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Factors Contributing to the Elimination of NCAA Division I Intercollegiate Wrestling Programs

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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE ELIMINATION OF NCAA DIVISION I
INTERCOLLEGIATE WRESTLING PROGRAMS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership

by
Jason Robert Fair
December 2017

Accepted by:
Dr. William Havice, Committee Chair
Dr. Tony Cawthon
Dr. Michael Godfrey
Dr. James Satterfield

ABSTRACT

NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling has lost more athletic teams to elimination since the early 1980's than any other intercollegiate sport (Irick, 2016). Research exploring reasons behind intercollegiate wrestling program elimination is scant and much of what does exist is part of a broader discussion regarding Title IX regulation. This study sought to understand factors that exclusively contributed to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs.

As a qualitative study, an interpretive framework with phenomenological methods were used to research this topic. A total of nine participants, three NCAA Division I head wrestling coaches, three NCAA Division I athletic directors, and three intercollegiate wrestling stakeholders were interviewed to gain an understanding of their experiences pertaining to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Coaches and athletic directors interviewed each represented different institutions.

Findings from these interviews revealed four key themes:

- gender considerations;
- financial considerations;
- culture; and
- complexity.

Collectively, these themes provided a focused representation of factors that have resulted in NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination, and of participant experiences related to these factors.

Results from this study suggested the decision to eliminate an NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program was often full of complexities. While financial considerations were most frequently cited, the ultimate decision to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling was filled with interrelationships among numerous factors. Moreover, these factors varied from institution to institution. Continuing to support the growth of women's wrestling and advocating for women's intercollegiate wrestling to gain NCAA emerging sport status could benefit men's NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. Additionally, the intercollegiate wrestling community should emphasize the strengthening and organizing of alumni groups that have a personal interest in supporting and solidifying the sport. Future studies should explore the impact of intercollegiate wrestling program elimination on first generation college students, and investigate further how administrative and campus culture play a role in the elimination of programs.

DEDICATION

To my wife, Marla. Without your support and encouragement none of this would have been possible. It's been a long journey filled with many obstacles. Thank you for having confidence in me even during those moments I didn't have confidence in myself.

To my daughter, Brinn. You inspire me in so many ways. Thank you for sacrificing "daddy" time while I worked towards completing this document. I love you beyond imagination.

To wrestlers everywhere, current and past, keep supporting and fighting for the sport we all care about so deeply.

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To my family, Dad, Mom, and Melissa, thank you for supporting my interest in the sport of wrestling and making sacrifices which allowed me to pursue the sport -- who would have guessed that my participation in wrestling would lead to this? To my former coaches, teammates, and friends who supported me, thank you. The items I learned from you, such as discipline, persistence, and the spirit to compete, are what carried me through this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Organized athletic competition has been part of the college student experience since the mid-19th Century (Lewis, 1970). Early contests were largely student-driven, with school pride and social interaction motivating the participants (Lewis, 1970). As athletic competition between institutions grew, so did the need for regulation and governance. To help fill this void the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was formed in 1906 (“History,” 2010, para 4). In 1910, the IAAUS became the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (“History,” 2010, para 4).

The NCAA is one of the largest governing bodies of intercollegiate athletics in the United States (U.S.), with more than 1,100 member colleges and universities (“What is the NCAA,” n.d.). The association is broken up into three separate Divisions, each with its own set of guidelines (“History,” 2010). The most well-known of these is Division I. Athletic departments who sponsor Division I programs are required to maintain a larger number of programs and offer greater financial aid to its student-athletes than Division II and Division III (“Divisional Differences,” n.d.). Moreover, athletic budgets at Division I schools are much larger in comparison to their Division II and III counterparts (Marburger & Hogshead-Makar, 2003).

A total of nineteen men’s and twenty-one women’s championship sports are governed by the NCAA (Irick, 2016). The NCAA recognizes eight additional sports for both men and women, but championship events are not sanctioned (Irick, 2016). Out of those offered, only Division I-A football and men’s basketball are considered revenue-

producing (Marburger & Hogshead-Makar, 2003). The remaining sports generally operate at a financial loss and are therefore considered non-revenue.

Since the 1980's, the number of male non-revenue athletic programs at the Division I level has decreased (Cooper & Weight, 2011a). The sport that experienced the most program eliminations was intercollegiate wrestling (Irick, 2016). For years advocates of intercollegiate wrestling and other Olympic style sports had looked towards Title IX as the reason behind this decline (Weight & Cooper, 2011a). Intercollegiate wrestling leaders such as Dan Gable, arguably the most famous U.S. wrestler and coach of all time, asserted that Title IX reform was paramount to the future of intercollegiate wrestling and other non revenue sports (Gable, 2004). Both the American Sports Council (formerly the College Sports Council) and the National Wrestling Coaches Association (NWCA) long fought for changes to the amendment in hopes of reversing years of cuts to male non-revenue teams.

Yet, not everyone placed blame for NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination on Title IX. Others pointed to athletic department budgetary decisions. Marburger and Hogshead-Makar (2003) argued that financial motives had resulted in "shifting resources from the minor sports to men's football and basketball" (p. 66) and encouraged elimination of non-revenue sport programs. A survey conducted by Weight and Cooper (2011b) supported this argument, finding that athletic directors used financial considerations as the key influence of whether to eliminate an athletic program.

Although various arguments existed related to program elimination (Weight & Cooper, 2011; Marburger & Hogshead-Makar, 2003), my study presupposed that the

decision making process and individual understanding of this process was filled with complexity and could not be fully explained or resolved by focusing on a single issue. Title IX and financial problems did not occur spontaneously. Therefore, this study built upon previous research and added to the knowledge base by allowing participants an opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences using their own words. With thorough exploration of these experiences, this study found additional understanding regarding the reasons for intercollegiate wrestling program elimination at NCAA Division I member institutions.

Statement of the Problem

The number of colleges and universities that sponsored intercollegiate wrestling programs has decreased considerably since the early 1980's. Between academic years 1981-82 and 2015-16, the total number of intercollegiate wrestling programs at NCAA institutions dropped from 363 to 232, a net loss of 131 teams (Irick, 2016). Over half of programs eliminated were at Division I colleges and universities, where the number of intercollegiate wrestling teams declined from 146 to 76 between 1981-82 and 2015-16 (Irick, 2016). As these numbers indicated, on average two Division I intercollegiate wrestling teams were eliminated each year since 1981 (Irick, 2016).

In correlation with program eliminations, the number of opportunities for student-athletes to participate in Division I intercollegiate wrestling decreased sharply. During the 1981-82 wrestling season there were 3,659 Division I intercollegiate wrestlers (Irick, 2016). In 2015-16, the number of intercollegiate wrestlers dropped to 2,501 (Irick, 2016), amounting to more than 1,150 eliminated roster spots.

Unlike NCAA institutions, opportunities for high school participation had increased since the early 1980's. According to a report by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), the total number of high schools which offered men's wrestling increased by greater than 1,700 and the number of participants by over 2,000 between 1981-82 and 2014-15 ("1969-2014," n.d.; "2014-15," n.d.). High school participation levels exacerbated the problem of limited Division I intercollegiate program numbers. Fewer high school wrestlers had the opportunity to wrestle at the pinnacle of college sports than ever before. College access may have suffered due to decreased scholarship opportunities. Following the 2014-15 academic year, men's high school participation numbers began to decline ("2016-17," n.d.). Although the number of high schools that offered men's wrestling continued to increase, the number of participants dropped by nearly 14,000 in that two year period ("2016-17," n.d.).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of factors that led to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Using a phenomenological research design, the study identified these factors and their significance through the experiences and perceptions (Glesne, 2011) of individuals who were close to the sport or involved in assessing program viability. My hope is that the findings of this study will be used by intercollegiate wrestling stakeholders to better position the sport for survival and growth. Additionally, scholars can use data presented in this study to further examine the causes of program elimination in intercollegiate wrestling and potentially other nonrevenue intercollegiate sports.

Research Questions

The research questions below were used as a guide for this study:

1. What are the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions?
2. What are the experiences of Division I head wrestling coaches regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions?
3. What are the experiences of NCAA Division I athletic directors regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions?
4. What are the experiences of critical stakeholders regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions?

Research Design

The research design for this dissertation is phenomenology. Phenomenology, which is rooted in the tradition of interpretive qualitative research, was selected because it allowed the researcher to apprehend meaning from the words of those with lived experiences (Glesne, 2011). Underpinning the phenomenological design was an interpretive theoretical framework. The interpretive paradigm grew from the work of Kant in the 1700's and was further developed by individuals such as Weber (Glesne, 2011). The goal of interpretive research is to “makes sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (Creswell, 2003, p.9). Further, interpretive research seeks

to understand “human ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts or in terms of the wider culture” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). Chapter Three explores the research design in further detail.

Data collected for the study consisted of participant responses to semi-structured interview questions and the ensuing respondent descriptions of their experiences. The semi-structured question design allowed for open-ended questioning to elicit explanatory responses from participants through their (the participants) own perspectives and experiences (Glesne, 2011). In this dissertation study, the semi-structured questions were asked to intercollegiate wrestling coaches, athletic directors, and influential stakeholders, to allow for follow-up questioning which probed deeper into the problem being addressed.

Delimitations

Delimitations are used to help restrict the range of variables for a study (Creswell, 2003). This study was delimited to NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. The selection of coaches was delimited to those who were in head coaching positions at the time of the study or those who were a head wrestling coach at the time their institution eliminated its program. Athletic Directors interviewed were a) employed at the time of the study or previously employed by an institution where wrestling was eliminated while the person held the position of Athletic Director at the time of program elimination, or b) employed at the time of the study by an institution which sponsored an NCAA Division I men’s westling team.

Also delimited were the selection of wrestling stakeholders. Stakeholders interviewed were those who had demonstrated a connection to the sport through either a) holding employment at the time of the study with a wrestling organization, or b) having led efforts which were geared towards raising funds, saving, or reviving the sport of wrestling or a wrestling team at the NCAA Division I level.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of Chapter One was to introduce the study and state the problem that was explored. Since the early 1980's, intercollegiate wrestling suffered more net program eliminations than any other NCAA Division I athletic team (Irick, 2016). Developing an awareness of the factors that contributed to the elimination of these programs is essential for coaches, participants, and other advocates for the sport. Much of the previous research on program elimination centered on two major developments, Title IX regulation and athletic department spending habits. This research study added to the knowledge base because it investigated the broader picture of program elimination, and the complexities involved, through the eyes of key stakeholders.

Terms and Definitions

Defined below are terms used during the course of this study, including an explanation of various organizations related to college athletics or wrestling.

Athletic Director – Individual who is employed by a college or university with the purpose of providing overall leadership and direction for the institution's athletic department and programs.

Dual Match – a competition where one team competes directly against another, with one wrestler representing each team per weight classification. Used interchangeably with Dual Meet.

Gender Equity – Term that refers to the equal treatment of male and female student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics. Used in reference to the enforcement of Title IX (“Gender Equity,” n.d.).

Intercollegiate Wrestling – Type of wrestling practiced at colleges and universities that are sanctioned by an athletic governing body such as the NCAA.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) – A governing body directed by colleges and universities which participate in membership. Its focus is providing student-athletes with a safe and rewarding athletic and academic experience (“What is the NCAA,” n.d.).

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) – National governing agency for high school sports and activities. The organization supports members in all 50 states and creates and distributes rules for male and female high school sports (“NFHS About Us,” n.d.).

National Wrestling Coaches Association (NWCA) – “The NWCA brings the wrestling coaching community together to advance the sport and ensure that current and future generations have the opportunity to engage in a safe and educationally based wrestling experience. This is primarily done by strengthening existing programs, creating new programs, and providing coaches with progressive educational opportunities” (“Mission Statement,” n.d.).

NCAA Division I Member Institution – One of three NCAA Divisions. The roughly 350 members of this Division have the largest number of students, the highest budgets, and offer the most financial aid to student-athletes. It is also the only Division that contains Subdivisions which are based strictly on football classification (“NCAA Division I,” n.d.).

NCAA Division II Member Institution – One of three NCAA Divisions. There are over 300 colleges and universities that participate in Division II athletics. These schools have smaller athletic resources than Division I but do offer athletic scholarships. Often the scholarships provided are partial or are divided between several student-athletes (“About NCAA Division II,” n.d.).

NCAA Division III Member Institution – One of three NCAA Divisions. Division III contains the largest number of member institutions and student-athletes. No athletic scholarships are awarded by its members (“NCAA Division III,” n.d.).

Non-Revenue Sport – Athletic programs which do not generate money for a university athletic department. This term encompasses all intercollegiate sports outside of football and men’s basketball.

Stakeholder – Individual who, although not employed as an Athletic Director or Wrestling Coach at a college or university, has a vested interest in the problem addressed by this study. This includes donors, employees of organizations dedicated to the success of intercollegiate wrestling, and employees of organizations dedicated to covering intercollegiate wrestling news.

Title *IX* – Legislation passed in 1972 seeking to prevent gender inequalities in organizations that receive federal dollars (“Title IX,” 2015, para 1).

Wrestling Coach – Individual who is employed by a college or university with the purpose of providing leadership and direction for the institution’s intercollegiate wrestling program.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of Chapter Two is to provide a summary of literature relevant to the state of intercollegiate wrestling at the NCAA Division I level. As was established in Chapter One, since the early 1980's numerous Division I colleges and universities eliminated intercollegiate wrestling as an athletic option for college students (Weight & Cooper, 2011; Irick, 2016). Over the same period of time, very few new programs were added (Irick, 2016). Although a few sports have experienced declines (most significantly intercollegiate wrestling), overall, team sponsorships and participation levels were at an all-time high for NCAA Division I members in 2015-16 (Irick, 2016). According to Irick (2016) "the number of women's and men's championship sport teams sponsored at NCAA member institutions increased from a total of 19,326 in the 2014-15 academic year to 19,506 in 2015-16" (p.7). From these, 6,545 teams (3,604 women's and 2,941 men's) were sponsored by Division I institutions (Irick, 2016). The Division I sport with the largest number of sponsored teams was basketball, with 346 men's and 344 women's programs (Irick, 2016). Meanwhile, 76 Division I institutions sponsored men's intercollegiate wrestling, while women's intercollegiate wrestling had yet to be recognized as a championship sport by the NCAA (Irick, 2016).

Although the total number of Division I male athletic teams had increased since the early 1980's, "the men's sport with the greatest net loss of teams is [intercollegiate] wrestling" (Irick, 2015, p.9). The following sections of this chapter present literature that

addressed potential reasons behind the decline of intercollegiate wrestling. This review includes issues directly related to intercollegiate wrestling, including:

- history and participation;
- prominent issues within the sport;
- intercollegiate wrestling and Title IX;
- spectator interest; and
- athletic department finances.

History and Participation

Wrestling is one of the oldest forms of athletic competition (Carroll, 1988) with early evidence of the sport traced to Europe an estimated 20,000 years ago (Dellinger, n.d.). Many artifacts have been discovered that substantiate wrestling antiquity, and supported the claim that it is the oldest sport existing in the world today (Carroll, 1988). Included in these artifacts were artwork depicting wrestling, some of which went back as far as ancient Mesopotamia (Azize, 2002).

The “formal history” (Futterman & Germano, 2013, para 1) of wrestling “dates back to the ancient Olympics in 708 B.C” (Futterman & Germano, 2013, para 1). During that time it was one of the most popular athletic events that took place in the Greek Olympic Games (Dellinger, n.d.). The sport can be found in writings from legendary Greek poet Homer, and classic Greek philosopher Plato had been a well-known and respected wrestling champion as a youth (Dellinger, n.d.).

In addition to the ancient Greeks, Native Americans are also believed to have wrestled as early as the 15th century (Dellinger, n.d.), and by the 18th century wrestling

had established itself as one of the most popular sports in the U.S. (Dellinger, n.d.). At the time of this study, wrestling competition existed worldwide in 135 nations, the modern Olympic Games, World Championship events, NCAA level events, and at High Schools across the U.S. (“Wrestling Facts,” n.d.). The popularity of wrestling outside the U.S. abounds: During the 2012 Olympic Games there were 29 countries that had a wrestler earn a medal (Futterman & Germano, 2013), and 27 countries had a wrestling Olympic medal winner during the 2016 Summer Games (Holmes, 2016). Nations “as small as Estonia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan and as large as India, the U.S. and Russia” (Futterman & Germano, 2013, para 5) had captured Olympic medals in the sport (Futterman & Germano, 2013).

Division I Participation

College athletics are considered to have begun in 1852, when Harvard competed against Yale in rowing (Mans & Gibbs, 2015), but it would be fifty years later before wrestling got its start as an intercollegiate competition (Hammond, 2006). This happened in 1903, when intercollegiate wrestlers from Columbia challenged Yale grapplers to a dual match (Hammond, 2006). Within the following two years, both Penn and Princeton initiated teams, and these two schools soon joined with Yale and Columbia to create the first intercollegiate wrestling athletic conference called the Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association (EIWA) (Hammond, 2006). The EIWA has remained an intercollegiate wrestling conference since 1904 making it both the oldest intercollegiate wrestling and the oldest athletic conference in the U.S. (“About Us,” n.d.).

Following the EIWA's formation, intercollegiate wrestling programs continued to emerge and to spread from the east to the midwest (Hammond, 2006). Intercollegiate wrestling made its way across the U.S. quickly, and by 1909 intercollegiate wrestling had its first west coast team established when Oregon Agricultural College began sponsoring a program (Hammond, 2006). In a span of just six years intercollegiate wrestling had made its way across the entire U.S.

The first NCAA intercollegiate wrestling championship tournament took place in 1928 (Hammond, 2006). By this time the number of colleges with intercollegiate wrestling programs had grown significantly. Although only fifteen colleges and forty intercollegiate wrestlers were in attendance at the 1928 NCAA championships there were many new programs emerging (Hammond, 2006). By 1941, a team point scoring system was implemented and the number of participating teams had more than doubled (Hammond, 2006). The NCAA intercollegiate wrestling championships were, and continued to be, held annually with exception of the years 1943-1945 (Hammond, 2006). During that timeframe student-athletes left college to join the armed services and fight in World War II (Hammond, 2006). Not even the Great Depression, which resulted in limited participation because of travel-related costs, would put a complete halt to the championship event (Hammond, 2006).

