serve as an impetus for further research (Andrew et al., 2011). Importantly for contextualizing my own interests in this study, I am a former NCAA Division III student-athlete, albeit not at a small college. While traveling throughout my undergraduate career for athletics competitions, and through my own observations and informal conversations with other student-athletes and coaches, I often felt that many of the small colleges seemed different than my institution holistically as a small college athletics department. As such, I acknowledge that I have a personal interest in learning more about the small college athletics environment. Further, from a practical standpoint, this familiarity helped with building rapport and gaining access. As elucidated by Corbin and Strauss (2008), “when we share a common culture with our research participants... it makes sense, then, to draw upon those experiences to obtain insight into what our participants are describing” (p. 80).

More specifically, I think my background as a former Division III student-athlete at an institution that would not be categorized as a “small college,” combined with my own previous

research experience examining Division III athletics impacted not only my initial personal interest in this study but also aided with researcher access and rapport development upon arrival at each of the institutions. I attended Washington University in St. Louis for my undergraduate education. There, I was a member of the women's basketball team for four years. We appeared in three Final Fours, three national championship games, and won the national championship in 2010. With approximately 6,600 undergraduates and 500 student-athletes, Washington University in St. Louis would not qualify as one of the small colleges eligible for participation in this study. I specifically sought out institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body.

At Washington University in St. Louis, student-athletes make up less than 8% of the overall student body. Therefore, my own experiences as a Division III student-athlete were not categorically one as a "small college" student-athlete. However, it was incredibly interesting to consider basic differences between institutions (e.g., enrollments, facilities, public vs. private, tuition, travel accommodations, etc.) we competed against in during both the conference and non-conference portions of our schedules. From afar, I had informal observations that large, public schools and large, private institutions like Washington University in St. Louis were seemingly "different" than many of the smaller Division III institutions I competed against. At the time, I did not have a comprehensive understanding of what "different" meant, nor did I have any intentions of pursuing any of that information as part of a comprehensive dissertation study. Rather, those observations were merely a reflection of a piqued interest in how things operate from an organizational standpoint in higher education.

It was not until I began my graduate work in sport management that I had the opportunity, time, and resources to undertake several different research projects on various aspects of the

small college and Division III athletics environment. Specifically I was able to be part of research studies that examined the student-athlete school selection process in Division III athletics (see Schaeperkoetter, Bass, & Gordon, 2015) and factors that contribute to winning (see Katz, Pflieger, Schaeperkoetter, & Bass, 2015). Throughout my research, I have been part of efforts to distinguish between different types of Division III institutions (see Katz et al., 2015) and have always maintained an interest in focusing in on a specific subtype of Division III institution – the “small college,” which for the purposes of this study, was defined as the aforementioned threshold of institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body.

Overall, in addition to my own informal observations about the small college athletics environment while a student-athlete at Washington University in St. Louis, previous and ongoing research on Division III athletics and the small college athletics environment framed my initial interest in examining athletics department success in small college athletics. While it is important to note the impact of those experiences on my researcher positionality, it is also relevant to detail the impact of that background once data collection began for this specific study. As emphasized by Andrew and colleagues (2011), “a researcher’s self-presentation can be critical to breaking down – or erecting – barriers to data collection” (p. 93). I intentionally chose to present myself in a manner that showcased my experience both as a Division III student-athlete and as a published author on aspects of Division III athletics. By doing so, I hoped to garner interest in participating in my study and to build rapport throughout the interview process. Specifically, when I initially reached out to small college Athletics Directors via email, I was intentional in mentioning that I was a former Division III basketball player at Washington University. I then catered each email slightly to make a connection between my own experiences at Washington University in St.

Louis and the prospective interviewee's institution if I had competed against their institution, if their institution was known for their athletic accolades, if their had a history of competing regularly against Washington University in St. Louis, or if any of their prior educational or work sites had a strong connection to Washington University in St. Louis. I wanted to make a link to the interviewees and also attempted to show that I was genuinely interested in their opinions and perspectives on small college athletics and that I was not simply sending email requests in mass quantities.

Once I arrived at each institution, and throughout the interviews, I sought to continue to present myself as someone familiar with the Division III athletics landscape both because of previous personal and academic experience. Further, I worked to incorporate Markula and Silk's (2011) recommendations for interviewing. Specifically, Markula and Silk (2011) emphasized,

As qualitative research is not limited by claims of objectivity, semi-structured and unstructured interviews allow the researchers to be an active participant in the interview situation and 'probe' further information or discuss issues that arise during the interview situation. The interviewer can also share his/her own experiences. (p. 85)

In casual conversation before the interviews and during the interview itself, I would often probe for further information as a combination of their responses and my own previous experience. I would work to share my own experiences as well. Importantly, I did not dominate interviews with my own personal experiences. Rather, I would share them as a way to serve as a springboard for further dialogue within the interview about the small college environment at their own specific institution. Throughout the interviews, and because interviewees knew of my background as a student-athlete at Washington University in St. Louis, interviewees would often compare their own institution's facilities, resources, enrollments, staff sizes, and student bodies

to those of Washington University in St. Louis. This opportunity aided in a more thorough understanding of the small college athletics environment. I firmly believe that my own researcher positionality had a dramatic positive impact on the framework and researcher access for this dissertation.

In all, an understanding of the relevant literature guiding the current study, in addition to paradigmatic methodological approaches undertaken in this study, frame the current examination of alternative definitions of success in small college athletics departments.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The themes that emerged throughout the 33 interviews are presented in this chapter. The results section is organized according to the following general themes: (1) communication process between campus administrators regarding goals for the athletics department and campus-wide perceptions of athletics, (2) the financial climate surrounding small college athletics, (3) athletics department strategies for stability, (4) Division III philosophy adherence and the small college athletics competitive marketplace and (5) administrators' reflections of athletics success. The goal of this chapter is not to critically analyze the priorities and roles of small college athletics. Rather, the purpose of this chapter is to detail the results in order to lead into the analysis and discussion that occurs in Chapter Five.

### **Communication Process Between Campus Administrators Regarding Goals for the Athletics Department and Campus-Wide Perceptions of Athletics**

Interviewees discussed the processes for setting goals and campus-wide perceptions of athletics. Additionally, faculty members were asked about existing tensions on campus as it relates to the Faculty Athletics Representative serving as a de-facto liaison between faculty and the athletics department.

**Goal-setting communication.** Each of the interviewees was asked to describe the communication process between themselves and university administration (if interviewee was the Athletics Director or a faculty member) or between themselves and the Athletics Director (if interviewee was a university administrator) regarding goals for the athletics department. The communication process was formalized for each school. To illustrate the idea that some of the Athletics Directors relied on an administrative team in goal-setting, consider the response of Athletics Director 4:

The way this works, I have an administrative team, I have athletic administrators – the senior women’s administrator, assistant ADs, head trainer, I include sports information in there too, the director of sports information, and we come up with what we think are some very viable short-term, medium, and long-term goals. Then those are shared with the leadership team for the student affairs leadership team, and discussed one on one with the VP for Student Affairs. They, we, I don’t have direct contact with the president if you will, except on conference matters. So when we’re talking about NCAA convention, and the [athletics conference] conference, then I will have direct contact with the president. But the goal-setting comes more from at the VP level, the senior staff level... So it’s not a direct mandate or goal setting with the president but it is definitely very intentional with the VP of student affairs.

Similar to Athletics Director 4, Athletics Director 6 has a senior staff that is internal to the athletics department that is relied upon for goal setting. From there however, Athletics Director 6 mostly discussed those goals with the Athletics Direct Report (ADR) rather than a campus-wide senior administrative team. Athletics Director 6 detailed such lines of communication by saying:

Well, the Vice President for Academic Affairs is my direct report. And it always has been. And that person is called the Dean of the College ... That one (Dean) is my direct report and it’s, it’s in the email (I just received recently). It’s goal time. So at the beginning of each new year, and July 1<sup>st</sup> is the beginning of the new year, then the senior athletics staff, we set our goals for the year. And the senior staff would be the SWA. There’s another assistant AD ... And the SID is an assistant to the AD. So we would set our goals for the year. And our goals involve all our measurables (sic). We call them KPIs – Key Performance Indicators: GPA, retention, graduation rates, social behavior rates if you will.

And then how we compare it within our conference and you're familiar with the Learfield Director's Cup and we try to set a goal, a number for ourself (sic). Like it was [x] this year and we were [a little below that]. But we were kind of within reach of our goal. And then we set goals in those other areas as well.

Comparable to Athletics Director 4 and Athletics Director 6, Athletics Director 7 conveyed the underlying theme of having formalized, measurable goals. However, the reporting line for goals for Athletics Director 7, similar to other factions of interviewed Athletics Directors, was simply goals that were developed primarily by the Athletics Director. While the Athletics Director informally relied on input from internal athletics department employees, there was no formalized athletics department team for goal setting. Further, Athletics Director 7 did not report to a campus-wide senior level staff team regarding goals. Rather, goals were discussed one-on-one with the ADR. Athletics Director 7 explained this process by saying,

Yes. First of all, just to show you my reporting line, I can meet with the president any time I want to. But like many presidents, he's got a full slate without me so the ADR has a set meeting with him each week because [my] ADR does not just help oversee athletics. ... so when we he reports to the president, it's not just about athletics. I can report directly to the president if I want but I have a standing meeting with [the ADR] at 10:30 every Friday. We talk about athletics ... As far as the goals setting, you know we do a program evaluation every year that [the ADR] does basically. And it's all about, your goals need to be measurable, and you know, usually you have goals about graduation rates, facilities, make sure that your budgets are meeting the needs of the program, things like that. ...I think we do a pretty good job of trying to accomplish those goals but the

key is being measurable. And we've found out one of the, the number one goal of our program is for our student-athletes to graduate, that's our number one goal.

Lastly in relation to the communication process for goal setting, some interviewees indicated there were specific campus administrators who had a role in giving and receiving measurable goals to and from the athletics department but the process itself was not as formalized as the majority of the other schools. Specifically, Athletics Director 9 conveyed,

Well I wouldn't say there's a formalized process. Again, I think if I were just showing up here to run the athletic program, maybe that would be different. But the fact that I've been here for 20 years I think creates a situation where maybe some of those things are I don't know, assumed that we understand. So maybe that prevents us from sort of having to have these intentional meetings. But, you know, nevertheless, we are, there are lots of things, we meet with – our admissions people come to some of our department meetings and update us and you know, I do meet with the Vice President for Enrollment Management periodically. I'm involved in meetings with our consultant that they use for, that admissions uses. So I guess I'm in the loop on that. But I report directly to President [name] so we meet, I mean theoretically, we're scheduled to meet once every two weeks. I mean obviously, various schedules, that doesn't always happen. But we're pretty good about that. But mostly it's like hey we're doing pretty well, keep it up, type of thing is the way that those things usually go and I present issues that it's usually reactionary type things. It's personnel, something going on with our personnel, either an issue or trying to see if we can save somebody from going somewhere else, or somebody has gone somewhere else and we're going to run a search to replace them. But there's really not a lot of intentional talk, hey each year this is what we expect, this is what we expect. But

we've been pretty consistent for a long time in terms of bringing in those numbers and in terms of, I mean, we've won [a lot of conference winning championships] so I mean that's not really something [we talk about consistently with goals because it's assumed]. Now, when we don't win it, we'll say something, maybe what's going on, what's the problem. We're typically in the top 25 in the Director's Cup. We've been in the top 10 and this year we were [x] so it fluctuates some.

This notion of communication occurring more so on an as-needed basis because of a long tenure was prevalent not only with some of the Athletics Directors but also with many Faculty Athletics Representatives when they discussed their roles with goal-setting and addressing issues on an as-needed basis with the athletics department. For example, most Faculty Athletics Representatives that had served in the role for more than five years, indicated that they were comfortable enough with the Athletics Director that they could simply call or stop by the Athletics Directors office to discuss any issues brought to them by faculty members. Further, Faculty Athletics Representatives also indicated that they took on more of a prominent role leading up to conference meetings and NCAA conventions. Specifically, whenever there was new conference-wide or Division III-wide legislative issues requiring a vote, the Faculty Athletics Representatives would be consulted prior to the vote. In general, as mentioned previously, goal setting was a very intentional part of each of the interviewees' roles. Responses varied as far as the specific committees for goal setting or for reporting structures, both based on length of tenure and based on the number of administrative committees internal and external to the athletics department.

**Campus-wide perceptions of athletics.** Overall, interviewees indicated that, for the most part, campus administrators supported athletics and saw its value to campus both from a campus culture standpoint and also from a financial, tuition, and enrollment standpoint. While the general consensus was there was administrative support for athletics in some capacity, respondents tended to think faculty were split as to whether they favorably or unfavorably viewed the role of athletics on campus. Further, the Faculty Athletics Representatives expressly noted they felt it was their responsibility, in part, to continue to work with faculty who viewed the athletics department in a negative light. FAR 9 discussed how he thought administrators viewed athletics as serving a number of very important purposes. He elucidated,

Well I know the administrators view it (athletics) as a strategic admissions tool. And in the broadest sense. That's not just in terms of the students they bring in but public relations, notoriety, you know, the name is out there. [Our school], when our teams do well, they view it as a way for us to connect with the local community. Those people come and support the teams and they're very involved and they enjoy that. So I think everybody who is involved in administration is very, very honest about the role that it plays. Now, closely behind that, I think, they would also very much recognize the value to the students and I'm very aware of that. And that's what I talk about with faculty a lot. Yes, in a utilitarian, functional way, they're very important to us, they bring in a lot of students. But, they also are very much a part of our mission as we develop the whole student, right. So just like the kids that are in music, the kids that are in other co-curricular activities, athletics is a very important part of that and we don't want to just see it as winning games because it's so much more than that.

Similar to FAR 9, FAR 3 expressed similar opinions as the other interviewees by saying,

I think the administration sees that they are a vital part of the university and the enrichment of the student-athletes' lives and since 50-plus percent of our incoming freshmen are seen as athletes, they do get that. The academic side and the faculty don't necessarily get that. And we're not meaning to diminish their programs or diminish the academic side, but they need to understand that that's a huge draw for enrollment is that opportunity to play sports.

Again, FAR 3 spoke of the factions of faculty that may not see the different roles athletics can play on campus. In general, the interviewed FARs indicated that either some faculty felt athletics impeded the academic mission of the college or that large numbers of faculty failed to realize the vital importance of student-athletes for enrollment and financial operating purposes across campus. Athletics Director 2 spoke of this split by conveying,

From a faculty side of things, folks – I think folks who like to see glass half full will say 'oh my gosh, look at athletics.' But I think there are that few that don't like athletics, and I'm not sure I would paint a picture that rosy. I think that I work with a number of faculty that are very passive aggressive about athletics, don't know enough about us, and make decisions about what we do and don't do. But I think the faculty members that choose to engage, or choose to get to know the student-athletes would say we're a value added to the institution and that's where you have folks like [male FAR] or [female FAR] – they do help me fight misperceptions and myths about things that are going on, that folks have about athletics, that type of thing.

At the same institution, FAR 2 had an impassioned response when asked how he thought faculty members tended to view athletics. Specifically, FAR 2 emphasized,

Ooo, way across the board. People like me who appreciate Division III athletics and especially [here], where it is I think, in a very healthy way integrated with the students' college experience. There's a certain contingent of faculty who either hate or disdain athletics because it dominates so much of American society. 'Here's one place where for crying out loud can I just keep my class without having to talk about damn football, please?' So there is some resistance. But I'd say about a third are very supportive, a third are you know 'live your own life', and a third are 'please don't talk to me about athletics.'

Again, similar to other respondents, FAR 2 opined that faculty were split on how they viewed athletics.

**Tensions as the Faculty Athletics Representative.** Faculty Athletics Representatives (FARs) were asked if they ever had to navigate any tensions between groups in their roles as the FAR. Each of the interviewees indicated that tension was almost exclusively about student-athletes missing class time for competitions. Some FARs also detailed that the school made an effort to not schedule classes during the late afternoon and evening hours so that student-athletes would have open blocks for practices. FARs specified that while such a policy for late afternoon open blocks for practice helped with the logistics of practice scheduling – particularly in light of the fact that such a high percentage of the student body was student-athletes – some faculty did not like that it limited scheduling as far as when classes could be offered. In describing such tensions, the FARs emphasized that there was frequently a push and pull between faculty, administrators, and the athletics department regarding having formalized written policies for missed class time because of athletics competitions. FAR 3 detailed how current faculty were opposed to having a campus-wide policy addressing missed class time for athletics competition by saying,

Yeah, I think part of it is that I sort of stepped back out of a situation, not a situation but a request for the attendance policy. We used to have, when I first started here [x] years ago, we used to have a written policy in the manual that students were allowed to miss class for university activities and that included sports. It's not written that way any more. It gives a lot more leeway or a lot more power if you will to the academic side and every instructor to create their own policy for attendance. A couple of years ago, there was an incident, not here but at another DIII university, where the student had to make the choice between attending NCAA playoffs or taking her Chem final or whatever it was. And she had to make that choice and chose to stay and take the test but the VPAA (Vice President of Academic Affairs) at that point had called me in and said well do you think it's time to see if we can try to approach the faculty to see if we can change our policy and I was, I said I don't think they're approachable yet (laughs).

At FAR 3's institution, there clearly has been tension regarding the presence (or lack there of) of formalized policies for student-athletes missing class because of a home competition or because of travel to an away competition. While there were no written policies at some schools, FARs at other institutions indicated they were able to ward off some tensions by having a formalized policy to rely on. However, even at those institutions, FARs indicated it was difficult for athletics, administration, and faculty to be in complete agreement about such policies. FAR 5 represented such ideas by detailing,

We had a situation here where there were scheduling conflicts due to competitions that fell on night classes and faculty that were just inflexible in a particular discipline. We've had to go back and make all of our different documents in the school mesh... A student handbook. Then we have a faculty handbook. And then we have official college policy

that's in the academic affairs handbook regarding absences and competition and practices, and so the tension (of missed class time) had good results because it's caused us to revisit the whole issue so that everything now is in order. But it was tough. I mean there were some students maybe not going to be able to pass their majors or compete and it's a small school, probably more of a small school problem because there are fewer options, fewer faculty, and fewer ways to make that [work] out. So that's one instance. There were no winners either. What we just found is that we needed to revisit our policy. We still didn't have an answer because we're kind of beholden to our conference as far as the schedules go. And sometimes the schedules don't come out soon enough for us to head it off, to change our school schedule. So competition schedule, school schedule, and then in the spring it's even more fun, we've got rainouts. That was a fun one though.

It is also important to further emphasize what FAR 5 detailed about the conference's role in scheduling for conference games. Many FARs detailed that the athletics conference their school was part of controlled scheduling the dates and competitions for all sports for their conference games. In many instances, a school's competitions within the conference could be upwards of 80% of a sport's schedule. As such, the individual school exerted very little control over the dates and times of the competitions. Many FARs described this not only as a logistical obstacle, but also conveyed that faculty did not understand this component of scheduling. As a result, while scheduling tended to be mostly out of the control of the athletics department, factions of faculty blamed the athletics department for class-competition conflicts. Many FARs did indicate they felt it was part of their FAR role to dispel this misconception amongst faculty members.

Lastly, in relation to tension FARs often have to navigate, some FARs spoke of the importance of making sure that, in addition to faculty being aware of policies for missed class time, the student-athletes themselves needed to be aware of, and adhere to, policies and procedures for missing classes. FAR 10 intimated such sentiments when conveying that even in instances where there were policies, some faculty and some student-athletes would try to take advantage of the situation. She detailed,

I think the biggest challenge in that tension is missed class time and it's students, student-athletes not doing what they should be doing. And faculty also not doing necessarily what they should be doing. Finding loopholes in the policies that are written on the faculty side and student-athletes, of course, it's their job to talk to their faculty members before the day before. Or the night before, or by email at midnight, or after the fact. So some of that tension, we work on education, but I think that's the biggest tension is we have a written policy, a college duty policy and our faculty find ways to finagle around it and sometimes it's not to the student-athlete's benefit. That's the biggest tension, missed class time.

Throughout this section that focused on detailing the current communication structures and procedures as well as formal and informal processes for managing campus-wide perceptions of athletics, it became evident that major constituency groups on campus (i.e., athletics employees, student-athletes, campus administrators, and faculty) clearly understood that athletics served a vital role on campus and were not simply an ancillary campus department. Athletics Directors were in frequent – sometimes daily – communication with enrollment management officers, admissions departments, and the campus president (either directly or via a campus administrator who directly reported to the president). Moreover, many interviewees indicated faculty were keenly aware of the prominent role of athletics in increasing or maintaining

enrollment. While such awareness did exist at nearly each interviewee's campus, most indicated not all faculty were necessarily in support of the growing role of athletics in regards to serving a prominent role for enrollment purposes. Faculty Athletics Representatives detailed how they felt they served as a voice for the athletics department to help change any misconceptions faculty have about athletics on campus.

