

DECISION-MAKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS:
CASE STUDY ON THE BIG TEN CONFERENCE REALIGNMENT

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This study focuses on the decision-making institutional leaders use during the process of conference realignment at the Division I level. Intercollegiate athletics has existed within higher education for well over a century. Conflicting values and objectives have persisted between intercollegiate athletic departments and the institutions of higher education with which they are affiliated. The publicity an institution receives from intercollegiate athletics, however, is more than any academic achievement can provide, so how college presidents make decisions that involve intercollegiate athletics is critical to higher education. The literature reveals that the economic climate has little to no significant impact on institutions' spending when it comes to intercollegiate athletics (Frank, 2004; Smith, 2008; Fisher, 2009). In fact, many institutions and athletic departments at the Division I level lose money every year (Knight Commission, 2010). Thus, if not financially, then how do decision-makers in higher education weigh the costs versus the perceived benefits when it comes to intercollegiate athletics?

Intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level has recently seen a wave of change in conference memberships. Over a two and half year period (June 2010 to December 2012), 77 Division I institutions changed conference affiliations for either their entire athletic departments or at least their football programs. Traditionally, conference membership has been determined by geography and by shared institutional values and objectives, and so this high number of changes over a 30-month period is a departure from these traditions. Examining conference realignment sheds insight into the decision-making process institutional leaders use when analyzing the costs and benefits of intercollegiate athletics to higher education.

Max Weber's rational decision-making model (Weber 1956), which analyzed the cost-benefit value of alternatives as well as the extent to which the alternatives reflected shared

cultural values and beliefs. This model evolved when March and Simon (1958) proposed the common model for rational decision-making, contending that actors enter into decision-making situations with known objectives and that the cost-benefit value for each of the alternatives is determined by those objectives. The actors gather information on alternative solutions and then select the optimal alternative. Chaffee (1983) suggested five criteria for examining the rational decision-making process. They are (1) values and objectives, (2) alternatives, (3) centralization of decision-making, (4) understanding of consequences, and (5) value maximizing choice. Chaffee's criteria guided this case study on conference realignment in the Big Ten Conference.

This study found that presidents identify values and objectives prior to making decisions of whether or not to realign and expand conference membership, and then they evaluate alternatives in terms of how well their institutions match Big Ten leaders' stated values and objectives. The affirmative decisions of the presidents studied resulted in increases in revenues and brands at each institution. This research contributes to the process of decision-making by leaders in intercollegiate athletics, particularly at the Division I level. From a broader scope, the results contribute to the rational decision-making model and the criteria used to test it.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	18
Chapter 3 Methodology.....	49
Chapter 4 Findings.....	67
Chapter 5 Discussion and Implications.....	108
References.....	141
Appendix A Document Summary Form.....	159
Appendix B Approval from UIUC IRB for Research.....	160
Appendix C Informed Consent Form.....	161
Appendix D Interview Protocol / Questions.....	165
Appendix E Timeline for Archival Records and Documents.....	167

Chapter 1 Introduction

Institutions in California, Idaho, and Texas are forming coalitions with schools on the Eastern Seaboard. The Big 12 represents ten members. Seven institutions announce they are leaving the Big East together. Traditional rivalries shunned for greener pastures. Geographical footprints tossed to the side.

As conference realignment took center stage in intercollegiate athletics at the NCAA Division I level, the sentiments expressed above were pervasive. From June 2010 to December 2012, there were rampant changes across college athletic conferences. During this period, 77 institutions at the Division I level either changed conference affiliation for their entire athletic department or for just their football program. As conferences and institutions go through what to many feel like seismic shifts, some institutions have bonded together, forming coalitions to protect like interests. In attempts to secure stability, members of conferences have raised costs for institutions looking to bolt (Peloquin, 2012). Casting a long shadow over this extensive realignment was the concurrent historic economic downturn in the United States. Institutions sought out a more stable, and more lucrative, financial future as the country emerged from a dark fiscal period.

From 2008 to 2012, the United States experienced the biggest economic recession since the Great Depression (Yen, 2011). Facing large deficits and growing debt, federal and state governments have revisited budgets repeatedly looking for ways to rein in spending, and higher education has felt the impact of budget cuts. Though the recent economic recession brought attention to these cuts, for the better part of thirty years, postsecondary institutions have seen a steady decline in federal and state support (Goldin & Katz, 1998; Zusman, 2005). Making the situation more difficult, institutional costs (e.g. salaries and benefits, facilities, etc.) have steadily

increased (Wellman, Desrochers, & Lenihan, 2009). Decreasing budgets combined with rising institutional costs have forced leaders in higher education to make some difficult decisions.

Programs and services in the academic setting are being trimmed or cut altogether.

In order to make up for budget deficits, administrators have had to make critical decisions on resource generating and allocation. Seeking potential revenue sources for their respective institutions, some have looked to commercial avenues. Bok (2003) argues that the commercializing of higher education is not something new and Toma (2003) further recognizes that, “institutions need to better understand themselves for what they really are-places that represent themselves apart from the commercial world in order to serve it-but they operate firmly within the ‘outside world’ in the acquisition of resources”(p. 272).

In efforts to compete for resources, schools vie for funds to improve the educational experiences offered by their institutions, a process made more challenging by the financial cuts. Since leaders want their institutions perceived as the best, they make to enhance academic reputation, thereby improving in national rankings. “As in business, a positive image – provided people become aware of it – is the basis of prestige and the pipeline through which resources flow in American higher education.”(Toma, 2003, p. 118) Promoting positive perceptions of institutions builds their brand names with potential “consumers” – that is, prospective students, donors, and research partners in the corporate sector. Universities and colleges want to raise money, but not for the same reason a business would desire to do so. With the exception of for-profit institutions, universities and colleges are generally defined as non-profit. Therefore, the more revenues rise, the more the institution can spend. The need for money is not just a reaction to budget cuts, but also a chronic condition of American higher education wherein institutions compete for the best faculty, students, and facilities, a competition that requires extensive

financial assets (Bok, 2003). For the “potential buyer” or “investor” into higher education, evaluating seemingly comparable institutions can be problematic. For example, how does a prospective student know that student support services at one school are any better than those at another? Or how might a potential donor assess academic curriculum within the same major but from two separate institutions? There is not a tangible measure to which a consumer can look to and provide answers to those questions.

Although it is difficult to compare institutions with one another using academic measures, they do compete in non-academic venues where measures of success are more easily determined. One such sector is intercollegiate athletics. Institutions can compete in sports in front of a national audience, vying for supremacy on the scoreboard. For example, Ohio State University’s football team competed against the University of Oregon for the inaugural Division I FBS National Championship in January 2015 and the Ohio State Buckeyes won. The public knows that the football team at Ohio State is better than the team at Oregon. Since athletic teams are associated with their institutions, they must be considered a part of higher education.

Athletic departments, though, are one area in higher education that appears to be immune to the budget cuts associated with the recent recession. Actually, financial reports from intercollegiate athletic programs show steady increases in revenue and spending during this time from 2008 to 2012 (Knight Commission, 2010; Fulks, 2012). How did this part of higher education seem to thrive while other areas were feeling the pinch?

One explanation is the explosion of television revenues over the past thirty years for spectator sports, or revenue sports, at the Division I level of intercollegiate athletics, particularly Power 5 conferences, formerly referred to Bowl Championship Series (BCS) conferences. Spectator sports, or revenue sports, refer to football and men’s basketball. Although basketball

offers more games to televise, football contracts command the most money (Staples, 2012). An example: the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) packaged the entire 1983 football season and sold the broadcast rights for \$69.7 million dollars. Fast-forward thirty years and ESPN paid \$80 million to broadcast the Rose Bowl game on January 1, 2015. Adjusted for inflation, the 1983 deal would be worth \$90.3 million today (Staples, 2012). In short, the amount of money that once bought a television network an entire season's worth of games, now only gets a network one game. Obviously not all games command this amount of money, but the growth of revenue in television rights is evident. According to Dosh (2011), the PAC 12 and the Big Ten conferences receive \$250 million and \$248.2 million respectively a year in television revenue alone. With revenues increasing at that pace, athletic departments were able to continue spending money without concern for larger trends in the economy.

Television networks have a strong stake in college athletics. Networks look especially to secure deals with Power 5 conferences for the broadcast rights to football and men's basketball seasons. With intercollegiate athletics spending continuing to rise while budget cuts happening elsewhere on campuses, leaders from institutions demanded that their conferences negotiate bigger deals with the networks. In order to do so, conferences explored means for improving the brand, or value, of the conference. Seeking an advantage in negotiations, conferences have turned to realignment. For the purpose of this study, conference realignment is defined as when an institution accepts an invitation to join an athletic conference with which they are not already affiliated. For example, the University of Missouri is a Division I member that participated within the Big 12 Conference. During the period of conference realignment mentioned earlier, Missouri accepted an offer to join the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and leave the Big 12.

Conference realignment touches all levels of intercollegiate athletics, but the “big-time” athletic programs at the Division I level receive the most attention for their activity.

Conference realignment is not new to intercollegiate athletics. Institutions changed membership in the early history of college athletics, but they did so out of desire to compete with philosophically similar institutions to or reform measures for decreasing investment in athletics imposed by their administrations (Thelin, 1994). The NCAA has seen modest changes in conference membership at the Division I level in 1990-1992, 1996, and 2004-2006. During those periods, however, only a few institutions changed conference membership. Relatively speaking, the NCAA Division I athletic conferences have experienced an enormous shift in membership starting in 2010. Since 2010, 64 schools have changed full-membership and 13 others have changed conference affiliation of their football program (2010-2012 NCAA conference realignment, 2012). With 335 members overall, Division I intercollegiate athletics has seen over 23% of its members move to a different conference between June 2010 through December 2012 while the previous twenty years saw less than a 3% change combined.

Athletics can act as a window to an institution, providing tremendous amounts of exposure to potential consumers. Conference leaders make decisions to invite other institutions to join them while institutional leaders search for more lucrative opportunities in different conferences. Exposure, perceptions of academic prestige, and revenue are all assumed benefits in conference realignment. Inviting an institution with a successful and prestigious tradition in intercollegiate athletics can strengthen the overall brand of the conference, thereby also raising the profile of all institutions involved. Conferences then have a better “product” to market and sell and can negotiate larger television contracts, which only continue to grow even during

difficult economic times. With this said, the focus now turns to the process conference leaders use to make decisions about which institutions they should invite.

Statement of the Problem

Nearly one in every four institutions who compete at the Division I level of intercollegiate athletics has changed conference affiliation since 2010. During the twenty years prior, only 3% of Division I programs changed conference membership. Revenue has been established as a driving force for these changes (Staples, 2012), but less is known about leaders' decision-making process. Historically, intercollegiate athletic conferences have always been designed with geographic proximity in mind (Thelin, 1994; Sweitzer, 2009); however, with recent realignment, this is no longer the case. Boise State, located in Idaho, accepted an invitation to join the Big East conference, made up of schools primarily on the Eastern Seaboard. West Virginia University left the Big East to join the Big 12, whose closest current member is 880 miles away in Ames, Iowa (Iowa State University). On a map, the moves may not make sense, but the opportunity to increase revenue and exposure, and to enhance brand, make moving to another conference an intriguing possibility. Intercollegiate athletics provide an important opportunity to build and communicate the image and reputation of a university. Television broadcasts of college football and men's basketball games provide a level of exposure that cannot be achieved by academic events. "The bottom line is that national publicity has long been the central factor in institutional prestige – and spectator sports continue to be what receives the bulk of the attention devoted to higher education among most people, particularly by those outside of academe" (Toma, 2003, p. 118). The problem, however, is that little is known about the decision-making process of leadership regarding conference realignment. When a conference decides to invite an institution(s), they are in essence tying the reputation of its

members to the reputation of the prospective member. What are the steps leading up to that point? Leaders from different institutions, each with concerns and issues unique to their own campuses, work together and make a decision to invite institution(s). These decisions impact whole institutions and not just their athletic programs, thus it is necessary to explore the rationale and methods used in order to gain a better understanding of the process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how conference leadership and members make decisions related to conference realignment. As previously stated, intercollegiate athletics has experienced an enormous shift conference affiliations, but little is known about the process of how these important decisions are being made. There are two sides to the decision process in conference realignment. They are (1) institutions discussing potential members to invite, and (2) institutions making the decision as to whether or not to accept an invitation or pursue an opportunity to join a different conference. This study will examine the decision process current conference members experience when determining whether or not to invite another institution(s) to join.

Understanding this process includes: identifying and examining the roles decision-makers have in conference realignment, the criteria used to evaluate prospective institutions, internal and external influences on the discussion of prospective schools, and discussion of final decisions as to which institutions to invite.

Research Questions

This study will focus on decision-making processes of senior level administrators in institutions of higher education, with a particular focus on decisions related to conference realignment. Conference realignment involves institutions collaboratively making choices that

impact each of their athletic programs as well as their conference for both the short and the long term. This study will examine these decision-making processes from multiple perspectives.

Within the realignment activity of the time period under examination, several questions emerge regarding the decision-making process of the leaders involved. Who is involved in the decision-making process? What is the rationale for the process used to identify and discuss prospective institutions? What are the steps for making a final decision and selecting an institution(s) to invite?

To thoroughly examine these primary questions, further follow-up questions need to be asked. With regards to who is involved and what influenced this group to consider conference realignment: What factors led leadership to the decision that conference realignment was necessary? Regarding the rationale used during the process of identifying and discussing prospective institutions: How did leadership gather information on prospective institutions? In order to be considered a good candidate for membership, what were the criteria? Who established these criteria? How was information shared on prospective institutions and what influence did outside sources have on the process? What was the evaluation process for prospective institutions? Finally, regarding the steps on making a final decision, selecting an institution(s) to invite: What were the deciding factors for selecting an institution? What was the process for determining the number of institutions to invite?

The primary questions guided the examination of the process that leaders followed when making decisions related to conference expansion. The questions also allowed the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the rationale used in decision-making by leaders in athletic departments in institutions of higher education.

Importance of the Study

This study explores the decision-making process of conference and institutional leaders. It examines the intricacies of the strategic decision-making process in the context of conference realignment. Chaffee (1983) called for more research in decision-making in higher education nearly thirty years ago. Little is known about how leadership progresses through decision-making processes that impact the long-term plans of an institution. More recently, scholars have continued to push for more knowledge on decision-making and claim much of the process is still unknown (Eckel, 2002; Tierney, 2008).

The literature on intercollegiate athletics tends to group institutions by many different categories (e.g. by NCAA level, gender, sport, revenue, etc.); however, little has been done to examine conferences and how affiliation with other institutions can bring revenue, prestige, and overall strengthened brands for all members involved. Prior research has focused on the impact conference realignment has on the academic reputation and achievement of member institutions (Kramer II & Trivette, 2012). The critical piece that is missing is analyzing the decision-making process and the rationale for those strategic decisions. In regard to college sports at the BCS level, the complexities of conference realignment offer an invaluable look at strategic decision-making in higher education, especially in relation to developing a brand. Findings could help conference officials, college presidents, and athletic directors in understanding the process of conference realignment both from the perspective of a conference looking to expand and from that of an institution changing affiliation. This study will identify factors to consider, describe discussions amongst the leaders involved, and relate conclusions drawn by a group of high-ranking officials.

This study will also demonstrate how institutional leaders make decisions regarding intercollegiate athletics, particularly because of the effect conference associations in college sports have on the perception of academics on a campus. The decisions made on conference realignment impact other areas of an institution, not just athletics. Understanding the process of conference realignment will provide insight into the value of perception and brand from the perspective of institutional leaders. Further, this study could answer calls for accountability and transparency in higher education – namely, a better understanding of the place of intercollegiate athletics within the overall mission of higher education institutions, as well as of rationales for the investment of large sums of money into the athletic department by institutional leaders.

This study could provide clarification as to why certain institutions are more appealing than others as prospective new conference members. Clarity on the characteristics and qualities that make an institution desirable can be valuable to college presidents seeking ways to raise the reputation and perception of their campus. With this knowledge, presidents can strategically plan for improving their athletic departments and institutions by seeking an invitation to a bigger, more lucrative conference. This study could also explain why conference leaders sometimes choose an institution that does not fit the geographical footprint of the existing conference membership. As mentioned earlier, athletic conferences traditionally came together on the basis of proximity of one institution to another, similarity in institutional type, and investment into athletics. According to the recent activity in conference realignment, geography no longer appears to be a concern. Recognizing the rationale and processes of leaders' decision making will shed light on this recent activity that dominated "big time" college athletics during the three-year period studied.

Scope of the Proposed Study

The focus for this study is the decision-making process leaders use concerning conference realignment. College presidents and athletic directors are trying to position their institutions so they can reap financial benefits and enhance their brands via conference affiliation. The recent trend in conference realignment began in December 2009 when the Big Ten announced they were going to conduct a 12-18 month study about expanding their current 11-member league. Only six months later, in June 2010, the University of Nebraska accepted an invitation from the Big Ten and left the Big 12. In this case, the process sped up because the PAC 10 was extending invitations to several members of the Big 12, and Nebraska received an ultimatum from the Big 12 requesting its intention to stay or leave the league (Moltz, 2010). This change sparked a massive wave of movement over the next two years, ultimately resulting in 64 institutions changing conference affiliations for their entire athletic departments and 13 more making a change for only their football programs.

My research explores the decision-making processes involved in conference realignment. The boundaries for the study extend around the Big Ten Conference from December 2009 to June 2010. The time period for this study begins with the conference office's announcement that it was exploring possible opportunities to expand the conference and ends with the moment Nebraska received the invitation. This study does not examine decision-making for realignment in other Division I intercollegiate conferences. Attempting to examine more than one expansion process is beyond the scope of this project because each conference within Division I athletics is unique in its membership, size, history, tradition, and culture. The Big Ten's decision to invite Nebraska is a distinct case because it was the first domino to fall, so to speak, in this recent wave of movement across conferences. Big Ten Conference officials' announcement that they were

going to study conference expansion led to many other conferences and institutions reviewing and eventually changing memberships. Other conferences were merely reacting, trying to maintain existence, and fight for survival. This study uses interviews with conference and institutional leaders at the member institutions prior to conference realignment in order to obtain a better understanding of the decision process these leaders used during realignment from December 2009 to June 2010.

At this time, it should be acknowledged that the Big Ten Conference realigned again in November 2012 when it announced the University of Maryland and Rutgers University were invited to join the league. This study only examines the decision-making process for the time period from December 2009 to June 2010, and does not include the most recent activity within the Big Ten.

There were two motivations for inviting Nebraska. First and perhaps most obvious was the desire to add a 12th member to the conference so that the Big Ten Conference would be eligible to host a football conference championship. This single game would significantly increase revenue. Second, especially considering that football is the most popular intercollegiate sport, the Nebraska Football team's long tradition full of triumph and tremendous national support made them an appealing prospect. "Its successful football program provides the University of Nebraska with a specific identity when the institution is otherwise rather ordinary – it is a strong brand because of football" (Toma, 2003, p. 197). Television contracts have pushed branding to the forefront for institutions and intercollegiate athletics. When the Big Ten invited Nebraska it was making an attempt to build and strengthen the conference brand, a brand that is made from all the participating members.

In 2012, the Big Ten Conference invited Maryland and Rutgers and for the first time went outside the geographic footprint of the league. Both campuses, however, are located in large television markets. According to Nielsen local television market estimates (Nielsen Company, 2012), by adding Maryland and Rutgers, the Big Ten would be adding the 1st (New York) and 8th (Washington, D.C.) ranked markets in the country. Therefore, though neither school is within traditional geographic proximity of another Big Ten member, adding them gave the conference five of the top fifteen television markets in the country, including 2 of the top 3.

Though certainly worth examination, the decision-making process for this realignment was still developing at the time of data collection, and thus is not included in this study. Further, it is difficult to put brackets on these decisions because they are still evolving and relatively new; Maryland and Rutgers just began participating in league play this academic year (2014-15). As noted earlier, over the course of 18 months, a lot can change when it comes to conference realignment. For example, Boise State announced in December 2011 that it was accepting an invitation for its football program to join the Big East Conference and leave the Mountain West. They would start participating in league games in the fall of 2013. Over the next year, though, the Big East saw many defections, and its stability as a conference and membership in the BCS came into question. Without playing a game in the Big East, Boise State announced exactly a year later that it was leaving the Big East and going back to the Mountain West. The Big East announced it would charge Boise State an exit fee. The situation in the Big East demonstrates that there is still shifting, and realignment is not complete. It is not a given that the Big Ten will not continue to invite more schools during this research. This study focuses on realignment that is completed and not on developing situations. In fact, participants may be hesitant to discuss the Maryland and Rutgers situation, whereas those involved in the Nebraska case have had a

significant amount of time to reflect on the process since it has concluded. A set of questions comparing the Nebraska case to the Maryland and Rutgers case will be prepared in case participants give the opportunity to do so. However, the decision process for inviting Nebraska will be the main focus for the data collection in this study.

Delimitations and Limitations

As in all studies, the researcher set specific parameters, yet factors beyond the researcher's control also influence the study. The decision was made to interview the Big Ten Conference commissioner, presidents of member institutions, and their athletic directors during the time period of the case, December 2009 to June 2010. Faculty athletic representatives, student-athletes, development officers, and alumni were not included. Thelin (1994) and Smith (2010) both address the decreased input and authority that faculty has in intercollegiate athletics today. Faculty athletic representatives, along with the other groups, were not involved in the decision-making process, and thus do not pertain to the focus for this study. These groups would be more useful if the research targeted perceptions of branding and the value it carries.

This research also does not examine the expansion or realignment of other conferences. The population was narrowed in order to limit the number of factors under examination, which would be difficult when looking at 77 institutions choosing to change conference affiliation.

Another decision was made to focus solely on the Nebraska decision, to the exclusion of the decision to add Maryland and Rutgers. As stated in the previous section, those two additions revolved around television markets, whereas the Nebraska case is about building a stronger brand and getting the conference eligible for a conference football championship game. Since the conference membership had remained the same for twenty years prior to Nebraska's invitation – and since the other conferences were fairly static as well with only 3% of the

Division I population changing conference affiliation during this period – restricting the analysis to the Nebraska case allows for decisions that follow within the Big Ten as well as other conferences to be evaluated using this study as a starting point.

A final limitation relates to methodology. This project does not use quantitative methods. Qualitative research reveals more depth in the decision-making process and allows for exploration into the rationale leaders used. This will be discussed further in chapter three.

There are limitations to this study that are beyond the control of the researcher. These findings cannot be generalized to other conference realignment decisions or processes. As mentioned earlier, the Big Ten conference has a number of factors that play a role in its decision-making process that differ when compared to other intercollegiate athletic conferences within Division I. The Big Ten initiated the recent flurry of movement in conference realignment; however, the member institutions' financial situations are stable compared to other conferences, thereby creating further divergence from other conferences. Another limitation is the researcher's interview skills. The researcher is not an expert, but a novice at best in this area of obtaining information. The researcher did do two recent research projects and gained valuable experience in interviewing senior level administrators. Related is the difficulty of obtaining information from participants who may or may not be willing to share all information and may especially choose not to share the details of conflicts and controversies that existed during the process.

Logistical limitations include time constraints, research participants' ability to recall events and information, change in leadership, and participation. Due to the timetable of the study, the researcher could not interview more people on each campus. The participants may have had a difficult time recalling the details of the process, and therefore, what participants

recall about the decision-making process and what actually happened could vary. Since the realignment was completed in 2010, there have been changes in leadership at some of the member institutions involved in this study, making it difficult to contact the presidents who were involved in the realignment process. The last limitation involves participation. All institutions did not elect to participate in the study. Six of the eleven institutions participated in the study.

Definitions of Terms

NCAA is an acronym for the National Collegiate Athletic Association. This is the governing body that oversees intercollegiate athletics for its members. Various levels, called Division I, Division II, and Division III organize members. Each division has its own requirements that pertain to personnel, amateurism, recruiting, eligibility, financial aid, and season length (NCAA Membership, 2010).

Division I is defined as the highest level of competition within the NCAA organizing structure. Member institutions must sponsor 14 varsity teams, with a minimum six for men and six for women. There are three subdivisions: Football Bowl, Football Championship, and Division I (remaining institutions that do not sponsor football). Overall there are 335 members, two-thirds of which are public universities and one-third of which are private (NCAA Membership, 2010).

Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) is defined by its use of the bowl system as a playoff when crowning a national champion in football. Institutions are required to sponsor 16 teams and have minimum attendance standards in football. There are 120 members divided into 11 conferences at the Division I FBS level. (NCAA Membership, 2010).

Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) is defined by its use of an NCAA playoff to determine its national champion in football. There are 118 members and it is considered Division I FCS level. (NCAA Membership, 2010).

Bowl Championship Series (BCS) is defined as the bowl system formerly used to determine the national champion in football for the FBS. It was created and managed by the commissioners of the eleven FBS conferences, the athletic director at Notre Dame, and bowl representatives from the five participating bowl games: the Tostitos Fiesta, Rose, Allstate Sugar, Discover Orange, and the BCS National Championship. Of the ten bids, six were automatic, going to the conference champions of the ACC, the Big East, the Big Ten, the Big 12, the PAC 10, and the SEC. The other four bids to these bowl games are considered at-large and open to any other team in these conferences, members of the remaining five other conferences in the FBS, or Notre Dame. For this paper, when the term BCS is used, it refers only to the members of the six conferences who receive an automatic bid and Notre Dame (The BCS is ..., 2010).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Though there is a plethora of research on intercollegiate athletics, within this body of work, conference realignment has received very little attention. Most of the existing research focuses on the academic success of student-athletes, the welfare of the student-athlete, the finances of intercollegiate athletics, intercollegiate athletics and commercialism, and the benefits of intercollegiate athletics for higher education.

From a historical lens, there has been conflict between academics and athletics since the beginning. The *student* in the term “student-athlete” has not been taken seriously since the beginning of intercollegiate athletics (Thelin, 1994; Smith, 2010). Special admission for academically unprepared student-athletes, coaches’ emphasis on sport over academics, and poor graduation rates are all examples of the distance commonly observed between athletics and the mission of higher education. In 1991, the Knight Commission released its first report on intercollegiate athletic reform. Reform measures focused on student-athlete welfare and achievement in the classroom (Knight Commission, 1991). This group has continued to lead the call for reform in intercollegiate athletics.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the NCAA made attempts to better align the values and objectives of academics and athletics at the collegiate level, particularly at Division I institutions, by drawing attention to the ways that the conflict between the commercial value of intercollegiate athletics and the overall mission of higher education informs leaders’ decisions. The NCAA has increased the number of requirements for initial eligibility for incoming freshmen, and recent NCAA legislation has mandated progress towards degree requirements for student-athletes. Commeaux and Harrison (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of studies the academic success of student-athletes who compete in Division I. They found that student-athletes

not prepared for the rigor of college work possessed common characteristics; they expressed particular concern for the low graduation rates for African-American males, especially those who compete in football and men's basketball. They also found a tendency for student-athletes to cluster in classes and majors at institutions. Commeaux and Harrison (2011) proposed a conceptual model that frames the college experience for student-athletes competing in Division I in stages from pre-college all the way through graduation. This conceptual framework guides future analysis in this sector of the literature on intercollegiate athletics.

Research consistently criticizes the lack of transparency in the finances of intercollegiate athletics and the lack of standardized accounting methods to report revenues and expenses (Knight Commission, 2010; Hesel & Perko, 2010; Bennett et al., 2010). Research reveals increased spending on intercollegiate athletic programs does not ensure success for those programs (Frank, 2004; Smith, 2008; Fisher, 2009). Decisions related to conference realignment take the finances into account. The decision-makers review cost-benefit analyses in exploration of the alternatives available within conference realignment.

