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Career Motivation Within NCAA: A Study on Division II Administrators' Motivation to Advance to Division I Athletics

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### Abstract

This study investigates the effects of career motivation in NCAA Division II athletic administrators' advancement to Division I. We specifically identified gender and current position within an athletic department as variables. The entire population of Division II athletic administrators at the assistant athletic director level or higher was surveyed, accumulating a total of 327 responses. Male ( $p=0.035$ ) and assistant/associate administrators ( $p=0.013$ ) are more likely to accept a similar or elevated role at the Division I level. This study is relevant to current and aspiring collegiate athletic administrators across all subdivisions who are looking to advance in their respective careers.

## 1. Introduction

With large operating budgets and enhanced exposure, achieving a career in Division I athletics can be seen as reaching the pinnacle in intercollegiate sports. In a male dominated field, it has been identified that there is a lack of female administrators in intercollegiate sports (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). The uneven ratio of male to female intercollegiate athletic administrators has produced numerous studies in the world of sport management. A majority of the research we have unearthed brought forth the inequalities that exist in the workplace, social roles that women are expected to conform to when pursuing a career in athletic administration, and other external factors that can hinder career development and advancement. This has prompted us to research what role gender and current position play in a Division II athletic administrators' motivation to advance to a similar or elevated position within Division I athletics. Using quantitative research through an online questionnaire, we used the Career Motivation Theory to measure motivation in order to answer the following research questions:

- Do Division II assistant/associate athletic administrators have a greater level of Career Advancement motivation than Division II athletic directors?
- Do male Division II athletic administrators have a greater level of Career Advancement motivation than female Division II athletic administrators?
- Are male Division II athletic administrators more likely to accept a position (in a similar or elevated role) at the Division I level than female Division II athletic administrators?
- Are Division II assistant/associate athletic administrators more likely to accept a position (in a similar or elevated role) at the Division I level than Division II athletic directors?

## 2. Literature Review

Data collected by Acosta and Carpenter (2014) show that out of the 300 Division II institutions, 69 athletic directors are female and 231 are male. The number of female athletic directors has risen from 47 in 2012. When looking at the data on Division I institutions, 37 out of the 347 athletic director positions are held by females, which hasn't changed since 2012 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Our research aims to further investigate if these females, in comparison with their male counterparts in Division II, aspire to advance their careers into Division I or the professional level. One reason to focus on Division II is because "scholars have argued that research often overlooks athletics at the lower NCAA Division levels, especially Division II" (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). We also believe there are more similarities between Division II and I, compared to Division III, when it comes to roles, responsibilities, and compliance issues of athletic administrators.

A recent study done by Harris, Pattie and McMahan (2015, p. 113) researched "factors that influence individuals' advancement and success in a career path." Their study sampled American football players because they have a defined career path. They used the human capital theory, which indicates that "individuals with the human capital necessary for a specific career should perform at a high level and garner more value as they advance within the career. Along with human capital, individuals' record of high performance should allow them to gain increased value as they advance in the specific career" (Harris et al., 2005, p. 103). Human capital is defined as "the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics possessed by an employee or potential employee of the firm that can yield positive outcomes" (Harris et al., 2005, p. 104). Secondary research was used to define each football player's career path from high school, college and professional levels as well as data from Rivals, a recruiting analysis database, to

determine human capital. Using the human capital theory, this study stressed the “importance of human capital to an individual’s success and advancement in a career” (Harris et al., 2005, p. 113). Since there is no defined test for human capital of athletic administrators, we will assume that the level of human capital increases with years of work experience in a career field.

The theory of career construction explains the “interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behavior” (Savickas, 2005, p. 3). Hancock and Hums (2015) used this theory to predict that both structural determinants (e.g., gender role stereotyping, opportunity for promotion) and social determinants (e.g., networking, work/life balance) influence career expectations, aspirations and goals. The participants in this study were all female senior-level athletic administrators and the qualitative data was collected via in-person interviews. Hancock and Hums (2015) also suggest that perceptions of gender and professional value incongruence affect women’s career choices and opportunities for advancement. Despite how athletic administration positions are perceived by men and women, we examined if gender plays a role when it comes to having motivation to advance one’s career.