### **The Financial Climate Surrounding Small College Athletics**

With an understanding of campus-wide perceptions of the athletics department, it is important to detail how interviewees discussed the financial landscape of small colleges and small college athletics. By asking interviewees an array of questions about the financial climate surrounding small college athletics, I sought to again gain a better understanding of the role of small college athletics in the overall institution. Interviewees were asked four specific questions to gain a better understanding of the financial constraints, limitations, priorities, and practices of small colleges where student-athletes make up a large portion of the student body (20% or more of student body for the purposes of this dissertation). Interviewees were asked (1) What role does tuition-discounting play in your school's financial aid packages for the overall student body?; (2) How has the financial climate of your athletics department changed in the time since you became (Athletics Director, campus administrator, Faculty Athletics Representative)? How about the financial climate of the overall college?; (3) If you had to place your athletics department and your school on a financial stability scale from one (extremely financially unstable) to 10 (extremely financially stable), where would your school fall and why?; and (4) If the athletics department ceased to exist, what sort of impact would that have on the university's chance for survival? As will become clear while detailing interviewee responses for each of the aforementioned five questions, financial goals and priorities are arguably the most salient drivers

of institutional decision-making. Moreover, the athletics department's role in the financial solvency of the institution was viewed as absolutely vital.

**The role of tuition discounting.** When Athletics Directors, administrators, and Faculty Athletics Representatives were each asked to describe the role of tuition discounting at their institution, respondents almost without fail said it played a huge role in the financial operating of the institution as a whole. Interviewees discussed the role of tuition discounting in a variety of ways, most notably in regards to it playing a crucial role, the notion that many small colleges are in the same situation, the heightened awareness of competitors' (both athletics competitors and other small colleges) financial aid packages, and of the impact of tuition discounting on recruiting. Administrator 1 emphasized the crucial role of tuition discounting by comparing its role to other policy-making and decision-making on campus:

On a scale of 1-10, it's (tuition discounting is) a 10 and nothing else is a 5. By far the most important part of our marketing efforts is tuition discounting. And our strategic plan is designed to enhance our value proposition, add some facilities, programs, and other areas where people are not selecting [institution] where we gave the best scholarship. Now, we'll continue to discount students with financial need. But the real issue is the families who have the ability to pay but will only pick us if we're a lot cheaper, because they don't see the value of [our school]. They're looking at [peer institutions]. They can't see why it's worth it to pay more to go [here] so discounting is how we've remained fully enrolled. That's not something we're proud of but that's the honest answer.

Again, the first part of his response is such a clear indication of how prominent a role tuition-discounting in general and specific tuition-discounting strategies are formed in order to keep the institution financially sustainable. Further, many respondents discussed the idea that numerous

small colleges must have a high-tuition, high-discount model in order to compete in the higher education setting. FAR 9 echoed many of the sentiments of fellow interviewees by saying,

It's (tuition discounting is) a huge role. I shouldn't say all, but 98% of small privates that don't have huge endowments, it's the number one problem in private education right now is tuition discounting. We all know that, so it's one of those things it's everybody recognizes it's a problem, nobody has a good solution. We've talked about it and very clearly the market research shows me – they tell me – that parents and consumers would much prefer to have a high sticker and a big discount than to have a low sticker. So we stick with that model, but something's got to give at some point. It just has to. If you said 'it only costs \$20,000 but you don't get any scholarship or it's 40 (thousand dollars) and we'll give you a \$20,000 scholarship because your son is so wonderful.' We'll give you \$20,000.

Similar to other respondents, there was an underlying notion that a large factor in tuition discounting policies is the value proposition of having a high discount. Other interviewees also indicated that many prospective students – and their families – thought colleges were making profits based on having such detailed strategies for their tuition discounting policies. Athletics Director 10 expressed frustration with such misconceptions by saying

There is a challenge to keep that tuition discount as low as they (administrators) can get it. But then there's the challenge of still getting students. Make as much money as you can on the students you can get. And it's not – people tend to misunderstand – it's not that the school is making money. The school is using that money to operate on, financially stable and sustainability. And that's the challenge for all these small schools.

In addition to talking about the crucial role of tuition discounting for the overall institution's fiscal solvency and some of the value propositions and misconceptions that are associated with tuition discounting, many respondents discussed the role of tuition discounting as it relates to recruiting. That is, because of the non-scholarship model of Division III athletics, coaches had to recruit student-athletes that were good academic and athletics fits, but also had to factor in the various tuition discounting packages. In many instances, Athletics Directors and administrators detailed that for coaches, they often had to recruit against other school's tuition discounting packages and would oftentimes have to compensate for lower financial aid packages. Athletics Director 9 discussed such an idea by detailing,

We are rarely the best financial aid package that a student that we're recruiting has. In fact, often times, we're the worst. So you know, what I try to convince our coaches of – and some of them are better than this at others – is that we have to be able to sell everything else we have to offer here at [institution] and get somebody to want to be here bad enough that they'll pay a little more to come here. And there are a lot of kids that will. The question becomes 'How much more are they willing to pay?' Are they willing to pay two or three thousand more? \$5,000? Maybe... So for us, it's about trying to get to a point in the recruiting process where you're the number one choice of that student-athlete before the money comes into the equation... But if we're just one of four or five schools when that financial aid package comes to them, we're not going to get very many of those kids because we're not going to be the cheapest... And then, if we're the top choice, and they have a financial aid package from [a competing institution] that is \$8,000 cheaper than (here), well then our admissions office will take a look, just like they would

for any student. They're going to narrow the gap hopefully enough that the person will still come here and pay more money (than they would at the competing institution).

To be clear, Athletics Director 9 was not saying the school would openly go against NCAA rules to lure a prospective student-athlete. Rather, because of the non-scholarship model of Division III athletics, an institution's tuition-discounting policies for all prospective students adds another complex layer to the recruiting process. As such, as part of the recruiting process, many coaches not only make it a point to be aware of the other schools the prospective student-athlete is considering but also try to know the specific details of the financial aid offers from those other schools. In many instances, prospective student-athletes would be very open with the coaches and the admissions officers and would work to have schools match other school's financial aid packages. Again, as many Athletics Directors and campus administrators noted, such a process would occur for any prospective student, not simply just for prospective student-athletes.

While nearly all interviewees discussed the crucial role of tuition discounting, the heightened awareness of competitors' financial aid packages and the notion that most small colleges face challenges associated with tuition discounting policies, several interviewees detailed extremely specific components of the relationship between tuition discounting and enrollment goals. Administrator 8 gave a detailed response when asked about the role of tuition discounting at the institution:

Enrollment now is two things. It's not just bringing in the class... I can bring in 320 new students, which we likely will, at 60% (discount). If I bring in 320 new students, that's a 35% increase over last year. Ah, that's great, everybody's the hero right? The coaches are great, we're (administrators are) great, it takes a campus to recruit a community. But if I bring in that class at a discount rate, and this year's discount rate will be about 60% off

tuition and fees. At 62%, any additional revenue I will have brought in by bringing in those new students is going to be erased by increasing the discount by 2%. Each one, at [institution], each one of our percentage points towards the discount is \$280,000. And that's DIII schools and DII schools in a nutshell right there... 95% of small, private liberal arts colleges are extremely tuition-dependent.

As Administrator 8 indicated by saying many small, private liberal arts colleges are tuition-dependent, developing tuition and discount rates are a supremely strategic and critical component of an institution's overall financial plan. Many interviewees indicated that student tuition was the primary revenue stream for the institution and therefore, the institutions were highly dependent on that tuition revenue, and the delicate balance of tuition discounting, in order to meet institutional financial goals. In all, interviewees emphasized that tuition discounting played a paramount role in the fiscal operations of their college and were open about the idea that many small colleges rely on the high tuition, high discount model to operate. Further, in relation to the role of tuition discounting in athletics department operations, many Athletics Directors and administrators detailed that administrators, Athletics Directors, and coaches are extremely aware of competitors' financial aid packages during the student-athlete recruiting process.

**The changing small college financial landscape.** Each Athletics Director, administrator, and Faculty Athletics Representative was asked how the financial climate of the athletics department and university has changed in their time at the institution. Many pointed to the high tuition, high discount model, the notion that there are more full-time head and assistant coaches to help with recruiting, the continued stretch of budgets while increasingly relying on athletics as an enrollment driver, and the financial strain associated with hiring administrators to help with

new government compliance standards in higher education. Like many interviewees, Administrator 9 emphasized the interconnectedness of the economy, increased administrative costs, and the role of athletics:

Oh, I think things have become more stressful budgetarily. The great recovery of '08-'09 – we just didn't go back to business as usual. I think early on we were hoping but we just didn't. I think prior to 2008, we felt really free to increase tuition pretty dramatically each year. After '09, we did not feel that way. So we're generating less revenue, adjusting for inflation, less revenue now that we did in the pre-'08 environment. So that gives us less money to spend on any number of activities, including intercollegiate athletics. And so we had fewer assistant coaches when I got here, now we have more assistant coaches than when I first got here... There is stress, there is consternation about reallocation (of funds for more full-time coaches) because there are always kind of losers and winners in reallocation but my impression is that everybody on our campus is pretty savvy about the role that intercollegiate athletics plays in building the student body, both numerically and qualitatively.

Importantly, Administrator 9 indicated that although budgets continue to tighten, athletics department staff size has grown. Rationale for doing so ties into the college's increased dependence on student-athletes as enrollment drivers. Thus, the impetus for paying for more full-time coaches – although not necessarily with lucrative salaries - is that the overall college will have a sound return on investment because of the athletics department serving as a strong enrollment driver. After describing the difficulty of sustaining the expensive small-college learning environment defined by small student to faculty ratios and decreasing financial margins,

Administrator 1 talked further about challenges many small colleges face and how athletics helps address some of those challenges. It was emphasized,

It's more expensive to deliver that (the small college experience). It's an 11 to 1 student to faculty ratio here. No graduate teaching assistants or anything like that. And so that does cost more. And that's how the financial circumstances have changed. Is that the margins have gotten slimmer and those (small colleges) with large endowments have sustained themselves by funding their discount and those without large endowments, that discount is just money that doesn't come in. So what I've seen over the last decade or two has been a restriction of programs, that many colleges in our region have gotten rid of the programs with lower enrollment. And they're often the humanities programs. So that's the single biggest change. The role of athletics is that I have seen athletics running counter to that. I've seen places investing more in athletics over the last couple of decades as a counter balance to the bigger financial picture that I just mentioned (that the high tuition high discount model continues to produce less and less gain). Chasing after athletics as a revenue source. Some institutions have completely remade themselves only on the basis of that.

As elucidated by the responses of both Administrator 9 and Administrator 1, external factors to the institution – most notably the economic hit of 2008 – had a great impact on the role of athletics to the overall college. While many respondents discussed the role of the economy, others also emphasized another very important external regulation that had a dramatic impact on the financial resource allocation in the small college environment. Specifically, because the government has either new or stricter policies regarding higher education administration, all sizes of colleges have had to spend more money to hire more people to make sure the institution

is in compliance with the government standards. Although many interviewees briefly detailed such regulations, several respondents went into great detail about the impact such regulations have had on the budgets at the small college level. Administrator 7 discussed the two aforementioned external factors – the economy and government regulations – in great detail by saying,

Being tuition-dependent, not having a huge endowment, being in competition with every other college in the state, it's always a challenge. We've never just been flush with money here. I think it's, I think it's more challenging now than it was 20, 40, 15, 10 years ago. I mean, you know, the recession in '08 hit everybody, knocked down the endowment values, kept some people from enrolling in private colleges because of the cost. And there's a lot more expense now related to increasing government regulation. I mean, that's a pretty big, that's increasingly a big chunk of the budget. So reporting requirements, compliance requirements. There's just more and more of that, it seems like all the time, that every school has to comply with, and it adds to the cost of operating the place.

Administrator 3 echoed many of the sentiments of Administrator 7 while also briefly talking about how such tightened budgets make athletics department decision-making more important. He also wove in many ideas mentioned previously by Administrator 9 and Administrator 1 and also discussed in general by other interviewees in that the advantages of the small college environment (personalized attention and small class sizes) are becoming increasingly difficult to fund. Administrator 3 detailed

I think it's (the small college financial environment has) become tougher actually because discounting has gone up. So every school I've been at has been tuition-driven so numbers

count and we don't have the endowment or the ability to raise money in other ways so numbers count. But you want to stay true to who you are and that is usually a small student to faculty ratio and at the same time, you have expenses going up. You're trying to hire good people, you have to pay them a fair, competitive salary. But then you have all these added administrative costs that just keep growing. A lot of it is government compliance issues and regulation, so Title IX and health issues and FERPA issues and safety issues – all with good purpose behind them but all take an inordinate amount of time and effort and money to fund... It's made it harder for small schools to survive. You don't have the same efficiencies of scale that a big school has so I think we have to operate – there's not as much room for error. I mean you can't start a sport or a program if you're not sure they're going to get the students you need to get.

When discussing the changing financial landscape of the small college environment, in general, interviewees discussed the high tuition, high discount model that has become more prevalent. They also emphasized that budgets continue to be stretched because of external constraints, most notably economic downturns that negatively impacted both the institution's endowment and interest of many prospective students to pay for a small college education.

**Rating the financial stability of the institution and the athletics department.** Each of the Athletics Directors, administrators, and Faculty Athletics Representatives was asked to rate the athletics department and also the overall institution on a financial stability scale from 1 (extremely financially unstable) to 10 (extremely financially stable). Similar to what has been noted throughout this chapter, interviewees shared that an endowment that is not robust had an impact on their rating. That is, many interviewees indicated that while they did not feel as though the school was in imminent danger of closing, a large endowment would ease some concerns

about the long-term health of the institution. Due to the fact that many of the schools' interviewees identified their school as having a less-than-ideal endowment size, many felt that there was an extreme reliance on tuition dollars to balance the budget. Further, in addition to discussing the endowment, many indicated that their ratings for the athletics department and for the overall institution would either have to be the same or extremely close because of the interconnectedness of the athletics department and the institution for fiscal solvency. Because of this emphasis, I believe the rationale interviewees gave was less important than the ratings itself. Consider the response of Administrator 1 to illustrate such an idea:

I'd say 8 for both (the school and the athletics department). I think whatever figure I'd give and of course I would say 7 or 9 or 4 and make a rationale for it. It would be the same for the college and athletic program because we're so interconnected in budgeting and enrollment and all the rest. They're the same.

Administrator 8, similar to many other respondents, clearly and succinctly described the extreme interconnectedness of the athletics department and the overall institution. When FARs responded to the question, many noted that they are not closely involved the financial budgeting of administration but did indicate they felt administration was very strategic about the vital connection between the athletics department and the overall campus for financial viability. For example, FAR 5 representatively said, "Our athletic department is dependent on the institution so I'm going to say that they're going to be one and the same. And strategically, I believe our administration is smart enough to know they can't gut the athletic department." Interestingly, FAR 10 detailed, "Not 10. I'm not sure. I think they are linked... There is no way the financial stability of the athletic department could be any higher than that of the institution." That is, because the athletics department plays such a vital role in supporting the objectives of the

institution, the athletics department itself was not enough of a separate entity that it would be more financially robust than the institution itself. Echoing this sentiment that the budgetary operations of the athletics department and highly reflective of one another, Administrator 9 articulated,

I think we're in a risky business of higher education in that each year requires a lot of energy and effort and pain to balance our budget but I'd say the athletic department is so integral a part of the institution that its budgetary woes or budgetary success are going to be parallel to or consistent with the institution as a whole.

As can be seen by interviewee responses when asked to rate the financial stability of their athletics department and the overall institution, ratings were either identical or very close.

Further, it was emphasized that the ratings are so close due to the extreme interconnectedness of the athletics department and the overall institution because of budgetary goals and priorities.

**The institution's chance for survival if the athletics department closed.** As part of the effort to gain a more holistic understanding of the financial climate surrounding small college athletics, interviewees were asked a hypothetical question. They were asked to detail what would happen to the college if the athletics department had to close. Interviewees described an array of implications of an athletics department shut down. Nearly all used words such as “devastating,” “catastrophic,” “big trouble,” “cripple us almost completely,” and “would not survive” to describe the impact. Athletics Director 9 conveyed sentiments similar to other interviewees by saying,

Do you want me to tell you honestly? [The institution] would close down, and I think if you asked most of the people in our administration, they would agree. Our faculty probably would not. But I will tell you that most of the people, in order for [the

institution] to exist, there would be a large reduction in staff, faculty, tenured faculty, because there's no more – let me put it this way, 2 years ago, our freshmen class here at [institution] was 51% student-athletes. So you see where I'm coming from.

Interestingly, Athletics Director 9, similar to many other respondents, used incoming freshmen class student-athletes as a way to measure student-athlete participation rather than the student-athlete representation percentages across all classes. Similar to Athletics Director 9 and in line with other interviewee responses, Athletics Director 3 discussed the percentages of student-athletes that were incoming freshmen. With such a loss from hypothetically taking those percentages out of the financial equation,

You're talking a huge hit on the budget and we don't really have the endowment... If we don't even have those lacrosse players (as a subgroup of student-athletes), say we have to shut down our program. I mean that's going to take a huge hit right there, to where those – let's just say 15 student-athletes – could cause us to not be able to have raises next year or something, or have to go through budget cuts yet again.

Many Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and faculty noted that if the athletics department hypothetically closed tomorrow, for instance, that did not mean that the entire institution would close the next day. Rather, the school would be in imminent but not immediate danger of closing. Such a focus was captured by Administrator 5 who said,

Well, I think it would be a devastating impact. It would be catastrophic. It's not to say that in the long run, the college could not provide for an alternative recruiting source and be recruiting non-varsity athletes. But it would require a lot of planning to do that. I don't see any way the college financially could manage very long without a pretty robust athletic program.

Across all of the questions for the interviews, many interviewees at one point or another gave specific hypothetical financial calculations of what would happen (e.g., if the tuition discount changed by a percentage, or if a team was lost, etc.). For this particular question, some interviewees gave a basic financial scenario of how much tuition revenue would be lost or gained based on the number of student-athletes. For example, Administrator 9 was discussing what would happen to the current student-athletes if the athletics department closed. It was detailed that,

If half of those student-athletes decided to go somewhere else because they wanted to try to pursue their athletic career as well as their academic career and we lost 300 students, 300 students at \$20,000 net revenue per year is \$6 million. That's a lot of money. So there's no question that athletics as an enrollment tool is part of these at [the institution]. I mean, I think at most small colleges that are more tuition-driven, that's the case. Not all Division III schools would fit into that... You know, I'm not sure, you would know better than I, but at Wash U (larger, private Division III institution with high finishes historically in the Director's Cup), they're probably not as dependent on that. At the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (large, public Division III institution with high finishes historically in the Director's Cup), probably not. But at the places I've been, I mean athletics is a huge enrollment tool.

Administrator 9 not only contrasted the small college athletics environment to other types of Division III schools but also contrasted with large, Division I state schools:

So when places like [a large, nearby Division I public school] have budget problems, one of the things they do is they look to cut sports, save expenses. That doesn't make sense at a place like ours. At a place like ours, when you have budgetary problems, it's usually

tied to enrollment and you're trying to find ways to improve your enrollment – you may add programs. We added women's lacrosse (relatively recently) as a strategic way to increase enrollment. So it's different at different places.

It was interesting to hear Administrator 9's perspective because the thoughts of many other interviewees were captured by giving two very specific examples – how much net revenue would be lost if the athletics department closed and how athletics department budgetary strategies can be much different than the more high-profile Division I level. Strategies for financial success, according to Administrator 9, are manifested differently in the small college athletics environment. The responses to a very hypothetical question of what would happen to the institution if the athletics department ceased to exist illustrated the role of small college athletics in a very pragmatic manner. Interviewees indicated the paramount responsibility of the athletics department in incoming enrollment classes. Further, as mentioned previously, interviewees gave an array of examples and in-depth rationale for their opinions about what would happen if the athletics department closed but were also able to succinctly summarize such opinions but using powerful words like “catastrophic” and “crippling.”

In all, although one of the overarching goals of the developed interview guide was to gain an understanding of the financial underpinning of small college athletics, four specific questions were asked to directly address the issue. By having interviewees discuss the role of tuition discounting, the changing financial climate of small college athletics, the ranking of institutional and athletics department financial stability, and the impact of a hypothetical athletics department closure, an understanding of financial operatives and priorities was expanded. Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and faculty intimated that financial constraints such as low endowments and increased costs associated with complying with new government standards in higher

education have further tightened the budget for many small colleges. Many small colleges continue to rely on a high-tuition, high-discount financial aid model, which is increasingly difficult to manage, in part, due to the increased costs associated with the low student to faculty ration that is a staple of small colleges. As such, when asked to rate the financial stability of institution and the athletics department, many interviewees indicated the ratings would be the same based on the direct strategy to rely on athletics as a tuition and enrollment driver. Therefore, any scenario in which the athletics department – and the related budgetary benefits – ceased to exist, there would be catastrophic implications for the solvency of the overall institution.