This review includes a brief history of the NCAA and Big Ten Conference. From there it defines events that have led intercollegiate athletics to the recent wave of conference realignment. Studies on conference realignment come under review, followed by an examination of the role of rationality. The literature closes with a discussion section that synthesizes the connection of the reviewed body of knowledge to this study.

Background

The crew races between Harvard and Yale in the 1800's were the first intercollegiate athletic competitions in higher education. By the end of the century, football had taken over most campuses. The commercialization of intercollegiate athletics was born then with the rise of

local and national publicity (Toma, 2003; Thelin, 1994; Smith, 2010). Rudolph (1990) credits the rise of commercialism in intercollegiate athletics to the growth in popularity of football during the start of the 20th century. Newspapers gave teams tremendous publicity, creating national heroes out of young men carrying pigskin around a field. The increase in attention led to financial growth, brought in by gate receipts from large crowds attending games, as well as an increase in expenses. The tremendous growth in football stadiums in the 1920's demonstrated athletic departments' and institutions' increasing invest in their financial futures with athletics. The popularity of the sport seized the American imagination and dominated higher education culture. Rudolph even went as far to say, "from identifying an institution with color to identifying it with a football team was a very short step, and before long very many Americans would be acting as if the purpose of an American college or university were to field a football team" (p. 387).

The NCAA formed at the turn of the 20th century. The organization monitored and conducted championships for college athletics. With so many institutions and an equal variance in the size of athletic departments, the NCAA organized the schools into different divisions -- from Division III, requiring the lowest financial commitment from institutions, to Division I (D-1), which required the highest financial commitment.

During the lowest economic time for America, the Great Depression of the 1920's, intercollegiate athletics appeared to be immune to the financial hardships the rest of the country faced. Coaches' salaries were larger than professors' and by the end of the 1930's, 74 concrete stadiums existed in the United States, with 7 of them seating 70,000 plus (Thelin, 1994; Toma, 2003; Smith, 2010). Critics claimed that athletic departments across the country lacked oversight on budgets, that presidents and chancellors had no control over athletics. The

conflicting values and goals intercollegiate athletics presented to institutions of higher education were becoming apparent. In 1929, backed by the Carnegie Foundation, Howard Savage released the findings from an extensive study of the corrupt practices occurring in college athletics. The report concludes that commercialism and negligent attitude towards education were the roots of the dishonest trends emerging in intercollegiate athletics. Savage based his findings from interviews he conducted at institutions with administrative leaders and not from statistical evidence. In his 1930 book, *Universities: American, English, and German*, Abraham Flexner, another sharp critic of athletics, condemned administrations' lack of control over the amount of institutional money spent on athletics (Thelin, 1994). Commercialization of intercollegiate athletics had taken over the nation, and institutional leaders ignored calls for reform. The commercial characteristics of intercollegiate athletics exposed cracks in higher education's idealistic ivory tower. Throughout the 20th century, though, the NCAA would continue to sponsor intercollegiate athletics, and this component of higher education continued growing and distancing itself from the mission of higher education, ultimately becoming the multi-billion dollar commercial industry it is today.

Origin of the Big Ten Conference

On January 11, 1895, presidents from seven Midwest universities came together in Chicago to discuss best practices in regulating intercollegiate athletics. From these meetings, the first intercollegiate athletic conference emerged, the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives. The founding members were University of Chicago, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, Purdue University, and the University of Wisconsin. Indiana University and the University of Iowa became members in 1899, and Ohio State in 1912 (Big Ten History, 2010). Michigan State replaced

University of Chicago (UC) in 1946. The original-founding members, also referred to as the Western Conference, eventually became the Big Ten Conference by 1917 (Big Ten History, 2010). Immediately, the conference would demonstrate its willingness to be a leader in change by advocating for eligibility rules for student-athletes. The Big Ten Conference attempted to bridge the gap between the values and goals of academics and athletics in higher education.

The conference has always been a leader in academics as is evidenced by its Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) initiative founded more than half a century ago in 1958. The CIC is a consortium of universities that includes all of the Big Ten institutions and the University of Chicago. The mission of the CIC is to share information and resources with each other in order for all of the involved institutions and their scholars to achieve even more (About CIC, 2011). The conference has taken the lead when it comes to the academic requirements for student-athletes. The Big Ten has consistently pushed for higher academic eligibility requirements for incoming as well as current student-athletes. An example is the progress-towards-degree requirements for Big Ten student-athletes, especially as those requirements are compared to those of the NCAA. The NCAA passed legislation in 2003 mandating the following requirements: upon completion of 4 semesters, student-athletes must have 40% of a degree completed, 60% after 6 semesters, and 80% after 8 semesters. The average degree program requires 120 credits to graduate, thus the 40-60-80 equated to 48-72-96 credits (NCAA Academic and Membership Affairs, 2012). The Big Ten demanded more from student-athletes by requiring them to have the highest of either 40-60-80% or 51-78-105 credits (regardless of total credit hours for degree). Leadership has been stable in the Big Ten. There have only been five commissioners in the conference since that position's inception in 1922. They are: Major John L. Griffith 1922-1944; Kenneth "Tug" Wilson 1944-1961; Bill Reed 1961-1971; Wayne

Duke 1971-1989; and James E. Delany 1989-current. The stability in leadership has been, in part, why the Big Ten has consistently set the standard when it comes to intercollegiate athletics connecting with the mission of higher education.

The Big Ten has positioned itself as one of the premier conferences in America for both athletics and academics. The conference has taken an active role in trying to maintain institutions' of higher education professed or focus on academics. Iconic figures and annual events in the athletic arena have raised the conference's status through the years. The Ohio State-Michigan football rivalry is arguably one of the best, and even had an ESPN documentary dedicated to it. Legendary, national-championship-winning coaches (such as football coaches Bo Schembechler at Michigan and Woody Hayes at Ohio State, men's basketball coach Bobby Knight at Indiana, and wrestling coach Dan Gable at Iowa) took on larger than life popularity even outside the athletic venue. An even more impressive list of past student-athletes have gone on to have successful careers: Magic Johnson (Michigan State), Jesse Owens and Jack Nicklaus (Ohio State), Dick Butkus (Illinois), Gerald Ford (Michigan), and Mark Spitz (Indiana) are just a few of the prominent former Big Ten student-athletes (Big Ten History, 2010).

Major Events Impacting Athletic Conferences

Intercollegiate athletic conferences have been in existence for over one hundred years. As of 2015, there are 31 conferences at the NCAA Division I level. Division I is subdivided further into three categories: FBS, FCS, No-Football. The FBS has ten conferences; FCS has thirteen, and nine conferences that do not participate in football. This study is focusing on conference realignment at the FBS level, specifically the Big Ten Conference. The FBS has an informal divide between the Power 5 conferences and the Group of 5 conferences. The Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten, Big 12, Pacific 12 (PAC 12), and Southeastern Conference

(SEC) make up the Power 5. Conference USA (C-USA), Mid-American (MAC), Mountain West (MWC), Sun Belt, and Western Athletic (WAC) are the Group of 5 (NCAA.org). Note, Notre Dame participates in Division I football and is member of the ACC for all other sports. The Notre Dame football program, while independent, is considered a member of the Power 5.

The landscape of intercollegiate athletics has changed dramatically in the past thirty years, particularly because of conference realignment, as is evidenced, for example, by the number of independents today compared to thirty years ago. In 1980 there were 31 football independents and now there are only four (Army, Brigham Young, Navy, and Notre Dame). More recently, intercollegiate athletic conferences have experienced a flurry of movement across FBS members. There are 124 institutions competing in FBS conferences, and over a short period (June 2010 to December 2012), 32 of those institutions have changed conference affiliation (2010-12 NCAA conference realignment, 2012). In other words, one in every four FBS institutions changed conference affiliation within a span of two and half years.

Economic reasons have driven conference realignment. Institutions want to secure membership within conferences that provide financial stability or more generated revenue. This emphasis on profit is a defining characteristic of a commercial attitude, and thus, the influence of commercialism has been present in intercollegiate athletics for over a hundred years. With the growth of commercialism surrounding intercollegiate athletics, revenues have expanded, particularly from television sources. Over the last thirty years, for events have most significantly caused this expansion: the 1984 Supreme Court case *Oklahoma vs. NCAA*, Penn State's 1990 move into the Big Ten Conference, the 1992 SEC Conference Championship football game, and the 2007 creation of the Big Ten Conference television network.

Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma v. NCAA. In 1952 the members of the NCAA noticed a trend in decreasing attendance at college football games that coincided with the introduction of television broadcasts of games (Fort, 2011). Concerned over lost gate revenue, institutions granted the NCAA the authority to act, and the NCAA obtained complete control of the broadcasting rights for its members. Thirty years later, administrators changed their opinions when they saw the opportunity for increased revenue through television broadcasts. The goal of the NCAA Television Plan was always to reduce the negative impact of live television upon live game attendance for college football. By 1982, the plan had evolved into separate agreements wherein each network bid for distribution rights. ABC, CBS, and TNT broadcasted fourteen live games each over the course of a season. Over a four-year period, a given athletic program could appear a maximum six times, and the networks agreed to pay those schools either a set price or minimum aggregate compensation (Excerpts from Supreme Court..., 1984).

In (year), members of the SEC, Southwest, ACC, and many independent football powers convened and formed the College Football Association (CFA) in an attempt to challenge the existing structure. No one from the PAC 8 or Big Ten joined the CFA. Led by the University of Oklahoma and University of Georgia, members of the CFA felt their programs could command more appearances and more money per appearance. In *Oklahoma v. N.C.A.A.* (1984) the CFA sued the NCAA over its television plan, claiming that it violated sections 1 and 2 of the Sherman Antitrust Act. The NCAA argued that its mission to work as a non-profit model, educating its student-athletes and providing opportunities to compete, was unique, and thus that its policies and regulations should not be subject to antitrust laws (Pacey, 1985). The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the CFA, finding the financial model of the NCAA, particularly football and men's basketball, to be purely commercial. The court therefore saw the NCAA as a monopoly

restraining the CFA's institutions' rights to negotiate television contracts. This decision opened the door to a new revenue source for institutions and conferences, the selling of television rights, which would lead conferences to explore realignment in order to offer the best "product" and command the most dollars from networks in negotiations.

Penn State joins the Big Ten. Conference membership at the BCS level remained fairly stable until the last ten years of the 20th century. In 1990, the Big Ten got the realignment ball rolling when Penn State University (PSU) joined the conference; however, it was not a smooth process. Until that point, the Penn State football team was an independent, while the rest of their athletic programs were members of the Atlantic Ten. In 1988, the football team was coming off its first losing season, and Bryce Jordan, president at the time, was concerned about the financial stability of the athletic department. Head football coach Joe Paterno had built the program into a national power and was the face for the Penn State brand, but the iconic football coach was aging, and the success of the football team appeared to be dwindling. President Jordan reached out to a close colleague in Stan Ikenberry, president at the University of Illinois and former Senior Vice-President at the Penn State campus. In December of 1989, the Council of Ten (committee of all Big Ten presidents) voted unanimously to extend an invitation to Penn State (Sansevere, 1990).

Prior to the announcement by the conference office, word of the invitation leaked to the media. Athletic directors, faculty athletic representatives, and coaches in the league were upset they had not been consulted (Kier, 1990). University of Michigan Athletic Director Bo Schembechler was quoted saying, "This confirms the worst fear I have of presidents getting too much control in athletics...not one athletic director was consulted on this matter" (Sansevere, 1990). The athletic directors, coaches, and faculty athletic representatives bonded together in

protest of the council's actions. Stan Ikenberry, the chairperson for the Council of Ten, released a statement in December 1989 saying that the conference members would go back to their campuses and discuss details that remained to be resolved, particularly scheduling and other financial concerns related to Penn State's inclusion in the Big Ten (Ikenberry, 1989).

Six months later, in June 1990, the Council of Ten voted 7-3 in favor of inviting Penn State to the conference. Indiana University, Michigan State and University of Michigan did not support the expansion. Presidents did not comment publicly on the vote, but Michigan State board chairperson Larry Owens criticized the expansion: "No one in this entire process has ever shown what advantages there are for MSU or for the Big Ten in adding an eleventh member"(Makinen & Miner, 1990, p. 1A-4A). Where was the rationale for adding Penn State? Though representatives of the three dissenting institutions did not see the benefit outweighing the cost, President Jordan proclaimed the merger to be a perfect fit, academically speaking. Penn State was a member of the AAU, and the Big Ten is the only athletic conference in the NCAA in which all participating institutions have also been elected to the AAU. Jordan also commented that Penn State is a land-grant university, like the Universities of Illinois, Michigan State, Minnesota, Ohio State, Purdue, and Wisconsin (Jordan, 1989). Leaders involved in the decision process did not address financial reasons for expanding.

Conference realignment had not been a topic for discussion in intercollegiate athletics for quite some time. By inviting Penn State, the Big Ten initiated the conversation drawing attention to the potential financial appeals of television (Sherman, 1990). Since the *Oklahoma v. NCAA* ruling, athletic conferences were negotiating new deals for their members; independent athletic programs did not want to be left out. Exposure and market share are important to television networks, and the conferences with the most television sets in their region demanded

the most dollars from the networks. Soon after the Big Ten announced it was inviting Penn State, the SEC announced it was looking to expand from 10 to possibly 12 or even 14 schools. Earlier that same year Notre Dame had announced an exclusive five-year \$37 million deal with NBC (Sandomir, 1991). Digital cable television and the limitless broadcasting opportunities did not yet exist, and thus institutions looked for the best combinations to get the most television sets in their conference footprint in order to secure a piece of the television revenue before the network space was gone. The network deals athletic conferences were securing led to more exposure and only increased demand more. One conference took conference realignment one-step further than the Big Ten had, finding an additional revenue stream, the football conference championship game.

SEC Inaugural Football Conference Championship Game. In 1987, the NCAA passed a rule allowing conferences with twelve or more members to hold a title game, a decision that became a landmark event in intercollegiate athletics (Blum, 1992). The SEC added the University of South Carolina and the University of Arkansas in 1992, which brought the overall membership to twelve institutions, taking advantage of the obscure new rule. In December of 1992, the University of Alabama defeated the University of Florida in the inaugural SEC Championship football game, and the landscape of college athletics was never the same, “Other expansion-minded conferences and institutions, looking for ways to erase the red ink in their sports budgets, kept close tabs on the SEC’s playoff experiment, which was expected to generate as much as \$8 million dollars” (Blum, 1992, para. 3). The financial windfall of a conference championship game was the driving force for administrators looking to expand their conference to twelve members during this time period. The ACC and Big East followed, both increasing their membership to twelve members.

An event that started out as an experiment twenty years ago became wildly successful, today generating nearly \$20 million a year for the SEC (Ourand & Smith, 2010a). The exposure that the conference championship games offer is larger games in the regular season. On a typical Saturday in the fall, during the regular season, there might be anywhere from 40 to 60 intercollegiate games played. The conference championship games are the first Saturday in December where there are only 10 to 15 games played. The ACC, Big Ten, C-USA, PAC 12, and SEC each only have 2 programs playing. The networks pay a high premium for these title games because of the national audience they attract because of the limited number of games available that day (Weaver, 2009). That said, the amount of money intercollegiate athletics spectator sports (football and men's basketball) gained from the networks did not come close to the revenues of the professional sport leagues. Therefore, it was not long before conferences started devising plans to obtain larger shares of the pie by taking control of their own broadcasting rights.

Big Ten Network. During the 1990s, Commissioner Delany observed the changing landscape for revenues and broadcasting rights in the sporting industry. Television contracts grew at exponential rates, and the networks dictated more and more who would play and when (Weaver, 2009). Digital television was expanding the space available for programming, and so cable and satellite companies were searching for more products to broadcast. In the late 1990s, Fox launched sports regional networks in hopes of providing coverage of more sporting. By the turn of the century, George Steinbrenner, owner of the New York Yankees, unveiled the Yankee Entertainment and Sports Network (YES). It was not long after that the NFL, MLB, and NBA introduced their own networks, too.

Wanting to protect the values and mission of the Big Ten and seeing a demand for sport programming, Delany and the Council of Ten began explore options for the Big Ten as a brand on the media market (Weaver, 2009). It was critical for the conference to maximize profits, and the best way to do that was to access the television landscape as a group. With the NFL, MLB, and NASCAR contracts all coming up for negotiations around 2004-05, precise timing was imperative. The Big Ten needed to strike a deal before these leagues negotiated their respective deals. If Delany and the conference waited, there would be a lot less money left on the table. To move ahead, the Big Ten agreed to a deal with Fox Sports, launching the Big Ten Network in 2006. The terms of the deal stipulated a twenty-year commitment, with the Big Ten receiving \$70 million a year with a 3% increase annually; it also included a \$35 million signing bonus for the conference. The Big Ten saw an increase in exposure, ability to promote content other than athletics, and of course, increased revenue (Weaver, 2009).

Money drove all of these four events, each of which had a major impact on changing the landscape of intercollegiate athletics, specifically for Power 5 conferences. Since the *Oklahoma v. NCAA* decision, “the financial stakes have grown enormously...driven in part by the growth of the television market for college athletics, both on cable and the major networks”(Weiner, 2009, p. 7). Shortly after the case, in 1990, the SEC distributed \$16 million in revenue amongst its members. By 2009, after conference realignment, the creation of conference championship game, and the birth of conference networks, the SEC distribution grew to \$130 million (Weiner, 2009). Member institutions saw big increases in revenue from the broadcasting rights, which provided more fuel for the spending growth in intercollegiate athletics.

These four events played a key role in the growth of revenue in intercollegiate athletics at the BCS level, particularly by shifting the control of revenue from individual institutions, to the

NCAA, and now to the conferences. The two largest grossing revenue sports in college athletics are men's basketball and football. Conferences have control over the broadcasting rights during the regular season. The NCAA controls the distribution of the postseason television revenue for men's basketball, otherwise known as the NCAA Men's Basketball Division I tournament.

Division I Football is a different story. There, conferences have taken control of the broadcasting rights for their regular season (similar to basketball), but the NCAA does not sponsor the football postseason. With conferences having so much control over the television revenue, membership is more important now than ever before. With the background established for intercollegiate athletics, I move now to an examination of the literature on conference realignment.

Literature on Intercollegiate Athletic Conferences

The NCAA membership is divided into three categories, Division I, II, and III. The focus for this literature review has been Division I. Division I is broken down into three categories for football membership: FBS, FCS, or no football (see definition of terms in previous chapter). The top tier, FBS, has ten conferences. Very little research has focused on conferences. The few studies available examined impact of affiliation and benefits of realignment.

Sandy and Sloane (2004), obtaining data from IPEDS and *US News and World Report* rankings, used a fixed-effects panel framework to study the benefits received by an institution's change in athletic department affiliation. Of the 693 institutions that reported to IPEDS, their sample was the 109 schools that moved up from either Division III to Division II or Division II to Division I between 1991 and 1999. Sandy and Sloane observed that there are "substantial gains in student numbers and in student quality when a given institution raises the level of its sports affiliation" (p. 93). Although the research reviewed in the previous section on benefits of intercollegiate athletics to higher education had mixed findings, Sandy and Sloane found

significant benefits when using change of membership level as factor. They did point out, however, that due to inconsistency in data available, their study does not measure the effects of any other programs or actual costs of having intercollegiate athletics.

Maxcy (2004) reviewed the process and decision-making involved in the NCAA's 1997 restructuring of its governing body. He found that though presidents obtained control, this was primarily a superficial revision. Another change was from a democratic model to a federated one, wherein major revenue producing football conferences have majority on legislative issues. This shift gave control of allocation of revenues to BCS conferences (now called Power 5), which have the highest commercial investment. The new structure gives 90% of bowl money and less than 50% of men's basketball tournament contracts to the power conferences. Maxcy infers that the altered governance structure emphasizes conference affiliation, which provides incentives for conference realignment. This informative piece gives an overview of NCAA legislation that shifted political power to BCS conferences (Power 5). Conference affiliation is important since the branding of a conference and its members is stronger than a single institution.

Sweitzer (2009) studied the implications of division and conference membership for an institution in a project that examined all NCAA institutions with an athletic program. Sweitzer found that the primary factors in conference alignment are institutional comparability and then geographic proximity. "Given the investment in athletics in Division I, particularly among the larger programs in the major conferences, competing against like institutions is more important than geographic proximity" (Sweitzer, 2009, p. 58). He credits significant exposure benefits for an institution that competes in a BCS conference. The BCS conferences generate the most revenue through television and ticket sales, thus motivating other institutions to seek membership.

Sweitzer (2009) asserts that Boston College, University of Miami, and Virginia Tech left the Big East for the ACC in 2004 for the financial benefits presented earlier and to be connected to a more prestigious group of institutions. Conference affiliation can enhance institutional prestige, so existing members care about the reputation of an institution they consider inviting, even at the expense of stretching the existing geographic footprint. He argues that institutions will switch conferences for “reasons beyond athletics” (p. 60), supporting this contention with the example of Penn State joining the Big Ten and becoming a member of the collaborating academic group, the CIC.

Sweitzer (2009) claims that, especially after the departure from the Big East of Boston College, University of Miami, and Virginia Tech, the financial allure of membership in a BCS Conference prompted the move of five institutions (University of Cincinnati, DePaul University, University of Louisville, Marquette University, and University of South Florida) from Conference USA to Big East. However, he cites presidents from Louisville and South Florida claiming academic benefits in the change in membership as well, particularly their concern for improving national academic reputation as research universities. Sweitzer found also that stakeholders outside the institution play a role in conference realignment. The governor of Virginia, for example, advocated for the inclusion of Virginia Tech over Syracuse in the ACC. A public flagship institution is an economic engine for the state, and its value increases when it is affiliated with other elite research institutions, Sweitzer concludes that institutions want to compete with like institutions, institutions that share the same approach, characteristics, and location. If conference affiliation adds prestige, then institutions must consider it seriously.

Four studies focus on conference realignment (Hill & Kikulis, 1999; Groza, 2010; Abbey, Capaldi, & Lombardi, 2011; Kramer II & Trivette, 2012). These four pieces focus on

realignment decision-making, realignment's impact on game attendance, realignment's impact on academic distinction, and realignment's effect on academic missions. Hill and Kikulis (1999) examined the dynamics of strategic decision-making within western Canadian university athletic conferences. Recognizing methodologies used and differences between intercollegiate athletics and higher education structures in the United States and Canada limits the ability to generalize their findings to decision-making processes for conference realignment in the NCAA. With that said, the Canadian process can be informative. The structure of intercollegiate athletic conferences on the western side of the country had been stable since the inception of the Canada West University Athletic Association (CWUAA) and the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC). Hill and Kikulis (1999) cite financial pressure on Canadian athletic programs as a growing concern and the effects of local governments' cost cutting approaches on budgets in all facets of postsecondary education. In 1989, the deans of physical education departments at western Canadian universities met to propose solutions to maintaining their athletic programs. Proposals to restructure the two existing conferences and merge them together presented conflicting information as to whether travel costs would rise or fall. Since the deans did not reach consensus, they did not take any action. By 1994, discussion of conference realignment had emerged again, leading to the case study Hill and Kikulis present.

Hill and Kikulis (1999) used a case study methodology because it provided the best way for better understanding "the dynamics associated with strategic decision-making process"(p. 26). Their study used the conceptual framework from the Bradford Studies, which, conducted by Hickson and associates, made critical contributions to the strategic decision-making literature. "The Bradford Studies acknowledged that many aspects need to be incorporated in order to fully understand and possibly develop a holistic theory regarding strategic decision making"(p. 19).

The three concepts identified that describe the characteristics of the decision-making process are politicality, complexity, and rules of the game. Politicality is the impact people have on the decision process. Complexity relates to the issues influencing the topic being discussed. Rules of the game refer to the structure the decision-making process takes based on the organization involved in it. All three concepts played a role in influencing a given decision as well as in influencing one another.

Hill and Kikulis (1999) used this model to form interview questions and to code and analyze data collected in the form of documents and transcripts of their semi-structured interviews. The authors used documentation from conference meetings, committee reports, memos by GPAC, and CWUAA constitution and bylaws. Interviewees were identified from that documentation. They interviewed seventeen people, including ten current athletic directors, two former athletic directors, one former conference president, two academic administrators, and two executive members. They audiotaped the interviews, each of which from 40-90 minutes and took place over a two-month period in 1995. They conducted sixteen interviews in person, and one was done over the phone. They transcribed interviews and then reviewed them for general ideas and themes. The areas discussed in the interviews were the people who are involved in the decision process for restructuring, the nature of restructuring, and the rules regarding the structure of the decision-making process. They also questioned participants as to their backgrounds with university athletics and their overall views of restructuring issues and decision processes. A non-numerical, unstructured data indexing, searching, and theorizing computer package, NUD-IST, was used to organize, store, and retrieve data.

The two significant political themes identified were those in favor of restructuring and those who were not. Birnbaum (1988) suggests coalitions form in a political environment and

participants join forces in order to protect their personal vested interests. In Hill and Kukulis' case, they found that external groups had an influence on the internal groups involved in the decision-making process. The diversity of interest revealed a complex and political decision-making process, with those who can control process becoming powerful.

Hill and Kukulis (1999) found that diversity of interests, levels of influence, and both the constraining and enabling rules of the game contributed to the ways the topic of restructuring was interpreted and how processes emerged to make restructuring decisions. One of the complexity issues influencing interviewees' interpretations of restructuring was the resentment CWUAA representatives expressed each time discussion of restructuring came up. The issues of scheduling, representation on national committees, and finances were also key in this decision-making process. The complexity issues associated with restructuring meant that different groups voiced different concerns.

The third concept, rules of the game, can be divided into formal and informal rules. Since GPAC institutions were requesting membership in the CWUAA, decision-makers followed the formal rules laid out in the CWUAA constitution and bylaws. The balance of power favored members of the CWUAA because only full members could vote on matters of restructuring. Thus, the CWUAA institutions felt ensured that their interests would be protected. In this case, rules of the game gave power to one group over another, thus having as much influence, if not more, in the decision-making process as complexity and politicality did. The results from the case study "suggest the rules of the game interact with complexity and politicality to define the decision-making process" (Hill & Kukulis, 1999, p. 40). The authors recommended future research exploring the ways that the informal rules of organizational culture also influence the decision-making process.

Even though this case study on conference realignment applies to institutions in another country, it provides valuable insight for this study. The steps in the methodology are valid, following a structured format. Researchers included all major stakeholders, and conducted all interviews in same manner. A conceptual framework guided the study and questions asked in the process. The qualitative case format provides details that could not have been discovered via a survey or statistical analysis.

Other studies on conference realignment examine the impact of realignment rather than the decision process toward realignment. Groza (2010) used an empirical model to review the impact a change in conference affiliation has on football game attendance. His sample included 21 Division I programs that changed conference membership from 2004 to 2006. Games played after the change in conference affiliation drew significantly more fans than the games prior to the change did. These findings indicate that reputation of a conference may influence game day attendance. Groza credited the increase in attendance to fan interest in seeing new, unfamiliar conference rivalries emerge as one reason for the drawing-power a conference might possess. The findings in this study motivate for athletic directors to work towards placing their programs into better conferences. A weakness in the study is the use of game attendance as a measure. Many different variables could impact attendance, such as cost of tickets, weather, or day of the week or time of day a game is played.