Toward the end of the 1960's into the 1970's the number of intercollegiate wrestling programs sponsored by NCAA institutions increased rapidly (Hammond, 2006). According to figures published in the NCAA's Sport Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report, there were 146 Division I institutions that sponsored a men's

intercollegiate wrestling team during the 1981-82 year (Irick, 2016). This was the largest number of Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs recorded since the NCAA began its current method for compiling annual statistics (Irick, 2016). During the 1981-82 year, more than half of all colleges and universities participating in Division I athletics sponsored a men's intercollegiate wrestling team (Irick, 2016).

Following the 1981-82 season the number of Division I institutions sponsoring intercollegiate wrestling began to decline. Between the 1981-82 and 1982-83 seasons the total number of Division I intercollegiate wrestling teams dropped from 146 to 136 (Irick, 2016). Beginning in 1985-86, the number of Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs decreased in fourteen out of the next fifteen years (Irick, 2016). Consequently, by 1999-2000 only 90 Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs remained; overall, in less than twenty-years a net total of 56 teams were eliminated by its institution (Irick, 2016). Although attrition would eventually slow, during the 2015-16 season, only 76 Division I intercollegiate wrestling teams existed (Irick, 2016).

Other Intercollegiate Participation

Like most other sports, many top competitors of intercollegiate wrestling participated at Division I institutions. However, NCAA Division I is not the only athletic governing body that recognized intercollegiate wrestling. At the time of this study, intercollegiate wrestling also existed at the NCAA's Division II & III levels, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). Further, the National Collegiate Wrestling Association (NCWA), a governing body solely for club intercollegiate wrestling teams, provided opportunities

for student-athletes to continue participation in the sport after high school (Giunta, n.d.). Unlike teams recognized as an official sport by their college or university, intercollegiate wrestling programs in the NCWA are not considered part of their institution's athletic department and are generally funded by the student-athletes themselves (Giunta, n.d.).

Although sponsorship at Division I Colleges and Universities suffered, there had been growth in other NCAA Divisions and in other governing bodies ("Wrestling Facts", n.d.). At the NCAA Division II level, the number of institutions that sponsored intercollegiate wrestling climbed to 60 for the 2015-16 season after being down to just 38 programs in 2002-03 (Irick, 2016). Division III contained the largest number of NCAA institutions with intercollegiate wrestling programs, reaching 96 teams in 2015-16 after being down to 87 in 2011-12 (Irick, 2016). Overall, between the years 2002-2016, more than 130 new intercollegiate wrestling programs were added at colleges and universities across the U.S. ("Wrestling Facts", n.d.).

High School Participation

Although participation levels have dropped since 2014-15 ("2014-15," n.d.), wrestling remains one of the most popular sports options for high school males. According to the Nation Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), during the 2016-17 academic years there were 244,804 male student-athletes who participated in the sport at 10,629 high schools across the U.S. ("2016-17," n.d.). These numbers were the seventh highest in terms of total participants among all male sports ("2016-17," n.d.). All 50 states had men's high school wrestling, but the largest was California, where a total of 835 high schools sponsored the sport ("2016-17," n.d.).

Not only was wrestling popular in high schools, but many participants continued to train and compete long after the high school season ended. Participation in the international styles of wrestling, Freestyle and Greco-Roman, lasted deep into the summer before culminating at the Cadet and Junior age group Nationals (Abbot, 2016). The tournament, often referred to as Fargo Nationals due to its regular home in Fargo, North Dakota, ran for the 46th consecutive year in 2016, and “features high school wrestlers in grades 9-12” (Abbot, 2016, para 4). Fargo Nationals was touted as the largest high school aged wrestling tournament in the world (Abbot, 2016) and was considered one of the best predictors of a high school wrestler’s performance at the college level (Hurst, 2015). Between 2005 and 2015, “82.3% of the possible 791 eligible Division I All Americans [had] competed in Fargo” (Hurst, 2015, para 2).

Women’s Wrestling Participation

Once overwhelmingly dominated by males, female participation in the sport of wrestling began to gain momentum towards the end of the 20th century. Before the 1990’s there were few options for aspiring female wrestlers, and women who wanted to compete in the sport often did so as part of a male team (“Women’s Wrestling History,” n.d.). However, during the mid 1990’s club and high school teams began to emerge and provided increased opportunities for women to compete (“Women’s Wrestling History,” n.d.).

The number of high schools offerings a women’s wrestling team increased dramatically starting in the mid 1990’s. Between 1996-97 and 2016-17 the number of teams rose from 217 to 2,091, and the number of female participants rose from 1,629 to

14, 587 (“2016-2017,” n.d.). As of 2016-17 there were 23 states with at least one women’s team (“2016-2017,” n.d.). Further, as mentioned in the section above, competing in the international styles during the off-season provided increased opportunities for competition, including for female wrestlers. In 2002 a women’s division was created at the Fargo Junior Nationals where 100 females competed (Hobeika, 2002). By 2016 the number of female participants at Junior Nationals had increased to 405 (“Tournament Participants,” 2016).

Women’s wrestling at the intercollegiate level also experienced growth in participation and popularity. A total of thirty colleges and universities sponsor a women’s intercollegiate wrestling (“Women’s Wrestling History,” n.d.). Although not a recognized championship sport by the NCAA, women’s intercollegiate wrestling had a National Championship event under the Women’s College Wrestling Association (WCWA) where team and individual champions were crowned. Believing that the success of women’s intercollegiate wrestling is a key to the overall future of the sport, the NWCA focused efforts toward attaining *emerging sport* status for women’s intercollegiate wrestling with the NCAA (“Five Year Strategic Plan,” 2016). Emerging sports is an NCAA program “created in 1994 to provide a fast track for eligible women’s sports to become full-fledged NCAA Championship events” (Stark, 2016, para 2). An important feature of emerging sport status was that it allowed institutions that sponsor an emerging sport to use their participation numbers towards meeting sport sponsorship and financial aid requirements (“NCAA Emerging Sports for Women”, n.d.).

One of the most historic developments in women's wrestling occurred during the 2004 Summer Olympics, when women's wrestling was included as an Olympic sport for the first time (Reguli, 2007). Women's wrestling inclusion as an Olympic sport helped to further popularize and grow the sport in the U.S. (Smith, 2016). During the 2016 games the first U.S. female Olympic wrestling champion, who also was a four-time WCWA intercollegiate National Champion, was crowned (Smith, 2016).

Prominent Issues within the Sport

Amateur wrestling is a combat sport, and widely considered one of the most grueling and intense forms of athletic competition. According to Cooper (2012), although most top athletes "have a tremendous amount of drive, wrestlers in particular seem to operate at a higher level of fortitude" (para 6). For reasons such as these, coaches of other sports, football in particular, touted the advantages of their athletes who were amateur wrestlers (Cooper, 2012). This drive and mental toughness also contributed to the success amateur wrestlers had in other combat sports like mixed martial arts (Jensen, P., Roman, J., Shaft, B., & Wrisburg, C., 2013)

Although the sport promoted many positive qualities, there had also been issues within intercollegiate wrestling that negatively affected its image. A study conducted by Cooper and Weight (2011b) determined that Athletic Directors placed significant value on the behavior of student-athletes and coaches of nonrevenue programs. The administrators studied "value the image that *nonrevenue*, Olympic sport teams portray in the surrounding community" (Cooper & Weight, 2011b, p. 257). Therefore, any issues which had shed a negative light on the sport of intercollegiate wrestling or its participants

could have been a consideration in the elimination of programs. The following sections dive deeper into some of the issues which have impacted Division I intercollegiate wrestling.

Health and Wellbeing

According to the information published in the 2016 NWCA Strategic Plan, intercollegiate wrestlers ranked at or near the top of all student-athletes when it came to usage of items such as pain medication, amphetamines, smokeless tobacco, dietary supplements, diuretics, and medication for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (“Five Year Strategic Plan”, 2016). In addition, a significant number of skin infections were reported for student-athletes who participated in the sport (“Five Year Strategic Plan,” 2016), and in a study of college student-athletes who participated in spring semester sports, intercollegiate wrestlers were significantly more likely to carry methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) than student-athletes in other sports (Champion et al., 2014).

From the 2009-10 until 2013-14 academic years, although football had more total injuries, “men’s wrestling experienced the highest overall injury rate (13.1 per 1,000) and practice injury rate (10.2 per 1,000)” (Kerr et al., 2015, p. 1330). The most common injuries for wrestlers impacted the joints, especially the knees (Boden, Lin, Young, & Mueller, 2002). While the overall injury rate may have been high for the sport, few of the injuries resulted in death or carried serious long-term consequences. According to a study by Boden et al. (2002), “the catastrophic injury rate in high school and college

wrestlers is approximately 1 per 100,000 participants” (p. 793), making these occurrences very rare.

One of the more unsightly injuries associated with wrestling is cauliflower ear. Cauliflower ear, proper name auricular hematoma, results from damage to the outside of the ear causing fluid buildup and enlargement (Summers, 2012). According to Summers (2012), when “the condition is left untreated, the distortion can become permanent and, over time, will look like the outside of a cauliflower” (p. 5). Wearing headgear that protects the ears is required for high school and college competitions, but many wrestlers choose not wear headgear during off-season competitions or during practice (Kinningham & Monseau, 2015). Inside of the wrestling culture, cauliflower ear “is seen as a sign of toughness and is even sought after by young wrestlers” (Kinningham & Monseau, 2015, p. 407) which may have kept the incidences of this injury high.

Controlling injuries and ensuring the health of student-athletes has been an important issue for athletics and the cultivation of future student-athletes. A survey of parents released in 2014 showed that nearly 90% feared their child would be injured playing sports and roughly 25% weighed whether to allow their child to participate due to injury-related concerns (Farrey, 2014). For a sport that has struggled to grow and attract the interest of both new participants and new spectators, the frequency and significance of health-related occurrences must be curtailed.

Rapid Weight-Loss

Amateur wrestling is a sport in which a participant competes one-on-one with an opponent. As with boxing and various forms of martial arts, the only factor

differentiating competitors is weight classification (Pettersson & Berg, 2014). The purpose of weight classes is to “establish equality between opponents regarding physical strength and body mass” (Pettersson & Berg, 2014, p. 267). However, athletes have attempted to use the weight classification system to their advantage by manipulating their bodies to find a balance between physical capability and weight optimization (Lakin, Steen, & Oppliger, 1990). In the days preceding weight qualification, some athletes engaged in weight-loss practices whereby they severely limited calories and liquids, and participated in activities designed to rapidly eliminate water from their bodies (Reljic, Hassler, Jost, & Friedmann-Bette, 2013).

Rapid weight-loss is deeply ingrained in the amateur wrestling culture, and has been “as much a rite of passage for its participants as it was a target for criticism” (Hendrickson, 2013, para 12). Moreover, for some the practice began at an early age (Fiorta, 2010). In a study by Kiningham and Gorenflo (2001), two-thirds of a sample from Michigan high school wrestlers engaged in rapid weight-loss. These student-athletes began rapid weight-loss practices at an average age of fourteen (Kiningham & Gorenflo, 2001). Improper weight management as an adolescent is dangerous and can result in “growth-failure due to malnutrition resulting from self-imposed calorie restriction.” (Dae, et al., 2002, p.1035). Additionally, engaging in extreme weight loss practices can put youth at risk for irregular heart rhythm, high blood pressure, and death (Dae et al., 2002).

Deaths. In 1997 rapid weight-loss practices in intercollegiate wrestling became national news. During a span of six-weeks, three separate incidents took place involving

intercollegiate wrestlers who died while attempting to make weight for competition (“Deaths Shock College Wrestling,” 1998). According to a news brief in *Healthy Weight Journal* (“Deaths Shock College Wrestling,” 1998), “these were the first identified deaths associated with weight loss in interscholastic or collegiate wrestling since national record keeping began in the United States in 1982” (p.34). The student-athletes, who competed at the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin La-Crosse, and Campbell University, all passed away while exercising for the purposes of making weight (Litsky, 1997). According to Ransone and Hughes (2004), “in the hours preceding the official weigh-in, all 3 wrestlers engaged in similar rapid weight-loss regimens that promoted dehydration through perspiration and resulted in hyperthermia” (p. 162). These deaths stunned the intercollegiate wrestling community and caught the attention of the national news media. *Sports Illustrated*, in particular, was highly critical, blaming the student-athlete’s deaths on “self-inflicted torture” and referring to rapid weight-loss practices as “college wrestling’s ugly secret” (Fleming, 1997, p. 134).

In the aftermath of the three intercollegiate wrestler’s deaths, the NCAA instituted several rule changes aimed at curtailing weight-loss practices (Oppliger, Utter, Scott, Dick & Klossner, 2006). Changes occurred swiftly as the NCAA adjusted weight class designations, increasing the lowest competitive weight class from 118 pounds up to 125 pounds (Oppliger et al., 2006). In addition, the NCAA took steps to improve healthy living and improved the quality of weight loss education provided to intercollegiate wrestlers (Oppliger et al., 2006). Dangerous weight loss tactics such as “laxatives, emetics, diuretics, excessive food and fluid restriction, self-induced vomiting” (Deaths

Shock College Wrestling, 1998, p.34) were banned, as were using items like “hot boxes, saunas, steam rooms, vapor-impermeable suits, and artificial rehydration techniques” (Deaths Shock College Wrestling, 1998, p.34). To its credit, the efforts of the NCAA resulted in widespread improvement with respect to rapid weight-loss practices in intercollegiate wrestling (Oppliger et al., 2006).

Even years following the tragedies stemming from weight-loss tactics, current and former amateur wrestlers could be found telling stories about their weight-loss experiences, in which they bragged about “losing a dozen or more pounds in the hours leading up to a match” (Hendrickson, 2013, para 2). Stories such as these, coupled with the occasional popular media coverage that criticized rapid weight-loss practices, made it difficult for amateur wrestling to shed this difficult part of its history (Fiorta, 2010).

Academic Progress

A key tenet of the NCAA is “the pursuit of excellence in both academics and athletics” (“NCAA Core Values,” n.d.). In order to better address how academic success of student-athletes was monitored in 2004 the NCAA implemented Academic Progress Rate (APR) guidelines (Christy, Seifried, & Pastore, 2008). Academic Progress Rate (APR) is calculated using a metric that emphasizes both retention and grade point average (“NCAA Frequently Asked Questions,” n.d.).

When APR was established in 2004, athletic teams were required to achieve at least 925 out of a possible 1,000 points on the progress rate metric or be faced with NCAA sanctions (Christy, Seifried, & Pastore, 2008). In 2014 the NCAA further strengthened APR eligibility requirements (Hosick, 2014). The updated standards

stipulated that a team must maintain a four-year APR of 930 or an average of at least 940 for the most recent two years (Hosick, 2014). Since their original implementation, APR guidelines have greatly impacted athletic department operations and decision-making (Christy, Seifried, & Pastore, 2008). According to Christy, Seifried, and Pastore (2008), concern over APR changed everything from the types of student-athletes being recruited to the ways in which administrators appraise the effectiveness of their coaching staffs.

According to Cooper and Weight (2011b), APR can influence an institutional decision to eliminate one or more of its athletic programs. One instance where this occurred was at Eastern Illinois University. The school announced the elimination of its intercollegiate wrestling program, citing unsatisfactory academic progress (ESPN, 2007). Eastern Illinois intercollegiate wrestlers' APR was the worst of any athletic team at the University, and one of the worst amongst all intercollegiate wrestling programs (ESPN, 2007).

Eastern Illinois University was not the only intercollegiate wrestling program to be impacted by low APR. Although they didn't see their teams eliminated, during the 2014-15 year both the University of Buffalo and Campbell University's intercollegiate wrestling programs faced NCAA sanctions stemming from low APR scores (Hosick, 2014). Consequently, no participants from either squad were eligible to take part in post-season events, removing any opportunity to participate in the NCAA Championship tournament or to battle for individual All-American status (Hosick, 2014).

Data released by the NCAA shows that intercollegiate wrestling falls near the bottom of the Division I APR rankings ("National and Sport-Group APR," 2016).

Intercollegiate wrestling had an average APR of 970 between the years of 2011-12 and 2013-14 place it 15th among male sports teams, and beneath all but one Olympic style, nonrevenue sport (“National and Sport-Group APR,” 2016). In a sport that has seen its number of Division I teams reduced, finding ways to improve the classroom performance of its student-athletes “is extremely important because it gives athletic directors one less reason to eliminate men’s wrestling programs in today’s intercollegiate athletic environment” (Cooper & Weight, 2011a, p.27). Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs APR did make improvements during 2014-15, producing a single year APR of 978, its highest score during any of the previous five-years (“National and Sport-Group APR”, 2016).

College Wrestling and Title IX

Ratified in 1972 and signed into law by President Richard Nixon, Title IX is an educational amendment designed to protect female civil rights (Valentin, 1997). The passing of Title IX was considered a major achievement for the advancement of women in the United States (Valentin, 1997). Title IX regulation explicitly stated that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (20 U.S.C. 1681[a]). Simply put, gender discrimination is prohibited in those educational institutions that received money from the federal government.

The scope of Title IX encompasses all levels of education from preschool through college, and pertains to all programming which benefits from federal dollars (Marburger

& Hogshead-Makar, 2003). Since athletics are considered to be an “after-school educational program” (p.10) they too are responsible for meeting the requirements of Title IX (Sawyer, 2010). According to Anderson, Chelsock & Ehrenberg (2006), although its regulations stretch across all areas of education, “the application of Title IX to college athletics has been especially complicated because athletic programs, unlike most academic classes, usually are sex-segregated by sport” (p. 225).

Title IX Implementation and Interpretation

Immediately following the enactment of Title IX, questions arose with respect to how college athletic departments would ensure they were meeting the requirements (Shook, 1995). Additional guidance was provided in 1975, when “Congress directed the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (“HEW”) to promulgate regulations implementing Title IX” (Shook, 1995, p. 775). HEW’s response included language directed specifically at athletics, providing athletic departments with guidance on how to measure institutional compliance (Anderson, 2012). Institutions had three years after receiving this guidance to ensure compliance standards were met (Johnson, 1994).