### **Athletics Department Strategies For Financial Stability**

As has been evident while detailing goal-setting processes for the athletics department, definitions of athletics success, and the financial climate surrounding small college athletics, small college athletics departments and small colleges in general are not on completely stable financial ground. As such, I sought to ask questions to glean possible strategies athletics departments utilize to provide higher levels of financial stability both for the athletics department and for the institution as a whole. The interviewed Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and Faculty Athletics Representatives – to the extent they were aware of – were asked three specific questions surrounding potential strategies for contributing to the financial stability of the small college: (1) What are your rules about roster sizes or tuition quotas?; (2) What conversations have occurred related to adding sports to increase enrollment?; and (3) What sort of role does donor and former student-athlete giving play in the overall revenues of the athletics department and the institution?

**Rules about roster sizes or tuition quotas.** Interviewees were asked if there were any rules about roster sizes or tuition quotas. Most interviewees indicated that campus administrators and Athletics Directors hesitated to use tuition quotas or formalized mandates for roster sizes. Rather, coaches were typically given target goals for roster sizes. Such goals were usually set as part of collaborative discussions between some sort of combination of coaches, Athletics Directors, and campus administrators. Athletics Director 7 illustrated such a collaboration by saying,

Yes and no. Let me explain that. Number 1, we don't put a 'you have to have this many in your program' stipulation. We don't have that problem with any of our coaches. The problem is having too many and so what our director of finance, myself, and our ADR (athletics direct report). We all met with each coach last spring and they told us what they wanted their optimum size to be. Now, the challenge is to get a budget that matches it because our budgets don't match up to our enrollment.

Importantly, Athletics Director 7 representatively conveyed the idea that there is some sort of collaborative process between coaches, the Athletics Director, and campus administrators for tracking and predicting roster sizes. Across interviewees, there was another common theme to make sure that roster sizes were optimal. That is, robust sizes for tuition and enrollment purposes were helpful, but it is also important to have the infrastructure in place to be able to have enough facilities, equipment, money, and coach-player attention in place to be able to support the roster. Therefore, interviewees indicated large rosters were helpful, but could be cost-prohibitive if too large. Administrator 8 echoed such cautionary sentiments by emphasizing,

That's the problem with DII and DIII schools just in general is that at schools like [institution], coaches at times feel like they have to overcompensate on roster sizes just to

save a school or to save a freshmen class. And you get into all types of problems with that then. You're bringing in all kinds of kids who may not be as strong academically, who may not be ready to play. May not be at the physical level they need to be to be able to play. They don't end up getting to play. They aren't happy. That affected the team, that affects retention. It's just kind of a bad trickle down. So I think that's what [the Athletics Director] and I are trying to do...is we're going to right-size the rosters.

Administrator 8 also emphasized the notion that if coaches have a bad year recruiting, it compounds to the next year because that small freshmen class will then rollover the next year to a small sophomore class. Therefore, a small recruiting class, or a low enrollment year really has a dramatic impact over the course of four years.

As mentioned previously, interviewees emphasized the relatively collaborative nature of predicting roster sizes and of setting roster size goals. However, there was some variation across interviewees as to which constituency groups in the collaboration had more of an influence. For example, some interviewees indicated that only the coaches and the Athletics Directors were involved in planning rosters sizes. Others indicated it was the Athletics Director and campus administrators and then the coaches were given a roster goal. Still others said coaches, athletics administrators, and campus administrators were involved. Again, there was never a strict directive given, but sometimes-different constituency groups had varying levels of input when setting the goals. For example, Athletics Director 1 described the process by saying,

We have never had that (quotas) until this last year and now we have what we call benchmarks, which is a nicer word apparently I guess. So this is the first year I've had benchmarks for my coaches – first year and transfer students coming in (benchmarks). And then we don't really have a benchmark for (overall) rosters but I have a roster

number that I have discussed with [the President] and we think we would be comfortable with, based on facilities and staff and experience.

Athletics Director 2 described more of a process in which campus administrators were not directly involved in roster size setting discussions. Rather, the process was back and forth between the Athletics Director and the coaches in which roster sizes were set based on a combination of what coaches wanted and what the Athletics Director deemed appropriate in terms of financial goals and infrastructure limitations (e.g., locker room space, budgets set aside for meals and team travel, etc.). Moreover, Athletics Director 5 detailed a process that a faction of other interviewees discussed. Specifically, at School 5, the Athletics Director has specific goals from administration and then works with the coaches to set team and athletics department-wide goals. Athletics Director 5 detailed the process as follows:

What we do is we sit down. I sit down with all the coaches in October, November, around there. And try to sit down with them and come up with an idea, and that number kind of fluctuates throughout the year because we try to take our best guess as to what we're looking at as far as retention, current roster size, graduation, and what we need to either grow the roster to where we want it to be, or keep it where it is. And that's kind of what drives our recruiting. And basically we come up with a number for every sports program and then that number is built in to the number that we turn in for sports. And, my attitude as athletic director is I want every sport to pull their weight. Ultimately, I think our administration's point of view is they don't care if we say we're going to bring in [x number of] athletes, they're not going to care if two or three of our sports come up short, but two or three exceed their goal. As long as we hit that ultimate number. My big battle as athletic director is trying to get everybody to understand that everybody needs to pull

their weight. Because we are tuition driven, so it's one of those things that it's not fair if we have one program meeting or exceeding their goal every single year while another program is not, even if they have enough kids to compete, and even if they're doing fairly well performance-wise.

As is evident throughout the interviewee quotes that represented different factions of overall responses to the question about the use of roster size quotas or goals, there was variance in which groups were involved in goals setting and in which members of the group had the most input when setting goals. However, it was consistent from interviewee to interviewee that roster size goals were not set unilaterally by the coaches, Athletics Directors, or campus administrators. Rather, it was somewhat of a collaborative process and it was important that roster sizes were beneficial to the university from the tuition standpoint but did not create an unnecessary financial burden in relation to the increased resources and facilities and decreased student-athlete experience that can often come with bloated roster sizes.

**Adding new sports to increase enrollment.** As another mechanism to assess institutional and athletics department strategies to better stabilize the financial outlook of the overall small college, interviewees were asked if there had been conversations related to adding sports to increase enrollment. In general, the Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and Faculty Athletics Representatives indicated that there were either frequent conversations about possibly adding sports or an actual implementation of new sport offerings. Rationale for doing so, according to the interviewees, tended to be a combination of adding sports for purposes of increasing enrollment, gender equity, or for meeting conference sport sponsorship requirements. Interviewees also indicated in order to add a new sport or new sports, there had to be an unsaturated market from the standpoint that there would need to be prospective student-athlete

interest in participating in that sport at that particular institution. FAR 6 encapsulated the multiple reasons the school sought to add sports by saying,

Yes, we recently added lacrosse a couple of years ago. I think it's a little bit of both – I think some sports are added out of interest of the sport itself. I think some are added for the fact that it can push enrollment as well. I think we see both directions coming. I think lacrosse was a combination of those. Admissions came forward and said we have students asking about lacrosse, asking about lacrosse. Admissions brought that to the academic side, to the dean of the university and then she kind of pushed the idea of having lacrosse and we as the athletics committee looked at it. (The Athletics Director) looked at it. It was a combination. It's not a decision that's made in a box by the president saying 'we're going to do this' kind of thing.

Clearly, for FAR 6 and for many other of the interviewees, adding sports was a frequent topic of conversation but the reasons for adding sports were multifaceted and enrollment played a moderate role in such decisions. For other institutions, enrollment motives served as arguably the primary reason for adding sports. Athletics Director 10 gave an answer that was similar to other interviewees whose institutions had also added sports with a primary objective of increasing enrollment:

We've been through that (a strong emphasis on adding sports) with a different enrollment group. They were pretty strict on trying to put a lot of – I don't know if pressure is the right word – but trying to set down requirements for that. I get it. I understand it because we are a big, at the Division III level, we are one of our school's primary revenue generators through admissions, through enrollment, through tuition, You know, we don't get money from sponsors, or television, or anything like that. But, you know, if we have

400 student-athletes and they're all paying \$10,000 a year (net revenue), that's \$4 million a year that we're generating. So it has certainly – I have seen it where it was a huge priority. Now it's not so much with this enrollment group right now. I've see us here have as many as 70% of the incoming class planning to be a student-athlete, which is not healthy. But it was reality. You know, and I think part of that is kids wanting to continue, in this case, their athletic career, and continue to play. And it was a hook so to speak.

As elucidated by Athletics Director 10, and similar to many other interviewees, schools were very active about potentially adding sports to their athletics department. However, responses varied as to how proactive schools were about adding sports. Some schools had added more than five sports over the past ten years. Others had extremely active conversations about adding sports but ultimately decided against doing anything either in the recent past or imminent future. Responses also varied as to the impetus for adding sports. Some schools were very open about adding sports strictly to increase enrollment. Others indicated that the enrollment-driving component of adding sports was one of many reasons for adding sports. Other reasons included Title IX compliance, adding male sports to help increase percentages of male students on liberal arts campuses that have upwards of 55% females, and to meet conference requirements for sponsorship of specific sports.

**The role of athletics department donor giving.** As another mechanism to better understand athletics department initiatives for contributing to the financial stability of both the athletics department and the overall institution, interviewees were asked if alumni giving served any sort of prominent role in generating funds for the athletics department. Interviewees either indicated that they already had specific directives in place or were actively looking to start sport-specific donor initiatives. Although there were two clear factions of whether there was currently

a program in place, there was remarkable consistency in that respondents indicated they had to be very careful about not drawing funds away from the campus' general development fund. Further, there was a general consensus that affinity-based alumni – whether they were involved in athletics, Greek life, band, music, etc. – are more apt to donate. Administrator 7 succinctly conveyed the importance of being careful about raising funds by responding,

We'll, we've got two or three angles on that. One is that, of course, our development office will support any coach that wants to raise money for his or her program. And we want them to work with our development office. We don't want them to be lone rangers on us, just going rogue because they, you can really get cross-wise with your constituency. And so almost all of them (sports), if not all of them, do some sort of fundraising, targeted toward the former athletes of that sport, mostly, and parents.

As such, Administrator 7's school, like about half of the interviewed schools, had formal programs in place for raising money for athletics department specific funds. After detailing the specific initiatives the athletics department is taking to raise funds to enhance the budget, Athletics Director 2 echoed the sentiments of Administrator 7 in that the school currently had a program in place for raising funds and was dually cautious about not drawing donor money that would otherwise go to the college's general development fund. Athletics Director 2 emphasized,

We're also careful because we know we have, we have a lot of needs on campus, and because high participation leads to high affinity, they want to give back to their sports teams, they want to give to their Greek chapters. Well, I can't be taking everybody's money. I mean I could, but that would get me in trouble across campus. So I have to be careful about what I'm doing.

Interviewees at other schools indicated they were in the planning stages of starting an athletics department specific fundraising efforts or already had very small initiatives but were looking to dramatically expand. As mentioned previously, nearly all interviewees indicated it was important to look for ways to raise additional money for the athletics department both because of a need for the money and also because of the strong notion that alumni that were involved in athletics programs on campus are more likely to donate to athletics department specific development initiatives. When asked if there were programs in place to raise funds for the athletics department, Athletics Director 4 succinctly said, “We have not. We’re in the fledgling portion of developing a complete business plan for that right now.” Like at School 4, School 5 was also in the process of working to start athletics department specific fundraising initiatives. Athletics Director 5 expanded on the efforts by detailing,

Prior to me getting the job, there really wasn’t any communication between athletics and institutional advancement. And when I got the job, they actually, shortly after I got the job, they hired a new vice president of institutional advancement. I’ve been working with her quite a bit too. But we’re really starting from scratch. There was nothing in place and we’re trying to start some things up that will boost the amount of giving. Because I do believe that, typically, our athletics will be more apt to donate to their program rather than just give to a general fund or just giving to the college, not knowing where that money will go.

Administrator 1 indicated there was now a much stronger push for athletics department specific fundraising and also echoed the sentiments of many other interviewees who touted the market for affinity-based giving by saying,

There are (plans) and we have a very small fundraising operation historically. We're trying to grow it now because we're raising less than we should. And so a lot of that is affinity-based... I think the national research is pretty clear. For most students who were deeply engaged while they were on some activity on campus, that's the hook for reconnecting them with your campus.

Overall, respondents indicated there was an active push to raise funds by specific initiatives to target former student-athletes. Such an active push was either a continuation of a previously established fundraising program or was a part of a newly established initiative. Interviewees were confident that there was an opportunity to raise funds from former student-athletes because of the consistent trend of affinity-based giving in higher education. Importantly, however, there was a consensus that athletics department-specific fundraising initiatives had to be strategic to draw a substantial amount of funds away from what would otherwise go to a general fund for the overall college. As detailed previously, interviewees indicated that the small college financial landscape is not completely stable. Therefore, respondents were asked to detail whether several strategies – student-athlete enrollment goals, adding sports, and athletics department fundraising initiatives – were part of the institution's quest for financial stability. In general, schools were proactive about using one or several of the aforementioned strategies to stabilize the financial outlook of the athletics department and the overall college.

### **Division III Philosophy Adherence and the Small College Athletics Competitive**

#### **Marketplace**

Many of the interview questions sought to understand financial priorities and how such priorities are operationalized. While it was a primary goal to gain a comprehensive understanding of such priorities and procedures internal to each institution, it was also important

to understand how the small college athletics environment at each school aligned with Division III athletics as a whole. Further, as has been emphasized throughout this chapter, remaining financially sustainable is a competitive and strategic process that requires an awareness of what is happening at small colleges and Division III athletics departments external to each institution. Therefore, several interview questions sought to gain a deeper understanding of how the interviewees measured their institution's fit into the small college athletics environment, Division III athletics as a whole, and how the institution operated in a manner to remain competitive in the proverbial higher education marketplace. In all, four specific questions were asked to assess Division III philosophy adherence and the small college (athletics) competitive higher education marketplace: (1) How does the athletics department mission align with Division III athletics?; (2) How level of a playing field do you believe Division III athletics is?; (3) What steps has the athletics department taken to remain competitive in the small college (athletics) marketplace?; And (4) How would you describe the small college athletics experience to someone who has no idea what it's about?

**Athletics department mission alignment with Division III athletics.** Interviewees were asked how the athletics department aligns with the Division III philosophy. Most respondents indicated they thought the athletics department aligned very closely, with some interviewees even saying that you could almost lay the athletics department mission on top of the Division III philosophy. There was a general consensus that the Division III philosophy is helpful for athletics department guidance because it is a list of actionable, operational items above and beyond the initial "Discover, Develop, Dedicate" mantra. Athletics Director 4 intimated many of the sentiments of other interviewees by touting the actionable items of the Division III

philosophy, but also detailed that there is a difference between knowing the actionable items and having the resources to implement such actions. Specifically, Athletics Director 4 emphasized,

Well I think if you look in the materials that DIII sends out, there were sort of actionable items from that tagline or from those headers. The discovery of DIII and what is it that – what are the qualities that make up a Division III school. So I do think, and the educational piece that you can deliver and there's a mission statement, and then the action item is really people become educated that this is the role of the liberal arts school in DIII. This is what a DIII school is in relation to a DI or DII school. So I think there's credibility in that. I think what clouds it is the previous question you've talked about. That once you've explained what those schools are, what their individual missions are, and what the athletics department missions are – which are fairly similar in terms of outcomes for the student, I think – the tough thing is do they have the means to do it? Can they go about it? And that's where the varying success comes in. So I do think that you can quantify or you can be successful from the mission statement into an action item and fulfill the action item. The question is in the variety of things that you're trying to accomplish, how much can you accomplish? Some schools do it much, much more and much, much better than others.

Therefore, while I detailed earlier how Athletics Directors, administrators, and faculty members define athletics success at their own institution, Athletics Director 4's response to mission alignment with Division III athletics clearly implies how some schools are successful from a resource perspective, while others are not. It is similarly important to further emphasize that Athletics Director 4, like many other interviewees, lauded the Division III philosophy for having items that could be operationalized. Athletics Director 2 described the helpful shift in changing

the Division III philosophy to have more clearly defined action items and then indicated that the Division III philosophy has one specific area that remains vague in some respects. Athletics Director 2 detailed,

Hopefully it (the athletics department mission) lines up pretty closely (with the Division III philosophy). There were a lot of folks when the branding and platform statement came out, thought like ‘what, why are we doing this?’ Well, discover, develop, and dedicate, but then you have comprehensive learning environment, proportionality, like all that stuff, academic success. And once you move past the discover, develop, dedicate part, those attributes are the words that frankly all of us were probably struggling with in the past as we tried to describe our institutions and what the experience is like. But we are there (with now knowing how to with the Division III philosophy). I think the only things that folks would say they question is there’s a part where they (the Division III philosophy) talks about broad-based athletics participation. Some folks interpret that to mean we don’t cut and we let anybody on the roster and our numbers are just all over the place. For us, we say we sponsor [a high number of] sports, that’s above the average. We have [high numbers of student-athletes], that’s how we meet broad based. That doesn't mean I have a soccer roster of 75 and a baseball roster of 95.

Like many interviewees, Athletics Director 2 appreciated that the Division III philosophy contains a list of action items that can be operationalized. As such, athletics departments were able to develop their missions using the Division III philosophy as a clear guide. In all, nearly all respondents indicated their institution and their athletics department adhered to the Division III philosophy. Moreover, many of those same respondents went into further detail by lauding the development of the Division III philosophy so that it now contains a list of action items that can

be measured. They appreciated that the initial tagline of “Discover, Develop, Dedicate” sounded like a marketable manta but even more so respected that the Division III philosophy also included many objectives that were easy to measure. Therefore, an institution could develop its own operations and own athletics department mission to align with the Division III philosophy.

**How level of a playing field is Division III athletics?** Although most interviewees felt their institution aligned with the Division III philosophy, it was interesting to hear the varying opinions when the respondents were asked their opinion on whether Division III athletics is a level playing field in terms to on the field competition. While respondents were calm and confident when discussing the athletics department’s mission alignment with Division III athletics, most respondents conveyed sheer disdain for any argument that Division III athletics is a level playing field. Several interviewees even balked at the question by laughing to start their response. There was a general consensus that Division III athletics is not level, based on schools varying resources, endowment, and whether the school is public or private. Many also conveyed that there are a lot of different types of Division III schools and compared competitive athletics equity in Division III athletics to Division I and Division II. Moreover, although there was a general consensus that Division III athletics was not level, there was some variation as to whether it was an issue Athletics Directors, administrations, and NCAA staff wanted to change. Respondents typically gave very in-depth answers. In this subsection, I will highlight the replies of four interviewees who gave representative, clear, and relatively succinct responses that tended to convey each of the aforementioned themes (role of resource, endowments, and public/private classification) and also displayed the factions of interviewees with disparate opinions about whether there should be initiatives to change the competitive equity in Division III athletics. Athletics Director 3 gave an impassioned response by iterating,

It's not (level). I don't think there's – this is one of the things that drives me crazy about NCAA conventions, for instance, and legislation. They're like 'oh, well it's not equitable.' Nothing is. We're in Division III, so is Wash U (Washington University in St. Louis)... It's a different academics standard. The degree is worth more. I mean, the facilities are better, the conference is better, all the travel – as far as plane travel and all that stuff... But then you also have the Wisconsin schools, where they're state schools. Tuition is cheaper, huge enrollments, but they're competing against a 1200 enrollment school that costs – some, take Keane for instance, that costs \$50,000. I mean, it's just ludicrous to think it's ever going to be equal. I mean, even within Division I, within the Power 5, is not equal. Even if you didn't get outside the Power 5. So it just boggles my mind that we try to pretend that we're trying to make things fair. It's not fair. It's never going to be fair.

The response of Athletics Director 3 aligned with the faction of interviewees who said Division III athletics was not level, there should be acceptance that it's not level, and we should stop trying to talk about it. Like most respondents, Athletics Director 3 indicated the impact of the academic prestige of the institution, facilities, financial resources, and whether the institution is public or private contributes to an institution's chance for excelling in prototypical measurements of athletics success – winning. Importantly, Athletics Director 3 indicated opinions on the several different types of Division III schools by clearly separating Division III athletics into distinct categories: schools with stronger academic reputations and greater financial resources, state schools with larger enrollments and cheaper tuition, and schools like Institution 3 (a private school with lower enrollment, a less prestigious academic reputation, and fewer financial resources).

Similar to Athletics Director 3 and to many other respondents, Athletics Director 4 detailed that Division III athletics is not level and emphasized the role of resources that contribute to the uneven playing field. However, Athletics Director 4 felt that there should be more discussion about how to create a better competitive balance in Division III athletics:

That's something that I think about once a month... I would subscribe to that from the standpoint of seeing some schools that very rarely have winning records in any of their sports. I don't know what the student experience is. I think that, I think that we (in Division III) don't have common academic standards, we don't have common financial aid practices, and I think it's really intriguing that the NCAA financial aid committee audits a school in its bubble if you will. I think it's very wholesome that they do that. But the minute that you start to make cross-court comparisons, and something we use is the EADA Report and the Cooper Data when we do salary comparisons, but you could look at the EADA report and look at the vast differences in the dollars that are going into DIII programs. And I think there's a correlation in DIII between a school that runs its operation very heavily off endowment dollars from a large endowment and then the other end of the spectrum on schools that have extremely small endowments where it's tuition-driven. And I don't think this is a very level, I think DI is more of a level playing field for sports. And DIII (more so) than DIII and it's something we just don't want to talk about. I do, but nobody will listen.