A study done on NCAA coaches by Bracken (2009) unveiled family duties and time requirements as the top two career-inhibiting factors for female coaches. Within the study, Bracken (2009) found that 73% of the women participants agreed family duties conflicted with their athletic careers. The family-work conflict will be relevant in identifying possible factors in both genders and how family commitments shape career goals and opportunities.

### **3. Method**

After completing our literature review, we determined that the majority of sport management studies conducted qualitative research. Researchers would conduct interviews

and/or focus groups to analyze trends and themes from conversations. However, we established that taking quantitative measures for our study would be most effective and the use of a questionnaire would yield the highest response rate.

The population of all Division II athletic administrators in the NCAA is 1,140. We defined athletic administrators as all athletic directors, associate athletic directors and assistant athletic directors. We obtained email addresses of everyone in this population since this information is public on institutional websites. When calculating a standard sample size, we are using a confidence interval of +/- 5%, confidence level of 95% and degree of variability of 50%. Using these numbers and the calculation tool on <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>, our standard sample size is 288 respondents.

An online questionnaire was created on Qualtrics to collect our data. We then sent an email invitation to the entire population requesting their participation in the survey. It was communicated in advance that the survey will take less than five minutes to complete. To maintain confidentiality, we prefaced the survey with a consent statement summarizing our intent to keep all data we obtain private, and made our contact information available in case the respondent had any additional questions or concerns associated with taking our survey. All respondents needed to review and accept our consent statement to continue taking the survey. We did not include any questions that recorded specific names, schools, or other identifying information. Because we did not ask for any identifying information, we could not send individuals a reminder email to complete their surveys. We anticipated a 20% response rate with email invitations sent out to such a large population of Division II administrators.

We used a cross-sectional/survey research design. Jones (2015) explains that “cross-sectional or survey research designs are perhaps the most common design within the social

sciences, especially with sport-related research” (p. 116). Our decision to use the cross-sectional/survey design was to reach the largest population sample possible. Interviews with only a handful of Division II athletic administrators are not a good representation of the entire population. The majority of our survey includes the Career Motivation Scale, which was created by Alnaçık, U., Alnaçık, E., Akçin, & Erat (2012). There are five parts of the scale that measure Career Motivation: Need for Recognition, Career Advancement, Self-Awareness, Career Resilience, and Career Awareness.

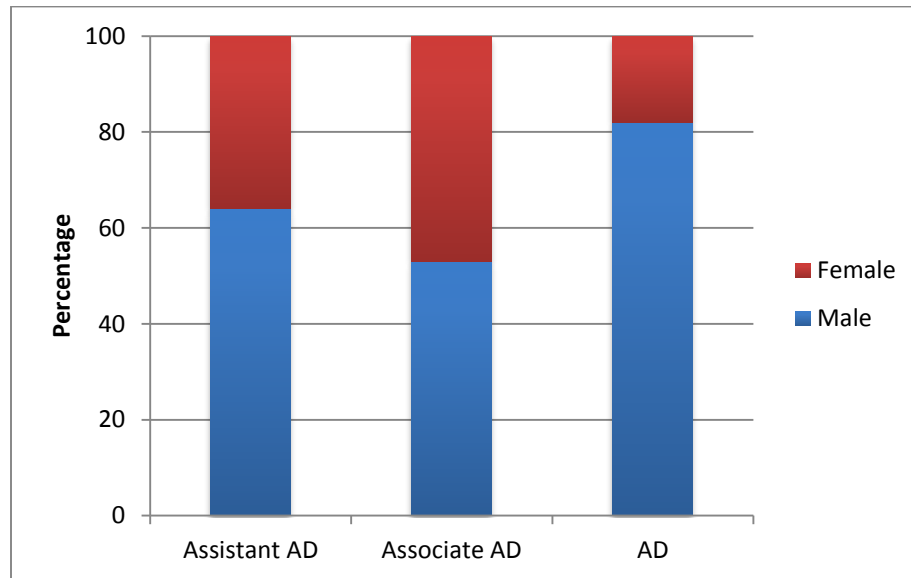
In addition to measuring Career Motivation, our survey also asked respondents about their gender, current position in Division II athletics, and the number of years they have worked in their current position. We also asked if the participants had already worked in Division I athletics. If answered YES, they were asked why they left their post at the Division I level, and the survey ended. If answered NO, the participants continued on to the Career Motivation Scale. The final question asked if respondents would accept a role (similar or elevated) at the Division I level and had the option of explaining why. After examining all of this information, we were able to test our hypotheses.

#### **4. Results**

Email invitations were sent to the entire population of NCAA Division II athletic administrators which we defined as athletic directors, associate athletic directors, and assistant athletic directors. In total, 1,140 Division II athletic administrators (379 females and 761 males) were sent emails and 356 responded by completing the voluntary survey. Of those 356, 327 were usable responses. Figure 1 shows the total number of respondents broken down by gender and current position. Reflective of the entire Division II athletic administrator population, 65% of the

respondents are male and 35% are female. In addition, 29% are athletic directors, 32% are associate athletic directors and 38% are assistant athletic directors.

*Figure 1.* Total number of respondents by gender and current position.



It is also important to note that 70% of the respondents have been at their current position for less than 8 years. There were 70 respondents, or 21%, who have previously worked in Division I and were not asked to complete the Career Motivation Scale. Instead, they were asked to identify reasons why they left Division I. They had the option of selecting all that apply as well as answering via open-ended text. The open-ended responses were grouped and coded, creating 7 total categories; 19% family constraints, 19% location, 18% new job opportunity, 13% work-related stress, 13% salary/benefits, 10% time commitment, and 5% prefer Division II philosophy.

The data that is most relevant to our research comes from the Career Motivation Scale created by Alniaçık, et al. (2012). While there was no significant difference between gender and the level of career motivation ( $p=0.320$ ), Table 1 shows that females had a slightly higher mean in every factor of motivation. Table 2 shows the differences between roles within Division II



athletic administrators. Except for the category ‘Need for Recognition’, athletic directors scored higher in every category than assistant/associate athletic directors.

*Table 1. Career motivation scale means by gender.*

	Career Advancement	Need for Recognition	Self-Awareness	Career Resilience	Career Awareness	Total Career Motivation
Males	4.165	4.210	4.381	4.280	4.240	4.250
Females	4.178	4.300	4.494	4.350	4.250	4.300
P-value	0.872	0.345	0.156	0.423	0.933	0.352

*Table 2. Career motivation scale means by current position.*

	Career Advancement	Need for Recognition	Self-Awareness	Career Resilience	Career Awareness	Total Career Motivation
Assistant/Associate AD	4.111	4.250	4.400	4.270	4.220	4.256
Athletic Director	4.336	4.240	4.500	4.390	4.320	4.350
P-value	0.008	0.985	0.325	0.242	0.006	0.042

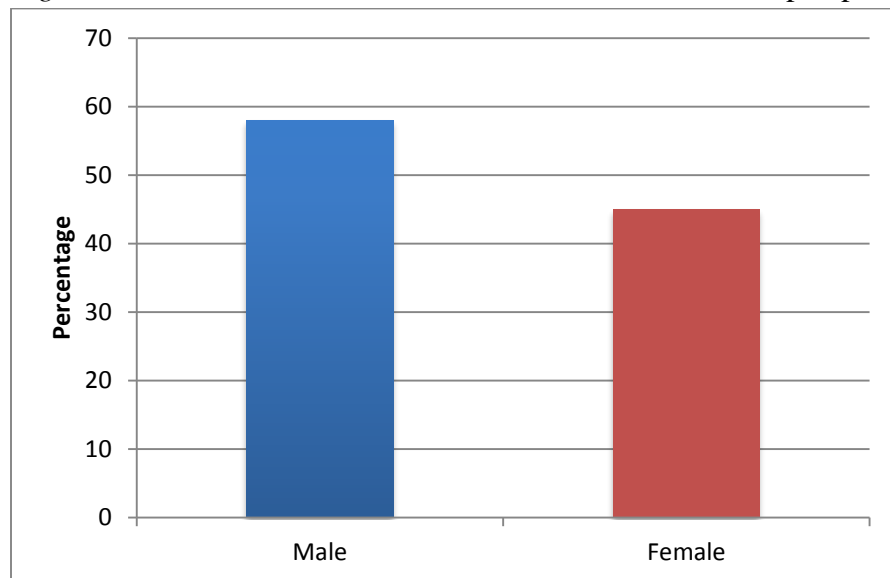
Since our hypotheses focused on advancing to the Division I level, we focused on the first factor of the scale, Career Advancement. When comparing the level of Career Advancement motivation between current Division II positions, athletic directors have significantly higher motivation to advance their career than assistant/associate athletic administrators ( $p=0.008$  and Pearson correlation= $0.118$ ). This was tested using the Pearson Correlation and ANOVA tests.

When comparing the level of Career Advancement motivation between genders, there is no significant difference between male and female Division II athletic administrators ( $p=0.872$ ). There is also no significant difference between genders in the level of Total Career Motivation ( $p=0.320$ ). Both of these were tested using the Pearson Correlation and ANOVA tests.

In addition to measuring the level of Career Advancement motivation, the last question of the survey asked our research question straight-forward, ‘‘If offered an athletic administrator position (in a similar or elevated role) at the Division I level, would you accept?’’ Of the 267

Division II athletic administrators who responded to this question, 53% responded YES and 47% responded NO, as seen in figure 2.

*Figure 2.* Division II athletic administrators who would accept a position at the Division I level.



Another hypothesis in our research was that male Division II athletic administrators are more likely to accept a position (in a similar or elevated role) at the Division I level than female Division II athletic administrators. The crosstabs test indicated that this hypothesis is significant ( $\chi^2=0.035$ ). Our final hypothesis was that Division II assistant/associate athletic administrators are more likely to accept a position (in a similar or elevated role) at the Division I level than Division II athletic directors. The crosstabs test showed this to be significant as well ( $\chi^2=0.013$ ).

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirmed that males are significantly more likely to accept a position (at a similar or elevated role) within Division I athletics. However, males do not have a significantly higher level of Career Advancement motivation as predicted. Although males scored slightly less on the Career Motivation Scale, the level of motivation does not determine if they are willing to advance to the Division I level. This could be due to the vagueness of the

Career Motivation Scale. Females may have scored higher in their level of Career Advancement motivation, but the scale does not specify that the advancement indicates Division I.

Respondents who took the survey could have interpreted the level of Career Advancement motivation as advancement within Division II or within their current institution.

Although Division II athletic directors have a greater level of Career Advancement motivation than Division II assistant/associate administrators, they are less likely to accept a position (in a similar or elevated role) at the Division I level. Prior to testing, we assumed assistant/associate athletic administrators would be more likely to accept a position at the higher Division level and therefore score higher on the Career Motivation Scale. This poses further questions regarding why athletic directors scored higher on the Career Motivation Scale, but are less likely to want to accept a position at Division I. Possible explanations include that they do not see Division I as career advancement, they do not believe in the philosophy of Division I athletics, or they would rather take another position within Division II athletics. Also, since the Career Motivation Scale measures a current, internal state of motivation, athletic directors may have scored higher because they believe they have reached the pinnacle of their career field within Division II.

The reported data demonstrated that male Division II athletic administrators are more likely to accept a position (in a similar or elevated role) in Division I than their female counterparts. When male administrators were asked if they would accept a position (in a similar or elevated role) in Division I, 58% of the respondents would consider leaving their current posts to pursue a career at the next level (Figure 2). Our study does not unmask the reason for the result and would require further research to investigate.

Our data on length at a current position could possibly support why Division II athletic directors scored higher in Career Advancement motivation than Division II assistant/associate administrators due to the theory of human capital. The theory of human capital states that “individuals with the human capital necessary for a specific career should perform at a high level and garner more value as they advance within the career” (Harris et al., 2005, p. 103). Since human capital regards to knowledge, skills, abilities, etc., the more time invested in a position could mean more development in these areas. We found that 35% of athletic directors have been at their current position for 8+ years and only 30% of assistant/associate administrators have been at their current position 8+ years. Nearly 40% of assistant/associate administrators have held their current position for less than 3 years. It can also be assumed that Division II athletic directors have additional experience as assistant/associate athletic administrators, although we did not gather this data. With a presumed higher level of human capital, this theory could explain why Division II athletic directors scored on average higher than Division II assistant/associate administrators on our Career Advancement scale.

When we evaluated the short answer responses as to why the participants would not accept a Division II position, we found the top two responses for staying in Division II are the job culture and the Division II philosophy. This finding relates to the the career construction theory in that the participants “impose meaning and direction on their vocational behavior” (Savickas, 2005, p. 3). The participants are content with their decision not to advance to the Division I level because of philosophical reasons.

We also found that structural determinants including the restriction of a traditional work/life balance for both men and women played a role in our respondents desire to distance themselves from Division I athletics. Results showed that 19% of all respondents that left their

post at the Division I level cited that family constraints was the primary reason. While the study conducted by Hancock and Hums (2015) theorized that women would have more difficulty achieving higher ranks in athletics due to gender stereotypes and pressure to balance a family with their careers, our results found that 93% of the respondents that left Division I due to family constraints were males.

### **5.1 Limitations**

The limitations of this study included restrictions the Career Motivation Scale placed on our specific research topic. The Career Motivation Scale was geared towards a broader audience, which may not have put the intended meaning behind the questions into perspective as it related to our groups desire to assess whether or not the participant wanted to advance to the Division I level. Factor 1 of the Career Motivation Scale, Career Awareness, could have been framed in a fashion that would allow for a more specific response in regards to career goals and how realistic they perceive that goal to be. The questions related to the Career Motivation Scale were very general and could potentially measure the career motivation of all career fields. Our research question was asked straight-forward at the end of the survey so we could gauge more accurately who would accept a position at the Division I level.

Our outreach to 1,440 administrators boasted a 31% response rate, however, with insufficient time to send a follow up reminder to the group, we were restricted to one initial email interaction with our pool of respondents. A follow up email would have allowed our study to reach a higher response rate.

### **5.2 Future Recommendations**

Future recommendations for this study would be to go more in depth in our survey as to why the administrator would or would not want to move up. We received several open ended

responses, that were not specific in nature, so it was difficult to categorize when we sought to analyze the response. The top three reasons for wanting to stay in DII are job culture (25%), DII philosophy (19%), and work/life balance (12%). The top three comments on those wanting to move to the DI level are as follows: the move would be a career advancement (22.5%), depending on the location (13.4%), depending on the job description (12%). Please note some respondents were coded into multiple categories depending on their responses.

Another recommendation would be to compare the level of career motivation between Division II and Division III administrators, as both of the sub-divisions have a similar philosophy. The jump from Division III to Division II would seem less drastic, eliminating the many responses related to elevated pay, increased attention, maximized resources, and any opinions that referred to the overall student-athlete experience. It was also noted that “scholars have argued that research often overlooks athletics at the lower NCAA Division levels, especially Division II” (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). This study can act as a framework for future research at the Division II level when it comes to comparing NCAA Divisions.

We recommend that all Division II and Division I athletic administrators identify what NCAA Division personally fits them and their lifestyle best. This also applies to aspiring athletic administrators. Despite each individual’s level of Career Advancement, the end-goal position that each individual has in mind may not be in a larger NCAA Division. One of the stark differences between Divisions is the philosophy of the institutional athletic department. Division I is heavily funded whereas Division II is not as driven by money. It is also argued that the athletic and academic balance is a Division II selling point. Philosophies among institutions may vary slightly, but the overall philosophies between Divisions I and II come from how they devote

and prioritize their financial resources. Every athletic administrator has to determine what divisional philosophy fits their personal philosophy best.

## **6. Conclusion**

Our group sought to identify the potential influence that gender and current position has on the motivation of Division II intercollegiate athletic administrators' desire make the transition to Division I athletics in a similar or elevated capacity. The Career Motivation Theory was used to measure each of our respondent's motivation to advance, substantiating our belief that male Division II administrators are more likely to assume a post at the Division I level and that Division II assistant/associate athletic directors are more likely to accept a position at the Division I level than athletic directors. This latter contradicts the results we uncovered indicating that athletic directors have a higher level of Career Advancement motivation than assistant/associate administrators. While our group expected to find a greater disparity in the differences in Career Advancement motivation between male and female administrators, it can still be said that the gap is still apparent.

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