Throughout the next several years, athletic departments and college administrators continued to express uncertainty regarding Title IX implementation (Anderson, 2012). Then, in 1979, a Policy Interpretation was released by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) (Messner & Solomon, 2007). The OCR’s report stipulated that colleges must ensure gender equality not only in athletic participation, but also in areas such as facilities, equipment, and locker rooms (Buzuvus, E., & Newhall, K., 2012). Additionally, the OCR outlined how institutions could demonstrate that Title IX standards were being met

(Messner & Solomon, 2007). Compliance would be determined by an institution's ability to meet one of three possible criteria, referred to as the three-prong test (Messner & Solomon, 2007). These criteria, as stated in the 1979 Policy Interpretation, assess:

(1) Whether intercollegiate level participation opportunities for male and female students are provided in numbers substantially proportionate to their respective enrollments; or

(2) Where the members of one sex have been and are underrepresented among intercollegiate athletes, whether the institution can show a history and continuing practice of program expansion which is demonstrably responsive to the developing interest and abilities of the members of that sex; or

(3) Where the members of one sex are underrepresented among intercollegiate athletes, and the institution cannot show a continuing practice of program expansion such as that cited above, whether it can be demonstrated that the interests and abilities of the members of that sex have been fully and effectively accommodated by the present program ("A Policy Interpretation," 1979).

Although the 1979 Policy Interpretation provided direction that colleges could use to maintain compliance, during the early 1980's Title IX regulations were not heavily enforced (Zimbalist, 2003). According to Zimbalist (2003) "from 1981 to 1984 the Reagan administration dragged its feet on gender equity" (p. 55). Then in 1984 Title IX stalled when the Grove City Supreme Court ruled that it was solely those departments

who received federal funding that would have to comply with Title IX policy (Priest, 2003). This allowed collegiate athletic departments who did not accept federal financial assistance to operate independently of Title IX policy. For approximately four years, intercollegiate athletics were not subject to Title IX regulations (Priest, 2003). However, in 1988 the Civil Rights Restoration Act was passed by Congress and reaffirmed the mandate that all institutions who receive federal assistance must comply with the regulations regardless of whether or not a specific department received direct funding (Zimbalist, 2003).

Decades after being signed into law, questions about interpretation of Title IX policy still remained, so much so that the Republican party used Title IX reform as part of its 2000 election campaign agenda (Hardin, Simpson, Whiteside, & Garris, 2007; Priest, 2003). Ultimately, in 2002, with urging from Title IX opposition groups such as the College Sports Council, President Bush convened a committee charged with reviewing legislation to ensure equal treatment and athletic opportunity for both male and female participants (Hardin, et al., 2007).

Challenges to Title IX

Throughout Title IX's history there have been a number of legal challenges from various constituencies. One of the earliest challenges was brought forward by the NCAA in 1979 (Anderson, 2012), over concern for the impact of the regulation on football and men's basketball (Hardin et al., 2007). The NCAA claimed that Title IX was not applicable to intercollegiate athletics because they (NCAA) do not receive federal money; however, this case was dismissed (Anderson, 2012). Even though the NCAA

itself was not obligated to abide to the regulations, their member colleges and universities were (Anderson, 2012).

In the years following the NCAA's lawsuit, several individual legal challenges were filed on behalf of male sport programs that were eliminated by institutions in order to maintain gender equity (Anderson, 2012). One such instance was *Kelley v. Board of Trustees*, where members of the University of Illinois men's swim team filed suit after the university cited Title IX compliance as the reason for their team's elimination (Anderson, 2012). This case was ultimately dismissed, helping to establish precedent that elimination of male sports teams as a measure to insure institutional compliance was not in breach of Title IX (Anderson, 2012).

Intercollegiate wrestling advocates have been particularly outspoken about the effects of Title IX on their sport (Griffith, 2003). In 2002, the National Wrestling Coaches Association (NWCA) filed a legal challenge against the Department of Education over Title IX (Anderson, 2012). The NWCA's position was that implementation of Title IX regulation by the Office of Civil Rights was unfair (Zimbalist, 2003). According to Griffith (2003) the NWCA argument was focused on the three-pronged proportionality testing requirements faced by colleges. The NWCA's belief was "that Title IX regulations function as an illegal quota system" (p.55), and as a result men's sports such as intercollegiate wrestling have been eliminated in pursuit of gender fairness (Zimbalist, 2003). However, similar to previous attempts to challenge the legality of Title IX, the NWCA's efforts proved unsuccessful (Anderson, 2012).

Is Title IX to blame for the Decline of Intercollegiate Wrestling?

In the years since Title IX passed into law, several male non-revenue producing sports have experienced program number declines. Division I male sports have been hit particularly hard, with substantial eliminations occurring in athletic programs such as fencing, gymnastics, swimming, and diving. (Irick, 2016). NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling is the sport that has suffered most (Irick, 2016).

As established throughout Chapters One and Two, the number of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs has decreased drastically since 1972. Those opposed to Title IX postulate that these teams would not have been eliminated if the regulation didn't exist, and "claim that compliance requires the elimination of opportunities for male athletes" (Anderson & Cheslock, 2004, p. 308). However, it was between the years 1981-1992 that intercollegiate wrestling suffered most, losing 88 total programs across the three NCAA Divisions (Zimbalist, 2003). Title IX advocates posited that the law was in a stage of flux during those years, and not heavily regulated (Zimbalist, 2003). Therefore, counter arguments existed that refute claims that Title IX is solely to blame for the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling and other male college sport programs (Zimbalist, 2003).

Yet, there have been instances of universities blaming Title IX for their decision to eliminate one or more male teams (Brady, 2007). One example occurred in 2007 at James Madison University (Brady, 2007), when the university eliminated a total of ten athletic teams - seven men's and three women's - in order to meet proportionality guidelines of Title IX (Brady, 2007). Brady (2007) quoted a James Madison University

official who claimed the University's only viable option for meeting compliance guidelines was to eliminate athletic programs.

Support for Title IX

While the NCAA, NWCA, and various advocates for male athletics have expressed positions against Title IX, others have taken a different stance. According to Priest (2003), arguments connecting program elimination to Title IX were without merit. Citing the significant increase in female sport participation, proponents argued that Title IX is doing its job and has had a positive impact on gender equality (Priest, 2003). Moreover, even though sports such as intercollegiate wrestling and gymnastics have seen declines in program numbers, "Title IX supporters and sports scholars argue that the reason some smaller men's sports have been cut at NCAA institutions is because of hypercompetition among schools to pump up revenue sports" (Hardin et al., p. 213). Griffith (2003) made a similar claim, suggesting "a more reasoned allocation of resources among men's sports will allow the continuing improvement in Title IX compliance and allow for retention of wrestling programs as well as the continuing expansion of men's teams" (Griffith, 2003, p. 63).

A study by Anderson and Cheslock (2004) investigated the ways in which intercollegiate athletic departments ensure Title IX compliance. Focusing on the years 1995-2002, they discovered a greater likelihood that athletic departments would add a female sports team rather than eliminate a male team for purposes of compliance (Anderson & Cheslock, 2004). These findings were based on statistics during the timeframe observed which revealed a significant increase in both female teams and

participants, as well as a minor increase in male teams and participants (Anderson & Cheslock, 2004).

The National Women's Law Center (NWLC) vehemently disagreed that male sport program elimination is attributable to Title IX ("Fact Sheet," 2015). Citing the decisions of the federal court system, which has refuted arguments that Title IX mandates elimination of male teams, the NWLC posited that the decision to eliminate a sports team is much more complex ("Fact Sheet," 2015). Further, the group provided substantial data indicating the improvements in female intercollegiate sport participation since Title IX was established ("Fact Sheet," 2015).

Concerns voiced by advocates of non-revenue intercollegiate sports such as wrestling drove the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) to conduct its own study regarding Title IX's impact (Weight & Cooper, 2011). The GAO report, released in 2000, noted that increases were made both to the amount of male sports teams and the number of male sport participation between 1980 and the time of the report (Zimbalist, 2003). This finding contradicted arguments which suggested overall male sport program loss is attributable specifically to Title IX.

Spectator Interest

Intercollegiate sporting events can be a very expensive undertaking for institutions, "and ticket revenue is a critical source of income to cover these costs" (Koo & Hardin, 2008, p. 30). For this reason a vast amount of energy and resources have gone into studying the consumption behavior of sport spectators. Sport management scholars have studied everything from why people purchase tickets and spend their time at

sporting events to how affiliation with a particular team or school develops (Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003). Research on this topic has evolved from those external items that affect sports attendance to individual motivation to attend a particular event (James & Ross, 2004). Most of this research has centered on major sports, with little attention to nonrevenue athletics (James & Ross, 2004).

This research trend changed with a 2004 study by James and Ross which focused specifically on consumer behavior related to nonrevenue athletics: intercollegiate wrestling, baseball, and softball spectators were included in this investigation. James and Ross (2004) found that “sport-related motives (i.e., entertainment, skill, drama, and team effort)” (p.23) were a greater influence on spectators of intercollegiate wrestling, baseball, and softball than influences related to “self-definition (i.e., achievement, empathy, and team affiliation)” (p.23) or that of “personal benefits (i.e., social interaction and family)” (p.23). Intercollegiate wrestling, in particular, attracted an audience based on the dramatics that can occur when two individuals competed against one another in this combat sport (James & Ross, 2004).

In 2009, Cooper conducted a study which specifically explored consumer interest at an intercollegiate wrestling event; the annual All-Star Classic. This competition paired two of the nation’s top competitors at each weight class for an unofficial match that does not count towards individual season records (Cooper, 2009). Student-athletes competing in the event were offered a bid based on previous accomplishments and competitors can include a cross-section of conference and team affiliations. The results of spectator interest at this event differed somewhat from the study conducted by James and Ross

(2004). Cooper's (2009) study found that the most significant forces motivating fans to attend the event was interest in the individual matchups, individual achievement of the student-athletes, and loyalty to the sport of intercollegiate wrestling itself. Team effort could not be equally compared because the All-Star Classic does not promote team competition nor does it keep team scores (Cooper, 2009).

Cooper and Weight (2011a) suggested that studying the behaviors and interests of current consumers of intercollegiate wrestling will help inform strategies for attracting new consumers. Both the studies by Cooper (2009) and by James and Ross (2004) focused on spectators who already have some interest or connection to the sport that is being observed. However, a challenge that intercollegiate wrestling experiences is that while many current and former participants are passionate about the sport, it is "unloved by casual sports fans" (Futterman & Germano, 2013, para 5).

Coaches, athletes, and supporters of intercollegiate wrestling have long asked the question of how the sport can attract casual fans to their events. Previous research added credence to the argument that a strong distinction existed between fans who are actively involved in consumption of a sport and spectators whose interest was more casual (Sloan, 1989). Sutton, McDonald, Milne, and Cimperman (1997) considered there to be three variations of consumers, each separated by their interest and commitment levels. Reasbeck (n.d.) lists fifteen ideas that he believed would help wrestling to better promote itself and secure more spectators, including items focused towards engaging the student-body and allowing them to take a participatory role in the production of the event

(Reasbeck, n.d.). He also suggested greater commitment to radio, Internet, and social media promotions (Reasbeck, n.d.).

In 2011a, Cooper and Weight turned their attention away from fans and spectators and towards individuals, who perhaps have the most personal reasons for caring about the well-being of the sport. Focusing on intercollegiate wrestling coaches, officials, participants, etc., their purpose was “to identify potential strategies to enhance the quality of the college wrestling product” (Cooper & Weight, 2011a, p. 24). Results indicated that both coaches and participants believed a transition from a two-semester season to a one-semester season would benefit the sport (Cooper & Weight, 2011a). Historically, the intercollegiate wrestling season overlaps both fall and spring semesters, with competitions spanning November to March. Coaches and participants believed that a shortened single-semester schedule would reduce the likelihood of athlete injuries, lessen academic eligibility issues, and improve marketing opportunities (Cooper & Weight, 2011a). Moreover, delaying the NCAA Intercollegiate Wrestling Championship tournament until the after the NCAA Men’s Basketball Final Four concludes would reduce competition for both spectators and television coverage. Empowered by the position of these critical stakeholders, the NWCA included in its 2016-2021 strategic plan a proposal to shift the start and end dates of the intercollegiate wrestling season which would result in the sport taking place mostly during the spring semester (“Five Year Strategic Plan,” 2016).

Cooper and Weight (2011a) findings are important to making the sport more appealing to consumers. However, “from a marketing perspective ... distinction between

fan and a spectator may be crucial” (Trail et al., 2003, p. 218). Developing strategies for attracting fans, which allows for increasing closeness and interaction with the participants, coaches, etc., can “accentuate this connection” (Trail et al., 2003, p. 218) to the sport and the fan’s team or participants of choice. Marketers of the NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling championships employed this strategy by designing a festival where fans can meet and interact with celebrity athletes and coaches and can watch demonstrations from U.S. World and Olympic Team hopefuls.

Attendance

Intercollegiate wrestling consistently ranks in the top five for revenue production of all NCAA championship events, and the sport has continued to experience increased ticket sales at its annual three-day Championship event (“Wrestling Facts.” n.d.). This was especially true from the years 2011-2015, when three different times a record number of seats were sold for the NCAA Division I Championship intercollegiate wrestling tournament. During the 2011 NCAA Championships held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 104,260 seats sold over six sessions, setting a new record for attendance and marking the first time that total attendance eclipsed the 100-thousand mark (Pilcher, 2011). This record was shattered the following year when combined attendance reached 109,450 at the 2012 Championship tournament held in St. Louis, Missouri (Moore, 2015). Although a slightly smaller venue prevented the 2013 Championships from breaking yet another attendance record, tickets to the to the event held in Des Moines, Iowa, completely sold out in fourteen minutes (Miller, 2013). The 2015 Championships,

held in St. Louis, has the current attendance record with a total of 113,013 seats sold throughout the event (John, 2015).

Aside from the popular NCAA Championship event, few teams enjoy substantial fan support. The largest attendance recorded for a dual match took place at the University of Iowa in 2015 (Finn, 2015). The event, held outdoors at Iowa's Kinnick Stadium, the same location where the University's football team plays its home games, attracted 42,287 fans (Finn, 2015). However, numbers this high at an intercollegiate wrestling event other than the annual NCAA Championships are an anomaly. The previous attendance record, set in 2013 by Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), was 15,996 (Finn, 2015).

A report of intercollegiate wrestling attendance released for the 2014-15 season named the institutions with the top average attendance ("BTN," n.d.). The disparity in attendance amongst Division I intercollegiate wrestling teams was evident from this list, as the team with the top attendance, the University of Iowa, averaged well above 8,300 spectators for each home dual, while Cornell University, which was tenth on the list averaged under 1,600 ("BTN," n.d.). This left the remaining 67 Division I programs with an average of fewer than 1,600 spectators per home match.

Athletic Department Finances

Revenue totals for NCAA Division I athletics have surged since the mid 2000's, largely due to money from television contracts for intercollegiate football and basketball (Hoffer & Pincin, 2016). According to Hoffer and Pincin (2016), "between 2006 and 2011, median NCAA Division I athletic department inflation-adjusted revenue grew

US\$4.14 million, a 27.82% increase” (p. 83). Moreover, during the years 2004-2009 the median athletic department revenue at Division I schools classified as Football Bowl Series (FBS) increased by greater than fifty-percent (McEvoy, Morse, & Shapiro, 2013).

Television revenue is “the single greatest pot of new money” (Weaver, 2013, p.15) for intercollegiate athletics. Universities, athletic conferences, and the NCAA are all benefitting from record-breaking deals (Weaver, 2013). Football and men’s basketball were the catalysts for these deals, such as the NCAA’s contract with Turner Broadcasting and CBS to televise the Division I Men’s Basketball tournament, a deal worth close to \$11 billion dollars over fourteen years (Smith, 2014). The Division I football playoff will earn the NCAA \$450-\$500 million annually through its deal with ESPN (Smith, 2014).

Major athletic conferences, specifically the power-5 conferences, including the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference (Big 10), Big Twelve Conference (Big 12), Pacific Ten Conference (Pac 10), and Southeastern Conference (SEC), have cashed in on television contracts and even have started networks dedicated fully to their own athletics (Smith, 2014). These media deals are overwhelmingly attributed to football and basketball and have resulted in the power-5 conferences raking in more revenue than ever before, allowing them to distribute enormous funds to their member Universities (Berkowitz, 2016). For the 2015 fiscal year, the Big 10 earned \$448.8 million, an astounding \$100 million dollar increase from the previous year (Berkowitz, 2016). Accordingly, with this spike in revenue “the conference distributed roughly \$32.4 million to each of its longest-standing 11 members” (Berkowitz, 2016, para 3).

For power conference schools “there is no other college activity – academic or extracurricular – that rivals athletics when it comes to engaging students and alumni, motivating donors, attracting new students, and engendering name recognition” (Dunn, 2013, p.44). Major network deals furthered this institutional exposure. However, as record breaking revenue amounts spilled into college athletics, a greater disparity existed between conferences and teams when it came to dividing shares of that money (McEvoy, Morse & Shapiro, 2013). Revenue from television is heavily skewed towards the major power conferences, “which has widened the financial gap between those schools and their counterparts” (McEvoy, Morse & Shapiro, 2013, p. 250).

Although television revenue has been a considerable source of new money, it was but one of many revenue streams for intercollegiate athletic departments. Funding for intercollegiate athletics can be divided into two main categories: a) generated revenue, which is comprised of money directly produced from the athletic department, and b) allocated revenue, which is money set aside for athletics from institutional or government sources (Fulks, 2015). Generated revenue included tickets sales, distributions from affiliated conferences and the NCAA, and money from donors (Fulks, 2015). In Fiscal Year 2014 the median generated revenue at FBS institutions was \$44,455,000 (Fulks, 2015). The median allocated revenue at FBS schools was \$12,941,000, with the most significant sources coming from direct institutional support and student fees (Fulks, 2015).

Even with growing revenue, only a fraction of intercollegiate athletic departments showed an annual profit (Samson & Masterson, 2013). A common misconception held

that athletic departments are completely self-sustaining and are able to generate enough revenue to justify their rising expenses (Samson & Masterson, 2013). The reality is quite the opposite at most institutions; only twenty-four of the schools that participated in the Division I FBS earned more than they expended during 2013-14, while none of the Division I Football Championships Subdivision (FCS) schools showed positive earnings (Fulks, 2015).