The response of Athletics Director 4, like many others, indicated that several specific pieces of Division III legislation – student-athlete academic eligibility standards, the non-scholarship Division III model leaves financial aid in the control of each institution – can lead to a competitive imbalance. Specifically, the financial resources vary at different Division III

institutions and that can have a dramatic impact on the athletics programs' ability to win athletics competitions. Interestingly and importantly, Athletics Director 4 used a very specific piece of financial information to distinguish between the proverbial "haves" and "have not's" in Division III athletics – the size of the institution's endowment. As was the case with many interviewees, they not only thought Division III athletics was not level from a competitive balance standpoint, but they also detailed what distinguished different types of Divisions III institutions in relation to being consistently successful from a winning and losing standpoint.

Athletics Director 6 indicated that Division III athletics was not level, but then went on to further detail what created the differences. Like previously quoted responses, and like many other interviewees, Athletics Director 6 conveyed the importance of whether the school is public or private, NCAA legislation, and endowment dollars when detailing how and why competitive imbalance exists in Division III athletics. When asked how level of a playing field is Division III athletics, Athletics Director 6 responded,

Ooh, that's a sticky wicket. Well, there's a big difference between state schools and private schools... Wisconsin, educationally, cost wise, keeping students in state, they do a great job. So I admire the wisdom of their system but I wish they weren't so smart because it makes it hard to compete with them. I can see why they do what they do.

They're not – they don't have a huge population. They want to keep their human resource – their students – in the state of Wisconsin so they keep their state school costs down.

And unfortunately, we've got to play them in DIII. And then you get this influx of NAIA schools and they all get a vote, well don't they. So now we look at the rules, you now, like becoming more and more liberal. [We] were a member of DIII when it was created. I was okay with non-traditional seasons... But suddenly, I find (our football team)

practicing football in cold weather (during the non-traditional season), it's all muddy.

And it's raining. And there's no equipment. It was kind of 'what the hell are we doing?'

Who won the Learfield Cup? Williams. What is it about Williams that makes it so

unique? Your school (Washington University in St. Louis), Williams, Emory... The

academically elite schools have huge endowments so financial aid, every pink elephant at that school gets the same thing, athlete or non-athlete.

Similar to Athletics Director 3, Athletics Director 4, and many other interviewees, Athletics Director 6 tended to distinguish that the "haves" schools – either large Division III public schools or private schools with large endowments – tended to distinguish themselves from a competitive success standpoint in comparison to the "have nots" – small, private, tuition-driven institutions with lower endowments. Based on interviewee responses, such distinctions strongly contribute to what they believe is an unlevel playing field in Division III athletics from an on-field, on-court winning standpoint. Importantly, these responses differ considerably from how interviewees defined athletics success at their own institutions – a definition of success that is largely defined by whether the athletics department contributes to the financial sustainability of the interviewed institutions, all of which are small, private, tuition-driven institutions and most of which self-identify as having low endowments.

The last representative quote succinctly states why the interviewee believes Division III athletics is not a level playing field. Athletics Director 11 briefly details why the primary legislative distinction of Division III athletics is that student-athletes cannot receive athletically related aid and how different types of Division III schools are able to offer more based on the institution's size, academic offerings, and financial funding options. When asked how level of a playing field is Division III athletics, Athletics Director 11 lamented,

Horrible... It's a very difficult, you know, it's just all over the place. I mean you've got schools of 600, you've got schools in Wisconsin, you're going to go play Whitewater. There's a big difference in funding, state, size, private, offerings, it's just all over the place. It's just a wide gamut... The idea that we're all Division III so we're not giving any aid, that that makes us all equal. No it doesn't. Because you've got more to offer on your campus than I do. We're not equal, I'm sorry. That's just the way it is... Can't compete with that. There's no way. So Division III is just all over the place. Maybe more so than any other division I think.

As detailed previously, interviewees were extremely opinionated about whether or not they thought Division III athletics was a level playing field from a competitive equity standpoint. Nearly all respondents indicated they felt Division III athletics were separated into factions of "haves" and "have nots." More specifically, the "haves" were normally institutions that were either private college with large endowments – typically academically elite institutions – or Division III public state schools that could offer extremely low tuition to student-athletes and non-student athletes alike. While there was a general consensus about Division III athletics not being a level playing field, and that large public colleges and heavily endowed private colleges had the best chances to excel athletically, compete for national championships, and finish high in the Learfield Director's Cup, respondents were split as to whether or not there should be efforts to try to restore competitive balance in Division III athletics. Some had more of an "it is what it is" mentality and wished people would stop trying to create competitive equity. Others wished there would be more proactive conversations to give small, tuition-driven privates more of a chance to compete on a national level for championships.

Lastly, many respondents compared the competitive balance – or lack thereof – to competitive balance in Division I and Division II athletics. They felt that Division III athletics was arguably less of a level playing field than other levels, in part due to the non-scholarship model of Division III athletics. That is, they felt that athletics scholarships served as an equalizer of sorts in Division I athletics because student-athletes were offered essentially the same financial package. At Division III institutions, because of the large disparity in endowments, academic offerings, size, and public funding for higher education, some types of schools were typically able to offer student-athletes better experiences – either academically, financially, or athletics competitive success – which when combined, contributed to an uneven playing field in Division III athletics.

**Steps the athletics department has taken to remain competitive in the small college higher education marketplace.** Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and Faculty Athletics Representatives – after discussing an array of topics related to tuition discounting, the financial stability of the institution and the athletics department, the role of athletics in enrollment, and the competitive balance (or lack thereof) in Division III athletics – were asked to detail any steps the athletics department has taken to remain competitive in the small college higher education marketplace. Most respondents discussed one or a combination of the following steps the athletics department has taken: hiring more full-time head and assistant coaches, facility upgrades, and being more intentional about sharing with faculty the mutually beneficial nature of small college athletics. I will relay representative responses of five interviewees with an added emphasis on three responses from one particular institution. Administrator 7 gave a very detailed response of both coaching changes and facility upgrades (the specific coaching changes and facility upgrades are left out to preserve anonymity) that were two specific, intentional steps the

institution had taken to remain competitive both in relation to financial solvency and to better the athletics department's winning percentages. Administrator 7 emphasized,

Well, we've done our best to hire and keep the best coaches that we can get. And I think we've done a pretty good job of that over the past few years. Right now we've got, I would say, a really good crop. And some of the coaches we've brought in the past few years, we've seen what a tremendous difference they've made in those programs... So coaching is one. Facilities is another. Our president, who I mentioned earlier, it's a high priority for him to really improve our athletics facilities.

While Administrator 7 discussed two initiatives put into action (coaching staff and facilities) and then detailed what specific coaches changes and facility upgrades were made, other interviewees went into great detail about the rationale for doing so. As mentioned previously, I will utilize the responses of each of the three interviewees at one particular institution to illustrate not only the specific steps the institution has taken to remain competitive in the small college athletics marketplace but to also showcase how, based on the similarity in responses, that three different factions of the same campus (athletics, administrators, faculty) clearly understand the rationale for the specific athletics department operatives to remain competitive in the small college athletics marketplace. Consider the response of Faculty Athletics Representative 9 who elucidated the following:

We have put a lot more resources into recruiting and we've done that by reducing the other requirements for coaches in terms of what they – in the old days, they used to teach more and being a head coach was more of a part-time job. Now, a head coach has moved to being more of a full-time job. And there's a little teaching and then there's recruiting time and resources built into that. And I think when we initially did that, the coaches in

the athletic department felt like it was a good way for us to be successful in terms of wins and losses and thus attract attention, which would be good for recruiting. But now, with the competition that we're in, the competitive landscape of higher ed that we're in now, that it's become – and I say this to the faculty members when they complain about how much athletics sort of gets – that athletics is really in many ways just an extension of our admissions department. So you just have to think of the coaches as coaches and admissions counselors because they bring all these good quality kids in and we need to resource that. So that's been the primary thing and since I'm not really involved with the recruiting on a micro-level, I don't know all of the other things they may be doing that are different over the past 15 or 20 years. But I know that has been a shift because there was a recognition of that by faculty. That well, they'd say you know, in the old days, the head basketball coach used to teach three courses and how he hardly teaches anything. Well, it's a different place.

FAR 9 tended to focus specifically on how the role of the coach has changed over the past several decades. By having more full-time coaches, the institution is able to better compete for prospective student-athletes that will not only help the athletics department in its efforts to win competitions, but will also help the overall institution meet its enrollment and tuition numbers. The administrator at the same institution, like FAR 9, chose to focus specifically on the changing role of coaches in relation to remaining competitive in the small college athletics marketplace. Administrator 9 emphasized,

There was a time, and it wasn't that long ago, even 20 years ago – there was a time when DIII athletics was amateurish and not, I mean, I don't use that term to be pejorative, but I guess it is. When it was not uncommon for some of the sports to be coached by faculty

members who were coaching in their spare time. it was not uncommon for, say the assistant coach in softball to be the head coach in volleyball. Or the assistant coach in baseball to be the head coach in soccer. And it was just, it was a lower cost endeavor. There were fewer FTEs institutionally devoted to Division III athletics and it was just considered an amateur expression of a student's desire to be an athlete. So over time, what we've done is what everyone else has done. We've professionalized our DIII operation quite a bit. So sports have full-time dedicated coaches. We don't have, I don't think we even have one coach now who is actually a full-time faculty member who is coaching on the side... So I think we've devoted lots of personnel, expanded personnel, professionalized the operation, specialized those people who are working in sport and making sure they're professionally qualified and competent coaches, not just people who are interested in coaching. But really competent and qualified. And the other thing we've done is free up a lot of their time that we might have used for some other things back in the day... Their (coaches') time is dedicated and the reason for that is recruiting is so important. And that's kind of a shift over the past quarter century. So in a quarter century, it seems to me that we've professionalized the coaching skills and we've reallocated. So we've expanded the number of coaches we have and we've reallocated their time or allocated their time in such a way that they can spend a lot of time recruiting student-athletes. So one of my coaches, when we first got here, our longtime coaches. I met for the first time when I got here and he said to me, 'I'm so and so, I used to be the x coach. Now I'm a recruiter who coaches x on the side.' And I thought that was kind of cool. And so that's, those are some of the big things we've done over the past quarter century. I'm sure you'd find that everywhere.

In Administrator 9's response, there was a very clear explanation of the timeline for changing coaches' duties, the rationale for doing so for the campus itself, and the impetus for making such changes in order to keep up with the initiatives of other Division III institutions. The third and final interview from Institution 9 was the Athletics Director. Like the FAR and campus administrator, Athletics Director 9 also heavily emphasized the changes the athletics department has made in order to compete in the small college athletics marketplace. Before giving a financial example as rationale for doing so, Athletics Director 9 also stressed that the school was intentional in upgrading athletics facilities in order to build enrollment. Specifically, Athletics Director 9 responded about specific strategies to compete in the small college athletics higher education marketplace by saying:

Well, I think we've done a great job in two areas – in facilities, I mean this place that we're sitting in, is a big part of that. I think that building this building a lot to do with enrollment, the perception at least that it would help us... We have ramped up our facilities so we've kind of got caught up a little bit in the arms race so to speak. I think still within reason. I mean we haven't gone nuts. And then staffing. And this has been a long-term thing, but over the 20-year period that I've been here, we've gone a long ways with our staffing, which is pretty much directly related to recruitment. I mean, the reason why you need better staffing is so your coach can recruit. You can coach a football team – when I got here, we had a head coach and one or two assistants in here during the day and then a whole bunch of guys that would just show up at 4:00, coach our team on the field fine. But when the season was over, their job was done. They weren't going to recruit. You know, they didn't recruit. And so we have sort of incrementally increased our staff so that pretty much all of our head coaches are full-time at the college. So like tennis

for example, used to be a part-time position. Now, it's a full-time job here. It's paired with a different – you know, that we have other duties besides tennis and we've been able to go from 20 men's and women's players combined to 32. So it may not sound like a ton. But 12 times \$20,000 (in tuition) every year, that's more than what it costs us to pay a tennis coach. So, facilities and staffing would be the things I would say.

Based on the extremely similar responses from each of the interviewees at Institution 9, it was clear that there were clear, understood initiatives – namely more full-time coaches – for the athletics department and the institution to remain competitive in the small college athletics marketplace. The interviewee responses were not only consistent within the institution, but also there was a general consensus among many interviewees that the move toward full-time coaches in order to enhance recruiting initiatives as a very consistent, direct step the interviewed small college had taken to remain competitive. Importantly, some interviewees – also as evidenced by the response of FAR 9 – indicated that while some faculty were hesitant about the role of coaches as recruiters, faculty were beginning to become more understanding of rationale for growing staff sizes in the athletics department. Other FARs in particular echoed these sentiments when thinking of their role as the liaison between athletics and the faculty. Athletics Director 10 also had been working closely with faculty members to change attitudes about the role of athletics in the overall college. Specifically, when asked about what steps that athletics department had taken to remain competitive, Athletics Director 10 accentuated the importance of faculty understanding the role of coaches. Athletics Director 10 detailed specific actions taken to change attitudes by saying:

I've seen our institution not fully embrace the idea that it – that (athletics) can be one of the primary reasons why a student chooses a college. But they haven't fully embraced

that, but they've accepted that now. And so when I've gone and asked for a full-time coach in this role, and I've gone and asked for budgeting increases. We've got 45 or 50 soccer players. Talked about starting lacrosse for instance. There was a day when those things would have been pushed to the side right away. For instance, a coach coaching three teams. Well now, they understand that we need full-time recruiters in those jobs for the institution's benefit. They may not embrace that, there's a lot of faculty members that don't embrace that. But they understand it now. And they're doing – my challenge was to convince the English professor, the science professor, whatever professor, that it's going to do them good as well because we're going to have good kids sitting in their classroom, and they're going to have a full classroom.

In all, most respondents, when asked to describe any steps the athletics department had taken to remain competitive in the small college athletics higher education marketplace, indicated a strong shift toward full-time coaches who could have a greater focus on recruiting prospective student-athletes. Some also emphasized having facility upgrades in order to recruit student-athletes, but the clear-cut most utilized strategy was an increase in full-time coaching staff members. Further, amidst the growth of full-time coaching staff sizes, Athletics Directors, Faculty Athletics Representatives, and campus administrators had been working to make faculty more receptive to the idea and rationale behind expanding staff sizes. As such, faculty tended to eventually, albeit slowly, understand that coaches could help recruit more students to the institution, students that were needed to fill each of the faculty's classes.

**Describing the small college athletics experience to someone who has no idea what it is about.** To end each interview, each interviewee was asked how they would describe the small college athletics experience to someone who has no idea about what it is about. Each response varied somewhat, but in general, a combination of the following ideas were part of most responses: the underrated competitive nature of Division III athletics, the academic priorities in Division III athletics, and stereotypes against Division III athletes. Further, most interviewees discussed their description of Division III athletics in comparison to Division I athletics. To illustrate the aforementioned thematic ideas in response to this question, I will relay the relatively representative quotes of four interviewees. Like many other respondents, FAR 2 discussed the academic and athletics nature of Division III athletics in comparison to Division I athletics:

So, on the one side, it (Division III athletics) doesn't own your life the way a scholarship Division I program can. At [a nearby Power Five Division I institution], they can tell you to be at practice at 4:00 and they tell you that you can't take that lab. Here, you can take the lab, you still have to get to practice, but you're allowed to be 10 minutes late, things like that. So on the one hand, you have greater freedom than a Division I athlete, but the varsity expectations are still very high. And so I think some students come to Division III and think they'll play on the team like they did in high school, show up for whatever they can, and give whatever effort they can spare to it. And the varsity teams can't succeed that way. You have to dedicate to it at least as much as any of your classes, usually more, just to make the team, much less to start or have success. so on one hand, it is more freedom than Division I but way higher expectations and performance level than I think most high school students understand.

FAR 2 noted the idea that Division III athletics are competitive and require a large time and effort commitment from the student-athletes. However, Division III student-athletes are able to prioritize academics, which creates a challenging, competitive academic-athletic balance. Similar to nearly all respondents, FAR 2 defined Division III athletics by comparing it to the more well known Division I level. Athletics Director 4 also emphasized the role of academics and compared the Division III experience to the Division I model, but also noted the importance of disseminating to the campus community what Division III athletics means at that particular institution. As such, Athletics Director 4 detailed,

We actually do that (describe the Division III athletics experience) with incoming faculty. And the reason is we ask in the faculty orientation, the coaches will meet the incoming faculty and it's a chance for them to get to understand what it is we do. And the first part of that session, we ask the incoming faculty, 'How many of you got your PhDs at an extremely large research institution with a very big athletic program and fall was all about football weekends?' And hands will go up. And we will say to them, 'This is your opportunity for you to understand the Division III non-scholarship model.' We explain to them the recruiting process, and we explain to them why it is a student would consider coming to this environment. We're also very frank with them and say that if you are, if you have the ability, and you're such a good player in a particular sport, you can finance your education through an athletics scholarship but there's a price to pay. And there is. We're very frank about that. Your life will be a lot about sport and fit your classes in when you can. And we don't disparage the Division I experience, but we try to say, we really honestly keep the focus on classes. We actually schedule our games and our schedules have to be approved by the committee on academic standards. There are all of

these governors or safeguards that we all just don't run amuck in the pursuit of winning.

But once we have all these things in place which satisfy the student ability to do as much as possible in the academic realm, then we make the most of everything else.

Athletics Director 4, like many other interviewees and as detailed previously, tended to describe the Division III model in comparison to Division I athletics, with a focus on distinguishing between scholarship models and in how he believes Division III athletics prioritizes academics. Contrary to most respondents, Administrator 4 chose to not compare Division III athletics to Division I athletics but rather spoke of the role of Division III athletics in creating a powerful student experience that has pragmatic implications for the institution. Importantly, albeit with a bit of a different focus than other respondents, Administrator 4 emphasized,

You know, I work hard with my colleagues in admissions and financial aid always to enroll students who are going to stay at the college. We don't want to be enrolling people who nine months later are submitting transfer applications. We want to enroll people who are going to be successful, whose satisfaction is going to be high, and who is going to graduate and do good things in the world. And the reality is, athletics works. Right? So when you think about retention rates, and satisfaction, and success, you could pretty much count on your varsity athletes to be retained at a higher rate than others... If I had all the money in the world, I would say we should all have a coach or a mentor because clearly the impact that a coach can have on a student's life, I think it's the coach that's the difference in that team experience, that is the difference between an average retention rate and a better retention rate.

Administrator 4's response aligns with what has been discussed in depth throughout this chapter – the idea that a solid student experience within athletics has very pragmatic implications in that an

involved student with a mentor or coach – as is frequently the case with student-athletes – will be retained at a higher rate. As such, schools are able to more consistently maintain their enrollment with higher retention rates. The last interviewee response that I want to highlight is that of FAR 6. The response I believe effectively encapsulates many of the themes that were prevalent in some form or another in many other interviewees' responses when asked how they would describe the Division III experience. Namely, FAR 6 detailed – albeit with an admittedly cynical tone – Division III athletics in relation to structuring academic courses, in comparison to Division I athletics, and also gives rationale to the promotion of Division III athletics. FAR 6 opined,

Well, I think it's (Division III) the purest part of amateur athletics. It is what the NCAA wants everyone to believe all divisions are. Where you are equally a student and an athlete. That you are balancing both of those and you're a student first, and that's typically how things run here. Now, not always in the student-athletes' mind. But I think in the faculty and the coaches' mind, you're a student first in the fact that if I have a lab that runs over – which I run into quite a bit in [the interviewee's academic area] – the coaches understand why you're not at practice. 'You're late, you're late why?' 'Well, I was in lab until 4:30 and I couldn't get here until now.' The student-athlete doesn't feel the pull to have to play. Growing up, I had friends who went on to get athletic scholarships and they ended up hating the games they played because they had to do it. The coaches held that over them and teaching at Division I schools, I've seen that where coaches were telling student-athletes what your major was gonna be. 'Well, you can't major in that, you have to major in these ones over here because it better fits our role'... I had a (Division I) coach once tell me that they can either be a good student, or they can be a good athlete, but they can't be both. Because they can't put the time into both at the

Division I level. I had a coach say that to me. I wish I could have taped it to tell people that. But that's not something you would hear here. I think Division III is the purest part of that. That's why the NCAA will never cut Division III out because in some ways it's their conscience-cleanser. Division III, they can point to Division III and say 'look at all these wonderful things that happen at Division III.' So I think it's a mixture of all those. The students are choosing to do athletics. They're not forced in by – their financial aid doesn't change if they quit playing. It's going to be the same.