Abby, Capaldi, and Lombardi (2011) recently used data from nine measures to index the universities in the six BCS conferences according to academic characteristics. Measures used were total research expenditures from all sources, federal research conducted, endowment, annual giving, national academy membership, faculty awards, doctoral degrees awarded,

postdoctoral fellowships supported, and average SAT scores of entering students. They found that:

Although the decisions about conference alignments and realignments turn primarily on issues of television, audiences, institutional athletic comparability, and of course money, the quality of an institution's athletic conference is one of the elements that helps universities create and sustain a reputation for high quality, much prized by prospective students and alumni.(Abbey, Capaldi, & Lombardi, 2011, para 13)

Their findings after the wave of conference expansion ranked the Big Ten first in academic distinction followed by the PAC 12, ACC, SEC, Big 12 and Big East.

Kramer II and Trivette (2012) presented a paper at the annual meeting for Association for Institutional Research on the impact of conference realignment on academic outcomes. The study analyzed data from 2004-2011 IPED surveys, and EADA and USA Today databases. The sample population was all Division I institutions. Kramer II and Trivette found one-year and three-year lagged effects on institutional selectivity and student profiles. Effects were larger for three-year lags suggesting that schools need two years to fully integrate their brand into new athletic conference markets. Student applications increased by 34% immediately following conference realignment but diminished by the third subsequent year. Institutions experienced a 3% decrease in admission rate and 5% increase in admission yield rate after three years. Kramer II and Trivette concluded that institutional and athletic administrators must understand the impacts that seemingly isolated decisions may have on one another. Conference realignment appears to enhance a school's ability to attract and retain new students of high academic quality. The study codifies the connections between athletics and academics and the benefits that can occur through mutual consultations. Impact on out-of-state applications would be a stronger indicator for impact on application increases, as it would show increase in exposure to regions outside the institution's proximity.

Discussion

Toma (2003) argues that college athletics, particularly football, is part of the collegiate ideal, and that the high profile sports provide branding opportunities via television exposure that academic achievements cannot garner. Institutional leaders tend to follow myths and perceptions more than research. They believe investing in athletics and building a successful program on the field can improve prestige and institutional rankings (Sweitzer, 2009). A measure of branding that has received little attention is the impact of conference affiliation and conference realignment. A few studies have proven that conference realignment did enhance academic and athletic outcomes (Groza, 2010; Kramer & Trivette, 2012). Abby, Capaldi, and Lombardi's (2011) research confirms that students and alumni value their institution's conference affiliation. Institutions in other conferences desire membership in the powerful and wealthy Power 5. On the other side of the conference affiliation decision, institutional leaders must consider the benefits and reputation a prospective institution can bring to an already powerful, prosperous conference. Hill and Kikulis (1999) provide an in-depth analysis of the decision-making process for conference realignment, presenting both sides of the process. A limitation, however, in terms of my own research questions, is that the subjects in the case study are from Canada. Studies have looked at the reasons for conference realignment and the benefits for institutions, however, the decision-making process for conference realignment has not been examined through an organizational theory lens.

Decision-Making

Conference realignment is a hot topic in intercollegiate athletics at the current moment. There are many concerns and issues institutional leaders must take into consideration when examining conference realignment. Leaders approach decision-making in higher education with

complexity (Auerbach, 2008). High stakes, public process, and the impact on populations within and outside of campus contribute to the complexity facing senior administrators trying to make decisions and plans for the long-term. Strategic decision-making is important in terms of choices made and assets used. It focuses on rare decisions made by top leaders that affect the path followed and level of success attained by the organization (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). Conference realignment is a rare decision that can have major ramifications on the public perception of an institution. Research has not examined the implications conference affiliation has on branding but it is evident that national exposure does increase based on the television contracts associated with respective conferences. The recent major break from traditional, geographical-based conference membership suggest that leaders are making these strategic decisions in a chaotic and inconsistent manner. Revenue concerns drive these decisions, and to many in the higher education community, institutional-fit appears ignored. Often, the question of benefits and costs of inviting an institution to a conference surfaces. The values and objectives of a conference must align with the alternatives examined by a central group of decision-makers. The rational decision-making model provides a framework for reviewing the decisions leaders make with regard to conference realignment.

Rational decision-making. The rational decision-making model traces back to classical theorist Max Weber. Weber was a German philosopher and political economist who understood the cost-benefit analysis found in capitalism and the relationship it shared with cultural values and beliefs (Weber, 1956). Simon (1976) introduced three steps when facing a decision: (1) list all alternative strategies, (2) determine all consequences that go with each strategy, and (3) comparatively evaluate all of the sets of consequences. However, he argued “it is obviously

impossible for the individual to know all his alternatives or all their consequences” (Simon, 1976, p. 67).

March and Simon (1958) proposed what is considered the common model for rational action. Actors enter into a decision with known objectives and the cost-benefit value for alternatives as determined by the objectives. The actors gather information on alternative solutions and then select the optimal alternative. Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992) reviewed the literature since and found that empirical research supports the existence of cognitive limits to the rational model. Decision-makers satisfice rather than optimize. It is not possible for a human to engage in a comprehensive search for all alternatives. The basic phases (identification of the problem, development of alternatives based on values, and selection of action) are not always performed in same sequence and are often repeated during the process.

Application of rational decision-making model. The rational decision-making model is primarily used in studies of economics and political science (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Milanowski (1997) examined the use of the rational model within the economics. His research in the larger public sector concluded that decision-making on job pay is more consistent with a bureaucratic model than a rational one. His case study evaluated the job pay for 250 classifications over a ten-year period and his results proved that the “public sector job pay is not highly responsive to market pay levels” (Milanowski, 1997, p. 169). Allison’s seminal political piece examines the Cuban-missile crisis and uses rational decision-making as one of the lenses with which to dissect that sequence of events. Rationality adds consistency to the application of values and objectives in order to select the best alternative. Allison and Zelikow (1999) define rationality as “consistent, value-maximizing choice within specified constraints” (p. 18). The core concepts of rational the decision-making model are the values and objectives of the

organization, identifying the set of alternatives set before the decision-maker, assessing the cost-benefit of each choice, and making the selection that ranks highest according to the stated values (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Allison's case study on the government's decision-making processes revealed how standard operating procedures conflicted with strategic decisions the government attempted to make during a time of crisis, thus Allison's findings challenged the use of the rational decision-making model.

Application of rational decision-making model within higher education. Higher education administrators make strategic decisions that impact their institutions. The rational decision-making model has been used to evaluate the path higher education leaders follow in these decision-making processes. A few examples include studies on policy and legislative decisions by political leaders that directly impact postsecondary institutions (Bachoo, 2008; Singleton, 2006). Two recent studies evaluated the choices made at the institutional level by deans and chairpersons. The rational decision-making model framed how their decisions aligned with their respective organizational or departmental missions (Hlavac, 2012; Keeney, 2012).

Bachoo (2008) examined the role of three governors shared in shaping the environment for higher education in the state of Connecticut. Through the use of interviews, the case study found that the rational model was used more than other models in the decision-making processes under examination. Singleton (2006), however, found bureaucracy and politics dominated administrative decision-making for universities dealing with new legislation reforms. The study used three case studies, each one on a different institution. Keeney (2012) examined strategic decision-making of fifty deans in academic health centers at public research universities. Her mixed-method study found that deans tied professional identity to appreciation of data. More than half of the administrators interviewed in this study initially said that information and facts

had great impact on their decision-making, thereby aligning with the rational decision-making model. However, when further prompted, several deans professed the actual use of intuition frame over rationality.

The literature provides evidence of the rational decision-making model in use within higher education. Critics have argued against the rational model and for the existence of cognitive limits (Simon, 1976; Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). Decision-makers must satisfice rather than optimize alternatives and can rarely engage in a comprehensive search. An emerging perspective is that decision-makers can be rational some ways, but not in others. The rational model is considered so stringent in theoretical demands that few efforts are made to test it. Thus, research has focused on bounded or limited rationality rather than its ideal form.

Chaffee (1983), an exception, argues that rational decision-making does occur and can be used by higher education administrators to their advantage. Her study examined decision-making for the budget process at one institution over a ten-year period. The case study found that rational decision-making enhances credibility. Chaffee (1983) identified essential features necessary for the rational decision-making model:

- Clear set of values and objectives. They serve as criteria for decision.
- Stability, confidence and predictability present in organization's atmosphere.
- Consistency of decision-makers.
- Analysis of the situation as strategic, tactical or operational.
- Identification of who makes decision, who is affected, and to what degree each group participates.
- Consider all possible solutions simultaneously.
- Method to assess that an alternative produces results that match values and objectives.

- Evaluate match after decision made.

Chaffee (1983) also provided five criteria to test rational model. They are:

- Values and Objectives
- Alternatives
- Centralization of decision-making
- Understanding of consequences
- Value maximizing choice.

Chaffee (1983) used mission statements to identify the objectives and values for a department or institution. Her interviews searched for evidence of simultaneous consideration of a complete examination of a wide array of choices by a central authoritative body. Through interviews, she examined the analysis of the cost versus benefit of each choice. Documents and outcomes observed whether or not the alternative selected advanced the values and objectives of the department or institution.

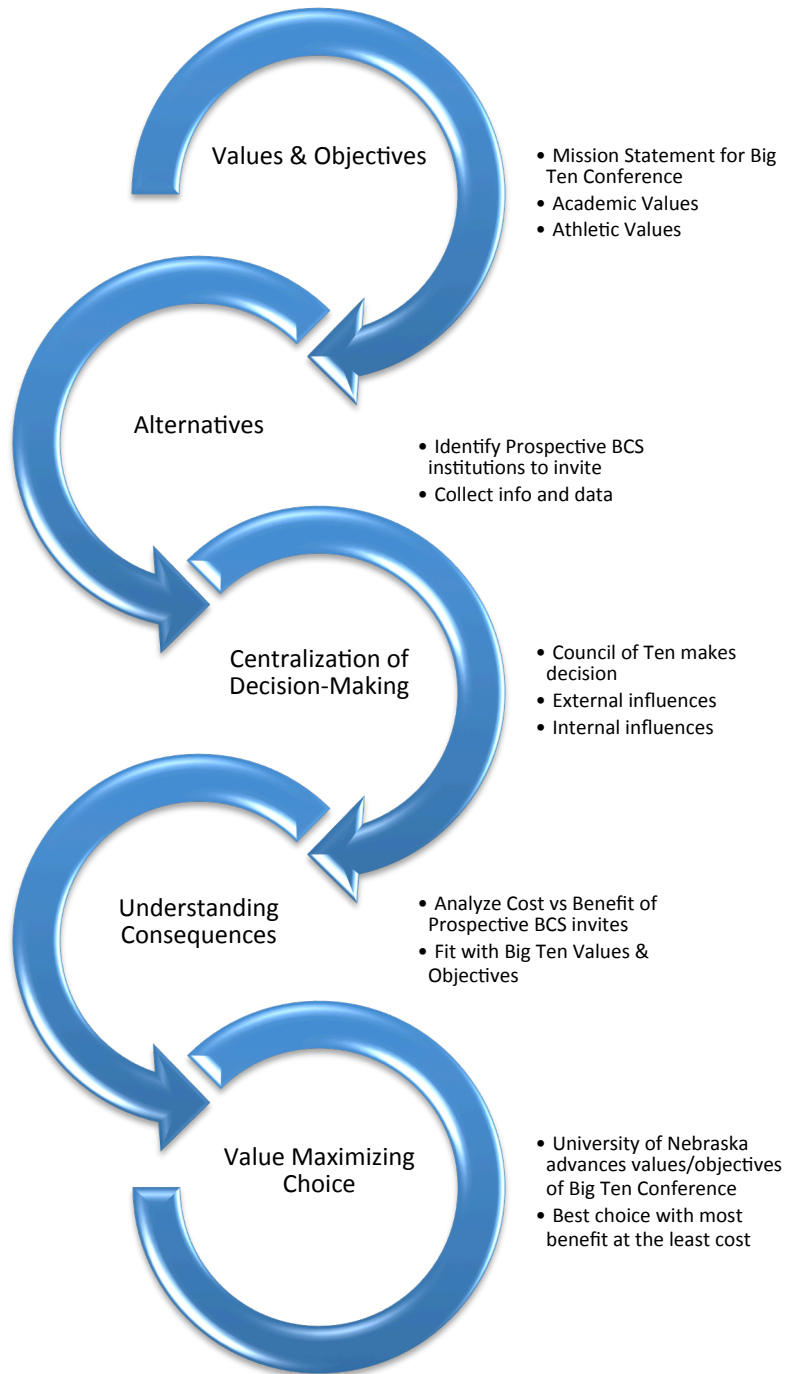
Chaffee's study inspired the format used for this study on conference realignment. The rational decision-making model has been used to examine different areas across higher education with the exception of administrative decisions impacting intercollegiate athletics. Thus, there is a gap in the decision-making literature. Decision-making models are not used to evaluate the decisions leaders are making in intercollegiate athletics, rather, this study will examine the role of rationality in conference realignment decision-making.

Conceptual Framework

Chaffee (1983) presents a model to use in examination of the use of rationality in a decision-making process. The five criteria described in the previous section allow the researcher to test the rational model. Figure 1 portrays a framework for examining the use of rationality in

conference realignment. The examination of decision-making by Big Ten Conference leaders uses the five criteria given by Chaffee to test the rational decision-making model.

Figure 1 – The use of rationality in Big Ten Conference Realignment Decision-Making Process



Limitations of Literature

This body of literature also has limitations. One limitation is the lack of qualitative research on conference affiliation and realignment. For the past two years, conference expansion and realignment has dominated the attention in intercollegiate athletics. However, conference realignment has been present in intercollegiate athletics since the birth of conferences (Thelin, 1994). After the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the institutions over the NCAA in *Oklahoma v. NCAA*, conferences took control of the television packages, thus obtaining power of a large and important piece of the financial structure under which Division I athletics operate. Presidents have been making strategic decisions as to conference affiliation throughout the history of intercollegiate athletics, yet there are no qualitative studies to document this process, allowing for comparison to the current wave of realignment washing over Division I athletics. Examining the decision process on conference realignment through a qualitative lens makes it possible to develop an understanding for how leaders prioritize values and why they choose certain paths. Understanding the value leaders see in college sports is useful for beginning the construction of a plan for how athletics and academics can coexist within the dynamic of seemingly conflicting values and objectives. More research is needed on the impact of conference realignment and affiliation. The group of institutions to which a school is connected has an impact on quality and prestige, therefore placing a high importance on conference affiliation and the decisions for conference realignment.

Future Research

Avenues for potential future research can be found from these limitations. One option is to examine the conference expansion process and investigate the decision-making process leaders used. This can be done from a few different perspectives. It could be looked at from the

perspective of institutions who choose to leave one conference for another, or from that of members of a conference who invite an institution to join them. It can also be done over a particular time period, examining the history of a conference and its growth through time. There are several different scenarios for the study of conference realignment within a decision-making model.

Other future research that could prove valuable to this literature would be exploration of the concept of branding and how it benefits intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level. With intercollegiate athletics becoming more and more commercialized, an institution's brand can impact generated revenue dollars not only for itself but also for other members of the institution's conference by adding to the marketability of the conference brand.

Conclusion

Intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level receive constant attention from the media and researchers. Debates persist as to whether "big time" sports benefit or bring detriment to higher education. Presidents and athletic directors value the exposure, connection to alumni, branding, and increase in student quality and applicants that successful athletic programs bring to an institution. These benefits along with the revenue generated provide justification to presidents for defending the spending trends seen in college athletics. The amount of revenue generated yearly from these athletic departments is similar to that generated by big businesses. Presidents and athletic directors are playing the roles of CEO, making decisions worth millions of dollars to their respective institutions. "Decision-making as a process involves individuals making choices; similarly, strategic decision-making involves executives making choices that will affect the long-term future of the organization" (Keeney, 2012, p. 55). Conference realignment is a process on which leaders must collaborate, making choices that impact the short and long-term

future of their institutions and conferences. It is critical for leadership to understand the value of following a model when attempting to make strategic decisions that will benefit those involved. Decision-making by leaders reflects an institution's values, ethics, and goals (Tierney, 2008). Strategic decisions are made with these factors in mind and objectives are prioritized and reached through long term planning. Examining the decision-making process for conference realignment by leaders could reveal the qualities and characteristics leaders in higher education value and support.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter includes the description of research design, case study design, case selection, data collection, data analysis, validity, role of researcher, and limitations.

Research Design

According to Manning and Stage (2003b), one of the most important decisions a researcher will make is the choice of which methodological technique to use. The research design for this study is qualitative and the technique is case study. Defining the orientation of qualitative research is beneficial when matching an approach with a research question. A qualitative technique is a form of inquiry that assists in understanding and describing the meaning of social phenomena (Manning & Stage, 2003a). Stake (2010) notes qualitative research relies on human perception and understanding through a microanalysis. Qualitative designs do not manipulate variables nor do they have a predetermined hypothesis to test, but rather they involve listening to the experiences of the subjects. This study emphasizes understanding the rationale for the choices leaders made during the (year) to (year) Big Ten Conference realignment process. The “what” and “how many” are known; the conference invited one school, the University of Nebraska. This study is not examining the cause and effect expansion has on institutions but rather exploring the experiences decision-makers had in the process, thus qualitative does fit.

Yin (2003) defines the scope of a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). To better understand conference realignment, it is highly pertinent to uncover the decision process leaders use when considering extending a membership invitation to another institution. Three characteristics define case study

techniques. They are the type of research question, the extent of control over behavioral events, and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2003). First, the researcher must determine the nature of the research question. Questions “why” or “how” a phenomenon occurred are suited for a case study. Second, case study methods require that the researcher have no control over behavioral or relevant events. The third characteristic is the emphasis on contemporary events. I desire to explore the “how” and “why” for the decision-making process used by the leaders of the Big Ten Conference that resulted in the extension of an invitation to the University of Nebraska in 2010. I understand that I have little control over the happenings under examination and the results discovered. The third characteristic of case study research is present in my focus on recent decisions involving conference realignment.

Stake (2005) emphasizes designing a study that allows the researcher to understand the case rather than to make generalizations about a phenomenon. Case studies emphasize relationships and comprehension of the experience(s) of subject(s) over attempts to make generalizations from those meanings. A researcher chooses the case that allows for greatest understanding of the critical issue of interest (Stake, 2005). The tension that exists between conflicting missions between academics and intercollegiate athletics at the division I level forces presidents to make decisions using a cost-benefit analysis. This critical issue is present in the Big Ten Conference, elite research institutions that also compete in big-time athletics. Examining the role of rationality in Big Ten Conference realignment will provide a deeper understanding of decision-making in conference realignment.

Case Selection

The initial step in designing a case study is to identify a case and establish the logic for the study. Case study method contributes to our knowledge of a person, group, or organization (Yin, 2009). The Big Ten Conference decision to invite the University of Nebraska was chosen as the case amongst many other conference realignment decisions. The timeframe for the case is from the Big Ten's announcement in December 2009 that conference realignment would be explored to June 2010 when Big Ten leaders announced that Nebraska was accepting an invitation to the conference. A rationale supported by scholars (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2005) for using a single case study is that the case is extreme or unique. From June 2010 through December 2012, seventy-seven institutions changed conference affiliation. The reason the Big Ten Conference was chosen over others is because the membership has been long considered the best at promoting academics and athletics at the highest level (Thelin, 1994; Weaver, 2009; Smith, 2010). At the Division I level these two areas share values but also have conflicting objectives. As stated in the literature, the rational decision-making model involves assessing the data and making a choice by identifying the alternative that provides the best benefit at the least cost. Thus, the Big Ten Conference is an ideal case to review when it comes to the role of rationality in conference realignment.

The approach and timeline announced for this decision was unique. The Big Ten first announced it would take twelve to eighteen months to examine conference realignment. No other conference announced a timeline of this length. The process sped up due to activity in other BCS conferences, thus forcing the Big Ten to make a decision within seven months. Still, this case provides a unique opportunity to explore a decision-making process over a period of several months by learning about the relationships and discussions conference and institutional

leaders shared. Enough time has passed that leaders should feel comfortable talking about this sensitive information, and the case has unfolded to completion with Nebraska making a transition to the conference. Other conference realignment issues are still unfolding, even within the Big Ten; thus, those cases are still ongoing and an analytical bracket cannot put around them.

Setting and Participants. All the members of the Big Ten Conference, prior to Nebraska joining the league, will be asked to participate in the case study with the exception of the University of Illinois (UIUC). The Champaign-Urbana campus was removed from the study for a few reasons. First, during the conference realignment process Illinois was dealing with an admission scandal on its campus that resulted in the president being relieved of his duties and forced to leave his position. Dr. Stan Ikenberry, former president of the UIUC campus and current faculty member, was selected as interim president until a permanent replacement could be found. From a previous study that the researcher conducted, Dr. Ikenberry was forthcoming that he was not involved in the expansion decision-making process until the very end. This fact and his position as a member of the researcher's committee for this study provide a conflict in interest. The remaining institutions include Indiana University, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Penn State University, Purdue University, and the University of Wisconsin.

Conference Profile. The Big Ten Conference membership includes twelve institutions. The member institutions that will be asked to participate in this study are: Indiana University, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, the Ohio State University, Penn State University, Purdue University, and University of Wisconsin. As stated previously, the leaders at the University of

Illinois will not be asked to participate, and the University of Nebraska became the 12th member when it accepted the invitation to join the conference in 2010. All twelve institutions are affiliated with Division I athletics and members of a BCS conference. The context of the case is the realignment process of the conference. At the time of the realignment in the summer of 2010, all of the schools were members of the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU); however, in April 2011 Nebraska lost its status when the members of the AAU voted to eliminate the institution. This is an important note to consider when examining the decision process of leaders. It is an example of the conflict between academic values and athletic values that exists in higher education. Conference members had to weigh the cost of lowering their academic values for the benefit of inviting an institution rich in tradition and athletic success.

On page 55, Figure 2 provides a profile of the twelve members, concentrating on institutional type, membership status for Big Ten and AAU, number of varsity sports sponsor, and yearly revenue and expense totals. Eleven of the twelve members of the conference are public institutions with enrollments ranging from 24,000 at University of Nebraska to roughly 64,000 at Ohio State. Northwestern, the only private institution, has the smallest enrollment at 16,000. The Big Ten has a long tradition of promoting academics and athletics. It is the only athletic conference in the country whose institutions are all members of the AAU, but this changed when Nebraska officially became a member on July 1, 2011. The athletic departments in the conference all sponsor more than the NCAA required 14 varsity sports. Purdue and Northwestern are the smallest departments with 18 and 19 programs respectively, while Penn State and Ohio State are the largest with 29 and 35 apiece (Big Ten History, 2010). It is well documented that the Big Ten considers all members of their conference as equal and shares all conference revenue evenly (Kalafa, 2010; Ourand & Smith, 2010a; Ourand & M., 2010b; Ubben,

2009; Weaver, 2010). However, Figure 2 reveals that even with this agreement there is still wide disparity across the conference in total revenue for each member. The Big Ten Conference revenue comes from national television contracts, bowl games, NCAA tournament, conference championships, licenses and royalties, and the Big Ten Network contract. According to Ourand and Smith (2010c), the conference paid out \$19.9 million dollars to each of its eleven members in the 2010 fiscal year, a 42% increase when comparing numbers from 2006-2007 fiscal year, where each school was paid \$14 million dollars (Ubben, 2009). The inflation in profits stems from new television contracts with ABC/ESPN and the Big Ten Network that paid \$9 million and \$7 million per school in 2010 fiscal year (Ourand & Smith, 2010a), which equates to close to 80% of the total disbursement each school received. The benefit for the Big Ten conference in adding a 12th member was the ability to host a championship game in football that would pit the two top teams of the conference against one another. The Big Ten made the announcement it will bid the event as a separate entity and demand as much as \$15 to \$20 million for the rights (Mandel, 2009; Ourand & M., 2010a). Critical to this process, however, was finding a program that would add to the pie and not diminish the existing school's take on conference revenue.

Figure 2 lists total revenue and total expenses for 2009-2011. The data from EADA database was used for these numbers (<http://ope.ed.gov/athletics/Index.aspx>). Eight of the institutions report expenses increasing at higher rate during this period. Only Iowa and Ohio State report revenue growing faster than their expenses. Presidents make decisions to subsidize athletic departments at the expense of academic programs on campus. This case study will examine conflicting ideals and try to understand the role of rationality in institutional decision-making.

Figure 2
Big Ten Conference - Institutional Profiles

School	Illinois		Indiana		Iowa		Michigan		Michigan State		Minnesota		Nebraska		Northwestern		Ohio State		Penn State		Purdue		Wisconsin		
	Type	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Private	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	Public	
Join Big Ten	1896	Yes	1899	Yes	1899	Yes	1949	Yes	1896	Yes	1896	Yes	2011	No*	1896	Yes	1912	Yes	1990	Yes	1896	Yes	1896	Yes	
AAU Member	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		No*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
# of Sports	21		24		27		25		23		23		21		19		35		29		18		23		
Total Revenues																									
2009	\$53,502,485	\$68,769,582	\$88,510,052	\$106,666,191	\$80,064,147	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,483,733	\$48,921,823	\$123,174,176	\$106,614,724	\$104,934,205	\$131,815,819	\$116,118,026	\$108,252,284	\$61,508,748	\$88,220,330	\$93,901,820	\$90,122,238	
2010	\$57,539,367	\$70,172,641	\$92,903,555	\$122,486,490	\$80,963,182	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$83,679,756	\$56,214,293	\$131,815,819	\$116,118,026	\$113,184,855	\$116,400,943	\$116,118,026	\$108,252,284	\$66,066,303	\$84,498,339	\$93,594,766	\$92,939,345	
2011	\$63,953,748	\$72,002,895	\$97,415,941	\$128,750,370	\$79,019,535	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$81,631,252	\$61,187,691	\$142,043,056	\$108,252,284	\$116,400,943	\$116,400,943	\$108,252,284	\$70,469,404	\$70,469,404	\$67,901,279	\$99,362,504	\$101,490,339	
% Increase	19.5%	4.7%	10.1%	20.7%	-1.3%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	11.1%	25.1%	15.3%	1.5%	10.9%	10.9%	1.5%	14.6%	14.6%	10.9%	8.1%	8.1%	
Total Expenses																									
2009	\$51,762,875	\$61,746,969	\$74,210,646	\$82,117,010	\$61,586,947	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$73,599,999	\$68,454,129	\$48,921,823	\$104,934,205	\$80,260,637	\$104,934,205	\$113,184,855	\$116,400,943	\$108,252,284	\$61,508,748	\$88,220,330	\$93,901,820	\$90,122,238	
2010	\$55,723,771	\$64,878,825	\$87,607,487	\$95,836,991	\$67,450,913	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,924,683	\$78,509,148	\$56,214,293	\$131,815,819	\$116,118,026	\$113,184,855	\$116,400,943	\$116,118,026	\$108,252,284	\$66,066,303	\$84,498,339	\$93,594,766	\$92,939,345	
2011	\$62,861,565	\$66,834,200	\$79,130,558	\$100,973,238	\$73,173,261	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$83,619,456	\$76,378,522	\$61,187,691	\$142,043,056	\$108,252,284	\$116,400,943	\$116,400,943	\$108,252,284	\$70,469,404	\$70,469,404	\$67,901,279	\$99,362,504	\$101,490,339	
% Increase	21.4%	8.2%	6.6%	23.0%	18.8%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	13.6%	11.6%	25.1%	15.3%	1.5%	10.9%	10.9%	1.5%	14.6%	14.6%	10.9%	8.1%	8.1%	

Note: * = Nebraska was a member of AAU but lost its membership shortly after joining the Big Ten. NR=not recorded. Revenue and expenses figures obtained from EADA database websites.

For many years, membership within the Big Ten has been static. The University of Chicago was the last institution to leave and that was 66 years ago, and the only additions during this period leading up to Nebraska's invite was in 1949 (Michigan State) and in 1990 (Penn State). The stability and consistency in its membership was symbolic of the culture that permeates through the conference. In an interview Morgan Burke, athletic director at Purdue University, summarized it best when he said, "Each conference develops its own culture. Over the course of the 100-plus years that the Big Ten has been in existence, our culture, the way we share revenue, is much different than the way other conferences share revenue. We tend to be much more 'everyone gets an equal share,' and that's not the case in some conferences" ("What's the Game Plan," p.4).

Data Collection

Data collection for case study research is harder than most other methods because procedures for collecting data are not routinized (Yin, 2003). A strength in case study research, however, is the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2005). The rationale for using multiple sources is triangulation. This principle allows the researcher to confirm findings and themes from different vantage points, thus providing validity to the study. For this study, data was collected from multiple sources -- collected documents and archival records as well as structured interviews.

Documents

This study examines the process decision-makers use in conference realignment. The media portrays the presidents as the decision-makers, however the lack of studies presenting evidence to confirm this notion means that it is not certain. The impact of external and internal participants cannot be dismissed. Thus, data collection began with review of documents and

archival records in an attempt to identify any other potential key actors in the decision-making process.

The strengths of using documentation in case study research are the stability, unobtrusiveness, exactness, and broad coverage they provide (Yin, 2003). The documents gathered for this study include Big Ten Conference mission statements, the Big Ten policy and regulations handbook, and the Big Ten Conference website. Following the criteria from Chaffee (1983), the objectives and values of the organization must be established in order to evaluate the role of rationality in the decision-making process. Keyword searches were conducted on Lexis Nexus in order to recover newspaper clippings during this timeframe of the case. Since digital media has become a popular medium for presenting the news, the websites of ESPN, The Chronicle, and Inside Higher Ed were searched for past articles referring to Big Ten Conference realignment during the timeframe for this case. Membership status and AAU values and objectives were gathered from the AAU website. Documents can be reviewed repeatedly and contain exact names and details of an event, at least from a given perspective. Concerns with using documents are accuracy, bias, and access. The researcher must identify the objective of author of each document. The author might have used poor sources or have poor recall and therefore might inaccurately describe events. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend a document summary form to assist in identifying the significance of each document and to give a brief summary of each. Appendix A provides a copy of that form. This form assisted in organizing and coding the wide range of documents collected.

Archival Records

The strengths of archival records are similar to those of documentation and are also valuable for their precise and quantitative nature (Yin, 2003). Archival records gathered for this

study focused on meeting minutes and agendas from presidential archive materials. Weaknesses are also similar for archival records to what they are for documentation, with an increased concern on accessibility due to privacy concerns. These private records could have been requested under Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) but would have harm the study in two ways. First, the amount of time it takes to obtain records through a FOIA request would extend the period required to complete the study. The other concern is that it would irritate potential interview participants, thus limiting access.

An option that was explored was that upon reviewing documents, I contacted authors who wrote several pieces on Big Ten Conference realignment and asking if they had any FOIA information that they could share with me for this study. The two authors who responded back to me both said they did not keep any of the materials they were given via FOIA. The archived material at member institutions was examined. The online catalog for these archives was inspected for possible records or documents pertaining to conference realignment in the presidents' papers that have been collected. A review of organizational charts obtained from the conference also provided insight into the centralization of decision-making. Documents and archival records only provide what is written on the paper or found on websites. These two sources, however, built the foundation for the data collection within this case. Documents and archival records, along with the criteria required for rational decision-making (Chaffee, 1983), guided the next phase of data collection: interviews that gave a deeper understanding than that achieved from reading documents.

Interviews

Interviewing is similar to having a conversation, but with a purpose: "The purpose of interviewing...is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Merriam, 1988, p. 72).

Interviewing is a skill, and for the novice interviewer, a structured or semi-structured format is preferable. I collected data through one-on-one, digitally recorded, phone or video chat interviews with participants. A snowball sample was used for the selection of participants. The first group of interview requests went to participants who were acting presidents during the time frame of the study but who are no longer serving in those roles. The rationale was that these subjects may be more willing to talk on the subject since they no longer are serving in such a high profile position. Following the snowball approach, upon completing these interviews, I asked these participants for suggestions as to whom I should speak next. Media portrays presidents as being the primary decision-makers in conference realignment; however, using the snowball approach allows for external or internal subjects who participated or had role in the decision-making to be included in the study.

Scholars prefer the structure of questions divided into stages: beginning with easy questions, progressing to tougher ones, and closing by toning them back down (Manning & Stage, 2003b). Three types of questions serve as primary ones that explore all parts of the topic; they are followed by questions that explore themes and ideas introduced by the answers, and the third group of questions is more probing, eliciting more details without changing focus (Merriam, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Stake, 2005). Questions for the interviews were tailored from documents and archived resources acquired and followed Chaffee's framework for necessary criteria for rational decision-making. Questions examined participants perceptions of values and objectives of the Big Ten Conference. Participants were asked about how information was collected on institutions that were considered for membership and how the cost-benefit analyses were evaluated.

Participants were interviewed individually. The interviews lasted between thirty to seventy minutes. This study is approved by the IRB (Appendix B), and participants were fully informed of the intent of the study, the interview and data collection procedures, and their right to refuse to participate. Five presidents and one athletic director agreed to participate. Each participant was required to sign the informed consent form indicating his or her willingness to participate in the study (Appendix C). The interview protocol, as I said above, was tailored from the documents and archives examined in the first stage of data collection (Appendix D). Chaffee's framework for rational decision-making was used to guide the structure of the protocol. All participants were given the same interview protocol, but additional questions were asked as issues and themes emerge.

Though interviews give a targeted and insightful look into the issue, they have some disadvantages. Interviews can suffer from poor questions, inaccuracies in an interviewee's recall, or interviewee perception that s/he should give the answer that the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2003). I am a novice when it comes to interview skills. The pressures associated with the public offices presidents and other potential participants hold might have limited participants' willingness to provide or discuss information that could be controversial. The participants might choose to answer questions in a politically safe manner, not giving details on political issues that arose between institutions during the decision-making process. Interviews conducted over the phone or via Skype are subject to some biases. People tend to be more defensive and protective in phone interviews.

Data Analysis

Regardless of the research methodology, data analysis and interpretation must be organized: "Analysis entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the

interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 210). Subject matter can develop all the way until the end of the writing process, so it is important to have a plan in place for how data will be organized. The data analysis process in responsive interviews operates in two phases. Upon completing each interview, the researcher prepares transcriptions and uses codes and themes to examine and organize the responses of the interviewee. The second phase involves comparing codes and themes across interviews.

For this study, the data was analyzed in an interactive and simultaneous format. The documents for this study were collected over two different phases of the research: at the beginning prior to interviews and again after the interviews were concluded. A timeline for when documents were found is listed in Appendix E. The first step was to search archival records and documents (newspaper articles and online media reports) for data pertaining to this case. The interview protocol was then framed using Chaffee’s criteria for the rational decision-making model and with support from initial archival records and documents. Using a snowball approach, attempts were made to the identified decision-makers asking for their participation in interviews. Each participant agreed to be recorded during the interview. The recorded data was then transcribed to a computer-based document using Microsoft Word software. The recorded data and the computer-based document contain the name of the participant as well as the date, time, and place of the interview. Handwritten notes from the interview were also transcribed to a computer-based document using Microsoft Word. There were forty-four pages of transcription to analyze that covered five hours and twenty minutes of interviews. Follow up interviews conducted via email were not confidential, and most institutions archive all emails sent or

received through university servers. Confidentiality could not be assured in this study, and each participant made his or her own decision about selecting this method for follow up.

After interviews are transcribed, the researcher read each interview three times while coding and organizing the responses of the participants based on the five criteria for rational decision-making. Upon completing the coding, the researcher compared codes and themes across interviews and across institutions. Presidents' responses were compared to other presidents in the study and to other subjects that participated. The central themes identified were compared to the original transcripts to confirm meanings and interpretations. Excerpts from the interviews included in Chapter 4 support generalizations I made on the case. Documents and archival materials found were used to confirm any themes and trends from interviews for appropriateness of fit within the rational decision-making model.

Validity

Qualitative research is criticized for its validity and credibility of findings. (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). The weakness stems from researchers not sharing their processes with their audiences. This applies to data collection and the design of interview questions that connect to the research questions, data management and the analysis of qualitative data, and the methods of data triangulation and identification of findings. For this study, the interview questions were cross-referenced with the research question and sub-questions guiding the study.

The research question and sub-questions examine the role of rationality in the decision-making processes involved in conference realignment. The five criteria for the rational decision-making model provided the framework for data analysis. Data collection began with retrieval of documents and archival materials. The information relevant to the research questions (or lack thereof) found from these sources guided the questions for the interview protocol. "Constantly

revisiting the central questions that the researcher hopes to answer is helpful in establishing a base of reference for the exploratory interview questions.” (Anfara, Brown, & Managione, 2002, p. 31) During the course of the study, I had to keep an open mind to developing issues as they emerged (Stake, 2005). Though perspectives differed between participants within institutions and across institutions, the interview protocol remained consistent in order to ensure a consistent process of data collection across; however, as themes or issues emerged, I asked the participant to provide more information regarding the respective theme or issue.

Triangulation validates methodology by examining results from several different perspectives. The author must take some ownership over the meaning the reader takes from the report (Stake, 2005). A major strength of qualitative research is the opportunity to use many methods when collecting data (Merriam, 1988). While experiments or surveys are limited to a standard measurement, case study methods can use interviews, documents, and archival records to collect data. Triangulation of data is defined by the use of multiple perceptions to portray the meaning and confirming the redundancy of an interpretation (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2005).

While case study research is not used to confirm a theory or make a generalization, the method can be used as foundation for creating new knowledge (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 2005). The findings in a case study could lead to future research that tests a hypothesis or contributes to more generalizable findings. The triangulation of data eases concerns of validity by avoiding reliance on a single source for the author’s report. The different perspectives of the different presidents and other participants supplied richness and a more complete recollection of the process. Interviewees had knowledge of the event and were experienced in the area of higher education decision-making, contributing to my ability to use official documents and newspaper

stories to confirm and compare findings (Stake, 2005). Documents and archival records were used to verify or negate the answers and responses given from the interviews.

Role of Researcher

As the primary analyst of the data collected, I must be aware of my own biases and the effect biases those have on interpreting data. It is the author's job to pass information on to the reader to develop greater understanding of a case's meaning (Stake, 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that I acknowledge my perspective, even as I make all attempts not to let it influence the study.

My passion in life is sports. Since the age of seven when I first participated on my first school t-ball team, I have devoted my interest and time to athletics. At the age of fourteen I went to my first college football game at the University of Florida, and my passion narrowed in its focus to intercollegiate athletics. My entire professional career has been in college athletics at the Division I level. Thus, it is not surprising that my research interest revolves around issues in Division I athletics.

Upon reviewing the current events and issues in intercollegiate athletics in spring 2010, a dissertation on the creation of the Big Ten Network caught my attention (Weaver, 2009). The study examined more than just the potential financial benefits of the network's creation. The detailed and in-depth interviews told a story of how, in a culture motivated by competition and gaining advantages, administrators, athletic directors, and a commissioner negotiated an agreement that would benefit all members of the conference. Some institutions sacrificed their own gain for the financial position of the conference overall.

At the same time, conference realignment was becoming a buzz word in Division I athletics, with the Big Ten and Pac Ten already announcing plans to expand and other BCS

leagues looking to survive, maintain, or even looking to expand themselves. One conference in particular, the Big Ten, caught my attention for a few reasons. Most obviously, this is due to my current employment in an intercollegiate athletic department in the Big Ten. Beyond the familiarity aspect, though, the culture of collegiality amongst members in the Big Ten and the conference's tradition of leadership in intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level were compelling.

My professional aspirations are to advance in administration in intercollegiate athletics, and ultimately, to serve as a collegiate athletic director. In previous chapters, the issues facing not only intercollegiate athletics, but also higher education as a whole make it important for leaders to research and examine decision-making procedures. As a future leader, I think it is important to educate stakeholders not only about the decisions leaders making, but also about understanding the rationale and the processes involved in making those decisions.

With strong and deep ties to a particular field and profession, there are concerns I need to acknowledge. My current employment and future aspirations can be a hindrance. Many would argue that an athletic employee would be subjective when interviewing other athletic employees, particularly the head of an athletic department. I also need to acknowledge that my career in athletics could influence me to harbor opinions regarding the role athletics play on a college campus as well as their value to that campus. It has been necessary for me to monitor my bias towards the Big Ten conference since I have worked for Big Ten institutions for over ten years.

Limitations

In addition to some of the limitations aforementioned in this chapter, a few more should be mentioned at this time. To begin with, five of the ten presidents were not willing, or available, to participate in an interview. Another limitation is that when interviewing senior

administrators, there is the possibility that she or he might have censored thoughts. Given the politically and economically sensitive nature of the subject matter, the participants may have provided socially acceptable answers or purposefully withheld information so as not to reveal controversial issues that arose during the decision-making process. Finally, the trustworthiness of the information found in the archives must also be taken into consideration. Due to the sensitive nature of these discussions and decisions, presidents and chancellors may not be willing to provide all materials and data to the university archives. The material that is given to the archives may present an edited view that protects certain discussions or issues that arose during this decision-making process that leaders may not want available to the public.

Chapter 4 Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study is to understand the Big Ten institutional leaders' conference realignment decision-making process. The central research questions guiding this study focus on which factors institutional leaders considered when making conference realignment decisions, which constituents were involved in the decision-making process, how the identification process was rationalized, how the conference and the institutions involved in it were impacted by choices made on realignment. After the document and archival search was completed, the researcher conducted interviews with five presidents and one athletic director across six different institutions. Due to requests for anonymity from all participants, their identities and institutions are not revealed here. The five criteria for testing the rational decision-making model (Chaffee, 1983) frame the findings in this case study. They are stated adherence to values and objectives, identification of alternatives, centralization of decision-making, understanding of consequences, and determination of the value-maximizing choice.

Reviewed above, Chaffee (1983) argues that rational decision-making does occur and can enhance the higher education administrators' credibility with stakeholders impacted by their decisions. Her study examined decision-making for the budget process at one institution over a ten-year period. Chaffee (1983) identifies essential features necessary for adherence to the rational decision-making model. An organization must have a clear set of values and objectives to serve as criteria for making a decision. An organization's atmosphere requires stability, confidence and predictability in order to identify who makes decisions, consider all possible solutions simultaneously, and ultimately make rational decisions. Finally, an organization

must have a method for assessing the decision made and the extent to which results match the values and objectives.

The data from this case study recognizes all of Chaffee's criteria except the requirement for determining the value-maximizing choice. It is very difficult to assess one choice compared to another. A prospective institution may, on paper, match all the values and objectives of the decision-makers' institutions, but whether or not the value is maximized depends on so many outside variables that are beyond an evaluator's control. For example, if an institution from the East Coast or Southeast were added to the conference, it would be impossible to predict with certainty that another cable distributor in the new region would uphold the Big Ten's existing television agreement. Therefore, the impact that inviting an institution from the East Coast or Southeast this would have on the objective to increase revenue is difficult to predict.

The studied institutions' values and objectives, confirmed through the interviews and documents analyzed, provided the criteria for institutional presidents' decisions about conference realignment. The requirement for matching values and objectives defined the possible alternative institutions to be considered. Key constituents from membership institutions participated in discussions, but the institutions' presidents ultimately decided to whom an invitation for membership to the Big Ten Conference would be extended. Data reveals that though decision-makers did recognize the consequences of inviting the University of Nebraska, it can neither confirm nor deny whether or not the choice maximized the conference's adherence to shared values and potential for meeting objectives. This chapter uses Chaffee's five criteria to detail these themes found in the data.

Themes

This case study on conference realignment within the Big Ten Conference investigated institutional leaders' decision-making process. The rational decision-making model frames the case. Chaffee (1983) uses five criteria to test for the extent to which a particular process aligns with the rational decision making model: adherence to stated values and objectives, identification of alternatives, centralization of decision-making, understanding of consequences, and determination of the value-maximizing choice. Though the following sections report the findings using these criteria to organize the data, under analysis, the data revealed that not all these categories applied nor were presented in the same manner as Chaffee presents. Values lead to the formation of the objectives, but are separate from each other. Thus the findings present values and objectives in separate sections. Following these two are sections on identification of alternatives, centralization of decision-making, and understanding of consequences. As mentioned earlier, settling with certainty on the value-maximizing choice was not applicable to the findings in this case study due to the inability to confirm whether or not one choice would produce more favorable results than another. All the data has been analyzed and is presented below by the adjusted criteria list as explained above.

Values

“We were very upfront that these were the things we would be looking for. There were sort of three pretty broad categories in that. One was academic fit. One was what I would call the cultural understandings of the Big Ten. We are a sharing conference, ok, as one example. We are generally a conference that sponsors a lot of sports. Title IX. Gender Equity. Diversity. There were several things that fall under cultural fit.” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014)

These words, quoted from a Big Ten institutional president, reflect how all of the participants in this case study view the values of the Big Ten. Whereas Chaffee (1983) defines

values as the mission statement of a company or group, in this case study, *values* refers to the ideals considered most important to the leaders of the institutions in the Big Ten Conference. The data reveal many values that fall under three categories: academics, athletics, and culture. Another president at a member institution repeated the same values to the media. Rittenberg (2010) writes that Michigan State president Lou Anna K. Simon says that academics, willingness to participate in the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, athletic competitiveness, and fiscal responsibility are important to the conference leaders. This example demonstrates with clarity that presidents value academics and athletics. Further, President Simon here hints at the culture with his emphasis on willingness to participate in the CIC and fiscal responsibility not only as institutions, but also in their connection to the rest of the members of the conference, thereby also demonstrating the culture, the relationships, that exist across institutions in the Big Ten. These three values (academics, athletics, and culture) are the core to the Big Ten Conference, defining the relationships that exist across the members. The next section presents the data on these three values.

Academic Quality. All the interview participants said that the academic quality of a potential institution was not only important, but it was the first thing considered in discussions of realignment. The Council of Presidents automatically dismissed any potential new member institution if its academic quality did not match up to the Big Ten institutions. President Simon commented to the press that of the criteria used to evaluate applicants, academics is at the top of the list. (Rittenberg, 2010) Presidents recognize the history of the conference, including its academic reputation. Another president interviewed for this study stated that, “the academic standing of an institution and the capability with respects to the types of research going on is who we are. Nebraska is a land grant, Michigan State is a land grant, Wisconsin, Minnesota,

Purdue, Ohio State. These are all historic universities with fairly strong research profiles. We would not have asked an institution who for example that did not have same or similar academic profile”(Anonymous, personal communication, June 21, 2014). This value is understood not only at the presidential level but among the athletic directors at conference member institutions as well. An athletic director interviewed for this case study reaffirmed President Simon’s statement regarding academic quality, saying, “job number one, and they were not kidding around about it, was they wanted an institution that was a peer academically first and athletically second”(Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Academic quality, however, is not easily defined. Membership in the AAU is one marker for academic excellence, and all the Big Ten universities were members of the AAU at the time of this case. The Big Ten institutions pride themselves on their combination of academics and athletics. A president interviewed for this study says, “the Big Ten is the only conference where at the time we were looking at conference realignment including Nebraska all the schools were thought to be very strong academically and were members of the AAU” (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013). Another president interviewed for this study described AAU status as, “a code of quality” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). The prestigious group is a consortium of the sixty-two leading research institutions. The official website for the AAU states:

Membership in AAU is by invitation and is based on the high quality of programs of academic research and scholarship and undergraduate, graduate, and professional education in a number of fields, as well as general recognition that a university is outstanding by reason of the excellence of its research and education programs. (“Association of American”, 2014)

Documents confirmed the importance of this membership by listing only schools that were current members in the AAU as potential new Big Ten members (Longman, 2010; Moltz, 2010;

Schlabach, 2010). Commissioner Jim Delany, however, said that while membership in the AAU is an important common trait of the Big Ten's members, it was not a requirement for any prospective institutions (Greenstein, 2010c). Another president reinforces this claim, stating in the interview that potential candidates did not have to be members. Membership in the AAU, however, does make it easier to explain the strengths of a potential conference member institution. Overall, three of the six interview participants agreed that AAU membership helped define the value of academic quality.

The University of Nebraska belonged to this elite group of institutions and was actually a founding member of the AAU. Throughout the whole process, from December 2009 to June 2010, even up to Nebraska's ultimate acceptance of its invitation to join, there was no concern that Nebraska might lose its AAU status. A few months after joining, though, Nebraska was removed from membership in the AAU. The commissioner and president above, however, confirmed that while AAU does provide a public badge of academic quality, it is not necessary for Big Ten decision-makers to view an institution as an academic peer. Academic quality is the number one characteristic that potential alternatives to possess in order to be invited to join the Big Ten; a close second is athletic success. The athletic director interviewed for this study says, "we would not compromise on academics or athletic capability"(Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Athletic Quality. The members of the Big Ten Conference value their academic reputations. Following closely is their value for athletic quality of their intercollegiate programs. The Big Ten is the oldest athletic conference in the country, and their members compete at the highest level in college sports. This reputation was not lost on the participants in this study. Five out of six participants said that athletics is valued within their institutions and that the athletic

departments are held to a higher standard, both on and off the field. Presidents expect their athletic programs, and those of potential member institutions, to compete with athletic excellence at an elite level as well.

When discussing with each other the criteria for new members, both athletic quality and academic quality were important. A president interviewed for this study explained, “if it had simply been about athletics, that would not have carried the day. If it had simply been about academics, that would not have carried the day either. It had to be a package” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014). Athletic quality is the second value that defines the Big Ten Conference. The importance of athletic quality is found in the preamble of the Big Ten Conference Statement of Guiding Principles, which states:

The association of universities known as the Big Ten was founded in 1895. Member institutions, chiefly but not solely public, cherish a mission of research, graduate, professional, and undergraduate teaching, and public service. They have accorded athletics an important place within that array of missions. (The Big Ten Conference Handbook 2010-2011, 2010, pg. 21)

Four presidents and one athletic director in interviews, several media sources, and even the conference handbook state the value athletic quality holds. A president interviewed for this study lists academics first when it comes to value of the Big Ten Conference, but follows immediately with, “we also wanted to have institutions that could compete at a national scale in the Big Ten, and bring us recognition in athletics” (Anonymous, personal communication, December 13, 2013). Another president interviewed for this study explains that conference member institutions value the national recognition that intercollegiate athletics brings to an institution and conference (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). It is important to presidents considering expansion that a new member adds to the existing level of athletic prestige in the conference.

The key to how academics and athletics are valued in the Big Ten lies within how they intertwine and form the culture of the conference. Interviewed for this study, a president described the balance between the two values, “the Big Ten had a very strong emphasis on academic validity of our conference but also wanted to make sure that institutions had similar abilities to be competitive in athletics”(Anonymous, personal communication, December 13, 2013). Another president interviewed for this study reaffirmed the strength a potential institution needs in these two areas stating, “One of the earlier conversations about expansion the presidents were all about only looking at quality institutions. By that I mean academic quality institutions that had something to bring in terms of a combination of academic and athletic prowess into the Big Ten” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014). A third president interviewed for this study pushed this even further by saying that success for athletics is viewed as a student-athlete who is successful in the classroom and on the sports field (Anonymous, personal communication, June 21, 2014).

The University of Nebraska possesses the same desire for excellence in academics and athletics professed by the Big Ten presidents interviewed. Focus on student-athlete experience and welfare is important to the Cornhuskers. Dr. Tom Osborne, former head football coach and athletic director at the time of expansion, has a legacy at Nebraska that reveals his time and energy spent mentoring student-athletes inside and outside the sports arena. Regardless of whether a student-athlete is a scholarship or walk-on, the Nebraska athletics department provides the resources, facilities, and support necessary to excel academically and achieve athletic success. Evidence is seen in Nebraska’s 314 CoSida Academic All-Americans (second and third is Notre Dame and MIT with 238 and 220) and twenty-nine intercollegiate athletic national

championships. Thus, in terms of commitment to academic and athletic excellence, Nebraska was a good fit for the Big Ten.

Culture. Members of the Big Ten Conference feel that the culture embedded in their relationships with one another separates them from other intercollegiate athletic conferences. The academic rigor and athletic competitiveness on a national scale are values the institutions in the Big Ten hold dearly. Leaders feel that they are truly peer institutions to one another in every way. The institutions share resources and collaborate to solve academic and athletic issues among their group.

This is nowhere more evident than in the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC). The CIC is a consortium made up of all the Big Ten institutions and the University of Chicago (a former member of the Big Ten). According to the CIC website, the CIC, “aims to be the model for effective, voluntary collaboration among top research universities” (About CIC, 2011). The CIC emerged at the semiannual meetings of the Big Ten presidents in 1956 from the desire of Big Ten presidents to cooperate across state boundaries to solve mutual problems. There was born the persistent Big Ten culture of working together and sharing resources in order to develop strength across their institutions’ academic and athletic programs. This committee continues to have value for member institutions. A president interviewed for this study claims:

We value that tremendously because it allows these powerhouse research universities to share a whole lot of resources and to do talent development and many other things that are the envy of, I think, in some cases of, uh, institutions in other conferences where that does not go on. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014)

Discussing and collaborating on issues such as conference realignment comes naturally to this group of higher education leaders whose collaboration does not stop at sharing ideas. The

2010-2011 Big Ten Handbook lists business-revenue sharing as one of the overall principles guiding the Big Ten Conference. Under business-revenue, the handbook states, “the conference shall promote competitive equality and collegiality through distribution of televised revenues, tournament and bowl receipts, and football gate receipts. The principle of nourishing and maintaining the concept of the Conference shall have priority in the distribution of revenue” (2010, p. 10). Sharing financial, athletic, and academic resources in collaboration amongst members defines the Big Ten culture of reaching for excellence collectively and not just individual institutions. A president interviewed for this study confirmed the spirit of the conference’s culture:

We like to think there is a culture associated with the Big Ten. We like to think there is a set of higher standards that we put out there that we expect our institutions, our student-athletes, our coaches, our athletic directors, our presidents...top to bottom to embrace and espouse. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014)

From the beginning of the conference to the present day, leaders of Big Ten universities have identified themselves as a sharing, collaborating, and competing group that expects to set the national standards for academics and athletics. The University of Nebraska has similar qualities and characteristics, giving it reason to leave the Big 12’s political culture for the Big Ten’s. As is the case with the majority of Big Ten members, Nebraska is a land grant, public school located in the mid-west, and it is the flagship institution for the state. Graham Spannier, former chancellor at Penn State spent five years (1991-1995) as chancellor at the University of Nebraska, providing a connection to a member in the group of decision-makers. Spannier’s relationship with the administration at Nebraska allow for open channels of discussion. The mission of the Nebraska Cornhusker athletic department is based on its core values of integrity, trust, respect, teamwork, and loyalty. The department funds twenty-three sport programs with

over six hundred student-athletes participating. The financial investment in athletic facilities demonstrates the high level of commitment the department and school have in their athletic programs. From Memorial Stadium to the Devaney Center to the NU Coliseum, and on down the line, the institution provides a quality athletic environment for its campus community.

The Big 12 as a different philosophy when it comes to sharing revenue amongst its members than the Big Ten. The institutions divide all the money evenly except for half of their television revenue (Griffin, 2008; Ourand & Smith, 2010c; Ubben, 2009). As the conference revenue varies considerably across member institutions, the Big 12 culture has been described as being characterized by adverse competition more so than by collegial collaboration. The Big 8 conference expanded in 1996 and became the Big 12 by inviting Texas A&M, Baylor, Texas Tech, and Texas. It did not take long for the perception to set in that the conference wanted to shine the light on the University of Texas a little brighter (Forde, 2010). Events seen as detrimentally political were the 7-5 vote to move the conference offices to Dallas from Kansas City. Nebraska was on the wrong side of that count. After the introduction of the four new institutions, the new division formats did not honor the long time rivalry between Nebraska and Oklahoma. The once called “Game of the Century, ” once scheduled annually, came to occur only once every few years. Instead, the Texas and Oklahoma rivalry moved to the forefront. The final objectionably political move for Nebraska was the move of the Big 12 conference championship game Dallas. The University of Nebraska was not only an original member of the Big 12, but it was also traditionally treated as one of the premier programs in the league. It is possible that Nebraska felt slighted by the lack of respect demonstrated by Big 12 leaders while all the attention was diverted to to their neighbors in Texas. In contrast, again, the Big Ten

culture emphasized inclusivity, working together to raise the bar for all members and not just a select few.

Their values clearly established, Big Ten presidents' next step in deciding about conference realignment was to determine the objectives in alignment with those values. The next section presents this case study's findings on the question of how Big Ten presidents articulated the goals that they hoped to achieve by expanding Big Ten conference membership.

Objectives

"The Big Ten conference, which many would consider the most financially, academically, and athletically successful of all the athletic conferences, has always been mindful of the need to monitor the conference structure and realignment landscape. We always wanted to make sure that the Big Ten was well positioned. We also looked at geography. You also not only look at the markets but the following schools have nationally, their brand, so to say. Finally, you want to go in a direction where revenues will be enhanced." (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013)

This statement by a president interviewed for this study sums up the objectives of conference realignment for the Big Ten conference presidents. In decision-making, Chaffee (1983) asserted that a group's mission statement reveals both its values and objectives, but in this case study, the academic and athletic values are defined by the Big Ten's culture, while finances drive realignment objectives. Values provide the criteria for fitting in with the group, while the objectives identify the goals for expanding that group. The objectives for this case are stability and increasing revenue for conference members. The next section provides the data on the two objectives identified by participants in this case study.

Stability. The Big Ten Conference is the oldest intercollegiate athletic conference. Seven members formed the group in 1895, and by 1946, the membership was at ten. Only one institution has ever left the conference, and from 1946 to 2010 only one institution joined. During this same period, four major college football conferences have folded: the Big East,

Missouri Valley, Western Athletic Conference, and Southwest Conference. Two have reclassified from FBS to FCS: the Ivy League and The Big Ten is joined only by the PAC 12 and SEC in not having had a member leave since 1965 (Bostock, Carter, & Quealy, 2013). With change comes new terrain, and when they announced their consideration of expansion, the Big Ten leaders wanted to make a rational decision that served the current members and provides continued stability. In an interview for this study, a president described this objective for realignment, explaining that leaders agreed that they should “try to have us evolve to a consensus so that the way it was done would assure that we remain built to last” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). Consistent membership has been key to the success of the Big Ten Conference over 119 years. Barbara McFadden Allen, Director of CIC, stated, “I attributed our success to our longevity” (Moltz, 2010, para. 23). Despite conference leaders’ commitment to stability, they could not sit and watch as the collegiate landscape changed dramatically.

In the market, the key to stability is making the product offered is well positioned in relation to its competitors. As stated above, other BCS conferences were looking at realignment and expanding conference membership from twelve to potentially as many as sixteen members. In order to not get left behind, Big Ten leaders believed it was important to examine expansion and determine if it would benefit the. A president interviewed for this study stated that the group began discussing realignment and:

What was going on with the instability, the expansion, was going to create and how that might impinge on the Big Ten. This was driven really by the instability of some of the other conferences and seeming desire to rearrange the deck chairs. So for us, we were, ok, lets take a look at this, and we are only going to do this if we think it really benefits the Big Ten. We are not going to do this for the sake of expanding. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014)

The thought amongst institutional leaders was this period of instability offered a good opportunity to examine the potential costs and benefits of expansion, ultimately determining, as is made obvious by the subsequent realignment, that expanding the conference would benefit their institutions. Presidential leaders identified an opportunity to strengthen the conference's position. A president interviewed for this study reflected, "the Big Ten has always been mindful of the need to monitor the conference structure and realignment landscape, and we did not want to be caught being unaware of the changes that were out there" (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013). Big Ten leaders found in other conferences' instability the opportunity to expand and thereby improve the position of the conference. The same president continues, "as things were changing from Big 8 to the Big 12, to movement in and out of the Big 12, to the expansion of the PAC 10, to changes in the Big East and ACC and other conferences, over time we always wanted to make sure that the Big Ten was well positioned" (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013). The words "well positioned" and "market place" in this case refer to the Big Ten Conference's ability to compete at an elite level in intercollegiate athletics while maintaining the values of its members and achieving the objectives set forth for realignment.

The Big Ten presidents agreed that the key to continued stability in the long term was an ongoing conference realignment process, one that could change with the addition or subtraction of a member(s) for a conference. In an interview for this study a president summed up this objective by saying:

You're constantly positioning yourself in relation to the other three or four major conferences. So you know if there is a rumor that one conference might be moving from 12 to 16,, or one conference might be collapsing or there might be some realignment, you want to be aware and how it will affect you, and if you are

thinking about expanding you want to position yourself as well as possible.
(Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013)

Stability was an objective driving the decision to expand Big Ten expansion. Presidents valued the long tradition of elite academics and athletics that exists among Big Ten institutions, and protecting their status among intercollegiate athletic conferences was a driving force in conference realignment. Another president interviewed for this study confirmed this objective when explained, “obviously we are trying to protect our space and brand. You know the Big Ten Conference remains the wealthiest conference in the country, and we want to protect ourselves” (Anonymous, personal communication, December 13, 2013). In the Big Ten, stability is a by-product from revenue sharing. The Big 12 model described above was based on performance in competition and thus benefitted the winners more than the group as a whole, thereby widening the divide between institutions within a conference.

Leaders interviewed reiterated the importance of the group not only maintaining, but also strengthening their position among intercollegiate athletics through expansion. In order to achieve this, the second objective, increasing revenue, was the other goal critical to the current institutions with conference realignment.

Increase Revenue. As stated in the value section, sharing revenue among all members is an established cultural practice in the Big Ten. All conference television contracts, football bowl game distribution, and NCAA Men’s Basketball tournament payouts are dispersed evenly each year among the members. Therefore, adding a new member(s) made it important to also increase the revenue or risk decreasing the revenue taken in by current members. A source inside the conference said “The point was: We can all get richer if we bring in the right team or teams” (Greenstein, 2010a, para. 3). Revenue sharing provides stability within the conference and

increasing revenue assists the institutions collectively in the conference's competition with the other BCS conferences. Three interview participants confirmed the importance of raising revenue, or at the very least maintaining it, in their considerations of realignment.

Of the shared revenues detailed above, conferences can only negotiate television contracts. The other areas of revenue generation are determined by athletic performance. For institutions considering realignment, it is imperative the outcome of their decision be attractive in terms of media distribution. This fact is not lost on leaders in higher education. Alan J. Hauser, president of the Faculty Athletic Representative Association, claimed, "it is quite obvious the reasons that the conferences want this – so they can leverage more and better television coverage, giving them more revenue" (Moltz, 2010, para. 15). A president interviewed for this study reinforced this sentiment when stating:

We looked at the viability of expanding the conference in relation to what newly negotiated television contracts might be. So since there are financial consequences in conference realignment. You want to go in a direction where revenues will be enhanced, or not decline (pause), or at the very least be held constant. (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013)

In order to identify the potential impact realignment would have on revenue, the presidents hired William Blair and Company, a consulting firm, to examine different regions within and outside the Big Ten geographic footprint to determine the revenue potential of each (Greenstein, 2010b). When it came to contracts with national television networks, the Big Ten Conference competed with the other BCS conferences; however, the Big Ten had an additional television revenue source that other conferences did not at this time.

The Big Ten Network launched in 2007 and provided a new revenue stream that leaders of Big Ten institutions controlled. The conference received eighty-eight cents per subscriber, so adding more television markets to their geographic footprint would add to the revenue generated

by the Big Ten Network (Schlabach, 2010). In an interview for this study a president echoed Schlabach's assertion, saying, "the Big Ten Network was a very young entity at that time. We were looking at if we expand the television footprint of the conference where would it make sense" (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014). Expanding conference membership to a new market would increase the gross revenue, but how much it would do so depended on the size of the television market annexed. Another president interviewed for this study expanded on this thinking: "In the case of Nebraska it is not as if the state has a lot of television sets. There are about 1.6 million people living in the state of Nebraska. It is not anything like New Jersey, Pennsylvania, or Illinois for example" (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013). Adding a large television market would offer the opportunity for the conference to negotiate a license fee per subscriber with the television provider(s) in that area (Jones, 2010).

Adding large television markets can guarantee increase in total revenue. Adding a new brand, however, could increase television revenue through its appeal to television subscribers. The same president continues, "However, you also look not only at the markets around those schools but the following they have nationally. The brand name appeal and sport brand name appeal and logos are important" (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013). Four participants in this study stated improving the brand was key to increasing the revenue. An athletic director interviewed for this study summarized the importance of brand best when he said, "I think we really wanted to add, and I use an overused word, a brand that needed to be an entity that really added a quality element. As football royalty certainly, plus the great traditions they have in volleyball and other sports, Nebraska certainly fit that bill" (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Nebraska football is a strong brand, 340 consecutive sell-outs

at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Nebraska, is evidence of that. “For half a century, fans have packed Memorial Stadium, making it the third largest city in the state on game days”(Sturgeon, 2014, para. 11). The stability and national following of Nebraska evidenced a strong brand that could add something to the table for the Big Ten.

With values and objectives established, Big Ten presidents’ next step in conference realignment decision-making, in the rational decision-making model, is to discuss the alternatives, or choices. The next section presents from the data collected in the case study a description of how the presidents identify and collect information about the various among the alternatives or potential institutions and their athletic programs.

Alternatives

“Then what we simply did was sort of looked at, as you might, the universe of institutions. That you know that independent, whether they were available or unavailable, to test truly the assumptions. And it had to be a mutual understanding. And the other piece about it was that we were in the process. We had our list, we had our analysis done, and along those broad scale categories, but we sort of sat back and waited for somebody to sort of begin the process with us.” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014)

This statement by a president interviewed for this study reflects the process of searching for alternatives within discussions of conference realignment by the Big Ten conference presidents. In decision-making, Chaffee (1983) used interviews to search for evidence of simultaneous consideration of a complete, wide array of alternatives by a central authoritative body. In this case study, the Big Ten presidents defined the criteria for conference realignment through their values and objectives. The criteria guided the Big Ten presidents when evaluating all alternatives. This process included, as the next session describes, collecting data, having a collegial discussion to evaluate alternatives, and gauging the desire of given institutions to join the Big Ten Conference.

Considering all Alternatives. Considering all alternatives is an essential characteristic necessary of the rational decision-making process (Chaffee, 1983). Due to the sensitive nature of conference realignment, however, participants would not discuss the institutions considered for expansion. Secondary data searches only resulted in documents that speculated on possible alternatives and could not verify all institutions considered. The list of rumored candidates included the University of Missouri, University of Nebraska, Notre Dame University, University of Pittsburgh, Rutgers University, Syracuse University, and University of Texas (Garcia, 2010; Greenstein, 2010a; Longman, 2010; Thamel, 2010).

For this case study, conference realignment provides a set of values and objectives that puts a requirement on alternatives. With that said, five of the six participants for this study believed the Big Ten presidents reviewed all possible institutions. A president interviewed for this study reflects this when states:

We looked at a range of possible institutions and some of them were too distant, or were not similar in academic profile, or in the judgment of people were not great academic and athletic institution but it came down to a lot of criteria and extensive discussions. (Anonymous, personal communication, June 21, 2014).

The criteria identified by the Big Ten presidents narrowed the list of alternatives down allowing them to consider all possible choices. “This is not an infinite set of institutions that fit the Big Ten,” said Michigan State president, Lou Anna Simon.” (Rittenberg, 2010, para. 14) With the criteria set and the possible alternatives identified, the presidents then gathered data on possible alternatives. For example, the University of Missouri, University of Texas, and Syracuse University would all have been realistic choices for the Big Ten to consider based on their current membership in Power 5 conferences and their similar financial commitments to intercollegiate athletics. Western Illinois University, Florida Atlantic University, or University

of Alabama at Birmingham would not have been realistic alternatives and could be dismissed automatically based on the financial commitments to intercollegiate athletics articulated in their budgets. The latter schools listed compete in the Summit and Conference-USA conferences, where the budgets are \$12.6, \$21.9, and \$31 million (EADA). These figures do not compare to even the lowest member of the Big Ten, \$55 million.

Collecting Data. Collecting data was the next step in the Council of Presidents and Chancellors' consideration of all alternatives. The Big Ten Conference office admitted that it had been gathering information on expansion prior to the announcement on December 15, 2009 that the conference was going to study expansion opportunities (Rittenberg, 2010). The official statement released by the conference office reported:

The COP/C has asked the conference office to obtain, to the extent possible, information necessary to construct preliminary options and recommendations without engaging in formal discussions with leadership of other institutions. If and when such discussions become necessary the COP/C has instructed Commissioner James E. Delany to inform the Chair of the COP/C, Michigan State University President Lou Anna K. Simon, and then to notify the commissioner of the affected conference(s). Only after these notices have occurred will the Big Ten engage in formal expansion discussions with other institutions. This process will allow the Big Ten to evaluate options, while respecting peer conferences and their member institutions. (DeArmond, 2009, para 5)

The first and last sentences of the statement reveal the presidents' intentions to collecting data on potential institutions and evaluate all realistic alternatives. The conference office used the consulting firm William Blair and Company to gather data (Jones, 2010). A president interviewed for this study explained, "we used them because we felt we were getting into some really deep water here with respect to the role of the media, economic trends taking place, issues that had to do with the reach and range of audiences" (Anonymous, personal communication, June 21, 2014). Positive financial impact of expanding the membership was an important

objective, and the presidents felt it was very important to have a complete understanding of the financial possibilities attached to each potential new conference member. The same president continued, “There are some big complexities that had to do with the growth and development of television, Internet, and everything you can imagine” (Anonymous, personal communication, June 21, 2014).

William Blair and Company assisted the council by providing data on the economic landscape in a way that stakeholders at the member institutions could understand. “They provided solid data for us to make a decision,” a president interviewed recalled, “I mean, obviously it was the point of having some external validation to our thinking in what we were doing. They certainly did that” (Anonymous, personal communication, December 13, 2013). The period between when the presidents announced that the conference was going to study expansion opportunities in December 2009 to the time it concluded in June 2010 with the University of Nebraska’s acceptance of their invitation was short for a group of eleven presidents and chancellors to gather data, review it, discuss it, and make a decision. This was a small window of time to execute a decision with large financial implications for those involved. To stay aligned with their own values and objectives, the presidents knew they had to be prepared. A president interviewed for this study expressed this sentiment:

Yea, we decided that whatever was going to happen would probably happen relatively rapidly, and at that point in time we couldn’t be as thorough as we wanted to about all the information we would want to have on these three broad categories: academics, cultural fit, athletics compatibility. And so we went ahead and did some work ahead of time, not because we were out sort of prospecting as much as the desire to be ready at the moment forced into a decision. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014)

Upon collecting the data, the presidents needed to examine it and discuss the potential costs and benefits of inviting the institutions identified. It was imperative that the council explored all

alternatives and whether or not each met the values and objectives elaborated above. Being prepared allowed the time for the council to discuss and evaluate alternatives. In an interview for this study a president explained, “It gave everyone a chance to talk about, over more than one meeting, the sort of pros and cons. It gave everybody a chance to talk and think about things before you had to make a decision” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). Having a collegial discussion was the next step in evaluating the alternatives and the extent to which inviting each would allow member institutions to stay within the boundaries of the Big Ten’s established culture and values while also aiming for the financial objectives stated above.

Collegial Discussion to Evaluate Alternatives. The Big Ten Conference’s statement on guiding principles defines presidential authority in this way: “the Big Ten Conference values the concept of one institution – one vote in a system of shared governance” (Big Ten Conference 2010-11 Handbook, 2010, pg. 23). The culture of the Big Ten is one of collegial and cooperative interaction. Jim Delany reaffirms, “it is not just a conference making a decision. It has always been and will continue to be about institutions making a choice” (Rittenberg, 2010, para. 16). The Council of Presidents and Chancellors (COP/C) is committed to discussing concerns or issues in a collegial environment.

Upon collecting the data, presidents convened to discuss the institutions with acceptably similar values and objectives. One president remembered, “It was not a decision but a collegial discussion because the Big Ten is, by and large, is very oriented collegial discussion” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). Jim Delany sent an email to the COP/C and athletic directors in March 2010 that addressed the collegial process. The Chicago Tribune, in a public records request, obtained the email. The subject of the email was a reminder from Delany to the institution leaders to avoid commenting to the press which would be

“inconsistent with the protocols of collegiality and trust which are the foundational elements of moving big and meaningful issues thru (sic) a governance system such as our own” (Assael, 2010, para. 1). Collegiality can be difficult to achieve in processes of making financial decisions, especially when the stakeholders each have different concerns to consider. The Big Ten institutions’ individual budgets vary, but the leaders but work to make decisions that are best for the group. When asked about the atmosphere of discussions of expansion, an athletic director interviewed for this study described this collective decision-making process:

Absolutely. Absolutely, one of the things I liked about the Big Ten is it is very collaborative. You poll people and get their point of view and they disclose biases but they hang their institutional hats at the door and really try to approach things from a conference perspective. I think some have different perspectives. I think it is no secret that Penn State felt like, “Hey, we really would like to go east.” But when we had the opportunity to add a Nebraska, Penn State was right in there saying it was a no-brainer. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014)

Primary source interviews confirmed that the COP/C engaged in collegial discussions of conference expansion that got into the evaluation of evaluate potential institutions. Secondary sources are non-existent due to the private nature of such conversations. In an interview for this study a president explained, “I don’t know how willing all these people are going to be talk about it. It was a very confidential matter” (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013). In the same email referenced above, Delany reminds the COP/C to decline opportunities to comment to the media regarding the Big Ten’s expansion study (Assael, 2010). Data collected guided the collegial consideration all realistic alternatives. The last component in the selection of alternatives in this case was the desire of the considered alternatives to join the Big Ten.

Desire of alternatives to join. This case study revealed that the desire of institutions to join the Big Ten also informed leaders’ selection. When asked how conference leaders compared

potential schools, a president interviewed for this study agreed that values and cultural fit are important but added, “we are also thinking about desire. What would be the desire on the part of another team to join the Big Ten?” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014). Secondary sources (Brackin, 2010; Rittenberg, 2010) reported that the Big Ten bylaws require an institution to apply for membership, and then the COP/C vote on whether or not to accept the application. It takes seven votes for an institution to be accepted. The Big Ten Conference 2010-11 Handbook (2010) confirms that this is the case. The process included collecting data, having discussions on all possible alternatives, and then discovering if an institution(s) had a desire to join. Once an institution(s) applied, then the COP/C would vote on whether or not to accept them. A president interviewed for this study recalled that at the end, “when we voted formally, it was on the request of an institution to join”(Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014).

The University of Nebraska expressed interest in joining the Big Ten Conference shortly after the Big Ten’s announcement to study expansion. In an interview for this study a president explained how this unfolded:

There was a kabuki dance. A wooing. A quick conversation. The truth of the matter is we would not have invited Nebraska without knowing they would say yes. There were informal conversations going on. That there were informal conversations that had been going on between Harvey Perlman and several of our presidents who are closer to him. So we knew basically their interest. We were not flying blind on this. (Anonymous, personal communication, December 13, 2013)

In January 2010, Jim Delany was at the Rose Bowl supporting the Big Ten participant University of Wisconsin. While there, he had a conversation with Barry Alvarez, athletic director for Wisconsin, who played football and graduated from Nebraska. Alvarez had dinner with Delany and, “peppered Alvarez with questions about the Huskers: Do they do things the right way? Do

you think they would fit in the Big Ten?” (Anderson, 2011, p. 66). Tom Osborne, athletic director at Nebraska, heard the rumors that the Big Ten might be interested in Nebraska and called Alvarez to confirm whether or not it was true. Osborne shared this information with Harvey Perlman, chancellor of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. “Then Perlman, intrigued by the potential for an enhanced academic profile in the Big Ten, talked to commissioner Jim Delany”(Forde, 2010, para. 38).

The instability within the Big 12 conference informed Nebraska’s interest in joining the Big Ten, with its 114-year history of stability. A president pointed out that Nebraska was the right choice and right fit, but just as important, “the timing would be good just because of the unstable conditions at that point in time in their own conference, and they were probably feeling and wondering what the future would hold for them” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014). Nebraska officials would not comment publicly, but popular media outlets offered reasons for why Nebraska wanted to leave the Big 12 (Associated Press, 2010b; Trotter, 2010). From Nebraska’s view, the University of Texas, who joined the Big 8 in 1994 with three other institutions to form the Big 12, was receiving preferential treatment from the conference office. In June 2010, it was reported that the PAC 10 was courting Texas, Texas A&M, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas Tech, and Colorado. Within a matter of six days, Colorado accepted an invitation from the PAC 10, reports surfaced that Texas A&M was considering joining the SEC, and the Big 12 office gave an ultimatum to Missouri and Nebraska, stating that they had five days to decide whether or not they were committed to the Big 12. With the existence of the Big 12 hanging by a thread, Tom Osborne and Harvey Perlman were convinced that the best option, most stable option was to apply for membership in the Big Ten (Associated Press, 2010b; Trotter, 2010).

In June 2010, Osborne and Perlman presented their proposed resolutions on conference realignment to the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, testifying to what alignment would mean to Nebraska (Agenda: The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, 2010). At the conclusion of the presentation, the Board agreed with the rationale for applying to the Big Ten and approved Nebraska's application for membership in the Big Ten (Report from the Board of Regents, 2010). Thus, the COP/C had confirmation of the Nebraska's desire to join the Big Ten. After collecting data, having collegial discussions about all possible alternatives, and identifying Nebraska's desire to join the Big Ten, the group was ready to make a decision. With values and objectives defined, and alternatives thoroughly reviewed, the next criterion in Chaffee's rational decision-making model is the centralization of decision-making.

Centralization of Decision-Making

"This was very heavily driven by the presidents and by really a sub group within the presidents and by the conference commissioner supported by a couple of his staff and athletic directors." (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013)

This statement by a president interviewed for this study summarizes who was involved in the decision to expand and accept University of Nebraska's application to join the Big Ten Conference. Chaffee (1983) used interviews to confirm there was a central authoritative body that reviewed all alternatives. The rational decision-making model calls for the centralization of decision-making. The authoritative body must understand the values and objectives of the organization and must consider all alternatives when executing a decision. In this case study, interviews and documents provide evidence that the Council of Presidents and Chancellors for the Big Ten Conference (COP/C) was the central authoritative authority making the decision as to whether or not the conference would expand. The COP/C, however, did lean heavily on the conference commissioner for information and data and, to a lesser degree, on their respective

athletic directors. Due to sensitive and political nature of this decision process, other groups were not included, such as Boards of Trustees and faculty athletic representatives. The next section provides evidence on the centralization of decision-making in the Big Ten Conference expansion process.

COP/C Central Authority. When it came time to make the decision as to who would be accepted, and who would not for that matter, the COP/C was the central authority. The Big Ten Conference bylaws (2010) state in the Rules and Organization section that the COP/C are the chief executive officers. The duties and responsibilities reserved to the council list thirteen areas where their authority rests, including admission into membership. This authority is reserved to the council and requires a vote of not less than 60%, or seven out of the eleven (Big Ten Conference 2010-11 Handbook, 2010). At the annual spring meetings for Big Ten athletic directors and coaches in Chicago in May 2010, Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez stressed that “any expansion would be a decision for university presidents, not athletic directors.” (Ubben, 2010, para. 6). Other media reports confirmed that this was a presidential decision, not a conference one (Brackin, 2010; Moltz, 2010; & Rittenberg, 2010).

Beneath the COP/C is the Joint Group and it is comprised of faculty athletic representatives, athletic directors, and senior women administrators (Big Ten Conference 2010-11 Handbook, 2010). According to the bylaws regarding membership referenced above, the council normally would expect to take such action upon the recommendations of the Commissioner, with the endorsement of the Joint Group. Others had influence into the decision and will be discussed in the next section, but overall the COP/C was the central authority. A president interviewed for this study recalled, “It was our vote. Jim had done all the homework for us and answered all our questions, and he continued to answer questions and was always

there to answer questions for us, but in the end it was the vote of the council that allowed it to happen” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014).

Presidents and chancellors have very busy schedules, and getting eleven together at the same time to discuss expansion was a difficult task. The six-month timeline for this decision process was intense for the higher education industry. A lot of information was collected and needed discussion among the eleven institutional leaders. An executive group within the council facilitated discussion across all eleven presidents and chancellors. In an interview for this study a president described it as, “usually very intense with the people on the executive committee. And I use the word intense, but I do not remember how often” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). When it came to sharing information discussed within the executive committee with the rest of the council, the same president said, “We would have very frequent calls with the rest of our colleagues and sometimes not everybody could be on the phone so there would be two calls. Everyone felt they had input and knew what was happening” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). In another interview for this study, an athletic director confirmed, “the presidents were extremely engaged. They asked a lot of questions and gave a lot of leadership” (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014). The COP/C drove this decision process, and all member institution presidents participated in the decision process, led by the executive group, but that is not to say it did not receive input and influence from others. Commissioner Jim Delany and the athletic directors also played a part in the decision process.

Commissioner’s Role in the Decision process. The rules of organization for the Big Ten Conference stated that the COP/C would make membership decisions based upon recommendations from the commissioner (Big Ten Conference 2010-11 Handbook, 2010). The

importance and significance Jim Delany played in this decision process cannot be overstated.

The COP/C did have the final vote, but Jim was key in providing the data and answering questions asked. Interviews revealed the high esteem in which the COP/C and athletic directors hold him. A president interviewed for this study proclaimed Jim Delany a strong leader in the process and the most knowledgeable commissioner when it comes to the impact of media on sports. When asked about the role the commissioner played, an athletic director interviewed for this study replied:

Jim Delany is a visionary. He sees around corners. The things he is talking about five years ago are percolating in the public consciousness now. His engagement and the confidence in which he is held by the presidents and athletic directors is a key component of this. The trust is really high that he was evaluating all of these things and making the appropriate recommendations to us. He certainly did not dictate things but he took us every step of the way. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014)

In another interview for this study, a president said that the commissioner provides expert judgment on the landscape. He continued, citing Delany's longevity within the conference and willingness to seek out answers to COP/C's questions as evidence for the justified trust bestowed upon the commissioner to represent their interest to outside groups as well as provide analysis to the COP/C (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2015).

The commissioner's role really involved collecting and providing information to the COP/C and keeping the process as private as possible. Due to the sensitive nature of conference realignment talks, Delany knew the need for those involved to keep discussions and conversations out of the public domain in order to protect the conference as well as prospective institutions. On March 3rd, 2010, Delany sent an email reminding the COP/C and athletic directors to continue to be discreet and not reveal information to the media regarding the expansion process:

Fyi – I appreciate Gordon and Barry being unavailable for this story per my request as we move our process forward. I made myself unavailable also and it had the consequence of making me a focus of the story. To reiterate as a collective we have no conference stake in contributing either on or off the record or via background on these stories. These comments can 1) do some brand damage because they tend to focus on the pecuniary side 2) they do not accurately reflect the complexity or the political challenges both internal and external associated with expansion execution 3) they tend to complicate and confuse the messages with respect to process that we painstakingly crafted in order to insulate ourselves re charges of insensitivity to others 4) are an affront to those who are practicing discipline by refraining from commenting 5) are inconsistent w the protocols of collegiality and trust which are the foundational elements of moving big and meaningful issues thru a governance system such as our own. At the end of the process the conference will expand or not because of what our board wants to do in the best interests of the conference and for no other reason. I will try to guide the process so that you have the opportunity to make that judgment in an appropriate environment with the appropriate information. We are moving into a substantive phase and the challenges in the media will become greater. (Assael, 2010, para. 3)

Delany's comments above to the COP/C and athletic directors evidence his large role in the Big Ten Conference expansion process. While the COP/C asked questions and made the final decision, the commissioner oversaw the whole process. Delany understands the values, objectives, and culture of the Big Ten and the importance of working together without leaking information to the media, making the COP/C's responsibility even more difficult. Delany is considered an expert by the COP/C when it comes to intercollegiate athletics and their trust lays with him to be the architect for this process. He leads the COP/C through the expansion process by providing all the facts to the central decision-makers. Another note to take away from this email is that it was sent to the COP/C and the athletic directors. Athletic directors did have an active role in this process, while other groups did not.

Athletic Directors and Others impact on the Decision. Secondary sources are limited to the few referenced above due to the private nature of this decision-making process. Primary sources via interviews, however, provide some sense of the roles that athletic directors and other groups

played in this decision-making process. All participants in the interviews stated that the athletic directors were involved in the decision-making process. The athletic directors did not have a vote but provided suggestions and gave opinions on potential alternatives. When asked about the role of athletic directors, a president interviewed for this study said,

Obviously we work as a team, and the athletic directors had a significant role, and their views on adding another team, and whether it made sense, and if Nebraska made sense. This is not solely a president decision. It is ultimately a presidential decision but not solely. (Anonymous, personal communication, December 13, 2013)

Anderson (2011) reveals in an interview with Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez that Commissioner Delany met with Alvarez in January 2010, a month after the conference announced it was studying expansion. The commissioner asked Alvarez a lot of questions including one about his opinion on Nebraska's athletic program since Alvarez played football and earned a degree from Nebraska.

During the next few months the presidents acted in advisory roles. An athletic director interviewed for this study remembered that, "the presidents were more like the Board of Directors, if you will, and we would gather recommendations" (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014). The athletic director continued,

Each athletic director worked closely with their president to keep them advised so they were not walking cold into discussions. One of our charges, frankly, as athletic directors, was to keep our president advised to the ebb and flow and how things were going, so when they walked into the room and got an overall briefing, they were not playing a lot of catch up. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014)

After the commissioner and athletic directors, other groups (on campus and off campus) were not involved in the decision-making process. Some presidents expressed concern about the additional politics involved if boards were to be brought into the equation. In an interview for

this study, one president made the point that a board serving multiple institutions that participate in multiple conferences could lead to a conflict of interest (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014). For example, one institution could gain by leaving for another conference, while other schools in state may suffer because they lost a conference member, bringing the stability of their own conference into question.

Stakeholders outside the COP/C, Athletic Directors, and Commissioner Delany did not have direct input to specific alternatives, or which schools to consider. As mentioned in the section above, the consulting firm William Blair and Company provided data to the conference office and presidents in order to assist with the presidents' understanding of the landscape, but not to make decisions. Whereas athletic directors were providing opinions and suggestions on specific institutions, a third party consulting firm was used to provide an overall picture of the landscape. An athletic director interviewed for this study explained the firm's role:

Yea, my recollection of that was that they were very helpful on sort of getting common set of information that we could compare, you know, from a variety of criteria, whether it was demographics or other areas. There was a lot of comfort. We had all the information we need to put in a digestible format. In my view they were really were not a driver as consultants can sometimes be. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014)

On campus, boards of directors and faculty athletic representatives were not included. A president interviewed for this study explained,

It is one thing to have eleven or twelve people in on a discussion. Then you bring in athletic directors; now you're into twenty-five some people and if you bring in the eleven governing boards now you have hundreds of people. And so things start leaking, and when they leak it causes a certain amount of chaos in a situation like this. (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013)

That chaos did play out in the Big 12 Conference with several rumors and so-called leaks swirling during that process. Numerous reports (Associated Press, 2010a; Associated Press,

2010b; Trotter, 2010; Ubben, 2010) reported politicians, college presidents, and a conference commissioner expressing concerns over the stability of the league, coverage that distracted from decisions, causing them to be made in haste, rather than through a rational process.

Over the course of six months, the Big Ten presidents, led by Jim Delany and assisted by the conference athletic directors, made the decision to accept the University of Nebraska's application for membership. The COP/C defined the conference values and identified the objectives for considering expansion. All realistic alternatives were considered by the COP/C and this central authoritative body made the decision only after collecting data from trusted working groups. The next phase in this process was predicting what the potential impact of Nebraska's addition to the conference. The next section examines decision-makers' understanding of the consequences of expanding the conference by adding Nebraska.

Understanding of Consequences

“So anything that is good for the conference, good for the Big Ten Network, good for our financial viability, I think is particularly good for us. Anytime though when a group gets bigger you lose a little of the essence of how you were before you started. You're more widespread and there are more people you shared less history but that is why it was important to align with universities who are a lot like us. I think we had our eyes wide open about the differences, and the positives way outweighed any potential negatives, and frankly I do not think there were any negatives.”(Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014)

This statement from an athletic director interviewed for this study reflects the conference leaders' understanding of the consequences from conference expansion. Chaffee (1983) examined through interviews how the decision-makers analyzed and weighed the costs versus benefits of each choice. Understanding the consequences is the fourth criteria in the rationale decision-making model. Upon executing a decision, the authoritative body must understand the impact that decision will have on its group. Documents and interviews for this case study identified impacts on revenue and brand as consequences for Big Ten conference realignment.

The three financial areas impacted by expansion were television contracts, revenue distribution with an additional member, and team travel costs. The addition of Nebraska directly impacted the brand and had an indirectly influenced the next expansion process. The next section provides evidence of Big Ten presidents' understandings of consequences within the Big Ten Conference expansion process.

Impact on Revenue. The consequences expansion would have on institutions and their revenues were an important factor. Increasing revenue was an objective identified at the beginning of the process. Would institutions still receive the same, if not more financial gain, by adding a twelfth member? How would the addition of Nebraska affect television contracts? How would expanding the conference's geographic footprint impact travel costs? The COP/C understood that these were consequences that would be revealed once the decision was made.

In an interview for this study a president explained the financial concerns of expansion:

What does it mean for Nebraska to leave the Big 12? What are the penalties going to be? What will they lose in the transition? What are their athletic revenues? What do they need to be made whole? At what point do you start giving the school coming in their equal share? If the Big Ten Network contract and the ESPN contract get adjusted upward, how much of that upward adjustment do they get, and how soon? (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013)

The Big Ten combines all revenue (from television contracts, bowl games, and the NCAA men's tournament) and distributes it evenly among its members. Bowl game and NCAA tournament distributions are based on performance thus fluctuate from year-to-year. Television contracts, however, are fixed amounts with values that do not depend on winning or losing. In 2010-11, the year prior to Nebraska joining the Big Ten Conference, the Big Ten paid its members \$22.8 million each from television contracts, while Nebraska received \$9 million from the Big 12

(Carmin, 2014a; Cordes, 2014). Nebraska would incur a penalty of \$9 million for leaving the Big 12 (Cordes, 2014).

Reviewing the data bolstered the COP/C's confidence that Big Ten that revenue would rise after expansion. A president interviewed for this study says,

We had a series of meetings regarding the question of the future of the Big Ten. Part of that conversation was the question of whether or not we should consider adding another team or teams and how that would impact us financially. Advantages for adding were the championship game and the terms of television footprint of the Big Ten. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014)

The addition of a football conference championship game increased revenue with a six-year deal worth \$145 million with Fox (Dosh, 2012). In another move to help offset cost of the addition to the member institutions, the Big Ten negotiated an agreement with Nebraska that they would not receive a full share of the conference's revenue until after six years (Carmin, 2014b; Cordes, 2014). The Big Ten institutions incurred start up costs when the Big Ten Network was first founded in 2007 and did not feel a new member should be able to receive a full share without investment. ““You just don't jump into the league and get a full share of what everyone else in this league has established over time,” Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez told the Associated Press. ‘I think someone has to buy their way into the league’”(Greenstein, 2010a, para. 9). The six year financial integration plan would allow time for the conference television contracts to become more profitable for member institutions, thereby raising the eleven members' revenue and still providing Nebraska with more money than it had received in the Big 12.

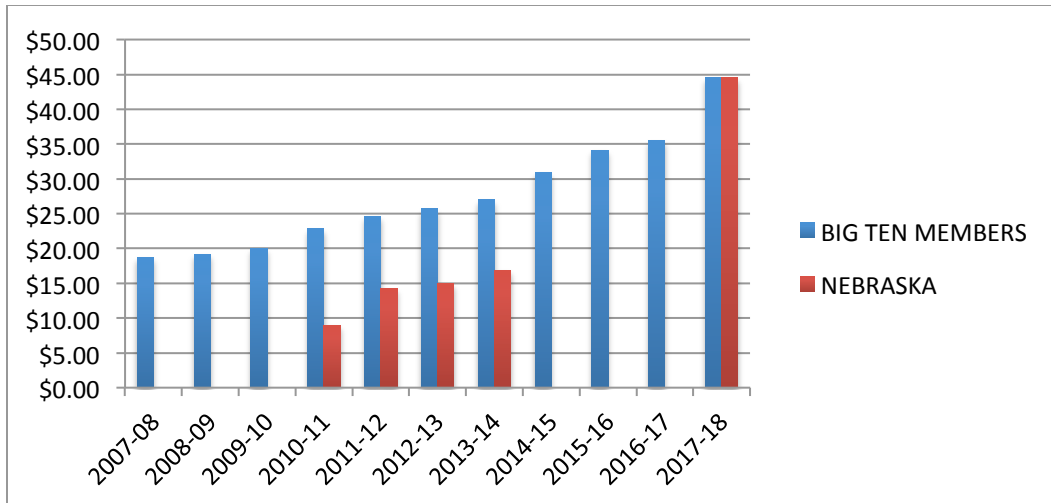


Figure 3: Big Ten Revenue Distribution and Projections (2007-2018)

Figure 3 (financial numbers on y-axis are in millions) shows that from 2007 to 2014, the members of the Big Ten have seen a 44% increase in television revenue, starting at \$18.7 million in 2007-08 and growing to \$27 million in 2013-14 (Bennett; 2012; Bennett, 2013; Durando, 2012; Durando, 2013). The numbers for 2014-2018 in Figure 3 are projections the Big Ten released in 2014 (Carmin, 2014a; Cordes, 2014; Fornelli, 2014). During the six-year financial integration plan, Nebraska went from taking in \$14.3 million in 2011-12 to taking in \$16.9 million in 2013-14. Compared to the \$9 million Nebraska received in its last year as a member of the Big 12, the projected \$44.5 million of revenue in 2017-18, when the institution receives a full share, amounts to almost a 500% increase over six years.

Presidents also considered that adding the University of Nebraska would expand the geographic footprint of the Big Ten. A president interviewed for this study pointed out:

We were cognizant of the impact on student travel and impact on academic work from travel, and whole range of things were considered, so we wanted to make sure we drew a circle around the institutions of the Big Ten, that it was a fairly cohesive group with good transportation routes at reasonable costs. (Anonymous, personal communication, June 21, 2014)

Only two interviewees expressed concern about an increase student-athletes' travel distances as a consequence, thus it could be a geographic location issue for those interviewees' schools but not an overall concern for all members. Outsiders also noticed the perceived lack of concern on travel and student welfare. Alan Hauser, president of the Faculty Athletic Representative Association lamented:

It is quite obvious the reasons that the conferences want this – so that they can leverage more and better television coverage, giving them more revenue. But this coverage comes at a price, and few people ever mention the pressures placed on student-athletes when discussions such as these are held. (quoted in Moltz, 2010, para 15)

The reward of greatly increased revenue far outweighed the consequence of extended team travel and increased travel costs. The next consequence the COP/C had to consider the impact that the addition of Nebraska would have on the Big Ten brand.

Impact on Brand. Expansion's consequences for the conference brand were something the COP/C took into consideration. The culture of the conference, built on the pursuit of athletic and academic excellence through the collaborative efforts of the members, combined with the stability of it, the oldest conference, defines the brand of the Big Ten. The sharing of resources and revenue across athletics and academics has built the Big Ten brand into arguably the strongest brand in college athletics. What impact did the COP/C expect expansion to have on the brand of the Big Ten? In an interview for this study a president recalled, "We had expansion discussions about this but in the end the case was compelling enough it was hard to see what potential downside there would be" (Anonymous, personal communication, February 26, 2014). Adding Nebraska was seen as having a positive impact on the Big Ten brand. Another president interviewed for this study added, "in terms of branding and recognition, and in terms of expanding our portfolio Nebraska was obviously a no-brainer. Nebraska is such a national

reputation” (Anonymous, personal communication, December 13, 2013). The state of Nebraska does not add a large populated area to the Big Ten footprint. The COP/C, however, saw the addition of a storied athletic tradition with a strong national following making up for that. In inviting Nebraska to join them, “The Big Ten gained a recognized football power with five national championship trophies and a strong local and national following”(Cordes, 2014, para. 30).

The addition of Nebraska also meant adding a championship game in football for the conference. As cited above, doing so brought in more revenue for the conference, and it also impacted the brand of the conference by providing exposure on a weekend usually reserved for the other power five conferences. A president interviewed for this study argued, “I think that the visibility and capacity for the championship game is, I think, as a whole, people would argue it was good for the conference” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). Prior to this expansion, the Big Ten football season always concluded on Thanksgiving weekend, leaving the Big Ten brand out of sight for the more than a month between then and the start of the bowl season. The COP/C viewed the additional television revenue and extended exposure of the championship game as a positive consequence for the Big Ten brand.

The conference members predicted that the addition of Nebraska would be positive for the Big Ten athletic brand. The consequences, however, have been mixed. Prior to the addition of Nebraska, the Big Ten was the only athletic conference in which all member institutions were also members of the prestigious AAU. No other conference could make that claim, even the academically prestigious Ivy League (Abourezk, 2010). Nebraska lost its AAU status a few months after being accepted into the Big Ten. As stated above, the member institutions of the Big Ten pride themselves on their academic achievements and statuses as much as they do on

their tradition of athletic accomplishments. Thus, Nebraska's loss of AAU membership, as well as its drop in national rankings, after accepting the invitation to join the Big Ten negatively impacted the brand. Interviewees, however, insisted that while AAU membership confirmed elite status, it was not required of Big Ten member institutions. One president interviewed for this study clarified, "I wouldn't say it wasn't AAU membership explicitly. It was schools of AAU membership or quality" (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013).

As a result of Nebraska's loss of AAU membership, the Big Ten could no longer tout the exclusive moniker across all of its member institutions. Though this could certainly be viewed as a negative consequence for the Big Ten, the COP/C could not have seen this coming at the time of their invitation. Further, the COP/C did not believe that Nebraska's academic quality had changed. "The discussion of Nebraska possibly losing their membership had not occurred in the AAU when discussions started on the athletic side," remembered a president interviewed for this study. The interviewee continues, "By the way I did not agree [with the decision to revoke the University of Nebraska's AAU status]" (Anonymous, personal communication, November 25, 2013). In another interview for this study a president explained that it had never only been Nebraska's AAU status that made the institution appealing academically, but also, "the factors of academics fit in terms of beyond AAU status such as international programs, breadth of programs, and areas of research remained" (Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2014). AAU was a shorthand for demonstrating quality, but not a requirement. While others questioned Nebraska's academic quality, the COP/C didn't waiver. A third president interviewed for this study reiterated, "at that time we extended the invitation, they were members, and one of the founding members I might add" (Anonymous, personal communication, June 21, 2014). "We were curious as to why [Nebraska's AAU status] was

changed,” one athletic director interviewed recalled, but ultimately, “We understood why and were not particularly bothered by it” (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

The COP/C felt that Nebraska ranked as a quality academic institution when it accepted their application for membership. *US News and World Report* releases rankings of institutions each year. The process has its flaws but year-in-year-out institutions publicize their rankings in attempts to help promote their academic brands to consumers. Prior to joining the Big Ten, the University of Nebraska was ranked 96th overall for national universities and 47th for public schools only in 2010. In comparison, the Big Ten institutions ranged from 12th overall to 71st for national universities in 2010. Over the five years since joining the conference Nebraska’s rankings have stayed steady, dropping as low as 101st overall and 49th for public schools and rising to 99th overall and 45th for public in the 2015 rankings. The consistent rankings also suggest that the University of Nebraska’s academic quality had not changed even though their AAU status had.

Conclusion

Chafee (1983) presented five criteria for examining an event through the rational decision-making model: establishment of values and objectives, identification of suitable alternatives, centralization of decision-making, understanding of consequences, and maximization of value. For this study the data presented found evidence of all of these criteria except for value maximization. Through primary and secondary evidence, values and objectives were clearly identified. The COP/C believed that the Big Ten was built on the values of academic quality, athletic quality, and collaborative culture. The COP/C aimed to increase revenue and improve their brand’s public perception through conference expansion. All

alternatives were discussed amongst the COP/C, and only institutions with a desire to join were considered. The Big Ten commissioner and athletic directors played supporting roles in the decision-making process, but the COP/C was the central authority in the decision. The COP/C understood the consequences, both positive and negative, that would follow the addition of Nebraska to the Big Ten Conference, but data was not found that supported whether or not the Big Ten maximized its value by ultimately choosing to extend an invitation to the University of Nebraska.

The next chapter will discuss the implications of this study by addressing three audiences: scholars, practitioners, and future researchers.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Overview

College presidents and chancellors are faced with many financial decisions that impact their institutions across time in complex ways. Operating costs and stakeholders' needs are rising while state and government funding is on a steady decline. Institutional leaders want to make their campuses more attractive to consumers by improving their brands. Intercollegiate athletics is a vehicle institutions can use to do so. Successful athletic programs can bring a level of national exposure to a university that no other entity can. This kind of recognition is gained through success in two sports: Division I FBS football and men's basketball. The amount of revenue generated via big time athletics television contracts is staggering, but it is tied to conferences and not to individual institutions. Thus, conference affiliation plays a pivotal role in the brand and exposure a university can receive. The Power 5 conferences have been identified as the strongest brands and, compared to other conferences, distribute the largest revenues to their member institutions. During a two-year period, from 2010 through 2012, seventy-seven institutions changed their conference affiliations. This dissertation focused one conference and its members' conference realignment decision-making process, using the rational decision-making model as a framework, and thereby uncovered a variety of insights into the conference realignment process. This concluding chapter summarizes the findings of this research and offers suggestions for future scholarship in the areas of higher education and intercollegiate athletics decision-making.

Then and Now

The Big Ten Conference released a statement from the COP/C in December 2009 announcing that the conference leaders would study opportunities for potential expansion of their

membership. By June 2010, the University of Nebraska applied for membership and was accepted into the conference. Twenty-six other conferences, and seventy-seven other institutions, experienced changes in membership between 2010 and 2012. The decision-making process for conference realignment impacts institutions in many ways. Brand, prestige, and revenue are the key areas conference membership decisions influence. Rudolph (1990) would likely not be surprised. He argued that intercollegiate athletics and commercialism have been intertwined from as far back as the early 20th Century, thriving financially even during the Great Depression when so many other industries struggled. This study reported similar findings where revenues and spending have continued to increase even coming off the Great Recession.

For the first time in twenty years, The Big Ten decided to expand membership in 2010. The objectives and processes of the 2010 expansion and the earlier one were both similar and different. When conference leaders accepted Penn State's application in 1990, the focus of the decision-making process was academic fit, not revenue. The landscape then was very different from what it was in 2010. Conference championship games in football, conference television contracts, and conference networks did not exist at that time. Media cycles were also different. The Big Ten made a public announcement that it would study expansion in 2010 because the presence of the 24/7 news cycle would have made it impossible to keep their consideration of expansion quiet. With Penn State, the process started with a phone call from one president to another; whereas in 2010, the start of the process was less direct. In both cases, the COP/C arrived at their decision through a vote, and both times Big Ten presidents sustained a collegial effort to work together. In 2010, this collaboration also included athletic directors. The conference presented a unanimous front when announcing Nebraska's acceptance, but with Penn State, publicly endured criticism from then current members, three of whom had voted against

the expansion. In both cases, conference leadership demonstrated a commitment to discussion of alternatives amongst all of the decision-makers. Both expansions maintained the geographic footprint of the Big Ten while building on the conference's value of athletic tradition. On the surface, the Big Ten's expansion in 2013 seems to have been driven by different factors again. Maryland and Rutgers added television markets by expanding the footprint to new regions with large populations, but did not contribute to the conference's tradition of a strong athletic brand.

As higher education continues to move further and further into the marketplace (Rudolph, 1990), intercollegiate athletics, through conference memberships, leads the way. Major events have moved the focus of brands from single institutions to conferences. The Supreme Court's decision in *Oklahoma vs. NCAA*, the addition of Penn State to the Big Ten, the birth of the SEC championship game, the introduction of the Big Ten Network, and the recent wave of conference realignment have transitioned the center of power from the NCAA and individual institutions to the conferences. This series of events culminated in proposed NCAA legislation that will give autonomy to the power five conferences, allowing them to provide more financial benefits to their student-athletes. Leaders argue that the rationale for doing so is to improve the welfare of student-athletes, but the ability to do so is a direct result of the growth of the commercial enterprise known as college athletics; in response, student-athletes have gone as far as to create unions and file lawsuits in order to receive a piece of their institutions' financial windfall. Nearly a hundred years ago, Howard Savage and Abraham Flexnor criticized the same commercial values and negligent attitude towards academics that has fueled current critiques of the treatment of student-athletes in a highly commercialized arena.

The prevailing theme during the history of intercollegiate athletics has been the movement towards professionalization of student-athletes. Recent proposals of cost of

attendance, pay-for-play, and unlimited meals, and acts by student-athletes at private institutions to consider unionization all mirror the professional model seen in the four major professional sport leagues in North America. Institutions in higher education are moving more and more to professionalization of the student-athlete. The tension between academic values and athletics keeps growing as financial commitments for athletic programs increase. The question one may ask is should institutions consider breaking from the traditional student-athlete ideal and look at creating a new model that focuses on strictly developing the individual's athletic skills rather than academic ones as well. An extreme alternative could be the institution that strictly pays athletes to come to their campus, work and develop their athletic skills, and represent the institution in competition.

The Division I membership could split into two different groups, those that follow the traditional model and those that choose the apprentice, or professional one. Institutions that choose the traditional could scale back the emphasis on athletics and promote an experience that offers an education as well as the opportunity to participate in athletics. The other side would identify athletic talent and offer the opportunity to come to campus and spend all their time honing their craft, just as an apprentice would do. In this scenario, athletes would not attend classes and work on their development with the only goal being to make a living as a professional athlete. In theory, the professional model would attract the best athletes, best coaches, and offer the best resources. Institutions would spend more but could potentially receive more in revenue from television contracts and media sponsorships. Institutional leaders would have to discuss with their campus leaders and make a decision on which model fits their values and objectives and where do they want to spend their money. Is academics most important? Is it athletics? Is it a combination of both? Essentially, leaders would need to define

their culture. This study found, that in the Big Ten, while members valued and based objectives for expansion on financial revenues, they also focused on academic and athletic achievements.

The pursuit of excellence in both areas is rooted deeply in the culture of this conference.

Summary of Findings

Question One: Who is involved in the decision-making process? What factors led leadership to the decision that conference realignment was necessary?

With the large number of institutions changing conference affiliation within a three year time period, the primary inquiry of this study centered on the questions of who was involved in these decisions and what factors led these decision-makers to believe that conference realignment was necessary. The rational decision-making model (Chaffee, 1983) framed the analysis of the process that the Big Ten Conference and its members used in making their decision. Conference realignment is sensitive in nature and is best done away from the media spotlight, a reality challenged by the need for numerous people to be involved in order to reach agreement across a group of institutions, forcing numerous people to be involved.

The findings from this case study reveal that, consistent with Chaffee's rational model, the Council of Presidents/Chancellors (COP/C) were the central authoritative decision-makers even though they they used their human resources (i.e. conference commissioner and athletic directors) to help educate and guide them through the decision-making process. The culture of an organization significantly informs the decision-making process especially in a complex organization with multiple partners, like intercollegiate conferences. Hill and Kikulis (1999) used the Bradford Studies model to evaluate a conference decision made by institutional leaders and argued those that have power control the decision. Their study argued that the rules of the game were more important than the people involved since conference bylaws dictate that those in power make the decisions. This case study found, though, that since collaboration and resource-

sharing are embedded in Big Ten culture, political battles for votes is not as important as it was in the institutions Hill and Kikulis studied. In the Big Ten, the COP/C want to make a decision that is best for all and not just for those in power. The conference announced in December 2009 that they would conduct a 12-18 month study of conference expansion, seeking out and examining the various factors that would help them determine if expansion was the right thing to do for the group as a whole. Ultimately, the potentials for increasing the revenue and improving the conference's brand led the COP/C to the decision that conference realignment was not only the best decision for the future of the institutions and the Big Ten's status as one of the elite conferences in intercollegiate athletics, but was actually necessary.

Question Two: What is the rationale for the process used to identify options, discuss them, and decide on whom to invite? How did leadership gather information on prospective institutions? What were the criteria for consideration? Who established these criteria? How was information about prospective institutions shared? What influence did outside sources have on the process?

Since it was evident that conference leaders were willing to leave geographical rivalries and other traditions behind, the second inquiry sought information on the process of identifying the desired criteria for potential institutions and how those discussions among conference members evolved. Following Chaffee's model, leadership first clarified the values most important to the current members. The Big Ten Conference was founded on the shared belief that it was better to work together than alone. The leaders identified academic and athletic quality and willingness to exist in a culture of sharing as the values that define the conference's culture. Potential institutions had to meet these requirements to be even considered for evaluation. Sweitzer (2009) argues that institutions are concerned with competing with similar, or peer, institutions, that proximity is no longer as important as it was in the past. The findings in this case study support Sweitzer's assertion. The COP/C were more concerned with academic and athletic excellence and cultural fit than they were with whether or not a school was located

nearby member institutions. The only concerns about location were revenue-oriented, specifically, concern over how location correlates with demographics and television subscribers.