For the vast majority of colleges whose athletic departments operated at a financial loss, the money to fill in the gap was made up from a variety of sources (Samson & Masterson, 2013). According to Samson and Masterson (2013), “subsidies that range from general university funds to state appropriations” (p. 127) are what made up a portion of the difference between departmental revenue generation and departmental spending. However, fees paid by students made up the most considerable outside source of athletic funding (Samson & Masterson, 2013). This was especially true at public institutions, where the median value for student fees spent on athletics at an FBS institution was over \$2.6 million in fiscal year 2014 (Fulks, 2015). Although the use of student fees to support athletics can be a contentious issue, colleges justified these expenses because they used athletics as a means for attaining financial support, engaging alumni, and attracting students to the institution (Tsitsos & Nixon II, 2012; Dunn, 2013).

Athletic Budgets and Program Eliminations

Studies that have investigated the reasons for sport program elimination identified athletic department finance as a major influence (Cooper, 2009). According to Marsh, Peterson, & Osborne (2016), “most athletic departments align their spending to utilize

nearly every dollar that they make and in most cases institutions are unable to generate enough revenue to cover all of their expenses” (p. 165). As discussed earlier in the chapter, the overwhelming majority of Division I institutions that sponsored football teams lost money (Fulks, 2015). In order to balance the books, colleges often searched for ways to manage their expenses through “cost cutting measures such as reducing travel per diems, taking longer bus trips rather than fly, and scheduling opponents closer to home” (Marsh, Peterson, & Osborne, 2016, p. 165). However, when these types of spending restrictions failed to level the balance sheet, some colleges resorted to eliminating teams (Marsh, Peterson, & Osborne, 2016).

The elimination of an athletic program can have a substantial financial impact on an athletic department. Money saved on travel, scholarships, equipment, coaching salaries, etc., can be appealing to administrators (Marsh, Peterson, & Osborne, 2016). This appeal was evident during the economic crises of the late 2000’s, as more than 227 sports teams were dropped at NCAA institutions between 2007 – 2009 (Watson, 2009).

Some have argued that athletic sports eliminations can be blamed on the spending habits of football and basketball (Fagan & Cyphers, 2012). In order to seek a competitive advantage, many FBS colleges have become entrenched in an “arms race” for their football and basketball teams to equip themselves with the best coaches, facilities, and student-athletes (Tsitsos & Nixon II, 2012). As a result, “football and hoops programs constitute 78 percent of men’s sports budgets” (Fagan & Cyphers, 2012, para 11) at FBS colleges. The Knight Commission (2010) raised concerns about these spending trends,

and about the lack of transparency in higher education athletics, illuminating how athletic spending was multiple times greater than academic spending at many major colleges.

The difference in spending on football and basketball compared with other male sports is substantial (Fulks, 2015). Yet, those male programs who received a smaller piece of the funding were more likely to be eliminated by their institution (Weight & Cooper, 2011). Intercollegiate wrestling has been particularly impacted, as the sport “suffered more losses in athletic participation opportunities than any other nonrevenue sport team” (Weight & Cooper, 2011, p.23). According to Griffith (2003), “expenses for football at NCAA schools are soaring, and the money to pay for the football tab has to come from somewhere, hence, the cut in the wrestling programs” (p. 61). Griffith (2003) further asserted that instead of offering 85 full scholarships “if Division I football teams were restricted to sixty full scholarships, men's athletic departments would not need to cut wrestling or other sports” (p. 61). Rotthoff and Mayo (2010) made similar observations, suggesting that to maintain per-athlete spending levels, eliminating non-revenue sports programs was the only viable option available to colleges. This was especially true for the elimination of male sport teams, because unbalanced elimination of female teams could lead to compliance issues with Title IX (Rotthoff & Mayo, 2010).

Examples of colleges eliminating intercollegiate wrestling due to financial constraints are plentiful. In 2013, Boston University announced it would not offer intercollegiate wrestling after the 2013-14 season (Friday, 2013). A program that had been in existence for 45 years and operated on a budget of merely \$187,000, was dropped primarily because university administrators believed the cost necessary to return the

program to prominence was too great (Mihoces, 2014). Another example occurred in 2010-2011, when Cal State Fullerton eliminated its intercollegiate wrestling program due to departmental financial concerns (“Wrestling, Gymnastics Programs Terminated,” 2011). Unlike at Boston University, the administration at Fullerton gave the program an ultimatum, to either raise enough money to fund the program or be terminated (“Wrestling, Gymnastics Programs Terminated,” 2011). The team was able to fund itself for 2010-11 but was eliminated after falling short of its overall financial goal (“Wrestling, Gymnastics Programs Terminated,” 2011).

Although the costs necessary to sustain an intercollegiate wrestling program are comparatively low, a team must still generate revenue sufficient to support itself (Cooper, 2009). According to Cooper (2009), “if college wrestling is going to exist in what has become a profit-driven athletic environment, the revenues realized by the men’s wrestling programs must be maximized so that athletic departments are not being [forced] to fund the programs” (p. 65). This is especially true in the 21st century athletic department, which has to cope with rapidly growing costs (James & Ross, 2004).

Numbers published by the NCAA indicated that intercollegiate wrestling, although lower in cost than many sports (“Wrestling Facts”, n.d.), still operated at a significant loss for athletic departments (Fulks, 2015). During the 2013-14 year, the median FBS institution that sponsored intercollegiate wrestling generated \$189,000 in revenues while accumulating \$884,000 in expenses (Fulks, 2015). This translated to net earnings of negative \$513k for the year (Fulks, 2015), ensuring that intercollegiate wrestling remained vulnerable to athletic department cost reduction initiatives.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two reviewed literature and data pertaining to: (a) history and participation; (b) prominent issues within the sport; (c) intercollegiate wrestling and Title IX; (d) spectator interest; and (e) athletic department finance. The exploration of these areas highlighted several issues that could be contributing factors to the more than three decade decline of the sport (Irick, 2016). Further, the review of literature demonstrated the scarcity of research available on the topic of Division I intercollegiate wrestling elimination, as much of the information available comes from the professional organization websites, press releases, and NCAA publications.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, intercollegiate wrestling at the NCAA Division I level has been on the verge of becoming an endangered sport due to years of program eliminations (Cooper & Weight, 2011; Irick 2016). Recognizing this, the primary goal of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to better understand the factors that contributed to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Items were identified through the individual experiences of those involved directly with the sport. Gaining a deeper understanding of coaches, stakeholders, and athletic directors' experiences, yielded a more thorough understanding of what lies beneath the commonly perceived reasons for the multi-decade decline of Division I intercollegiate wrestling.

The purpose of Chapter Three is to introduce the design and research methodology of this study. The methodology used was qualitative and guided the researcher's "assumptions about the nature of the world and about what counts as valuable knowledge" (Glesne, 2011, p. 14). The chapter begins with a summary of the phenomenological research method and further explores the interpretive perspective that guided the study, followed by a statement of subjectivity regarding the researcher's role in the study, discussions of participants and their experience in the study, data collection, protection and confidentiality, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Design

Phenomenology

The research design selected for this study was Phenomenology. Fixed in philosophy and keenly interested in the experiences of the individual (Creswell, 2003), this method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to describe the phenomenon of Division I intercollegiate wrestling program eliminations “as they appear to the person experiencing the phenomenon” (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013, p.17). In this dissertation, the person “experiencing the phenomenon” (Tuohy, et al, 2013, p.17) was either a wrestling coach, athletic director, or relevant stakeholder.

German philosopher Husserl is credited for being the “father of phenomenology” (Tuohy, et al, 2013, p.17). To Husserl, phenomenology was fixed in disbelief “that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). Husserl believed that in order to find reliable information about external objects “anything outside of immediate experience must be ignored” (Groenewald, 2004, p.4).

Husserl’s phenomenology began to gain traction as a research methodology in the late twentieth century (Groenewald, 2004). The prevailing practice was descriptive and the researcher’s purpose was to “describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 5). In order for this process to occur objectively, it was the researcher’s responsibility to bracket, or set aside, their own knowledge, experiences, and feelings so that data collected remained pure (Crotty, 1998). In Husserl’s view, bracketing prior knowledge would eliminate researcher bias and insure objectivity.

Out of Husserl's work a new branch of phenomenological thought began to emerge. This variation, referred to as interpretive phenomenology or hermeneutics, is traced to the works of Heidegger (Tuohy et al, 2013). While descriptive approaches required bracketing out the experiences of researchers, interpretive phenomenology acknowledged the role of researchers' feelings and experiences related to the topic being investigated (Tuohy et al, 2013). This acknowledgement of a researcher's understanding of the topic ensured "readers of their research are clear about the study's context and possible influencing factors" (Tuohy et al, 2013, p. 19).

The strand of phenomenology practiced during this research study was interpretive. Due to the researcher's involvement as a participant and his personal interest in the success of NCAA Division I wrestling, it was not realistic to completely put aside previous knowledge and biases. As mentioned in the paragraph above, bracketing plays a stricter role in descriptive phenomenological approaches. Scholars who use interpretive phenomenology do not necessarily dismiss bracketing altogether, but neither do they subscribe to the notion that "all conscious and unconscious thoughts" (Tuohy et al, 2013, p.18) can be completely tuned out. According to Conroy (2003) "reciprocal interdependence between self, others, and objects" (p.6) exists whether or not we are acutely aware of its existence. Therefore, something as simple as the researcher's demonstrated understanding of language and terms unique to the sport could influence the participant. Rather than bracket previous knowledge and experience, the researcher embraced his familiarity with the sport.

Interpretive Framework

An interpretive qualitative research tradition was used to describe the experiences of coaches, stakeholders and athletic directors pertaining to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Centered on the belief that the universe does not exist the same way for any two people (Glesne, 2011), interpretive qualitative research posits that people develop their own unique perspectives about life based on their own experiences and realities and what these mean to them individually (Creswell, 2003). Inherent in the interpretive framework is an understanding that not only do individual people experience life differently from others, but also that the same person can experience the same phenomenon differently depending upon the social factors present (Wahyuni, 2012). Focusing on individual experiences and meanings is what made this study unique from previous research conducted on intercollegiate wrestling. While previous research often shifted blame towards Title IX (Cooper & Weight 2011), this study did not make initial presumptions about factors contributing to declining numbers of NCAA Division I wrestling programs, and instead allowed participants to describe the occurrences freely and in their own words.

Interpretive research is also vastly different from the traditional methods used in positivist research studies. Positivist research is predicated on the belief in a “fixed reality external to people that can be measured and apprehended to some degree of accuracy” (Glesne, 2011, p. 6). Positivist researchers typically use quantitative methods of inquiry, which emphasizes maintaining objectivity, replicating research, and generalizing findings across a larger population (Glesne, 2011). Interpretive research is at the opposite end of the spectrum. The abilities to generalize and replicate have no

value to interpretive researchers, who instead aim to capture the spirit of an occurrence through subjective accounts of individual experiences (Wahyuni, 2012).

An interpretive tradition was the best fit for this study because it allowed the researcher to capture insights from various constituents regarding their understanding of the reasons behind the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling programs. Based on their own experiences in and around the sport, the participants had the opportunity to describe the phenomenon in question based on the meaning it had to them individually. The interpretive approach provided flexibility and a lack of standardization, which allowed the research to pursue different angles based upon participant response (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 463).

Although this study was guided by an interpretive paradigm, the researcher recognized that certain limitations to this approach existed. One important limitation is researcher bias. The researcher's previous knowledge of the topic and personal engagement in the data collection process (Creswell, 2003) had the ability to influence or skew the data. Another limitation to interpretive research is the use of interviews for data collection. Data collected from interviews are "filtered through the views of interviewees" (Creswell, 2003, p. 186) and the participants "are not equally articulate and perceptive" (Creswell, 2003, p. 186). This can lead to incomplete or misleading data.

Statement of Subjectivity

According to Golafshani (2003) "qualitative researchers ... embrace their involvement and role within the research" (p. 600). This statement was true throughout this study, as my decision to research the sport of intercollegiate wrestling had personal

interest and meaning. I joined a youth wrestling club at the age of seven. At the time I was a skinny, rambunctious, fifty-five pound kid who thought he was entering into world of professional wrestling. It was nothing like I had expected: I lost every match I wrestled that first year, but despite the frustrations of losing, I fell in love with the sport.

Every year since that winless season I have been connected with the sport, either as a participant or spectator. Wrestling had a major influence on my life and I credit it with a part in my upbringing, including instilling in me a work ethic as well as confidence which has carried me through many difficult times in life. Luckily, as a participant I eventually began to win more than I lost, providing me opportunities to turn my successes on the mat into meaningful experiences I would have not otherwise have had. As a competitor I was able to travel across the country and make several lifelong friends. Furthermore, it was through wrestling that my eyes were opened to the possibility of attending college and thinking of life beyond my teenage years. For the reasons listed in this paragraph, I had to resist taking on the role of advocate (Glesne, 2011) and avoid using this study to “champion” (Glesne, 2011, p. 170) the plight of intercollegiate wrestling.

Although I ultimately chose to wrestle intercollegiately at a Division II school, I was recruited by several Division I institutions. While intercollegiate wrestling as a sport had already experienced significant decline, the number of programs available for me to choose from was still substantially greater than it is today (Irick, 2016). Even for a student like myself, who in high school had very little interest in the “student” part of

“student-athlete” there were opportunities created through the sport to pursue higher education.

As a former youth, high school, and intercollegiate wrestler, and overall fan and proponent for the sport, I recognized that reflexivity and subjectivities could exist, sometimes significantly, during the entire dissertation process. In order to ensure my scholarly activity was not skewed by personal agendas, I engaged in processes that made certain I was transparent with person biases and that encourage me to understand emotional reactions during the research study (Glesne, 2011). I followed guidance on achieving this from Gilgun (2010), who suggested that researchers should “write, reflect upon, and discuss” (p. 2) items related to reflexive practice. Similarly, Glesne (2011) advocates for writing notes which can be used to help understand the connection between the individual and the research he or she conducts. Employing these types of practices helped me to limit biases and produce more effective research.

It was critical that throughout the course of the study, from review of prior literature to data collection and reporting of findings, that I consistently reminded myself of my role as a researcher. Being the “primary instrument for gathering and analyzing of data” (Ary et al, 2006, p. 453), I was aware of the fact that my reactions and opinions may not always agree with those of my participants; however, I took steps to prevent this from influencing and compromising the integrity of this study. Further, because of my connection to the sport, I knew the reputation of one or more of the study participants. When this occurred, I did not treat these individuals any differently than other participants and did not stray from my typical data collection and interview protocols.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. This type of sampling is common in qualitative research because it allows researchers to select individuals for the study with distinct backgrounds and experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation (Ary et al, 2006). The participants selected for this study had current or prior association with NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. However, to identify differences in the experiences of those associated with intercollegiate wrestling program elimination, “variation sampling” (Ary et al, 2006, p. 473) was also employed. The variations were related to the type of relationship the participant had with the phenomenon, which was either as a coach, athletic director, or influential stakeholder.

As mentioned in the above paragraph, participants “that will best help the researcher understand the problem” (Creswell, 2003, p. 185) were selected during the course of this study. Therefore, of particular interest were those participants who had direct experience or involvement with the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. However, in order to ensure that a sufficient population existed from which to sample, Division I intercollegiate wrestling coaches employed at the time of the study and Division I athletic directors from institutions which offered intercollegiate wrestling as an NCAA sport at the time of the study were considered. The nature of their positions themselves (wrestling coaches and athletic directors) gave them valuable access and influence to athletic department decision-making as well as necessary insight into the importance of those factors which impact department and program health. In addition,

participants were also selected from intercollegiate wrestling stakeholders who had either been involved in efforts to save or revive a Division I intercollegiate wrestling program or who work for one of the major amateur wrestling media outlets. Minimum criteria for each of the three types of participants (Coaches, Athletic Directors, and Influential Stakeholders) are listed below.

Participant Criteria

Coaches interviewed in this study met one of two criteria: either a) held position of head Wrestling Coach at NCAA Division I member institution at the time of program elimination, or b) were employed at the time of the study as a head Wrestling Coach at an NCAA Division I member institution.

Athletic Directors interviewed in this study met one of two criteria: either be a) employed at the time of the study or previously employed by an institution where wrestling was eliminated while this person held the position of Athletic Director at the time of program elimination, or b) employed at the time of the study by an NCAA Division I institution that sponsors wrestling.

Influential stakeholders interviewed in this study met one of two criteria: either a) be employed at the time of this study by a wrestling organization such as a wrestling media outlet, or b) have led efforts geared towards raising funds, saving, or reviving wrestling program(s) at the NCAA Division I level.

Participant Experience

Subsequent to being identified as a prospective participant, the selected individuals received an email (see appendix A) requesting their participation in the study.

This email contained a brief introduction to the study, including its purpose, and also informed the potential participant that their involvement in the study has no known risks and that their recorded response will remain secure. The email concluded by asking the individual to provide their preferred contact information should there be interested in participating.

After responding to the initial email and scheduling a time and format (face-to-face, phone, interactive video), but before the actual interview itself, the participant received a copy of the research information form (see Appendix B). This form provided the participant with a short description of the study and their role in it, an explanation of any potential risks and benefits, details regarding how privacy and confidentiality will be maintained, and contact information of the primary investigator for the study. Since an introductory meeting did not occur, these communications to the participant helped to establish rapport and trust ahead of the interview (Englander, 2012).

Before starting the interview, the participant was asked for permission to audio record the session. The ability to record the interview, among other benefits, allowed for multiple listens to ensure accuracy and “provides a basis for reliability and validity” (Al-Yateem, 2012, p. 31). Participants were told to anticipate an interview lasting roughly thirty minutes. Due to the nature of the open-ended questioning style this sometimes varied but every effort was made to respect the time of each interviewee.

Data Collection

Data collected during this study came primarily through participant interviews. Interviews are the primary method for collecting data in qualitative studies involving

human subjects (Englander, 2012). The setting for each interview was not significant, as each was conducted via telephone. Although face-to-face interviews have the advantage of allowing the researcher to read physical cues of the respondents, Ary et al. (2006) stressed that telephone interviews have their own benefits, including being typically lower cost, allowing for access to geographically diverse sample in significantly less time, and assisting in reducing biases (Ary et al., 2006). All participants were asked, and agreed, to allow the researcher digitally record the interviews.

Questioning during the interviews was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews start with a set of open-ended questions (see Appendix C) that encouraged a participant to provide unencumbered responses and allowed the researcher to explore these responses more deeply with follow up questions which emerged based on a participant's answer (Glesne, 2011). The purpose of this type of "interviewing is to capture the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account for something" (Glesne, 2011, p. 4). This technique ensured the researcher was able to extract information far beyond perfunctory responses about the driving factors behind the struggles faced by intercollegiate wrestling.

One disadvantage to the use of interviews for this study was the potential for bias. According to Ary et al. (2006) bias can take place "when the interviewers own feelings and attitudes" (p. 409) influence questions or how answers are perceived. Rather than attempt the impossible task of eliminating bias, this study acknowledged the potential for biases in the statement of subjectivity earlier in this chapter.

Protection and Confidentiality

The protection and confidentiality of participants was of highest priority throughout this study. According to Glesne (2011), “participants have a right to expect that when they give you permission to observe and interview, you will protect their confidences and preserve their anonymity” (p. 172). Therefore, the names, associated institutions or organizations, and any other personally identifiable data were known only to the researcher. In addition, pseudonyms were used during the writing process to further protect the identity of the participants. Recorded interviews along with all written or typed notes were stored in a secure location available only to the researcher. At the conclusion of the study, all identifiable materials such as digital recordings and researcher notes were destroyed. In alignment with standards of informed consent (Glesne, 2011), individuals participating in the study received an information form (see Appendix B) providing a description of the study, possible risks and benefits, a description of steps taken to ensure confidentiality, and contact information of the primary investigator as well as Clemson’s Office of Research Compliance.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is an iterative process in which the researcher attempts to make connections and gain further understanding of the available content (Creswell, 2003). There are many different ways that qualitative research can be analyzed depending on the nature of the study and types of data collected (Creswell, 2003). Whichever approach, qualitative data analysis requires significant time demands, as the researcher must sort through substantial amounts of data (Ary et al., 2006). To

make this process tenable, Ary et al. suggested compartmentalizing “into three key stages: (1) familiarization and organization, (2) coding and recoding, and (3) summarizing and interpreting” (2006, p. 490).

A careful review of the audio recordings started the data analysis process. All audio recordings were then transcribed using precisely the same words spoken during the interview (Ary et al, 2006). The transcribed interviews were then distributed to the participants to review for accuracy and provide any additional clarifications. After participants had an opportunity to review their interview transcript, data coding began. Data coding is the process of “identification of categories and themes and their refinement” (Ary et al., 2006, p. 492). This was achieved by carefully reading, and re-reading, the data collected during the interviews (Ary et al, 2006). Throughout this process, “units of meaning – words, phrases, sentences” (Ary et al, 2006, p. 492) were sorted and categorized. These units were color coded based on how relatable they were to the study and research questions.

In order to make sense of the information collected and coded, thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis, according to Glesne (2011), “focuses analytical techniques on searching through the data for themes and patterns” (p. 187). Making connections from the categories of coded data allowed these themes to emerge, and provided the basis for beginning the narrative (Creswell, 2003). The four themes that emerged from this study were a product of organizing “units of meaning” (Ary et al, 2006, p. 492) into clusters. Data was placed in separate tables (see Appendix D) with corresponding participant statements and researcher notes and thoughts. The tables were reviewed with

clusters organized and moved between tables for likeness. The data and themes were then examined by, and discussed with, a former intercollegiate wrestler in order to help ensure accuracy.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a quantitative research study lies in its reliability (ability to replicate the results of a study) and its validity (assurance that the item being measured was accurately measured) (Golafshani, 2003). However, the same cannot be said when it comes to qualitative research. Stenbacka (2001) claims “the concept of reliability is even misleading in qualitative research. If a quality study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is rather that the study is no good” (p. 552). Glesne (2011) disputes the role validity plays in qualitative studies because “truths” (p. 49) and accuracy cannot be measured when working with socially constructed theory.

While the terms reliability and validity may not hold the same meaning in qualitative research, determining the trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be easily achieved (Stenbacka, 2001). Creswell (2003) offers the following eight strategies to measure trustworthiness in qualitative studies:

- *Triangulate* different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes.
- Use *member-checking* to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or

themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate.

- Use *rich, thick description* to convey the findings. This may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences.
- Clarify the *bias* the researcher brings to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers.
- Also present *negative* or *discrepant information* that runs counter to the themes. Because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for a reader.
- Spend *prolonged time* in the field. In this way, the researcher develops an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and can convey detail about the site and the people that lends credibility to the narrative account.
- Use *peer debriefing* to enhance the accuracy of the account. This process involves locating a person (a peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher.
- Use an *external auditor* to review the entire project. As distinct from a peer debriefer, this auditor is new to the researcher and the

project and can provide an assessment of the project throughout the process of research or at the conclusion of the study (pp. 196-197).

A variety of the methods for ensuring trustworthiness were used during this study, including the Statement of Subjectivity presented earlier in Chapter Three to “clarify the *bias* the researcher brings to the study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Triangulation was used by collecting data from three different sources (coaches, athletic directors, stakeholders) regarding the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. In addition, member checking took place. Each participant received a copy of the transcribed interview and were provided the opportunity to review for accuracy and provide clarification for any statements made during the interview. A peer debriefer with intercollegiate wrestling experience was consulted throughout the study to help ensure thematic accuracy and identify potential bias. A separate peer debriefer with phenomenological research was consulted for feedback on the study’s trustworthiness. Taking these steps helped to ensure the participant responses were portrayed correctly and solidified the credibility of the researcher’s interpretations of the data collected (Ary et al, 2006).

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three laid out the research design for this study. The phenomenological research method and interpretive theoretical framework used for this study were explained. Since interviewing was the technique used as the primary method for data collection, as is commonly the case with phenomenological research (Englander, 2012), a detailed explanation of the selection and recruitment of participants and the purpose

behind semi-structured interview questions used by the researcher were provided. Also explored were confidentiality, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present findings from this study. There were four research questions addressed: 1) What are the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions; 2) What are the experiences of Division I head wrestling coaches regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions; 3) What are the experiences of NCAA Division I athletic directors regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions; and 4) What are the experiences of critical stakeholders regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions? This chapter begins with a brief description of participants, followed by a discussion of themes and any associated subthemes that emerged during the analysis.

The four overarching themes discussed are:

- Gender Considerations;
- Financial Considerations;
- Culture; and
- Complexity.

The four themes evolved from a thorough data analysis process, which involved identifying and organizing key words and statements, or “units of meaning” (Ary et al, 2006, p. 492), into data clusters. These data clusters were placed into separate tables and reviewed again for commonalities. Clusters of data that involved similar subjects were then combined to form tables with larger amounts of data. The themes emerged from these combined data sets.

Participants

A total of nine individuals were interviewed for this research study. Participants each fell into one of the three categories described in Chapter Three: head wrestling coach, athletic director, or critical stakeholder. Due to the limited available sample size for each of the three aforementioned categories, detailed individual descriptions were not included in order to help guarantee the anonymity of the participants.

All three coaches interviewed had previously been the head wrestling coach at a NCAA Division I college or university during the time the institution eliminated its intercollegiate wrestling program. Each head wrestling coach had also participated as an NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestler themselves before entering the coaching profession. Two of the three athletic directors interviewed were employed at a NCAA Division I college or university as the athletic director at the time the institution eliminated its intercollegiate wrestling program. The third athletic director was employed, at the time of the study, by an institution which sponsored a NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program. No two head wrestling coaches whose teams were

eliminated were members of the same athletic conference and no two athletic directors represented an institution within the same athletic conference.

Each of the three stakeholders interviewed had significant involvement in the sport of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. Each were former NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestlers. Moreover, every stakeholder interviewed was employed at the time of the study by an organization dedicated to the sport of amateur wrestling, inclusive of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. Two of the three stakeholders interviewed were alumni of eliminated NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs.

Theme: Gender Considerations

Eight of the nine participants discussed issues pertaining to gender as a factor in the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. WC #3 was the lone exception. His experiences were more closely related to themes discussed later in this chapter. Items discussed related to gender varied, ranging in topics from male versus female college enrollment statistics to women's intercollegiate wrestling. Gender considerations most heavily discussed by the participants are detailed in remainder of this section.

Title IX

Seven of the nine participants, including all three athletic director's, spoke specifically about Title IX legislation and the impact it had on male intercollegiate sports, including NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. Athletic Director #3 (AD #3) discussed the substantial role Title IX played in the decision to eliminate intercollegiate

wrestling as well as other male intercollegiate sport programs at his institution. He stated:

We were faced at that time with a situation of sports reduction, based upon where we found ourselves with regard to Title IX compliance. We are an institution that's roughly 40% male, 60% female ... we were significantly out of compliance. And, that's why we went through a series of program reductions ... wrestling was earmarked as one of those programs that would be eliminated ... It was a matter of trying to find enough men's sport programs to reduce on the male side to get us compliant with what we had to meet in order to meet the interpretation of Title IX ... It was difficult, and when you get into a situation like that, working with your Title IX consultant who is just trying to help you make your numbers work. It's kind of a shame that's [balancing numbers for Title IX compliance] what it comes down to, but unfortunately, that's the standard that we are being held accountable to.

Ultimately, in order for the institution to meet Title IX requirements, AD #3 eliminated all but six male sports teams, and "two of the six programs that were funded were golf and tennis, which have very, very small rosters."

Athletic Director #2 (AD #2), although firmly rejecting the idea Title IX played a role in the decision to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling, admitted that "I did not use Title IX as an excuse ... probably could have." AD #2 elaborated further: "it would have been easy to just say: well, you know our participation numbers, I've got to get them more in balance, and, you know, we have more women on our campus." However, a

belief in the value of transparency and one's personal integrity drove AD #2 away from using Title IX as the institutional scapegoat when it was not the most significant contributing factor in making the decision. Even so, AD #2 was keenly aware that "there are Title IX implications on many campuses" and acknowledged that "you're not going to see many women's programs being eliminated, depending on your sport mix."

Athletic Director #1 (AD #1) discussed Title IX's influence on university decision-making, and offered the observation that "if there are equity issues, it makes you eliminate a men's program instead of a women's program" to balance proportionality. However, when discussing Title IX's overall impact on NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination, AD #1 was not ready to shift all the blame towards the law. Rather, AD #1 stated that "everyone is going to say, oh, it's Title IX. Well, maybe Title IX was a factor, but not positive that it is just Title IX." AD #1 went on to say, with respect to NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program eliminations:

I think earlier on there might have been more based on gender equity, but if you look at the law, nowhere did gender equity or Title IX say that you have to drop a sport. The institutions made the decisions how they wanted to, you know, abide by Title IX. So, some institutions added women's sports, some institutions cut wrestling.

Gender equity was also a topic of discussion during interviews with stakeholders. Two of the three stakeholders discussed Title IX as a factor for the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Stakeholder #3 (SH #3) discussed his

involvement with respect to challenges made to proportionality requirements of Title IX.

He stated:

Some of the leaders in the women's sports community that have a vested interest in maintaining proportionality, which is one of the prongs of the Title IX enforcement, they took certain positions and used numbers in certain ways. There were other ways that we thought were more accurate.

Even so, SH #3's experiences did not lead him to believe that Title IX alone was to blame for the many program eliminations intercollegiate wrestling has suffered over the past three decades. SH #3 described:

You know, for a long time the wrestling community definitely hammered on Title IX proportionality as being a leading factor, and it was. There is no doubt that regardless of what side you take on this, the pressure for colleges to meet Title IX requirements, and specifically if they choose to go prong one with the proportionality, affected the decisions of certain institutions. It's no doubt ... but, anyone who says it was Title IX alone is not paying attention. They don't get it.

Stakeholder #1's (SH #1) experiences led to his belief that intercollegiate wrestling at public institutions was particularly vulnerable to Title IX. SH #1 stated, with respect to the threat of program elimination, that "exacerbating the whole problem is you have a situation where, with Title IX, schools, particularly the public schools, I mean all schools, but the public schools even more so, I think have become under more and more scrutiny."

Two of the three wrestling coaches discussed their experiences with Title IX. Wrestling Coach #2 (WC #2), while not considering Title IX the largest threat to NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling, did believe it had a major impact on male intercollegiate sports. WC #2 stated:

Well, I think Title IX. You look at when it started to decline and it was right after the law was passed. In the late 70's/80's ... and when Title IX came through and they realized we have to balance this out, instead of adding sports they were like let's just cut some sports. All throughout the country a lot of male sports were cut. It wasn't just wrestling. Wrestling got hurt probably the most, but there were a lot of male sports that were cut at that time.

WC #2 went on to say while "Title IX definitely hurt our sport, it hurt wrestling," he also believed it was a necessary step to improve female opportunities, saying "the law, I think, definitely overall, was a great thing. But, the sport of wrestling got impacted by it."

Wrestling Coach #1 (WC #1) stated, "I think Title IX, unfortunately, is a factor" and took aim at how a portion of the law is worded and interpreted by the universities. WC #1 discussed his experience with women's athletic team coaches who wanted to reduce their roster sizes, which in turn, can limit male roster spots if proportionality issues were present. WC #1 explained:

You know, one thing I would like to do is get away from this roster count. It's about Title IX's definition. We're not going to deny anybody participation in sport - any sport - due to their sex ... Why is Title IX looking at that? Let the coach decide who they want to keep on and don't match number for number.

WC #2 made similar comments related to language and interpretation of Title IX, stating “the law should say you have to balance things out, but you can’t do it the wrong way. You can’t cut things [referencing his belief that some institutions eliminate male athletic programs in order to maintain compliance rather than adding women’s athletic programs].”

A Counterpart Sport

Six of the nine participants (two each from athletic directors, wrestling coaches, and stakeholders) discussed lack of a female counterpart sport for intercollegiate wrestling. SH #3 described the lack of a “matching women’s sport” to wrestling as a substantial problem, especially after the implementation of Title IX. SH #3 explained that not having a female counterpart sport is what distinguished other male athletics from wrestling. SH #3 stated:

... the one thing they have that we didn’t have, we didn’t have a women’s sport.

When the trend was, that we need to increase women’s opportunities and the way they did it was to get rid of men, we didn’t have men and women’s wrestling, we just had wrestling.

SH #1’s observations were nearly identical, stating that “From a Title IX perspective what hurt us is we did not have a women’s counterpart to our sport” to help balance participation numbers.

AD #3 discussed the impact a counterpart female sport may have had on the decision to eliminate wrestling at his institution, stating “it would have made a significant difference.” The relatively large roster size of an intercollegiate wrestling program can

make balancing the numbers challenging. However, AD #3 later went on to say that in his situation, the university faced such substantial compliance issues that intercollegiate wrestling would still have been considered for elimination even with a corresponding women's sport with similar participant numbers.

AD #1 would like to see women's wrestling become a NCAA Division I sport, stating he was "100% in favor of growing women's wrestling programs." While he thinks this may benefit the U.S. from a competitive standpoint internationally, especially considering women's wrestling is now an Olympic sport offering, he does not believe women's wrestling would have been the "savior of college wrestling." However, he also commented that any female counterpart sport would be beneficial because then "you have your men's and your women's program balance and doesn't leave your men's program out there isolated."

WC #2 compared lack of a female counterpart sport for wrestling to other nonrevenue NCAA Division I athletic programs where both male and female options for participation existed. He stated:

... in intercollegiate wrestling, the problem is, we do have women's wrestling growing, but it doesn't have the significant other sport. So, it would be, you know, look at the growth of lacrosse because you have men's and women's lacrosse. With wrestling, we don't have women's wrestling, so to keep a wrestling program ... there always is that pressure with wrestling

According to WC #1 the female counterpart sport "doesn't have to be wrestling; although, it might be cheaper for the university. But it could be another – it could be

women's soccer - anything with 35 roster spots, I think that's the main thing." Even though women's wrestling was the sport participants most identified as a possible counterpart to men's wrestling, it is also important to note that women's intercollegiate wrestling is not currently recognized as an NCAA sport (Irick, 2016; "Five Year Strategic Plan," 2016).

Football and Gender Considerations

The sport of football, its relationship to gender equity, and its place as a factor for eliminating intercollegiate wrestling programs was also discussed by participants. As mentioned earlier in this section, AD #3's institution made the decision to eliminate its NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program due to Title IX compliance issues. Part of the issue, according to AD #3, was that "we run a Division I football program with over one-hundred and some student athletes," all of which are males. He elaborated further:

I think inherently, any time you have one program that takes over 100 opportunities it's going to skew the scales with regard to participation. So, for us that was trying to maintain the program, football program that we competed at a high level obviously, and our program has been successful but there is also a lot of pressure to keep it there. That's part of it.

WC #2 also discussed football's relationship to gender equity, stating:

Football kind of changes the whole Title IX issue because you have 85 full rides [full athletic scholarships] and that's a lot ... And then you look at the women's sports, there's no sport that even carries that many people. So, it kind of messes

up the Title IX. You know, right now at [Midwest University] we're, you know, I don't like to preach that but we are cutting back male rosters and trying to get the women's rosters to increase. But, they can't get women to come out. They can't increase it because they really don't have a need for it. They don't want the extra women on their roster because it just causes more issues. Where I can have a hundred kids on my roster if I wanted to, I'm turning kids away left and right. So, Title IX has helped women's sports, but they don't have the significant sport to football that can make that kind of revenue and that can – there's no sport that has 85 spots in a women's sport. So, that's kind of the problem. So if you look at most programs, they always have more female sports than males to try and balance that out.

Theme: Financial Considerations

Factors that led to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs involving budget and finances were discussed during each of the nine interviews. Issues pertaining to finance were broad and either stood on their own as a main factor, or were a critical sub-factor that limited an institution's ability to maneuver beyond other pressing issues, such as with Title IX. Some of the financial considerations discussed by participants in this study included items such as the ability of intercollegiate wrestling to generate revenue, the impact of revenue generating sports such as football and men's basketball, and the cost of maintaining a competitive program.

Athletic department and institutional financial problems were the main reasons cited for eliminating intercollegiate wrestling at AD #2's institution. AD #2 offered

bluntly that “It was a budget decision, period.” According to AD #2, “We did not have a financially sustainable model” so budget cuts had to be made. Yet, AD #2 was conflicted over the decision to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling due to financial considerations, stating:

... we’re not a business, in terms of, if we were a business I tell my colleagues that we’d be fired, because you don’t run a business that way that you work in higher education. So, there’s always been that oxymoron about making decisions about the bottom line, or what’s your return on investment.

WC #2 did not hesitate to provide the main reason for intercollegiate wrestling program eliminations based on his experiences. WC #2 stated, “It’s simple. All administrators care about is money.” He went on to say, as a result of administration focus on the bottom line, “Olympic sports are going to get cut. I watch it every day.” Financial reasons were also behind the elimination of the intercollegiate wrestling program formerly lead by WC #1. However, rather than dealing with departmental or institutional related financial problems, WC #1 situation “was kind of unique in the sense there were state wide budget cuts” which ultimately resulted in the elimination of his program.

Each participant went into varying levels of depth on different ways financial considerations caused an institution to eliminate athletic programs for budget-related reasons. Participants across each group (Athletic Director, Stakeholder, and Wrestling Coach) alluded to financial issues becoming an increasingly critical factor for athletic departments. AD #1 addressed this in the following statement:

... you get some programs that, you know, financially were strapped. And then, the University becomes financially strapped and you have to cut back ... I think most of the consideration for the last five or ten years, maybe a bit longer than that, has been mainly budgetary.

AD #1 attributed some of these problems to the expenses necessary to be competitive in revenue sports, and provided the following example:

The President and CFO, Chief Financial Officer, probably went to the AD and said, you know, we can't get you what you need to make your football and basketball team good. We can't do this, your money is such, you know, we need to save X number of dollars.

Although AD #3 identified Title IX compliance as the impetus behind eliminating intercollegiate wrestling at his institution, financial considerations underpinned this decision. AD #3 discussed receiving pressure from different groups to add additional female programs, which may have helped balance out Title IX. However, he noted:

We could have added, or we could have kept wrestling, we would have had to obviously kept other female programs and we were trying to balance that out, and that comes down to an expense issues as well ... we were in a situation where we just couldn't add the other programs. Financially we couldn't do that. Some of the programs that were petitioning us were very expensive programs that would have added significantly to our bottom line cost.

Ultimately, AD #3's institution believed it better to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling and other male sports in order to put their athletics "program in a position where long

term we were able to manage it financially.” The nonrevenue male athletic teams were then evaluated for their viability, and “of course the other two sports were your revenue sports football and men’s basketball” which were not in consideration for elimination.

AD #2 discussed considerations used when making the decision to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling due to financial constraints. This included the overall cost of operating its intercollegiate wrestling program, and items such as “recruitment in state versus out of state, scholarship dollars” and funding needed to ensure competitiveness of the other athletic programs at the institution. Additionally, in consideration was the ability of the intercollegiate wrestling program to bring money into the institution. Yet, AD #2 stated:

[R]evenue generation ... really falls last on the list because in intercollegiate athletics there are no sports that generate revenue in terms of covering their full cost, with the exception of football and men’s basketball, and that’s at a limited number of schools.

However, AD #2 also noted the institution allowed its program to go to the “wrestling community” and discuss the potential for saving the program, communicating that “if we can raise X amount of dollars, perhaps we can do that. That occurred here after we made the decision, then part of the challenge, well, for us, is we were not raising significant amounts of dollars.”

AD #2 further stated that “if someone had, had come through with a million dollar endowment ... we would have looked at that.”

SH #1 attributed the financial troubles some athletic departments experience to the “broken football and basketball business model” practiced by colleges and universities. Based on his experiences, NCAA Division I athletic departments have attempted to be competitive in football and men’s basketball, but “have a tendency to mortgage their Olympic sports.” SH #1 believed this was a major issue for NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. SH #1 explained:

... of the 120 Division IA athletic departments, 22 turned a profit, the other 98 lost an average of 11.9 million dollars. And those are the 120 athletic departments that have the money. So, you can imagine what happens when you get to these mid-major and lower-level Division I programs.

He continued in reference to mid and lower level Division I institutions, adding that “historically, they’ve funded their athletic department budgets through student fees. And, now what’s happening is that the students are starting to rebel.” The result of this, according to SH #1 “is a downsizing of the overall athletic department because so few schools actually make money.”

According to Stakeholder #2 (SH #2), intercollegiate athletic departments are “continuing down the track of separating for profit and nonprofit programs” and when financial resources are scarce “you [athletic departments] just cut other male sports and save your revenue producing sport.” He goes on to say at “the Division I level where the money is made the money is mostly spent.” Due to this, SH #2 witnessed revenue producing sports of football and men’s basketball receive the bulk of promotion and

marketing dollars. He believed that practice is “not fair” and further marginalized nonrevenue sports, including intercollegiate wrestling.

SH #3 also questioned the current athletic department finance and budgeting model. SH #3 cited the “philosophy of Division I programs to put more resources into their revenue generating sports” as a factor in the elimination of Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs.

Financial considerations had a part in each of the three wrestling coaches losing their former programs. However, the experiences leading up to those eliminations were vastly different. As mentioned earlier in this section, WC #1’s program was eliminated due to system-wide state level budget reductions. Exacerbating the problem according to WC #1, was the “Chancellor took this 2 million dollars away that was supposed to be directed towards athletics and sports.”

WC #3’s institution eliminated intercollegiate wrestling in part because of its desire to start and fund a different male athletics team. Moreover, a major retail brand had lobbied for the institution to make the addition. As WC #3 discussed, even though the wrestling program was only partially funded, the University decided to make the new athletic team “a fully funded program.” WC #3 went on to say that the retail brand influence was a significant factor because it was located near the university and promised “to donate three million dollars to a new field” to support the new team.

WC #2 discussed the increasing costs associated with maintaining competitive football and basketball programs and the strain that maintenance places on athletic department budgets. According to WC #2:

... you're going to see a lot of the Olympic type sports cut, because they have to pay ... for basketball, football, what the conferences care about, you know. The most revenue makers, the possible revenue makers. So, it's really just a business decision ... It's pretty simple business. You have restaurants that don't make money, you have restaurants that do make money. You got to pay that chef more than that one, and to save money you can cut the one that doesn't make revenue. It's a pretty simple, you know, business model.

WC #2 discussed that these financial problems have continued to worsen and are unlikely to change:

... you're paying coaches three and eight million dollars now. Just for one coach, that's a lot of money. That, revenue, and now paying the athletes, that the other sports are kind of, I think it seems like it's starting to – administrators would never admit this but – the other sports are getting in the way. Their just an extra cost where they can cut it and put it into the sport that could make the revenue.

However, adding to the problem WC #2 states, is that:

The revenue is not going up. The problem is cable TV is starting to fail, revenue is going down, people aren't getting cable as much, they go online and get things. So, the revenue is going down so something has got to give. They're going to have to. I wouldn't be surprised if in a couple of years that they reduce the minimum sport from 16 or wherever it's at now, to 10 sports is all you need in college athletics in Division I ... It's a business and you're paying these athletes so much more than – something's got to give.

Theme: Culture

One of the broader themes that emerged during interviews was the role culture played as a factor in eliminating NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Each of the nine participants discussed their experiences and perceptions related to cultural factors. Discussions regarding culture spanned topics including administrative culture, the culture of coaches and student-athletes on campus, and wrestling as a part of or, its absence from, the overall culture in various regions of the country.

Administrative Culture

According to SH #2, intercollegiate wrestling is “very misunderstood” by individuals who lacked experience with the sport. Coaches and stakeholders stressed the importance of being able to influence upper administration’s opinion of the value of intercollegiate wrestling. An important component of these discussions was the relationship between the head wrestling coach and the athletic director. This was deemed especially important in those instances where the athletic director was not a former participant or did not have previous intimate knowledge of the sport. SH #3 discussed this directly, stating:

... you can do research to see which AD’s dropped wrestling and if any of them had a wrestling background, because a few have actually. But our odds of being cut by a former wrestling coach are lower than our odds of being cut by a former football or basketball coach.

Two of the three athletic directors interviewed for this study had extremely limited experience with the sport of intercollegiate wrestling until they began working in athletic administration. As AD #2 shared:

I did not know a whole lot about wrestling growing up. I went to a small rural HS in [East Coast] that did not have that. When I got to the [Eastern University], we had a wrestling program there. Was not particularly familiar with it as an undergraduate. I worked at [Eastern University] for twelve years after graduation and we had a good wrestling program, we did not fund it at that time the way that it probably needed to be funded. Fast forward, go to [Southeast University], we did not have a wrestling program at [Southeast University]. You know, followed nationally, issues around intercollegiate athletics and obviously read and knew of the concerns about participation rates and sports that were being eliminated or reduced for lots of different reasons and wrestling was one of those.

With respect to the sport of amateur wrestling, AD #3 was “first exposed to it at the collegiate level when I was an Assistant Athletic Director, and actually helped hire our wrestling coach at the time.” AD #3 later accepted a position at a university that did not sponsor intercollegiate wrestling, before moving to his current institution where ultimately the program was eliminated from its athletic offerings.

AD #1 provided insight into how an athletic director’s lack of familiarity with the sport of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling may influence campus culture. Specifically, he discussed how this unfamiliarity can foster an environment in which an

institution ignores problems in the way their intercollegiate wrestling program is run until it becomes nearly irreversible. AD #1 provided an example:

... a coach that has let the program go absolutely deplorable and nobody cares anymore, and by the way, I think the institutions let that happen ... You know, an institution lets the program run itself down to almost nothing, they got a coach in there they didn't want to get rid of, they should have got rid of 5 years ago, nobody cares about the sport ... institution moves on.

AD #1 went on to say that the mindset of some athletic administrators when it comes to non-revenue sports is "the less programs you have to work with the less coaches that report to you, you know, makes your job a little easier."

Similar to comments made by AD #1, SH #1 discussed how issues with wrestling coaches went ignored by administration because lack of exposure of the sport. He stated:

... when that happens in football and basketball they will fire the coach and go out and hire another coach. And with the Olympic sports, it's a lot easier to just get rid of the whole sport, and its less headache for the administration.

Wrestling Culture on Campus

Each of the stakeholders and two of the coaches identified either coaching performance or athlete behavior as responsible for creating a favorable (or unfavorable) campus culture for NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. According to SH #1, an important factor in program elimination is:

... when you have a situation where you have a coach who is not a very good steward of the program. The coach is at odds with the administration, the kids are

getting in trouble, you know, ugly off-the mat incidences. You know, that sort of thing ... included in that bucket would be poor academic performance. A wrestling program that's not operating in close alignment with the educational values of the school would I guess be the best way of explaining it.

SH #2 discussed the importance of coaches being well-rounded leaders. SH #2 attributed a culture of acceptance to intercollegiate wrestling on campus to "the coach's ability to lead like a CEO. In other words, a good coach, he gets performance. He recruits, he gets performance out of his athletes, he graduates his student athletes, and he galvanizes financial support and the alumni."

SH #3 expressed that a coach's ability to create strong campus culture was often limited because the institution did not provide the financial support necessary to hire a full-time head coach with full-time assistants. He stated that:

The athletes were not the best citizens and it gave athletic departments an opportunity to maybe get rid of a program where they maybe weren't being good members of the campus community. I think back when I was wrestling, a lot of the coaches were part-time coaches, which means that they weren't getting the best attention to their program as they would if they had a full-time coach.

He asserted that some institutions held back resources purposefully, making a conscious decision to ensure intercollegiate wrestling program failure and thus making it easier to eliminate the program. SH #3 discussed this further by stating:

... you could tell some programs that the athletic department had decided they were going to find a way to drop it because they would hire a coach that was

unqualified. Then that coach wouldn't succeed and then they could drop the program. So, that was an administration decision, you know.

Two of the three coaches interviewed discussed how program leadership not in alignment with institutional culture impacted NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program numbers. WC #1 explained:

... there has been some programs dropped, where the wrestlers were getting in trouble or the coaches did something unethical, or a combination of, has led to that as well ... you got to get the community involved, you know, get the alumni involved. Financial support, you have to be a fundraiser now these days too, to keep the program going. You just got to have really good relationships, more than some of these other sports.

According to WC #2:

... a lot of people don't understand the sport of wrestling, which is partially our fault, you know, the people that are in the sport. We're a very small, kind of, it's just a niche sport. I always have people come to a match here at [Midwest University] and they are like this is the first time I have ever been to a match. I don't really understand it, don't know how to keep score. That's an issue with it, because when people don't understand any sport, or understand about it, it's easy to get rid of it. Where people understand the sport of football and things like that, it's tougher to get rid of.

He added "I think programs get eliminated because things aren't being done right in the program" and elaborated:

... if you're running a good program and things are going well, and you're raising money and boosters are helping with an endowment and things like that. You have to do more than other sports have to, but if you're doing that then you are going to be in good shape. But, if you have kids going out and getting in trouble, your APR is low, kids are flunking out, and it hurts the image of the school, then there's really not a reason to keep the program ... this happens in a smaller, in a niche sport, they'd probably just say let's get rid of it. We don't need these problems.

Regional Preferences

Each Athletic Director discussed the impact of regional preferences in the decision to eliminate an intercollegiate athletic program. When discussing these factors, AD #2 noted, "part will be geography, where you're located. Do you have teams to play?" In addition to proximity of other competition, AD #2 stressed the importance of the ability to recruit in-state for a public institution, and explained "it's a factor that you consider, and going back to what is, what's going on in your state. Is it a healthy sport that's growing in high schools?" If in-state high school competition in the sport is lacking, then in order to be competitive the university would have to spend more money on recruiting and scholarships for out-of-state student-athletes.

AD #3 echoed the importance of geographical considerations but also discussed the importance of conference affiliation and conference culture when it comes to a sport. He explained, when deciding to eliminate a program, including making the decision to

elimination intercollegiate wrestling, conference was an important consideration. AD #3 described:

Well, for starters I think is it a sport that's offered underneath a conference halo? For our league, again, was it a sport we would have competed in at the conference level ... also programs that the conference had had as long-standing sport programs. So, the thought was never given to eliminating a soccer program or to eliminate a baseball program.

According to AD #1, eliminating NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling at major colleges across the country hurt the long-term visibility of the sport and helped ensure it didn't grow into the cultural fabric of different regions. AD #1 explained:

If Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Alabama, Auburn, LSU, all had wrestling right now like it did ... and there is probably a ton more also, UCLA, wrestling would have a much bigger stronghold or foothold in college sports. Because, you're looking at a lot of, I mean Georgia, Georgia Tech, Florida, Florida State, Alabama, Auburn, and LSU all had wrestling just think of the media impact that would have. You know, Syracuse, Boston College, Notre Dame, Indiana State, I mean they're all places that had wrestling that don't now. And I am just thinking of those off the top of my head. That's a lot of market share for media. You know, back when they dropped, you were still talking cable was in its infancy, there was not all these, you know, cable TV things. Cable wasn't looking for programming. Now, just think of the notoriety and the amount of fan base wrestling would have.

Regional issues were not as widely discussed by Stakeholders and Wrestling Coaches. WC #1 commented that conference affiliation was a key contributor to program elimination and WC #3 discussed how regional issues led to program eliminations in the northeastern-most part of the U.S. However, SH #3 was an outlier among coaches and stakeholders when it came to discussing regional issues as a factor in the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. According to SH #3,

For a long time the southeast conference had wrestling. They recruited a lot of kids from other parts of the country rather than people from their region. So, when they started looking at programs and ways to adjust their athletic departments, I don't think the geographical makeup of a lot of those southern schools – because wrestling wasn't real strong in the South and these were Division I coaches that wanted to win. So, they would go and recruit New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Midwest, etc., and they would have a team that didn't have very many athletes that were from their own backyard. I think that was a contributing factor in the Deep South, and especially in the Southeast Conference ... A number of schools in the PAC 12 ... dropped all at the same time. So, you went from having teams in your region or your conference that had wrestling, to having fewer. I mean, and then you had increases in cost because you had to travel more and all of that ... that's a regional thing, we lost entire regions of the country. We lost New England, we lost the Deep South, and we had a real big hit out west.

Alumni Presence

Several participants discussed alumni and their relationship to institutional wrestling culture. In most instances, lack of alumni engagement was not identified as a direct factor leading to NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination, but rather as an ancillary factor with the potential to greatly influence decision-making.

For instance, at AD #2's institution the alumni group was not large enough to make a substantial impact on decision making. AD #2 stated:

We did not have a strong alumni base, and when I say strong alumni base, we had – believe me, we had people who were very passionate, our wrestling program was pretty successful during their tenure here. Our program, our overall athletics program was so young ... so there was not the history and tradition.

These circumstances were in alignment with comments made by AD #1. AD #1 implied when a NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program is eliminated, the program alumni attempted to organize but often it was too little too late.

SH #2 stated lack of support from “alumni is one big reason” for the decline in wrestling programs at Division I institutions. He related these issues creating a strong culture of alumni presence to the head coach's ability to cultivate strong relationships with the right people. SH #3 made similar comments regarding alumni support:

A lot of the programs that dropped wrestling didn't have a very strong and organized alumni group. So again, that left us a little vulnerable in some situations, you know. If the alumni has been donating and showing up on their campus it makes that a more difficult decision.

However, SH #3 also experienced alumni engagement from a different angle. As an alumnus of an eliminated intercollegiate wrestling program, SH #3 considered himself one of many former Division I wrestlers without a team of their own to support. He stated:

So you have entire groups of alumni out there, and families, that no longer have the team that they wrestled for. We are in the 70's, when I wrestled we were in the 150's, so the Division I tournament is half as large in terms of the number of schools represented from when I wrestled ... those are the kind of people that, they're out there, there are a lot of people that donate money to wrestling but they can't donate it to their college because they don't have it anymore ... I won't give to my alma mater anymore because they dropped wrestling, it's kind of a perspective.

He went on to provide an example of a university that dropped wrestling several years ago and whose alumni continue to support the sport by attending the annual NCAA Division I Championship event. SH #3 explained:

... they show up every year at the NCAA tournament with all their alums from wrestling to watch wrestling. Of course, [Coastal University] hasn't had a team in twenty-years. That's an element that people don't notice enough, there is this strong alumni group of wrestling people that can't even donate to their own college.

Team Affiliation

Although only discussed in-depth by one participant, the dichotomy of wrestling as both an individual and team sport was discussed heavily by WC #2. WC #2 spoke about how team sports can transform a campus and entire cities, an important consideration when it comes to campus culture and the broader culture of sport-fans in general. He explained:

Whole cities are following their team. Where they are and where they fit into the playoff race. Same with baseball, people follow the statistics in the paper and how many games back they are. Football – all the cities love their teams, their NFL teams and, people move out but they still meet at bars and restaurants and watch it. So it's, it's something they can relate as a team. It's the same thing on a college campus. Just the pageantry, and the bands, and what goes on. The social setting behind the football game – it's amazing. They've figured it out, you know, they make it so people want to be there, and it becomes an event more than a sporting event. It's a whole day event of people meeting and hanging out. They can watch the game, but a lot of people don't watch the game. There's 20-30 thousand people outside the stadium just hanging out. It's a place to meet and hang out. Where I don't think the smaller sports have that. Because they are niche sports, it's really just the family and people that understand the sport go and watch it. Where football, I feel like people go to socialize and party and do business and we don't have that in the niche sports right now ... we should find a way to promote the team concept ... without a doubt in our country team sports are more popular than individual sports. So, when you just do an individual

tournament we're getting, you know, the ratings for ESPN were good, but they were in nowhere comparison to the Cubs/Cardinals game last night.

WC #2 believes these fan bases developed "because people grow attached to a team," and specifically with regard to intercollegiate wrestling, WC #2 believes a stronger emphasis on dual meets in addition to the already popular NCAA Division I Wrestling Championship Tournament could help grow the sport's popularity. He shared:

We can't grow the individual tournament [NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling championship tournament] anymore. It sells out. It puts 111 thousand [total seats sold over the course of the three-day event], so that's maxed. But, to me, if you're maxed in the business and your sport still hasn't been growing. You're still at 70 something programs. How do we grow it? And I look at the dual meet. The excitement of a dual meet and the anticipation, and the write ups, and how the atmosphere can be unbelievable. We should be focused on that and making it a part of the individual championships and the excitement. Every sport, you name a professional sport and I will tell you their playoff system has expanded ... we're saying oh we don't want to ruin a good thing. We have a good thing and it's one weekend. Why not make it three weekends when you have such a great thing? So, that's my perception of it.

Theme: Complexity

The fourth theme that emerged from the interviews was one of complexity. This includes the complexity involved in making the decision to eliminate a NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program. Moreover, the complexity in terms of the number of

factors involved, and complexity in the sense that the factors impacted different institutions in different ways. While some factors stood out above others, specifically gender and financial considerations, the process of making the decision to eliminate an NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program and the factors considered in the overall decision differed from institution to institution.

Each of the three athletic directors discussed the complex and difficult nature of deciding to eliminate any athletic program from their campus. AD #1 noted, “an athletic director doesn’t wake up in the morning and say” lets drop intercollegiate wrestling. He goes on to say:

... but it is a very complicated issue of them, of people dropping sports. I don’t think, and in particular wrestling, I don’t think there’s one magic fix ... There’s so many things that are tied to whether an athletic administrator, a President, a council or trustees, board of governors, whatever the model is, what is their value, what either keeps wrestling or eliminates wrestling?

AD #3 stated “it’s a very complicated process” to make the decision to eliminate a sports program. AD #2 also discussed how challenging the decision was to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling. AD #2 explained:

When you look at a review of programs it’s really difficult, one of the most difficult decisions ... It’s no different than a quote-unquote program review on the academic side of the house. How do you determine ... Each school is going to have different factors.

Outside of the three athletic directors, SH #3 was the only other participant to directly speak about complexities. When asked to discuss the most significant factors that result in the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs, he stated that “it’s not a simple thing. I think every program has a different reason, a different history and a different story.” SH #3 continued:

... if you’re doing a sophisticated study you’re going to be looking at 100 programs in Division I that disappeared. If you focusing only on Division I, you almost have to look at each case ... each college has a different story, you know ... I hate to say it, but you have to look at all the factors differently.

Many Factors Involved

Each participant provided descriptions of the most important factors they have experienced when it came to the elimination of a NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program. The majority of the factors discussed by participants overlapped with one another, particularly those related to gender equity or financial and budgetary items. However, a wide range of factors were discussed, and often two or more factors were interrelated in various ways.

Every participant discussed multiple individual factors, such as AD #1 whose following statement exemplified how a large number of factors can itself be a complexity. AD #1 stated:

I think that if it came down to just one item it would be easier to fix. I think certain schools, you know, have coaching and or athlete issues, and it has caused them to, you know, eliminate the program. Violations or just bad coaches, nasty

coaches. And then, you get some programs that, you know, financially were strapped. And then, you know, the University becomes financially strapped and you have to cut back. Part of the issue becomes, you eliminate the programs that might not be as successful ... equity issues ... But, is it money? Is it department staff is overwhelmed with too much to do? Is it the APR is not good? Is it the coaches just let it go and the kids are bad, and they are not graduating? Does the program have a bad reputation ... overall I don't think there is one reason.

Although financial reasons were the final factor for the decision at AD #2's institution, there were many other items considered before eliminating intercollegiate wrestling. These included the "strength of the sport ... from a recruiting standpoint" in the region, the institutional "sport mix" and the program's "potential for revenue generation" which included donor support and program sponsored events which bring money into the local economy. Also considered by AD #2 was the quality of the program's "facilities" and strength of the program's "alumni base."

When AD #3's institution decided to eliminate male sports programs, there were multiple factors its considered most important. Aside from Title IX compliance and financial issues, they looked at whether or not the sport was well represented in the athletic conference in which the university participated, the ability to compete in the sport regionally, and the high school participation numbers and trends. Also considered by AD #3's institution was the success of the intercollegiate wrestling program, not only on the wrestling mat but also in the classroom and in the community.

Based on SH #1's experiences, elimination of intercollegiate wrestling programs came down to three key issues. Two of these were Title IX and a broken financial model for intercollegiate athletics. The third factor, he explained:

... when you have a situation where you have a coach who is not a very good steward of the program. The coach is at odds with the administration, the kids are getting in trouble, you know, ugly off-the mat incidences. You know, that sort of thing ... and included in that bucket would be poor academic performance.

Factors SH #2 identified as most important were the current NCAA Division I intercollegiate financial model, the way schools chose to prioritize which sports are marketed and promoted more heavily, the strength of alumni, and "the coach's ability to lead like a CEO." SH #2 also discussed three factors not discussed by other participants. One of these was health concerns, especially those related to concussions. The second, according to SH #2, was "in the system that the model that currently operates today ... you cannot build a home following." SH #2 elaborated that the limited number of allowable home competition dates ultimately prevents intercollegiate wrestling teams from generating ticket and concession revenue. The third factor SH #2 identified as most important was media coverage. He explained "what's been a real catastrophe for nonrevenue sports, in particular, nonrevenue men's sports, is that they have virtually gone away from being reported on by the media. So, that lack of coverage is extremely detrimental to the sport."

SH #3 believed that Title IX used to be a major factor but is not as much in recent years. He now points to "financial issues" and "the philosophy of Division I programs to

put more resources into their revenue generating sports” as a growing factor. Other factors identified and discussed by SH #3 included regional issues, problems with student-athletes and coaches related to how they represented the institution, and universities not providing an appropriate infrastructure for coaches to reasonably grow and develop their programs.

Critical factors that have led to wrestling program eliminations according to WC #1, include the success of the team, the team’s academic progress rate (APR), and the ability of the coach to raise money for the university. He also placed some of the blame on coaches and student-athletes, stating that eliminations had occurred “where the wrestlers were getting in trouble or the coaches did something unethical, or a combination of, has led to that as well.”

WC #2 focused much attention on financial considerations as the leading factor in the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. He also discussed to a considerable extent issues that were more self-inflicted, such as the discord within the coaching ranks when it came to placing more emphasis on dual matches. From a coaching leadership standpoint WC #2 stressed the need to “have the right kids recruited in here, kids have to behave right, their GPA’s have to be good, the APR, all that stuff has to be done right because you don’t want to give them a reason.”

Finances and poor athletic department leadership were main factors that echoed throughout WC #3’s interview. He believed personal agendas and the desire to make a name for one’s self influenced athletic administrator’s decisions, even to the point of their own demise. WC #3 felt that the culture on campus allowed this to happen, because most

of the college administration and board of trustees have little, if any, knowledge about the sport of intercollegiate wrestling.

The Decision

Each of the nine participants addressed the question of who is most responsible or has the most influence over the making the decision to eliminate an intercollegiate NCAA Division I wrestling program. While all of the participants felt college administration was most influential in the decision, two of the stakeholders specifically identified athletic directors as being most influential.

According to SH #1, the decision to eliminate NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling at an institution rests on the shoulders of “the athletic director. Obviously, the Athletic Directors have the biggest stick.” SH #2 also identified the athletic director, especially during the period when intercollegiate wrestling was experiencing its greatest number of eliminated programs. He stated that:

I think it’s the athletic directors. I don’t think it starts from the President down. I think that they’re the ones that are tasked with meeting goals of that administration and that athletic department. I don’t think that a lot of those decisions, although later on I think they got more sophisticated using the sports support councils they have on campus to kind of agree with their assessment that it’s good to drop a program. But, I was there in the period where you didn’t have an organized student-athlete, and community people that were on some sports council like a lot of the colleges have now. Back then in the AD’s were the king.

The three athletic directors themselves also discussed their influence in the process. AD #2 and AD #3, both having been through the process of eliminating intercollegiate wrestling, discussed initiating an athletic program review process based on university administration awareness that athletic department changes were needed. AD #1 also acknowledged the influence of athletic directors in making a decision to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling or any sports program, stating that “at most institutions ... it all stems around the upper administration and the athletic director.”

Having been associated with two NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs that were eliminated, WC #3 had the most direct experience with regard to who is most responsible for making the decision. In both instances, WC #3 believed “it came down to a decision by the person in control. Meaning the athletic director.” He went on to say:

That’s one thing that I see time and time and time again, and I think for the most part, about programs being dropped that people overlook. A lot of times, you know, these athletic directors got their own little agenda ... it comes down to an individual decision.

WC #3 noted these decisions were not without consequences. In both instances where he experienced program elimination the athletic director’s job was lost shortly thereafter.

WC #1 was an outlier. In his experience, “The athletic director was not going to cut wrestling, and then, from what I understand, the President made him.” Although this was his particular experience, WC #1 believed that in most cases “the Athletic Director and President are the two main figures” that influence the decision.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of Chapter Four was to provide the findings from this research study. Throughout interviews with the nine participants, there was significant discussion about various factors that contributed to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. From these discussions and from the analysis that followed, four main themes emerged:

- Gender Considerations;
- Financial Considerations;
- Culture; and
- Complexity.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Beginning in the early 1980's, NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program numbers have been nearly cut in half (Irick, 2016). This reduction in programs sharply reduced opportunities for student-athletes who aspired to participate in NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of factors leading to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs.

Four research questions guided this study: 1) What are the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions; 2) What are the experiences of Division I head wrestling coaches regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions; 3) What are the experiences of NCAA Division I athletic directors regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions, and 4) What are the experiences of critical stakeholders regarding the most significant factors that have contributed to the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling program sponsorship at NCAA Division I institutions? To address these questions, nine participants (three athletic directors, three wrestling coaches, and three stakeholders) with intimate knowledge of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination decisions were interviewed. These

participants shared their experiences and perceptions related to NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination decisions. Four fundamental themes emerged:

- Gender Considerations;
- Financial Considerations;
- Culture; and
- Complexity.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss findings from the study in relation to the four themes and various subthemes which emerged. Where available, comparisons to relevant literature are discussed in context of the findings. Recommendations are provided for future practice and research. Limitations of this dissertation study are discussed, before concluding with a summary of Chapter Five.

Discussion of Findings

Participants interviewed during this study were asked questions regarding their experiences related to factors that contributed to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Five participants, including two athletic directors and three coaches, were employed by a NCAA Division I institution during the time their institutions eliminated intercollegiate wrestling. Each of the three stakeholders interviewed were former NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestlers. Moreover, each were employed by an organization which kept the stakeholders closely connected to intercollegiate wrestling, and each had intimate knowledge of program elimination and associated factors.

Attitudes towards the research topic and themes were varied. Coaches and stakeholders had the most personal investment when it came to NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination, and naturally were passionate about the sport and its value. Coaches and stakeholders were also the harshest critics of intercollegiate wrestling leadership, especially with respect to the administrative and leadership abilities of head intercollegiate wrestling coaches. Athletic directors, as the position dictates, looked at intercollegiate wrestling on a broader spectrum, and as a component of the overall institutional sport program. Coaches, stakeholders, and athletic directors shared an acute concern about the impact of program elimination on student-athletes.

Gender Considerations

The impact of Title IX and gender equity on NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination has been the subject of debate for many years (Anderson, 2012; Griffith, 2003; Priest, 2003; Zimbalist, 2003). Documentation of university officials citing Title IX and gender equity as a central factor in the decision to eliminate their intercollegiate wrestling program is indisputable (Brady, 2007). Findings from this study align with previous evidence that suggested Title IX regulation and gender considerations contributed to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs.

Intercollegiate wrestling coaches have been particularly vocal about the influence of gender equity policies on intercollegiate wrestling (Griffith, 2003). Wrestling coaches surveyed by Weight and Cooper (2011) indicated they perceived gender equity was the

most significant reason behind the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling programs. However, results from this dissertation study differed somewhat from Weight and Cooper's (2011) findings. While two of the three coaches interviewed discussed issues related to gender equity, neither experienced or perceived it as the most important factor leading to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Moreover, none of the three coaches' former institutions cited Title IX or gender equity as the reason behind eliminating its intercollegiate wrestling program. One potential reason behind the differences in findings is that institutions with previous gender-related compliance issues have since balanced out their numbers, by either adding additional women's sport programs or eliminating male teams.

Athletic directors were the most vocal participants when it came to gender-related influences on NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination decisions. AD #3 explicitly cited gender considerations as the primary reason for his institution's decision to eliminate its program, and AD #2 made it clear that gender equity issues exist "on many campuses." Athletic directors' beliefs that gender considerations were a significant factor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination decisions aligns with Weight and Cooper's (2011) study. In their sample, Weight and Cooper (2011) found athletic directors rated "gender equity implications" (p. 67) as the second most important criteria when making the decision to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling from their campus. In consideration of athletic director's authority level in elimination decisions, the importance of gender considerations on the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling and male athletic programs in general cannot be ignored.

Intercollegiate wrestling stakeholders each believed gender considerations were an important factor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination decisions. However, none of the stakeholders interviewed believed it was an overriding factor. This differed from previous research, and from challenges to Title IX made by intercollegiate wrestling advocates (Anderson, 2012; Griffith, 2003; Zimbalist, 2003). However, any discrepancy between previous literature and findings from this study may be semantics, since challenging Title IX rulemaking and believing factors other than Title IX and gender equity to be the most important factor in the decision to eliminate intercollegiate wrestling programs are not mutually exclusive.

While there was general consensus that NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling had been affected by gender equity, some participants believed it to have impacted the sport more so in the past than in the present. For instance, SH #2 stated: “I think initially, when they were trying figure out how to comply with Title IX, it was easier to drop a men’s sport.” Similarly, AD #3 experiences led him to believe that gender is no longer as great of a threat as in previous years. He stated: “I think that earlier on there might have been more [NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs eliminated] based on gender equity.” Yet a fair comparison is difficult to make, since the number of intercollegiate wrestling programs eliminated in recent years has decreased considerably (Irick, 2016).

Financial Considerations

Previous research indicated that non-revenue athletic programs have been at risk of elimination due to institution and athletic department financial considerations (Griffith,

2003; Weigh & Cooper, 2011). The results of this study supported previous research, as each of the nine participants indicated money was a factor in program elimination decisions. Moreover, financial considerations were the primary reason behind the elimination of wrestling programs at AD #3, WC #1, WC #2, and WC #3's current or former institutions. Consequently, matters pertaining to finances were the most frequently cited of all factors found during this study.

Not only were financial considerations the most frequently identified factors discussed across all three categories of participants (athletic directors, wrestling coaches, stakeholders), the impact of financial considerations on intercollegiate wrestling appears to be worsening. Each stakeholder and wrestling coach interviewed discussed what SH #1 referred to as a "broken ... business model" inside of NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics, a model, based on their experiences, that caters to revenue producing sports while largely ignoring other athletic program needs. Stakeholders and coaches shared a belief that this model marginalizes non-revenue sports programs and promotes a widening divide among football and men's basketball, and the remaining less profitable sports.

While each athletic director also discussed financial considerations as critical to NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination decisions, they expressed these issues in a different tone. Perhaps not surprisingly, athletic directors' experiences and viewpoints appeared to be based more on their present realities, which was that football and men's basketball bring money into their institution, while every NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program operates at a financial loss (Fulks, 2015). As

a result, athletic directors appeared to view each sport as its own business. Accordingly, non-revenue producing sports, such as NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling, become part of elimination discussions when an athletic department finds itself in a position where it needs to reduce costs.

Culture

Culture as a factor for NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination was discussed during all nine interviews. Culture is a broad, but substantive topic. While gender or financial considerations may place a sport in jeopardy of elimination, issues pertaining to culture can be what differentiates one sport team from another when an institution is making elimination decisions. This was especially true when poor leadership from intercollegiate wrestling coaches facilitated a culture which, as explained by SH #1, was “not operating in close alignment with the educational values of the school.” Issues of culture discussed in the findings of this study included: administrative culture, wrestling culture on campus, regional preferences, alumni presence, and team affiliation.

Findings from this study indicated factors pertaining to culture may be greater than previously described in the literature. Evidence of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination due to cultural factors have existed. An example can be found at Eastern Illinois University, where the institution eliminated the intercollegiate wrestling program because its team academic progress did not meet institutional expectations (ESPN, 2007). However, few additional references to cultural factors in

NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination can be found in the literature.

Issues pertaining to administrative and campus cultures were the most heavily discussed cultural item. Two of the three athletic directors interviewed had almost no exposure to intercollegiate wrestling, or amateur wrestling in general, before taking employment in athletic administration. Lack of experience with intercollegiate wrestling from senior athletic administrators supports the beliefs of wrestling coaches and stakeholders' that the sport is not well understood by administration. Even so, each of the stakeholders and two of the coaches placed responsibility on head intercollegiate wrestling coaches when it came to changing the administrative and intercollegiate wrestling cultures on their campuses. Moreover, AD #1, the only athletic director interviewed with previous exposure to the sport of intercollegiate wrestling before taking employment in athletic administration, emphasized the coach's responsibility in facilitating a successful wrestling culture. As such, these findings point to the importance of hiring intercollegiate wrestling coaching staff who not only excel as instructors on the wrestling mat, but also as effective administrators and advocates for the sport of intercollegiate wrestling in general.

Complexity

The final theme to emerge from this research study was complexity. Although complexity itself is not a factor in the elimination of intercollegiate wrestling programs, it was critical to understanding nearly four decades of intercollegiate wrestling program elimination decisions. The complexities were evident in findings from this study, as each

participant discussed multiple contributing factors that influenced NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling elimination decision making.

Issues of complexity have not been directly addressed by previous research on intercollegiate wrestling. Yet the athletic directors in this study, who were the most influential in evaluating the viability of intercollegiate wrestling programs, were emphatic that interplay between numerous factors existed. As AD #1 explained, “it is a very complicated issue ... so many things that are tied to whether an athletic administrator ... keeps wrestling or eliminates wrestling.” Consequently, focusing too much on one issue or applying a catch-all approach may prove unsuccessful in efforts to save NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs from elimination by their institution.

Recommendations for Practice

Intercollegiate wrestling leaders and stakeholders have fought a losing battle against NCAA Division I program elimination for nearly four decades (Weight & Cooper, 2011; Irick, 2016). Although these battles continue for proponents of the sport, some believe previous efforts to improve sustainability of intercollegiate wrestling have been fragmented and misguided (Griffith, 2003; Priest, 2003). Using findings of this study, the researcher identified two key recommendations for practice to help intercollegiate wrestling strengthen its position as a NCAA Division I sport.

Continue to Support the Growth of Women’s Wrestling

Several participants addressed lack of a female counterpart sport as an issue for intercollegiate wrestling. Gaining NCAA emerging sport status for women’s

intercollegiate wrestling, a goal the National Wrestling Coaches Association (NWCA) addressed in its strategic plan (“Five Year Strategic Plan,” 2016), could help alleviate this problem, ultimately benefitting men’s NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling. While the large number of programs lost between 1981-82 and 2015-16 (Irick, 2016) cannot be reversed, NCAA recognition of women’s intercollegiate wrestling as a championship sport could help sustain current men’s programs, and be a selling point for institutions looking to expand their athletic offerings.

In addition to soaring popularity domestically (“Women’s Wrestling History,” n.d.; “1964-2014,” n.d.; “Tournament Participants,” 2016), women’s wrestling has enjoyed international growth, and was added as an Olympic sport in 2004 (Reguli, 2007). The addition of women’s NCAA wrestling could provide a low-cost option (“Five Year Strategic Plan,” 2016) for institutions that want to address the burgeoning demand for women’s intercollegiate wrestling opportunities while simultaneously ameliorating Title IX proportionality.

In August 2017, a significant step towards making women’s intercollegiate wrestling a reality was taken (Spey, 2017). Wrestle Like a Girl, Inc., spearheaded a request that was sent to the NCAA requesting emerging sport recognition for women’s intercollegiate wrestling (Spey, 2017). This request was supported by eleven Colleges and Universities across various NCAA Divisions (Spey, 2017). This effort, coupled with efforts made by the NWCA, must continue until women’s intercollegiate wrestling is officially recognized by the NCAA.

Galvanize Alumni Engagement

When intercollegiate wrestling was at its peak in 1981-82, there were 3,659 active NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestlers during that season (Irick, 2016). Although this number has dropped substantially in correlation with program eliminations, it does indicate there may remain thousands of individuals who are former NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling participants. As discussed by SH #3, many of these alumni felt disenfranchised and “no longer have the team that they wrestled for” due to program elimination decisions. Even before many wrestling alumni experienced elimination of their former program, findings from this study suggested wrestling alumni were, in many cases, unorganized and lacked serious presence on many college campuses.

Alumni giving is one of the most critical financial resources for an institution (Koo & Dittmore, 2014). Not only do successful intercollegiate sport teams bring money from alumni into the athletic department, but they also increase alumni donations college-wide (Koo & Dittmore, 2014). The stronger the alumni base of an intercollegiate wrestling program, the more valuable the team is to its institution. Statements made by AD #2 supported this argument. AD #2 discussed how their institution’s wrestling alumni group was not large enough to help produce the resources needed to sustain the future of the intercollegiate wrestling program. With no other place to seek resources, the program was eliminated by the university.

Organized and engaged alumni groups with a strong campus presence are needed. This is true for individual NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs and for intercollegiate wrestling as a whole. Intercollegiate wrestling leaders and coaching staff must make alumni a priority in order to sustain and grow the sport.

Recommendations for Research

This study explored factors that contributed to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Data was collected through participant interviews, which allowed the researcher to collect detailed explanations of participant experiences and perceptions. The research design used phenomenological principles underpinned by an interpretive framework. This is different from other research which aimed to identify and list factors, or investigated specific factors exclusively, such as Title IX. The findings from this study presented opportunities for future research into the sport of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling.

Impact on First Generation Students

One opportunity for future research is to explore the impact of the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs on first generation college students. The rate of first generation college students who participated in intercollegiate wrestling was discussed by SH #2. He stated:

one of the most important speaking points out there is that wrestling, across all divisions, Division I, II, & III, has the largest percentage of first generation college bound student of any NCAA sport. And, that's something that resonates very well with college presidents. They pride themselves on getting first generation college bound students at their school.

As discussed by SH #2, improving access and success of first generation college students is an important issue for higher education leaders (Engle, 2007). With fewer NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs, the extent to which college access is

reduced for first generation students and the impact on first generation students who were enrolled at the time of program elimination overall academic success and graduation rates are important considerations. These questions should be further explored to help understand the full scope of intercollegiate wrestling elimination and the possible effect on aspiring and current student-athletes.

Investigation of Successful Program

Existing research on the health of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling focused on issues within the sport. My study followed a similar path. Yet, little literature exists which explored the practices of successful wrestling programs. Understanding the relationships successful NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling coaches built with their administration, alumni, student body, and their community could serve as a model for new and aspiring intercollegiate wrestling coaches.

Explore Administrative and Campus Culture

An important item that surfaced during this study was the significance of administrative and campus culture on decisions to eliminate athletic programs. Participants discussed how factors such as administrators' familiarity and perceptions, coaches' ability to create and promote a team image that mirrors institutional values, and a strong alumni presence on campus are major influences. Yet, little literature exists which examines the role administrative and campus cultures play in the decision to eliminate an intercollegiate wrestling program.

Successful Financial Models

Financial considerations were factors most thoroughly discussed by participants. A consensus existed that institutional and athletic department financial health played a substantial role in the viability of intercollegiate wrestling programs. However, while both previous literature and the respondents of this study indicated financial considerations as a factor in program elimination, there lacks significant literature regarding a sustainable financial model for intercollegiate wrestling. Studies which leads to the creation of a financial model that could be tailored to fit most NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs may be the single most important need for the future of the sport.

Limitations

There were multiple limitations to this study. First, as a qualitative phenomenological study, the research findings likely cannot be duplicated or generalized. While appropriate for phenomenological research, the sample size used in the study also lessens the ability to generalize findings. Another limitation was the researcher's inexperience directing phenomenological research studies. Additionally, because of distance, availability, and lack of financial resources, the researcher was unable to conduct face-to-face interviews. As a result, the ability to observe participants' demeanor and body language was removed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed findings of the research study in connection with factors leading to the elimination of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs. Connections were made to previous research on intercollegiate wrestling program

elimination, and the researcher made conclusions in context of themes discussed during Chapter Four. Recommendations for future practice, recommendations for future research, and limitations of the study were discussed. The potential effect of NCAA Division I program elimination on first generation college students and the creation of a successful financial model were identified as particularly important topics needing further exploration. Results from this study demonstrated that financial considerations were the most frequently cited factor identified from the participant sample, but gender and cultural factors were also significant.

Appendix A
Recruitment Email

Hello _____,

My name is Jason Fair and I am a doctoral student at Clemson University. I am conducting research about factors that contribute to the loss of wrestling programs at the NCAA Division I level and I am interested in your experiences as it pertains to this issue. The purpose of the research is to gain insights into the most significant factors that can lead to wrestling program loss. Your participation will involve one informal interview that will last no longer than 30 minutes. This research has no known risks and any notes and audio taken during the meeting will be kept in a secure location accessible only by the researcher.

If you would like to participate, please respond to this email with your preferred contact information. I will follow-up to schedule the interview.

Sincerely,

Jason Fair

Appendix B

Information about Being in a Research Study

Clemson University

Factors contributing to the loss of wrestling programs at NCAA Division I member institutions.

Description of the Study and Your Part in It

Dr. William Havice and Mr. Jason Fair are inviting you to take part in a research study.

Dr. William Havice is a Professor at Clemson University. Jason Fair is a student at Clemson University, running this study with the help of Dr. William Havice. The purpose of this research is to identify, through the perspective and experience of wrestling coaches, athletic directors, and influential stakeholders, the most significant factors that can lead to the discontinuation of collegiate wrestling programs. Only those individuals whose experience is with NCAA Division I institutions will be considered.

Your part in the study will be to answer questions communicated by the researcher pertaining to your perceptions regarding the loss of NCAA Division I wrestling programs.

It will take you no greater than 30 minutes to be in this study.

Risks and Discomforts

We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

Possible Benefits

We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study.

However, this research may help us to understand more fully the reasons which contribute to the loss of wrestling programs at the NCAA Division I level.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality

Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants is of highest priority. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. No information written in the final reporting of research will compromise your identity. If any of your words are quoted, it will be done so anonymously. All physical records, including audio recordings, researcher notes, and any additional hard-copy materials will be stored in a locked file cabinet accessible only by the researchers. All electronic notes will be stored behind encrypted pass code on an external drive. Only the investigators will have access to these materials. All recordings and transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

Choosing to Be in the Study

You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. William Havice at Clemson University at 864-656-7644.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

A copy of this form will be given to you.

Appendix C

Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews:

1. Describe your relationship to and/or experience with the sport of intercollegiate wrestling.
2. In your perception, what are the most significant items that can lead to the elimination of a NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program?
3. What experience do you have with these factors?
 - a. How did these factors initially arise and further develop?
 - b. How did these factors result specifically in NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination?
4. What individual(s) or groups do you perceive have the greatest influence over these factors, and, ultimately, over the decision to eliminate a NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program. Why?
5. What challenges (e.g., socially, economically, educationally, etc.) and/or struggles did you experience or witness as a result of a Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination and/or as a result of the declining number of Division I intercollegiate wrestling programs in general?
6. Are there any additional items not already addressed during this interview that you believe are important to the topic of NCAA Division I intercollegiate wrestling program elimination or to the declining number of NCAA Division I intercollegiate programs in general?

Appendix D

Sample Coding Process for Themes

THEME/DATA CLUSTERS	PERSON	PARTICIPANT STATEMENTS	NOTES
<p>Gender Equity; Title IX; Women’s Wrestling; Male vs Female enrollment; Football Roster results in imbalance; Title IX more of a factor early on, but less so in recent years;</p>	<p>AD1</p>	<p>If there are equity issues, it makes you eliminate a men’s program instead of a women’s program</p> <p>Everyone is going to say, oh, it’s Title IX. Well, maybe Title IX was a factor, but not positive that it is just Title IX.</p> <p>I think that earlier on there might have been more based on gender equity, but if you look at the law, nowhere did gender equity or Title IX say that you have to drop a sport.</p> <p>The institutions made the decisions how they wanted to, you know, abide by Title IX. So, some institutions added women’s sports, some institutions cut wrestling. You know, back when the big loss between the 70’s and early 90’s. So, an institution was strapped for Title IX, needed to add a</p>	<p>Interesting that it always seems to flow one-way. Is this based on history – it’s definitely changed over the years – but are males inherently, possibly biologically more programmed to be interested in sports?</p> <p>The decline has happened over many years, implications that factors have shifted. Regarding program loss “earlier on there might have been more based on gender equity”. However, does not believe it’s the most significant contributor anymore.</p> <p>Important observation – never did title IX mandate male sport eliminations. However, programs cost money. Title IX as an indirect killer of male Olympic programs?</p>

		<p>women’s sport, what do you cut?</p> <p>[in regards to women’s wrestling influencing schools keeping men’s wrestling] do I think that is a savior of college wrestling? No. But, I think it is a benefit to college wrestling. The schools that feel it appropriate it may help their situation. If it’s an emerging sport it’s be much more likely a school would add a women’s program. Now you have your men’s and your women’s program balance and doesn’t leave your men’s program out there isolated.</p> <p>I think you could do it with, um, you would need some staffing investment, but you could do it with one wrestling room, you could do it with one weight room, um, you know, it’s not like you would need a whole new facility. So, your costs for a women’s program, I don’t know it would be significant.</p>	<p>The idea of men’s wrestling being isolated is important. This will come up again. Wrestling can be a large roster program – some with 35-40 athletes. With exception of football are there any other sports that carry that many athletes? It looks like Lacrosse and Track, but both of those have male/female counterparts.</p>
	AD2	I did not use Title IX as an excuse. Probably	very adamant that Title IX not be blamed

		<p>could have.</p> <p>I think there are Title IX, Title IX implications on many campuses. So you look at those participation numbers</p> <p>I do think sometimes we use, we use different excuses and, for me, uh, TITLE IX has always sort of been, you know, thrown out there. And, you know, TITLE IX is, you know, it's been a law since 1972 and much more, it's, it's, so interesting to me, this is another topic probably be a good dissertation topic</p> <p>it would have been easy to just say, well, you know our participation numbers I, I've got to get them more in balance, and, you know, we have more women on our campus.</p>	<p>for this institution's decision to drop wrestling. Yet, very interesting that feeling was it could be used as excuse. Is transparency and issue with some institutions? If so, what is being covered up? Could be personal?</p>
	AD3	<p>We were faced at that time with a situation of sports reduction, based upon where we found ourselves with regard to Title IX compliance. We are an institution that's roughly 40% male, 60% female. We run a</p>	<p>Relationship between Title IX and financial is important. Title IX alone never actually has to be a reason to drop? But without money balancing numbers is impossible. Football comes up again. It</p>

		<p>Division I football program with over one-hundred and some student athletes, and at the time that I came we were significantly out of compliance</p> <p>[with regard to women's wrestling] It would have made a significant difference I would think. It's important to note though, in our scenario, we were so far out of compliance we were even forced to eliminate our men's swimming sport programs being built over a number of years without, in some cases, factoring in the implications of Title IX compliance. Although I would tell you I think it would help in that scenario, given what happened to us with the reduction of those men's programs, and still keeping the women's programs in place, would have been challenging.</p> <p>we would have had to added an inordinate number of female sports in order to balance out our ratios</p>	<p>takes up resources and roster spots without a balancing female counterpart.</p>
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	<p>[in regard to the role football plays] I do, I do. I think inherently, any time you have one programs that takes over 100 opportunities it's going to skew the scales with regard to participation. So, for us that was trying to maintain the program, football program that we competed at a high level obviously, and our program has been successful but there is also a lot of pressure to keep it there. That's part of it.</p> <p>It was difficult, and when you get into a situation like that, working with your Title IX consultant who is just trying to help you make your numbers work. It's kind of a shame that's what it comes down to, but unfortunately that's the standard that we are being held accountable to.</p> <p>I think a balance, whenever you talk about sports, whenever you have a balancing female program it takes away one more point that any individual that's</p>	
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		trying to eliminate it can have as a discussion point. I think that balancing those two at most schools	
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Appendix E

IRB Approval

Dear Dr. Satterfield,

The Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) reviewed the protocol identified above using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on **December 23, 2013** that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as **Exempt** under category **B2**, based on federal regulations 45 CFR 46. The approved consent documents is attached for distribution. **Your protocol will expire on February 28, 2015.**

Please note that we will need a site letter before you may recruit participants at the Chesapeake Energy Arena. Please refer to our guidance on research site letters, http://media.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/research_site_letters.pdf, for more information and send the letter to irb@clemson.edu.

The expiration date indicated above was based on the completion date you entered on the IRB application. If an extension is necessary, the PI should submit an Exempt Protocol Extension Request form, <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/forms.html>, at least three weeks before the expiration date. Please refer to our website for more information on the extension procedures, <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/guidance/reviewprocess.html>.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately. All team members are required to review the "Responsibilities of Principal Investigators" and the "Responsibilities of Research Team Members" available at <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html>.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Good luck with your study.

All the best,
Nalinee

Nalinee D. Patin

IRB Coordinator

Clemson University

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Appendix F

Amended IRB Approvals

Dear Dr. Havice,

The Clemson University Office of Research Compliance reviewed your amendment request using exempt review procedures and has recommended approval. You may begin to implement this amendment.

Amendment requested: update data collection tools; extend project completion date

Your protocol will expire on December 31, 2017. If an extension is necessary, the PI should submit an Exempt Protocol Extension Request form at least three weeks before the expiration date. Please refer to our website for more information on the extension procedures, <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/guidance/reviewprocess.html>.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or informed consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, complications, and/or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance immediately.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title when referencing the study in future correspondence.

All the best,
Nalinee

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Dear Dr. Satterfield,

Your amendment to recruit participants by e-mail has been approved. You may begin to implement this amendment.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

All the best,
Nalinee

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Dear Dr. Satterfield,

The Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) reviewed your extension request using exempt review procedures and a **determination was made on March 6, 2015** that the proposed activities involving human participants continue to qualify as **Exempt under category B2**, based on the federal regulations 45 CFR 46. **Your protocol will expire on February 29, 2016.**

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the ORC immediately.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

All the best,
Nalinee

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