Overall, when asked how they would describe the Division III experience to someone who is unfamiliar, most interviewees tended to discuss a combination of the following ideas: the misconception that Division III athletics is “JV-ish,” Division III athletics is the “purest” form of college athletics because of the high emphasis on academics and on student-athletes being integrated into the student body, and the mutually beneficial nature of small college athletics as it relates to maintaining enrollment while also providing a beneficial student experience to student athletes. Lastly, most interviewees compared Division III athletics to Division I athletics in their responses.

### **Reflections of Athletics Success**

As part of the effort to gain a more holistic understanding of how small college athletics departments and small college campuses compare to, and contrast with, more traditional conceptualizations of athletics success (e.g., winning), interviewees were asked not only to specifically detail how they define athletics success but they were also asked questions that would denote how such definitions are manifested in the hiring and firing process of athletics department personnel. Two questions were specific to the Athletics Director. First, Athletics Directors were asked to think of when they went through their own hiring process as Athletics

Director. Athletics Directors were then asked to describe any expectations that were placed on them and their department for on-court, on-field athletics success (winning). Second, Athletics Directors were asked to detail what specific factors have contributed to – or would hypothetically contribute to – firing a coach. Such questions attempted to gain a better understanding of how expectations for athletics success are displayed in overt organizational decisions such as hiring and firing.

**Expectations for winning as part of Athletics Director hiring process.** In general, Athletics Directors said expectations about winning and losing were not explicitly discussed as part of their own hiring process. Many Athletics Directors did indicate that coaches, student-athletes, and athletics department personnel were inherently competitive people but that certain goals for the athletics department and institutional limitations made it such that winning was not or could not be a direct, top priority. Athletics Director 11 representatively echoed many other Athletics Directors' sentiments by saying,

Winning was never an issue, has never been brought up. It was more participation. It was more DIII philosophy, more graduation, retention, was really what we've built here.

Being a small, tuition-driven institution, not heavily endowed, very tuition-driven. The idea was (enrollment) numbers, retaining numbers and graduating good students. And be competitive, whatever you want to define competitive, whatever that type of thing is.

Athletics Director 11, along with many other Athletics Directors, indicated that winning could be a byproduct of enrollment and a quality student-athlete experience. It was not likely for student-athletes to have a good experience if they were consistently losing. Retaining those student-athletes and recruiting new student-athletes was closely associated with a quality student-athlete experience, which was associated in part with not always losing. As such, for Athletics Directors

and for administrators placing expectations on Athletics Directors, winning itself was not a direct priority. While lamenting the lack of a level playing field in Division III athletics – a topic that will be described in depth later in this chapter – many Athletics Directors voiced that winning simply could not be seen as a primary measurement of athletics success because of some inherent limitations as a small, often resource-deprived institution. Athletics Director 5 intimated such feelings when he said,

No (there were no win/loss expectations as part of the hiring process). And honestly, that's one of the things we've never really had here (performance goals). We are small, and the other thing is, our programs have been improving over the years. It's one of those things, even from our administration, that's not necessarily, it's one of those things we look at within a program but it's not anything we evaluate a head coach on based on their wins and losses. With us being somewhat small, and having limited majors compared to others, sometimes it is difficult to get those top end athletes to come here. And I think our administration understands that, that like I said, we're not always going to have that championship-caliber team. Now, I think our coaches want to win and they're competitive people so that makes it, I think that's the main reason for the growth but we don't have anything in place as far as win, loss performance as part of the coaching evaluation.

Many Athletics Directors, while answering this question – and other interviewees throughout their interviews – consistently mentioned that as enrollment-driven institutions, one of their leading foci for success was whether the athletics department met enrollment goals that helped the overall institution meet its enrollment goals and thus maintain financial solvency. As mentioned previously, such mentalities that were widespread throughout the interviewed

institutions did not indicate that athletics department personal and campus administrators were opposed to winning. Rather, they knew that in order to meet the financial objectives of the institution, enrollment numbers and tuition dollars were supremely important. Such an emphasis was accentuated by the fact that these institutions had not only high overall student-athlete percentages at the institution but because incoming freshmen classes were frequently more than 45% student-athletes. Athletics Director 8 emphasized the aforementioned emphasis on athletics serving a prominent role in campus enrollment while also acknowledging that athletics department personnel are still competitive and want to win. When describing the role of expectations for winning that were discussed during the hiring process, Athletics Director 8 detailed,

There was not (anything about winning). We are an enrollment driven institution and we really needed to bring in a competitive (enrollment) class, not only for our athletic department to help enrollment – to boost enrollment – but we, if you look at our records, we need to win. So we had, my focus was ‘let’s get those rosters back up where we need to be.’ And I was almost an extension of the admissions department. I do a report every Monday (for the Enrollment Management Office). And our goal was to try and get some numbers going and bring some more quality athletes in to kind of get moving into this year, start winning again.

Again, throughout Athletics Directors’ responses to the question regarding expectations placed on them during their own (Athletics Director) hiring, most all Athletics Directors indicated there were rarely discussions about winning and losing athletics competitions. Such a question was aimed at gaining a more holistic and indirect assessment of how small college athletics personnel

define athletics success and tailor organizational decisions and priorities for athletics department success.

**Factors contributing to firing a coach.** As another means to assess how small college athletics administrators define success, Athletics Directors were asked what factors have contributed – or would contribute – to firing a coach. Such an actionable decision arguably represents how definitions of athletics department success are operationalized. Each Athletics Director gave a slightly different answer to the question, but each indicated some sort of combination of ethics, the student-athlete experience, retention, and recruiting were factors valued most with when evaluating coaches. Many did not discuss the role of winning and losing as contributing to a coach being fired. Others indicated winning and losing played a factor but only if the aforementioned factors (ethics, student-athlete experience, retention, recruiting) were not being handled well. Winning and losing was not a strong enough stand alone reason to keep or fire a coach. Additionally, for the Athletics Directors that did discuss winning and losing as a small factor, they indicated that a firing would take place if a coach was unwilling to change his or her coaching style to try to create a better student-athlete experience and to create better opportunities to win. Athletics Director 2 illustrated that a combination of factors – with winning and losing as a smaller factor – could or have contributed to firing a coach. It was detailed that,

We did have an interesting conversation about where does wins and losses come in when you're evaluating a coach, because we started having a conversation about when was the last time [the school] had fired somebody type of thing. And folks had made the comment in the interview that you know we really hadn't fired anybody for not having enough wins or losses... I want them to create an environment where the students have a good experience. I want them to be able to recruit, retain, and mentor those student-athletes

that they bring to campus. I want them to be collaborative, engaged on campus, fiscally responsible. We don't talk about wins and losses in there. But we do talk about the ability to perform under stress and their ability to adapt to change. And what I find is that the coaches that perhaps don't, the coaches that have more losses than wins are the ones that are less likely to adapt and cannot respond to stress. That then translates into a bad attitude I would say, which then overlaps into the student-athlete experience, and the student-athletes pick up on it. Termination for us here is you're willingly going against university policy for things or after repeated attempts to move you into a space in which you're providing a better student-athlete experience for our students, you either can't make it happen or you refuse to make it happen kind of thing. So that's when we've asked coaches to leave.

Athletics Director 2 represented the overall idea that there was a combination of factors that would contribute to firing a coach – namely factors that were not directly winning and losing. However, Athletics Director 2 did represent the faction of interviewees who indicated persistent losing year after year was not acceptable and would serve as grounds for firing if it was combined with some of the more important factors of ethics and the student-athlete experience. Importantly, as elucidated in other parts of this chapter, there was an underlying belief that recruiting the appropriate amount of students for enrollment purposes and having a high quality experience were not mutually exclusive. Further, when those factors were combined, it was more likely that – in the minds of the Athletics Directors – the teams and coaches would perform better from a winning performance standpoint. Other Athletics Directors indicated the consistent idea that a series of factors would contribute to firing a coach but that a coach contributing to a successful athletics department was hardly about winning and losing. Athletics Director 5 noted

that some qualities of Division III athletics were particularly conducive to providing strong student-athlete experiences even when winning and losing were not the values most highly regarded by the Athletics Director or campus administrators. Athletics Director 5 held that,

The three biggest factors I would look at in considering firing a coach – Number 1 is are they treating their staff and their student-athletes appropriate. And I'm not necessarily talking sexual harassment and things like that are a no-brainer. But I'm just, accessibility, being accessible to their student-athletes. If they have questions, concerns, or just want to come into their office and hang out. And I think, [I've coached at other levels] and I think that one benefit of Division III is that we can be more personal with our student-athletes, more accessible, more human-like because at least here at [school] we're not judged by winning and losing... The other two factors are staying within budget and recruiting... I try not to look at one single year because I've coached at this level, and sometimes you're doing everything right, and you're working hard, and you just can't reach that (enrollment) goal. But it's one of those things where if it's two or three years in a row that you're consistently under the (enrollment) goal, then I think we need to look at it.

Such a response demonstrates that notion that the non-scholarship model of Division III athletics inherently makes recruiting more difficult from the standpoint of a recruit that commits to coming to an institution may be less likely to do so in comparison to Division I and Division II when there are athletics scholarships and scholarship limits for each team. Again, a combination of factors would contribute to firing a coach and at some schools, winning and losing was not even part of the proverbial equation that would directly lead to a firing. Such an example illustrates that a coach being successful in a small college athletics department may have less to do with stereotypical definitions of athletics success – winning and losing.

As mentioned previously, each Athletics Director gave a slightly different answer in response to factors that would contribute to firing a coach. However, Athletics Directors consistently emphasized the critical role of recruiting and maintaining enrollment numbers. Athletics Director 11 represented such a salient idea about the role of recruiting by emphasizing – after detailing the coaches leading priority should be that they’re morally and ethically in line with the goals of the institution – that

As you’re going down the line (of priorities for coaches), the next thing would be the viability of the program and are you recruiting, are you bringing numbers in, are you retaining students, are you a revolving door (with high student-athlete turnover) or not... They’re (the student-athletes are) one-semester wonders, they blow in, they blow out, they’re not going to class, they’re not doing those types of things, they’re not recruiting the right type of kid, then we’re not going to tolerate it. Winning and that would come later down the road.

Overall, Athletics Directors indicated either that winning and losing played a tertiary role in evaluating a coach or did not play a role at all. Leading factors when judging whether or not a coach was successful and whether a coach should be fired were student-athlete experience, ethics, and recruiting and retaining student-athletes. The goal of gleaning a better understanding of such factors was simply to assess how athletics success would be operationalized in one specific manner in the small college athletics environment.

**Definitions of athletics success.** Another prong of the overall approach to gain a deep understanding of how small college athletics success is measured was to directly ask interviewees how they expressly define athletics success. Each interviewed Athletics Director, campus administrator, and faculty member at the 11 institutions was asked when looking back on

a school year, how they judge whether or not it was successful from an athletics standpoint. Because this was such a broad question and because each interviewee gave in-depth answers, responses will be organized according to type of employee (faculty, campus administrator, Athletics Director). Doing so not only helps to clearly detail responses but also allows for comparison across type of employee. As will become evident in describing interviewee responses, interviewees tended to respond in ways that reflect their specific role on campus. As such, faculty tended to look at more academic measureables, campus administrators looked at the overall viability of the general campus and the role of athletics in that viability, and Athletics Directors looked at more internal measures of athletics department operating and then expanded into how those internal components contributed to the financial solvency of the institution.

*Faculty definitions of athletics success.* Faculty interviewees tended to focus on the role of athletics specifically in relation to academic performance. Additionally, faculty emphasized the pragmatic role of athletics for financial initiatives and campus culture. FAR 9 representatively defined athletics success from the FAR point of view by emphasizing,

The first thing I always look at or think about is the degree to which our student-athletes are well-integrated into the campus life, the degree to which they are successful academically in the broadest sense – both in terms of grades and graduation and participation fully in their academic programs. And the degree to which the coaches, in my interaction with them, seem to appreciate and are aware of the student-athletes, and in that order (student and then athlete), and don't get that reversed. I don't even – I mean I enjoy it when we win but if we don't, doesn't bother me a lot. So that's probably the opposite of the coaches but of course that's their job to be competitive.

FAR 3 echoed such sentiments and further emphasized that student-athletes and academic departments can be mutually beneficial. Specifically, student-athletes can help for enrollment in different academic programs and therefore can increase academic resources for the whole campus body. In turn, student-athletes can have an empowering and career-defining academic experience. FAR 3 stressed,

To me, for the athletic department to be successful, it's sort of two-fold. It's bringing in student-athletes that will benefit our program and vice versa. Where [the school] will help them. But also to retain them as students and to me that's the success, to bring in students that can handle the academic side. And I think that's the number one goal with DIII, is the education first and athletics second.

FAR interviewees, in general, emphasized that the athletics department was successful in their eyes by having student-athletes that were strong contributors from an academic standpoint. Based the sheer number of student-athletes at the interviewed small colleges, if the student-athletes were strong students and contributed positively to the campus culture, the overall campus would be positively influenced not only from a financial sustainability standpoint but also from an academic profile standpoint.

*Administrator definitions of athletics success.* As mentioned previously, administrators tended to define athletics success by looking at the overall campus viability and how athletics contributed to that viability. Many acknowledged the importance of the student-athlete experience and adhering to the Division III philosophy but also emphasized the paramount importance of the athletics department contributing to the financial solvency of the institution. Importantly, administrators indicated that they felt student-athletes could have a well-rounded experience and that the campus could highly value the money associated with the athletics

department and the tuition dollars brought by such high numbers of student-athletes on campus. Administrator 1 captured this idea and the idea that was conveyed by many of the other administrators by detailing that,

The most important criterion is the student experience. So it's maybe cliché Division III philosophy, but I truly, deeply believe it. That the learning that takes place through participation in athletics is vital to our mission, to our liberal education mission. So that's the ultimate, I'd say criteria as far as which performance is judged. We do that through end-of-season surveys and so on. But if students say they're not learning through this, I'm not having a good life experience, and all the things that athletics helps to develop then that would be a problem. So that's one way. But another way, a practical sense, we are enrollment-driven, and most colleges like us are, and we really have to hit our goals in athletics recruiting to meet our class. And so I can say that without feeling apologetic about it because I feel like I believe that the experience the students (student-athletes) have when they get here justifies it – it really is a great experience for them. But we have to hit those roster sizes too to keep all of the machinery turning.

Again, Administrator 1 – along with many other administrators – argued that two priorities that could seemingly contradict one another – highly valuing the student-athlete experience and highly valuing the financial bottom line – are in fact mutually beneficial to one another.

Administrator 8 took such ideas to a more in-depth level by focusing on how the student-athlete experience and the financial bottom line can be tracked numerically. It was accentuated that the student-athlete experience could be measured in part by retention numbers and that retention numbers would also reflect the ability of the institution to remain financially healthy.

Administrator 8 emphasized,

Well, retention is also part of my job and under a portion of my purview. So at the end of the day, what I like to do as I'm at an institution for longer periods of time, I want to see the student come here, be successful, and graduate and I do hold coaches accountable to that. So if I'm taking a chance on Tommy or Tammy, I'm keeping a note of Tommy or Tammy and following through their matriculation at [school]. Ultimately, what is successful is filling what we determine what the roster sizes are... A lot of it has to do with hard work and are you (coaches and admissions counselors) making contacts. And those are all things now that we can track, unlike, you know, we may have tracked it 10 to 15 years ago with paper. Now it's all automated through [software programs] and various CRMs (customer relationship management measures). So a successful year is a coach who brings in a good class, but it goes beyond that. How is their, how are their retention numbers going to be and how are their graduation numbers going to be as well? So I do base it largely on numbers because that's what I do. That's who I am.

Clearly, administrators focused on the role of athletics as it relates to the functioning of the overall college. Although there was an emphasis on students – and student-athletes – enjoying their college experience, it was also of paramount importance that the athletics department was able to consistently contribute enrollment numbers to the institution. Further, enrollment numbers were not simply part of an internal-to-the-athletics-department goal-setting process. Enrollment numbers were not a directive handed from administration to the athletics department. Rather, enrollment goal-setting was part of a collaborative process between coaches, Athletics Directors, and campus administrators. Administrator 4 captured such ideas and detailed the collaborative process when asked how athletics department is measured from the administrative point of view:

We've started looking at numbers by individual sport and trying to get a handle on what is the team size that both makes the coach happy from a standpoint of what they can do with their athletes to keep them happy while they're in school, and retain them to also what are the needs for the university in terms of the student and how do we balance what's best for the student and then also how many team members we might need. So one of the things we've spent a lot of time looking at is going sport by sport. And [the Athletics Director] and I just met recently and he gave me an update on what all the numbers are and I think as a whole, we do a pretty good job... As we move forward, it's really setting those realistic goals for each coach each year. How do those play into the larger role, knowing there's going to be fluctuations and up years and down years for various reasons on either side, so we're trying to plan and communicate about what they need, what our students need, and sort of what we need to meet our numbers.

When answering this question about defining athletics success, some administrators did not directly mention winning but did so in other parts of the interview when explaining how they thought the student-athlete experience would be enhanced if the student-athletes were not losing by large margins on a consistent basis. Other administrators, when asked to define athletics success, did directly incorporate winning into their answer while discussing the overall student-athlete experience. Administrator 3 detailed the operational goals of athletics and the goal of the athletics department to contribute to the campus mission, while also explaining the role of winning in the total measurement of athletics success. Administrator 3 detailed such definitions of success by saying,

One, simply how we operate. I mean they are a complex department. I mean there's a lot of moving parts. When I talk to [the Athletics Director] about how the athletics

department is operating, it you know, are people doing what they need to do, are we following what the NCAA is telling us to do as far as recruitment and eligibility? Kind of an institutional effectiveness thing if I would steal a term from accreditation. Like are we operating under the best practices that athletics departments operate? Do we have coaches? Are we supervising games? Do we have the right equipment? Are we taking the right legal precautions?...I think competition's probably a factor, although it's not the highest factor. I think you can't say that winning doesn't matter. I think it does matter, I don't think it's a driving force behind who we are or what we do but I think it's, it would be a lie to say that if we're getting hammered all the time, losing all the time, that that, I think that degrades the experience for our student-athletes.

As can be seen by Administrator 3, and as was discussed either as a response to this question or as part of other interview questions, athletics administrators felt winning was never a primary goal of the athletics department. However, for some factions of administrators, not consistently losing was somewhat important because it was related to the overall student-athlete experience. Overall, administrators indicated that athletics could serve several important purposes, with enhanced student experiences and stronger financial viability of the campus are two leading goals for measuring athletics department success.

*Athletics Director definitions of athletics success.* In comparison to Faculty Athletics Representatives and to campus administrators, Athletics Directors tended to be slightly more direct in discussing winning as a measurement of athletics success. Again, however, winning was either a tertiary measurement of success or it was considered a byproduct of an enhanced student-athlete experience. Further, while faculty and campus administrators clearly valued measureable statistics such as GPA, retention rates, and enrollment numbers, Athletics Directors

tended to emphasize similar statistics and also discussed athletics success in terms of on-field, on-court performance. When asked how athletics department success is measured, Athletics Director 9 responded in a way that was quite similar to the responses of other interviewed Athletics Directors:

Well, from a department standpoint, and it's really the same if you look at each individual sport, there's some degree of quality of experience that we're trying to evaluate. So we have all of our student-athletes complete an evaluation at the end of the year – or at the end of each of their seasons – basically on their sport. And so one of the things we do is a composite of that, tally that up, have a department average for all of the sorts of questions we ask on there. So I will certainly be paying attention to kind of where the quality of experience ranking, rating comes in. Obviously, competitive success is part of it. From a department perspective, I guess you measure competitive success by how many conference championships you won, how you fared national in the Director's Cup – those types of things. And then is our, has our department been successful in recruiting at the level that we need to or expect to, both I guess in terms of quantity and quality, although it's certainly easier to judge the quantity sooner than it is to evaluate the quality. But we also have to be paying attention to the other part of the budgetary aspect of things. So what's the state of our operation from a financial perspective? Those would probably be – quality of experience, competitive success, the level of recruitment, and then making sure that we're healthy financially.