The COP/C relied on the conference commissioner and his staff, as well as a consulting firm, to gather information on the landscape of intercollegiate athletics and on the impact annexing certain regions would have on television revenue and brand exposure. Discussions were held via conference calls that sometimes would take several rounds in order to pass along data and share opinions across all member institutions. All members of the COP/C participated in the discussions, some more so than others. In addition to values-oriented criteria, an institution to be considered an acceptable candidate had to possess an individual brand that would increase conference revenue. The COP/C had the final say on which institution to invite, but relied heavily on the opinions they requested from the commissioner and their athletic directors. The other stakeholders (i.e. student-athletes, alumni, faculty, television networks, and coaches) did not influence the decision process. Chaffee's rational model calls for an understanding of consequences among decision-makers, and the COP/C did evaluate prospective institutions based on whether or not they possessed the high academic and athletic quality common among current Big Ten institutions as well as on their willingness to join the culture of the Big Ten.

Thus, the data presented demonstrates that the COP/C took a rational approach in the 2010 expansion decision. Contrary to what Keeney (2012) reports, the decision-makers interviewed in this case study did not rely on intuition, but rather on defined values and objectives.

Question Three: What are the steps for making a final decision as to which institution(s) to invite? What were the deciding factors or criteria for selecting an institution for invitation? What was the process for determining the number of institutions to invite?

After the COP/C defined their values and identified their objectives for expansion, the next step was evaluating institutions against their values and objectives in order to determine whom to invite. Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992) reviewed the research literature on rational decision-making model and argue that there are cognitive limits on the applicability of the model. However, in this case study, there were a limited number of institutions that were acceptable candidates for Big Ten membership. These confined parameters for prospective institutions made it possible for Big Ten decision-makers to consider all possible alternatives. According to media reports (Garcia, 2010; Greenstein, 2010a; Longman, 2010; Thamel, 2010), the list of potential institutions included University of Texas (UT), Notre Dame, University of Missouri (Mizzou), and University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) to name a few. The COP/C held discussions to talk about potential institutions and the extent to which each of them matched the profile of an ideal conference member. These schools had to possess strong academics and successful athletic programs. Finally it was imperative that the new member(s) express a willingness to join the Big Ten and to operate in a culture of sharing and working together.

Knowing the values and objectives the COP/C had established I can revisit the decision and speculate if the other realistic alternatives listed above would have met the Big Ten leaders goals for expansion. UT, Mizzou, and Pitt are all members of the AAU, thus possessing the code of quality the COP/C were looking for. Notre Dame, while not a member of the AAU, is consistently ranked in the top 20 institutions in the country by U.S. News and World Report and possesses the academic reputation. When it comes to athletic quality, Notre Dame and UT are considered football royalty (like Nebraska) and have strong athletic programs across the board

in all their sports. Mizzou and Pitt, while members of a Power 5 conference, are not considered on the same level as a Notre Dame or UT.

As for the objectives of the COP/C, increase revenue and brand, Notre Dame and UT could do both while I speculate Pitt and Mizzou would not increase the brand nor revenue. Notre Dame is a brand all to itself, evident from their ability to remain and independent all these years in football and have an exclusive contract with NBC for fifteen years. UT is strong brand that is recognized all over the country while Pitt and Mizzou are both strong in their respective regions, but not on a national scope. With regards to revenue, adding the 12th member would increase conference revenue for simple fact the Big Ten could sell the rights to a conference football championship game. Beyond that initial increase, however, Notre Dame and UT would increase the Big Ten's overall revenue because of their brand awareness mentioned earlier. UT's location would also increase revenue. The Big Ten footprint would be expanding into a new region, the southwest, which means more cable subscribers for the Big Ten Network and bigger television contract with the networks. The addition of Pitt would not add any new cable subscribers due to being in same state as Penn State. Mizzou would expand the Big Ten footprint, thus adding new cable subscribers, but the state does not have a large population when compared to Texas and the latest demographic reports show a stagnant population growth for the Midwest, including Missouri.

All the schools fit the academic criteria, and do meet the athletic quality, although Notre Dame and UT clearly more so than Pitt and Mizzou. Only Notre Dame and UT could likely contribute significantly to conference objectives. The final piece is do they demonstrate willingness to participate in the Big Ten's collaborative culture. Notre Dame and UT have strong academics and athletics and have strong brands that would increase conference revenue.

UT, however, did not have an interest in sharing resources and collaborating with conference members. At the time of these expansion talks, UT had just received the blessing of the Big 12 to create its very own network, the Longhorn Network. Notre Dame had been pursued by the Big Ten conference a few other times in the past but was never willing to give up its own television rights and share revenue. Both Notre Dame and UT did not have a desire to join the Big Ten and participate in the collaborative, sharing culture when they already had situations that allowed them to pursue all the revenue each could demand and keep for their institution. Pitt and Mizzou did have a desire to join due to the instability of their conferences at that time and overall revenue being generated in the Big Ten. Pitt was a member of the Big East and the league revenue was significantly lower than the Big Ten was distributing amongst its members.

Mizzou was a member of the Big 12 which was also experiencing instability. Rumors were swirling the league might lose up to six institutions to the PAC 10. The Big Ten and SEC were also considering potential members. Mizzou wanted stability and bigger revenues, something Big Ten could offer. Mizzou would have been willing to join the culture of the conference and did have a desire to do so. In the end, the Big Ten did not have an interest in Mizzou nor Pitt because neither met the objectives given by the COP/C. Notre Dame and UT did fit the academic and athletic criteria. They both would have been huge additions to the overall brand of the Big Ten and had big impacts on future conference television revenue, but neither had a desire nor would have fit the culture that defines the Big Ten. Pitt and Mizzou, on the other hand, would have met the academic and athletic quality, neither would have increased brand awareness nor overall revenue in big picture. It is safe to say both Pitt and Mizzou would have been willing to join in resource-sharing and collaboration with the Big Ten and willing to do so at a reduced percentage of allocated revenue for the first six years of their membership.

Unfortunately for these two institutions their lack of brand awareness would have meant small revenue increases in the next round of television contract negotiations. Thus, none of these four potential institutions would have ended the

Nebraska, as mentioned in the data, did meet all the values and objectives and was willing to join the Big Ten, even at a partial revenue share for the first six years. The importance of a school willing to forgo receiving its full revenue share during the transitional period cannot be overstated. Nebraska's willingness to do so allowed revenue the time to catch up with member expansion, thereby avoiding any decrease in the current members' share. With regard to the number of institutions to invite some interviewees wanted more than one and others wanted to take a conservative approach and only add one, if any at all. In the end, the conservative approach won out because, as stated above, doing so gave time for the impact on revenue to be evaluated as well as limited options that fit all the values and met the objectives.

Implications for Intercollegiate Athletics

Athletics is like the front porch of a house to an institution of higher education because it provides a first impression on a national scale. The national exposure athletic teams brings to their respective institutions is unparalleled by any academic accomplishments. Institutional leaders, however, value perception more than research when it comes to making decisions about intercollegiate athletics. They rationalize investment in athletics, building successful programs on the field, by arguing that obtaining prestigious conference affiliation can improve institutional rankings. The six participants in this study valued conference affiliation and admired the Nebraska brand. The data revealed that they all believed that adding an institution with a national brand would add to the overall prestige of their conference, thus improving their individual institutions' brands. Sweitzer (2009) reported the same beliefs among leaders when

examining the ACC expansion in 2004. However, the institutional rankings for Nebraska before and after joining the Big Ten show that conference affiliation did not enhance the reputation of any of the current Big Ten members nor Nebraska. In *US News and World Report* rankings, the conference members were all ranked in the top 75 prior to 95th-ranked Nebraska's entrance into the conference. Since joining the conference, Nebraska's rankings have consistently dropped, ranging from a drop to 96 to 101. Other members of the Big Ten have remained steady, not changed more than a position or two in their rankings.

Abbey, Capaldi, and Lombardi (2011), however, found that even though financial issues drive realignment among the power 5 conferences, the quality of an athletic conference did help institutions create and sustain the reputations for high quality valued by alumni and students. Abbey, Calpaldi, and Lombardi ranked the Big Ten first in academic distinction followed by the PAC 12. The nine measures used to evaluate institutions, however, were not connected to intercollegiate athletics nor to conference affiliation. And yet, stakeholders continue to believe that an institution's reputation is influenced by conference affiliation. The prevailing theme across studies is the myth that conference affiliation influences an institution's academic reputation even though empirical evidence has not been found to support that notion.

An athletic department cannot change an institution's academic reputation, but what about its brand? Athletics provides consumers on a national scale a look inside an institution. Through cable television, football and men's basketball at the Division I level can introduce a national audience to institution, reaching potential students beyond the regional population that may already be familiar with that institution. Conference affiliation takes branding possibilities a step further by promoting the success of all its members together rather than providing exposure to just one institution. One institution may not have a strong tradition in athletics or may be in a

down cycle over a period of years, but there is strength in numbers, and affiliation with a strong conference brand can carry an institution through unsuccessful years. The Big Ten Network's continuous rise in revenue evidences the power of group branding. Cable television provides the programming space that allows conferences to package themselves together and promote their single brand twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Decision-Making in Conference Realignment

During a two and half year time period (from June 2010 through December 2012) one in every four institutions at the Division 1 level changed conference affiliation. Since conference affiliation does impact the brand of an institution, the strategies of the decision-making process are important to understand. Hill and Kikulis (1999) examined decision-making within conference realignment in Canada. While the intercollegiate athletics contexts in Canada and the United States are different, I found similarities, as well as the expected differences, between the decision-making processes described in their study and those of the Big Ten. The findings of this dissertation echo Hill and Kikulis' discovery of organizational culture's influence on conference realignment. Using the Bradford Studies as a framework, the Canadian conference realignment decision-making process they described was influenced more by the rules of the game than by contextual complexity and politics. In other words, conference bylaws, which stated that a majority vote determines whether or not the conference members realigned essentially dictated the outcome: those in favor of realignment were the majority, thus had power in the decision. The culture of the organization, or in this case conference, was one where members took sides and maneuvered in ways that allowed them to gain the outcomes they desired. In contrast, in the Big Ten, there is a culture of collegiality and sharing. Issues are discussed openly and inclusively, and the decisions are made that are best not just for a particular

sub-group of institutions, but the conference as a whole. Thus, though both studies found different cultures existing among conference members, in both cases, the overall culture of an organization played a large role in defining the decision-making process. Whether it is an imbalance in power or a collegial atmosphere, organizational culture is a key component in the decision-making process. Though this case study used Chaffee's rational decision-making model to examine the decision process of Big Ten leaders, Chaffee did not directly reference organization culture as an essential feature of an application of the rational decision-making model. I now turn to the implications of this study on understandings of the rational decision-making model.

Implications on the Rational Decision-Making Model

The rational decision-making model is typically used in economics and political science and rarely in higher education. The origins of the rational decision-making model trace back to March and Simon (1958). Their description of the model stated that the actors entered into a decision knowing the objectives and the cost-benefit value for all alternatives. After collecting all the information on all of the alternatives, the actors choose the optimal alternative. The findings in Big Ten Conference expansion decision process align with this contention in part, given that the actors (i.e. presidents) entered the realignment decision only after establishing their values and objectives. However, while the presidents could speculate on cost-benefits of alternative institutions, such as the projected financial consequences for adding a national brand like Nebraska in comparison to the consequences for adding another, those speculations could not be definitively confirmed.

Leaders of the Big Ten could project revenue increases based on future television contracts, since adding a championship game in football would change the terms of future deals

with networks. As in many areas in higher education, though, there are too many moving parts, or independent variables, to allow for certainty in financial predictions for institutions, or in this case, for a conference. The populations within the Big Ten's geographic footprint are not increasing, and esteem in which the national audiences hold Big Ten athletics, particularly for the conferences' two major sports, football and men's basketball, has been on a downslide for many years now. Over the last twenty years, the conference has had only three national champions in football (Michigan-1997 and Ohio State-2002 & 2015), and competed only once in the national title game (Ohio State – 2006) in the eleven years preceding their appearance this year, 2015. The Big Ten's statistics in national championships in men's basketball are even lower, with Michigan State in 2000 the only conference member to win in the last twenty-five years. Though the Big Ten brand is valuable, it is worth noting that national audiences do not consider the conference the best among the Power 5. The point here to take away is that it is difficult for the decision-makers to predict with absolute certainty the costs and benefits of conference realignment due to circumstances and trends beyond their control; that said, leaders have demonstrated a willingness to investment in a brand of a conference that has stood the test of time. Nebraska last won a national championship in football in 1995, and they played for another in 2001. Their men's basketball team has never competed for a national championship. The Nebraska brand, though, boasts stability, tradition, and a loyal fan base, and so the Big Ten leaders chose to invest in it for those qualities rather than for the guaranteed financial figures associated with adding larger television markets than Nebraska's.

Simon (1976) listed the same steps in rational decision-making as March and Simon (1958) but he argued that it was impossible for decision-makers to know all alternatives or all consequences. The data from this dissertation supports the assertion of the impossibility of

foreseeing all consequences, but disproves the impossibility of knowing all alternatives. The Big Ten could not foresee all consequences; for example, they did not expect the revocation of Nebraska's AAU status. When it came to identifying all alternatives, however, adherence to March and Simon's model was possible. Across intercollegiate athletics conferences, there are a limited number of institutions that can either move from one Power 5 conference to another or make the jump from a lower conference up to a Power 5 conference. Though there are obviously other schools that participate in Division I athletics outside of conferences, their budgets, revenues, and facilities do not allow them to be considered realistic alternatives for Power 5 conference membership. This case found that alternatives could be exhaustively identified by eliminating from consideration those institutions that do not meet the values and objectives of the decision-makers.

More recently, Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992) reviewed the literature on the rational decision-making model and found empirical evidence to support cognitive limits to the model. They argued that it is not possible for humans to engage in a comprehensive search for all alternatives. The case study on the Big Ten Conference expansion, however, proves that it is possible to perform a comprehensive search when there exist a finite number of established options. Through following the initial steps of identifying the values of the conference and objectives for realignment, it became possible to narrow the list of possible alternatives for consideration for membership. Allison and Zelikow (1999) would likely agree with this finding. They defined rationality as making a consistent, value-maximizing choice within specified constraints. Specified constraints make it possible to review all realistic alternative choices.

There are four steps to Allison and Zelikow's rational decision-making model. The decision maker(s) identify the values and objectives for the organization, choose acceptable

candidates among all candidates, perform cost-benefit analysis of each choice, and determine the candidate that brings in the highest benefits as defined by their values and objectives. Allison and Zelikow frame their four steps by their definition of rationality. The concept of specified constraints did emerge in the findings from this study of the Big Ten Conference realignment decision process; the decision to add Nebraska was aligned with consistent values among current members as well as Nebraska. Data was not found, though, that definitively supported that Nebraska was the value-maximizing choice.

If evidence for Nebraska's value maximization is based on bringing additional revenue to the conference there are many facts to consider. First, adding any twelfth member automatically increased conference revenue by the addition of a conference championship game in football. Further specifics on potential revenue increase would have required the COP/C having information on the impact each potential alternative would have on future television contract negotiations, but due to the public attention conference realignment brings, it would have been neither contractually possible, nor wise, for the COP/C to have these discussions with networks. First, all the Power 5 conferences have contracts with networks and therefore the networks would have been in violation of their contracts had they discussed with the Big Ten the potential revenue impact of adding a team from another conference. Further, it becomes a slippery slope when institutions start making conference affiliation decisions based on the advice of networks. Arguably, intercollegiate athletics is already commercialized enough, and by relinquishing scheduling to the networks conferences would also lose control of the culture of the organization. Findings from this study revealed the influence of Big Ten culture on the conference realignment decision-making process. The culture of the Big Ten is a collegial one in which all revenue is shared equally, academic resources are communal, and issues are discussed inclusively. Third

party control over membership decisions would negatively disrupt the culture of the organization. The next section will discuss the implications this study has on Chaffee's rational decision-making model.

Implications on Chaffee's Model

Chaffee called for more research into decision-making in higher education nearly thirty years ago. This case study examines collaborative decision-making at the highest level across several institutions. Chaffee believes the rational decision-making model can be used in higher education and presents the essential criteria for doing so. Definition of values and objectives, identification of possible alternatives, centralization of decision-making, understanding of consequences, and the selection of the value-maximizing option are the five criteria Chaffee puts forth for testing the extent to which a decision made reflect the rational model. Findings from this study both support and challenge these criteria, making it possible to offer a revised model for consideration.

Values. To begin with, a clear set of values and objectives is a must. The findings from this study support Chaffee's work on values and objectives. The presidential leaders in the Big Ten have a clear set of values for their conference. The simultaneous pursuit of academic and athletic excellence exist within a culture of sharing and collaboration. These three values, academic excellence, athletic achievement, and collegiality, led to the formation of this first intercollegiate athletic conference and have guided it to its positioned as one of the leaders in college athletics. Without a clear set of values, it would be difficult for leader(s) to steer an organization toward a decision that worked for the stakeholders affected by the decision.

In a higher education setting, values can differ from one institution to the next dependent on many factors such as location, size, mission, or tradition. Alumni, faculty, administration,

and student population hold institutions and the values associated with them dearly. The rational decision-making model is well suited to this setting because it guides leaders to decisions based on those deeply rooted beliefs. This is never more evident than the Big Ten Conference where eleven institutions are connected and share common characteristics, and yet, each school has unique traditions that set it apart from the others. Among conference leaders, a focus on their common values allows them to pinpoint the objectives for conference expansion that will benefit the group as a whole, and not just a group of institutions or one single institution.

Objectives. The values provide the decision-maker with the criteria, or requirements, for potential alternative solutions. Values-aligned objectives further help to identify the best alternative. In conference realignment, the COP/C aimed for increased stability and continued stability. With spending needs continuing to rise at alarming rates for athletic departments in the Power 5, it is imperative the current members not lose revenue after conference realignment as a result of allowing more hands into the pie, so to speak. In order to pursue academic and athletic excellence while sharing all revenue evenly across members, the COP/C knew that upon expansion, the revenue must increase more than \$22.8 million, the amount of each individual institution's share in 2010-11. Institutional leaders, as a group, would not agree to add a new member if it meant taking a cut in conference revenue. This objective is not just common to intercollegiate athletics in the higher education landscape. Across higher education, at all levels, funding has become the issue that drives almost all decisions. State funding has decreased at a steady rate and institutional leaders must be financially prudent in their decisions. Making values-aligned, fiscally-responsible decisions is a shared emphasis across campuses, and an objective that allows decision-makers to narrow their lists of alternatives.

Chaffee argues that it is not enough for an organization to have a clear set of values and objectives. The rational decision-making model also calls for stability and predictability in the organization's atmosphere. The findings from this study support Chaffee's assertion. The Big Ten leaders value for their group's culture provides a stable and predictable environment for its members. The consistent foundation of values allowed Big Ten presidents to cultivate an environment that is not present within other conferences. At a time when so many conferences are adding and losing members, the Big Ten used the stability of their membership, finances, and culture to attract alternatives, such as Nebraska, from the unpredictability associated with other conferences. A stable group, or organization, possessing a clear set of values and objectives can then name potential alternatives that provide solutions to the decision.

Alternatives. According to Chaffee (1983), another essential feature for the rational decision-making model is the simultaneous consideration of all possible solutions. The findings from the Big Ten Conference realignment exemplified this feature. A criticism of the rational decision-making model is the cognitive inability for humans to consider all alternatives, but a key word in Chaffee's feature is "possible." Using the literal definition of possible would mean looking at all intercollegiate athletic programs, but it can also be interpreted as only alternatives that are possible, or realistic. In a vacuum, it would be nice to consider all solutions, but reality dictates that some solutions can be removed from consideration immediately. The COP/C was not going to consider every institution that had an athletic program because of the minimum financial commitment it takes to compete at the highest level in Division I. Another factor in identifying realistic options was the academic reputation of potential institutions. The Big Ten leaders were able to dismiss potential institutions without quality of faculty, research and resources, or student

profiles. The values the COP/C identified allowed the decision-makers to eliminate unrealistic solutions.

The elimination of unrealistic alternatives is a feature of a revised rational decision-making model that can apply to decisions in different areas of higher education and not just intercollegiate athletics. Deans making decisions as to which curricula to offer, and strategic planning committees considering locations for new facilities are just two examples. A department cannot add a curriculum if there is not a demand for it, faculty to teach it, or the resources and facilities support it. A strategic planning committee cannot recommend building new facilities if the sizes of spaces available to the institution cannot accommodate additional facilities. The Big Ten Conference leaders model this systematic way of making collaborative decisions early on in their process by announcing that they would study conference expansion across the intercollegiate landscape. Doing so gave them the opportunity to identify and focus on rational alternatives for potential membership in the conference.

Centralization of Decision-Making. The next criterion in Chaffee's rational decision-making model is the centralization of decision-making. Essential features of this criterion are consistency and identified participants. The findings from this study support Chaffee's claim. The Big Ten Conference has a tradition of stability in its membership and of setting standards for academic and athletic excellence. The institutions all share a commitment to equal allocation of revenue, to working as a collaborative group and to sharing resources; thus, together they foster a culture where concerns are discussed amongst all members and decisions are consistent with group values and objectives.

Identification of decision-makers is the other component of the centralization of decision-making that Chaffee calls essential. Again, the findings from the Big Ten realignment study

support this claim. As with the Bradford Studies model used by Hill and Kikulis (1999), the rules of the game had the biggest influence on the Big Ten's decision. The Big Ten conference bylaws recognize the COP/C as the final authority on all matters pertaining to conference membership. That said, the COP/C welcomed input from the conference office and from their athletic directors. The presidents' collective high regard for the conference commissioner and the working group of athletic directors helped the COP/C feel confident that it was receiving all the data necessary for informing their decision. Due to the public attention conference realignment receives at the Division I level, leadership recognized that it could not include others on campus, such as faculty athletic representatives and institutional governing boards. Limiting those involved in the decision-making process also created less opportunity for information to leak out to the media, thus protecting the brand of the conference and of the prospective institutions they evaluated from potential revelation that a prospective declined Big Ten interest or that the Big Ten decided not to extend an invitation to an interested institution.

Prior to the Big Ten's announcement in December 2009 that it would study conference expansion alternatives, there was speculation several times in the past that the conference had made overtures to Notre Dame and that Notre Dame had walked away from those discussions. No conference or institution benefits from public knowledge that it was left at the altar, so to speak, or spurned for another. During the time period of focus for this case study, the media suggested that the University of Texas was a potential alternative, and indeed that institution possessed strong academic and athletic programs and would have likely increase revenue and brand exposure while maintaining conference stability, but UT was not a good cultural fit. Texas was already having talks about creating its own network and did not share Big Ten institutions' belief that all conference revenue should be distributed equally. Despite rumors, the Big Ten

Conference chose to work privately, keeping private all internal discussions and discussions with potential. Notre Dame and the University of Texas were potential, realistic alternatives for Big Ten Conference realignment but did not fit the Big Ten culture like Nebraska did.

Understanding the Consequences. Chafee's next essential feature of the rational decision-making model is a method for assessing choices by the extent to which produces results that match the organization's values and objectives. In order to make the best choice possible, decision-makers must be able to evaluate and predict the expected consequences for each alternative. This study supports this part of Chafee's model. The COP/C understood the consequences of extending a membership invitation to potential institutions. The data from this study of conference realignment showed that the COP/C anticipated alternatives' impacts on the conference revenue and brand.

As discussed earlier it was not possible for the Big Ten Conference and its leaders to engage in conversations with television networks on the potential impact certain institutions would have on future contract negotiations. The COP/C could, though, look at the population of an alternative's region and figure the increase of additional television subscribers. For example, in 2010, the US Census reported a population of 1.8 million in Nebraska. Adding this alternative would not significantly increase the number of subscribers to the Big Ten Network. The conference could infer, however, based on numbers from other conference championship games, that with the expansion of the conference to twelve members and the addition of a football conference championship game, they could expect an increase of anywhere from \$15 to \$20 million a year (Mandel, 2009; Ourand & M., 2010a). This was additional revenue that could help in maintaining each member's yearly revenue share. Adding only one additional member to the conference also meant that the revenue only needed to grow by one share, rather than three or

four if more members were added. It was safer for the COP/C to add only one institution since it could not obtain information on the impact expansion would have on television contracts. This allowed them to find an institution that matched in academic and athletic prowess while also increasing revenue and maintaining stability in membership. The other decision that allowed the COP/C feel assured that revenue for each institution would increase or at least stay the same was their implementation of a six-year revenue integration plan with a new member. Nebraska took in \$14.3 million in their first year in the Big Ten, \$10 million less than the other eleven members, but \$5 million more than Nebraska had received in its last year in the Big 12. Using an integration method ensured that revenue would increase and allowed for the increase in television contracts to come to fruition. The decision-makers had a method for assessing the number of alternatives to consider and the impact on generated revenue each of them would likely have.

The second consequence under COP/C examination was the impact that expansion would have on the Big Ten brand. Chaffee, as stated earlier, calls for a method for comparing the results that each choice would produce. When it comes to impact on brand, there is not tangible evidence that can guarantee one way or the other the impact a new institution will have on the brand of a conference. When it comes to brand, decision-makers have to make an educated guess based on past performance. Its similarities in academic and athletic reputations did help to make Nebraska an appealing choice, but the driving reason for inviting Nebraska was the recognition of its remarkable football tradition. Nebraska football has sold-out all home football games for fifty-three consecutive years, and for many, *Nebraska* is synonymous with *football royalty*. However, its success on the field is mostly from a time long ago. Nebraska last won a national championship in football in 1995 and last competed for one in 2001. The COP/C could

not predict the future success of Nebraska football, but the long-standing tradition and loyal support associated with the Nebraska brand suggested that it was a safe investment for the COP/C to make. Groza (2010) did find in his research that a change in conference affiliation influenced game day attendance, but with Nebraska only playing four road games in conference a year, the impact was difficult for the COP/C to predict. Further, there are too many variables that can impact attendance, such as weather, day of the game, and time to name a few.

In a different context, brand evaluation works similarly. In the business sector, companies make agreements and mergers for financial reasons but also so that a group can gain a new affiliation with a strong brand to help build the perception of their own brand on a national landscape. Overall, the data from this study supports Chaffee's call for a method of assessing the potential impact of alternatives, but in some cases it is not always possible to do so with guarantees. The final criteria in Chaffee's model for the rational decision-making model is even harder to evaluate.

Value Maximizing Choice. The final criteria in Chaffee's test for the rational decision-making model is the selection of the value-maximizing choice. This essential feature demands an evaluation of the match after the decision is made. This study did not find data to support whether or not the decision made was the best choice. In order to do this the decision-makers would have to be able to show the impact each other realistic alternative would have had on revenue and brand, as determined by performance on the field. A major flaw in this speculative process, however, is the outcomes would have been different for each alternative had they been invited to join the Big Ten because each would then have been competing against different teams than the ones they did. It is therefore not possible to compare the impact Nebraska did have on the revenue and brand of the Big Ten to other institutions that were considered in realignment.

This feature of the rational decision-making model would likely also be difficult to evaluate in other contexts where there are multiple variables impacting the evaluation measures. In the decision-making process, if the alternatives all operate or work in a controlled or under precise conditions, then they could be retroactively evaluated in comparison to one another, but not many of these situations exist.