Importantly, Athletics Director 9 had a four-pronged approach for measuring athletics success. Seemingly, each of those four prongs were interconnected based on the consistent theme throughout the interview – and throughout other interviews – that the quality of the student-

athlete experience was associated in part with competitive success. Student-athlete experience and competitive success were linked with the level and ease of recruiting, all of which ties to the financial stability associated with having engaged, contented, and desired quantities of student-athletes. Moreover, in relation to competitive success, Athletics Directors tended to discuss winning and losing in relation to an all-conference trophy or some similar sort of accolade in which each institution in an athletics conference had a composite finish based on the aggregate of each sport's finish in the conference standings. Athletics Directors did indicate the importance of campus goals for conference finishes to be in line with resource allocation for the athletics department. For example, Athletics Director 3 indicated the strong desire to be more competitive within the conference but also acknowledged some administrative constraints to doing so. Consider Athletics Director 3's definition of athletics success with a particular emphasis on the role of administration in satisfying athletics department goals:

I'm going to look at enrollment obviously. I'm going to look at how much money we raised. I'm going to look at our retention of our staff and what I've been able to do with regards to getting more resources from the institution, whether that be adding full-time coaches, or adding operating budgets, raising more money. Satisfaction of our student-athletes is a huge part of that, as far as retention... Our academic success as well, our GPA, and how many ineligible students we've had. And then competitiveness... Like what do we need to catch up to where we used to be. We used to be [near the top in the conference], and the university just spread us so thin with adding sports and other institutions have put money behind their (athletics) programs. We talked as a staff like what do we need to do in order to compete at a higher level and what is success for us and developing the strategic plan. But at the same time, our president needs to tell us

what he expects too... The institution has to make a decision if they care if we're competitive or if they only see us as an enrollment tool.

Some Athletics Directors were content with their history of performance within the conference, others said there needed to more of a connection between resources and expected finishes, and others indicated there was not a significant amount of hope for an influx of resources so had to manage finishing consistently in the bottom third of conference standings. As mentioned previously, Athletics Directors tended to initially measure athletics success in terms of factors internal to the athletics department or within their own athletics conference (in terms of competitive success) and then expanded how those factors contributed to the overall health of the institution. Athletics Directors consistently emphasized the importance of having definitions of athletics success that are measureable and that also fit into the college's institutional priorities. For example, Athletics Director 6 described specific measures and also the importance of those fitting into the overall campus:

We have to measure lots of statistics. Key performance indicators for athletics teams are GPA for teams, graduation rates for teams, retention rates for teams, and then how do these measurables - which are relatively easy to measure - compare to the student body as a whole. So those are measurables that institutional vice presidents and the president and Board of Trustees and coaches has to look at and deal with. But how do we compare it to our own conference in terms of who won the (conference) all sports trophy. Were we pretty good across the board? And if we have teams that are down here (low in conference standings), well why?

In general, Athletics Directors responses tended to be relatively similar to the responses of both faculty athletics administrators and campus administrators. Specifically, each type of

interviewee (FAR, campus administrator, Athletics Director) valued the student-athlete experience, academic performance, and some sort of pragmatic contribution in terms of enrollment and tuition dollars. Faculty Athletics Representatives tended to value academic performance the most and athletics competitive success the least whereas campus administrators prioritized the student-athlete experience and the role of athletics in relation to the financial solvency of the institution. Athletics Directors shared similar values as the faculty in relation to academic performance and to campus administrators in regards to the student-athlete experience and the pragmatic financial role of the athletics department to the institution. However, Athletics Directors tended to value on-field, on-court performance more so than the faculty or the campus administrators, particularly in relation to the school's performance as measured within conference standings and championships. The definitions of athletics success for each group intuitively makes sense when considering the specific roles on campus that were reflected. As such, faculty valued academic contributions of the student-athletes, campus administrators valued the athletics department's contributions to the campus culture and institution's financial health, and Athletics Directors valued internal performance measures such as student-athlete GPA, student-athlete retention rates, coaches' recruiting numbers, and competitive success as measured by aggregate all-conference finishes.

In all, while the interviews were structured to gain a more holistic, in-depth understanding of small college athletics priorities and organizational decision-making in relation to such priorities, three specific interviewee questions were asked to more directly determine how success is measured in the small college athletics environment. The first question was asked solely of the Athletics Directors. Each Athletics Director was asked to detail what sort of on-court, on-field (e.g., winning) expectations were placed on them as part of the process in which

they were hired as Athletics Director. In the second question used to gain a better understanding of how athletics success is measured, Athletics Directors were asked what factors have contributed to – or would contribute to – firing a coach. Each of the two aforementioned questions was asked to see how definitions of athletics success were operationalized within the athletics department. The third, and most direct, question was asked of each interviewee. Although they were simply asked to detail how they define athletics success, interviewees gave extremely in-depth answers that necessitated grouping responses by interviewee type – faculty, campus administrator, and Athletics Director.

### **Conclusion**

A combination of themes, summaries, and representative quotes based on interviewing 33 Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and faculty (11 each) at 11 different Division III institutions where student-athlete comprise 20% or more of the student body have been detailed in this chapter. The specific direct quotes were selected because they were representative of the responses of other interviewees. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the goal of Chapter Four was to provide a holistic, descriptive representation of the results of this study. The interviews covered an array of topics – from the financial climate of small college athletics, financial stability, the small college athletics marketplace, goal-setting, perceptions of athletics, and operationalizing definitions of athletics success, – all under the broad umbrella of gaining a deep understanding of the role of athletics in a small college and how athletics success could be defined differently than athletics success being normalized as winning athletics competitions.

The section was organized according to five different general themes: (1) communication process between campus administrators regarding goals for the athletics department and campus-wide perceptions of athletics, (2) the financial climate surrounding small college athletics, (3)

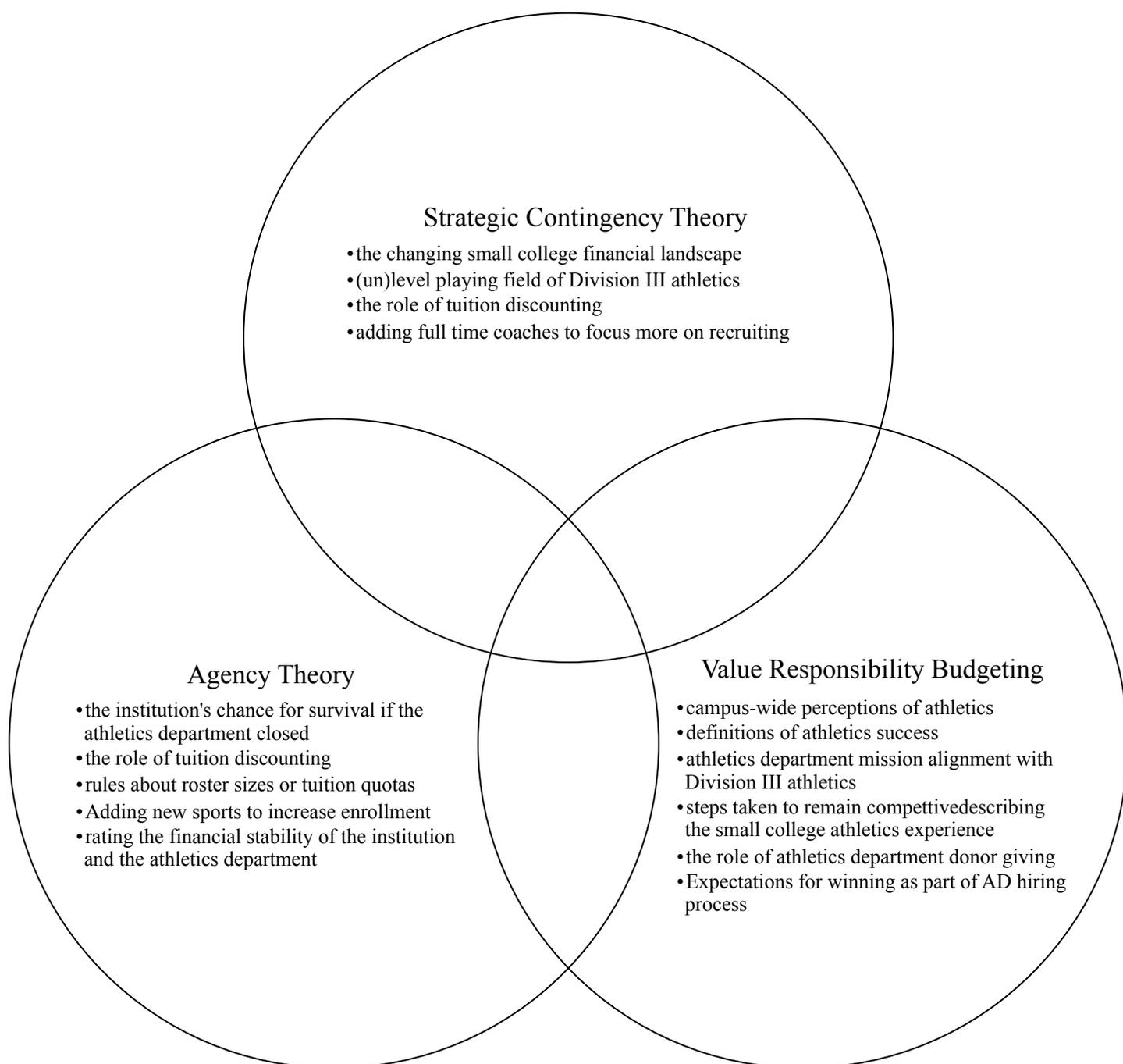
athletics department strategies for stability, (4) Division III philosophy adherence and the small college athletics competitive marketplace and (5) administrators' reflections of athletics success. In all, the goal of this chapter was to provide detailed descriptions of interview themes while also using representative quotes to illustrate the specific thought-processes of the various Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and faculty that were interviewed. In the next chapter, interview themes and interviewee responses are analyzed with a focus on the theoretical underpinnings that contribute to the development of an "Alternative Success Theory" for small college athletics programs. Throughout the discussion, practical implications for NCAA Division III administrators, Athletics Directors, and campus administrators will also be emphasized.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In Chapter Four, I presented the findings from the in-depth interviews that were conducted at 11 different Division III institutions where student-athletes make up 20% or more of the student body. I organized the findings according to five general themes. This section will proceed by first discussing the intersection of the findings of this study with Agency Theory. I will then discuss the alignment of small college athletics priorities and decision-making with Value Responsibility Budgeting. I will then discuss the third and final theoretical prong underlying this study – Strategic Contingency Theory – before discussing practical implications, limitations, future research directions and then concluding rationale for “Alternative Success Theory” and the resulting theoretical implications. For this chapter, the discussion will be organized according to the three primary theoretical constructs – Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, and Strategic Contingency Theory – underlying this study that were detailed in Chapter Two. When discussing the three aforementioned theoretical constructs, I will reference the specific interviewee themes and responses that are related to each theoretical construct. In all, I will provide evidence that when combining the findings of the empirical material detailed in Chapter Four and analyzing the material through the lenses of Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, and Strategic Contingency Theory, there is strong rationale for the development of an “Alternative Success Theory” in order to address the general purpose of this dissertation. Specifically, the development of an “Alternative Success Theory” seeks to not only contextualize the fit of the small college athletics department into both the overall institution and into Division III athletics but also to detail how small college athletics may help the institution remain competitive in the proverbial higher education marketplace.

Figure 1 provides a chart to illustrate the three-pronged approach and helps to provide an organizational mechanism for how this chapter will proceed.

*Figure 1. Three-pronged theoretical constructs for “Alternative Success Theory”*



## Agency Theory

As detailed in the literature review, Agency Theory is a financial, economic, and organizational behavior model that explains the most profitable relationship that can exist between a principal and an agent (Liefner, 2003; Massy, 1996; Olson, 2000; Johnes, 1999). The principal is the person or group of people that lays out the parameters or rules for action, while the agent is the one operating under said rules (Olson, 2000). Importantly, this specific principal-agent relationship is not for the exclusive use at the macro level. Rather, in institutions of higher education, the principal-agent relationship can include different factions of campus. Further, a specific entity (e.g., the Athletics Director) may serve as the principal in some agent-principal relationships and as the agent in other agent-principal relationships (Liefner, 2003; Olson, 2000). This concept of the principal-agency relationship and the ability for one person or one entity to serve as a principal in some campus responsibilities and as the agent in other roles is extremely important for analyzing the small college athletics environment. To critically examine the principal-agent relationships in small college athletics, I will analyze four specific principal-agent relationships that have implications for the proposed “Alternative Success Theory”:

1. Institution (Principal) ---- Student (Agent)
2. President/Campus Administration (Principal) ---- Athletics Director (Agent)
3. Athletics Director (Principal) ---- Coaches (Agent)
4. Institution (Principal) ---- Athletics Department (Agent)

**Relationship 1: Institution (Principal) ---- Student (Agent).** Although the focus of this study is to examine the role of athletics in the overall small college, it is paramount to detail the Institution-Student agency relationship to better contextualize the vital role of the athletics department in the small college’s financial solvency. Therefore, Relationship 1 examines the role

between the institution and the overall student body. This relationship is arguably most prevalent at the interviewed colleges in regards to the role of tuition discounting. As detailed throughout Chapters One, Two, and Four, most small colleges are tuition-driven, enrollment-driven institutions (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Bonvillian & Murphy, 2014; DesJardins & Bell, 2006; Riddle et al., 2005; Zdziarski, 2010). In these small, tuition-driven, private institutions, there is more of a direct relationship between tuition and the true cost of attending the college. At tuition-driven institutions, the tuition itself is inherently the primary revenue source. Hence, the moniker “tuition-driven.” Therefore, the fiscal solvency of a small college relies predominantly on the tuition from the students. In Chapter Four, I detailed interviewees’ thoughts on the role of tuition-discounting. Nearly all said it played a crucial role. Recall that Administrator 1 compared tuition-discounting policies to the development of other policies on campus by saying,

On a scale of 1-10, it’s (tuition discounting is) a 10 and nothing else is a 5. And our strategic plan is designed to enhance our value proposition ... They’re looking at [peer institutions]. They can’t see why it’s worth it to pay more to go [here] so discounting is how we’ve remained fully enrolled. That’s not something we’re proud of but that’s the honest answer.

Since the institutions themselves control the setting of tuition, and the students operate (e.g., pay) under those tuition parameters set by the institution, a strong principal-agency relationship exists between the small college and the students. As detailed in Chapter Four, interviewees responded in great detail about the vital role of student tuition and tuition discounting in the overall financial sustainability of the institution. Specifically, nearly all interviewees indicated the institution relied nearly exclusively – except for modest endowment and fundraising dollars – on the tuition from students to cover institutional operating budgets.

This notion that many small private institutions utilize a high-tuition, high-discount model as a way to attract students and their related tuition-dollars as the primary revenue stream at these tuition-driven institutions was detailed by FAR 9. Not only were FAR 9's sentiments similar to many other respondents, FAR 9 opined on the role of tuition-discounting at many similar institutions by detailing,

It's (tuition discounting) is a huge role. I shouldn't say all, but 98% of small privates that don't have huge endowments, it's the number one problem in private education right now is tuition discounting. We all know that, so it's one of those things it's everybody recognizes it's a problem, nobody has a good solution. We've talked about it and very clearly the market research shows me – they tell me – that parents and consumers would much prefer to have a high sticker and a big discount than to have a low sticker. So we stick with that model, but something's got to give at some point. It just has to.

While the “small college as a principal and the students as an agent” concept to describe how heavily tuition-driven small colleges rely on student tuition to remain financially sustainable is not newfound knowledge, it does help better contextualize how Agency Theory applies specifically to the small college athletics environment.

**Relationships 2 and 3: President/Campus Administration (Principal) ---- Athletics Director (Agent) and Athletics Director (Principal) ---- Coaches (Agent).** With a clear establishment of the Principal-Agent relationship that encompasses small, tuition-driven colleges, it is important to examine how Agency Theory, in some important ways, manifests itself in the small college athletics environment. Specifically, because the institution as a whole is so reliant on tuition dollars for its own fiscal solvency, and because the interviewed small colleges have student-athletes that comprise 20% or more of the overall student body, it is hopefully evident

that campus decision-makers (e.g., college presidents, enrollment managers, provosts, etc.) would factor student-athlete tuition dollars into their enrollment and budgetary projections. As was evident throughout the interviews and as detailed in Chapter Four, there were several specific potential strategies for the athletics department to contribute to the financial stability of the institution, namely in the form of robust roster sizes and adding sports to enhance overall campus enrollment. Such a direct relationship between the athletics department and the overall institution's financial solvency will be discussed in Agency Theory Relationship Four in the next subsection. First, however, it is relevant to explore the Principal-Agent relationships between campus administration and the Athletics Director and also between the Athletics Director and the coaches.

In Chapter Four, I described that small college athletics department, in accordance with communication from campus administrators, can often consider two specific initiatives to contribute to enrollment and the fiscal solvency of the overall institution – having robust roster sizes and adding new sports to increase enrollment. As will be discussed in the Value Responsibility Budgeting section, goal-setting for the athletics department is somewhat of a collaborative effort and while there are not necessarily formalized mandates from campus administrators to Athletics Directors regarding enrollment goals, there are some parameters put in place by campus administrators for Athletics Directors and then put in place by Athletics Directors for coaches. Many interviewees hesitated to use the word quotas or mandates to describe the process for filling rosters, but nearly all interviewees indicated there were discussions between coaches, Athletics Directors, and campus administrators regarding roster size projections and how those projections would fit into overall campus enrollment goals and needs. This process varied slightly from school to school, but Athletics Director 5 described how

the process worked at Institution 5, which showcased the collaborative efforts present at many other interviewed institutions. Athletics Director 5 detailed,

What we do is we sit down. I sit down with all the coaches in October, November, around there. And I try to sit down with them and come up with an idea, and that number kind of fluctuates throughout the year because we try to take our best guess as to what we're looking at as far as retention, current roster size, graduation, and what we need to either grow the roster to where we want it or to be, or keep it where it is. And that's kind of what drives our recruiting. And basically we come up with a number for every sports program and then that number is built into the number that we turn in (to administration) for sports.

Interviewees spoke of the frequent conversations between campus administrators and Athletics Directors regarding athletics department enrollment goals. At some institutions, campus administrators were involved in enrollment targets for each of the specific teams. At other institutions, campus administrators were more so concerned with overall enrollment numbers from the athletics department and let the Athletics Directors work with each of the coaches to make sure individual team roster goals contributed to overall athletics department enrollment goals. In each of those scenarios, there were Principal-Agent relationships. Namely, when campus administrators would work with Athletics Directors to set enrollment goals for the athletics department in the aggregate, the campus administrators served as the principal and the Athletics Director served as the agent. When Athletics Directors would work with independent coaches to set enrollment goals for the coach's specific team, the Athletics Director served as the principal and the coaches served as the agents. I hesitate to use the word "mandate" or "directive" when discussing goal setting or roster size management because interviewees indicated such goal

setting fell on a spectrum between directive and collaborative. Therefore, while enrollment goal setting did not operate purely under the auspices of Agency Theory (one entity developing the rules and the other entity following the rules), the “principal” tended to have more formalized, final say in the goal setting than the “agent.” As such, it is still relevant to explain such enrollment goal setting relationships using Agency Theory.

Lastly in regards to Agency Theory Relationships Two and Three, it is important to briefly detail the rationale for considering adding a sport for enrollment purposes. Most interviewees indicated that there had at least been discussions about adding sports for enrollment purposes with some institutions assertively adding sports with enrollment enhancement serving as the primary impetus. For adding sports, interviewees detailed that adding a sport needed to be done in a very cautious, and calculated manner. With adding sports, Athletics Directors and campus administrator worked as co-principals with hypothetical student-athletes and coaches serving as agents. In such instances where enrollment goals served as the primary motivation when adding – or considering to add – sports, projected financial bottom lines were studied in great detail before making any final decisions. Interviewees indicated that adding a sport, at best, would positively contribute to the financial bottom line of the institution. At worst, the new sport could not negatively contribute to the financial bottom line. Said differently, interviewees were very open about the idea that because the institution was so tuition-driven, it could not afford to take large financial risks. Based on some of the start-up costs with adding a sport (e.g., new coaches, facilities, equipment, etc.), the institution could not afford to fail to meet enrollment goals for an added sport. As such, the co-principals (campus administrators and Athletics Directors) hesitated to set formalized rules for agents (prospective coaches and student-athletes) unless they knew the Principal-Agent relationships would almost assuredly have a positive

financial outcome. Such ideas align closely with the Hendrix College case study example detailed in Chapter One, in which football was added at the school. Adding football at Hendrix College was done only after considerable market research showed doing so would drive up enrollment at the institution.

**Relationship 4: Institution (Principal) ---- Athletics Department (Agent).** After looking at a macro-level principal-agent relationship between the overall small college and students and then taking a micro-level examination of the principal agent relationship between campus administrators and Athletics Directors and Athletics Directors and coaches, it is vital for the purposes of this study to look at the principal-agent relationship between the institution and the athletics department. Throughout each of the interviews, it was extremely clear that the athletics department served a vital role in the overall financial solvency of the institution. Specifically, because student-athletes made up large percentages of the general student body – and even higher percentages of incoming freshmen classes – the athletics department helped the institution meet enrollment goals. As part of institutional goal-setting processes, the tuition-dollars from the athletics department were clearly part of the budgetary parameters set by campus administration. For the specific financial goal setting of the small colleges where I conducted interviews, net revenues were clear targets and the athletics department was expected to serve as a significant contributor toward those targets. In such a relationship, the institution itself (and associated campus administrators) served as the principal, while the athletics department served as the agent. While this idea was prevalent throughout the interviews, it was arguably most apparent when interviewees were asked (1) what would happen to the institution if that athletics department ceased to exist and (2) to rate the financial stability of the institution and the athletics department.

As mentioned previously, a salient theme throughout the interviews was how much the institution relied upon the athletics department to serve as a large contributor to the revenues of the overall institution. Interviewees consistently rated the financial stability of the overall institution and the financial stability of the athletics department identically because of the institution's reliance on the athletics department for institutional financial sustainability. Additionally, one specific question was asked to learn more about the potential of a principal-agent relationship between the institution (principal) and athletics department (agent). As detailed in Chapter Four, interviewees were asked what would happen to the institution if the athletics department closed. Responses indicated very strongly that there would be catastrophic consequences for the institution if the athletics department (and the associated tuition-dollars from student-athletes) ceased to exist. Nearly each of the interviewees used a combination of the following words to describe the impact of such a scenario on the institution: "devastating," "catastrophic," "big trouble," "cripple us almost completely," and "would not survive." In Chapter Four, the response of Administrator 9 provided a comparison between Division III athletics and Division I athletics when analyzing the relationship between the athletics department and the institution. Administrator 9 compared the role of athletics in the overall institution at the small, tuition-driven Division III college to large, public Division I schools by detailing,

So when places like [a large, nearby Division I public school] have budget problems, one of the things they do is they look to cut sports, save expenses. That doesn't make sense at a place like ours. At a place like ours, when you have budgetary problems, it's usually tied to enrollment and you're trying to find ways to improve your enrollment – you may add programs.

Further, several interviewees gave very number-driven responses when detailing the interconnectedness between the athletics department and the institution in relation to meeting financial goals. Administrator 9 and Athletics Director 10 both described revenue projections based on student-athlete numbers and what would happen if those student-athletes were no longer on campus. Administrator 9 rationalized,

If half of those student-athletes decided to go somewhere else (if the athletics department ceased to exist) because they wanted to try to pursue their athletic career as well as their academic career and we lost 300 students, 300 students at \$20,000 net revenue per year is \$6 million. That's a lot of money. So there's no question that athletics as an enrollment tool is part of these at [the institution]. I mean, I think at most small colleges that are more tuition-driven, that's the case.

This very pragmatic example illustrates the principal-agent relationship between the institution (principal) and the athletics department (agent) for utilizing the athletics department and its student-athlete tuition dollars to meet institutional financial goals. Athletics Director 10 similarly illustrated this principal-agent relationship when saying,

I get it. I understand it because we are a big, at the Division III level, we (the athletics department) are one of our school's primary revenue generators through admissions, through enrollment, through tuition. You know, we don't get money from sponsors, or television, or anything like that. But, you know, if we have 400 student-athletes and they're all paying \$10,000 a year (net revenue), that's \$4 million a year we're generating.

In addition to the evidence of the principal-agent relationship between the institution and the athletics department when discussing what would happen to the institution if the athletics department ceased to exist, interviewees also demonstrated a principal-agent relationship when

rating the financial stability of the institution and the athletics department. As described in Chapter Four, many interviewees indicated the financial stability of the athletics department would have to be very similar – if not identical – to the institution because of the interconnectedness of the institution and the athletics department for institutional fiscal solvency. Administrator 1 illustrated such an idea by saying:

I'd say 8 for both (the school and the athletics department). I think whatever figure I'd give and of course I would say 7 or 9 or 4 and make a rationale for it. it would be the same for the college and athletic program because we're so interconnected in budgeting and enrollment and all the rest.

While the athletics department did have relative control over their internal budgeting breakdown, the overall athletics department financial strategies simply had to align with the institution's overall financial strategies. Therefore, the institution-athletics department relationship aligns very closely with Agency Theory because of how much the institution (the entity setting financial parameters for institutional financial success) utilized the athletics department for overall fiscal solvency. Overall, through several different principal-agent relationships in the small college athletics setting, Agency Theory serves as an explanatory tool – in part – for gaining a deep understanding of how athletics department success is measured at small colleges. Specifically, interview themes indicate the existence for a principal-agent relationship between (1) the institution and the student body, (2) the president/campus administration and the Athletics Director, (3) the Athletics Director and the coaches, and (4) the overall institution and the athletics department.

## **Value Responsibility Budgeting**

With an understanding of how Agency Theory serves as a partial explanatory tool for the existence of an “Alternative Success Theory” in the small college athletics environment, it is important to discuss how Value Responsibility Budgeting helps to explain other facets of small college athletics. Notably, Value Responsibility Budgeting developed out of Agency Theory. Massy (1996) created a subsidiary model of Agency Theory that could be used more applicably in the higher education setting (Johnes, 1999; Massy, 2009; Newton, 2000; Vonasek, 2011). Because higher education is not purely a market-driven discipline, as in Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting finds a balance between mission-driven decisions and profit-driven decisions. When appropriately strategized, mission attainment and net financial gains can enhance one another (Massy, 2009). Such tenets align very closely with many of the results of this study.

As detailed in Chapter Four, interviewees discussed campus-wide perceptions of the athletics department, their own definitions of athletics department success, athletics department mission alignment with Division III athletics, steps taken to remain competitive in the small college athletics marketplace and higher education marketplace, and goal setting processes for the athletics department. Themes from each of the questions and responses indicated a strong applicability of Value Responsibility Budgeting to the small college athletics environment. Specifically, the idea that a strong alignment with the Division III philosophy and an emphasis on student-athlete experience, combined with the strategic use of athletics to help with the financial sustainability of the institution demonstrate Massy’s (2009) vow that when strategized correctly, financial strategies and mission attainment increase the other.

Said differently, by capitalizing on offering quality student-athlete experiences, the associated tuition revenue from student-athletes is reinvested into the overall college to make the overall institution more financially sustainable. When interviewees detailed campus-wide perceptions of athletics, many indicated that administrators understood the very pragmatic role of athletics for generating tuition dollars at these inherently tuition-driven institutions. However, providing an opportunity for student-athletes to enjoy their athletics and academic undergraduate endeavors was also extremely important because of the missions of the institution, the athletics department, and Division III athletics. Recall FAR 9's response that was detailed in Chapter Four. FAR 9 talked about the mutually beneficial nature of the athletics department and student-athletes on campus by saying:

Well I know the administrators view it (athletics) as a strategic admissions tool, in the broadest sense. That's not just in terms of the students they bring in but public relations, notoriety, you know, the name is out there. [Our school], when our teams do well, they view it as a way for us to connect with the local community... So I think everybody who is involved in administration is very, very honest about the role that it plays. Now, closely behind that, I think, they would also very much recognize the value to the students and I'm very aware of that. And that's what I talk about with faculty a lot. Yes, in a utilitarian, functional way, they're (the athletics department) very important to us, they bring in a lot of students. But, they also are very much a part of our mission as we develop the whole student, right. So just like the kids that are in music, the kids that are in other co-curricular activities, athletics is a very important part of that and we don't want to see it as winning games because it's so much more than that.

These ideas of the mutually beneficial nature of small college athletics were also very salient when interviewees described their own definitions of athletics department success. Notably, mission attainment, student-athlete experience, and financial goals were all interspersed throughout the top priorities of how athletics department success manifests itself. Typical conceptualizations of winning athletics contests were also part of the definitions, but typically ranked lower than the aforementioned priorities of the student-athlete experience and the athletics department positively contributing to the tuition and enrollment goals of the overall institution. Administrator 1 wonderfully captured such the interconnected benefits of small college athletics for the students and for the overall institution when he defined athletics department success means to him. As was detailed in Chapter Four, Administrator 1 stated,

The most important criterion is the student experience. So it's maybe cliché Division III philosophy, but I truly, deeply believe it... So that's one way (to measure athletics department success). But another way, a practical sense, we are enrollment-driven, and most colleges like us are, and we really have to hit our goals in athletics recruiting to meet our class. And so I can say that without feeling apologetic about it because I feel like I believe that the experience the students have when they get here justifies it – it really is a great experience for them. But we have to hit those roster sizes too to keep all of the machinery turning.

Again, in accordance with Value Responsibility Budgeting, financial strategies (i.e., the role of student-athlete tuition dollars) and mission attainment (i.e., quality student-athlete experience, small college mission attainment) increase the other. In addition to the mutually beneficial nature of the student-athlete experience and the fiscal solvency of the overall institution as it relates to success in the small college athletics environment, several smaller

specific strategies of the athletics department also emphasize the use the Value Responsibility Budgeting as an explanatory tool for what athletics department success means for small colleges. Interviewees discussed the formalized processes for setting roster size goals for the athletics department. For all parties involved, it was crucial to find the ideal roster sizes for a quality student-athlete experiences, retention and graduation rates, and campus-wide enrollment and tuition goals. This middle ground between financial operatives and mission attainment aligns well with Value Responsibility Budgeting. Similarly, as part of the hiring process for Athletics Directors, winning was not discussed. There was some acknowledgement of a likely connection between winning and the student-athlete experience, but the emphasis during the hiring process was for the Athletics Directors to lead a department focused on mission attainment, the student-athlete experience, and meeting tuition goals. Such a specific interview question provided further general evidence for the applicability of Value Responsibility Budgeting to the small college athletics environment.

Notably, many interviewees indicated the importance, within the past 10-15 years, of the athletics department hiring more full-time head coaches and assistant coaches. In doing so, the athletics department could dually achieve two of its primary goals: positively contribute to the financial sustainability of the institution and enhance the undergraduate experiences of the student-athletes themselves. With more coaches on campus in a full-time capacity, the coaches can focus more on recruiting and retention, all of which helps in a very practical sense with generating tuition dollars for the institution. As emphasized in Chapter Four, adding more full-time coaches can help the institution financially but can also provide more qualified coaches for the student-athletes to interact with more throughout their undergraduate careers, when in turn can enhance the student-athlete experience. Administrator 9 conveyed,

There was a time, and it wasn't that long ago, even 20 years ago – there was a time when D3 athletics was amateurish and not, I mean, I don't use that term to be pejorative, but I guess it is ... So over time, what we've done is what everyone else has done. We've professionalized our 'D3' operation quite a bit. So sports have full-time dedicated coaches... So I think we have devote lots of personnel, expanded personnel, professionalized the operation, specialized those people who are working in sport and making sure they're professionally qualified and competent coaches, not just people who are interested in coaching but really competent and qualified.

From a student-athlete experience perspective, many interviewees indicated that full time coaches who were on campus throughout the day and were more engrained in the team culture helped serve as another mentor for the student-athletes simply because they were around and available for the student-athletes. Administrator 4 discussed the dual-benefit of having more coaches in that they help with attracting students but they also help to enhance the student-athlete experience and ultimately the institution's retention rates. Administrator 4 emphasized,

And the reality is, athletics works. Right? So when you think about retention rates, and satisfaction, and success, you could pretty much count on your varsity athletes to be retained at a higher rate than others. If I had all the money in the world, I would say we should all have a coach or a mentor because clearly the impact that a coach can have on a student's life, I think it's the coach that's the difference in that team experience, that is the difference between an average retention rate and a better retention rate.

Further, several interview questions and emergent themes are associated with the role of athletics department donor giving as part of an emerging strategy for better financial stability.

Hogg (2006) detailed that an impetus for group membership can be a desire to reduce uncertainty.

When describing the Division III experience, interviewees indicated that many Division III student-athletes want to play competitively for an additional four years after high school. Some interviewees indicated that they felt this was such a part of the student-athletes' upbringing, they knew that participating in Division III athletics would help to reduce uncertainty (e.g., social, academic, athletics uncertainty) in their lives. Administrator 2 showcased the interest in reducing uncertainty by emphasizing,

I always talk to families about, is it's just another connection that you make on campus. So while you might have your residence hall group and your mentor group from your seminar, coming in and having that ready made other group (on the team) is huge and that can often be more significant than either of these other groups and more significant than even if you joined a fraternity or sorority. So I think there's that bond and that friendship.

Interviewees indicated the student-athletes, coaches, Athletics Directors, and campus administrators truly did value a shared balance between student-athletes as students and as athletes. As detailed in Chapter Four, FAR 6 discussed the delicate balance for student-athletes between academics and athletics. FAR 6 first described the balance of identities by saying, "You are equally a student and an athlete" but then detailed that academics are prioritized slightly ahead of the athletic commitment. FAR 6 said, "That you are balancing both of those and you're a student first, and that's typically how things run here. Now, not always in the student-athletes' mind. But I think in the faculty and in the coaches' mind, you're a student first." Later in the response, FAR 9 addressed the idea that the student-athletes are specifically seeking out the opportunity to participate in Division III athletics to continue their athletic careers when he said, "The students are choosing to do athletics. They're not forced in by – their financial aid doesn't

change if they quit playing.” Salient group identification, particularly as part of affinity groups (Holmes, 2008; 2009), can lead to loyalty and emotional attachment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), which can lead to the strong association between affinity group participation (e.g., sports) and later donor giving (Holmes, 2008; 2009; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007). Therefore, a quality student-athlete experience in which a student-athlete has a quality student-athlete experience as part of the athletics department will be more likely to lead to athletics department alumni giving in the future. Administrator 1 illustrated this concept by saying

We’re trying to grow it (fundraising) now because we’re raising less than we should. And so a lot of that is affinity-based ... For most students who were deeply engaged while they were on some activity on campus, that’s the hook for reconnecting with them on your campus.

This notion is also reiterated by literature that was discussed in Chapter Two. Being a student-athlete while in undergrad has shown to be a key predictor in having a higher propensity to donate funds back to the university as an alumnus (Holmes, 2009; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). Additionally, the student experience is also related to emotional ties to the university and later alumni giving (Weertz & Ronca, 2009).

As such, this relationship between student-athlete experience and alumni giving can be described using Value Responsibility Budgeting because of the dually beneficial nature. More specifically, the trend for small college athletics departments to utilize athletics department donor giving as a new revenue stream is dually beneficial for the financial bottom line and also to fulfill the Division III philosophy of providing high quality experiences for Division III student-athletes.

Overall, Value Responsibility Budgeting serves as a vital explanatory tool for what athletics department means for small colleges. Most importantly, Value Responsibility Budgeting finds a balance between purely bottom-line driven initiatives and higher education initiatives that are more focused on holistic educational experiences by valuing tenets of each (financial vs. holistic experience) that are mutually beneficial. Such a relationship is paramount in the small college athletics environment, where the quality experience of the student-athlete is extremely important and the associated student-athlete tuition dollars are vital for the financial sustainability of the higher education institution as a whole.

### **Strategic Contingency Theory**

Under the tenets of Strategic Contingency Theory, the organization's primary goal is to survive. In order to do so, it must adapt to the external environment in which it operates (Daft et al., 1984; Duncan, 1972; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). As emphasized in Chapter Two, the environment is "the totality of physical and social factors that are taken directly into consideration in the decision-making behavior of individuals in the organization" (Duncan, 1972, p. 314). Duncan (1972) asserted that in the environmental simple/complex dimension, the number of competitors in the environment and the homogeneity/heterogeneity of the competitors must be taken into consideration. In the small college athletics environment, many small colleges operate under the umbrella of Division III athletics. Importantly, the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the competitors must be factored in as well. Throughout the interviews, it was very clear that there were several trends within both the small college athletics environment and within small colleges in general that driven by attempts to remain competitive in the environment. Interviewees spoke of the changing small college financial landscape and detailed trends with tuition discounting and financial aid strategies, a shift toward full-time coaches to help with

recruiting in a competitive higher education marketplace, and increasing reliance on athletics as an enrollment driver. Further, the homogeneity of many small college athletics programs and the heterogeneity between several different types of Division III schools helped create an uneven playing field from a winning and losing standpoint in Division III athletics.

When interviewees spoke of the shift toward a high tuition, high discount financial aid model, they also spoke to the interaction with the environment when setting those policies and when recruiting prospective student-athletes. Interviewees indicated a heightened awareness of what competitor schools were offering in financial aid packages. This knowledge of the environment manifested itself in two distinct ways. First, campus administrators – namely admissions officers and enrollment management officers – were keenly aware of what packages other schools were offering. Administrator 8 succinctly noted this by emphasizing, “I see the packages that come from other institutions, and I see what they’re giving.” Secondly, as part of the recruiting process, prospective student-athletes were often very open about the types of financial aid packages they were receiving from other others. The prospective student-athletes would often try to receive a better financial aid package that would be in line with competitor’s packages. Importantly, this is a common practice amongst student-athletes and non-student athletes alike, in accordance with Division III compliance standards. The second manner in which small college athletics personnel had to operate in the external environment was the role of coaches when financial aid packages remained different between the coach’s institution and competing institutions also vying for the same prospective student-athletes. Interviewees emphasized the importance of coaches’ recruiting to convince the prospective student-athletes that it was worth paying a few thousand dollars more to have the student-athlete and academic experience offered by the school. As mentioned in Chapter Four, some schools knew their

financial aid packages would often be a few thousand dollars less than competitors. Athletics Director 9 illustrated this concept by saying,

We are rarely the best financial aid packages that a student that we're recruiting has. In fact, often times, we're the worst. So you know, what I try to convince our coaches of – and some of them are better at this than others – is that we have to be able to sell everything else we have to offer here at [institution] and get somebody to want to be here bad enough that they'll pay a little more to come here. And there are a lot of kids that will. The question becomes 'How much more are they willing to pay?' Are they willing to pay two or three thousand more? Five thousand more? Maybe.

As such, there was a heavy reliance on the coaches' recruiting abilities to still attract prospective student-athletes. The reliance on coaches for recruiting helps to explain the trend to have more full-time coaches so that there can be a more of a focus on recruiting in the increasingly competitive higher education marketplace. As detailed in Chapter 4 when discussing interviewees responses to what steps the athletics department has taken to remain competitive in the small college higher education marketplace, FAR 9 represented the ideas of many other interviewees by emphasizing,

Now a head coach has moved into being more of a full-time job... and I think when we initially did that, the coaches in the athletic department felt like it was a good way for us to be more successful in terms of wins and losses and thus attract attention, which would be good for recruiting. But know, with the competition that we're in, the competitive landscape of higher ed that we're in now, that it's become – and I say this to the faculty members when they complain about how much athletics sort of gets – that athletics really is really in many ways just an extension of our admissions department. So you have to

think of the coaches as coaches and admissions counselors because they bring all these good quality kids in and we need to resource that.

Athletics departments have had to adapt to the environment in order to enhance the institution's chance for financial survival. Such adaptation has essentially been forced for those that wish to survive, since organizations seek out environments that dually satisfy stability and viability (Dess & Beard, 1984).

While this examination of the small college athletics environment has inherently focused on small colleges, it is extremely important to discuss that not all Division III institutions are small colleges. Rather, homogenous factions of small, tuition-driven institutions and the heterogeneity between such small tuition-driven colleges, private institutions with larger endowments, and relatively large Division III public institutions have created what nearly every interviewee detailed: an uneven playing field in Division III athletics. As such, small colleges could adapt to the environment, but only to an extent because of resource constraints internal to the institution. Small, tuition-driven institutions could not adapt themselves into institutions with robust endowments, or could not strategically convert to large, state institutions. Further, tuition-driven small colleges typically are less successful from the standpoint of winning and losing than their Division III counterparts that have larger endowments or are large, public institutions (Katz et al., 2015). Interviewees indicated such different factions within Division III athletics and that Division III institutions are not one homogenous group. Thus, many interviewees voiced that, as a whole, Division III athletics was not level. Importantly, interviewees also emphasized that while Division III as a whole is heterogeneous, small-tuition driven institutions are relatively homogenous and it is important for each small college to work to distinguish itself from other institutions when recruiting prospective student-athletes that are also considering matriculation at

other small Division III institutions. Therefore, in relation to Duncan's (1972) simple/complex dimension of Strategic Contingency Theory, small colleges have to operate in response to an environment with other relatively homogenous small, tuition-driven institutions while also under the Division III umbrella that contains relatively heterogeneous types of institutions such as (1) private institutions with larger endowments that are not as reliant on student tuition dollars for financial sustainability and (2) relatively large public institutions with more offerings on campus and traditionally lower costs of attendance. As detailed in Chapter Four, Athletics Director 11 illustrated the heterogeneity of Division III athletics by conveying,

It's just all over the place. I mean you've got schools of 600, you've got (large, public state) schools in Wisconsin. You're going to play Whitewater. There's a big difference in funding, state, size, (academic) offerings, it's just all over the place. It's just a wide gamut... So Division III is just all over the place. Maybe more so than any other division I think.

Athletics Director 6 provided rationale for why he thought Division III athletics was unequal. In doing so, the topics of endowments and public institutions were also discussed. Athletics Director 6 detailed,

Ooh, that's a sticky wicket. Well, there's a big difference between state schools and private schools ... Wisconsin, educationally, cost-wise, keeping students in state ... Who won the Learfield (Director's) Cup? Williams. What is it about Williams that makes it so unique? Your school (Washington University in St. Louis), Williams, Emory ... The academically elite schools have huge endowments, so financial aid, every pink elephant at that school gets the same thing, athlete or non-athlete.