Decision-makers can, however, determine afterwards whether or not the results of a decision met the desired objectives. In this case, the Big Ten leaders were able to confirm later that the addition of Nebraska did indeed meet their objectives. Immediately, in the first few years since the decision to invite Nebraska, the Big Ten members have seen a 44% increase in conference revenue distribution, going from \$18.7 million per member in 2007-08 to \$27 million in 2013-14. Projections show those figures only continuing to rise in the future, but it is impossible to compute with certainty that these figures are the highest that they could have gone because of multiple, independent factors influencing outcomes. This is a flaw in Chaffee's rational decision-making model. Rather than ask if the choice made had the best results in comparison to what-if scenarios, it would be more reasonable to evaluate whether or not the decision made met the objectives listed at the beginning of the process. In this way, the criteria used by Chaffee should be modified.

Revised Criteria for Rational Decision-Making Model. The rational decision-making model, in theory, allows decision-makers to identify alternatives based on the values and objectives for their organization, analyze costs vs benefits of each alternative, and use that analysis to select the alternative that maximizes the values and objectives (March & Simon, 1958; Chaffee, 1983; Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Scholars have argued over the cognitive limits of the rational decision-making model and the ability to evaluate a comprehensive search of all alternatives

(Simon, 1976; Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). The findings from this study provide support for a revised list of criteria for the rational decision-making model.

Values, objectives, and centralization of decision-making are all connected to the culture of an organization. Culture encompasses all three of these criteria, and together these three criteria define the culture of the organization. For example, in this case study the culture of the Big Ten was one of collegiality, sharing, and cooperative. The culture of the conference guided members' decision-making process. On the contrary, if there is a political nature to the culture of an organization, then the group with more power will lead the decision-making process. The group in power would determine the values, objectives, evaluate the alternatives, and make a choice based on their values and objectives. This could or could not be what is best for the organization, depending on the agenda of the power group.

The other issue in this example is that power can swing from one group to another in a political environment. The values and objectives will change and the the direction of the organization will change. A political environment lacks the stability and consistency necessary for the rational decision-making model. In the case where only one person is making the decision for an organization, then the rational decision-making model can be used, but it should be noted that the values and objectives are not necessarily reflective of the organization, but rather of one individual in that organization. The culture of a group, or organization, plays the most pivotal role when it comes to decision-making. The first criteria for the rational decision-making model should be to identify the culture, as it is instantiated in values and objectives. The findings from this study support the inclusion of the identification of values and objectives, and centralization of decision-making as two criteria for the rational model.

It is not possible for a human to compute all the alternatives for a decision, but using the criteria listed above can provide a list of realistic, or sensible, options. Based on the values of an organization or group, and their objectives for a decision, a limited list of alternatives that fit these criteria can be sifted out of an infinite list of choices. Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992) called for a bounded rational model and the findings from this study support this recommendation. While there may be an infinite number of alternatives, there is limited number of alternatives that match the values and objectives identified by the decision-makers (see figure 4).

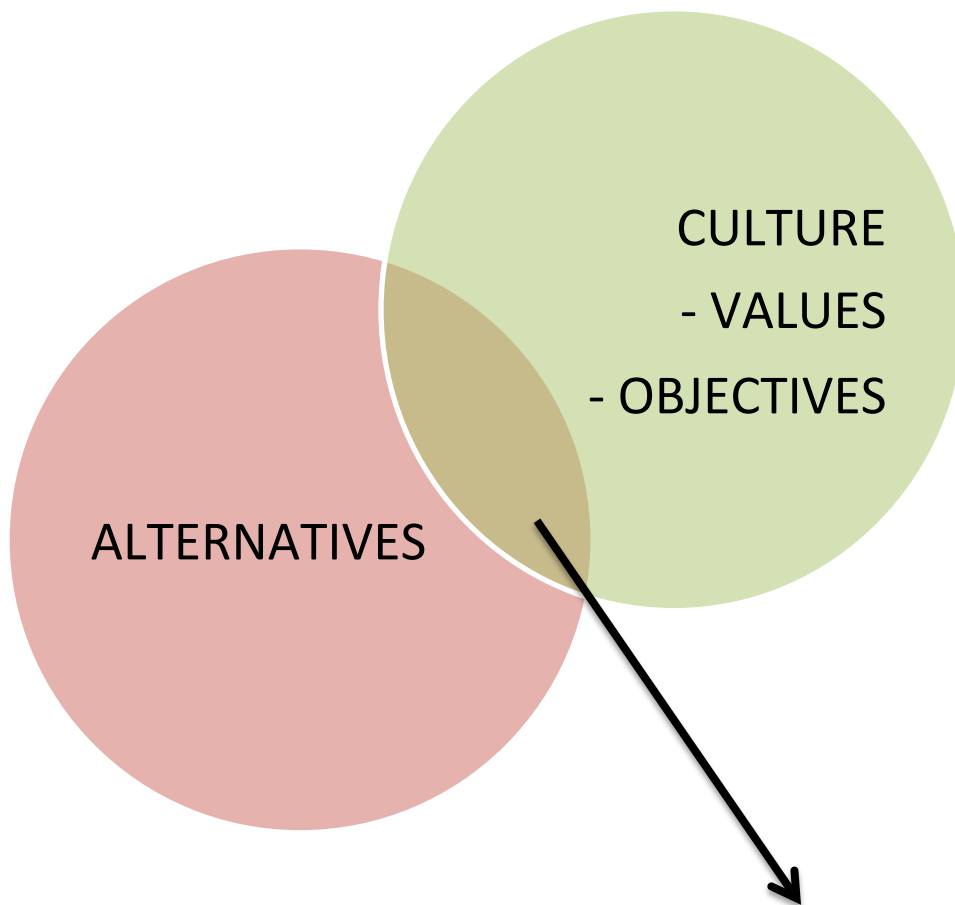


FIGURE 4 - PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVES
- UNDERSTANDING OF CONSEQUENCES
- EVALUATE COST / BENEFIT

Once the practical alternatives are identified, the decision-makers can evaluate the benefits and costs, and can understand the consequences, of the remaining choices. Chaffee's model calls for simultaneous consideration of multiple alternative, but does not limit that recommendation to those alternatives that are. This study found that while there could be a large, comprehensive list of alternatives, there is a subset of alternatives that narrows the selection down to a manageable set of options. A recommended change to Chaffee's criteria is to identify practical alternatives, rather than just all alternatives. Decision makers can then assess the practical alternatives and determine the consequences for choosing each.

The findings from this study did not find data to support Chaffee's last criteria for the rational decision-making model, determining that the value-maximizing choice was selected. It is not possible to determine from the results of the choice made that consequences would be different than if another alternative had been selected. Unless operating in a vacuum and not having other variables that impact the results, it is not possible to confirm or deny if the practical alternative chosen was the best one. Prior to the implementation of the decision, leadership can evaluate the practical alternatives and make an educated choice based on how the alternatives match up with the organization's values and objectives, but it cannot accurately retroactively compare the results from the final decision to those that would have come to fruition "what-if" another alternative had been chosen. Rather than try to assess the results of other alternatives, the decision-makers should review the extent to which the decision helped the organization meet its objectives and whether or not the results are consistent with the values of the organization.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Throughout the process of this research study, other questions emerged regarding intercollegiate athletics and the rational decision-making model. Conference realignment was a

major issue in intercollegiate athletics from 2010 to 2012. This study focused on the decision process used by current members evaluating potential members. Continuing with the qualitative lens, it would be beneficial to investigate the other side of the equation, the perspective of prospective institutions. What are the objectives and processes for institutions looking to change conference affiliation? How does an institution market their brand to potential conferences? My current place of employment, the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), is faced with this dilemma. Due to the elimination of UAB's football program, the athletic program is now trying to develop a strategy for either staying in their current conference or convince another one to extend an invitation. UAB leadership faces a number of real-life versions of the above questions, most pressing: Why is it good for conference "X" to ask them to join? It would be valuable to learn about the process of the seventy-seven institutions that changed conference affiliation, to gain insight as to how the process unfolded from their side of the table.

Since a few years have passed since the big wave of conference realignment, another potential study is comparing and evaluating the impacts that changes in conference affiliation had on institutions. A quantitative study using the reported financial data can give some insight to the impact a new conference had on an institution's generated revenue. How did reported revenues change for an institution in the years prior to realignment and how did they change in the years after? How did adding new member(s) impact the revenue for institutions who were already members?

This case study identified pivotal moments in intercollegiate athletics that led to the big wave of conference realignment. Since this wave of conference realignment, intercollegiate athletics has seen a major push by the Power 5 conferences for more autonomy. Paying student-athletes, providing a cost of attendance stipend, covering insurance premiums for risk of loss of

future earnings, and unlimited meals are just a few of the proposals on which the Power 5 conferences are voting that have the potential to drastically change the landscape of college athletics again. All of these proposals would have direct effects on athletic departments' budgets. With so many institutions already heavily subsidizing intercollegiate athletics, how are institutions going to fund such proposals? How will these new proposals impact competitive balance across institutions? Using what process will institutional leaders decide what can they afford to do for student-athletes, and if not all, how much of competitive disadvantage will it have on their programs compared to others who choose to do more, if not all? The rational decision-making model and the revised criteria given from this study could be used to design and evaluate the decision process when it comes to these new proposals. At the present moment, it is not known if conferences will implement the proposed changes together or allow institutions to decide individually. Either possibility would provide a good population for research on how institutions make those decisions, either through a case study within a few institutions, or a quantitative survey across many Division I institutions.

The proposals highlighted above also are creating a wider gap between the Power 5 conferences and others. Future researchers may want to consider elite theory if examining conference realignment given the Power 5 institutions heightened status. Elite theory examines and enlightens the power relationships that exist in positions of authority in our society. Elite theorists such as C. Wright Mills (1956) offer critical analysis of the use of elite theory in decision-making processes which could provide a different lens to explore the decision-making process of chancellors and presidents within conference realignment.

Across other areas of higher education, the rational decision-making model can be used to learn more about the decision-making processes of campus leadership. Whether the making

decisions about admissions, funding of programs, curriculum, or retention programs, the rational model can be used to frame a study for a researcher wanting to learn more about the processes leaders use to make decisions that impact their institutions.

Closing

Throughout this process of completing this dissertation, I had the opportunity and privilege of having conversations with campus leaders about the decision-making process for issues pertaining directly to intercollegiate athletics. The experience of discussing leadership with these highly respected individuals was invaluable to my professional future. The insight into how decisions were made is also beneficial to all current and future administrators. In a time where social media makes decisions and actions go viral in minutes, leaders must resist the demand for a quick decision. Using the criteria set out by the rational decision-making model, leaders can make an informed decision that matches the values of an organization and continues guiding the group in a consistent manner towards the goals of all involved.

In many ways, the case study examined here likely fit the Chaffee model better than the most recent decisions made on conference realignment in the Big Ten. The most recent iteration appears to be less rational and focuses more on business than on values. The University of Maryland and Rutgers University are both members of the AAU, but their athletic brands do not carry the same reputation for success as the University of Nebraska's does. What these two institutions do have, though, is that they are both attached to large populations in which, prior to the announcement, the Big Ten did not have a place. The New York and Washington, D.C. markets added a lot of television subscribers, and at the same time expanded the Big Ten's profile from the Eastern Seaboard to the plains of Nebraska.

With new autonomy measures being passed, the financial resources gap between the Power 5 institutions and the others will only continue to grow. Currently there are sixty-four schools with membership in the Power 5 conferences, plus Notre Dame (independent in football, ACC all other sports). Will this number grow? What changes will the next wave of conference realignment bring to intercollegiate athletics? Presidents and other institutional leaders will still have to make decisions as to what is best for their institutions. Will there eventually be four super conferences of sixteen teams each? Football drives the realignment discussions and the recent inaugural college football playoff championship was a big success not only with fans but in terms of revenue. The Big 12 was left out this time, and it is hard not to wonder whether its members will look to leave for other conferences who seem to have a stronger brand or opt to stay together and look to add to their membership? If stability and longevity are valued, then the leaders of these institutions need to take a rational approach, making a decision grounded in their values, aimed at their objectives, and mindful of consequences across the whole picture and not just a temporary financial solution.

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Appendix A

Document Summary Form

Document Number	
Site:	
Document:	
Date received:	
Date document:	
Name or Description of document:	
Author:	
Significance/Importance of document:	
Brief Summary of Contents:	
If Document connects with Chaffee's 5 criteria for RDM	
Quote 1	
Quote 2	
Quote 3	

Appendix B

Approval from UIUC IRB for Research

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Bureau of Educational Research
College of Education
38 Education Building
1310 South Sixth St.
Champaign, IL 61820



January 29, 2013

Jeffrey Guim
Education Organization, Policy and Leadership Department
College of Education
1310 S. Sixth Street
MC-708

Dear Jeff,

On behalf of the College of Education Human Subject Committee, I have reviewed and approved your research project entitled "Decision-making in higher education and intercollegiate athletics: Case study on the Big Ten Conference realignment". I find that this project meets the exemption criteria for federal regulation 46.101(b) 2 for research involving normal interview procedures where the identifying information is protected.

No changes may be made to your procedures without prior Committee review and approval. Your project number is 4874 and projects are typically approved for three years with annual reports required. You are also required to promptly notify the Committee of any problems that arise during the course of the research. If you have any questions about this process please don't hesitate to ask.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan A. Fowler".

Susan A. Fowler
College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee

Cc: Dr. Lorenzo Baber

telephone 217-333-3023 • fax 217-244-0538

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Decision-making in Higher Education and Intercollegiate Athletics: Case study on the Big Ten Conference Realignment

Responsible Principal Investigator: Dr. Lorenzo D. Baber

Other Investigator(s): Jeffrey S. Guin

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand the process of how conference and institutional leaders make decisions on conference realignment. The past two years have seen a seismic shift in schools changing conference affiliation. Little is known about the process and how these important decisions are being made at the conference level. Intercollegiate athletics provide an important opportunity to build and communicate the image and reputation of a university. Through television broadcasts and the national media coverage, the state, country, and the world are introduced to a campus. Football games serve as three and a half hour and basketball games serve as two-hour commercials that promote and give publicity to an institution. When a president and athletic director decide to change the institution's affiliation or invite another school to join a conference, they are tying their reputation to another school or schools. Factors to consider during the exploration of this study are criteria for identifying prospective schools, internal and external influences on the discussion of prospective schools, and the goal(s) or desired outcome for expanding. This study will investigate the conference realignment process leaders in the Big Ten used, which resulted in extending an invitation to the University of Nebraska in June 2010. These decisions have direct and indirect impact on athletic and academic programs at the institutions involved, and it is imperative to understand the rationale behind them.

Procedures to be followed: The participants of this qualitative study will be requested to participate in an interview session. . Participants located on the conference member campuses will be asked to interview in-person, phone, or video chat. In-person interviews will last approximately one hour. Phone and video interviews will last approximately 30-45 minutes. All forms of interview will be facilitated using open-ended questions in order to collect data about the participant's experience and perspective of the expansion process and the impact it will have on the conference members' athletic departments. An example of an open-ended question is describing your initial perspective on conference realignment prior to discussions? The researcher will request that the in-person interviews take place in the participant's workspace so it is a place of comfort for the participant. If the participant requests to have the interview take place in some other location, the researcher will accommodate.

There is a possibility of the need for a brief follow-up discussion with the participants, in order to get clarification or perhaps obtain additional information. All follow-up will be via phone meeting, and every effort will be made to ensure minimal time is required by the participant, not exceeding 30 minutes.

During the post data collection, each participant will be contacted given the opportunity to review the researcher's transcript from the interview. If permission was given to record audio, the participant will review a transcribed document of the interview session. If audio recording permission was not granted, then the participant will have opportunity to review the researcher's notes from the interview. During this post data verification process, the participant will have the opportunity to change or delete answers from the transcripts.

The total time commitment for each participant, assuming two interviews and data verification, is estimated at:

1. 45-60 minutes for the interview
2. 30 minutes for potential follow up questions or clarification with the participant via phone.
3. 60 minutes for post data collection verification, allowing the participant to review the transcript of the interview if they so desire.

Discomforts and Risks: The project represents no physical and only three potential emotional risks to the participants. Those risks include: 1) the time commitment required to participate, 2) the fear of disclosing what could be perceived as negative information about their institution, athletic department; 3) the fear of disclosing what could be perceived as negative information about the current environment in which intercollegiate athletics operates.

Benefits: This study explores the decision-making process used by conference and institutional leaders. It examines the intricacies of the decision-making process in the context of conference realignment. Little is known about how leadership progresses through decisions that influence the long-term plans of an institution.

Due to the novelty of the recent conference realignment movement, there has been little research on the topic. The critical piece that is missing is analyzing the decision-making process and the long-term goals for those strategic decisions. Concerning "big time" college sports, the complexities of conference realignment offer an invaluable look at decision-making in higher education. Findings could help institutional and conference leaders in approaching the process of conference realignment from the perspective of a conference looking to expand, or from the viewpoint of an institution changing affiliation. This study will identify factors to consider, discussions amongst the leaders involved, and conclusions drawn by a group of high-ranking officials.

This study will also demonstrate how leaders make decisions regarding intercollegiate athletics and the effect college sports have on the perception of academics on a campus simply by the conference and institutions with which it aligns. Insight will be garnered on whether leaders consider factors influencing areas outside athletics when examining conference

realignment and how this benefits non-athletic departments and influences decision-making. This study could answer calls for accountability and transparency in higher education. A better understanding can be acquired on the place of intercollegiate athletics into the overall mission of a higher education institution, and this research can offer a rationale for the investment of large sums of money into the athletic department by institutional leaders.

1. This study could provide clarification on why certain institutions are more appealing than others to invite. The characteristics and qualities that make an institution desirable can be valuable to college presidents seeking answers on how to raise the reputation and perception of their campus. With this knowledge, presidents, athletic directors, and conference commissioners can strategically plan for improving their athletic department(s) and institution(s) while seeking an offer to a bigger, more lucrative conference. This study could also explain why an institution is chosen that does not fit the geographical footprint of the existing conference membership. Recognizing the rationale and thought process of leaders' decision-making will shed light on this recent phenomenon that has dominated "big time" college athletics for the past two years.

Statement of Confidentiality: Data collected via face-to-face interviews will be stored by the researcher on a digital recording device or on a paper based notes. The data will be transferred to a computer-based document using Microsoft word. Data collected via phone interviews will be stored by the researcher on paper-based notes and transferred to a computer-based document using Microsoft word. Data collected via email will be stored by the researcher in a folder. The data will be transferred to a computer-based document using Microsoft word. The data will be secured, kept confidential, as follows:

The digital media device containing the interview recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's place of employment (a university). This cabinet is maintained in the researcher's office. However, email is not confidential and most institutions archive all emails that are sent or received through university servers. Confidentiality cannot be assured by researcher and the participant must make their own decision about selecting this method for interview. After the digital audio recordings have been transcribed to a Microsoft word document, they will be kept in the secure cabinet for three years after the project has concluded (in order to allow the researcher future reference to the data). At the end of the three-year period, the recordings will be erased. The hand written notes will also be kept for a three-year period after the project has concluded in the same locked cabinet as the digital recordings device. At the end of the three-year period the hand, written notes will be shredded. The computer-based documents will be stored on a secure/password protected network drive of the University of Illinois. The computer-based documents will be kept for three-year period after the project has concluded for future reference by the researcher. At the end of the three-year period, all electronic records will be erased using the university's standards of permanently erasing electronic information.

For each of the forms of recorded data (audio, paper-based notes, and computer-based files from Microsoft word) only the researcher and the responsible project investigator (RPI) will have access to view them. The audio recordings and the paper-based notes will only be able to be accessed by the researcher or the RPI by physically going to the researcher's office and having a key to unlock the cabinet. The computer-based files will have security such that only the researcher and the RPI can view them.

Whom to contact: If you have any questions about research subject's rights, please contact Anne Robertson at the University of Illinois' Bureau for Educational Research by telephone (call collect) at 217-333-3023 or email at arobrtsn@ad.uiuc.edu. You may also call him if you feel you have been injured or harmed by this research at 217-333-1576. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or via email at irb@uiuc.edu.

Voluntariness: Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time and for any reason without penalty. Your choice to participate or not will be confidential. You are also free to refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You will receive a copy of the research results after this project is completed.

Dissemination: The data compiled will be disseminated via the co-principal investigator's doctoral early research and dissertation defenses. Findings may be presented via academic papers, journal articles, conference presentations, and other professional venues.

I understand that I may consent to the interview being recorded or I may not agree to recording and the interview will proceed based on written notes of the interviewer. (Please initial one blank below to indicate your choice.)

_____ Yes, I agree to be recorded during my interview.

_____ No, I would prefer not to be recorded during my interview.

I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Appendix D

Interview Protocol/Questions

Decision-making in Higher Education and Intercollegiate Athletics: Case study on the Big Ten Conference Realignment

Date:

Name:

Organization:

Telephone #:

Email:

I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today.

I am attempting to understand your perceptions of decision-making regarding conference expansion in intercollegiate athletics. These questions are open-ended and designed to get the conversation going, PLEASE feel free to add any additional information you think is relevant. If needed, I may have other questions that may expand each main topic.

I will be audiotaping our conversation and will transcribe the interview. I will transcribe this interview over the next couple of days and ask you to review the transcription for accuracy.

Do you have any questions of me before we begin?

VALUES & OBJECTIVES OF THE BIG TEN CONFERENCE:
1. From your perspective, what objectives and underlying values drove this most recent expansion of the Big Ten Conference? Do you think other presidents/chancellors shared those views?
2. Of all the factors you have mentioned, in the end, which ones took primacy?
ALTERNATIVES:
3. What criteria were applied to assess prospective institutions?
4. What was the role of the Commissioner? Also, the conference hired a consulting firm. What did they contribute and recommend?
5. How did the consulting firm impact recommendations on prospective institutions for expansion and how their recommendations aligned with the values and objectives of the Big Ten presidents and chancellors?
6. Did other groups or sources compile information on candidate institutions for your use? What impact, if any, did it have? The Athletic Directors, for example?
7. What process was used to evaluate potential candidates for expansion? How did you compare and assess information on the various options?
8. Outside of the group of presidents and chancellors, the Commissioner and the consulting firm, whom else contributed information and had an impact on the decision?
9. Once prospective institution(s) were identified, how was their interest gauged in joining the Big Ten Conference?
CENTRALIZATION OF DECISION MAKING:
10. The Council of Presidents/Chancellors has final authority in expansion. But what input did you receive from your campus (governing board, Athletic Directors and Faculty Representatives)?

11. What influence or role did Jim Delany have on the decision-making process?
12. My document analysis found a lot of conversations regarding the impact of groups on Big Ten expansion. What was the impact/role of the following on the ultimate decision: A) Television networks B) AAU C) Conferences Expansion Rumors D) Others?
UNDERSTANDING OF CONSEQUENCES OF DECISION:
13. How did you think your institution would benefit from conference expansion?
14. Nebraska's membership status in AAU was in question (and eventually revoked) around the time of expansion. How was the brand/identity of Big Ten Conference weighed and affected?
15. What unintended side effects, potential negative impact of expansion did the presidents and chancellors weigh in the decision-making process?
VALUE MAXIMIZING CHOICE:
16. How did this expansion influence the next one?
17. What else should I know to gain a more accurate picture of expansion?

Sources used:

CC Athletics Dissertation

Appendix E

Timeline for Archival Records and Documents

The following list of archival records and documents used for this study were found in two distinct searches. The first search was prior to the interviews taking place and the second search was after completing the interviews.

Archival Records and Documents Search #1 (May 2013 – August 2013)
Associated Press. (2010a, 7 June). Baylor devoted to keeping Big 12 intact
Associated Press. (2010b, 2 August). Nebraska AD says move not for money
The BCS is... (2010, September 22)
Big Ten Conference 2010-11 Handbook (2010)
Brackin, D. (2010, 10 June). Big Red, Big Ten: Big Deal in the works
College Athletics Finance Database (2010, September 22)
DeArmond, M. (2009, 15 December). Big 10 confirms will to expand
Dosh, K. (2011, May). Television contracts breakdown
Dosh, K. (2012, 10 May). College tv rights deals undergo makeovers
Forde, P. (2010). Big 12 provides temporary solution
Garcia, M. (2010, 10 June). New alliances reshaping college sports
Greenstein, T. (2010a, 1 March). Big Ten told its safe to expand horizons
Greenstein, T. (2010b, 29 April). Big Ten expansion with Teddy Greenstein
Greenstein, T. (2010c, 18 May). Delany: Big Ten not tied to expansion timetable
Griffin, T. (2010, 17 November). Despite criticism, Big 12 will keep current revenue sharing model
Ikenberry, S. (1989). Personal Statement
Jones, D. (2010, 7 March). How the Big Ten Network makes expansion more likely this time around
Jordan, B. (1989). Personal Statement
Kalafa, J. (2010, February 28). Big Ten Revenue Sharing: Are Michigan and Ohio State getting fair share
Kier, D. (1990). No title.
Longman, J. (2010, 2 February). As Big Ten Studies Expansion, Others Brace for Ripple Effects
Makinen, T., & Milner, B. (1990).
Mandel, S. (2009, December 15). Big Ten Serious about Expansion, but risks could outweigh benefits
Moltz, D. (2010, June 9). The great conference confusion
NCAA Membership (2010, December 20)
Ourand, J., & Smith, M. (2010a). Big Ten's title game rights to hit market
Ourand, J., & Smith, M. (2010b). How Big 12's Beebe made the math work
Ourand, J., & Smith, M. (2010c). Texas Hold'em
Peloquin, M. (2012, December 31). Conference realignment.
Rittenberg, A. (2010). Big Ten unaware of Big 12 ultimatiums
Sandomir, R. (1991, August 25). College football; Notre Dame scored a \$38 million touchdown on its tv deal

Sansevere, B. (1990). Presidents stick it to their conference
Schlabach, M. (2010, 9 June). Expansion 101: What's at stake?
Sherman, E. (1990). Is Big 10 a trendsetter? More conference realignment may follow
Staples, A. (2012, August). How television changed college football – and it will again
Thamel, P. (2010, 5 June). Conferences consider expansion, not traditions
The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska: Agenda (2010, 11 June)
The Nielsen Company. (2012). Report of the local television market universe estimates
comparisons of 2010-11 and 2011-12 market ranks.
The University of Nebraska Report from the Board of Regents. (2010, June).
Trotter, J. (2010, 12 June). Conference realignment timeline: 1987 to now.
Ubben, D. (2009, May 26). How the Big 12's teams rank in revenue-sharing funds
Weaver, K. (2010). Conference realignment offers lesson in survival
What's the game plan. (2010, June 21)
Wikipedia. (2012, June 7). 2010-2012 NCAA conference realignment

Archival Records and Documents Search #2 (June 2014-December 2014)

Association of American Universities (n.d.)

Bennett, B. (2012, 4 June). Big Ten to distribute \$284 million to teams

Bennett, B. (2013, 6 May). Big Ten's revenue keeps climbing

Bostock, M., Carter, S., & Quealy, K. (2013, 30 November). Tracing the history of the N.C.A.A.
Conferences

Carmin, M. (2014, 26 April). Big Ten schools expect big payouts to continue

Carmin, M. (2014, 27 April). BTN profit shares likely to boost Big Ten revenue

Cordes, H. (2014, 9 February). UNL's Big Ten windfall around the corner

Durando, S. (2012, 18 May). Big Ten payouts estimated at \$24.6 million

Durando, S. (2013, 6 May). Big Ten payouts to hit \$25.7 million per school

Fornelli, T. (2014, 26 April). Big Ten schools projected to make \$45 million with new tv deal

Sturgeon, M. (2014). Memorial Stadium sellout streak continues with Husker season home
opener