Small colleges have had to adapt both in relation to strategies for financial solvency and relatedly, ways in which athletics success is measured. As a way to compete in the small, tuition-driven college environment, many small colleges have increasingly relied on athletics as a vital contributor to the financial sustainability of the institution due to student-athlete enrollment percentages and their related tuition dollars. Such a shift arguably signifies how athletics success may be measured differently at small colleges because, in accordance with Strategic Contingency Theory, institutions seek out environments that enable financial stability and viability (Dess & Beard, 1984). Therefore, normalized conceptualizations of athletics success (e.g., winning) have shifted in continued quests for financial stability and as a result of a heterogeneous Division III environment in which homogenous tuition-driven colleges struggle, in general, to consistently win athletics competitions against heterogeneous groups such as highly endowed private institutions and large, public institutions. Overall, Strategic Contingency Theory serves as the third prong of a three-pronged (Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, Strategic Contingency Theory) explanatory mechanism for detailing the small college athletics environment and what athletics department success means for such institutions.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study was not without its limitations. Student-athletes and coaches – two vital constituency groups of the small college athletics environment – were not interviewed as part of this study. Moreover, while different constituency groups on campus (e.g., Athletics Director, Faculty Athletics Representative, campus administrator) were interviewed, the interviewees only represented a snapshot of the athletics environment at their institutions. The selected interviewees could arguably be inclined to describe the role of athletics on campus in more positive terms due to the nature of their specific jobs. Interviewees did indicate they felt faculty

represented the largest constituency group that could be resistant to the increased reliance on the athletics department to help meet institutional enrollment and financial goals. Notably, faculty that did not have some sort of connection to the athletics department were not interviewed. As was a common idea present throughout this dissertation, there was a strategic relationship between the institution and the athletics department. More staffing and resources had consistently been devoted to athletics in an effort to rely on student-athletes as a large percentage of the overall student body. There could be other avenues to strategically address enrollment concerns. This could include, for example, devoting resources to a robust recreational or club sports program or to specializing in particular academic programs. Information about such endeavors or interviews with institutional staff who would prefer such a focus were not conducted. Finally in regards to limitations of this study, while data was collected from 11 institutions across seven states, interviews were not conducted at institutions on the East Coast or West Coast. Data from such institutions could have potentially indicated some geographic differences in the small college athletics environment. Due to the qualitative nature of the research design in this study, results are not generalizable.

The limitations and results from this study indicate several avenues for future research. Future studies could examine the small college athletics environment from the perspective of student-athletes and coaches. Further, data could be collected from schools located on the East Coast and West Coast to provide even more geographically diverse information about the small college athletics environment. Future research on this topic could seek to develop practical recommendations for how a deep understanding of the small college athletics environment could positively impact coaches and the athletics department in their recruiting efforts for prospective student-athletes.

While the aforementioned ideas about directions for future research are focused on micro level extensions of the study (e.g., expanding data collection to more geographically diverse schools, interviewing coaches and student-athletes, etc.), expanding this research study to examine the college athletics environment on a more holistic level would also be beneficial. This dissertation sought to gain a deep understanding of the small college athletics environment within Division III athletics. Future research could examine the other Division III colleges that fall outside of the small college purview (those schools operationalized as institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body). As was detailed in Chapters Four and Five, there is a seemingly heterogeneous Division III environment of “small colleges,” public institutions, and more highly endowed private institutions. Examining these other subsets of Division III institutions could potentially glean insightful information as well. In all, an underlying purpose of this dissertation was to examine the role of athletics in the institution as a whole. This notion could be expanded outside of Division III athletics as well, particularly to the Division II and NAIA levels. Amid growing public discourse about budget tightening across all levels of higher education, it will continue to be of paramount importance to gain a deep, holistic understanding of the changing role of athletics departments in institutions of higher education.

## **Conclusion**

As outlined previously, there may be “alternate definitions of success” for different factions of Division III institutions, namely small, enrollment-driven institutions (Katz et al., 2015, p. 115). For the purposes of this study, small colleges were operationalized as Division III institutions where student-athletes comprised 20% or more of the overall student body. As was detailed throughout the findings and also in the discussion of the findings, for many of these small colleges, the athletics department’s contribution to institutional enrollment goals serves as

a highly prioritized measurement of athletics department success. While Division III athletics departments do not bring in revenue comparable to their Division I brethren in the form of broadcasting rights contracts, corporate sponsorships, and ticket sales, the small college athletics department plays a vital role in the financial solvency of the overall institution.

Prior to describing the results of this study, the manners in which scholars have detailed the small college higher education marketplace were identified. Specifically, by covering a wide-range of concepts – the early history of the small college, factors contributing to the current college financial environment, increased reliance on student tuition dollars, strategic plans and mission attainment, and programmatic issues facing university and athletics administrators – context was provided for taking an immersive dive into understanding the goals and operatives of the small college athletics environment. To provide explanatory mechanisms, I relied upon a three-pronged approach – Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, and Strategic Contingency Theory – to best situate what athletics department success means to small colleges.

Although Agency Theory focuses on the most profitable financial relationship between entities, which does not necessarily directly lend itself to mission attainment in a higher education system, Agency Theory is important to contextualize the different principal-agent relationships between different campus entities. Ultimately, these various principal-agent relationships (e.g., institution-student, campus administration-Athletics Director, Athletics Director-coaches, institution-athletics department) do demonstrate situations in which the principals develop parameters for the agents to act upon in a manner that will positively contribute to the fiscal solvency of the overall institution. As evidenced previously, the small college athletics environment is an extremely complex entity with constituency groups that range from the general student body, to campus employees, to higher education systems in general, to

the NCAA Division III membership. Understanding the various principal-agent relationships that contribute to – and help define – what athletics department means to small colleges is extremely important. The various principal-agent relationships in the small college athletics environment enabled a better understanding of the following previously discussed themes: (1) the institution's chance for survival if the athletics department closed, (2) the role of tuition discounting, (3) rules about roster sizes or tuition quotas, (4) adding new sports to increase enrollment, and (5) rating the financial stability of the institution and the athletics department.

Value Responsibility Budgeting was developed out of Agency Theory in an effort to capture the higher education setting in which there is a balance between mission-driven decisions and purely market-driven financial decisions (Johnes, 1999; Massy, 1996; Massy, 2009; Newton, 2000; Vonasek, 2011). When utilized correctly, Value Responsibility Budgeting allows for mission-driven initiatives and strategic decisions solely focused on the financial bottom line to be mutually beneficial. That is, when small colleges focus on providing quality student-athlete experiences, the financial bottom line of the institution as a whole will stabilize because of increased retention rates, opportunities for increased recruiting numbers, more lucrative affinity-based donor giving, and increased success with the athletics department meeting institutional enrollment goals.

Further, small colleges are not operating in an insular environment confined to their institution. Rather, small college athletics departments have to operate in the very external environment of Division III athletics. Importantly, in the environment of Division III athletics, small colleges operate in both a relatively homogenous environment with many other small, tuition-driven institutions that strategically utilize athletics to meet financial goals of the overall institution and also in a heterogeneous environment in which they compete for championships

against well-endowed private institutions and large, public schools. Ultimately, under the tenets of Strategic Contingency Theory, the institution's primary goal is to survive (Daft et al., 1984). As such, there have been strategic shifts in the small college athletics environment in order to increase institutional chances for survival.

In addition to the three-pronged explanatory mechanism that utilized the academic constructs of Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, and Strategic Contingency Theory, findings from this study also have several practical implications. As such, it may be useful to provide a brief list of practical recommendations for Athletics Directors, campus administrators, and NCAA personnel. Given some of the inherent characteristics of qualitative research (e.g., results are not generalizable), these recommendations should not be viewed as a general guide for all small colleges or all NCAA Division III institutions. Rather, I hope the aforementioned groups can take the information throughout each of the chapters and apply to their work where they deem there is sufficient overlap with the findings of this study.

1. Continue collaboration between campus administrators, Athletics Directors and coaches to find roster size balances that will dually enhance the student-athlete experience while also meeting enrollment goals. Findings indicate that a quality student-athlete experience is related to graduation rates, recruiting success, and to a lesser but still relevant extent – winning.
2. Continue to work with different constituency groups on campus – especially faculty – to educate them about the very practical role of athletics on campus. Many of the students on campus and in their (faculty) classes would not be there if they did not have the opportunity to participate in college athletics at their institution. They would

- likely go to another small college instead because of athletics participation opportunities.
3. Adding sports as a tool to increase campus enrollment is a viable option but must be done with careful consideration due to the risk involved with adding a sport. Specifically, due to the delicate nature and financial implications of losing even 20 students, Athletics Directors and campus administrators need to be nearly certain that the up-front costs associated with adding a sport (e.g., hiring coaches, facility needs, equipment purchases) will result in a net positive return within the next three to five years.
  4. Understand that the small college athletics and higher education marketplace continues to be increasingly competitive. As such, consider adding more full-time head and assistant coaches to help with recruiting. There is likely a positive return on investment if you are able to project a new coach's salary will be less than the added tuition revenue from X number of new student-athletes.
  5. The use of student-athlete tuition dollars to help meet the budgetary goals of the overall institution is not mutually exclusive from providing a high quality academic and athletics experience for student-athletes. Prospective Division III student-athletes understand – or will quickly learn at the beginning of the recruiting process – that there are no athletics scholarships at the Division III level. As such, Athletics Directors and administrators should feel comfortable utilizing athletics as a budgetary strategy, provided the student-athletes have ample opportunities to enjoy their undergraduate experience.

6. Work to decide if your institution cares about the apparent competitive imbalance in Division III athletics.
7. Continue to fine-tune what athletics department success means at your specific institution and adjust programmatic strategies and operations accordingly.
8. Share your experiences and opinions with the NCAA as part of the legislative and governance process.

In all, I believe the information presented throughout this dissertation justifies the development of an Alternative Success Theory for the small college athletics environment.

Based on findings from the study, Alternative Success Theory is defined as follows:

Small college athletics department success (for the purposes of this study, Division III institutions where student-athletes comprise 20% or more of the student body) primarily includes 1) helping the institution meet enrollment and tuition goals while also 2) providing a quality student athlete experience.

Winning and competing in NCAA tournaments is important for aiding in student-athlete experience and retention rates – and for inherently competitive coaches and student-athletes. However, winning athletics competitions is not a primary measurement of small college athletics department success. Many of the interviewees from the selected institutions indicated the typical small college athletics department cannot compete consistently in Division III NCAA tournaments with highly endowed institutions or large, public state schools. The inherently tuition-dependent nature of small colleges arguably necessitates a strong reliance on the athletics department to meet institutional tuition, enrollment, and financial goals.

As detailed in the aforementioned practical recommendations section, there are several pragmatic steps for small colleges to take to best ensure alternative definitions of athletics

department success. Namely, small college athletics departments can 1) have more full-time coaches to help with recruiting and student-athlete retention, 2) determine ideal roster sizes for tuition maximization while also maintaining a quality student-athlete experience, 3) add sports strategically, 4) explore student-athlete alumni fundraising as another/new revenue stream, and 5) communicate the role of the athletics department to various campus constituency groups, including, but not limited to, administration, faculty, staff, athletics department personnel, and students. The aforementioned details on Alternative Success Theory and related information presented in Chapters Four and Five sought to address the two research questions underlying this dissertation:

RQ1: How does the small college athletics department fit into both the Division III and higher education competitive marketplace?

RQ2: How is athletics department success defined and operationalized in the small college athletics environment?

While the definition of Alternative Success Theory and related pragmatic implications above address RQ2 and the aspect of RQ1 related to the fit between the small college athletics department into the higher education marketplace, I will conclude by addressing the component of Research Question 1 concentrating on the small college's fit into Division III athletics. Small colleges must deal with the simultaneous homogenous and heterogeneous Division III environment. That is, small colleges must continue to work to differentiate themselves from other like-minded small, tuition-dependent institutions, while also facing the very stark reality that the "typical" small college cannot consistently compete for national championships with more resourced highly endowed or large public institutions.

In closing, I have used the preceding space to provide an in-depth examination of what athletics department success means to small colleges. I emphasized the strong intersection between athletics department operations and institutional goals. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the small college athletics environment, I utilized a three-pronged theoretical approach – Agency Theory, Value Responsibility Budgeting, and Strategic Contingency Theory – to argue for the existence of an Alternative Success Theory to help capture how small college definitions of athletics success impact day-to-day and long-term athletics operations. Finally, I highlighted the practical implications of a deeper understanding of the small college athletics environment. In all, I endeavored to understand the underpinnings of small college athletics success in hopes it would be helpful for academicians and practitioners alike.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Sample Email To Athletics Director

Good afternoon [name],

My name is Claire Schaeperkoetter and I am a research fellow in the Sport Management department at the University of Kansas. I am also a former Division III basketball student-athlete from Washington University in St. Louis.

In conjunction with a grant from the NCAA, I am conducting a study on what athletics success means for Athletics Directors and administrators at small Division III colleges.

This summer, I am traveling to interview Athletics Directors, Faculty Athletics Representatives, and high-ranking university administrators (e.g., chancellor/president or VP/provost involved with campus recruitment/enrollment).

I am reaching out to you to see if you would be interested and available to help coordinate 3 interviews at [institution] – 1 with you as the Athletics Director, 1 with the Faculty Athletics Representative, and 1 with a university administrator. Interviewee responses would remain anonymous. I expect each interview to take about 30-45 minutes. I can be in [name of town/city] [date range] and would ideally be able to schedule the interviews at [institution] during one of those days.

When you get the chance, please let me know of your thoughts and of the potential of me coming to [institution]. Thank you for your time [name]. I very much appreciate it.

Sincerely,  
Claire Schaeperkoetter

Claire Schaeperkoetter, M.S.E.  
Doctoral Research Fellow  
Production Director, Journal of Amateur Sport  
Department of Health, Sport, and Exercise Sciences  
University of Kansas  
Claire@ku.edu

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide – Athletics Director

1. When you applied for/interviewed for the Athletics Director positions, what were the expectations placed on you for department-wide on-court, on-field athletics success?
2. When looking back on an a school year, what goes into you judging whether the athletics program was successful or not?
3. What types of schools do you feel like your institution is in competition with for student-athletes?
4. If the athletics department ceased to exist, what sort of impact would that have on the university's chance for survival?
5. What conversations have occurred related to adding sports to increase enrollment?
6. What are your rules about roster sizes or tuition quotas?
7. Could you describe the communication process between you and university administration regarding goals for the athletics department?
8. What factors contribute to you firing a coach?
9. What steps has the athletics department taken to remain competitive in the small college (athletics) higher education marketplace?
10. What role does tuition-discounting play in your school's financial aid packages?
11. How does the athletics department mission align with the overall college/university? With Division III athletics?
12. How has the financial climate of your athletics department changed in the time since you became Athletics Director? How about the financial climate of the university?
13. In your opinion, how has the financial climate of small college athletics (specifically, DIII) changed in the time since you became Athletics Director?
14. What are the biggest positives of your institution that coaches use to recruit student-athletes?
15. What do you feel like are the biggest drawbacks of your university that your coaches have to overcome when recruiting?
16. In what ways are the student-athletes representative of the student body as a whole?

17. How would you describe the small college athletics experience to someone who has no idea what it's about?
18. If you had to place your athletics department/your school on a stability scale from 1 (extremely unstable) to 10 (extremely stable), where would your school fall and why?
19. What sort of role does alumni giving play in the overall revenues of your institution? Are there any sort of specific directives or statistics kept on former student-athlete alumni donations?
20. How do you feel like university administrators view the athletics department?
21. How level of a playing field do you believe Division III athletics is?

**Interview Guide – Campus Administrator**

1. Could you briefly describe your responsibilities as they relate to the athletics department?
2. When looking back on a school year, what goes into you judging whether the athletics program was successful or not?
3. What types of schools do you feel like your school is in competition with for students? How about for student-athletes?
4. If the athletics department ceased to exist, what sort of impact would that have on the university's chance for survival?
5. What conversations have occurred related to adding sports to increase enrollment?
6. What are your rules about roster sizes or tuition quotas?
7. Could you describe the communication process between you and university administration regarding goals for the athletics department?
8. What steps has the university and the athletics department taken to remain competitive in the small college (athletics) higher education marketplace?
9. What role does tuition-discounting play in your school's financial aid packages?
10. How does the athletics department mission align with the overall college/university's mission? With Division III athletics?
11. In what ways are the student-athletes representative of the student body as a whole?
12. How has the financial climate of the athletics department and the overall university changed in the time since you started working here?
13. In your opinion, how has the financial climate of small college (and small college athletics) changed since you started working here?
14. How would you describe the small college athletics experience to someone who has no idea what it's about?
15. If you had to place your athletics department/your school on a stability scale from 1 (extremely unstable) to 10 (extremely stable), where would your school fall and why?
16. What sort of push is there on raising funds through alumni giving? Are there any sort of specific directives or statistics kept on former student-athlete alumni donations?
17. How level of a playing field do you believe Division III athletics is?

**Interview Guide – Faculty Athletics Representative**

1. Could you briefly describe your responsibilities as the Faculty Athletics Representative?
2. When looking back on a school year, what goes into you judging whether the athletics program was successful or not?
3. What types of schools do you feel like your institution is in competition with for student-athletes? How about other schools in competition with for general students (non student-athletes)?
4. If the athletics department ceased to exist, what sort of impact would that have on the university's chance for survival?
5. What conversations have occurred related to adding sports to increase enrollment?
6. Could you describe the communication process between you and university administration regarding goals for the athletics department?
7. Do you have any examples of tension between either you athletics priorities or athletics priorities and university administrator priorities? (beyond your role, trying to take advantage of ties)
8. Have you ever felt like there have been situations where you've been put in a tough situation serving as a liaison between athletics and academics?
9. How does athletics work with admissions in relation to spots for student-athletes?
10. What steps has the athletics department taken to remain competitive in the small college (athletics) higher education marketplace?
11. What role does tuition-discounting play in your school's financial aid packages?
12. How does the athletics department mission align with the overall college/university? With Division III athletics?
13. How has the financial climate of the athletics department and the university changed in the time since you started working here?
14. In your opinion, how has the financial climate of small college athletics (specifically, DIII) changed in the time since you became Faculty Athletics Representative?
15. In what ways are the student-athlete academic eligibility standards in line with expectations for general students?

16. How would you describe the small college athletics experience to someone who has no idea what it's about?
17. If you had to place your athletics department/your school on a stability scale from 1 (extremely unstable) to 10 (extremely stable), where would your school fall and why?
18. What sort of push is there on raising funds through alumni giving? Are there any sort of specific directives or statistics kept on former student-athlete alumni donations?
19. How do you feel like university administrators view the athletics department?
20. How level of a playing field do you believe Division III athletics is?

## Appendix C

### **IRB Approval**

**On 9/9/2015, the IRB reviewed the following submission:**

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	"Alternative Success Theory": An examination of what athletic department success means for small colleges
Investigator:	Claire Schaeperkoetter
IRB ID:	STUDY00003021
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• oral consent form, • IRB Claire Schaeperkoetter NCAA small college research 9.3.15 update.pdf</li> <li>• Alternate Success Theory interview questions.docx</li> </ul>

The IRB approved the study on 9/9/2015.

1. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in the original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at [https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human\\_subjects\\_compliance\\_training](https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training).
2. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported immediately.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.
- 4.

Continuing review is not required for this project, however you are required to report any significant changes to the protocol prior to altering the project.

Please note university data security and handling requirements for your project:  
<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/IT/DataClassificationandHandlingProceduresGuide.htm>

You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the “Documents” tab in eCompliance.

Sincerely,  
 Stephanie Dyson Elms, MPA  
 IRB Administrator, KU Lawrence Campus

## Appendix D

### **Informed Consent**

As a doctoral student in the University of Kansas's Department of Health, Sport, and Exercise Science, I am conducting a research project about NCAA small college athletics. I would like to interview and observe to obtain your views on the role of athletics in the university and how success is measured for the athletics departments.

Your participation is expected to take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. You have no obligation to participate and you may discontinue your involvement at any time. Your participation should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, the information obtained from the study will help us gain a better understanding of the environment and experiences of NCAA Division III personnel. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission.

The interview will be recorded. Recording is not required to participate. You may stop taping at any time. The recordings will be transcribed by me. Only the investigators will have access to recordings which will be stored on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed after transcription.

Participation in the interview and observation indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it you may ask us at the Department of Health, Sport, and Exercise Sciences. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at (785) 864-7429 or email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

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### **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Claire Cecilia Schaeperkoetter was born and raised in Columbia, Missouri. She graduated from Rock Bridge High School in 2008 before attending Washington University in St. Louis. Along with completing a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a Bachelor of Science in Spanish in 2012, Claire was a Division III women's basketball player. She was awarded a Masters of Science in Education (Sport Management specialization) at the University of Kansas in 2013, while also serving as a Graduate Assistant in the athletics department. In May of 2017, she was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Physical Education (Sport Management specialization) from the University of Kansas. She is currently employed as an Assistant Professor of Sport Management at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois.