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PERCEPTIONS OF ICE HOCKEY SEASON TICKET HOLDERS ON THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF A DONOR-BASED SEATING MODEL AT MIAMI UNIVERSITY,  
A PUBLIC MIDWESTERN MID-MAJOR INSTITUTION

Doctor of Philosophy

Higher Education

The University of Mississippi

DAVID COLEMAN BARNES JR.

DECEMBER 2017

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## ABSTRACT

Intercollegiate athletics is a \$10 billion marketplace (Suggs, 2012), with some Division I athletics operating budgets approaching \$200 million. College athletics programs are charged with maximizing revenues in an effort to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. This study provides an examination of the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University.

Miami ice hockey consistently fills its venue and generates crucial revenues for the athletics department. As the cost to compete for championships continues to increase, schools like Miami must be creative in identifying ways to maximize revenues. The need for expanded revenue streams coupled with high demand for tickets led Miami Athletics to introduce a donor-based seating model for ice hockey prior to the 2014-2015 season.

This qualitative case study grounded in phenomenology utilized Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory. Collective research and standardized open-ended interviews were conducted with 16 randomly selected ice hockey season ticket holders from the 2013-2014 season. A majority of participants in this study were not in favor of Miami Athletics implementing a donor-based seating model for ice hockey. Despite all the criticisms, most interview participants recognized the need for the athletics department to generate revenue to better position Miami ice hockey for success.

College athletics is constantly evolving and revenue generation is so critical to compete at the highest level. To maximize revenues, though, understanding the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model is extremely

important. Nine major themes emerged from this study, with the most prevalent being that people express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating. Miami Athletics administrators will be able to utilize the results of this study and learn more about their ice hockey season ticket holders' willingness to support and enhance the student-athlete experience through donor-based seating. Effective communication, relationship building, and student-athlete integration should reduce the backlash that naturally comes from fans having to pay more and ultimately lead to increased funds to support and enhance the student-athlete experience.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my wife, the former Mary Beth Justice, whom I met in the Student Services in Higher Education class the first semester I was enrolled at Ole Miss. Her support and patience throughout this journey was truly amazing. You are an amazing wife and mother and I appreciate your willingness to embrace and follow my career goals. To my parents, David and Cookie Barnes, as they have preached the importance of education my whole life. They never hesitated to provide educational opportunities for me and my sister, Brooke, and were gracious enough to fund our undergraduate education. To Brooke, thanks for being a great aunt. To Mazie Elder, my granny, you are truly an amazing woman. Lastly, to my children, Caroline and William. I encourage you to embrace education and pursue lifelong learning. I love you all very much!

## ABBREVIATIONS

BCS	Bowl Championship Series
CCHA	Central Collegiate Hockey Association
CSU	California State University
FBS	Football Bowl Subdivision
FCS	Football Championship Subdivision
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NCHC	National Collegiate Hockey Conference
UAB	University of Alabama at Birmingham

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people helped me throughout the process of completing this dissertation. I first want to thank the chair of my committee, Dr. Amy Wells Dolan, for sticking with me from the moment I started writing. I appreciate your advising, patience, and motivation over the years. I also want to thank others on my dissertation committee, Dr. John Holleman, Dr. Susan McClelland, and Dr. K.B. Melear. I could not have asked for a more supportive and compassionate group. I must also thank Dr. Tim Letzring, who admitted me to the program. Pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher Education provided me the opportunity to meet my now wife, the former Mary Beth Justice. We are now both Ole Miss graduates!

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To the 16 Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders who participated in the interviews, thank you very much for your contributions to the study. Your candor was greatly appreciated and will help shape future studies and decisions made by athletics administrators in regards to donor-based seating models. There are so many other people who have helped shape my philosophies on fundraising throughout my career. Lastly, many thanks to my bosses, co-



workers, colleagues, and friends in the business that I have engaged with since entering the profession in 2003. It is a privilege to work in college athletics!

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Intercollegiate athletics is a multi-billion dollar business where increasing revenue is critical for providing an outstanding student-athlete experience, improving the sustainability of programs, and positioning teams for competitive success. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* estimated that college athletics is a \$10 billion marketplace (Suggs, 2012). “The business of college sports has become big-business, a sophisticated business wherein athletic directors oversee multi-million dollar licensing deals, integrated sponsorships, apparel contracts, preferred seating, seat licensing programs, and cable and television contracts,” said Martin Greenberg (2008), a member of the National Sports Law Institute Board of Advisors.

In an effort to create an outstanding experience for student-athletes and to support the rising costs associated with positioning athletics programs for greater success, fundraising has become of greater importance (Bucci & Waters, 2014). In 1998, the percentage of donations that supported a university’s athletics department was nearly 15%, but increased to 26% in 2003 (Fulks, 2005). In 2012, the donation percentage was slightly higher at approximately 27% (Brown, 2013). Stinson and Howard (2010b) mentioned that this growth was due to increasing operating budgets of athletics departments, and the fact that donations are often required in order to access tickets, parking, and other benefits.

Despite the benefits, institutional leaders are at a crossroads as critics continue to denounce the financial support of intercollegiate athletics programs. Colleges and universities continue to subsidize athletics programs with student fees and other institutional funds that some claim could be used for academic support and additional areas of the mission related to teaching, research, and service. According to *Athletic Management*, the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Division I athletics departments are putting their institutions at risk by spending too much money, growing their budgets at a rate two to three times that of the rest of higher education, and borrowing against future earnings to pay for facility expansions and upgrades (Assessing, 2007).

In 2012, only 23 of 228 NCAA Division I public institutions operated with a surplus (Berkowitz, Upton, & Brady, 2013). In addition, all but seven of these received an institutional subsidy. For fiscal year end 2016, the number of self-sufficient athletics programs remained at 23 (Berkowitz & Schnaars, 2017). The number of schools operating with a surplus typically varies from year to year. In fact, during the 2008-2009 academic year, only 14 institutions reported making a profit (Joyner, 2010). The funding models for intercollegiate athletics departments will likely continue to be criticized. Two common criticisms toward athletics programs are that coaches' salaries and institutional subsidies are too high and may not directly support the academic mission of the university.

Stinson and Howard (2010b) stated that sustaining growth in private support is one of the strategies available for universities to help offset the declining state and other governmental support. In conjunction with the overall reduction of institutional support, athletics departments are now dependent upon generating more of their own revenues, especially from private support. The multi-billion dollar business of college athletics continues to be fueled by alumni and friends

of institutions craving for championship teams. Those supporting the program expect a return on their investment. Failure to increase donation revenues, including revenues from donor-based seating, may lead to a decrease in the amount of scholarships that get funded or even a reduction in athletics programming, which may negatively impact the student-athlete experience.

### *A Symbiotic Relationship*

College sports provide student-athletes with skills necessary to succeed in the classroom, in competition, and in life (NCAA, 2016). They also promote the well-being of student-athletes and teach them leadership, confidence, discipline, and teamwork. Fulks (2010) revealed that universities are increasingly investing in athletics programs at the highest levels of competition. Tsitsos and Nixon, II (2012) indicated that institutional officials, trustees, athletics boosters, and donors place a very high value on success in big-time athletics. College sports are important and highly visible components of the majority of colleges and universities in the United States (Matheson, O'Connor, & Herberger, 2012).

Robert Sternberg (2011), former provost and senior vice president at Oklahoma State University, argued that competitive sports have a number of positives among the benefits for institutions and individuals. He identified leadership development, spirit, pride, loyalty, memories, lifetime fitness, recruitment, stress relief, prosocial behavior, well-roundedness, balance, town-gown relationships, alumni loyalty, involvement, advancement, branding, and lifelong friendships. Sternberg acknowledged this after he saw all the issues surrounding college athletics when he was a faculty member, but now as a university administrator, he has had the opportunity to view college athletics from a different angle.

The exposure that an institution receives when one of its teams plays on national television, as well as the number of alumni and friends venturing back to campus for athletics



events, can help promote the institution as it prospers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Bill Lubinger (2011) cited the value of visibility, positive exposure, and pride all having an impact on alumni who are prospective donors. Even at the University of California, Berkeley, a faculty group seeking ways to reduce institutional support for athletics acknowledged, “Athletics adds to campus spirit and unity, provides free advertising for the campus, helps in branding, and provides a link and outreach to alumni” (Berkowitz, Upton, McCarthy, & Gillum, 2010). In addition to providing free advertising, Fisher (2009) explained that spectator sports promote the university to local and national audiences, resulting in a great tool to strengthen perceptions of institutional quality. Fisher added that spectator sports might influence the quantity and quality of applications by prospective students and the number and size of donations, especially from alumni.

Former UC Berkeley chancellor, Robert Birgeneau, stated, “There should be no doubt that we fully intend to provide intercollegiate athletics with continued financial support as long as required to ensure that we remain true to our tradition of comprehensive excellence.” He added, “It engages our community, including especially our undergraduate students, celebrates excellence, and showcases our student-athletes” (University of California, Berkeley, 2010). An NCAA study, which focused on revenues from 1993 to 2001, produced evidence that for every one dollar invested in football, approximately one dollar of revenue was produced (Litan, Orzag, & Orszag, 2005). In addition, the research found that for every one dollar invested in other sports, approximately \$0.25 was generated. As donations continue to be of great importance to intercollegiate athletics departments’ budgets, donor-based seating plays a key role in driving revenues. These revenues have the potential to make a difference in the lives of student-athletes by enhancing their college experience as they strive for excellence in the classroom, in competition, and in life after graduation.

## *The Rise of Big-Time Intercollegiate Athletics*

In *Higher education in transition: A history of American colleges and universities*, Brubacher and Willis (1997) explained that intercollegiate athletics began in the United States during the 1850's. In a 1929 Carnegie Foundation report, Howard Savage suggested that 1880 was "the dividing line between the earlier, informal period of college sports and the rise of highly organized 'big-time' intercollegiate athletics." Savage explained how the simplicity of sports changed, including the costs to fund athletics programs. This is when coaches started to be compensated for their services.

Brubacher and Willis (1997) noted that the financial demands of college athletics increased to a level that led to commercialization. Money had to be raised from donors, thus alumni gained more of a voice toward athletics programs. Alumni giving became a primary source of funding, as did gate revenues from football games. The authors explained how successful teams ignited interests of fans, thus increased gate revenues helped support the program. Larger facilities started to be constructed, allowing more paying customers to attend games.

More than a century later, this all sounds very familiar, but the intensity level has multiplied. Today, the costs associated with college athletics have increased substantially from its beginning days. *USA Today* listed the 2012 athletics operating revenues at the University of Texas at more than \$163 million (Berkowitz, Schnaars, & Upton, 2015). The number climbed to nearly \$166 million in 2013, fell to \$161 million in 2014, but soared to \$188 million in fiscal year 2016 (Berkowitz, Schnaars, & Hannan, 2017). All of these amounts represent nearly a 400 percent increase compared to its 2002 budget, which at that time was \$50 million (Taylor, 2002). Surpassing the University of Texas' high revenues, the University of Oregon reported \$196

million in 2014, including approximately \$125 million from contributions. In 1896, the University of Pennsylvania had an athletics budget of just under \$63,000 (Athletics, 1896). The University of Pennsylvania led all the Ivy League universities in 2013 with an athletics operating budget over \$39 million, more than 600 times its 1896 budget (Schiefelbein, 2014). Berkowitz et al. (2017a) showed that Miami University's operating revenues were \$20.6 million, \$29.4 million, and \$33.6 million in 2005, 2014, and 2016, respectively.

Increased revenues by athletics departments and competitive pressures helped lead to escalating salaries for head coaches. Tsitsos and Nixon, II (2012) indicated that the 25 highest paid college football coaches in 2010 earned between \$1.925 million and \$5.17 million, and this did not even include some external, non-university payments. By 2015, the 25 highest paid college football coaches earned between \$3.35 million and \$7.087 million (Berkowitz, Upton, Schnaars, Dougherty, & Neuharth-Keusch, 2015). The ranged widened in 2017, as the 25 highest paid coaches earned between \$3.55 million and \$11.132 million (Berkowitz, Schnaars, & Daugherty, 2017). In 2009, Mack Brown, the former head football coach at the University of Texas, negotiated a deal that pushed his annual salary above \$5 million, the highest in the country (Haurwitz, 2009). President William Powers, Jr., stated, "I think this was a good investment in our financial strength and stability as we go forward," also adding that the athletics program under Brown's direction has had no subsidies or deficits, all while contributing \$6.6 million into academic programs in recent years.

Mack Brown was forced to resign after going 8-5 during the 2013 season, demonstrating personal accountability that accompanies the increased pressures of winning or meeting expectations of key constituents. "Only by continuing to win games can teams meet the extreme expectations from alumni, governing boards, and fans, consequently bringing in greater revenues

through ticket sales, donations, and income distributions from media contracts,” said Chen and Zhang (2011). Brown ended with a 158-47 record, a 77 percent winning percentage in his 16 seasons leading the Longhorns (Mandel, 2013). After Brown was dismissed, there was speculation that his replacement would be the University of Alabama’s head football coach, Nick Saban. According to *USA Today*, his salary had surpassed Brown’s in 2012, as he earned \$5.395 million, the most in all of college football (Alabama, 2013). Ending the rumors, however, Saban agreed to an extension at the University of Alabama and was expected to earn more than \$7 million annually (Taylor, 2014). His salary, including bonuses, escalated to more than \$11 million in 2017 (Berkowitz et al., 2017a).

The significant increases in coaches’ salaries and institutional subsidies are forcing university leaders to rely more on the athletics departments to increase revenues. Padilla and Baumer (1994) stated, “The ability to win football games has a direct influence on the revenues generated by athletic programs.” At some institutions, revenues from football often support the entire athletics department (Morgan, 2014). Morgan (2014) stated basketball, predominantly men’s, is the only college sport besides football that typically generates significant income, but nothing compared to football as a whole. In 2010-2011, the top 15 college basketball programs generated \$293 million, less than one-third of the top 15 college football programs.

Although football and men’s basketball are often the programs that produce vital revenues for athletics departments, some universities may have other sports that positively impact revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. This is the case at Miami University, as its ice hockey program consistently fills its venue and generates crucial revenues for the athletics department. According to Weaver (2011b), “Athletic departments have long searched for new and innovative ways to generate revenue for their programs.” As the cost to

compete for championships continues to increase, schools like Miami University must be creative in identifying ways to maximize revenues. The need for expanded revenue streams coupled with high demand for tickets, led Miami University Athletics to introduce a donor-based seating model for ice hockey prior to the 2014-2015 season.

### *Two-Part Pricing*

Athletics departments produce revenue, but also depend on supplemental income through private donations to be financially viable (Ko, Rhee, Kim, & Kim, 2014). Colleges and universities have different names for donor-based seating models, or as Gilbert Gaul (2012) called them, “mandatory ticket schemes.” He identified personal seat licenses (PSLs), premium seating programs, priority seating plans, and endowment seating programs as examples. In 1995, Peter Monaghan of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, mentioned that colleges have used access to athletics venues to help raise money for sports programs since the 1970’s. He added, “Now, with revenues from state funds and contributions from student fees drying up, institutions are seeking other ways to raise money.” Monaghan continued by saying, “In exchange for set levels of donations, fans receive a good view, perks that include reserved parking spots and cushioned chairs, and a tax deduction.” Gaul said the purpose of these programs was to “generate more revenue by taking advantage of the unprecedented demand for seats.” Furthermore, Gaul revealed that Southeastern Conference (SEC) schools generate more than \$100 million annually from these programs.

Donor-based seating models are forms of two-part tariffs, or two-part pricing. According to Walter Y. Oi (1971), a two-part tariff is one in which the consumer must pay a lump sum fee for the right to buy a product. Wong (2012) stated that two-part pricing requires consumers to pay a lump-sum fee upfront for the right to purchase a product or service at a fixed unit price.

Phil Miller (2009) claimed that two part-tariffs have been used for years in college football and basketball. His definition is that a fan must pay a flat fee that essentially gives him or her the right to buy tickets. In the case of college athletics, the flat fee is the donation made to acquire season tickets. “When you look at how college athletic department officials make business decisions, they act a lot like their professional counterparts even though the athletic departments are legally non-profit organizations,” said Miller (2010). He added, “But being non-profit in a legal sense doesn’t mean that you, as a decision-maker, cannot have maximum net revenue as an objective.”

Quinn (2012) said, “Donating for the right to purchase a seat is more or less universal in major college athletics.” Blair and DePasquale (2010) provided examples of two-part pricing, including the Bull Gator program at the University of Florida. Bull Gators must donate \$15,000 annually for the right to purchase up to eight football season tickets at a discounted rate. The University of Kansas and the University of California, Berkeley both collaborated with Stadium Capital Financing Group to introduce a new form of two-part pricing, “equity seat rights” or the “sports mortgage” (Hubbard & O’Brien, 2012). Sport mortgages allow fans to lock in seats for an extended period-of-time (e.g., 10 to 50 years) at the current year’s price. These seats at the University of Kansas sell for as much as \$105,000 to be paid over 10 years, working similarly to a mortgage, with the requirement of an annual interest payment of six percent. The University of Kansas uses the revenues to fund \$34 million in stadium renovations, with the ultimate goal to generate \$200 million without going into debt or relying on public tax dollars.

The University of California, Berkeley branded its sports mortgage concept as the endowment seating program, with seating options for nearly 3,000 seats ranging from \$40,000 to be paid over 40 years or \$220,000 to be paid over 50 years. This program was established to

assist the university in generating enough revenue to cover the \$321 million renovation expense (Weaver, 2011a). The University of California, Berkeley generated \$41 million from its endowment seating program, and this number fall short of projections.

Blair and DePasquale (2010) identified other examples of two-part pricing outside of college and professional athletics, including buying clubs such as Costco and Sam's Club, private golf clubs, and even amusement parks. Wong (2012) also added that ski resorts with season passes and banks for lines of credit were examples of two-part pricing. Generating additional revenue is critical not only for intercollegiate athletics departments, but in all areas that market themselves to build a consumer base while establishing everlasting, loyal relationships.

Miami University implemented a donor-based seating model for its ice hockey season ticket holders prior to the 2014-2015 season. Ice hockey season ticket holders at Miami University are required to donate for the opportunity to purchase season tickets in the "lower bowl" of Steve "Coach" Cady Arena. All public lower bowl season tickets require a \$125 per-seat donation in addition to the season ticket cost. This program not only increases revenue for the athletics department, but it also provides donors the opportunity to make a transactional donation where a portion is tax deductible (Ice, 2013).

Under a 1988 federal law, taxpayers may deduct 80 percent of their gift from donor-based seating models supporting college athletics departments (Freedman, 2013). The University of Texas and Louisiana State University pushed to have legislation passed by Congress in 1988 to establish the "80/20 rule" (Gaul, 2012). *Bloomberg* estimated that approximately \$1 billion in tax revenues could be lost annually due to this tax benefit (Freedman, 2013).

John D. Columbo, a professor of law emeritus at the University of Illinois said, “The tax breaks defy the laws of charity and highlight how Congress has carved up the tax code benefitting scores of special interests” (Gaul, 2012). Donors to other areas of a university enjoy tax deductions for their philanthropic generosity. As long as college athletics supports the educational mission of a university, its donors should also benefit from the tax laws in place. If donors were not able to benefit from the tax laws in place for access to season tickets that require donations, ticket prices would likely rise and institutional subsidies could increase to cover any funding gaps. However, any suggestion of an increase in student fees is likely to come with resistance.

### *Pressures for Reform*

Controversy surrounds college athletics, and the cost of supporting programs is often at the forefront of what is considered wrong with the business. One of the leading voices for college athletics reform is the Knight Commission (2010). They indicated that lucrative television contracts and the quest to win championships in high profile sports have “had a destabilizing influence on athletics programs.” The Knight Commission also stated conference realignment, paying huge dollars for high profile coaches, and expenses that continue to surge are other “worrisome developments.” Ultimately, the Knight Commission said that schools are buying into the myth that spending more money leads to more success and ultimately, more revenues.

Former president at the University of Michigan, James Duderstadt, stated, “The simplest way to characterize the problem with college sports is to recognize that it is a very profitable commercial entertainment business that is moving farther and farther away from the original academic purposes of the university” (Budig, 2007). Duderstadt (2003), author of *Intercollegiate*



*Athletics and the American University*, argued that the increased commercialization of college athletics endangers the primary goals of colleges and universities.

Although college athletics departments may appear to operate as a business through revenue generation from high profile sports programs, the reality is the NCAA requires that FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision) athletics programs support a minimum of 16 teams, including a minimum of six men's and eight women's sports (NCAA, 2014). In addition, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 requires gender equity for boys and girls in every educational program that receives federal funding (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Title IX is a law that has paved the way for hundreds of thousands of women and men to participate in sports.

Subsequently, because it is the law, college athletics programs cannot operate similarly to businesses seeking to earn profits. If colleges and universities were not subject to Title IX, you would likely see a different model. Some institutions would choose to reduce sports offerings due to lack of revenue generation and deficits that accumulate and are funded by student fees and other institutional subsidies. Revenue generating sports like football and men's basketball, or ice hockey at Miami University, help fund sports that do not have the capacity to generate revenues.

### *Conclusion*

Institutional leaders must ask themselves how supporting an athletics program fits within the mission of the institution. Even some of the most prestigious institutions, including those that belong to the Association of American Universities (AAU), place tremendous value on their athletics programs. For example, Harvard University supports 42 Division I teams, the most of any institution in the country (Harvard, 2017). Stanford University has won the past 23 Learfield Sports Director's Cups (formerly the Sears Cup), an award given to the most outstanding

athletics program in the country (Lee, 2017). Harvard University and Stanford University are both charter members of the prestigious AAU (Association, 2015).

College presidents often think of athletics as the “front porch” of their institutions (Weaver, 2011a). An effective public relations team, which may encompass management and technical functions of media relations, community involvement, fundraising, management, and marketing, can help share the vision of the athletics department and its role with the university and in higher education (Pratt, 2013). Maximizing revenues is vital for programs at the highest level and institutions must explore ways to create demand and establish value for their greatest assets. At Miami University, ice hockey consistently sells out and brings alumni back to campus, thus, there is high demand for the product. The athletics department implemented a donor-based seating model to reward donors for their current and historic giving, but also to create a new revenue stream that will help increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience.

#### Statement of the Problem

College athletics programs are charged with maximizing revenues in an effort to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. In order to accomplish this, athletics departments must consider strategies that have the ability to create or enhance revenues, especially through donor engagement. This may, however, have an impact on fans. This study provides an examination of the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University, a public Midwestern mid-major institution. This will be accomplished through collective research and standardized open-ended interviews with ice hockey season ticket holders and athletics administrators at Miami University.

## Significance of Study

Athletics programs constantly look for ways to maximize revenues in an effort to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. In June 2013, Miami University Athletics announced its plans to introduce a donor-based seating model for ice hockey (Ice Hockey, 2013). Miami University Athletics listed its 2012 operating revenues at just over \$28 million (Berkowitz et al., 2013). More than 71 percent represent revenues from institutionally allocated sources, including student fees and other support. Miami University has a storied athletics history and is known nationally as the “Cradle of Coaches” for having famous head football coaches such as Woody Hayes (1949-1950), Ara Parseghian (1951-1955), and Bo Schembechler (1963-1968) get their start in the collegiate ranks in Oxford, Ohio (Cradle, 2014). For all of its sports since the mid-1950’s, 20 collegiate and professional coaches with Miami University on their resume have earned national coach of the year honors.

The Miami University head ice hockey coach since 1999, Enrico Blasi, has been named national coach of the year twice and has earned five conference coach of the year honors (Enrico, 2015). Blasi has led the RedHawks to three regular season championships, two conference tournament championships, ten NCAA Tournament appearances, and two Frozen Fours (semifinals for college ice hockey). The team consistently competes in front of sold-out crowds, demonstrating that there is a high level of interest from alumni and friends to support the program. Subsequently, a donor-based seating model for ice hockey was implemented to generate new revenue to support and enhance the student-athlete experience at Miami University.

There has been limited research, if any, conducted on the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of donor-based seating models. It is not uncommon, however, for

athletics departments to count on donor-based seating models to generate revenue. Eichelberger and Babcock (2012), in a *Bloomberg* survey, stated that 34 public universities from the six largest football conferences generated \$467.2 million in seat donation revenue for fiscal year 2011. The authors indicated that Ohio State University generated the most at \$38.7 million. Louisiana State University and the University of Texas generated \$38 million and \$33.9, respectively.

Andrew Zimbalist, a Smith College professor of economics and frequent voice on the commercialization of college athletics, stated in response to the *Bloomberg* survey that it would not be unreasonable to estimate that donor-based seating models may generate \$1 billion annually for college athletics departments (Eichelberger & Babcock, 2012). All donations to college athletics have already surpassed the \$1 billion mark according to Wolverton and Kambhampati (2015b), with the top 20 athletics departments reporting collective donations of more than \$700 million.

Examining the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University will provide a detailed perspective on the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders being required to donate in order to obtain or maintain season tickets. It may also assist the athletics administration with planning for any future modifications of the current model. Increasing revenues is vital to the growth of an athletics department's operating budget to ultimately support the programs and enhance the student-athlete experience. Failure to do so may lead to the reduction and/or elimination of programming and/or scholarship support. In fact, Miami University cut its wrestling, men's soccer, and men's tennis programs in the 1990's due to not being compliant with Title IX and facing an operational deficit of approximately \$1 million (Miami, 1999). Former Miami University president James Garland mentioned Title IX's

mandate for gender equity and chronic budgetary problems as the primary reasons for sport elimination. Different reviews took place on campus and a study by a nationally known Title IX consultant were instrumental in proceeding with cuts necessary to address Miami's fiscal and gender equity problems in athletics. "I have no desire to close down sports nor deny future opportunities to male Miami student-athletes," he said. "However, Miami also has an obligation to provide opportunities for female student-athletes," Garland added.

John Thelin (2000) challenged the claim that Title IX is the reason for funding deficits for college athletics departments. Thelin provided an historical background on the evolution of Title IX from its inaugural date on June 23, 1972 to April 21, 1997, when the United States Supreme Court refused to hear the case of Cohen versus Brown University. This decision upheld a lower court's decision to require Brown University "to adhere to strict criteria for demonstrating gender equity in intercollegiate athletics." Thelin detailed how women's sports were not incorporated into the NCAA constitution and structure until 1981. Numerous athletics administrators and coaches argued that the implementation of women's sports were a drain to athletics departments, but Thelin provided strong evidence that the problems started well before Title IX became law.

Thelin (2000) mentioned that rising expectations and budgets for athletics grants-in-aid for all men's sports during the late 1960's through the mid-1970's attributed to their financial shortfalls. "Ambitious and optimistic coaches in a host of nonrevenue sports had helped escalate men's athletic budgets into a new, expensive orbit whose underlying characteristic was an 'arms race' for talent, resources, and facilities," said Thelin. Atwell, Grimes, and Lopiano (1980) cited that revenue shortfalls and the inability to curb expenses in spectator sports like football and men's basketball were the major problems in college athletics. Thelin and Wiseman (1989)

mentioned that a fundamental problem university administrators were reluctant to acknowledge was that sports geared toward spectators had struggled to be self-sufficient. Even with the addition of women's teams, Thelin noted that they received substantially less funding than men's teams. "The women's teams wore motley rag-tag uniforms, did not have the same number or dollar amount of scholarships, and had inferior access to facilities, lockers, and travel," he said. Title IX has provided so many opportunities for female and male student-athletes to compete in college athletics. Unfortunately, a number of universities chose to eliminate some sports programs to position the institution to be compliant with the law. Increasing private support may help reduce the risk of sports being targeted for elimination due to lack of funding or for Title IX purposes.

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study will be to explore the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University. The results will enable athletics administrators to learn more about fans and their willingness to support and enhance the student-athlete experience through donor-based seating, as well as assist with any future modifications to the model. Miami University is a public Midwestern institution competing in the NCAA's National Collegiate Hockey Conference (NCHC) for ice hockey. All other varsity sports, except Synchronized Skating, compete in the Mid-American Conference.

#### Research Questions

The researcher proposes a qualitative case study grounded in phenomenology to address two questions:

1. What perspectives on social identity and group membership characterize ice hockey season ticket holders' participation in donor-based seating at Miami University?

2. How do Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders describe their interest in supporting student-athletes and their college experience?

#### Theoretical Framework

The researcher will use Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory for this qualitative case study. Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group memberships (McLeod, 2008). Hogg and Vaughan (2002) defined social identity as the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in social groups. Season ticket holders have their reasons for supporting their favorite teams, including entertainment value, loyalty to their alma mater, being part of a group, among other things. Groups for which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem, and groups give us a sense of social identity, or a sense of belonging to the social world (McLeod, 2008).

The social identity theory applies to season ticket holders strongly in the "us" versus "them" debate. McLeod (2008) stated, "The central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image." College athletics administrators are often charged with making difficult decisions, especially when it comes to reseating venues. Some long-time season ticket holders tend to believe the seats they renew on an annual basis are actually "their" seats, but the reality in nearly all cases is they lease the seats from the institution. When donor-based seating models have the potential to impact one's long-time seating location, season ticket holders as a group will challenge any potential movement of their seats. If given the opportunity to keep the same seats, they may then choose to challenge any increase in pricing, especially if a donation requirement is introduced or increased.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) claimed that social categorization, social identification, and social comparison, in this particular order, are the three mental processes involved in evaluating others. Social categorization is the first mental stage, and athletics departments categorize patrons who pay for season tickets as season ticket holders. Season ticket holders may have certain privileges that non-season ticket holders have because of their classification in this group. Social identification is the second stage, and once season ticket holders are identified as season ticket holders, they will become emotionally tied to the group. Interaction with other season ticket holders will naturally occur and relationships will grow as the years pass. The last state of the mental processes involved in evaluating others is social comparison. When donor-based seating models or other programs that may have an impact on season ticket holders are introduced, season ticket holders have high expectations to be rewarded for loyalty when being compared to other groups.

“Adopting premium ticket pricing schemes means reassigning ticket priorities, which is a tricky issue: the tradeoff between current revenue and fan loyalty is not easy to assess. If you fail to win, the Johnny-come-lately’s will desert you, and the displaced loyal fan might not come back,” said Skip Sauer (2006) of *The Sports Economist*. Charlie Barnes, the executive director of Florida State University’s Seminole Boosters, asked, “How long does loyalty last?” He continued, “It’s a very legitimate question. There are people who feel that because they gave money 25 years ago and they’re sitting on the 50-yard line, you shouldn’t move them. Other people think if you walk in with a sack of cash, you should be able to kick them out” (Monaghan, 1995). These are legitimate perspectives expressed by Sauer and Barnes. Donor-based seating models play an important role in regards to fan loyalty, and determining how they are perceived by donors and season ticket holders is imperative.



According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity theory has an impact on the way people deal with social and organizational change. They also stated that it has a considerable impact on social psychology and is tested in a wide range of fields and settings, including prejudice, stereotyping, negotiation, and language use. Individuals shape their personal and social identity through group membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Identification has been shown to have an impact on sport event consumption and fan behavior (Fink, Trail & Anderson, 2002; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). This confirms the validity of social identity theory as the theoretical framework for this study that focuses on the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model.

#### Overview of Methods

The researcher will conduct a qualitative case study that will provide an analysis of the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University. The researcher will interview ice hockey season ticket holders who were impacted by the implementation of a donor-based seating model. Season ticket holders will be restricted to individual accounts, thus corporate accounts will be excluded. Also, only season ticket holders who pay for their tickets will be considered, thus individuals with accounts that receive complimentary tickets, for whatever reason, will be excluded. Participants will include donors and non-donors to the athletics department based on their status during the 2013-2014 ice hockey season. In addition to 16 season ticket holders, the director of athletics and deputy director of athletics at Miami University will be interviewed.

#### Delimitations

This study will be restricted to one public “Group of Five” institution, Miami University. Institutions that compete at the FBS level but outside of the College Football Playoff are now

known as members of the Group of Five (Myerberg, 2015). The College Football Playoff has replaced the Bowl Championship Series (BCS), and BCS institutions are now known as members of the “Power Five.” Miami University was one of the 128 institutions that competed in the FBS during the 2014-2015 academic year (NCAA, 2015). The Miami University ice hockey program competes in the NCHC, a conference that began its inaugural season in October of 2013. Only 16 of the 130 FBS institutions compete in the NCAA’s highest classification for ice hockey (Men’s, 2017). Data will be collected from running reports of ice hockey season ticket holders in NeuLion, the ticketing database for Miami University Athletics. The university’s development database, Banner, will provide each season ticket holder’s donation history to Miami University Athletics. A random sample of individual paid season ticket holders will be selected to participate in a standardized open-ended interview in an effort to understand their perceptions on the implementation of a donor-based seating model for ice hockey.

#### Limitations

Interview participants may misinterpret questions, which could lead to inaccuracies in the data analysis. The results from this study may not be generalized to other FBS institutions, nor to institutions in the NCAA’s Division I Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), Division I institutions without football, Division II institutions, or Division III institutions. In addition, the results may not be generalized to other sports.

#### Definition of Terms

1. Bowl Championship Series (BCS): The BCS was a five-game showcase of college football designed to ensure that the two top-rated teams in the country met in the national championship game, while creating exciting and competitive matchups among eight other highly regarded

teams in four other games. (BCS, 2014). In April of 2013, it was announced that the BCS would be replaced by the College Football Playoff (College, 2013).

2. Division I: Among the three NCAA divisions, Division I schools generally have the largest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets, and offer the most generous number of scholarships. With approximately 350 colleges and universities in its membership, Division I schools field more than 6,000 athletics teams, providing opportunities for more than 170,000 student-athletes to compete in NCAA sports each year. Division I is subdivided based on football sponsorship. Schools that participate in bowl games belong to the FBS. Those that participate in the NCAA-run football championship belong to the FCS. The third group does not sponsor football at all and is identified simply as Division I (Frequently, 2014).
3. Donor-Based Seating: Each institution may have its own definition for donor-based seating. According to Boston College (2014), donor-based seating is used as a method to help increase funding for athletics scholarships. In addition, it rewards donors by providing them with season ticket options in prime seating areas. The program requires an annual, per-seat contribution in order to retain seats within these prime seating areas. Although Boston College utilizes revenues from donor-based seating to support scholarships, how other schools use the funds may vary. Miami University utilizes donor-based seating revenues to support student-athlete scholarships (Killy, personal communication, March 27, 2014).
4. Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS): Formerly known as Division 1-A until 2006, there are five requirements for these Division I institutions: 1) Sponsor a minimum of 16 varsity intercollegiate sports, including football; Sponsorship shall include a minimum six sports involving all male teams or mixed teams (males and females), and a minimum of eight varsity intercollegiate teams involving all female teams. Institutions may use up to two emerging sports to satisfy the required

eight varsity intercollegiate sports involving all female teams. 2) Schedule and play at least 60 percent of football contests against members of the FBS. Institutions shall schedule and play at least five regular season home contests against FBS opponents. 3) Average at least 15,000 in actual or paid attendance for all home football contests over a rolling two-year period. 4) Provide an average of at least 90 percent of the permissible maximum number of overall football grants-in-aid per year over a rolling two-year period. 5) Annually offer a minimum of 200 athletics grants-in-aid or spend at least four million dollars on grants-in-aid (NCAA, 2014).

5. Group of Five: Consists of Division I institutions in the American Athletic Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West Conference, and Sun Belt Conference (Myerberg, 2015).
6. Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics: Formed by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in October 1989 in response to more than a decade of highly visible scandals in college sports (Knight, 2014). The Commission's initial goal was to recommend a reform agenda that emphasized academic values in an arena where commercialization of college sports often overshadowed the underlying goals of higher education. Since 1989, the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics has worked to ensure that intercollegiate athletics programs operate within the educational mission of their colleges and universities.
7. Mid-Major: An institution that competes in one of the following Division I conferences: America East, American Athletic, Atlantic Sun, Big Sky, Big South, Big West, Colonial, Horizon, Independents, Ivy, Metro Atlantic, Mid-American, Mid-Eastern, Missouri Valley, Northeast, Ohio Valley, Patriot, Southern, Southland, Southwestern, Summit, Sun Belt, West Coast, and Western Athletic. These schools typically have much smaller budgets than high-major, or Power Five, institutions. (Men's Mid-Major, 2014).

8. National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA): More than 1,200 schools, conferences, and affiliate organizations collectively invest in improving the experiences of student-athletes on the field, in the classroom, and in life (NCAA, 2017b). There are three-divisions, set up to create a fair playing field for more equally matched institutions while providing student-athletes with the opportunity to participate in 90 championship events. College and university presidents and chancellors guide each division, supported by an extensive committee structure guided by athletics administrators, faculty, and student-athlete representatives. Each division creates its own rules that follow the overarching principles of the NCAA.
9. National Collegiate Hockey Conference (NCHC): Founded in the summer of 2011 when six institutions bonded together to form a collection of some of the most notable college hockey programs in the nation. The conference grew to eight teams shortly after its founding and began its inaugural season in the fall of 2013. Built on the principles of excellence both on and off the ice, the NCHC is committed to fostering an environment of integrity, sportsmanship, and competition (NCHC, 2014).
10. Power Five: Includes Division I institutions in the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, and Southeastern Conference; also includes the University of Notre Dame. In 2014, the NCAA Division I Board of Directors voted to approve autonomy for the Power Five conferences and the University of Notre Dame, enabling these 65 schools to begin passing legislation that only affects themselves and does not involve non-Power Five leagues, likely resulting in more money, benefits, and voting power (Taylor, 2014).
11. Red & White Club: The Red & White Club provides annual scholarship funding to Miami University student-athletes (Why, 2014).

12. Student-Athlete Experience: The foundation for building a quality, competitive, and successful athletics program, focusing on three key components, including athletics skills and strategy, personal growth, and the enhancement of the overall educational experience (Majeski, 2012); Helping student-athletes have a fulfilling college experience by keeping them healthy and safe, providing fair and inclusive environments, and encouraging them to learn and grow in all aspects. Five components of the student-athlete experience include athletic resources, academic resources, health and well-being resources, time management resources, and personal and professional development (NCAA, 2017a).

### Conclusion

Understanding the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University will provide athletics administrators with crucial information about some loyal supporters. Institutional leaders will be able review the data and learn more about fans and their willingness to support and enhance the student-athlete experience through donor-based seating. Perspectives on social identity and group membership will also emerge, which will be beneficial to decision-makers in today's competitive world of college athletics.

Increasing revenues is at the forefront of all athletics departments at the FBS level. As the costs to compete for championships continue to escalate, athletics administrators are often forced to make decisions that may not be appealing to fans. However, every decision that athletics administrators make should be made in the best interest of the student-athletes. This may ultimately require fans to contribute more financially. At a time when state and institutional support continues to diminish, creating and enhancing revenue streams to support and enhance the student-athlete experience is imperative. Educating fans on the importance of philanthropic

support and the need for new revenues may help with any backlash that arises as a result of the implementation of a donor-based seating model.

### Organization of the Study

In Chapter II, the literature review, the reader will gain a better understanding of the importance of generating revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. This information will allow the reader to have a better understanding on why donor-based seating models are important to the overall operations of an FBS institution. The literature review is organized into four sections, including social identity theory and group membership, donor motivation and alumni engagement, athletics success and donations, and critical perspectives on increased donations for intercollegiate athletics, focusing on coaches' salaries and institutional subsidies. Chapter III describes the methods used for this qualitative study. Primary sections in the third chapter include research design, role of the researcher, data collection, research questions, and data analysis. Chapter IV will describe the findings from the study while Chapter V will conclude the study with a discussion.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The literature review is based on an exploration of a series of related themes. The first theme provides a background on social identity theory and group membership. The second theme addresses donor motivation and alumni engagement. The third theme explains athletics success and donations. The fourth and final theme details critical perspectives on increased donations for intercollegiate athletics, focusing on coaches' salaries and institutional subsidies.

#### Social Identity Theory and Group Membership

According to McLeod (2008), "Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group memberships." Cornelissen, Haslam, and Balmer (2007) defined social identity as "individuals' knowledge that they belong to certain groups together with the emotional and value significance of that group membership." Tajfel and Turner (1979) formulated the social identity theory during the 1970's in an effort to help explain group behavior. People tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). As part of higher education, intercollegiate athletics is a subgroup of the enterprise. Intercollegiate athletics includes numerous subgroups as well, including coaches, student-athletes, donors, season ticket holders, among others.



According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), little research has been conducted on identification with organizations. Organizational identification, according to Hall, Schneider, and Nygren (1970), was defined as “the process by which the goals of the organization and those of the individual become increasingly integrated and congruent.” All athletics administrators and season ticket holders want to win championships. One of the ultimate goals for being a student-athlete, or a general student, is to graduate. All athletics administrators and season ticket holders are investing in student-athletes by positioning them to win championships and graduate. Although there could be some resistance to the implementation of donor-based seating models, these decisions are ultimately made to benefit student-athletes. Season ticket holders have to choose whether or not they feel the value and impact of a donor-based seating model is a worthy investment.

Mael (1988) found that identification of alumni with their alma mater predicted how they donated. Athletics administrators must keep this in mind when they make decisions that impact season ticket holders. The donor-based seating model at Miami University was implemented to provide “significant new and ongoing resources to help enhance and elevate Miami Hockey and Miami Athletics” (Ice Hockey, 2013). In addition to the launching its donor-based seating model, Miami University announced its first fundraising campaign exclusively for athletics in April 2015, branding it as the “Graduating Champions Campaign” (Frieden, 2015). On the Graduating Champions (2015) website, “The Graduating Champions Campaign is a once-in-a-generation effort that will create and name the signature athletic facilities that will be cornerstones of today’s and tomorrow’s athletic success and fund the scholarships that fuel the dreams of those who write the next great chapters of Miami Athletics’ storied tradition.” All gifts made for donor-based seating purposes support student-athlete scholarships and count toward the

Graduating Champions Campaign. Season ticket holders often make their decision to support a team because they want to be part of a group, which parallels O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) definition of identification: "involvement based on a desire for affiliation."

Athletics administrators need to be familiar with "social mobility," which Tajfel and Turner (1986) referred to as "individuals' belief systems about the nature and the structure of the relations between social groups in their society." The authors added, "The belief system of 'social mobility' is based on the general assumption that the society in which the individuals live is a flexible and permeable one, so that if they are not satisfied, for whatever reason, with the conditions imposed upon their lives by membership in social groups or social categories to which they belong, it is possible for them to move individually into another group that suits them better." Competition for the dollar is so intense that some season ticket holders may not renew for a variety of reasons, including due to a team's lack of success or because they just cannot afford it. Subsequently, they may drop their tickets and invest their discretionary money elsewhere. Paying attention to season ticket holders and educating them on why decisions are made is imperative for athletics administrators.

"Human interaction ranges on a spectrum from being purely interpersonal on the one hand to purely intergroup on the other," said Tajfel and Turner (Hornsey, 2008). They added that a purely interpersonal interaction involves people relating entirely as individuals; the opposite, a purely intergroup interaction, is one where people relate entirely as representatives of their groups. Hornsey described that groups are not islands and that they become psychologically real only when defined in comparison to other groups. Prior to Miami University's implementation of an ice hockey donor-based seating model, some season ticket holders were already donors.

However, others were not, and they often expressed their displeasure with being forced to donate for the right to purchase season tickets through the donor-based seating model.

“Organizations are internally structured groups that are located in complex networks of intergroup relations characterized by power, status, and prestige differentials. To varying degrees, people derive part of their identity and sense of self from the organizations or work-groups to which they belong,” cited Hogg and Terry (2000). Cornelissen et al. (2007) revealed that the “quest for positive distinctiveness means that when people’s sense of self is defined in terms of ‘we’ rather than ‘I’, they strive to see ‘us’ as different from, and preferably better than, ‘them’ in order to feel good about who they are and what they do.” Season ticket holders often rally together and voice their opinions, both positively and negatively, toward athletics administrations. Communication is a critical asset for both parties when tough decisions need to be made. “Identical conditions may have positive as well as negative consequences, both for the individual and from the perspective of the social system as a whole,” said Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002). They cited Leary and Baumeister (2000), who stated, “Inclusion in a group may serve important self-protective functions,” adding that they have seen that people may suffer from being categorized against their will.

“People have a tendency to emphasize group cohesiveness when the value of the group is threatened,” stated Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999). Doosje, Spears, and Ellemers (2001) claimed highly committed members of a group are most likely to stick together with their group in terms of identification, even when there is no realistic chance of improving its status position. Brewer (1996) stated that it is impossible to ignore existing beliefs about the history of intergroup relations. “Functions and roles in a new polity cannot be arbitrarily assigned without recognizing longstanding differences between groups in values and skills and claims to

specialized knowledge,” she said. Ultimately, athletics administrators are compensated to make difficult decisions for the benefit of student-athletes. These decisions may come at the displeasure of season ticket holders, especially when considering introducing or making adjustments to a donor-based seating model. Athletics administrators must understand the history of the program and the investments made throughout the years by season ticket holders. Effectively communicating why the implementation of a donor-based seating model is critical for the success of the athletics department may keep renewal rates high, while also demonstrating that decisions are made to support and enhance the student-athlete experience.

As previously stated, social identity theory has an impact on the way people deal with social and organizational change (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted that individuals shape their personal and social identity through group membership. Fink et al. (2002) and Wann and Branscombe (1993) discussed how identification has an impact on sport event consumption and fan behavior. Subsequently, when researching the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model, the social identity theory is validated as the theoretical framework for this study.

### Donor Motivation and Alumni Engagement

Understanding why donors, many of whom are alumni, give to athletics programs is essential for athletics administrators. Athletics administrators must establish, build, and maintain relationships with donors, especially because subsidies from the university may be reduced or may not grow fast enough. Strong relationships are also imperative when success levels may not be meeting the expectations of alumni and fans, including donors. Understanding donor behavior is also important during tough economic times (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). Because most athletics departments operate with a deficit, fundraising units are almost always called upon to

help offset the athletics budget. As previously stated, only 23 of 230 of NCAA Division I public institutions in fiscal year 2016 operated with a surplus (Berkowitz & Schnaars, 2017).

There have been various studies conducted to help identify reasons why donors contribute to athletics departments. Gladden, Mahony, and Apostolopoulou (2004) examined donors of three institutions by asking an open-ended question on why they donate to athletics. Mahony, Gladden, and Funk (2003) developed a new scale that measured donor motivations, assessed the relative importance of the motives, examined the utility of the scale in predicting donor behavior, and explored differences between individual institutions. Verner, Hecht, and Fansler (1998) used the social cognitive theory as their theoretical framework to study donor behavior. They researched studies pertaining to the motivation of athletics donors, studied literature describing overall donor motivation, and interviewed donors about their motivation to give to athletics programs.

In a study with the application of the stakeholder theory, Covell (2005) sought to determine how intercollegiate athletics factors into American higher education and explain the importance of the stakeholder. He wanted to measure the interests and values of stakeholders, how stakeholders demonstrated attachment and allegiance to the sport property, and how stakeholders perceived the importance of winning toward giving to their Ivy League institution. In their article, Hall and Mahony (1997) wanted to learn the various methods used within annual giving programs, to examine environmental factors and their influence on annual giving programs, and to determine the impact of environmental factors on the various methods used within annual giving programs.

Some of these studies provided a broad perspective on factors of donor motivation to support college athletics departments. Gladden et al. (2004) categorized 16 different reasons for

donor giving. These reasons included affiliation, doing what feels right, commitment, doing good makes sense, doing good is a family tradition, entertainment, family needs, good cause, help student-athletes, membership benefits, doing good in return, doing good is fun, support and improve the athletics program, support and promote the institution, ticket oriented, and miscellaneous reasons. Verner et al. (1998) narrowed their study to 12 factors of donor motivation, including participating in secondary events, public recognition, giving of time and energy, inside information, priority treatment, philanthropy, collaboration, create, change, curiosity, power, and loyalty. The environmental factors that Hall and Mahony (1997) identified as having an impact on annual giving included type of school, status of the institution, support of the top administration, competition, winning percentage, graduation rate, community support, tradition, apprehension or resistance to change, state of the local economy, and relationship with the alumni office and the university foundation.

These studies, derived from quantitative, mixed-methods, and qualitative approaches, had a variety of results that may be useful to athletics administrators as they strive to learn more about donor motivation and alumni engagement in regards to giving. Gladden et al. (2004) suggested that four challenges exist for athletics administrators, including a struggling economy, competition against other charitable organizations, inconsistency of giving by donors, and donors contributing for priority seating purposes. They mentioned the most popular reasons for donor giving to athletics programs included to support and improve the athletics program, access to tickets, and to support student-athletes. Two of these three reasons, to support and improve the athletics program and to support student-athletes, will give athletics programs a chance to generate more revenue through fundraising. Regardless of success levels, donors with this philosophy are more likely to support their school after unsuccessful seasons. When donors

contribute for ticket purposes, getting these gifts could be at the mercy of success levels. Schools with rich history and high demand for tickets, however, may keep some people in seats due to the fear of losing them and not being able to get them back.

Mahony et al. (2003) noted that 17 percent of college athletics department revenues were derived from private contributions. In the *USA Today* NCAA Finances Database, by dividing the contribution category by total revenues, the percentage of athletics revenues derived from private contributions at the University of Texas and Miami University were 25 percent and five percent, respectively (Berkowitz et al., 2013). Mahony et al. concluded that some motives were more important than others in the study, with the most important being priority seating, improving the quality of revenue sports programs, and other success related factors. Priority seating programs, or donor-based seating models, have been implemented to assist institutions in their quest to become financially stable. Many donors are contributing only in an effort to obtain what they perceive to be the best seats. Covell (2005) claimed that the relationship between winning and giving could only be measured on an institution-by-institution basis. The research indicated that stakeholders who had been donating for fewer years were more likely to allow wins and losses to affect their giving habits. Stakeholders who had been giving for a longer period-of-time were more likely to continue contributing, even with unsuccessful teams.

Billing, Holt, and Smith (1985) developed the Athletic Contributions Questionnaire, which identified four motives for donor giving. These motives included philanthropic, social, success, and benefits. The authors mentioned the opportunity to provide for athletics scholarships was the reason for philanthropically contributing. For the social motive, attendance at games with family and friends was important. The success factor demonstrated the importance of winning over losing. Lastly, the benefits motive identified tax deductions as a reason for giving.

The authors did not include tangible benefits such as parking or tickets as examples. Staurowski, Parkhouse, and Sachs (1996) extended this research by adding curiosity and power as additional factors to donor motives.

Tsiotsou (2007) suggested that motives for athletics giving included to improve the quality of the athletics program, to promote the image of the university and the state, to provide an educational opportunity for young people, priority seating in athletics events, special parking, priority on tickets for away games and bowl games, decals, hospitality rooms, license plates, and membership plaques. She stated that sociodemographics such as age, gender, income, residency, religion, and education might be important factors when determining donor giving behavior. Tsiotsou concluded, “Athletic fundraising is expected to continue to grow due to lack of state support and the enormous operational expenses of the athletic departments. Competition will be intensified in the nonprofit sector and effective marketing strategies will become increasingly important.”

In another article, Tsiotsou (2004) expressed that research on donor characteristics, attitudes, and behavior is needed to understand how donors function in an effort to improve fundraising practices. Not surprising, she found that donors who contributed small amounts of money had lower income and were less involved with athletics than donors who made larger donations. Tsiotsou concluded that donors who are motivated and have the capacity would make larger donations than those who are not very motivated and have less capacity. She suggested that as a result of her findings, fundraisers could predict the level of donation when involvement and income are known, and more strategically prepare their solicitation proposals.

The implementation of donor-based seating models helps to increase revenues and rewards donors for their current and historical support, but there are also some potential



drawbacks of these models. Noll (2010) stated that two potential drawbacks of personal seat licenses, a form of two-part pricing, include how to handle events that do not sell out and how to avoid losing revenues from regular fans who do not want to pay for increased ticket prices. Belson (2009) stated that some loyal fans reject the idea of personal seat licenses because of the high fees and the fact that they cannot afford them. Although selling personal seat licenses increases revenues in theory, they do not guarantee profits (Hill, 2008). These methods of two-part pricing are not just associated with sports, as performing arts and entertainment businesses also embrace this concept (Barbieri, 2000).

Chen, Henderson, Worrell, and Salazar (2012) conducted a study to investigate the perceptions and expectations held by sport fans of a mid-sized regional state institution, and whether the practice of personal seat licenses would affect fans' willingness to attend sporting events and pay for fees associated with this two-part pricing method. The authors found that fans of mid-sized regional schools "do not enthusiastically favor" the implementation of personal seat licenses. They noted that fans who considered themselves affiliated with the athletics program for many years discouraged the idea of personal seat licenses. They also found that "fair weather" fans prefer the single ticket price structure. Statistically, approximately 31 percent of participants opposed or were neutral towards the idea of personal seat licenses being implemented. Only 45 percent of those surveyed would pay extra for the right to purchase a personal seat license.

Chen et al. (2010) suggested that small and mid-size regional college athletics programs "should carefully and thoroughly investigate their market size and fan base before attempting to implement a personal seat license program." They stated that the needs of loyal fans should be considered because retention is critical. Ultimately, the authors' study determined that

“overwhelming support for personal seat licenses does not exist.” When implemented, two-part pricing programs such as personal seat licenses must offer some type of added value or benefit to further entice fans to pay for the higher priced seat (Green & Bowers, 2012). Generating revenues from ticket sales is so important for college athletics administrators. Donor-based seating models or two-part pricing methods like personal seat licenses can be great revenue drivers, but careful implementation is critical and establishing increased value for the donor can help with retention.

Philanthropic giving by former student-athletes may be an area that needs more focus from athletics administrators. Shapiro, Giannoulakis, Drayer, and Wang (2010) conducted a study with the purpose of developing a scale to measure the degree to which donation barriers exist for former student-athletes. They stated that as spending continues to increase, identifying and cultivating a larger segment of potential contributors (e.g., former student-athletes) becomes more important. The authors mentioned that most of the literature on donor motivations focuses on donors themselves, but instead should examine non-donors and what factors may prevent or discourage them from donating. Shapiro et al. (2010) communicated that former student-athletes are a critical group of alumni that may be overlooked, citing that this segment already has a connection with the institution that many others do not have. The authors stated that maintaining a relationship with former student-athletes could lead to future support, adding that only five percent of former student-athletes were donors to their alma mater’s athletics department. Despite this low percentage, Clotfelter (2003) indicated that participation in varsity athletics is positively correlated with subsequent giving. For fiscal year 2015, Miami University had six percent of its former student-athletes contribute to the Red & White Club, the annual fund for Miami Athletics (Athletes, 2015).

Former student-athletes may have different attitudes towards giving back to their athletics program (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Shulman and Bowen (2001) identified feelings of animosity from athletics alumni towards their former athletics department. They mentioned that high profile athletes were less likely to give back when compared to general alumni, as these former student-athletes believe they have already given back due to their contributions while competing or they may feel as if they were undercompensated as a student-athlete. O'Neil and Schenke (2007) also identified reasons that former student-athletes may not give back. These included a lack of identification with their alma mater, the student-athlete experience, feelings of isolation as an athlete, and feelings that former athletes have already given to the athletics department through practice and competition.

In addition to former student-athlete support, a focus on overall alumni support is critical. Webb (1998) described alumni as the only permanent stakeholder of higher education institutions. Weerts and Ronca (2009) stated, "Many alumni report positive experiences about their college experience, but far fewer give back to their alma mater." The authors shared that giving is somewhat linked to their involvement in college, as larger gifts come from alumni who have strong feelings about the quality of academics and participated in various organizations, such as being a student-athlete. They stated that fundraisers must distinguish between groups of alumni who are likely to be donors and those who are not. Once groups of alumni who are likely to be donors are identified, implementing an effective strategy to engage them will increase philanthropic support. Pearson (1999) claimed that one deterrent to alumni giving is that there is a feeling that the university does not need their support. Weerts and Ronca (2009) countered by stating that alumni who feel that the university needs their support may gain more satisfaction from giving, which could ultimately result in them making a larger gift.

Wunnava and Okunade (2013) revealed various statistics about the types of alumni who give back to their alma mater. Male alumni in Greek social organizations and alumni with the higher-order executive job titles tend to be more philanthropic. They shared that alumni donations are historically the largest share of private giving, growing from \$5.7 billion in 2002 to \$7.8 billion in 2011. Eicher and Chevailler (2002) indicated that alumni giving could offset declines in tax-funded appropriations and other governmental support.

Gallo (2013) indicated that most alumni have multiple connections to the university based on their student experience. Specifically relating to athletics, Wunnava and Okunade (2013) mentioned that national championship wins are significant positive drivers of alumni giving in both the championship year and the year after. Martinez, Stinson, Kang, and Jubenville (2010) mentioned, “Alumni donors are more strongly influenced by athletics success than the general population.” They added that football appears to have the strongest effect.

“Alumni play broader roles in supporting colleges and universities beyond writing a check,” said Weerts, Cabrera, and Sanford (2009). The authors stated that volunteers might be engaged in mentoring, student recruiting, assisting with events, and other activities that are often less structured. Weerts and Ronca (2008) mentioned that an inclination to volunteer is associated with the quality of one’s academic experience as a student. They also mentioned that alumni donors might be more likely to give back by volunteering their time if they received help in financing their education. Volunteers may not be philanthropically engaged initially, but with an outstanding experience giving back their time, soliciting these alumni may lead to an increase in philanthropic support

Shapiro et al. (2010) claimed, “Donor motivations cannot adequately explain the specific barriers which may prevent charitable contributions from being made. Therefore, donor

constraints must also be examined to offer a complete understanding of donor behavior.” Citing Lepisto and Hannaford (1980), the authors identified five purchase constraint categories, including marketing constraints, cultural constraints, social constraints, personal constraints, and structural constraints. Marketing constraints were defined as barriers formed through failure to provide product, price, place, and promotion effectively to the consumer. Cultural norms and values that influence purchase decisions were stated for cultural constraints. Social constraints were labeled as purchase decisions influenced by others such as family and friends. Personal constraints were internal forces that affect purchase behavior, including whether or not it was a fit as well as the importance of having the product. Lastly, external forces that impede a purchase were mentioned for structural constraints. Shapiro et al. mentioned barriers identified by other studies for non-profits, including time or lethargy, cost, inconvenience, insensitive marketing, and insufficient funds to make a difference. They added information issues, the lack of need, and general issues with the non-profit organization as other barriers.

Due to the increasing need for charitable contributions to support college athletics departments, understanding donor behavior and perceptions regarding donations is critical (Shapiro et al., 2010). Donors have different reasons for giving, and when an athletics department best figures out its alumni and donor base, including former student-athletes, it will have a greater opportunity to generate philanthropic revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. When athletics administrators understand why donors contribute to their programs, it will be easier to cultivate and steward them for future gifts. It also will save time and money for recruiting new donors, as unsuccessful methods of solicitation could be reduced.

## Athletics Success and Donations

Budig (2007) stated, “The NCAA faces a very real arms race, one fueled by an insatiable appetite on the part of students, alumni, and the general public for college athletics success.” There is much debate about the role of intercollegiate athletics within the framework of the college or university, especially when contributions to academic programs may be affected. Critics claim that athletics are expensive and excessive spending results in fewer contributions to academic programs. Stinson et al. (2012) mentioned that several studies have said there are little or no relationships between university athletics and institutional giving, while other studies have indicated that there is a significant, positive effect of athletics on giving. Those in favor of big-time intercollegiate athletics programs claim that successful teams create a positive image of the institution, which attracts gifts that otherwise, may not have been donated. Stinson and Howard (2007) claimed that athletics programs were shown to attract new donors to the institution, servicing important marketing and branding functions. Stinson et al. added that athletics programs have the potential to make tremendous contributions to broader institutional branding and fundraising efforts. This section will focus on how athletics success can impact donations to an institution.

Baade and Sundberg (1996) investigated how the success of football and men’s basketball programs affected alumni giving. The authors believed that a student’s experience at an institution played a major role in whether or not he or she donated in the future. They examined how donor behavior changed with success or lack of success of an institution’s athletics program researching data between 1973 and 1990. Humphreys and Mondello (2007) conducted a study to learn how athletics success affected donations to Division I institutions. The authors focused on football and men’s basketball, which are often the largest revenue generators

for institutions in regards to athletics teams. The authors were interested due to recent increases in spending on intercollegiate athletics, and focused on institutions that competed at the FBS level in football or men's basketball.

Rhoads and Gerking (2000) examined the role of successful football and basketball programs at the Division I level in motivating alumni and other donors to contribute. Football and men's basketball at most Division I FBS institutions help financially support the entire intercollegiate athletics department, including non-revenue generating sports. The NCAA generated \$871.6 million during the 2011-2012 fiscal year (Morgan, 2014). Eighty-one percent of these revenues came from its broadcast rights agreement with Turner/CBS Sports. An additional 11 percent came from sponsoring championships, including the "March Madness" basketball tournament. Lawrence (2013) mentioned that 40 percent of the NCAA's distribution calculation is based on competitive success. In 2016, the NCAA generated a record \$996 million in revenues, but had \$1.4 billion in expenses, which was up nearly \$500 million (Berkowitz, 2017).

Morgan stated that no college sport generates more revenue annually than football. He indicated these revenues mostly come from broadcast rights, ticket sales, and merchandising, but did not mention donations. Morgan stated that at many schools, the revenues generated by successful football and basketball programs fund the entire athletics department. Martinez et al. (2010) suggested, "The performance of the focal revenue-generating sport on a given campus is a significant influence on institutional fundraising. Researchers and universities should continue their efforts to understand how to use these athletics programs to best benefit the entire institutional fundraising effort."

Daughtrey and Stotlar (2000) sought to determine the impact of an NCAA football championship on contributions to the intercollegiate athletics department and the entire university. Only institutions whose football teams won a Division I-AA, Division II, or Division III national championship between 1987 and 1997 were considered. Stinson and Howard (2007) examined alumni and non-alumni giving to both academics and athletics programs at FBS football institutions. Turner, Meserve, and Bowen (2001) conducted a study in an effort to determine how changes in an institution's football success affected giving behavior and if former letterwinners were more or less sensitive in their giving behavior than other alumni. The authors indicated that the institutions selected in their study were at very different levels of athletics intensity and far from being representative of higher education.

In their study, Grimes and Chressanthis (1994) focused on the effect of athletics success and failure over time and the impact it had on contributions to academics. Annual giving totals were examined for a 30-year period beginning in 1962 at Mississippi State University. Also examined were winning percentages of football, men's basketball, and baseball teams during the same period. An indication of NCAA sanctions was noted between the years of 1975 and 1977.

Baade and Sundberg (1996) claimed that institutions benefited from alumni giving due to successful athletics programs. Despite this, they warned that spending on athletics does not necessarily lead to success, and money spent trying to build an athletics program might actually reduce alumni giving if academic quality is tarnished. In fact, it was determined that winning percentages did not significantly affect alumni giving, but bowl appearances and basketball tournament appearances did. The data collected by Humphreys and Mondello (2007) showed that donations to public institutions amounted to more than \$11 million annually while gifts to private institutions totaled more than \$17 million annually. The authors stated that when an



institution appeared in a bowl game or a postseason basketball tournament, unrestricted donations were not affected, but restricted donations increased. They also mentioned that athletics success may benefit only restricted giving to athletics programs and not restricted giving to other areas of the institution. When donors make restricted gifts and know how their money is being used, they may be more likely to continue their support in the future. It is important to understand that a number of factors can influence the amount of annual giving to a program, including whether or not an institution is in the middle of a capital campaign as well as an institution having priority seating requirements (Rhoads & Gerking, 2000).

Rhoads and Gerking (2000) stated that athletics success has a positive impact on levels of alumni giving. They stated that athletics and academic quality may both lead to increased contributions. Their results indicated that older universities received more total voluntary contributions and alumni support per student. In addition, private universities received more voluntary support than public universities. They suggested this is most likely because public institutions receive more state appropriations than private institutions, thus, the need for private donations was less essential. The authors concluded that year-to-year changes in athletics success have no impact on levels of giving by non-alumni, but alumni respond positively to football bowl wins.

Daughtrey and Stotlar (2000) claimed that the average total donations to all institutions was \$3.9 million for the three-years prior to the championship (considering I-AA, Division II, and Division III institutions). A total of \$4.6 million was contributed during the championship year while \$4.9 million was contributed for the year following a national championship. A similar trend existed for donations to the intercollegiate athletics department, as \$133,000 was contributed during the three-years prior to the championship, \$158,000 for the championship

year, and \$189,000 for the year after the national championship. The number of donors to the entire institution and to the intercollegiate athletics department also increased as a result of the national championship. It was concluded that a national championship positively impacted the number of donors and total contributions to an institution.

Turner et al. (2001) concluded that no relationship existed between won-lost records in football and general giving rates at FBS or Ivy League institutions. The authors stated that athletics success would not necessarily lead to increased contributions from alumni. In fact, they stated that winning had a negative effect on overall alumni giving for FBS institutions. Stinson and Howard (2007) wanted to understand the relationship between intercollegiate athletics programs and private giving to academics and athletics programs. The research indicated that athletics success does not influence alumni and non-alumni donors differently, but does influence giving to athletics programs differently than giving to academic programs. They emphasized the importance of their research during the changing times of intercollegiate athletics, as limited research has been done concerning the relationship between donor giving and athletics success.

Grimes and Chressanthis (1994) claimed that athletics success could positively influence giving to academics. For every one percent increase in overall winning percentage by the three sports they examined, contributions to academics will increase by nearly \$300,000. The research suggested that for each additional alumnus or alumna, between \$62 and \$136 will be donated to the academic endowment. The authors stated that post-season play does not necessarily impact contributions to academics, but television appearances are positively related to contributions. Lastly, when sanctions are imposed on an institution's athletics teams, contributions may be slightly reduced to academics.

When athletics teams are successful, both the intercollegiate athletics department and the entire university may see a positive impact. Athletics success may increase applications for admissions, ticket sales, merchandise revenues, private contributions, and the number of alumni and friends coming back to campus. Thus, athletics success not only benefits an athletics department, but also has the potential to benefit the entire university. Beyer and Hannah (2000) stated that a successful athletics program might lead to increased enrollment, visibility, alumni donations, sense of camaraderie, and an event for students, alumni, staff and fans to rally around. In Rosner and Shropshire's book, *The Business of Sports* (2004), the authors stated, "Athletics is an integral source of name exposure for almost every university and often the only frequent source of exposure for schools possessing little in the way of academic reputation" (p. 544).

Does athletics success increase revenue for the university through donor giving? According to Grant, Leadley, and Zenon (2013), "The conventional wisdom of athletic directors and other university administrators is that a successful football program will increase attendance and related game day revenues and will generate valuable publicity in the local newspaper and other media outlets." They continued, "Contributions by boosters and alumni and the value of broadcasting rights may increase, as well as sales of team and university merchandise, likely hats and sweatshirts." The authors concluded, "And it may also result in increased undergraduate applications and an increase in the average quality of applicants." Subsequently, a successful athletics department, especially its football program, can positively impact the entire campus.

Tucker (2004) studied whether there is statistical evidence that alumni giving rates are influenced by football or men's basketball success for major universities after adjusting for key academic variables. He hypothesized, "In terms of the average alumni giving rate, a higher winning percentage would be expected to create a positive externality by 'charming' alumni and

a greater percentage of them make contributions.” The results showed that success variables for football positively influenced contributions to the university. Specifically, a 10 percent increase in a football program’s winning percentage over a six-year period increased the average alumni-giving rate by approximately one percent. However, success in basketball had no significant effect on alumni giving. The author mentioned that we need to know why universities offer “expensive, big-time athletics” as part of the educational process because the one percent increase does not seem significant when compared to increases in expectations.

Meer and Rosen (2009) conducted a study with the primary purpose to see “whether winning teams induce alumni to make more donations, and if so, whether these donations go to the support of the university as a whole or only to the athletics program.” The authors found that the impact of athletics success on donations differs for men and women. They claimed that when a male graduate’s former team wins its conference championship, his donations for general purposes and to the athletics department increase by about seven percent for both. Meer and Rosen added that male varsity athletes whose teams were successful when they competed as student-athletes made larger donations to the athletics department. The authors found that for women, there is no effect of a former team’s success on current giving. Ultimately, Meer and Rosen stated that varsity athletes whose teams were successful when they were undergraduates made larger donations to their alma mater’s athletics department. They added that football and men’s basketball are less important as determinants of giving than the success of one’s own team. The authors’ study was restricted to a selective university and no information on income or wealth was utilized. Subsequently, they stated that it is not clear whether or not the results would generalize to other schools.

Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) declared that women represent a viable portion of the donor population that has the potential to generate significant revenue through voluntary support. Verner (1996) mentioned that women control a large percentage of the nation's wealth and represent a market that fundraisers have not tapped yet. Tsotsou (2006) also indicated that the ability to cultivate female donors is lacking. Braus (1994) stated that women live an average of seven years longer than men do, thus, they often manage the estates after their spouse dies. Women are less motivated than men by the social and tangible benefits associated with athletics gifts and are more motivated by philanthropic concerns (Staurowsky, 1996). Due to these factors, development officers should make cultivating women a priority in their efforts to increase philanthropic support.

Alumni and non-alumni have a choice when deciding how to donate their money. Success of athletics teams, especially the high profile sports, may have a positive impact on not just the athletics program, but on the entire university. Stinson et al. (2012), when discussing the relationship between college athletics programs and fundraising, stated, "While private donations represent only one form of revenue to the institution, the ability of athletics programs to attract and influence donors has allowed a more careful examination of the returns associated with athletics investment." Stinson and Howard (2010a) relayed, "New athletic donors that can also be cultivated to make academic gifts turn out to be the most valuable donors to the institution, as they make larger gifts and are retained at higher rates than are their counterparts." Subsequently, the success of college athletics programs not only can increase revenues for the athletics department, but also for the university at-large.

Stinson et al. (2012) mentioned that other studies, including Goff's (2000), have supported that athletics success can have a positive effect on applications and enrollment. The

authors also stated that a lack of success has been linked to a decline in applications. Mangold, Bean, and Adams (2003) mentioned, “Arguments have been made that successful athletic programs should increase the social connection and integration of students on campus, presumably increasing retention and graduation rates.” The study conducted by Stinson et al. (2012) concluded that there is clear empirical support that college athletics provides positive returns on investment to universities, thereby lessening the financial expectations for current and prospective students. Wunnava and Okunade (2013) added, “Superior athletics programs enrich student life quality and learning environments. Concerning the national media exposure factor, athletics programs with a consistent history of championships raise marketability of the institution’s athletics and academic programs, alumni donations, and student applications for admission.”

#### Critical Perspectives on Increased Donations for Intercollegiate Athletics

The criticism of college athletics as part of a university is not uncommon, and two of the most popular criticisms pertain to coaches’ salaries and institutional subsidies. From a fundraising perspective, increasing revenues through donations is critical for recruiting and retaining top coaches and positioning athletics programs for greater success. Many institutions, however, are not generating enough revenue to pay high caliber coaches or appropriately fund other areas within the athletics budget. Thus, institutional subsidies often provide a revenue stream that is vital for the operation of an athletics department. Athletics departments, especially at the FBS level, are counted on to maximize revenues through existing and newly identified revenue streams. Failure to do so may lead to not being able to recruit or retain a top coach. In addition, there are never any guarantees that revenues from institutional subsidies will always be available.

The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics was formed in October of 1989 in response to more than a decade of scandals in college athletics (Knight, 2014). According to its website, “The goal of the Commission was to recommend a reform agenda that emphasized academic values in an arena where commercialization of college sports often overshadowed the underlying goals of higher education.” It also stated, “The cost of intercollegiate athletics is rising faster than other university expenses and coaches’ salaries and facility expenses are increasing at unsustainable rates.” The reform group mentioned that the majority of athletics departments operate with a deficit and count on university subsidies to maintain operations. “Additionally, the role of athletics on campus has been strained by pressures to win and generate revenue through giving more control over to television broadcasters and corporate partners.” The Knight Commission stated that it is continuing to address the current challenges and promote more transparency to ensure academic and fiscal integrity in college sports.

In addition to the Knight Commission, numerous books have been written to challenge the existing state of college athletics. Duderstadt (2003) emphasized in his book, *Intercollegiate athletics and the American university: A university president’s perspective*, how institutions must regain control of their intercollegiate athletics programs. He provided controversial suggestions on how to deemphasize athletics and bring about necessary change. College athletics programs are multi-million dollar businesses and the University of Michigan boasts one of the most recognized and successful programs. He suggested to institutions that if they refuse to adjust the operations of their athletics programs, then they must recognize them for what they are: commercial, professional, and independent entertainment businesses.

In one of the most controversial books pertaining to intercollegiate athletics, *Beer and circus: How big time college sports is crippling undergraduate education*, Murray Sperber

(2001) encouraged readers to make people think about what really goes on at a university, especially with its athletics program. Sperber claimed that revenues generated by intercollegiate athletics teams never make it to academic departments on campus. Relating to student fees, the author criticized institutions for deceiving students about what they actually receive when stepping foot on campus. He claimed that institutions sell students on intercollegiate athletics events in order to gain tuition revenues to assist in research and graduate programs. With the tremendous exposure and millions of dollars that institutions are generating because of multimedia rights deals, ticket sales, and fundraising efforts, institutions are not likely to drastically change the way their intercollegiate athletics departments operate in the attempt to appease critics.

Heather Lawrence (2013) talked about the financial inequality within college athletics. She relayed that it stems from free-market forces influencing intercollegiate athletics, specifically the NCAA, television broadcasting, and the BCS. Lawrence indicated that because the NCAA operates on behalf of its member institutions, the inequalities “trickle down to all conferences, universities, and athletics programs, to specific sports, and finally to student-athletes.” Andrew Zimbalist (2013) added that inequality is a problem in college athletics for two main reasons: competitive balance and financial stability. Lawrence added that there are some additional problems when there are financial inequities at the campus level, including that sports may be eliminated due to financial pressures, student-athlete support positions may be eliminated, and facilities may receive more attention than others. “The reality is that wherever there are limited financial resources, priorities ultimately drive decision-making, and that almost always results in differential treatment and benefits,” said Lawrence.



### *Coaches' Salaries*

In March of 2009, the University of Kentucky welcomed John Calipari to Lexington as the head men's basketball coach and offered him a record eight-year, \$31.65 million contract (Miller, J.R., 2009). This offer was made after the firing of Billy Gillespie, whose 40-27 record was considered a failure and thus resulted in his termination. Athletics director Mitch Barnhart noted, "We do not use state appropriation or university funding to pay our coaches. Except for his base salary of \$400,000, the bulk of this compensation is derived from our multimedia rights contract that includes radio and television agreements, other sponsors and conference revenue sharing." Barnhart sees this deal as an investment, stating, "The marketplace that we operate in, to be the premiere basketball program in America, you want the best coach, you must pay a premium price." He continued, "If done correctly, the investment in a coach will pay for itself and yield returns for the overall program in general." Calipari led the Wildcats to a national championship in just his third year and posted a 102-14 record in his first three seasons, proving a wise investment by Barnhart. Calipari was rewarded with a \$5.2 million per year contract, not including bonuses (John Calipari, 2012).

While Calipari is the highest paid men's basketball coach, Nick Saban is the highest paid coach in college football. Saban earned more than \$5.5 million in 2012, but received a raise to between \$7 and \$7.5 million annually after there was speculation that he could possibly become the head coach at the University of Texas (Alabama, 2013). As previously stated, he this number increased to more than \$11 million in 2017. Former University of Alabama athletics director Bill Battle stated, "Coach Saban is the best in the business and has led our program to the pinnacle of college football. This agreement is a strong indication of our mutual commitment to building on the foundation he has established." Robert Witt, the University of Alabama's former chancellor,

called Nick Saban the best financial investment in the school's history (Smith, 2013). Prior to Saban's arrival in Tuscaloosa, the university had an acceptance rate of 77 percent. Now they only accept 53 percent of applicants, while rival institutions such as Auburn University and Louisiana State University continue to accept approximately 80 percent of applicants. The athletics department also contributed approximately \$6.5 million to the university for additional funding to support faculty and non-athletics scholarships during the 2012-2013 academic year.

The speculation of Saban going to the University of Texas surfaced when word spread that its long-time head coach Mack Brown would resign at the conclusion of the 2013 season. Brown was forced out by the university's administration, despite winning 158 games over 16 seasons and making the University of Texas the most valuable team in college football at \$133 million in revenue generation (Ozanian, 2013). The previous year, Brown even received a contract extension through 2020, paying him more than \$5 million annually.

Jennifer Kearns, an NCAA Spokesperson, stated, "Coaching salaries are determined by economic forces at the individual school and market value. It is important to note these same forces apply to hiring professors and other faculty members. Market value reality means coaching compensation packets can be worth millions of dollars" (Miller, J.R., 2009). Kaplan (2008) stated that in a free market system, it is reasonable to assume that better managers and leaders will have greater compensation than less qualified individuals will. "Most institutions fund large parts of their athletic programs through donations and ticket sales," Iowa State Athletics Director Jamie Pollard said, "When you ask your constituents to fund the enterprise, you bring them into the decision-making process. And what they typically want is bigger facilities and more successful teams. To accomplish that, you have to pay top dollar to coaches and do capital projects" (Assessing, 2007). Pollard continued, "For institutions whose

constituents are willing to fund that kind of success, I see absolutely no problem with it. But it becomes a problem when institutions without the constituent base to play in that arena feel pressured to try to compete at that level anyway.” Pollard’s comments are applicable to cost of attendance expenses that athletics departments are now able to award student-athletes. Wolverton and Kambhampati (2015a) suggested that programs with less money to spend worry that they will be at a competitive disadvantage in recruiting players.

With these high salaries comes increased pressure to win. This is reflected in the fact that the average tenure for college football coaches in the FBS is only 4.5 years (Berkowitz & Upton, 2012). In 2014, 20 of 128 FBS schools hired a new head football coach (Men’s, 2014). This number is down from 2013, where 31 of 125 teams started the season with a new leader. In college basketball, 46 Division I programs had new head coaches prior to the 2013-2014 season (NCAA, 2013), down from the previous season where 50 programs introduced new coaches (NCAA, 2012). After the 2016-2017 season, there were 47 Division 1 head coaching changes made (Norlander, 2017).

What drives these decisions? Stahura, Dobbs, Greenwood, and Appache (2006) mentioned in their article that trends in football suggest that decision-makers are quick to change coaches in an attempt to meet the demands of the increasingly impatient constituents that support these programs. They indicated that football programs are the “cash cows” of athletics departments around the country. “Money is generated from television revenue, ticket sales, alumni and donor contributions, merchandise sales, government funding, parking revenue, concession sales, tournament and bowl appearance revenue,” said Beyer and Hannah (2000). Failure to win may cost coaches their jobs, but they may be protected by the terminology in their contract and receive large sums of money just for parting ways.

In 2007, University of Wyoming athletics director Tom Burman fired head men's basketball coach Steve McClain with three years remaining on his contract (Katz, 2007). Burman stated, "It's a challenge and it's hard to swallow. We had to use money from a foundation and that will have to be made up through money donated and athletic department revenue." Burman added, "It's unfortunate, but it's the nature of the business. Coaches get long-term contracts and that's the nature of the beast. It shouldn't impact us since we had the money, but if we had to do this again we wouldn't have the money to pay for it. We have to build it back up."

The University of Wyoming paid out \$500,000 to McClain, but there are more extreme cases that exist. At the University of Mississippi, former head coach Houston Nutt was owed \$6 million to be paid over five years. Ultimately, the school settled with Nutt and saved \$550,000 by doing so (Houston, 2013). In his first two years in Oxford, Mississippi, Nutt led the Rebels to an 18-8 record and two Cotton Bowl victories. However, his 6-18 record in his final two seasons led to his "resignation" and settlement. Nutt stated, "The thing about the SEC that I know. They pay you to win" (Houston, 2011). Former University of Mississippi Chancellor Dr. Dan Jones said, "I know we're all disappointed in the lack of success over the last two years." Pete Boone, athletics director at the time of the firing, said, "Our goal is to compete for championships. And we are not making progress in that regard." The Houston Nutt situation at the University of Mississippi demonstrates how quickly things can change in constituency support of college athletics programs.

In 1999, there were only five one million dollar head football coaches (Budig, 2007). In 2013, at least 70 of the 125 head coaches of FBS teams made a salary of more than \$1 million, and at least 17 made a salary of more than \$3 million (Berkowitz et al., 2013). Coaches at the FBS level earned an average of \$2.4 million in 2012, up from \$573,000 in 2006 (Byrd, Mixon, &

Wright, 2013), not including the seven private schools that did not provide salary information. Andrew Zimbalist claimed that the market is rigged by those who place too high a value on the coaches' talents, adding that coaches are profiting from players who are not paid beyond their scholarships (Hummer, 2009).

Bill Curry, former head football coach at numerous FBS institutions, said, "It comes down to what is the value system of the culture? In the value system of this culture, a coach who can go into a high-pressure situation and win big is worth a certain amount of money. If the system were different, if it were predicated on accomplishment in academics or in social action or other important things, it would be a different system, obviously" (Hummer, 2009). Curry continued, "People who think coaches and professional players are overpaid, they're in complete control in a free market and they always have been. All they have to do is not go to the games and turn off the television. Salaries will go down, that's just a fact of life. Pay will drop drastically if you keep not watching." Byrd, Mixon, and Wright (2013) mentioned that the most important factor in a head football coach's pay is the total revenue generated by the entire football program. Being able to fund these market driven salaries will be a challenge for athletics administrators if revenues do not continue to grow, thus, growing revenue streams like a donor-based seating model is critical.

State legislatures continue to decrease funding to universities across the country, thus, there is a renewed focus on generating private support at public institutions (Stinson et al., 2012). College athletics departments rely more and more on private support to position their athletics programs, especially those that generate the most revenues, for greater success. Fulks (2008) found that fundraising is the largest source of total revenues for athletics departments, with ticket sales identified as a close second. Charitable contributions can help offset the consistent growth

in expenses (Stinson et al., 2012). College football is big business, and many programs operate as large corporations with the head coach acting in similar capacity to a chief operating officer (Byrd et al., 2013). Successful coaches have increased their pay, but this has also come with increased expectations and pressures.

Fulks (2011) mentioned that football and men's basketball are the two programs driving revenues. College coaches can increase their salaries as long as productivity continues to increase (Byrd et al., 2013). Much of this is due to television contracts and revenue sharing agreements by conferences, which drive revenues upward. Berkowitz and Upton (2012) mentioned that coaches have been commanding greater pay despite budgets at colleges and universities shrinking. A one percent increase in revenues generated by a college football program will increase a coach's pay by 0.69 percent (Byrd et al., 2013).

Byrd et al. (2013) stated that there is a strong statistical link between the revenue a football program receives and current compensation of a head coach. Subsequently, the more revenue a school generates from its football program, the higher the compensation of the coach. They noted that head football coaches are compensated in a similar fashion to corporate top management, with past performance motivating future compensation. Byrd et al. acknowledged that the strongest link between a head coach's pay and top management of a company is the size of the athletics department or firm. The authors mentioned, however, that the pay of a head coach does not guarantee future success.

Greenberg (2008) stated that coaches' salaries and facility expansions are part of the rapidly expanding arms race among FBS athletics programs. A study was conducted by Tsitsos and Nixon (2012) that focused on the escalating salaries of head coaches, specifically around football and men's basketball. They utilized the term, "star wars arms race," to emphasize the

high salaries of coaches, but also indicated that paying the highest salaries does not necessarily ensure success such as a highly ranked team. “Arms race,” was defined by Harry Edwards (1984) as “increased operating expenditures by schools in a conference are associated with increases at other schools in the same conference.” The authors studied to see if whether participating in the star wars arms race has led to success and prestige for college athletics departments and their universities. The results of their study indicated that success was not assured for the best-paid coaches after they signed their “lucrative contracts.” Tsitsos and Nixon claimed, “Athletics directors and their institutions feel compelled to spend whatever it takes to hire and retain coaches with records or prospects of major success because they will attract the most talented recruits who are the ultimate key to competitive success.” The authors mentioned that the athletics administrators often justify the high compensation because of the “realities of the marketplace” and a “more investment equals more wins” rationale.

Zimbalist (2006) argued that paying these extraordinarily high salaries did not make sense and proposed that paying a coach at a college or university more than its president “conveys a message of distorted priorities.” The average compensation of presidents and head football coaches at FBS institutions in 2005-2006 was \$416,719 and \$918,238, respectively. In 2014, the average salary of a public college president only increased to \$428,000 (Fox, 2015). For college football head coaches, the average salary had risen to \$1.64 million in 2012 (Brady, Berkowitz, & Upton, 2012). This number continues to increase, as 78 head football coaches made more than \$1 million in 2017 (Berkowitz et al., 2017a). In a survey conducted by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 85 percent of college presidents believe that college football coaches’ pay is excessive (Wieberg, Upton, Perez, & Berkowitz, 2009).

Grant et al. (2013) analyzed the primary influences on compensation for NCAA FBS head coaches and tested the hypothesis that the most important influence on compensation is winning. They concluded that records do affect compensation; however, other factors, including winning percentage, ranking, and recruiting success, also have a statistically significant impact. The authors found that frequency of bowl appearances did not significantly influence compensation of head football coaches. However, they mentioned that this variable did not distinguish between major and minor bowls, which could have impacted the results, especially for elite programs. Big Ten Conference commissioner Jim Delaney mentioned that talk radio, blogs, and ESPN create an artificial market, putting presidents and athletics directors in a position where they feel they must appease donors, alumni and other stakeholders (Weaver, 2011a).

Plehn-Dujowich, Kent, and Swanson (2012) cited that little empirical investigation has been conducted to determine compensation for college coaches of revenue generating programs. They conducted a study to explain how the level of coaching compensation is determined based on three theoretical perspectives in managerial compensation. These perspectives included the marginal productivity theory, human capital theory, and managerialism. The marginal productivity theory argues that the compensation of workers reflects their contribution to the overall performance of their organization (Gomez-Mejia, Tosi, & Hinkin, 1987). The authors indicated that the marginal productivity theory predicts a high correlation between pay and performance of college football coaches. Human capital theory states that managerial compensation is influenced by one's skillset (Becker, 1964). Plehn-Dujowich et al. compared this definition to experienced coaches. For managerialism, compensation structures are influenced by the level of power individuals have on their organization (Combs & Skill, 2003).



The authors mentioned that coaches with greater power are more likely to have influence during contractual discussions.

Proponents of college football coaches earning these high salaries believe that the increase in compensation is a reflection of their value in the labor market (Upton & Wieberg, 2007). They mentioned that coaches are rewarded because of their success and role in increasing revenues for the university. Subsequently, the thought is that in order to keep programs competitive and profitable, institutions have to pay more to keep or hire successful coaches. To counter this argument, Plehn-Dujowich et al. (2012) indicated that four of the ten highest paid college football coaches in the FBS did not finish in the Associated Press Top 25 poll in 2010. Plehn-Dujowich et al. concluded that there is a positive relationship between past performance and compensation of FBS college football coaches.

There is considerable concern in the greater academic community about the escalation of football coaches' salaries (Plehn-Dujowich et al., 2012). Tsitsos and Nixon (2012) indicated that salaries of coaches are increasing despite university employees facing furloughs, salary cuts, and layoffs. The University of California, Berkeley paid its former head football coach, Jeff Tedford, \$2.8 million despite a \$150 million reduction in state funding that led to layoffs and increased tuition (Zimbalist, 2010). Tsitsos and Nixon presented an interesting comparison, "It is important to note that the nuclear arms race, from which the athletic arms race takes its name, eventually ended when the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) realized that the pattern of investing increasingly sums of money in weapons was unsustainable. However, these nations were left with commitments to very large defense budgets." They concluded, "This could be the legacy of the arms race in college athletics, even if it ended today."

Stinson and Howard (2008) claimed that it is clear that successful athletics programs often lead current donors to make larger gifts and attract new donors to the institution. They suggested that investing in high profile athletics programs might produce positive returns to the academic programs on campus. The researchers recommended the continued study of the relationship between athletics giving and private academic support at all levels of competition due to the changing nature and prominence of college athletics programs. King, Sexton, and Rhatigan (2010) suggested, “The most successful coaches, who likely are tremendous fundraisers, command long-term contracts with healthy buy-out features and enjoy salary benefits in multiple figures beyond that of the president.” In addition, they stated, “Winning dominates all other factors. Alumni and students expect to win. Winning costs money, and successful fundraising in intercollegiate athletics equates to winning.” Coaches are paid to win and compensating them at their market value may pay dividends to the university.

### *Institutional Subsidies*

Institutional subsidies may show up as operating revenues on an athletics department’s budget, but there is controversy surrounding their existence. These institutional subsidies, or allocated revenues, include student fees, direct state or government support, direct institutional support (general fund money), or indirect institutional support (facilities, energy costs, etc.) (Lederman, 2010). Generated revenues, which include but are not limited to donations, ticket sales, and guarantees from multimedia rights holders, have become more important now than ever. “A majority of athletic departments relied heavily on direct and indirect subsidization of their programs by the student body, the institution itself, and state governments in order to balance their books,” said Matheson et al. (2012). The authors continued by stating that without this funding, less than one-third of BCS athletics departments would show positive revenues.

Student fees were introduced in the 1800's as a way for students to voluntarily fund activities that may have not been covered by their tuition payments (Denhart, Ridpath, & Vedder, 2011). Denhart et al. (2011) mentioned in their case study that now student fees are mandatory and much larger, citing that the average fees at a four-year public research university averaged more than \$1,700 annually in 2008. This amount was 36 percent more than it was in 2000. The authors stated, "As institutions dig into their own pockets to fund intercollegiate athletics programs not supported by ticket, logo, concession, broadcasting, parking revenues, or private gifts, they are increasingly forced to rely directly on funds provided by student fees."

Doug Lederman (2010), after analyzing data on sports revenues and expenditures, noted that all but four of the 99 FBS athletics programs surveyed by *USA Today* reported receiving at least some allocated revenues from their institution during the 2007-2008 academic year. The four institutions that did not receive any allocated revenues included Louisiana State University, Ohio State University, Purdue University, and the University of Nebraska. Louisiana State University and the University of Nebraska were the only public institutions whose athletics programs reported receiving no subsidies in each of the four years studied (Gillum et al., 2010).

In sharp contrast, he mentioned that 11 programs received at least two-thirds of their operating revenues from allocated revenues. Institutions in this category included Eastern Michigan University, Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, Kent State University, Miami University, Middle Tennessee State University, Ohio University, Western Kentucky University, Western Michigan University, University at Buffalo, and the University of Akron. When the need is immediate, institutions are asking for new or increased student fee support (Hosick, 2005). "Instituting or raising an athletics fee can raise the ire of students who believe their money would be better spent on a service they'll actually use," said Michelle

Brutlag Hosick (2005) of *The NCAA News*. She added, “Students believe if they don’t attend games, they shouldn’t have to pay the fee, sometimes voicing their opinions loudly when such a fee increase is proposed.”

In the article, “Seething over sports subsidies,” David Moltz (2010, May 20) mentioned that the Mid-American Conference has 10 of the top 21 most-subsidized athletics programs. He stated, “Greater pressure is being placed on institutions with smaller and less-well-known athletics programs to rely on institutional subsidies.” In another article, “The athletics tax,” Moltz (2010, June 1) reviewed the great disparity that exists between subsidies by conference. He mentioned that the subsidies for institutions in the Mid-American Conference and Big Ten Conference are approximately 75 percent and four percent, respectively. The University of Michigan, a Big Ten institution, was only one of 13 public programs in the FBS that generated a profit in 2008. The author highlighted a report from the Center for College Affordability and Productivity that analyzed institutional subsidies of athletics programs. The report stated, “Rich, famous, and athletically well-known schools have only been trivially impacted at the institutional level by the explosion in intercollegiate athletics costs, while a significant number of schools that are, on average, poorer, less prestigious, and athletically more marginal have been clobbered.” To conclude, the report showed that conferences with the greatest wealth have the lowest institutional subsidies for college athletics.

In the *USA Today* article, “Amid funding crisis, college athletics soak up subsidies, fees,” Gillum, Upton, and Berkowitz (2010) stated that more than \$800 million in student fees and university subsidies are supporting FBS athletics programs, despite the crisis in higher education funding. The subsidies for athletics departments at 99 public institutions in the FBS increased from \$685 million to \$826 million over three years, after adjusting for inflation. Lederman

(2010) indicated that the majority of athletics programs receive institutional support in order to operate. These numbers continue to increase, as between 2010 and 2014, more than \$10.3 billion in mandatory student fees and other institutional subsidies were allocated to sports programs (Wolverton, Hallman, Shifflett, & Kambhampati, 2015).

Matthew McGowan (2010) of the *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* outlined information compiled by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, indicating that institutions are losing sight of their core mission as they allocate more money toward a "runaway" growth in college athletics. Calling for change, one of the greatest concerns is on funding models, claiming that money is pulled out of the classroom to fill gaps in athletics department budgets. The report cited that only seven of the nearly 120 universities included in the report, funded their programs entirely through athletics revenue, while all other institutions were subsidized at some level with university funds.

Another issue relayed by Lederman (2010) was that institutional subsidies for athletics programs are likely to disturb employees, especially as salaries and positions are being frozen while employees are being furloughed. Gillum et al. (2010) mentioned that some of the most heavily subsidized institutions have also seen faculty salaries decrease, state-funded financial aid dry up, and students anticipating further increases in tuition and fees. Carole Browne, a professor at Wake Forest University who co-chairs the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (a national faculty group that advocates for athletics reform), declared, "It's appalling in the big picture and representative of what is going on in athletics with coaches' salaries and facilities. It's part of a bigger problem."

When discussing student fees, Karen Weaver (2011a), the former director of athletics, intramurals, and recreation at Penn State Abington, mentioned this "tax" represented nearly 14 to

17 percent of the total bills for students. She mentioned that the average athletics fee for a full-time student increased by 28 percent from 2004-2005 to 2008-2009, noting that these fees are rarely itemized, thus, can often go unnoticed. Denhart et al. (2011) wanted to see how much students knew about the fees they were paying to support the athletics program and whether or not they approved of it. The authors indicated that funding of college athletics departments has “historically been mired by secrecy and arguably, deception.” They indicated that 81 percent of the 207 Division I public schools included in their study allocated student fee revenues to support the athletics department. Denhart et al. also noted that some of the remaining 38 institutions might have had student fee revenues reported under the category of “direct institutional support.”

Despite the issues, others believe institutional subsidies provide a return on the investment. Former Texas Tech University chancellor Kent Hance stated that much of the money spent on athletics yields much higher returns, further mentioning that in some ways, athletics comprises a key piece of the core mission (McGowan, 2010). "It's your showcase. It's a rallying point for your alumni and your students. It's the front door of your house. It's the first thing people see. It gives us a great exposure that we wouldn't get otherwise." University of Hawaii associate athletics director Carl Clapp said, "A strong, successful athletic program is very important to the connection with alumni, donors, and leaders in the state, and it magnifies the university not only in Hawaii but beyond the state. That's the visibility that the athletics program can have" (Berkowitz et al., 2010). Berkowitz et al. (2010) claimed, “Many schools help cover the gap between their athletics departments' expenses and revenue because they regard sports teams, especially football and men's basketball, as important parts of campus life and excellent vehicles for generating publicity and alumni support.”

Student fees are one of the most controversial institutional subsidies. Berkowitz et al. (2010) indicated that as much as 23 percent of the annual bill for in-state students is going to support athletics. According to the authors, these student fees are added to tuition at nearly all schools, and are often not itemized to demonstrate exactly what the student is supporting. Students will likely receive free or reduced admission to athletics events on campus due to paying these fees. Berkowitz et al. explained that institutions are reluctant to make public how much athletics departments get from student fees, even though federal and state organizations are putting forth the effort to require greater transparency of college costs. The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 now requires institutions to report separate figures for tuition and required fees. "At a time when the cost of attendance at college is going up at a very high rate, it's a matter of transparency and fairness and equity that people ought to know what they're spending their money on," said Knight Commission co-chairman William E. Kirwan, former chancellor of the University System of Maryland regarding student fees.

There are different opinions surrounding student bodies when it comes to voting for student fees to support athletics programs. Jere Longman (2009) of the *New York Times* stated that despite students voting down increases in student fees at some institutions, other schools have had success in getting students to buy into the vision. He noted that the University of North Texas approved a per-credit-hour athletics fee up to \$300 annually to help pay for the construction of a new on-campus football stadium. Berkowitz et al. (2010) highlighted situations at Bowling Green State University and Utah State University where students approved fees to support athletics. In March 2009, Bowling Green State University students approved by a two-to-one ratio a \$60-per-semester fee to help finance the construction of a new campus arena. That same month, Utah State University students voted 53 percent to 47 percent to more than double

their athletics fee to nearly \$120 a semester to support a funding plan in order to have a more viable football program in the FBS. Scott Barnes, the former director of athletics, stated that part of the message the administration delivered to the students was that a competitive athletics program would increase enrollment, donations, and visibility. “Athletics are the front porch of the university,” Barnes said. “It’s not the most important room in the house, but it is the most visible” (Longman, 2009).

James Madison University student body president Andrew Reese stated, “It’s not cause for much concern for students because the school provides free admission to events, puts student sections in prime seating areas, and athletics is a very big part of the student culture” (Berkowitz et al., 2010). Robert Leary, president of the student senate and a senior classics major at Ohio University, said, “There is a misconception by a lot of faculty that athletics is being held harmless. That’s just not true. Their budget is being cut. The amount they can spend next year has been reduced tremendously. I know Ohio (University) doesn’t have the most prestigious athletics program, but having a Division I sports program does contribute to the overall experience here at the university. I know a lot of students who are supporting athletics through all of this” (Moltz, 2010, May 20).

Despite these success stories, there are numerous examples of institutions where students have voted down the implementation of a fee to support athletics. At the University of Montana, an FCS powerhouse in football, the student body rejected a proposed athletics fee increase, overriding action by elected student leaders (Berkowitz et al., 2010). In April 2009, the University of New Orleans voted against a fee increase to support the athletics program, leaving the university to consider dropping baseball, basketball, and every other sport (Longman, 2009). At the University of Hawaii, the state board of regents voted to impose an athletics fee for the



first time due to the accumulation of a \$10 million debt that was projected to increase between \$1.5 million and \$2 million annually (Berkowitz et al., 2010). This came despite objections from student organizations. Jack Boyle, Cleveland State University's vice president of business affairs and finance, mentioned that if students do not want their money going toward sports, there are options such as online schools and schools such as the University of Phoenix that do not have athletics programs.

Since 2003, eight FCS institutions and three FBS institutions have removed football (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014). A fourth, the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), announced in December 2014 that it would be dropping its football program, as well as its rifle and bowling programs (University, 2014). UAB president Ray Watts stated, "The fiscal realities we face – both from an operating and a capital investment standpoint – are starker than ever and demand that we take decisive action for the greater good of the athletic department and UAB." He continued, "As we look at the evolving landscape of NCAA football, we see expenses only continuing to increase. When considering a model that best protects the financial future and prominence of the athletic department, football is simply not sustainable." Ironically, UAB reinstated football only six months after shutting it down (Lewis, 2015).

Hutchinson and Bouchet (2014) stated, "Academic and athletics administrators are challenged to balance a unique combination of internal and external forces. Athletics administrators are met with tremendous pressure to please various, often competing stakeholder groups (e.g., faculty, alumni, students, donors, community members, media, and television networks), while maintaining submission to athletic association regulations (e.g., NCAA operating bylaws) and government mandates (e.g., Title IX compliance)." This pressure played a role in students, alumni, and others to fight for the reinstatement of football at UAB

(Scarborough, 2015). Donors pledged enough funds to change president Watts' mind. He stated, "The biggest single difference is we now have tangible commitments for additional support that we have never had before. Without that additional support, we could not have maintained a balanced budget moving forward."

Institutions within the California State University (CSU) System, including California State University, Fresno, California State University, Sacramento, California University, Long Beach, and California State University, Fullerton, have also witnessed students refusing fee increases to help pay for athletics (Longman, 2009). In April of 2008, students at California State University, Fresno voted against a fee increase to support athletics, but they were overturned by then president John Welty, who implemented a modified increase despite the opposition. The fees were to be used primarily to add two women's sports. Welty concluded, "The issue for us was to make sure we continued our commitment to gender equity." Longman found that there are some similarities at institutions where students have voted down fee increases, including that they are primarily commuter colleges and they either do not compete in major football conferences or do not have football. He suggested that university administrators would be wise to consult students prior to any votes to present the vision of the program and how it will benefit their experience on campus.

Dees, Bennett, and Villegas (2008) mentioned that Division I athletics departments with FBS football programs increasingly resemble the front offices of professional sport organizations in regards to their mission and business operations. The authors mentioned that these departments strive to produce winning teams and profitable events with their huge operating budgets, state-of-the-art facilities, world-class athletes, and multi-national corporate sponsors.

They indicated that athletics spending has been rising at a faster rate than increases in academic spending.

Despite institutional subsidies appearing as operating revenues on an athletics department's budget, the appropriateness of these allocated revenues are subject to debate, especially student fees. Increasingly fewer schools generate more revenues than expenses (Hosic, 2005). The pressure has increased in regards to generating new revenue streams (Weaver, 2011a). Philanthropic giving is becoming ever-more critical for athletics departments, and the implementation of new revenue generating programs to further support the athletics budget and potentially reduce subsidies, will help ease tensions across campus.

The literature review section of this qualitative case study discussed four primary related themes: 1) Social identity theory and group membership, 2) Donor motivation and alumni engagement, 3) Athletics success and donations, and 4) Critical perspectives on increased donations for intercollegiate athletics. Sub-themes of critical perspectives on increased donations for intercollegiate athletics included coaches' salaries and institutional subsidies. "Intercollegiate athletics promote learning, personal development, and the manifestation of desirable character traits," said Nate Pine (2010), director of athletics at the College of the Holy Cross. He continued, "Athletics provide for an educational experience outside of the classroom and for the physical and emotional development of participants." Pine indicated that student-athletes could be models for others in their virtues of leadership, work ethic, teamwork, time management, and self-sacrifice.

Denhart et al. (2011) indicated that college athletics threatens to "crowd out" other higher education activities, including the core mission of teaching and research. Pine (2010) countered by stating, "Intercollegiate athletics are an integral component of the university with elements of

learning, teaching, and scholarship; they are most certainly worthy of institutional investment. Humphreys (2006) mentioned that revenue generation is not the primary reason for college athletics programs to exist. He stated, “Athletics can provide students a valuable entertainment option, and participation in sports can be thought of an educational experience in and of itself.” Humphreys concluded, “Athletics competitions allow alumni to connect with their alma mater in a tangible manner and raise the visibility of the college to prospective students, funding agencies, and the public in general.”

### *Conclusion*

There is no shortage of opinions on whether or not an athletics program is important on the collegiate campus. Arguments often center on the funding sources of the programs, subsequently indicating that athletics departments need to become more self-sufficient. Matheson et al. (2012) stated that while there are many good reasons to have an athletics program, profit generation is not one of them. Donor-based seating models, however, have the ability to generate new revenues for colleges and universities. Understanding the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model may help identify reasons why donors choose to support their favorite team or alma mater, which could lead to increased philanthropic support.

This chapter provided depth on a variety of themes that play a role on the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University, a public Midwestern mid-major institution. The topics included social identity and group membership, donor motivation and alumni engagement, athletics success and donations, and critical perspectives on increased donations for intercollegiate athletics, including two of the most popular criticisms, coaches’ salaries and institutional subsidies. The next chapter will

outline the methodology. Major components include the research design, role of the researcher, data collection, research questions, and data analysis.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This qualitative case study focuses on the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University, a public Midwestern mid-major institution. This chapter addresses the research design of the study, exploring the qualitative research and case study design. The individual interview design is discussed, highlighting why season ticket holders are unique. The role of the researcher details his professional background and assumptions. The data collection is divided into five sections, including the setting, participants, instrument, gaining access, and procedure. The setting describes the plan for how the research will be conducted. The participants section describes the people who will participate in the study. The instrument section addresses the trustworthiness of the study. In the gaining access section, the steps that will be taken to appropriately conduct the study are outlined. The procedure section provides a step-by-step summary of the study. Furthermore, the research questions are identified: 1) What perspectives on social identity and group membership characterize ice hockey season ticket holders' participation in donor-based seating at Miami University?, and 2) How do Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders describe their interest in supporting student-athletes and their college experience? The data analysis plan is then described with the segments consisting of an interview analysis, coding,

triangulation, and peer debriefing. Finally, details of each section are explained and followed by a conclusion.

### Research Design

The researcher will conduct a qualitative case study that will provide an analysis of perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model. This single site study will be conducted at Miami University, a public Midwestern mid-major institution. The researcher will interview ice hockey season ticket holders from the 2013-2014 season who may have been affected by the implementation of a donor-based seating model. This group of participants will include donors and non-donors to the athletics department. In addition to season ticket holders, the director of athletics, David Saylor, and deputy director of athletics, Jude Killy, at Miami University will be interviewed.

#### *Qualitative Research Design*

This qualitative case study was based on phenomenology, which is “the reflective study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Smith, 2007). Patton (2002, p. 105) wrote that phenomenology was introduced in 1913 by German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl, indicating that his most basic philosophical belief is “we can only know what we experience.” Husserl’s (1931) book, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, stated that phenomenology is “a descriptive analysis of the essence of pure consciousness.” The participants in this study will be 2013-2014 individual paid season ticket holders, consisting of donors and non-donors to Miami University Athletics.

Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) defined social identity theory as a person’s sense of who they are based on their group memberships (McLeod, 2008). With Husserl’s point on phenomenology that we can only know what we experience, season ticket holders are part of a group that have

shared experiences over time and will continue to in the future. Their loyalty and pride drive them to make the decision to renew their season tickets annually. However, when they are forced to pay higher prices for season tickets due to donor-based seating, they may weigh the value of the season ticket holder experience before choosing to invest more of their discretionary dollars into the athletics program.

A study grounded in phenomenology provides participants the opportunity to share their experience relating to the donor-based seating model supported by their first-person point of view. The donor-based seating model implemented at Miami University for the 2014-2015 season required a \$125 per-seat donation. Subsequently, all public season ticket holders are now donors. Focusing on 2013-2014 season ticket holders provides the potential to include non-donors, as they may have chosen not to renew their season tickets for the 2014-2015 season.

As the need for increased revenues to support intercollegiate athletics departments rises, season ticket holders and other fans are often counted on to assist by making per-seat donations for certain ticketed sports. The need for increased revenues was the reason for implementing a donor-based seating model at Miami University (Killy, personal communication, February 11, 2016). As prices increase, the emotions of season ticket holders can become negative. Standardized open-ended interviews will enable the researcher to better understand how season ticket holders feel about donor-based seating models, as well as learn about their interest in supporting the student-athlete experience.

Creswell (2003) identified some of the advantages of interviews as a data collection type, including that they are useful when participants cannot be observed directly, participants are able to provide historical information, and the researcher is allowed to demonstrate control. Patton (2002) stated, "We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe



behaviors that took place at some previous point in time” (p. 341). He further mentioned that the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 341). For the purpose of this study, the researcher is hopeful to uncover what is in the mind of ice hockey season ticket holders who may have been impacted by the implementation of a donor-based seating model.

### *Descriptive Case Study as Research Design*

When describing a case study, Creswell (2003) said that the researcher explores a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals in depth. He continued by adding that the cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period-of-time. Patton (2002) mentioned that a case study should catch the complexity of a single case. Case study design is an appropriate research method when the emphasis is on answering questions of “why” and “how,” when the researcher focuses on contemporary issues, and when the researcher has little to no control of events (Yin, 2003). With donor-based seating models becoming ever-more contemporary, Yin validated that an effective approach for the researcher’s study is a case study.

Merriam (1998) characterized case studies as “particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (p. 29). Specifically related to Merriam’s descriptive characteristic, the ultimate goal is for the end product to offer “a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study.” The goal with the interviews is to have season ticket holders be candid in their perceptions on the implementation of a donor-based seating model. Although these models may provide a new revenue stream to athletics departments, perceptions toward the athletics department may change due to being required to donate in order to receive season tickets. Over time, this could erode the good will of donors, emerging as counterproductive to long-term strategies and goals.

Merseth (1994) stated three essential elements of cases: 1) They are real, 2) They rely on careful research and study, and 3) They foster the development of multiple perspectives by users. Donor-based seating models are becoming ever more prevalent in college athletics. More research is needed to better understand the perceptions of season ticket holders who are affected. Perceptions may vary, but potential trends may be identified which may ultimately lead to a more effective donor-based seating model.

### *Individual Interview Design*

Individual interviews will be conducted with 2013-2014 ice hockey season ticket holders at Miami University. The season ticket holders will consist of customers who are active or inactive donors to Miami University Athletics. Miami University Athletics considers active donors for this study to be individual account holders who made a contribution of at least \$100 from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014 to the Red & White Club. Inactive donors represent individual account holders who did not donate to the Red & White Club from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014.

Standardized open-ended questions will be asked in an effort to gain an understanding of the perceptions of participants toward the implementation of a donor-based seating model. Patton (2002) stated that there are three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews. These include the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview (p. 342). This study will utilize the standardized open-ended interview approach, as its highly detailed approach will ensure that each participant is asked the same questions “in the same way and the same order” (p. 344). One of the researcher’s goals is to maintain consistency with questions throughout the interview process.

Patton (2002) stated that open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents. He added, “The task for the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking” (p. 21). The individual interview with standardized open-ended questions will provide a consistent delivery, but may ultimately result in a variety of responses that should assist the researcher in better understanding the broad range of perceptions on donor-based seating models that exist among season ticket holders. Understanding season ticket holder perceptions on donor-based seating models may help formulate and adapt donor-based seating processes at Miami University. The feedback may also be beneficial to other institutions contemplating the introduction or adjusting of donor-based seating.

#### Role of the Researcher

The researcher’s role in qualitative research is essential to the success of the study. Patton (2002) stated, “The credibility of qualitative methods hinges on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork” (p. 14). Creswell (2003) mentioned, “Qualitative research is interpretative research, with the inquirer typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (p. 184). Some ice hockey season ticket holders were distraught over the fact that a donor-based seating model would require additional financial support to Miami University Athletics in the form of a donation. This may be a sensitive topic to a number of participants, thus being empathic is vital. Patton (2002) stated, “Empathy involves being able to take and understand the stance, position, feelings, experiences, and worldview of others” (p. 52). Ko et al. (2014) shared that a successful donor program requires a deeper understanding of the donors’ perceived image, trust, and commitment toward the organization. “Effective

fundraising in higher education requires a profound understanding of the donors and their rationale for giving,” stated Bucci and Waters (2014).

This qualitative case study is grounded in phenomenology, thus it is imperative that the researcher selects a topic of personal and social significance (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Gall et al. (2007) stated the researcher should select a topic that will be engaging both intellectually and emotionally. As an aspiring athletics director, the researcher understands the need to maximize revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. Donor-based seating models are being used frequently to provide an additional revenue stream that supports the student-athlete experience, but their implementation may disgruntle season ticket holders and long-time supporters. The researcher will strive to effectively communicate with interview participants throughout the entire process, being respectful and understanding that feelings may be tense and emotional. Although the researcher has knowledge of a variety of donor-based seating models at other institutions, the researcher will attempt to refrain from commenting during the interviews in an effort to be consistent with all participants. In addition, the researcher’s goal as a qualitative researcher is to fully understand (without judgment or bias) the participants’ perspectives.

### *Professional Background*

The researcher has worked in college athletics since 2003 after competing as a football student-athlete at the University of Kentucky. The researcher’s professional career began at Harvard University, serving as an intern in the athletics ticket office from August 2003 to May 2004. From June 2004 to March 2005, the researcher served as an athletics development associate/intern at the University of Miami. In April 2005, the researcher began as the athletics development associate at the University of Mississippi. The researcher was promoted after one year to assistant director of athletics development, functioning in that role through July 2008. In

August 2008, the researcher began as the assistant athletics director for development at California State University, Fresno. One year into the researcher's position, the researcher was elevated to executive director of the Bulldog Foundation and associate athletics director for development. The researcher remained in these roles until his departure in July 2011 to become the associate athletics director for development at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, staying until July 2013. That month, the researcher started at Miami University as the senior director of development and associate athletic director. In January 2017, the researcher was promoted to senior director of development and executive associate athletic director. The researcher began duties as the assistant vice president and deputy director of athletics for external affairs at Utah State University in July 2017. In addition to the researcher's experiences at the aforementioned institutions, the researcher has also been a member and volunteer for the National Association of Athletic Development Directors (NAADD), while also serving as a mentor for students in sport management programs at numerous universities throughout the country.

The researcher has been privileged to oversee athletics development offices at four FBS institutions, including California State University, Fresno, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Miami University, and Utah State University. All four institutions are at a disadvantage in terms of revenue generation due to their program classifications as Group of Five and mid-major. These institutions, as well as their conference peers, do not receive substantial amounts of television revenue as compared to institutions in Power Five conferences. The research in this study, subsequently, will be most applicable to institutions competing at the Division I FBS Group of Five level. It must be stated that neither the University of Alabama at Birmingham, California State University, Fresno, nor Utah State University supported varsity ice

hockey programs. The researcher will be as objective as possible with the research; however, there could be some bias, based upon the researcher's prior experience and knowing how donor-based seating revenues can positively impact the bottom line. As athletics administrators constantly search for new revenue streams, realizing that loyal and committed fans may be impacted is critical.

While employed at Miami University as the senior director of development and executive associate athletic director at Miami University, the researcher's primary responsibilities included oversight of the athletics development office, including major gifts, annual giving (Red & White Club), and special events. The researcher was charged with effectively identifying, cultivating, soliciting, and stewarding current and prospective donors to ultimately support and enhance the student-athlete experience. The researcher had four direct reports, including one associate director/assistant athletic director, two assistant directors/major gift officers, and one development coordinator. The researcher also received support from an administrative associate and numerous student-workers. The researcher reported directly to the associate vice president for advancement, but also indirectly to the deputy director of athletics.

Deputy director of athletics, Jude Killy, produced a report that indicated Miami University Athletics raised \$4.3 million in overall cash giving during fiscal year 2013, which ranged from July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013 (Killy, personal communication, July 29, 2013). Included in this amount is \$708,000 that was generated from 1,233 Red & White Club members. The Red & White Club is the annual fundraising arm for Miami University Athletics. A minimum donation of \$100 annually is required to be an active member of the Red & White Club. For fiscal year 2014, which ranged from July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014, \$877,000 was raised from 1,440 Red & White Club members. Subsequently, Red & White Club annual fund

revenues increased by \$169,000 from fiscal year 2013 to fiscal year 2014. A portion of this 24 percent increase was directly attributed to the implementation of a donor-based seating model. Miami University Athletics is in the public phase for its \$80 million Graduating Champions Campaign, consisting of \$40 million in capital goals and \$40 million in scholarship goals. More than \$67 million has been raised since the silent phase began in December of 2012, which was the month of the announced hiring of the director of athletics, David Saylor.

### *Researcher Assumptions*

The researcher's professional background provided him the opportunity to work at a variety of institutions of higher education. The researcher has worked at institutions of all types, including public and private, commuter and residential, urban and rural, and large and small. The researcher has also worked at institutions that focus on research where others focus on undergraduate education. Although the researcher has been fortunate to work at a variety of institutions, the researcher has not worked at one that he would consider very similar to Miami University. Thus, just because something may have worked at one of the researcher's previous employers, he cannot assume that it will work at Miami University or other institutions.

My first assumption is that participants will express their displeasure that they had to participate in the new donor-based seating model at Miami University in order to maintain their season tickets. People often want the best deal possible when making a purchase for entertainment purposes. Although the donor-based seating model was implemented in an effort to increase revenues to further support student-athlete scholarships, many season ticket holders may not care about supporting student-athletes, but instead only care about "their" season tickets.

My second assumption is that a majority of ice hockey season ticket holders at Miami University will continue to pay for their season tickets and required donation in order to maintain

seating for Miami University Ice Hockey. The capacity of Steve “Coach” Cady Arena is 3,642, which includes approximately 600 standing room only tickets (Killy, personal communication, March 27, 2014). The majority of Miami University’s home contests are sold out and there is a season ticket wait list of approximately 600 accounts. Thus, despite many season ticket holders not liking the implementation of a donor-based seating model, most will participate in the program due to high demand and fear of losing seats in perpetuity.

My third assumption is that season ticket holders will continue to purchase ice hockey season tickets until two things happen: 1) The success level of the team declines, and 2) There is no longer demand for tickets. When and if these two things happen, the researcher would anticipate more people giving up season tickets because they likely will be accessible on an individual game basis or through mini-plans and other special athletics promotions.

My fourth assumption is that non-alumni will be more upset than alumni in regards to having to donate due to the implementation of a new donor-based seating model. The researcher believes a majority of alumni genuinely care about doing whatever is in the best interest of Miami University. Thus, if Miami University needs more support for ice hockey in order to remain competitive at the national level, the researcher is confident that alumni will be willing to support the program.

#### *Researcher Bias*

In regards to the researcher’s four assumptions, steps will be taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the data and to best prevent researcher bias from misinterpretation of findings. Merriam (1998) stated, “In producing a qualitative study, the researcher must also be sensitive to the biases inherent in this type of research” (p. 22). There are three biases that the researcher has regarding donor-based seating models. First, the researcher believes programs that aspire to



compete for championships and have demand for season tickets should have donor-based seating models in place. In today's world of college athletics, generating revenue is critical to countering the enormous expenses associated with operating a top program. Donor-based seating models can help generate revenues, often times large sums, which ultimately will help subsidize expenses and support and enhance the student-athlete experience.

My second bias is that everyone should have the opportunity to maintain any seating locations they may have under a donor-based seating model. However, this does not mean that the researcher believes prices should not increase. Whatever price points are established, the researcher believes season ticket holders should have the first right of refusal for purchasing the tickets. Season ticket holders often feel that a seat they have been in for a long period-of-time is actually their seat, when the reality is they are just leasing the seat for a specific amount of time. Despite the researcher's bias, providing season ticket holders access to the same seats may not be possible when new venues are built or current venues are substantially altered.

My third and final bias is that donor-based seating models should not change too often. These models should be priced fairly and effectively, all in an effort to drive demand and maximize revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. Pricing out customers and attempting to capitalize off them in a reactionary way will ultimately lead to the failure of a donor-based seating model when success levels are not meeting the expectations of the fan base. Miami University promised that required donation amounts would not change for at least three years.

Glesne (2006) described eight verification procedures often used in qualitative research. One of these verification procedures was "clarification of researcher bias – reflection upon your own subjectivity and how you will use and monitor it in your research." (p. 37). Glesne also

stated, “Continual alertness to your own biases and theoretical predispositions assists in producing more trustworthy interpretations,” (p. 167). Due to listening and not engaging in defensive responses over explanatory comments with the participants, the identified biases should not affect the researcher’s study. Patton used the phrase, “emphatic neutrality,” to suggest “there is middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding” (p. 50). Interviews will be transcribed verbatim, notes will be coded, and a peer debriefer will crosscheck with the researcher’s assumptions in an effort to ensure bias did not impact his study. In particular, the researcher will use extra precaution in the researcher’s first few interviews by employing peer debriefing and advisor review to check my performance in interviews and to make any adjustments needed for future interviews or to reword questions to get as much depth from participants as possible.

#### Data Collection

This section will provide an overview of the data collection process for the study. An introduction will transition into sub-sections that will include the setting, participants, instrument, gaining access, and procedure.

##### *Setting*

The study site for this qualitative case study is Miami University, a public four-year Midwestern institution with its main campus located in Oxford, Ohio. Undergraduate enrollment in Oxford, Ohio during the fall of 2015 was 16,387 while graduate student enrollment was 2,520 (Quick, 2016). Miami University also had 5,700 students enrolled at regional campuses in other nearby Ohio cities, including Hamilton, Middletown, and West Chester. Miami University even has a campus in the European country of Luxembourg, where approximately 230 students travel to study abroad for a semester annually.

According to its website, Miami University is one of the oldest public universities in the country as it was chartered in 1809. Its name reflects the history of the Native American tribe that once inhabited the Miami Valley region of Ohio. Miami is a residential university that philosophically focuses on teaching undergraduates with a liberal education core. The university has been able to achieve a top-tier national ranking by immersing students in both academic and co-curricular experiences. Its national rankings back-up this philosophy, as the university consistently ranks among the nation's top public universities for the quality of teaching and overall student experience. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Miami University second among the nation's top universities for its exceptionally strong commitment to undergraduate teaching (Recognition, 2014). *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*, *SmartMoney.com*, and *Forbes* also ranked Miami University high in regards to value and return on investment.

### *Participants*

The sample for this qualitative case study will be gathered from a report run through Miami University Athletics' NeuLion Ticketing System and imported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. This report will initially consist of all 2013-2014 ice hockey season ticket holders at Miami University, as well as their contact information (address, city, state, phone numbers, and e-mail), ticket type (paid or complimentary), and ticket quantity. Only individual accounts will be considered, thus corporate accounts will be removed. In addition, Miami University Athletics has a limited number of suites, club seats, and opera boxes; accounts with season tickets restricted to these areas will also be omitted. Only individual paid season ticket holders in the lower bowl will be considered the population for this study, as they may have been directly affected by the implementation of a new donor-based seating model. Individual paid season ticket holders will then be labeled in one of four groups: 1) Exceptions, 2) Retainer fee paid, 3)

Retainer fee not paid, and 4) Non-renewed. Gall et al. (2007) mentioned, “The essential criteria for selecting participants are that they have experienced the phenomenon being studied and share the researcher’s interest in understanding its nature and meanings” (p. 496). The donor-based seating model concept is new to a majority of ice hockey season ticket holders at Miami University, thus the interview process should produce relevant information that may be considered in future decision-making at Miami, as well as other colleges and universities with similar programs.

Miami University Ice Hockey plays its home contests at Steve “Coach” Cady Arena located inside the Goggin Ice Center. The team previously played at the “old” Goggin Ice Center until the 2006-2007 season. In August 2006, before the transition, Miami University Athletics made a commitment to a select group of ice hockey season ticket holders, the exceptions, that they would be guaranteed their same seating through the 2016-2017 season, assuming specific criteria were met. This group is identified as “Exceptions.” The criteria for exceptions included:

- 1) Twelve or more consecutive years of season tickets (five or more prior to the 2006-2007 season maintained each year through the 2013-2014 season),
- 2) The location of the seats for the 2013-2014 season are the same location as selected in 2006-2007,
- 3) Season tickets (and donations where applicable) were paid in full by the published payment deadlines each year, and
- 4) They received the initial correspondence from Miami University Athletics. It was also stated that the number of seats selected for the 2006-2007 season are the same number that can be maintained without being required to pay a seat retainer fee. Any additional seats added since the 2006-2007 season are not included as part of the exception.

Of the 399 individual paid season ticket accounts, 58 qualified for the exception. These season ticket holder accounts were exempt from a \$500 seat retainer fee that guaranteed ice

hockey season ticket holders their same season ticket locations through the 2016-2017 season. Non-exempt accounts had the opportunity to maintain their exact season ticket location if they paid a seat retainer fee of \$500 by December 31, 2013. This \$500 was per account and not per season ticket, and locked account holders into the same seats through 2016-2017 season if all appropriate donation and season ticket deadlines were met. This group is identified as “Retainer fee paid.” There were 122 accounts that completed this option, ultimately leaving 219 individual paid accounts to go through the reseating process. This group is identified as “Retainer fee not paid.” Although some season ticket holders may have been exempt from going through the reseating process, they are still responsible for paying for their season tickets annually at a date and price to be determined. In addition, a \$125 per-seat donation is due annually by June 30, and the amount will remain consistent through the 2016-2017 season. Exceptions accounts and season ticket holders who paid the seat retainer fee did not have to go through the reseating process, assuming they met the season ticket and per-seat donation deadlines, and were auto-allocated into their same seating locations. This allocation process was completed in July of 2014. Seventy-two accounts from the 2013-2014 season chose not to renew their ice hockey season tickets. This group is identified as “Non-renewed.”

All other season ticket holders participated in an allocation process where their point of allocation was determined by the Red & White Club’s loyalty points program. The Red & White Club established a loyalty points program to reward Miami University fans for their longstanding support of Miami University Athletics. Loyalty points are used to allocate ticket and parking locations, and potentially other membership benefits. Active Red & White Club members purchasing tickets and parking with the greatest number of loyalty points receive the highest priority.

Loyalty points can be earned in a variety of ways, including the following annual point categories: 1) Red & White Club gifts (per \$100), 2 points; 2) Consecutive years of Red & White Club membership (Awarded for each consecutive year of Red & White Club membership. If membership is not renewed for a year or more, the count starts over), 10 points per year; 3) Years as a season ticket holder (Awarded per sport for each year an individual has purchased at least one season ticket in football, men's or women's basketball, volleyball, or ice hockey), 2 points per year; 4) Restricted gifts (per \$100), 1 point. One-time bonus opportunities also exist, including receiving points for: 1) Miami University graduate (Any person who has earned a degree from Miami University, undergraduate or graduate), 20 points; 2) Former Miami University student-athlete (Any former varsity student-athlete on the Miami University campus in Oxford, Ohio), 15 points. The loyalty points program ranked all remaining ice hockey season ticket holders based on total loyalty points.

In mid-July 2014, the Miami University athletic ticket office and the athletic development office allocated accounts based on seating requests at season ticket holders' point of allocation. Account holders indicated either their seating request on their season ticket renewal form or they participated in a seat selection process where they were given a time to personally select their season tickets. Season ticket holders from the 2013-2014 season who participate in the interviews will be randomly selected from each group. Thus, the sample will consist of account holders who qualified for an exception, those who paid their seat retainer fee, those who chose not to pay their seat retainer fee, and those who chose not to renew.

#### *Instrument*

Patton (2002) highlighted that "the researcher is the instrument" in qualitative inquiry (p. 14). In this study, the researcher will use standardized open-ended questions to best gain an

understanding of ice hockey season ticket holders and their perceptions on the implementation of a donor-based seating model. Glesne (2006) stated, “Trustworthiness is likely to increase with time and the establishment of a trusting relationship with your respondent,” (p. 102). Although the interviews are likely to be sensitive to some participants, the researcher will go into the visits with an open mind and let them know how much their feedback will help Miami University Athletics in its future planning when there is consideration to implement another or a revised donor-based seating model, while also contributing to research in the field of intercollegiate athletics.

### *Gaining Access*

Permission has already been received from the deputy director of athletics at Miami University, Jude Killy, to interview season ticket holders as the sample for the study. These interviews will help Miami University Athletics in future planning as donor-based seating models are likely to continue due to the great need for increased revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. The Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) will be completed and up-to-date prior to collecting data from interviews with the sample of ice hockey season ticket holders. In addition, the researcher will seek approval from the dissertation committee and pass the prospectus component of the dissertation before proceeding with the study.

### *Procedure*

The population of individual paid ice hockey season ticket holders and all necessary data will be gathered from a report run through Miami University Athletics’ NeuLion Ticketing System and imported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The researcher will conduct face-to-face interviews with ice hockey season ticket holders and appropriate athletics administrators from

October 2016 through January 2017. Interviews shall last no longer than 45 minutes each and consist of no more than ten standardized open-ended questions. Glesne (2006) mentioned that an interview is between at least two persons, but other possibilities include one or more interviewers and one or more interviewees (p. 79). She further stated that interviewing more than one person at a time sometimes proves very useful (p.79). Ice hockey season ticket holder accounts may consist of one or two contacts (most often a husband and wife), but only the primary account holder will be asked to participate in the interview.

Prior to any interviews, the researcher will effectively communicate with all interview participants via phone conversations and/or e-mail. Of the 399 individual paid season ticket holder accounts, a random sample of 16 accounts will be selected to participate in the interview process, representing the four groups of exceptions, retainer fee paid, retainer fee not paid, and non-renewed. There is risk that some season ticket holders selected from the random sample will choose not to participate in the study. In these situations, random sampling will continue to take place until all 16 interviews are completed. All interview participants will be ensured confidentiality and their feedback will not be documented to their season ticket or donor accounts. In addition to conducting interviews with ice hockey season ticket holders, the researcher will also interview the director of athletics and deputy director of athletics at Miami University.

In order to ensure the validity of the study, the data will be transcribed verbatim and interview participants will have the opportunity to make any adjustments they deem necessary. Once approved, the data will then be coded to allow the researcher to organize information into groups. Merriam (1998) stated that coding enables the researcher to quickly locate specific data. Triangulation will then occur to compare the responses from the four types of individual 2013-



2014 season ticket holders: 1) Exceptions, 2) Retainer fee paid, 3) Retainer fee not paid, and 4) Non-renewed. Analyzing the differences in responses amongst these groups may provide information unique to each group.

### Research Questions

The researcher proposes a qualitative case study grounded in phenomenology to address two questions:

1. What perspectives on social identity and group membership characterize ice hockey season ticket holders' participation in donor-based seating at Miami University?
2. How do Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders describe their interest in supporting student-athletes and their college experience?

### Data Analysis

Glesne (2006) said, "Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned," (p. 147). She further stated that the researcher must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data that has been collected (p. 147). Creswell (2003) identified six steps to effectively construct a case study analysis: 1) Organize and prepare the data, 2) Read through all the data, 3) Begin detailed analysis with a coding process, 4) Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis, 5) Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative, and 6) Make an interpretation or meaning of the data. The researcher intends to follow Creswell's identified steps in an effort to complete the study (pp. 191-195).

### *Interview Analysis*

Creswell (2003) suggested researchers record information from interviews using handwritten notes, audiotaping, or videotaping. The researcher will take notes during the face-to-face interviews and record each interview utilizing an Apple i-phone. The researcher will record the interviews and attempt to transcribe verbatim within one week of the interview. Merriam (1998) stated that data analysis and collection should occur at the same time. These transcriptions will be sent electronically (or personally delivered or mailed if no e-mail address exists) to each interview participant for review to ensure the data was recorded accurately. Member checking, as defined by Gall et al. (2007), is providing participants the opportunity to review statements to ensure accuracy and completeness (p. 475). A timeframe will be given to them to confirm the transcription or offer suggestions to modify their responses. There is risk that participants could then decide to withdraw from the study.

### *Coding*

The data will be coded after the interview participants agree with the transcription. Patton (2002) defined coding as, “A method of data analysis in qualitative research in which segments of data are assigned to one or more categories” (p. 634). Categories will be formed for each question and the quantity may vary depending on the answers of the interviewees. Member checking and coding will help obtain qualitative validity. Patton defined validity as “the extent to which the research uses methods and procedures that ensure a high degree of research quality and rigor” (p. 657). The procedures in place will assist in conducting a valid study. Member checking also seeks to find participant affirmation of analysis and themes.

### *Triangulation*

Patton (2002) said, “Triangulation within a qualitative inquiry strategy can be attained by combining both interviewing and observations, mixing different types of purposeful samples, or examining how competing theoretical perspectives inform a particular analysis” (p. 248).

Responses from the four types of individual paid season ticket holders: 1) Exceptions, 2) Retainer fee paid, 3) Retainer fee not paid, and 4) Non-renewed, will be analyzed through triangulation. Analyzing the differences in responses amongst these groups may provide information that is different from analyzing the entire sample.

### *Peer Debriefing*

The final technique to ensure trustworthiness will be peer debriefing. Creswell (2003) informed researchers to use peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account. The researcher shall find a person who will review and ask questions about the qualitative study in an attempt to allow the study to make sense to others (p. 196). Dr. Kiernan Gordon, assistant professor of sport studies at the University of New Hampshire, will serve as the researcher’s debriefer. The researcher met Dr. Gordon while he was serving as a visiting assistant professor of sport studies at Miami University during the 2014 spring semester. Dr. Gordon received his doctoral degree in 2013 from Ohio State University.

### *Conclusion*

Intercollegiate athletics has become a multi-billion dollar business and the need for institutions to increase revenues has grown exponentially. Daly (2013) stated that all development officers have strategic responsibility for fundraising as part of their portfolio of responsibility, including major gift fundraising, low-level alumni and other giving, legacy giving, and campaigns. Another avenue many Division I athletics departments have capitalized

on is with the implementation of donor-based seating models, a form of two-part pricing. Donor-based seating models, however, require season ticket holders to make a donation in order to obtain or maintain season tickets, often causing them to become disgruntled. This qualitative case study focuses on the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University, a public Midwestern mid-major institution.

This chapter addressed the research design of the study, exploring the qualitative research and descriptive case study design. The individual interview design was then discussed, followed by the role of the researcher. The data collection was divided into the setting, participants, instrument, gaining access, and procedure. The setting described the plan for how the research will be conducted. The participants section described the people who will participate in the study. The instrument section addressed the trustworthiness of the study. In the gaining access section, steps that will be taken to appropriately conduct the study were outlined. The procedure section provides a step-by-step summary of the study. The research questions were then identified: 1) What perspectives on social identity and group membership characterize ice hockey season ticket holders' participation in donor-based seating at Miami University?, and 2) How do Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders describe their interest in supporting student-athletes and their college experience? A data analysis was then described, with segments including an interview analysis, coding, triangulation, and peer debriefing. Chapter IV will present the research findings, including detailed interviewee summaries. Themes within each group (exceptions, retainer fee paid, retainer fee not paid, and non-renewed) will also be identified. Lastly, Chapter V will discuss the results of the research findings and provide recommendations for athletics administrators when contemplating how to most effectively implement donor-based seating models at their institutions.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### Introduction

The research findings in this study focusing on donor-based seating were described in this chapter. Information on the 16 interviewed season ticket holders representing four different groups (exceptions, retainer fee paid, retainer fee not paid, and non-renewed) from the 2013-2014 Miami University ice hockey season was detailed and themes within each group were identified.

For qualitative interviews, sample selection does not need to be random, but I randomly selected interviewees from a feature in Microsoft Excel. This was very rewarding to me in my researcher and professional role, as I had only personally known three of the 16 interviewees. In addition, the confidentiality of the participants motivated them to be very candid, which should help Miami Athletics administrators in their future decision-making with donor-based seating. The results of this study will enable athletics administrators to learn more about fans and their willingness to support and enhance the student-athlete experience through donor-based seating, as well as assist with any future modifications to the model. College athletics departments, especially at the Division I level, are constantly charged to increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. The transparent communication associated with the implementation of donor-based seating models may increase revenues and better position programs for competitive success.

## Participants

I interviewed 16 Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders from the 2013-2014 season. Of these season ticket holders, only 11 were still season ticket holders during the 2016-2017 season while 13 were donors to Miami University Athletics. Thirteen of the interviewees were male while three were female. Twelve of the interviewees were Miami University graduates ranging from the Class of 1962 to the Class of 1999. Six of the interviewees lived Oxford, Ohio while the other ten lived within 80 miles from campus.

The 2013-2014 season ticket holders interviewed were randomly selected from each of the following groups: 1) Exceptions, 2) Retainer fee paid, 3) Retainer fee not paid, and 4) Non-renewed. The new donor-based seating model impacted each group differently, thus, opinions and themes may vary. The 58 season ticket holders who qualified for the exceptions group were exempt from a \$500 seat retainer fee and guaranteed their same seating through the 2016-2017 ice hockey season as long as they met the criteria outlined in Chapter III. For this group, three were male and three were graduates of Miami University. Two lived in Oxford, Ohio and all four were still ice hockey season ticket holders for the 2016-2017 season and donors to Miami University Athletics. I personally knew one of the interviewees prior to the interviews.

The retainer fee paid group consisted of 122 non-exempt accounts who had the opportunity to maintain their exact season ticket location if they paid a seat retainer fee of \$500 by December 31, 2013. This locked account holders into the same seats through 2016-2017 season if all appropriate donation and season ticket deadlines were met. For this group, all four were male graduates from Miami University. Only one lived in the city of Oxford, Ohio and all four were still ice hockey season ticket holders for the 2016-2017 season and donors to Miami University Athletics. I personally knew two of these interviewees prior to the interviews.

For the retainer fee not paid group, these 219 season ticket holders were either not exempt from paying the retainer fee or chose not to pay the retainer fee. They instead went through the reseating process and were only responsible for paying the appropriate season ticket and per seat donation costs. In this group, all four were male and three were Miami University graduates. One of the interviewees lived in Oxford, Ohio. Three of the interviewees were still ice hockey season ticket holders for the 2016-2017 season but all were donors to Miami University Athletics. I did not know any of these interviewees prior to the interviews.

For the non-renewed group, 72 season ticket holder accounts chose not to renew their ice hockey season tickets after the 2013-2014 season. Of those interviewed, two were male and two were Miami University graduates, while two lived in Oxford, Ohio. None of these interviewees have returned as season ticket holders; however, one continues to donate to Miami Athletics. I did not know any of these interviewees prior to the interviews.

Table 1:  
*Characteristics of the Interviewees*

Pseudonym	Group	Male or Female	Miami Graduate?	2016-2017 Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holder?	FY17 Donor?	Oxford, OH Resident?
Aiden	Retainer fee paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Benjamin	Non-renewed	Male	No	No	No	Yes
Elijah	Retainer fee not paid	Male	Yes	No	Yes	No
Emma	Exceptions	Female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethan	Retainer fee paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Isabella	Non-renewed	Female	Yes	No	Yes	No
Jackson	Retainer fee not paid	Male	No	Yes	Yes	No
Jacob	Retainer fee not paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
James	Retainer fee not paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liam	Exceptions	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Logan	Non-renewed	Male	No	No	No	No
Lucas	Retainer fee paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Mason	Exceptions	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Noah	Exceptions	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Oliver	Retainer fee paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Olivia	Non-renewed	Female	Yes	No	No	Yes

The participant narratives are organized into four sections: 1) Exceptions, 2) Retainer fee paid, 3) Retainer fee not paid, and 4) Non-renewed. Each section provides a summary of each interview within the group and concludes with a discussion of themes that emerged. To prevent identifying information from being used in this study, pseudonyms are used for each ice hockey season ticket holder interviewee.

### Exceptions

Table 2:  
*Characteristics of the Exceptions Interviewees*

Pseudonym	Group	Male or Female	Miami Graduate?	2016-2017 Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holder?	FY17 Donor?	Oxford, OH Resident?
Emma	Exceptions	Female	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liam	Exceptions	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Mason	Exceptions	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Noah	Exceptions	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

#### *Emma*

Emma demonstrates passion and energy when describing her affiliation with Miami ice hockey. Her age and health have created barriers for her to continue to attend games, yet she still finds ways to support the program. Emma does not recall her earliest memory of Miami ice hockey, as she had been attending games and keeping stats for her own personal leisure well before she became a season ticket holder. Her greatest memory of Miami ice hockey was attending the two Frozen Fours the RedHawks reached in 2009 and 2010. At the 2009 Frozen Four in Washington, D.C., Emma paid “a small fortune” for tickets that were in a box with fans from Boston, Massachusetts. This was something she had never experienced and enjoyed the



company of avid ice hockey fans, even though they were cheering for Miami's opponent in the finals, Boston University. Emma did not make a lot of money; however, the proud fan in her would not let her miss this rare opportunity.

Emma has held season tickets for more than twenty years. An experience of going to a game at the old Goggin Ice Center (Miami's home ice arena until the new facility was built in 2007) prompted her to request season tickets. Miami was hosting the University of Michigan and the line to get in was all the way into the street. Emma had enough and made the decision to purchase season tickets. Emma keeps renewing her tickets and said, "It's just the love of hockey, I guess. Which is just stupid. I'm paying for a ticket and shouldn't be because I'm not getting to the games." Although now she is physically unable to attend games, she has a strong relationship with members of the Blue Line Club, a support group for Miami ice hockey, and she does not want to let them down.

After Miami instituted a donor-based seating model for ice hockey season tickets, Emma said she "hated it." "I don't think it is right," she said. In fact, the \$500 seat retainer fee to keep season tickets in the same location, made her "feel like they're putting a gun to your head." If it were not for the fee exemption, Emma would have had to "quit." Emma said that other season ticket holders that she knew hated it too, adding that even some very loyal fans who had been there for decades decided to quit.

When describing what would influence her decision to renew, Emma described in more detail that she physically cannot attend, explaining that she had "already quit" because she cannot get into the seats and has trouble walking. Emma again brought up the \$500 seat retainer fee and expressed her displeasure. Clearly, Emma had frustrations with the donor-based seating model. However, her passion for the program outweighed these frustrations.

Emma did not know what Miami Athletics administrators could do to increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. “You know that it’s going to go up because everything else goes up,” she said. Emma then referenced the \$500 seat retainer fee again and how “ridiculous” she thought it was. Emma stressed there was not anything that could be done for her to get more philanthropically involved with Miami University because she revealed that she was on a fixed income. Emma described examples of how other schools keep their fans involved, including drawings/raffles that help make them feel more a part of the program. The experience of being a fan and season ticket holder was important to Emma. Although she was nearly at a breaking point on whether or not she could afford to renew her season tickets, the value of her investment to herself and the team kept her annual investment alive.

#### *Noah*

Noah grew up around ice hockey and as a Miami University student in the late 1970’s, he enjoyed watching the transition of the ice hockey team from a club sport to a varsity program. He recounted how Miami was great as a club sport but “took a hit” as a varsity team, especially when they joined the Central Collegiate Hockey Association (CCHA). Despite the initial struggles, Noah’s greatest memory was when Miami upset the University of Michigan in its early days as a varsity program.

Noah became a season ticket holder when his work schedule changed enough so that he could actually attend the games. He added that his kids were playing ice hockey, which helped in the decision-making. Noah’s decision-making for him renewing his ice hockey season tickets was two-fold. “The desire to watch hockey and the desire to support the program,” he stated. When describing what he enjoys most about being a season ticket holder, Noah said just being

part of the program and having that history. Winning is important to Noah, but he is not a fan who gets warped out of shape when the team loses. He sees the value of his investment and believes that his support helps provide opportunities for Miami student-athletes.

As Noah described his feelings when Miami Athletics implemented its donor-based seating model for ice hockey, he admitted he was “probably a little bit confused; a little bit taken aback.” He asked himself, “What are they thinking?” Noah continued, “Hockey is the only successful sport they’ve got right now and they’re doing their best to alienate people there.” He added that other season ticket holders were much more hostile than he was after the model was announced. Although he stressed the communication from the athletics department could have been better, Noah did not discount the need of donor-based seating to better position the program for success.

When offering suggestions for Miami Athletics administrators in their decision-making to increase revenues, he explained, “I think Miami has to address things. I think Miami is small enough or maybe it’s still unique enough that the more personal approach, I think, works.” He added, “I think the one thing that hasn’t helped is you’ve extracted more money from people that were essentially loyal supporters.” Noah then mentioned that the biggest complaint he hears is that these supporters do not see much difference, citing there is not any more engagement.

Noah requires a personal approach to consider getting more philanthropically involved with Miami Athletics. “It’s got to be that personal approach. It’s got to be somebody that really comes, that addresses the issue, that explains the need and the desire.” He said this was especially important because all the charities that he regularly supports continue to solicit him for more money. Noah gave examples of some personal approaches that the program incorporated in the past, highlighting how the former student-athletes were divided up for Thanksgiving because

they were stuck in Oxford, Ohio. This enabled him and other fans to build relationships with the players. Referencing the personal impact, “I think that’s the one thing that’s lost and in my opinion, at least for me, the only way you’re going to get more out of it is to bring back that in some semblance.”

Noah understands the need for donor-based seating and had the entire program explained to him by a Miami Athletics administrator. Still, he thinks Miami ice hockey lost something when they went from the old Goggin Ice Center to the new Goggin Ice Center. He talked about how season ticket holders at the old Goggin Ice Center had known each other for years, sat together, and had the same cheers. “I understand it probably had to be done, but I think it probably could have been geared up a little bit better,” he shared. Noah added that more information is better and people want to see where the dollars are going. Despite Noah not being completely on board with the implementation of donor-based seating at Miami University, he made it clear how important transparency is for these types of changes that impact so many people.

### *Liam*

Liam is a die-hard Miami Athletics fan, attending nearly every home sport. He saw an article in the newspaper in 1978 or 1979 that Miami was going to start an ice hockey team and thought it was a joke because there was very little interest in the sport throughout Ohio. From humble beginnings to when Miami defeated the University of Michigan in double overtime in the regional final at Fort Wayne, Indiana during the 2009-2010 season, Liam has always been part of the program’s journey as a varsity program. He described how Miami ice hockey had a great team in the early 1990’s, being ranked second or third in the nation, and that there were times where he could not get a seat so he snuck in on occasion. The team eventually made it to

the NCAA Tournament and all the excitement prompted him to purchase season tickets and he has been a season ticket holder ever since.

Liam has modified the number of ice hockey season tickets from three to two in recent years, citing that Miami does not allow the selling of tickets outside the arena. He often would have an extra ticket or two that he could not get rid of, prompting him to “get out of the ticket scalping business.” Liam enjoys the social occasion of being a season ticket holder. He usually goes out to eat with friends before the game and enjoys the friends that he sits with. “It’s one sport which Miami has a chance to someday win a national championship,” he noted.

When describing his feelings regarding the implementation of a donor-based seating model for Miami ice hockey, Liam revealed, “I’m not eager to give out more money, but I’ve always wanted Miami to be competitive at a national level in hockey.” He was in favor of the model since moving to the NCHC would require additional resources for travel and other program enhancements. In fact, Liam revealed that most of his friends are Miami graduates and they were in favor of donor-based seating. He added that he hears “more grumbling” from season ticket holders who are not Miami alumni. Liam also shared that as long as there is a “long and lengthy” season ticket wait list that it is okay to have donor-based seating.

Liam revealed that if the donor-based seating requirement ever exceeded his total annual donation to Miami Athletics, he would have to think about whether or not to renew. He said that Miami Athletics must get more money out of football and men’s basketball as opportunities to increase revenues. Liam added that this means there has to be a better product in these sports. “I don’t see how we can get much more out of hockey,” referencing that he heard the season ticket wait list is nearly exhausted. He shared that because of shrinking wait list, if the donor-based seating requirement was raised too much, there likely will not be enough season ticket holders to

fill the arena. Liam talked about the team's recent struggles, specifically being on the verge of not making the 2017 NCAA tournament for the third time in four years after making it eight years in a row, as another reason not to raise donor-based seating requirements in the near future.

Liam has been donating the same amount of money for a number of years, he said, but mentioned that he has decreased season tickets in all sports for which he purchases. He said that more success in football and men's basketball might lead him to get more philanthropically involved. Liam relayed that similar to ice hockey, he is concerned about the direction of the men's and women's basketball programs. He travels more than an hour to campus for nearly every ice hockey, football, men's basketball, women's basketball, and volleyball game. Winning is very important to him, but the pride he has in his alma mater keeps him coming back to campus to support even the struggling programs.

### *Mason*

Mason's earliest memory of Miami ice hockey came more than 27 years ago, after his sons asked to see an ice hockey game. Because he and his wife were "Miami Mergers (at Miami University, an alumna/alumnus becomes a Miami Merger when he/she marries another alumna/alumnus)," they decided to attend a Miami ice hockey game instead of a professional one. They fell in love with it and went for a year just trying to buy individual game tickets. The family entertainment value was important to Mason, as they were able to witness countless wonderful Miami moments. When describing his greatest memory and one of the greatest games he had ever seen, similar to Noah, Mason talked about when Miami beat the University of Michigan in the old Goggin Ice Center. "The old Goggin sound had movement to it. Sound was more than sound; it just shook the place," he described.

Wanting to become a season ticket holder instead of purchasing individual game tickets, Mason had a conversation with a member of the Miami University Board of Trustees who encouraged him to donate to the athletics department and get on the wait list. Mason did this and was able to purchase two season tickets for the following season. Later, his season tickets climbed from two to four to six, enabling the entire family to be able to enjoy Miami ice hockey together. Mason offered three things that drive his decision-making on whether or not to renew his ice hockey season tickets, including whether or not they are still enjoying it, whether or not the team is winning, and the price. When he explained what he enjoyed most about being a season ticket holder, he said the overall enjoyment and the ability to go and know he has a seat. “It’s an expensive luxury, but I choose to do it,” he said.

Mason was not happy about the implementation of donor-based seating for Miami ice hockey. He realized other universities were doing this to raise money, but he had a problem with Miami doing it. He said, “Greed entered the picture here for money.” Mason was led to believe that every ice hockey student-athlete had an endowed scholarship and the arena was paid for, so he was trying to figure out why Miami needed the money. Mason further communicated, “My impression was that they’re trying to be like the big boys, like Ohio State, that commands sufficient leverage to squeeze money out of people for tickets and has done that for years. I didn’t feel Miami was at that level.” He continued by talking about how Miami had always been a proponent of the family concept, and that was important to him. He thought the donor-based seating model countered this quality. Mason also revealed that had he not been exempt from paying the seat retainer fee he would not have renewed. He stated that other season ticket holders were not happy about the donor-based seating model, sharing that they were not in a position to

afford the required donation. He said he knew people who chose not to renew, including one couple who felt like they were being “blackmailed.”

The price of donor-based seating will influence Mason’s decision to renew whenever the costs increase. When describing how Miami Athletics could increase revenues, he stated that the administration needs to figure out how to get the football and men’s basketball programs to be more self-supportive. “It seems like they’re squeezing money to run other things,” he concluded. Mason said he did not know what would lead him to get more philanthropically involved with Miami Athletics, citing that he is involved with a number of philanthropic charities.

Mason commutes nearly an hour each way to support Miami ice hockey. It is an outlet that has provided his family with many great memories, but he clearly was frustrated with the donor-based seating model. Some information he had was inaccurate, and he appreciated learning more about how the program worked and why it was important. Personal communication is so critical when implementing these types of programs and may be the difference in whether or not a season ticket holder chooses to renew in the future.

#### *Exceptions Major Themes*

Three major themes emerged from the exceptions group of 2013-2014 Miami ice hockey season ticket holders. At least three of the interviewees shared the following:

- 1) Big games matter
- 2) Fans enjoy the games and social occasion
- 3) People express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating

Three season ticket holders from the exceptions group, Mason, Liam, and Noah, described that their greatest Miami ice hockey memory was playing against and beating the University of Michigan. Whether it was beating them for the first time, beating them when they



were ranked number one, or beating them in the NCAA regional final, games against the University of Michigan created positive memories for these season ticket holders. Emma, another season ticket holder in the exceptions group, said the national championship game during the 2008-2009 season was her greatest memory. Although Miami lost, this was a positive memory for her. Season ticket holders may be more motivated to give due to the excitement of games against big-named opponents, rivals, or meaningful games. Big games matter was the first theme for the exceptions group.

People enjoy the thrill of victory and success. One of the most beautiful things about sports is the competitive nature of both participants and fans. In college athletics, student-athletes pour their hearts out in the competitive venues to win games in pursuit of championships. Winning a big game against a rival or a big-named opponent creates unforgettable memories. Student-athletes and fans remember last second shots and goals, especially when they come out on top. Miami ice hockey fans enjoyed playing against and beating the University of Michigan. They enjoyed playing against the University of Notre Dame, Ohio State University, and Michigan State University. Although the team has transitioned from the CCHA to the more competitive NCHC, fans remember playing brand name opponents more frequently. Big games matter and may play a role in sales, both for individual games and season tickets.

The second theme was that fans enjoy the games and social occasion that comes with being an ice hockey season ticket holder. Mason, Liam, and Emma described how much they liked going to games as what they enjoyed most about being a season ticket holder for Miami ice hockey. More specifically, Liam talked about the social occasion and the people he sat around. Miami ice hockey games can be fun, which is so important when the team may not be winning as

much as everyone would like. In the literature review, entertainment was a motive for donor giving according to Gladden et al. (2004).

In the literature review, one of the themes described was social identity and group membership. As Tajfel and Turner (1979) established the social identity theory during the 1970's, they explained that people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories. Season ticket holders is a category for which people associate themselves, and it is crucial for athletics administrators to pay attention to this group. Miami ice hockey season ticket holders enjoyed the social occasion and joy that comes from attending games. As Hall, Schneider, and Nygren (1970) discussed, the goals of the organization and those of individuals become increasingly integrated and congruent. Thus, the social mobility that Tajfel and Turner (1986) described is so critical. They shared that individuals live in a flexible and permeable society, thus, it is possible for season ticket holders to move into another group where they feel more appreciated.

Watching ice hockey in-person is one of the more entertaining college sports. This was made clear when interviewing Miami ice hockey season ticket holders. These season ticket holders may become friends with others sitting around them. The game provides them an avenue to have something in common both during competition and away from the venue. An exciting game with an enthusiastic student section, engaging band, and memorable promotions gives season ticket holders something to talk about amongst each other and share similar memories. Some season ticket holders may have dinner before the game together or enjoy a celebratory drink after a victory. Others may have a relationship where they can share tickets when one cannot attend. Like-minded people are more likely to associate with one another, and Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders demonstrate this.

The third theme was that people express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating. Season ticket holders in the exceptions group are not fans of the donor-based seating model. Strong responses such as, “hated it,” “trying to alienate people,” “greed,” “financially squeezed out,” “countered family concept,” “taken aback,” “confused,” “didn’t think it was right,” and “gun to your head” were responses offered by Mason, Noah, and Emma. They said that other season ticket holders were not happy about the model and it was quite hostile, adding that people “hated it,” “couldn’t afford it,” or “felt like they were being blackmailed.” Mason, Noah, Emma, and others they knew were not proponents of the donor-based seating model and expressed undesirable feelings toward its implementation.

It is human nature to not want to pay more money for something. In addition, change is never easy. Although donor-based seating models are common revenue generation tools across college athletics departments, it is highly unlikely that season ticket holders will ever be fans of them. College athletics departments are constantly looking for creative ways to increase revenues. Where demand exists, donor-based seating models provide a platform for them to accomplish this. However, season ticket holders will always have the opportunity to let their tickets lapse. Communication is key for athletics administrators and consistently educating season ticket holders on the importance of donor-based seating models for the department’s operational budget is imperative. Season ticket holders will be more likely to embrace the added cost as part of the overall cost to attend when they feel like the athletics department is being transparent with its needs and how these resources will be utilized.

The exceptions group was exempt from paying a \$500 seat retainer fee when the new donor-based seating model was announced. Had this group not met the requirements for exemption, it would have been interesting to see whether or not they would have chosen to

renew their season tickets and pay the seat retainer fee, renew their season tickets but not pay the seat retainer fee, or not renew. In its future adjustments to the donor-based seating model for ice hockey, the Miami Athletics administration does not anticipate having an exceptions group as this was only promised for the first ten years after the new Goggin Ice Center was built. With that said, it is also undecided if there will be a seat retainer fee for any future reseating of Steve “Coach” Cady Arena. If a seat retainer fee is part of any future donor-based seating model revisions, the decision will need to be made about how much this fee will be and whether or not it is per account or per season ticket. When Miami Athletics introduced the donor-based seating model, they communicated that adjustments would not be made for a minimum of three years. Thus, the first year that an adjustment in donation requirements for the seat retainer fee or per seat donation would not have been until the 2017-2018 ice hockey season. During the spring of 2016, however, Miami Athletics messaged to ice hockey season ticket holders that no adjustments would be made to the model until at least the 2018-2019 season.

#### Retainer Fee Paid

Table 3:  
*Characteristics of the Retainer Fee Paid Interviewees*

Pseudonym	Group	Male or Female	Miami Graduate?	2016-2017 Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holder?	FY17 Donor?	Oxford, OH Resident?
Aiden	Retainer fee paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ethan	Retainer fee paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Lucas	Retainer fee paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Oliver	Retainer fee paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

#### *Aiden*

Aiden lived in the same dormitory as players on the Miami University club ice hockey team in the late 1970’s. College provided Aiden his first experience around ice hockey. In fact,

he said he nearly froze to death hitchhiking to one of the team's games at an open-aiored rink in Hamilton, Ohio. The university constructed the old Goggin Ice Center right outside of his dorm, which enabled him to watch practices and become friends with members of the team (many of whom he is still friends with today). Aiden mentioned that his greatest memory was when the new Goggin Ice Center opened in 2007. He highlighted some big wins the program had over the University of Notre Dame and the University of Michigan. Aiden said playing for the national championship in Washington, D.C. in 2009 would have been the greatest memory had it not been for losing in the last minute.

After he retired from his first career, Aiden's family moved to Oxford, Ohio. Being a "big sports guy," he bought season tickets to football, men's basketball, and ice hockey. When describing why he chooses to purchase ice hockey season tickets, Aiden remarked, "It's a great way to invite friends or recruit, build relationships, or even take students. I've used them multiple ways over the years." Aiden added that ice hockey is the only program that plays at the competitive level that football and men's basketball did when he was a student in the 1970's. Success is important to Aiden, as he has maintained his season tickets for ice hockey due to the program's momentum. However, due to the lack of success in football and men's basketball, he recently let his season tickets for these sports lapse. In addition to a winning program keeping him purchasing season tickets, Aiden said it is easy for him to get to the games, his grandson plays ice hockey and enjoys watching the sport, and the he appreciates the relationships he has with all his old ice hockey friends. Aiden concluded that he does not think of it much from a cost point of view. When describing what he enjoys most about being a season ticket holder, he declared that he has the ability to go to as many games as he wants to attend, he knows whom he is sitting with, and he feels like he is part of the community.

Aiden knew all the work that went into figuring out the original seating plan and he felt like Miami Athletics underpriced the seating early. When describing his feelings on the implementation of donor-based seating for Miami ice hockey, Aiden shared, “This is the natural evolution of supply and demand and ice hockey is one sport where Miami Athletics can extract money, so it wasn’t a big surprise.” The increase helped lead to his decision to drop his football season tickets, which in the end made it “kind of a wash.” Aiden revealed that he is in with the old crowd in Oxford, Ohio and there was a lot of grumbling. He added, though, that he did not see people not buy tickets because of it. “I guess the roar was bigger than the bite,” he said.

Aiden plans to move south when he retires again in the next five years, and this, not cost, would play a role on whether or not he will renew his ice hockey season tickets. He might consider sharing them, but then added he can always get into the building when he comes back. “It will likely be an expense I don’t need,” he revealed. “As long as I’m here, within reason, I’m probably going to buy season tickets,” Aiden added.” He continued, “I think it’s pretty good value compared to what you pay for most entertainment things.” Aiden concluded, “It’s expensive to go to sports. I don’t see Miami, even with the added cost, being that far out of line.”

When suggesting what Miami Athletics administrators can do to increase revenues, Aiden mentioned that it is not easy to get people to come to Oxford, Ohio, thus he quipped that he would build new highways. Knowing that this solution is not likely, he added, “Part of it is winning; that’s the easiest solution.” Aiden talked about big-named student-athletes like Ben Roethlisberger in football and brand named ice hockey opponents like the University of Michigan, the University of Notre Dame, and Ohio State University as being important components for increasing revenues. He urged Miami Athletics administrators to think carefully when raising prices or modifying the donor-based seating model. “I think you want to be careful

to not overtax the loyal fans you got because they have been coming so you've got to keep that in balance. I think you also want to not exclude the students from being there like I see at some schools, where sporting events are not for students, they're for alumni, donors, and people with money."

The likelihood of Aiden getting more philanthropically involved is small. He counts what he has done the past 13 years as a season ticket holder as his contribution. He also expressed that he would be more likely to give to the academic side before athletics. To conclude, Aiden thinks donor-based seating is fine, citing supply and demand. He added, "I think it's just a matter of communicating and being able to project so people can plan for it and expect it by giving people flexible ways to pay." He mentioned that the Blue Line Club does "a lot of good activities in terms of allowing folks to engage with students." Aiden concluded by sharing how memorable senior night is for fans as they get to learn about their majors and career aspirations.

### *Ethan*

Ethan's earliest memory of Miami ice hockey was as a student-athlete on the club ice hockey team in 1966. His greatest memory was when Miami played for the national championship during the 2008-2009 season in Washington, D.C. Ethan first became an ice hockey season ticket holder in the old Goggin Ice Center when he learned that the new Goggin Ice Center was going to be built. Mentioning that he was close to retirement, Ethan knew he would be able to come to more games, thus, he made the decision to go ahead and buy season tickets. Ethan plans to continue to buy season tickets and would only stop when he does not have the ability to drive to the games any longer. Describing what he enjoys most about being a season ticket holder, he said that he loves his seats, loves the camaraderie of those sitting around him, and enjoys just being part of the whole sport at Miami University.

Ethan was not personally bothered by the implementation of donor-based seating for Miami ice hockey, mentioning that he did not have to pay more than he was already donating. When describing how other season ticket holders felt, he said he thought some were upset. However, Ethan said those he talked to, though surprised, all recognized the need to generate additional revenue. “The majority of them, they may have grouched a little bit, but they continued to get their season tickets and pay the additional fee.” As a member of the Blue Line Club, Ethan knew board members voiced concerns about the implementation of donor-based seating, primarily because they were unsure if they would see a reduction in membership. He said they did not see a decrease and concluded that their membership is directly correlated to the program’s competitive success. “Memberships increased when the team played well and decreased when the team struggled or because of members dying off,” Ethan stated.

The amount of any future increases in donor-based seating costs would influence Ethan’s decision to renew. If substantial, he said he would then have to think about it, but otherwise, it would not be a problem. Ethan did not have any suggestions for Miami Athletics administrators on how to increase revenues, adding that donor-based seating was a great way to help. Unique experiences are important to Ethan, as he cited an experience he had at a Miami University football game at Army (West Point). Ethan mentioned that he stayed at the team hotel, enjoyed a reception the night before the game, had lunch at the stadium, watched the game, and then was transferred back to the team hotel. He said more opportunities like this would help motivate him to get more philanthropically involved.

### *Oliver*

Oliver’s earliest memories of Miami University ice hockey was when they started the program, built the old Goggin Ice Center, and went into the CCHA. His greatest memory was



going to the Frozen Four with his grandchildren. Regarding when he first purchased ice hockey season tickets, Oliver mentioned that he had tickets early on but let them lapse as life got in the way. He picked them up again when the new Goggin Ice Center was built. Oliver did not grow up around ice hockey, so his first experience around the sport was watching it in Oxford, Ohio. “It seemed like an interesting sport and it was fun,” he said. When describing what drives his decision-making on whether or not to renew his season tickets, Oliver said it depends on everything, including funds available and enjoyment. “I just enjoy watching the progress and the development of the team,” he explained on what he enjoys most about being a season ticket holder. “And I found it fascinating to get to meet some of the ice hockey players,” he added.

“I was somewhat surprised,” Oliver said when he learned that Miami Athletics was implementing a donor-based seating model for ice hockey. Despite this, he thought it was a logical development, citing ice hockey’s success and football and men’s basketball’s decline. He offered a variety of quotes from season ticket holders he knew, including: 1) “Oh God, they’re dumping on me because I’ve been a follower ever since this program started.” 2) “Why are they coming after me?” 3) “Well this is interesting. I don’t know if I’m going to do it or not.” 4) “Well I can understand this.” Oliver said he thought the range of emotions covered about every aspect and he knew people who gave up their season tickets while others continued to renew.

Oliver indicated health and the ability to attend would influence his decision to renew when there is an increase in donor-based seating requirements. Financially, he can afford an increase. He added, “I think it depends how my interest is. And everybody loves a winner. So as long as they keep putting on a good show, they’re more likely to be followed.” In regards to how Miami Athletics administrators can generate more revenue, Oliver said communication is the main thing. “I think people who are loyal are willing to give if they have the means and as long

as they know where it is going,” he shared. Oliver heard from some people that they were not going to pay the extra fee and renew their ice hockey season tickets, but instead would invest in other sports. He again referenced communication and the need to know what is going on as being important.

Philanthropy is important to Oliver, and he is getting to the point where he is eventually going to retire. Although he is not sure where his philanthropic support will be directed, he mentioned that he has to look out for his family, including his grandchildren who will soon be attending college. Oliver admitted, “I would certainly enjoy giving money away if it were there. But things are quite uncertain right now.” Oliver talked about the student-athlete experience and how he has been able to get to know a number of student-athletes over the years. He said he enjoys meeting the ice hockey players, sharing that they are pretty well driven and good kids. Oliver also mentioned how much he enjoys meeting Miami coaches and “figuring out where they’re coming from.”

### *Lucas*

When Lucas was in high school in the early 1990’s, his older sister was a student at Miami University and she told him he should attend an ice hockey game because they were so much fun. He went to a couple games at the old Goggin Ice Center and was hooked. Lucas’ greatest memory was in 1993 when he waited in line for six hours to get into the game against the University of Michigan. “That was the greatest Miami Athletic experience ever,” he said.

Prior to being a season ticket holder, Lucas purchased tickets “here and there,” yet revealed that it was difficult because of the high demand and a limited number of seats. He started to attend more when his dad purchased season tickets. Then when the new Goggin Ice Center opened, he made the decision to personally get season tickets. When referencing what

drives him to renew, Lucas said that with a growing family, the financial aspect would be the deciding factor. “Honestly, at this point, it’s now whether or not I can I afford it,” he admitted. “It’s not whether we win or lose. I mean, at the end of the day, it’s Miami and I’ll always be a Miami fan.” Seating location is what Lucas enjoys most about being a season ticket holder, citing that his seats are right on the glass. “My kids really like that because they’re right next to the RedHawk bench and the players are fantastic with how they interact with kids,” he revealed.

Lucas was skeptical about the implementation of the donor-based seating model because he did not want to pay any more money than he had to, given the big investment he makes just for the season tickets. He said he asks himself at times, “Do we really need this?” referencing that attendance appears down and it seems like it is easier to get tickets now. Lucas only knew of one season ticket holder who dropped because of the donation requirement, but he did not hear what other season ticket holders thought about the new model. He did share, however, that those who used to sit around him are no longer there, which he interpreted as they dropped their season tickets or they did not pay the seat retainer fee and chose to relocate.

Responding to what would influence his decision to renew when season tickets and/or donor-based seating costs increase, Lucas mentioned that ticket price per game is not a factor because he has people that split the ticket cost with him. However, he revealed that the yearly donation would be the biggest factor. Lucas said that he did not know if there was a way to increase revenues for Miami ice hockey. He mentioned that he feels like the men’s basketball team has been forgotten about, and he had felt that way about football, but does not any longer after the team found success at the end of the 2016 season. “It helps when you start winning games,” he said.

Lucas gives as much as he can philanthropically and would love to help more than he does, but revealed he just cannot afford to do so. To conclude the interview, I asked him if he had anything else to share and he offered the idea of instead of focusing on donor-based seating, have ice hockey season ticket holders purchase tickets for men's basketball or football. He described that offering this tangible opportunity may increase attendance for all the sports. Lucas ended the interview by saying, "There has to be a way to generate more. It seems like we're focusing on maximizing the revenue for the people we have instead of trying to bring in more people."

#### *Retainer Fee Paid Major Themes*

Four major themes emerged from the retainer fee paid group of 2013-2014 Miami ice hockey season ticket holders. At least three of the interviewees shared the following:

- 1) Big games matter
- 2) Seat location is important
- 3) People express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating
- 4) Affordability and price increases play a role in renewal decisions

Similar to the exceptions group, big games matter emerged as a major theme with all interviewees in the retainer fee paid group. This group specifically mentioned the national championship game, Frozen Four, and the games against the University of Michigan. Oliver talked about experiencing the Frozen Four with his kids. These games created everlasting memories for Miami ice hockey season ticket holders in the retainer fee paid group. Additional commentary about beating the University of Michigan and playing in the national championship game was provided in the big games matter theme for the exceptions group.

A second major theme for the retainer fee paid group was that seat location is important. When asked about what they enjoy most about being a Miami ice hockey season ticket holder, Aiden, Lucas, and Ethan all talked about how they loved their seats. Aiden and Ethan mentioned how they enjoyed sitting with the people around them and just being part of the sport. Fans enjoy the games and social occasion was a theme that emerged from the exceptions group and correlated with the social identity theory and group membership theme from the literature review. Seat location is important is another theme that identifies with the literature review's social identity theory and group membership theme. Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) stated, "People have a tendency to emphasize group cohesiveness when the value of the group is threatened."

Season ticket holders fall in love with their seats and this is one reason why they choose to renew them on an annual basis. Any program or cost increase that may be introduced that would cause them to have to relocate may not be well accepted, especially if there is risk to be moved to a location they perceive to be worse. Season ticket holders build camaraderie with others sitting around them. They invest in their seats and as Isabella from the non-renewed group, stated she felt like she owned them (much like one owns a house and buys into a particular neighborhood with certain neighbors).

In the exceptions group, donor-based seating was not popular with people they knew. Similarly, this major theme also emerged from the retainer fee paid group when describing how other season ticket holders felt after the donor-based seating model was announced. Comments like "thought they were picked on," "didn't know if they'd renew," "some grudgingly accepted it," "surprised," and "there was a lot of grumbling" were relayed by Aiden, Ethan, and Oliver. Oliver also communicated that the "roar was bigger than the bite," referencing that he did not

notice anyone drop their tickets. Additional commentary about cost and principle was provided in the people express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating theme for the exceptions group.

The fourth and final major theme that emerged from the retainer fee paid group was affordability and price increases play a role in renewal decisions. Lucas, Ethan, and Oliver all mentioned this in response to what would influence their decision to renew when season tickets and/or donor-based seating costs increase. They specifically shared affordability, annual donation cost, and amount of the increase as factors when deciding to renew. In the literature review, Tsiotsou (2007) indicated that income might be an important factor when determining donor behavior.

In today's world, people have so many entertainment options inside and outside of their home. Technology has made it easy for consumers to play or shop on mobile phones, watch ultra-high-definition movies, and navigate the internet at incredible speeds. They can find deals for entertainment options through websites like Groupon and Living Social, or find a ticket for a sporting event on market driven websites like StubHub or eBay. Miami University is located nearly one-hour from its largest alumni base, Cincinnati, Ohio. People in Cincinnati, Ohio have access to multiple entertainment options. Providing a high-valued product and experience at an affordable price should consistently be part of Miami Athletics administrators' discussions. With that said, budgets are built to provide student-athletes the greatest experience possible and position them to compete for championships. Resources matter for both the athletics department and the consumer, thus strategic pricing of venues may be the difference in maximizing attendance and revenues.

Ice hockey season ticket holders in the retainer fee paid group chose to pay a \$500 per account seat retainer fee for the right to maintain their same season ticket location after the donor-based seating model was introduced. In addition to the seat retainer fee, season ticket holders were responsible for a \$125 per seat donation. When changes do occur, Miami Athletics administrators will have to decide whether or not to require a seat retainer fee, and if so, determine if it is per account or per seat. The athletics administrators will also have to decide how to modify per seat donation requirements, and whether or not there will be various price points depending on seating location and/or demand. Currently, all public season tickets in the lower bowl of Steve “Coach” Cady arena require a \$125 per seat donation in addition to the cost of the season ticket.

#### Retainer Fee Not Paid

Table 4:  
*Characteristics of the Retainer Fee Not Paid Interviewees*

Pseudonym	Group	Male or Female	Miami Graduate?	2016-2017 Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holder?	FY17 Donor?	Oxford, OH Resident?
Elijah	Retainer fee not paid	Male	Yes	No	Yes	No
Jackson	Retainer fee not paid	Male	No	Yes	Yes	No
Jacob	Retainer fee not paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
James	Retainer fee not paid	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

#### *Elijah*

Elijah’s first memory of Miami ice hockey was from the early 1990’s at the old Goggin Ice Center. He remembered that the aluminum bleachers were so cold, but the games were always fun. He added that the program was “climbing up the ladder of hockey powers.” Elijah continued, “It was always terrific when Miami would beat Michigan State, Michigan, Ohio State, or Notre Dame, because in this general geographic region, that was really important.” Prior to the

2013-2014 season, Miami transitioned from the CCHA to the NCHC, thus, lost some of its rivals from the past few decades. In response to what was his greatest memory of Miami ice hockey, Elijah described the last 60 seconds of the NCAA national championship game in 2009: “I don’t know if it’s a great memory, but it’s the most powerful memory for me for ice hockey.”

A friend was responsible for getting Elijah interested in attending ice hockey games. Elijah expressed that the program was having success, it was fun to go to games, and the student body was supportive as reasons why he eventually became a season ticket holder. Elijah recalled that the old Goggin Ice Center had a track around it and fans would stand behind the glass and beat on it. Describing ice hockey, Elijah said, “That’s the fastest sport when those guys are flying around, knocking each other into the wall, and flipping that puck around.” He added that the games are too long, though, and because he attends men’s basketball games, he mentioned that it is hard to go to two ice hockey games and a men’s basketball game during the same weekend. Elijah added that it was getting harder for him to go and oftentimes he was not using his tickets, subsequently he felt like it was a poor investment and eventually dropped the ice hockey season tickets. Although he dropped the tickets, he remarked that he enjoyed knowing where his seat was as well as the family atmosphere that came with the people around him.

In response to how he felt about the new donor-based seating model, Elijah said, “Well, it didn’t really bother me a lot because, first of all, it wasn’t a lot of money and I was giving that kind of money to the university anyway.” However, a close friend of his was part of a season ticket holder group and they were not fans of the new model. “They pretty much all complained and complained and complained,” Elijah added. He shared that this particular group thought that the university did not value them although they were football, men’s basketball, and ice hockey season ticket holders. Elijah then added that the whole group let their tickets go and he never felt



like the arena was quite as packed after the model was introduced. He then mentioned how the University of Dayton introduced a similar model for basketball, but at a substantially higher price. “While a lot of them maybe didn’t like it, I think almost everybody did participate,” he said. Elijah explained that Miami is selling a product that is 45 minutes from the nearest group of people, “so you can’t afford to upset very many people because if they decide to give those tickets up, I don’t think they’re going to come back.”

In response to what Miami Athletics administrators should do to increase revenues, Elijah suggested, “You have to get some butts in seats.” He also mentioned the need to get students and new blood in the seats at basketball due to the age of most season ticket holders. “The student body is apathetic to sports except for hockey,” Elijah said. “We need to really work hard to try and get people to the games and support the teams.” He talked about how the lack of success for football and men’s basketball “just destroys attendance because people get tired of going to games where you’re not even competitive.” Elijah stressed the importance of a good product and recruiting prospective student-athletes from the area. Describing his future philanthropic support, he said he did not know what would sway him to do more for athletics. He added that of his total giving to Miami University, 25% goes to athletics.

### *James*

James’ earliest memory of Miami ice hockey was taking his junior high aged son to games at the old Goggin Ice Center during the mid-to-late 1980’s. “He used to love to come to the old Goggin,” James said. “He used to get all of the sticks and pucks from the players. He had a collection of them. When he came to Miami, he played on a club team, so it had an impact on him.” Similar to Elijah, James’ greatest and worst memory was playing in the national

championship game against Boston University in 2009. “That was the greatest game and the most painful at the same time,” he said.

James communicated that the excitement of the teams that were “really good” is what prompted him to buy season tickets five or six years ago. He said that the combination of cost and how many games his son and grandson can attend play a role in his decision-making on whether or not to renew. James added that he does not know how much longer he is going to be interested in renewing if they are not going to be able to attend. He mentioned that he now actually shares and splits the cost of the season tickets with his son’s friend. When describing what he enjoys most about his season tickets, James loves his seats in the first row, knowing he is going to be right there on top of the action. He again mentioned all the pucks his family has gotten over the years.

In regards to how he felt about the implementation of the donor-based seating model, James did not hold back, “I was really angry. I was pissed off. I didn’t think it was a fair thing to do. I probably didn’t understand it. And if it hadn’t been for my son and grandson, I would have stopped buying them.” James admitted that he did not know many other season ticket holders, but the ones he spoke with were upset too. “I don’t know that I found anybody who had a good feeling about it, who had positive things to say about it,” he added.

Level of interest, how much of a price increase, and how well the team does are factors that would influence his decision to renew the ice hockey season tickets. James revealed that the money is not an issue for him, but added that if he was not able to split the tickets, he would not do it. When sharing his thoughts on how to increase revenues, he said, “I know why the donor-based seating is important. I understand that.” He continued, “I don’t have a good answer, to tell you the truth.” James then stressed that football needs to get more competitive. In regards to his

philanthropy, James said he gives away 35% of his income to other charities he values at a higher level and that Miami Athletics would likely not ever be a beneficiary beyond his current contribution. Offering some final thoughts on donor-based seating, James said, “So as long as there’s a good product on the ice, I’m okay with it. I don’t like it, but I’m okay with it. I understand it.”

### *Jacob*

Jacob’s earliest memory was taking his kids to the old Goggin Ice Center about 15 years ago. They loved it and were hooked on Miami ice hockey. He said that his greatest memories were making the Frozen Four and some of the old rivalries, especially against the University of Michigan.

In response to what led him to become a season ticket holder for Miami ice hockey, Jacob said he used to get tickets to several games each year as a Red & White Club member. He could not get season tickets because they were sold out. An opportunity finally came up for him to secure season tickets and he decided to buy them, adding that a number of people at his business enjoyed going to the games as well. When sharing what drives his decision to renew, Jacob said the ability to attend as he lives in Dayton, Ohio adding that it is tough for him to get to Oxford, Ohio twice every home weekend. He then talked about a sign-up sheet his office has which helps get the tickets utilized. Jacob declared that renewing his season tickets would be an annual decision because his family continues to grow, the time commitment to attend, and the fact that sometimes tickets go unused. In response to what he loves most about being a season ticket holder, he said he loves his seats, the games are fun, and just being able to get back to campus.

Describing how he felt when Miami Athletics implemented the donor-based seating model, Jacob said that he was not crazy about the idea but understood it. He reiterated reasons for what motivates his decision to renew, eventually saying that if he ever does let them go, he will still try to attend several individual games each year. Jacob added that he liked seeing the introduction of a split season ticket that was introduced for the 2016-2017 season, which offered a Friday or Saturday night season option. Jacob said that he did not hear much from other season ticket holders about the donor-based seating model, and shared that he has a friend who is an avid fan with great seats who felt that it was just part of the package to him.

Responding to how Miami University Athletics can increase revenues, Jacob said winning always helps. He added the importance of getting students to attend the football games to create more of a college atmosphere. In response to what would lead him to get more philanthropically involved, Jacob recommended getting closer contact with the programs and knowing more about the student-athletes. He added that offering more incentives to fans is important, stating “The more dedicated the fan you are, maybe there should be some reward to that program.”

### *Jackson*

Jackson’s earliest memory of Miami ice hockey was when he was in high school in the mid 1980’s and watching games at the old Goggin Ice Center. Although he was not in attendance, Jackson indicated that the Frozen Four and runner-up finish was his greatest memory, as it was for all members of the retainer fee not paid group. When describing what drove him to first become a Miami ice hockey season ticket holder, he mentioned that his sons grew up playing youth ice hockey for the Junior RedHawks in Oxford, Ohio and the entire family enjoyed watching the sport. He said they found themselves trying to get tickets to the

games, so they eventually just bought season tickets. Jackson said that knowing he always has the same seats and having the ability to share his tickets with friends or acquaintances are what he enjoys most about being a season ticket holder.

When the donor-based seating model was introduced for Miami ice hockey, Jackson admitted that he was confused. He added that he was a little bit frustrated because he was not sure of the exact cost, which is a big factor in whether or not he will continue to renew. In response to how other season ticket holders felt about the model, he said he did not know many season ticket holders, but singled out one of his son's coaches who was really upset and frustrated.

Family interest is what would influence Jackson's decision to renew if season tickets or donor-based seating costs increase. He explained that it is already difficult with his two sons away at college. He added that his daughter, however, who is a junior in high school, enjoys going with her friends and this helps with the decision-making. Jackson said that he would really like to see Miami go away from the donor-based seating model because it is confusing. He stressed, "I realize that they need scholarships, but it seems like there could be a way of maybe making the tickets a fixed price instead of a two-piece priced ticket." Jackson continued, "We had an IRS audit a couple of years ago and the auditor was a little confused." He said that if he could just buy the season ticket outright, it would make the renewal decision easier for him.

Jackson did not have an answer for how Miami University athletics administrators could increase revenues beyond donor-based seating. He would like to have a better understanding of the funding model and how it supports the student-athlete experience. When asked about what would lead him to donate more, he stated, "The scholarships these kids are getting is a huge help for their families. It's very time-consuming for the student-athlete to be involved in any of the

sports. But I guess I really would feel better answering that if I knew more of the numbers too.” He continued, “What tuition costs? What are they getting currently? And where should it go from here? So I don’t know enough information on it to answer it.”

#### *Retainer Fee Not Paid Major Themes*

Six major themes emerged from the retainer fee not paid group of 2013-2014 Miami ice hockey season ticket holders. At least three of the interviewees shared the following:

- 1) Facilities create memories
- 2) Big games matter
- 3) Seat location is important
- 4) People express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating
- 5) Success boosts revenues
- 6) Careful cost-benefit analysis involving family and ticket usage

Miami ice hockey played its home games at the old Goggin Ice Center from 1978-2006 until the new Goggin Ice Center was built and ready for the 2006-2007 season. Jackson, Elijah, and James all specifically referenced the old Goggin Ice Center as their earliest memory of Miami ice hockey. Facilities create memories, and many outstanding memories were born at the old Goggin Ice Center. Jackson referenced going to games at the old Goggin Ice Center in the mid-1980’s as a high school student, Elijah described the cold bleachers of the facility, while James talked about going to games there with his son in the late 1980’s. As referenced by Hall and Mahony (1997) in the literature review, tradition has an impact on donor motivation and alumni engagement. The traditions that are born inside facilities create memories for season ticket holders. This was the first major theme identified by the retainer fee not paid group.

The total game day experience is so important for getting people excited about coming back. People want to have a pleasant experience parking, entering the venue, finding their seat location, and witnessing engaging promotions. They want to have access to quality concessions and clean restrooms. College athletics administrators must make the experience memorable for spectators. Although athletics administrators cannot control what happens on the ice, they can control so many things that play a role in the overall experience. Miami ice hockey celebrated many successes at the old Goggin Ice Center, but the program elevated its stature when it moved to the new Goggin Ice Center prior to the 2006-2007 season. This move proved Miami University was serious about competing at the highest NCAA ice hockey level. Fans that walk through the venue's doors see the red brick throughout the facility, they see the history and tradition of the program on the walls, and they see championship banners hanging from the rafters. The old Goggin Ice Center provided some amazing memories for student-athletes and fans for more than two decades, but the new Goggin Ice Center is likely to create memories for generations to come.

Big games matter emerged as a major theme again, as all interviewees from the retainer fee not paid group indicated the national championship game of the 2008-2009 season as their greatest memory. Similar to other interviewees in the exceptions and retainer fee paid group, Jacob referenced playing the big games against the University of Michigan. He also mentioned the old rivalries Miami ice hockey used to have in the CCHA. Additional commentary about the University of Michigan games and the national championship game was provided in the big games matter theme for the exceptions and retainer fee paid groups.

All four interviewees in the retainer fee not paid group identified seat location as what they enjoyed most about being a season ticket holder. This major theme was also identified by

the retainer fee paid group as a major theme. Jackson and Elijah enjoyed knowing their seats would always be available. James and Jacob talked about how much they loved their seats. Additional commentary about relationships with other season ticket holders and excitement of the location was provided in the seat location is important theme for the retainer fee paid group.

Season ticket holders in the retainer fee not paid group were not fans of the implementation of the donor-based seating model. Neither were people they knew, as this again emerged as a major theme. When sharing their feelings, the retainer fee not paid group mentioned items like “frustrated,” “didn’t know what it was going to cost,” “angry,” “pissed off,” “not fair,” “would’ve canceled it if were not for family,” and “not crazy about the idea.” The group described how other season ticket holders felt after the donor-based seating model was announced, mentioning comments like “upset,” “didn’t hear anything positive,” “complained,” “didn’t feel valued,” “taken advantage of,” and “heard some grumblings at games” were shared by Jackson, Elijah, and James. Additional commentary was provided for the people express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating theme in the exceptions and retainer fee paid groups.

In response to what suggestions the retainer fee not paid group has for Miami Athletics administrators to increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience, a new theme emerged. This theme, success boosts revenues, was identified by responses from Elijah, James, and Jacob. Elijah communicated that a better product is needed, James said football needs to get competitive, and Jacob simply said that winning helps. Athletics success and donations was a theme from the literature review. Research varies, but Baade and Sundberg (1996) claimed that successful athletics programs led alumni giving to increase. Beyer and Hannah (2000) also shared that successful athletics programs may lead to increased donations from alumni.



A new theme to emerge was careful cost-benefit analysis involving family and ticket usage. All retainer fee not paid interviewees indicated that ticket usage plays a role in their decision on whether or not to renew. Elijah mentioned that it was hard to get to two ice hockey games during the same weekend. He found himself not utilizing the tickets, which eventually led him to drop the season tickets. James also described that how many games he and his grandson can attend play a role in his decision-making on whether or not to renew. He added that he is not sure how long he will be interested in renewing if he is not able to attend the games. James expressed that if he was not able to split the season tickets with another person he would have already dropped them. Jacob indicated that the ability to attend games drives his decision-making, mentioning that it is difficult to get back to campus twice every home weekend. He added that that the time commitment to attend is a challenge, especially with a growing family, and that he oftentimes has tickets go unused.

Jackson relayed that it is difficult for him to attend games now, as he has two sons attending college. Despite this, he added that his high school aged daughter enjoys going to games with friends, and this helps in his decision-making when renewals are due. Jackson talked about how much his family enjoys watching the sport and their interest and ability to attend will determine whether or not he will renew in the future. Elijah enjoyed the family atmosphere at Miami ice hockey games. James even shared that he would have stopped buying if not for his son and grandson due to the increase in the cost to attend. He enjoyed Miami ice hockey memories when his son was in high school, and now enjoys many of the same memories with his grandson today.

There are so many entertainment options for people to choose from, especially families, which presents challenges for athletics administrators on getting fans to attend games. When

tickets are not utilized, it will have season ticket holders question why they should renew, especially when this wasted investment could provide a memorable experience elsewhere. Athletics administrators much have constant conversations regarding best practices for family engagement and ticket usage. Competition for the dollar is so high, that when families have alternate options for entertainment, they will conduct their own cost-benefit analysis to assist with their decision-making.

Winning does wonders. Or as Oliver stated, “Everybody loves a winner.” The reality in most cases, though, is for every winner there is a loser. Positioning programs for success is imperative when trying to increase attendance and revenue streams. It often takes money to make money, so investing in revenue generating programs and platforms to position teams for success should increase opportunities for victories. It is a lot easier for a fan to drive one-hour to watch a team with a realistic chance to win a big-game or a championship. A program that is not competitive or does not show progress for the future is less likely to drive interests from prospective customers who have access to other affordable entertainment options.

Season ticket holders in the retainer fee not paid group chose not to pay a \$500 per account seat retainer fee for the right to maintain their same season ticket location after the donor-based seating model was introduced. They instead chose to let Miami Athletics’ loyalty point system determine their point of allocation. Some season ticket holders were able to improve their seating location due to their total loyalty points that they accumulated over the years as a donor and/or season ticket holder. Others may have been allocated in seats perceived to be in a worse location. Similar to members of the exceptions and retainer fee paid groups, season ticket holders in the retainer fee not paid group were responsible for a \$125 annual per seat donation.

Non-renewed

Table 5:  
*Characteristics of the Non-renewed Interviewees*

Pseudonym	Group	Male or Female	Miami Graduate?	2016-2017 Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holder?	FY17 Donor?	Oxford, OH Resident?
Benjamin	Non-renewed	Male	No	No	No	Yes
Isabella	Non-renewed	Female	Yes	No	Yes	No
Logan	Non-renewed	Male	No	No	No	No
Olivia	Non-renewed	Female	Yes	No	No	Yes

*Olivia*

The earliest memory of Miami ice hockey for Olivia was when she was a student in the 1990’s, although she did not attend any games. Later as a parent, going to the games with her kids when they were little provided great family time and was her greatest memory. Olivia first became a season ticket holder after she took a position at Miami University and the team was transitioning from playing in the old Goggin to the new Goggin Ice Center. She mentioned that wanting to be part of the community was important in her decision-making. Olivia revealed that the cost played a role in her decision to renew. When she could not find anyone to share the season tickets with after the donor-based seating model was implemented, Olivia decided to drop them. This was a tough decision for her, though, as she talked about how much fun it was to go to the games. Olivia enjoyed supporting Coach Blasi and his wife, as they were friends. “There’s times I regret giving up my tickets,” she admitted, as her kids often times want to attend.

Olivia thought the introduction of the donor-based seating model was “sort of a double-whammy,” citing the per seat donation requirement and the seat retainer fee. She did not think it was a nice way to treat loyal fans, saying “they felt like their loyalty just didn’t matter anymore.” Olivia mentioned that people were shocked and upset; adding that she did not know of anyone

who said that the donor-based seating model was great. She suggested that maybe this was due to the way the process was handled. “They just felt all at once like they were being gouged,” she said. Olivia recalled that fans expressed their displeasure on Facebook pages and some of the local people who could not afford it were upset the most.

“That’s tough for me to answer,” Olivia stated when asked for suggestions on how Miami Athletics administrators could increase revenues. She added that she knows that it is hard for athletics when they are trying to generate revenue, but some of the programs are not performing well. “You can only ask so much or you might start losing people,” Olivia said. She talked about how she enjoys family days, but taking her family to an individual football game is too expensive. In regards to what would get her more philanthropically involved, Olivia said that it is not realistic from a cash perspective; however, she said she would be willing to try to attend more games or provide her time and service. “I wish I could do more to support the sports and go to them,” she revealed. She concluded by stressing the importance of providing opportunities for families to attend events: “I think it’s wonderful when you do things that bring the community in.”

### *Benjamin*

Benjamin started to attend Miami ice hockey games when the new Goggin Ice Center opened in 2007. His greatest memory was on a bus trip to Bowling Green with the Blue Line Club when a fight broke out on the ice and equipment was tossed everywhere. “It was quite a show,” he said with a laugh. The reason he became a season ticket holder was that his wife, the avid fan, wanted to continue watching ice hockey. Their daughter, whom she previously attended games with, went off to boarding school so they became empty nesters and decided it would be a good activity to do together.

Benjamin renewed the tickets annually until the new donor-based seating model was implemented. “We looked at it and basically said we could afford it, but determined it was an insufficient value to put that much money into it,” Benjamin said. He added that his wife was having back trouble, so they struggled to attend all the games and did not like to resell the tickets. “So we just decided that we would occasionally get tickets for single games,” he said. Benjamin mentioned that his wife still keeps up with the program and subscribes to NCHC.tv, the conference’s online broadcast option.

Knowing where his seats were all the time and getting acquainted with the people around him is what Benjamin enjoyed most about being a season ticket holder. He continued, “And the enthusiasm and tradition in there was always very nice.” When I asked Benjamin about his feelings when the donor-based seating model was announced, he said to his wife, “Looks to me like they don’t want our kind around here anymore.” Speaking in regards to other season ticket holders’ feelings, he said nobody was happy about it. However, Benjamin added that some people kept their tickets because they thought it was worth the price and good for them.

Offering his thoughts on how Miami Athletics administrators can increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience, Benjamin said, “Miami has made the decision to be Division I and Division I implies running with the big dogs; and so as long as you’re choosing to do that you’ve got to find ways to do that.” He continued, “On the other hand, I think one of the big impressions of hockey season ticket holders is that was going to be the cash cow to pay for some revenue-deficient sports.” He concluded, “I understand why they raised prices; it’s good old supply and demand. The only other route is some kind of fundraising and you guys are doing as much as you can right now.” In regards to philanthropy, Benjamin kept his

Blue Line Club membership for a couple of years, but revealed that money is tight right now and it is not likely that Miami Athletics will move to the top of his charitable giving list.

Benjamin stated that donor-based seating is just a matter of how much revenue the department thinks it can generate and what kind of model will be used for it. “I suppose that donor-based seating is good for corporate operations and getting people to pay for this, but it’s going to be pretty tough to imagine too many individuals are going to be able to walk with that,” Benjamin relayed. He continued, “I think Miami has done pretty well in trying to keep the student in the student-athlete part of things. In spite of the fact that there’s always pressure to win and fill seats, I think that Miami has done a nice job of not betraying its values.”

#### *Logan*

Logan’s interest in Miami ice hockey developed in the mid-to-late 1980’s by the team’s success and the fact that they had a nice program. He said that making the Frozen Four during the 2008-2009 season was his greatest memory. Logan’s association with Miami began during his high school years, then continued as a parent of children who attended the university, and ultimately as a donor to the university’s academic and athletics programs, including golf and football. While a donor, he was invited to a meet-the-team event and was able to sit with one of the ice hockey players. This event prompted him to participate and attend games. After a couple years, he was contacted about season tickets and bought them for three or four years.

From a renewal standpoint, Logan indicated that he enjoyed going to the games and talking to the friendly people around him. “It was just high-key enough to be fun, but it was low-key enough that you didn’t feel sophisticated about anything,” he relayed. In reference to what he enjoyed most about being a season ticket holder, Logan said that unlike other sports that he had experience with, ice hockey was a sport where the students, faculty, alumni, and people like

him had the common goal of watching the game and cheering for the team even if they lost.

“There was just a split there that was truly supportive of the athletes, both from the students and from the adults,” he explained. “I thought it was a unique experience, really.”

The donor-based seating model, according to Logan, was a “little bit presumptuous.” He added, “We weren’t given any notice that this was even in the cards; to my knowledge we weren’t.” He shared an experience he had with a National Football League (NFL) seat license purchase in the early 1970’s, and he thought that was “borderline fundraising appropriate for pro sports.” Logan added that he did not think donor-based seating was for amateur sports. “I really didn’t think it was appropriate to expect seat holders to financially, through seat reservations, support a sport,” he said. Logan indicated that the people who sat around him were not happy about the new model, adding he felt 90% were against it.

Logan mentioned that the costs for college education have accelerated at a rate that is far beyond appropriate. He then stated that the need to increase revenues is not necessarily correlated with the actual needs to support the scholarship student. “I think that as a university function, if in fact the academic program and the sports program are aligned, and in fact, the sports programs are beneficial to the overall well-being of the university, then that’s a university expense and ought to be expensed as part of that,” he reasoned. Logan said he is not sure he would want to get philanthropically involved with Miami Athletics as he has some fundamental differences on fundraising for higher education and college athletics. He added that he is not in favor of donating to specific sports as it insinuates some programs are more worthy than others. Although he does not agree with donor-based seating, Logan does not mind paying for tickets. He concluded, “I think the university has to apportion the funds appropriately for scholarships because they’re scholarshiping not just an athlete.”

## *Isabella*

Isabella's earliest memory of Miami ice hockey was in 2000 at the old Goggin Ice Center, both standing around the rink and being "squished in the seats." Her greatest memory was one of the games at the old Goggin Ice Center against the University of Michigan. She could not recall if Miami won, but knew they were competitive, fans were standing, and it was a great memory.

She decided to purchase season tickets due to the excitement around the program, as it was growing and getting better and better. Isabella mentioned that the new Goggin Ice Center provided an opportunity to get into seats on the ground floor. She liked her seats, knew exactly where they were, and felt like she owned them when describing what she enjoyed most about being a season ticket holder. In regards to why she dropped her season tickets, Isabella mentioned that it was a combination of the seat fee and leaving the CCHA to move into the NCHC. She talked about losing the natural rivalries and the strength of the old conference.

Responding to how she felt about the implementation of the donor-based seating model, Isabella said she was disappointed because Miami was changing; changing divisions and "kind of changing the product a little bit." She added, "It just seemed like a whole lot of money to be putting into something that you didn't really know what the outcome was going to be." Referencing other season ticket holders, Isabella mentioned one of her friends was disappointed in the new model, thus dropped his seats.

Isabella works in higher education and knows that it is extremely difficult to fund programs like ice hockey. She suggested fundraising as an avenue to secure additional support, adding: "I know the budget concerns that we face at our university. And I know that you guys have them, too. It's just hard to put that on the consumer, on the people who are coming to watch



the games. It's hard to continue to offset that onto them." Isabella likely would not get philanthropically involved with athletics at a high level, but will continue supporting the Red & White Club. "It seems to me like higher education has gotten more focused on athletics than it has really educating people," she said. Despite this belief, she said she wants the football program to continue to improve and wants Miami to be strong athletically.

#### *Non-renewed Major Themes*

Four major themes emerged from the non-renewed group of 2013-2014 Miami ice hockey season ticket holders. At least three of the interviewees shared the following:

- 1) Facilities create memories
- 2) Fans enjoy the games and social occasion
- 3) People express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating
- 4) Philanthropy is not likely

Just as the retainer fee not paid group cited, the non-renewed group talked about how facilities create memories as a major theme. Logan, Benjamin, and Isabella all recalled memories from the old Goggin Ice Center. Logan referenced the success the program had in the 1980's, while Benjamin described his experience there with family. Isabella described the old Goggin Ice Center as it transitioned into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Additional commentary was provided about the old Goggin Ice Center in the facilities create memories theme for the retainer fee not paid group.

The second theme to emerge was that fans enjoy the games and the social occasion. This theme was originally identified as part of the exceptions group. Olivia revealed that her friends attended and the games were fun. Logan talked about the unique experience that Miami ice hockey provided, especially with the involvement of the students. Benjamin referenced the people around him, the tradition of the program, and the overall enthusiasm at the games. These

highlights identified by Benjamin have an impact on sport event consumption and fan behavior, as referenced by Fink et al. (2002) and Wann and Branscombe (1993) in the literature review. Additional commentary about fan engagement and family entertainment was provided in the fans enjoy the games and social occasion theme for the exceptions group.

Not surprisingly, season ticket holders in the non-renewed group did not like the introduction of the donor-based seating model, nor did people they knew. Comments for this third major theme included “disappointed,” “big investment not knowing about the new league,” “a bit presumptuous,” “not appropriate for amateur sports,” “they don’t want us,” “price too high,” “wasn’t a very nice way to treat loyal fans,” “double whammy,” “loyalty didn’t matter,” and “too much money.” When describing how other season ticket holders felt, examples such as “disappointed,” “90 percent against,” “talk was not positive,” “nobody was happy,” “everybody had resentment,” “shocked,” “nobody thought it was great,” “didn’t like how it was handled,” and “gouged” were communicated. Additional commentary similar to the aforementioned criticisms was provided in the people express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating theme for all three previous groups, including exceptions, retainer fee paid, and retainer fee not paid groups.

A fourth and final major theme emerged with the non-renewed group. This new theme, philanthropy is not likely, is not all that surprising considering members of this group chose to give up their season tickets when the donor-based seating model was implemented. Olivia talked about the inability to financially support Miami Athletics. Logan and Benjamin both shared that it is not likely anything can be done to get them philanthropically involved, while Isabella was very candid in declaring that nothing can be done as her passion is with academics. As revealed in the literature review theme of donor motivation and alumni engagement, Gladden et al. (2004)

shared that one of the four challenges that exist for athletics administrators is a donor contributing for priority seating purposes. Also from the literature review, Belson (2009) stated that some loyal fans reject donor-based seating due to the high fees and that they could not afford them. With the rejection of donor-based seating and a transactional giving relationship, a philanthropic relationship (especially at a major gift level) is highly unlikely.

Donor-based seating models are transactional in nature, thus, many season ticket holders may have never made a philanthropic donation to support an athletics department. In an Advancement Resources blog, it mentioned, “Transactional gifts have their place. But if we think that is all there is to athletic philanthropy, we are missing something important” (More, 2015). Some season ticket holders introduced to donor-based seating do not like the fact that they are forced to donate in order to have the opportunity to purchase season tickets.

The key to philanthropy for any season ticket holder is engagement and relationship building. Athletics development offices must incorporate engagement in their strategy to increase philanthropic giving. “By bringing it down to the individual level, you can create an emotional connection that deepens the relationship beyond the merely transactional” (More, 2015). Miami University Athletics hosts events for Red & White Club members, shares how annual gifts play a role in supporting student-athletes, and consistently looks for ways to have student-athletes say thank you or share how donor support provides them an opportunity to compete at the highest level of Division I athletics. Consistently telling the story of how donor support truly makes a difference may increase the likelihood of transactional donors becoming philanthropically engaged when they no longer choose to purchase season tickets.

The non-renewed group of 2013-2014 Miami ice hockey season ticket holders chose not to renew their season tickets for the 2014-2015 season. Reasons varied, but both the seat retainer

fee and per seat donation requirement played a role in most members of this group’s decision-making. Although some may have dropped their ice hockey season tickets, it did not eliminate them from necessarily wanting to stay involved with a Red & White Club membership or as a volunteer.

Table 6:  
*Major Themes within Groups*

THEMES	GROUPS			
	Exceptions	Retainer Fee Paid	Retainer Fee Not Paid	Non-renewed
Big games matter	X	X	X	
Fans enjoy the games and social occasion	X			X
People express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating	X	X	X	X
Seat location is important		X	X	
Affordability and price increases play a role in renewal decisions		X		
Facilities create memories			X	X
Success boosts revenues			X	
Careful cost-benefit analysis involving family and ticket usage			X	
Philanthropy is not likely				X

The themes that emerged from the individual interviews correlated with all of the four themes from the literature review. Fans enjoy the social occasion and seat location is important

are both related to the social identity theory and group membership theme. Success boosts revenues is related to the athletics success and donations theme from the literature review. Baade and Sundberg (1996), Rhoads and Gerking (2000), and Grimes and Chressanthis (1994) all shared how successful programs increased revenues for an athletics department.

A number of themes fit within the donor motivation and alumni engagement theme, including big games matter, affordability and price increases play a role in renewal decisions, facilities create memories, careful cost-benefit analysis involving family and ticket usage, and philanthropy is not likely. In the literature review, critical perspectives on increased donations was one of the themes discussed by the Knight Commission (2014), Duderstadt (2003), and Sperber (2001). These authors, among others, criticized the rising costs of college athletics, stressing the rising cost of coaches' salaries and institutional subsidies. During the individual interview process, one critical perspective was that people express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating. This theme emerged across all groups and was clearly important to a majority of the season ticket holders interviewed.

Rhoades and Gerking (2000) shared that when donors know how their money is being used, they may be more likely to continue their support. The authors also relayed that having donor-based seating requirements can impact donation amounts to a program. Effective communication from athletics administrators is so critical when donor-based seating models are introduced, and may salvage some of the private support that might be lost as a result of implementation.

## Conclusion

As the former senior development officer and executive associate athletic director at Miami University, the interview process for this study on donor-based seating was extremely

rewarding. I had the opportunity to visit with season ticket holders for the Miami ice hockey program, most of whom I had never met. These ice hockey season ticket holders appreciated the opportunity to be heard from different perspectives and potentially make a difference with the decision-making at Miami University and other institutions who utilize or plan to incorporate donor-based seating as a revenue generation tool. The next chapter will provide an overview of the study, discussion of the research findings, conclusions, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the study as well as discuss the research findings and the themes that emerged within the exceptions, retainer fee paid, retainer fee not paid, and non-renewed groups. Conclusions organized by the research questions, implications for practitioners in intercollegiate athletics fundraising, and suggestions for future research will then be presented. The key areas for improvements in practice and new directions for research center upon the three areas: Effective communication, relationship building, and student-athlete integration.

#### Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University. Individual interviews with 16 2013-2014 Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders and two athletics administrators, including the director of athletics and the deputy director of athletics, were conducted for this study grounded in phenomenology to address two questions:

1. What perspectives on social identity and group membership characterize ice hockey season ticket holders' participation in donor-based seating at Miami University?
2. How do Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders describe their interest in supporting student-athletes and their college experience?

The 16 ice hockey season ticket holders interviewed were randomly selected and their responses were confidential, which enhanced participants' candor. I assigned pseudonyms for each of the participants. After ensuring validity, data was coded to allow me to categorize the information. Triangulation then occurred to compare the responses from the four types of individual 2013-2014 season ticket holders: 1) Exceptions, 2) Retainer fee paid, 3) Retainer fee not paid, and 4) Non-renewed. Data saturation was reached with my goal of interviewing four season ticket holders in each of the aforementioned groups used in the study. Fusch and Ness (2015) shared that there is a direct link between data triangulation and data saturation, and that triangulation ensures data saturation. Denzin (2009) stated that no single method, theory, or observer could capture all that is relevant or important and triangulation is one method by which the validity of the study results are ensured.

#### Discussion of the Research Findings

I wanted to show themes that emerged within the groups of exceptions, retainer fee paid, retainer fee not paid, and non-renewed 2013-2014 Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders. To be considered a theme in this study three of the four interviewees per group had to provide a similar response for each question asked. The results from interviewing 16 ice hockey season ticket holders representing four different categories, combined with my experience as a student-athlete and college athletics fundraiser, have shaped me to think more broadly as an athletics administrator charged to make decisions regarding donor-based seating models.

Throughout my career, I have promoted opportunities for alumni and friends of various programs to invest in the student-athlete experience by purchasing season tickets and paying any associated donor-based seating requirements. Some patrons understand the concept and are willing to do whatever is in the best interest of the athletics program, as long as it is within their



financial means. Others, however, do not believe that donor-based seating models are suited for college athletics programs. They may then choose to not renew their season tickets or renew and express their displeasure about being forced to make a donation for the right to purchase season tickets. My perspective has been shaped by the fact that I have been a football season ticket holder at the University of Kentucky since I left Lexington in the summer of 2003. Whether through a privilege fee enforced by the K Club (former letterwinner organization for the University of Kentucky) or a per seat donation requirement by the K Fund (the University of Kentucky's athletic development office), donor-based seating has always been a requirement for the right to renew my football season tickets.

Season ticket costs and donor-based seating requirements have increased substantially since that summer of 2003. So has the University of Kentucky's athletics operational revenues, as *USA Today's* annual financial report shows a 142 percent increase since 2005, from \$54.5 million to \$132.2 million (Berkowitz et al., 2017b). I have witnessed the University of Kentucky increase its donor-based seating requirements over the years, upsetting numerous family members and friends, some of whom dropped their season tickets out of principle or getting priced out. Every year I have a choice to renew, relocate, or not-renew my football season tickets. There have been times when the renewal form arrives that frustration sets in because of an increase in donor-based seating requirements after a bowl appearance or after large raises are provided to coaches, not to mention a very short notice of the increases. Although I have made some modifications to my season ticket quantity, I continue to support my alma mater because my experience as a student-athlete at the University of Kentucky helped set me up for a successful career in intercollegiate athletics.

As an athletics administrator in external affairs and development, I will likely have a voice in the parameters or modifications of donor-based seating models and I would like to keep what I have learned through my research in any decision-making. I understand that these programs are in place to increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience, but I also understand that season ticket holders have a choice on how they invest their discretionary dollars. Effective communication of why donor-based seating models are necessary is so important. It may not eliminate the complaints that come from being forced to donate for the right to purchase season tickets, but it will increase the potential for a season ticket holder to renew if they feel like their investment is being put to good use.

College athletics is big-business and athletics administrators are charged to increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience, graduate student-athletes, and win championships. Throughout my career, I have worked as a development officer, striving to build personal relationships with active and prospective donors that result in increased private support. Although donor-based seating technically counts toward fundraising support, courtesy of the IRS's 80/20 rule (Gaul, 2012), it can be quite controversial. Donor-based seating is essentially forced giving, requiring season ticket holders to donate in order to sit in priority areas.

Every FBS institution I have worked at, minus Harvard University, had donor-based seating models when I was employed there. Throughout my career, I have always understood the need to increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience, primarily because of my bias from competing as a student-athlete. These increased revenues may help obtain or maintain a talented coach, increase scholarship support, construct or improve facilities, or provide additional resources to position student-athletes for greater success.

Educating the fan base on the impact donor-based seating models can have on the program is essential. Educated donors and season ticket holders are more likely to think through the impact of their support when they are contemplating whether or not to renew their season tickets. Athletics administrators and development officers must explain the funding model of the athletics department and effectively communicate how increased resources from donor-based seating will help position the program for greater success. Most importantly, describing how these private dollars positively affects student-athletes is critical. As stated in Chapter I, the NCAA (2016) said that college sports provide student-athletes with skills necessary to succeed in the classroom, in competition, and in life. College sports also promote the well-being of student-athletes and teach them leadership, confidence, discipline, and teamwork. These life skills may be difficult to see from afar, which increases the importance of providing engagement opportunities between donors/season ticket holders and student-athletes.

Despite those positive gains for student-athletes, fans still love a winner. When teams are not performing as well as fans' expectations, some will choose not to renew their season tickets and donor-based seating requirements. If athletics administrators and development officers are effectively telling the story of how a donor's investment is making a positive impact in the life of a student-athlete, the likelihood of salvaging the relationship should increase. David Saylor (Saylor, personal communication, February 3, 2017), director of athletics at Miami University, talked about why communication has to be very clear and be able to be understood by somebody as to why what they are doing is important. "I just think the more you can tie it to the student-athlete experience and what you're going to do with the revenue is key for people." He continued, "Getting people to understand what they do does make a difference for us is always part of our PR campaign challenge."

I am extremely passionate about private support playing a role in supporting and enhancing the student-athlete experience, primarily because I had the opportunity to walk-on as a longsnapper on the University of Kentucky's football team and eventually earned a scholarship for two years. Knowing that donors played a role in making this possible, whether through purely philanthropic gifts or donor-based seating requirements, motivates me to share the message about how private support truly makes a difference. Although donor-based seating is controversial, if implemented, messaged, and managed appropriately, season ticket holders will be more likely to buy-in to the concept.

Athletics administrators must not be reactionary after an outstanding season and automatically increase donor-based seating requirements. Any increases in season ticket costs and/or donation requirements should be relayed in a reasonable amount of time before any deadlines to give fans a sufficient amount of time to prepare. Providing a variety of payment plans may be enticing for season ticket holders who are close to being priced out. Donor-based seating models must be set up in a way that helps create demand for seats. This parallels what Gaul (2012) said in Chapter I, that the purpose of donor-based seating models was to "generate more revenue by taking advantage of unprecedented demand for seats." Priority point systems then can dictate who qualifies for gaining access to any available seats. If demand does not exist, athletics administrators should rethink how they are utilizing donor-based seating models. Donor-based seating models may serve as a significant source of revenue, but season ticket holders should never be taken for granted.

Adding value to season ticket holders for their donor-based seating contributions is encouraged. As explained in Chapter I, Tajfel and Turner (1979) shared that social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on group memberships. When season ticket holders are

provided value-added experiences or benefits, they may be more inclined to be supportive of donor-based seating models. Green and Bowers (2012) discussed the importance of value, while interviewees Benjamin, Mason, and Aiden did as well. Providing a variety of seating options for fans to choose from may also help if the price point is beyond what a season ticket holder is willing to pay. Season ticket holders who have sat in a location for a long period-of-time may, however, not entertain any relocation opportunities and instead choose to not renew.

In this study, I found that although some interviewees understand the need for donor-based seating, the following theme: people express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating, emerged in all four interviewee groups. Reasons varied, but athletics administrators cannot be blind to the fact that people do not like having to pay more for tickets, regardless if it is the season ticket alone and/or donor-based seating requirements. Philanthropy is not likely emerged as a theme for the non-renewed group and could come into play if season ticket holders eventually let their tickets lapse. Other themes that emerged included big games matter, fans enjoy the games and social occasion, seat location is important, facilities create memories, careful cost-benefit analysis involving family and ticket usage, affordability and price increases play a role in renewal decisions, and success boosts revenues. These themes, as well as a personal approach in communication and enhanced engagement, need to be considered when donor-based seating conversations are taking place.

### *Research Questions*

This qualitative case study grounded in phenomenology enabled me to answer the following research questions:

1. What perspectives on social identity and group membership characterize ice hockey season ticket holders' participation in donor-based seating at Miami University?

2. How do Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders describe their interest in supporting student-athletes and their college experience?

There has been limited research, if any, conducted on the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of donor-based seating models. Although these programs have the potential to be a significant revenue source for athletics departments, the controversy that comes with their implementation is enough to warrant significant research by athletics administrators and effective communication with fans potentially impacted.

*Question 1:* What perspectives on social identity and group membership characterize ice hockey season ticket holders' participation in donor-based seating at Miami University?

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory was used for this qualitative case study. McLeod (2008) defined social identity as a person's sense of who they are based on their group memberships, while Hogg and Vaughan (2002) described social identity as the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in social groups. Identification has been shown to have an impact on sport event consumption and fan behavior (Fink, Trail & Anderson, 2002; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Miami University season ticket holders enjoy the overall ice hockey experience, especially when they have an opportunity to interact with other season ticket holders. These social groups help season ticket holders develop new friendships with others around them. Being a season ticket holder enables one to feel like they are more part of the community.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) shared that individuals shape their personal and social identity through group membership. Liam from the exceptions group talked about the social occasion as what he enjoyed most about being a season ticket holder. He talked about going out to eat before the games with the people he sits with and then going to the games together. Aiden from the

retainer fee paid group talked about how he enjoyed the people he sat around, mentioning he sits near the ice hockey staff's families. He enjoyed seeing the same people and knowing who he was going to be sitting with. "It's just part of the community," he said.

Ethan, also from the retainer fee paid group, loved the camaraderie of those who sat around him. He also enjoyed a road trip sponsored by the alumni association as it allowed him to interact with a group of fans. Ethan even stated that opportunities like this might even get him to consider donating more. McLeod (2008) mentioned that groups for which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem, and groups give us a sense of social identity or a sense of belonging to the social world.

Elijah from the retainer fee not paid group enjoyed getting to know the people around him "in a casual sense." I asked Jacob, also from the retainer fee not paid group, about potentially getting more philanthropically involved, and he shared that more group events, getting closer contact with the program, and knowing more about the student-athletes would help. "It makes it more personal when you know who the players are and I think that helps a lot," he revealed.

Olivia from the non-renewed group first became a Miami ice hockey season ticket holder because she wanted to be part of the community. She shared that going to the games was fun and that many of her friends attended. Olivia added that there are times where she regrets giving up her tickets. Logan, also from the non-renewed group, enjoyed talking to the friendly people around him when attending games. He said, "We had some friends on the faculty who also went who we would see, and that was kind of nice reminiscences. It was just high-key enough to be fun, but it was low-key enough that you didn't feel super-sophisticated about anything."

Benjamin, also in the non-renewed group, talked about getting acquainted with people around him. Describing this, he said it was “always a nice homey feeling.”

Miami ice hockey season ticket holders enjoy interacting with other fans and supporting the team. Relationships and everlasting relationships are born around Miami ice hockey games. Season ticket holders enjoy watching Miami ice hockey with others who share their same interests. The in-game experience of interacting with each other, cheering for the RedHawks, and celebrating victories and special memories plays a role in decision-making come renewal time.

Although some athletics administrators may feel the pressure to implement donor-based seating when it does not exist, they should strongly consider the repercussions that may transpire as a result of its introduction. Fans today have so many choices on how they can spend their money for entertainment purposes. They also have easy access to watch sports on their phones or on their big-screen televisions. Athletics decision-makers must make a game, match, or contest more than about just the competition itself. This will help motivate fans to utilize their tickets. The event must be fun, engaging, and present value-added opportunities for the consumer. Failure to incorporate these elements will make it easier for a season ticket holder, including those who have been purchasing for decades, to walk away when the team is not winning as much as they would like.

As previously mentioned, Sauer (2006) said that donor-based seating models are tricky: “If you fail to win, the Johnny-come-lately’s will desert you, and the displaced loyal fan might not come back.” The social identity theory and the research conducted from this study both highlight the importance of group membership. Tajfel and Turner (1986) described social mobility, indicating that the society where individuals live is a flexible and permeable one. They



added that if these individuals are not satisfied with the conditions imposed upon them in regards to their social groups, it is possible for them to move into another group.

Relationships matter for season ticket holders, including relationships with athletics staff, student-athletes, and family. It is important for athletics staff members, from the athletics director to the development officer to the ticket sales representative, to engage with season ticket holders. These athletics staff members have a platform to say thank you, while talking about all the great things that happen within an athletics department as a result of the support of fans, donors, and season ticket holders. Season ticket holders who are able to engage with student-athletes will see the impact of their investment outside of the competitive venues. Families have so many options for entertainment, and when college athletics events engage families into the game day atmosphere, memories are made and the desire to attend again increases. As these types of relationships evolve, the frustrations that may have surfaced due to the implementation of donor-based seating models may diminish.

*Question 2:* How do Miami University ice hockey season ticket holders describe their interest in supporting student-athletes and their college experience?

Athletics donors have a variety of reasons why they choose to contribute to athletics departments. Some choose to donate to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. The NCAA (2017a) identifies five components of the student-athlete experience, including athletic resources, academic resources, health and well-being resources, time management resources, and personal and professional development. With nearly 500,000 student-athletes, the NCAA is “committed to helping them have a fulfilling college experience by keeping them healthy and safe, providing fair and inclusive environments, and encouraging them to learn and grow in all aspects.”

Gladden et al. (2004) found that one reason donors contribute is to help student-athletes. Tsiotsou (2007) stated that donors contribute to provide educational opportunities for young people. Billing, Holt, and Smith (1985) stated that athletics donors contribute to provide for athletics scholarships. This study found that some Miami ice hockey season ticket holders enjoy supporting student-athletes, which should positively influence their decision to renew or increase their philanthropic support. In the exceptions group, Liam is supportive of contributing more if it provides the student-athletes an opportunity to compete at a higher level. Noah, also in the exceptions group, mentioned that his desire to support the program helps drive his decision-making on whether or not to renew his season tickets.

Oliver from the retainer fee paid group, “found it fascinating to get to meet some of the hockey players,” when describing what he enjoys most about being a season ticket holder for Miami ice hockey. When I asked Oliver about sharing anything else relative to the student-athlete experience, he described: “Student-athlete experience is getting to know some of these kids, and it’s a really interesting thing over the years. I mean, we’ve had basketball players and football players live in our apartments and we’ve gotten to know some of them quite well.” Oliver continued, “We enjoy getting to meet the hockey players, and for the most part, these kids are pretty well driven. And they’re good kids. They mess up every now and then, but who doesn’t? But again, it’s interesting to see them develop and mature.”

Elijah from the retainer fee not paid group shared that to support the team and the university prompted him to renew his season tickets for Miami ice hockey. When describing how the athletics department and fans can support the ice hockey program, he declared, “We need to really work hard to try and get people to go to the games and support the team.” Also in the retainer fee not paid group, James talked about some of his earliest memories going to Miami ice

hockey games and how the players would sometimes give his son their sticks and pucks. With his seats in the front row, his grandchildren often go to the games with him and the players continue to hand out pucks to them. James explained that these types of actions keep him coming back. Athletics departments need to share these feel-good stories with fans to motivate others to attend, increasing revenues while reducing the amount of empty seats. These empty seats are bad for the bottom-line, but certainly provide an opportunity to increase revenues.

Logan, an interviewee in the non-renewed group, explained how he transitioned from being a parent of a Miami University student to getting more involved as a donor with the golf and football programs. He described how the ice hockey team received some positive press in the local newspapers, both athletically and academically. Logan was invited to a meet-the-team event and had the opportunity to sit with one of the student-athletes who was very impressive. This moment prompted him to get on the wait list for season tickets, then after a couple of years, he had the opportunity to purchase. Logan revealed that although he had not had much experience with ice hockey, this positive experience with an ice hockey student-athlete motivated him to want to attend games.

Miami ice hockey season ticket holders, when given the opportunity to interact with student-athletes, appreciate their investment in the program even more. Miami ice hockey student-athletes not only compete at a high level on the ice, they also engage in the community and make season ticket holders appreciate how their financial support positively impacts their intercollegiate experience. Athletics departments have so many great stories to tell regarding their student-athletes, and the more people hear about it, the more likely they will be to renew their season tickets or get more philanthropically involved.

Athletics administrators must be great storytellers on how donor support makes a difference for student-athletes in the classroom, in competition, and in life after graduation. They must focus on identifying an emotional connection between the donor and student-athlete. Promoting the great stories that exist through various mediums, including press releases, social media, newsletters, and other technology platforms is imperative. Student-athlete integration may be the difference in renewing a season ticket holder who is upset about donor-based seating and/or the team's performance. Herein are some suggestions for practice: Host annual student-athlete thank-a-thon and/or thank you writing sessions, promote student-athlete feel-good stories, and engage student-athletes with fans at various events.

As previously stated, relationships matter for season ticket holders. It is important for athletics staff members to provide engagement opportunities for fans, donors, and season ticket holders with student-athletes. Season ticket holders in this study described memorable experiences they had with Miami University student-athletes. They talked about how it played a role in them continuing to purchase season tickets, even though they may have been frustrated about the implementation of the donor-based seating model. When fans, donors, and season ticket holders have a connection with student-athletes, they may be more likely to embrace why donor-based seating models are important to support and enhance the student-athlete experience.

### *Summary*

Although the ice hockey season ticket holders in this study and other season ticket holders they know were not proponents of the donor-based seating model, it is important that I share some of the positive comments that the interviewees expressed. In the exceptions group, Mason realized other schools have donor-based seating. Liam stated that he wants Miami ice hockey to be competitive nationally and he was in favor of this model, as it would provide more

revenue to support the program. Noah understood the need, while Emma stated, “You know that it’s going to go up because everything else goes up.”

In the retainer fee paid group, Lucas stated that he understands that these funds may be needed on the back end. Oliver stated that it was a logical development while Aiden relayed that the model did not come as a surprise and was the natural evolution of supply and demand. Ethan mentioned that those he talked to all recognized the need for the donor-based seating model and how it would generate additional revenue to support the program.

For the retainer fee not paid group, Elijah recognized that this was not uncommon as other schools had donor-based seating models. At the end of the interview with James, he said that he was okay with it and understood it, while Jacob also understood it and shared that a friend of his made the comment that it was just part of the package. Jackson said he had no problem paying for the tickets and suggested that the donor-based seating requirement just be added to the season ticket cost.

Surprisingly, the non-renewed group made comments that they understood why the donor-based seating model was introduced for Miami ice hockey. Benjamin understood why it was implemented as it was just supply and demand. Both Isabella and Olivia shared that they knew how difficult it was for the university to fund its athletics programs.

Change is never easy, especially when more money may be required from the consumer. A majority of participants in this qualitative case study were not in favor of Miami Athletics implementing a donor-based seating model for ice hockey. Despite all the criticisms of the model, most interview participants recognized the need for the athletics department to generate revenue to better position Miami ice hockey for success. The athletics department can never communicate enough when describing how additional resources will positively impact the

student-athlete experience. These resources may need to come from season ticket holders through donor-based seating. If so, effectively communicating the need and potential impact is critical.

The interview participants in this study shared a number of things that may be beneficial to Miami Athletics administrators. Season ticket holders and other fans they have a relationship with are not proponents of donor-based seating models. Despite this, they understand the need for increased resources. This is why effective communication from athletics administrators to season ticket holders is so important, and must be done in a reasonable amount of time. Fans want to have fun at games with their family, friends, and coworkers. In-game entertainment that engages as many fans as possible will create positive memories that will help bring fans back and assist with the decision-making of season ticket holders around renewal time. Season ticket holders are especially interested in keeping their seating location due to relationships that they have built with other season ticket holders.

Although fans want to see their favorite team take on big-name opponents or rivals, athletics administrators/coaches must find balance between scheduling these teams and scheduling games that provide a greater chance to win. Successful programs are more likely to see an increase in revenues. When programs are successful, however, more resources will likely be needed to retain talented coaches or bring in brand name opponents. Athletics administrators must then make decisions that could increase season ticket costs or donor-based seating requirements. Keeping prices affordable will help position programs for more sellout situations, which will provide more of a home ice/court/field advantage. It will also create memories that will forever be cherished, having fans boast about certain wins and atmospheres in the facility.

These recommendations and ideas may directly or indirectly assist with increasing revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience.

In the exceptions category, Mason talked about the family concept and the importance of getting football and men's basketball more self-supportive. James also mentioned the importance of getting football competitive again. Winning will help increase ticket sales, but this can also be accomplished by effectively communicating the importance of investing in the program to support and enhance the student-athlete experience, building relationships with alumni and friends, and integrating fans with student-athletes. Noah stressed the importance of the personal approach and that more information is better. Overcommunicating about how season ticket sales and donor-based seating revenues positively impact the student-athlete experience will demonstrate that it is not just about a transaction, but rather about making a difference in the lives of young people. Emma talked about making fans feel more part of the program. Engagement opportunities during pregame, in-game, and postgame will provide added value opportunities beyond the game itself. Other engagement opportunities with student-athletes and coaches throughout the year will pay dividends for athletics programs.

For the retainer fee paid category, Aiden offered some suggestions to increase revenues, including to not overtax season ticket holders, do not exclude students, communicate, and offer fans flexible ways to pay. Payment plans, online payment options, mobile ticketing, and a ticket exchange program will show fans that the athletics department wants and needs them to attend events. Lucas suggested that the athletics department focus on bringing in new people instead of maximizing revenues from the same people. Implementing a referral program that gives fans the opportunity to access benefits like official team gear, complimentary tickets, or unique experiences has the potential to establish ambassadors for the program beyond paid athletics

staff. Ethan and Oliver talked about opportunities to interact with student-athletes. Oliver added the importance of communication and knowing where donor-based seating revenues are going. Although fans may not agree with some decisions made for donor-based seating, transparency will help show the true needs of the athletics department from a resource standpoint.

In the retainer fee not paid category, Jackson said he wanted to know more about the numbers and that he wished the transaction of purchasing season tickets was easier. When season ticket holders are not able to renew their season tickets and donor-based seating requirements at the same time, the consumer may be confused about what they owe and by what dates. Creating one-stop-shopping opportunities will help with these situations. James talked about the challenge of attending so many ice hockey games and how this may play a role in his future decision-making. He shares tickets with someone and would be interested in a flexible season ticket package. Half-season ticket opportunities and mini-plans that are renewable may help keep some season ticket holders around in some capacity rather than just letting tickets lapse completely. Jacob also talked about the difficulty of attending two games in one weekend and he was interested in a flexible season ticket package. In addition, he mentioned that learning more about Miami student-athletes and getting football fixed might help increase revenues. On a similar note, Elijah mentioned the importance of getting football and men's basketball competitive again. Specifically with basketball, he talked about the need to get "new blood" in seats. Alumni and friends who live relatively close to campus should be targeted. Promoting unique experiences that occur before, during, and after games may help drive interest, especially from millennials.

Olivia in the non-renewed group stressed the importance of providing families affordable options to attend Miami Athletics events. Creating family seating sections at a rate comparable to



other entertainment options and establishing flexible ticket packages that can be used across multiple sports are possible options. Logan described how the positive experiences he had with Miami student-athletes and coaches led to him getting more involved. Educating coaches about the importance of fan engagement to increase attendance will help. Special events during a season and in the offseason gives teams a platform to self-promote and encourage fans to invest in the program as season ticket holders or donors. Isabella mentioned the importance of football getting competitive again. To conclude, Benjamin talked about how fundraising is critical for increasing revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. He also stressed the importance of value and continuing to share the positive stories about Miami student-athletes. Establishing an electronic newsletter and promoting programs through social media gives teams a chance to engage fans. These mediums can also promote unique benefits and experiences that may come with attending certain events.

Having the opportunity to interview these 16 ice hockey season ticket holders from the 2013-2014 season was extremely rewarding. I was able to hear so many different perspectives on how donor-based seating impacted Miami ice hockey season ticket holders. Confidential face-to-face interviews gave the interviewees a platform to express themselves candidly and provide feedback that may help shape college athletics administrators' decision-making on the implementation of donor-based seating models. At minimum, the responses will assist in the future decision-making of donor-based seating at Miami University.

These findings identify three areas of improvement: Effective communication, relationship building, and student-athlete integration. Some specific recommendations for intercollegiate athletics fundraisers to consider from these findings include but are not limited to:

### *Effective Communication*

- 1) Have the athletics director host an annual state-of-the-program event.
- 2) Host town hall meetings to educate fans on any major changes that affect a large number of donors/season ticket holders.
- 3) Produce an annual report that details an athletics year-in-review to share all success stories and financial information on how ticket and donation revenues were utilized.
- 4) Establish monthly electronic newsletter for fans, season ticket holders, and donors promoting the success stories of teams and student-athletes, as well as any other information that may not be easily accessible.
- 5) Ensure that websites and collateral materials have all important dates and deadlines, while also educating fans on the importance of donor-based seating.

### *Relationship Building*

- 1) Identify an athletics staff member in development and/or ticket sales to be the personal contact for donors/season ticket holders.
- 2) Make an effort to have a staff member in development and/or ticket sales visit as many donors/season ticket holders as possible at events or on personal visits, especially to say thank you.
- 3) Create a benefits program for donors/season ticket holders that focuses on unique experiences that cannot be purchased.
- 4) Invite donors/season ticket holders to exclusive, unique events (i.e. pregame chalk talk, postgame wrap-ups, etc.).
- 5) Host an athletics caravan that takes athletics administrators and coaches on the road to areas where there are a large number of alumni/donors/season ticket holders.

### *Student-Athlete Integration*

- 1) Host annual student-athlete thank-a-thon and/or thank you writing sessions to acknowledge fans for their support.
- 2) Incorporate student-athlete feel-good stories (i.e. academic accomplishments) into electronic newsletters, social media, and events.
- 3) Host meet-the-team preseason events to get fans excited about the upcoming season.
- 4) At each home event, engage fans with student-athletes on video boards either through a get to know you segment or something funny that engages the crowd.
- 5) Promote how student-athletes are volunteering their time in the community and provide opportunities for donors to volunteer with student-athletes.

### Implications for Practitioners

Athletics administrators and development officers constantly look for ways to generate revenue to better position their student-athletes for success in the classroom, in competition, and in life after graduation. One potential revenue stream is donor-based seating, which provides an opportunity to increase transactional revenues above and beyond a season ticket purchase. Jude Killy, deputy director of athletics at Miami University, explained that donor-based seating models allow people to get involved who are interested in attending games but may be less philanthropically inclined to support a program (Killy, personal communication, January 30, 2017). Donor-based seating models can be successful when there is demand for a product, whether it is within an entire facility or an area of the facility with demand, such as courtside seats at basketball games. Athletics decision-makers must be conscientious about how the implementation or modification of donor-based seating takes place, as season ticket holders may express undesirable feelings toward the model. Providing season ticket holders the opportunity to

designate their donor-based seating gift for a different sport may attract fans who are passionate about another sport and increase sales.

Effectively communicating the needs of the athletics department, the vision for competing for championships, and how revenues from donor-based seating will position the program for success is critical. Sharing any benefits that may come from participating in donor-based seating is important. One of the current benefits that some purchasers may not know about is that donor-based seating gifts are 80% tax deductible. This benefit, however, could potentially disappear if the U.S. House Republicans tax reform bill that was introduced on November 2, 2017 becomes law (Murphy, 2017). Adding value to the season ticket holder experience for their increased investment will assist with the mindset of season ticket holders who have donor-based seating requirements. Ultimately, athletics administrators must protect their greatest assets, create demand, and maximize revenues, but also be compassionate and communicative with their constituency when donor-based seating models may require an increased investment from season ticket holders.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

Although donor-based seating models may provide an additional revenue stream for college athletics departments, athletics administrators must carefully research the potential repercussions of their implementation. So many athletics departments create these models without educating their season ticket holders on the importance and impact of the revenues generated from donor-based seating gifts to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. If season ticket holders do not have a relationship with the athletics department and/or student-athletes, they may not see the value of this mandatory donation. Athletics administrators must add value to the season ticket purchase when donor-based seating is implemented. This study can

be replicated at any institution, but results may vary depending on the sport, level of the institution, geographic location, and history of success. In addition, Miami University did not have donor-based seating in place when introducing this model to its ice hockey season ticket holders. It would be interesting to see how results compare between institutions that already have donor-based seating models and those that do not.

I intend to continue researching ways to increase revenues from donor-based seating models to benefit other universities who see this an opportunity to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. This study provides more knowledge on the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of donor-based seating models, but there has not been enough scholarly research on the topic. Qualitative studies at other Division I institutions will provide additional useful data for the topic. Quantitative studies would be beneficial as well and would open the door for additional questions to be asked.

One strength of this qualitative case study was that I had the opportunity to personally engage with people, enabling them to truly feel like they were being heard. It must also be shared that the donor-based seating model introduced to Miami ice hockey season ticket holders was introduced prior to my employment at the university, which further allowed the interviewees to express their opinions. If I had not been employed at Miami University, it would have been interesting to see if the interviewees would have been even more candid with their responses.

As long as there is a tax deductibility component to donor-based seating, I think athletics departments should utilize these models. However, I would suggest only implementing donor-based seating where high-demand for seats exists. I would not be reactionary to a team's success and raise donor-based seating requirements too often. Athletics administrators should instead implement a donor-based seating model that is priced at a level that keeps renewal rates high and

let a priority point system determine how new season ticket holders can gain access to the best seats. If changes are necessary, communicating in a reasonable amount of time before any deadlines is essential. Ultimately, more research is needed on the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of donor-based seating models.

### Conclusion

College athletics is constantly evolving and revenue generation is so critical to compete at the highest level. To maximize revenues, though, understanding the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model is extremely important. Here is a summary list of the major themes found within the exceptions, retainer fee paid, retainer fee not paid, and non-renewed groups:

- 1) People express undesirable feelings toward donor-based seating
- 2) Big games matter
- 3) Fans enjoy the games and social occasion
- 4) Seat location is important
- 5) Facilities create memories
- 6) Affordability and price increases play a role in renewal decisions
- 7) Success boosts revenues
- 8) Careful cost-benefit analysis involving family and ticket usage
- 9) Philanthropy is not likely

Miami University athletics administrators will be able to utilize the results of this study and learn more about their ice hockey season ticket holders' willingness to support and enhance the student-athlete experience through donor-based seating. Educating season ticket holders on the importance of the donor-based seating model and how it supports and enhances the student-

athlete experience is critical. Effective communication, relationship building, and student-athlete integration should reduce the backlash that naturally comes from fans having to pay more and ultimately lead to increased funds to support and enhance the student-athlete experience.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SEASON TICKET HOLDERS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SEASON TICKET HOLDERS

1. What is your earliest memory of Miami Ice Hockey? How about your greatest memory?
2. Tell me about the decision-making that went into you first becoming a Miami Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holder.
3. What drives your decision-making on whether or not to renew your season tickets for Miami University Ice Hockey?
4. What do you enjoy most about being a season ticket holder for Miami University Ice Hockey?
5. How did you feel when Miami University Athletics announced its plans to institute a donor-based seating model for the lower bowl at Steve “Coach” Cady Arena?
6. How did other season ticket holders that you know feel after the donor-based seating model for Miami University Ice Hockey was announced?
7. There may come a time where season tickets and or donor-based seating costs will increase. What would influence your decision to renew your ice hockey season tickets when this time comes?
8. Miami University Athletics uses donor-based seating revenues to help fund student-athlete scholarships. As scholarship costs continue to rise, what suggestions do you have for Miami Athletics administrators in their decision making to increase revenues to support and enhance the student-athlete experience?
9. What would lead you to get more philanthropically involved with Miami University Athletics to support and enhance the student-athlete experience?
10. What else would you like to share relative to donor-based seating or the student-athlete experience?

\*\*\*For season ticket holders classified as “Non-renewed,” the past tense will be used in the questions above.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ATHLETICS ADMINISTRATORS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ATHLETICS ADMINISTRATORS

1. What is your opinion on the importance of donor-based seating as a revenue source for college athletics departments?
2. How important is donor-based seating to the Miami Athletics operating budget?
3. How do increased revenues from donor-based seating support Miami Athletics?
4. Will you share how increased revenues from donor-based seating have the ability to better position programs to compete for championships?
5. What messaging is important to encourage undecided season ticket holders to renew their ice hockey season tickets and donor-based seating requirements?
6. What messaging is important to encourage season ticket holders to donate beyond any donor-based seating requirements?
7. Explain to me what will influence donor-based seating requirements at Miami University to increase or decrease in the future.
8. What else would you like to share relative to donor-based seating or the student-athlete experience?



APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### *INTRODUCTION*

Hello (NAME),

My name is Coleman Barnes and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education at the University of Mississippi. I am also the Senior Director of Development and Associate Athletic Director for Miami University Athletics. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in today's interview, which should last no longer than 45 minutes. I will be taking notes and recording today's interview with my Apple i-Phone, but please know that your name will not be used in the transcription of the data nor will any identifying information be used in this study to define your participation.

I kindly ask that you answer all the questions to the best of your knowledge. If you have any questions throughout the process or are not comfortable with a certain question, please do not hesitate to let me know. Your participation is completely voluntary. These questions are open ended and will help college athletics administrators better understand the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of donor-based seating models.

Before we begin, I would like to review the information sheet and the release form you received via email.

### **(READ THROUGH THE INFORMATION SHEET / CONSENT FORM TOGETHER)**

Now that we have reviewed the information sheet and consent form, do you have any questions? (IF NONE) Great. Please sign and date the release form at this time.

I will now start recording as it is time to begin the interview.

APPENDIX D  
INFORMATION SHEET

## INFORMATION SHEET

### *Information About a Qualitative Research Study*

Title: Perceptions of Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holders on the Implementation of a Donor-Based Seating Model at Miami University, a Public Midwestern Mid-Major Institution

#### Principal Investigator

David Coleman Barnes Jr.  
Miami University Athletics  
230 Millett Hall  
Oxford, OH 45056  
513-280-7222  
barnesd@miamioh.edu

#### Research Advisor

Dr. Amy Wells Dolan  
University of Mississippi  
Department of Leadership & Counselor Education  
219 Guyton Hall  
University, MS 38677  
662-915-5710  
aewells@olemiss.edu

#### Description

College athletics programs are charged to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. In order to accomplish this, athletics departments must consider strategies that have the ability to create or enhance revenues, especially through donor engagement. This may, however, have an impact on fans. This study provides an examination of the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University, a public Midwestern mid-major institution. This will be accomplished through standardized open-ended interviews with current ice hockey season ticket holders, athletics administrators at Miami University, and individuals who once held but no longer hold ice hockey season tickets.

#### Procedures

The population of individual paid ice hockey season ticket holders and all necessary data will be gathered from a report run through Miami University Athletics' ticketing system. I will conduct face-to-face interviews with ice hockey season ticket holders and appropriate athletics administrators during the fall of 2016. I will also talk to individuals who opted not to renew season tickets when Miami University implemented a donor-based seating model. Interviews shall last no longer than 45 minutes each and consist of no more than ten open-ended questions. Ice hockey season ticket holder accounts may consist of one or two contacts (most often a husband and wife), but only the primary account holder will be asked to participate in the interview. Prior to any interviews, I will communicate with season ticket holders randomly selected for interviews. All interview participants will be ensured confidentiality and their feedback will not be documented to their season ticket or donor accounts. In addition to conducting interviews with ice hockey season ticket holders, I will also interview the director of athletics and deputy director of athletics at Miami University. In order to ensure the validity of

the study, the data will be transcribed verbatim and interview participants will have the opportunity to make any adjustments they deem necessary. Once approved, the data will then be coded to allow me to organize information.

### Risks

Throughout your interview, you will be asked questions related to your experience as a season ticket holder at Miami University and your opinion of donor-based seating models. The researcher will utilize this data, in conjunction with data from other interviews, to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor based seating model. No risks are anticipated; however, shall you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, you may withdraw from the interview.

### Costs/Benefits

The interview should take no longer than 45 minutes and no benefits will be received.

### Confidentiality

No identifying information will be utilized in this study and pseudonyms will be substituted for participants' names. All transcripts and research materials will be kept in a secure locked file cabinet.

### Right to Withdraw and Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawing from the study will result in any information you have provided to be discarded and not utilized. Any information you share will not impact your status with Miami University and the athletics department. You may notify me of your decision via email at [barnesd@miamioh.edu](mailto:barnesd@miamioh.edu) or by phone at 513-280-7222.

### IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law, as well as University policies. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB at 662-915-7482.

### Questions

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me, David Coleman Barnes Jr., at 513-280-7222, or my research advisor, Dr. Amy Wells Dolan, at 662-915-5710.

APPENDIX E

RELEASE OF RIGHTS TO WRITTEN OR RECORDED INFORMATION

# THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

## RELEASE

For valuable consideration, I do hereby authorize The University of Mississippi, its assignees, agents, employees, designees, and those acting pursuant to its authority ("UM") to:

- a. Record my participation and appearance on video tape, audio tape, film, photograph or any other medium ("Recordings").
- b. Use my name, likeness, voice and biographical material in connection with these recordings.
- c. Exhibit, copy, reproduce, perform, display or distribute such Recordings (and to create derivative works from them) in whole or in part without restrictions or limitation in any format or medium for any purpose which The University of Mississippi, and those acting pursuant to its authority, deem appropriate.
- d. I release UM from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such Recordings including any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, rights of publicity, or copyright.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18): \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX F  
INVITATION FOR INTERVIEW



## INVITATION FOR INTERVIEW

Dear (NAME),

My name is Coleman Barnes and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education at The University of Mississippi. In addition, I am the Senior Director of Development / Associate Athletic Director at Miami University. I am working on a research study that will help athletics administrators better understand the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of donor-based seating models. My dissertation is titled:

### **Perceptions of Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holders on the Implementation of a Donor-Based Seating Model at Miami University, a Public Midwestern Mid-Major Institution**

College athletics programs are charged to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. In order to accomplish this, athletics departments must consider strategies that have the ability to create or enhance revenues, especially through donor engagement. This may, however, have an impact on fans. This study provides an examination of the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University, a public Midwestern mid-major institution. This will be accomplished through standardized open-ended interviews with ice hockey season ticket holders, athletics administrators at Miami University, and individuals who once held but no longer hold season tickets.

You have been randomly selected to participate in this study, and I respectfully ask for your willingness to participate in an in-person interview. I can meet you at a location that is convenient for you and anticipate the interview lasting no longer than 45 minutes. I will record the conversation and take notes, but confidentiality will be ensured.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Also, feel free to contact my research advisor, Dr. Amy Wells Dolan, Associate Professor of Higher Education and Associate Dean of the School of Education at the University of Mississippi, at 662-915-5710 or [aewells@olemiss.edu](mailto:aewells@olemiss.edu). I kindly ask that you let me know if you are willing and able to participate in this research study by (DATE). I will follow up with a phone call if I have not heard from you by the suggested deadline. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law, as well as University policies. For any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, contact the IRB at 662-915-7482.

Love and Honor,

David Coleman Barnes Jr.  
Doctoral Student, Higher Education  
The University of Mississippi  
[barnesd@miamioh.edu](mailto:barnesd@miamioh.edu)  
513-280-7222

APPENDIX G

FOLLOW-UP PHONE CALL SCRIPT

## FOLLOW-UP PHONE CALL SCRIPT

Hello (NAME),

This is Coleman Barnes, Senior Director of Development and Associate Athletic Director for Miami University Athletics. As a doctoral student at the University of Mississippi, I am following up on an invitation I sent to you requesting your participation in a study that will help athletics administrators better understand the perceptions of season ticket holders on the implementation of donor-based seating models. Did you receive the invitation?

If yes...

Great. Would you be willing to visit for an interview that will last no longer than 45 minutes on a day and location that is convenient for you?

If no...

I understand. Please know that any information you share will not impact your status with Miami University and the athletics department. Would you be willing to reconsider?

If necessary, I will share the following description with the participants:

My dissertation is titled:

### **Perceptions of Ice Hockey Season Ticket Holders on the Implementation of a Donor-Based Seating Model at Miami University, a Public Midwestern Mid-Major Institution**

College athletics programs are charged to support and enhance the student-athlete experience. In order to accomplish this, athletics departments must consider strategies that have the ability to create or enhance revenues, especially through donor engagement. This may, however, have an impact on fans. This study provides an examination of the perceptions of ice hockey season ticket holders on the implementation of a donor-based seating model at Miami University, a public Midwestern mid-major institution. This will be accomplished through standardized open-ended interviews with ice hockey season ticket holders and athletics administrators at Miami University.

To conclude the call...

If yes...

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to visiting with you on (CONFIRM DAY/TIME).

If no...

Thank you very much for your time.

## VITA

David “Coleman” Barnes, Jr. was born in Louisville, KY on September 22, 1979. His educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts in Education (Major – Kinesiology, Minor – Business) from the University of Kentucky in 2002, a Master of Science (Kinesiology and Health Promotion) from the University of Kentucky in 2004, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education from the University of Mississippi in 2017.

Dr. Barnes has worked in college athletics since 2003 after competing as a football student-athlete at the University of Kentucky from 1999 - 2002. He started at longsnapper from 2000 – 2002, earning three letters. Dr. Barnes was a three-time Academic All-American candidate, two-time Academic All-District IV team, two-time Southeastern Conference Academic Honor Roll, and was placed on the Athletic Director’s Honor Roll for a 4.0 GPA during the spring of 2001. The former walk-on was named the Johnny Unitas Foundation Walk-on of the Year in 2000 and earned a scholarship for two years.

His professional career began at Harvard University, serving as an intern in the athletics ticket office from August 2003 to May 2004. From June 2004 to March 2005, Dr. Barnes served as an athletics development associate/intern at the University of Miami. In April 2005, he was named an athletics development associate at the University of Mississippi. Dr. Barnes was promoted after one year to assistant director of athletics development, functioning in that role through July 2008. In August 2008, he began as the assistant athletics director for development at California State University, Fresno. One year into Barnes’ position, he was elevated to

executive director of the Bulldog Foundation and associate athletics director for development. He remained in these roles until his departure in July 2011 to become the associate athletics director for development at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, staying until July 2013. That month, Dr. Barnes started at Miami University as the senior director of development and associate athletic director. In January 2017, he was promoted to senior director of development and executive associate athletic director. Dr. Barnes began duties as the assistant vice president and deputy director of athletics for external affairs at Utah State University in July 2017.

In addition to Dr. Barnes' experiences at the aforementioned institutions, he has also been a member and volunteer for the National Association of Athletic Development Directors (NAADD), while also serving as a mentor for students in sport management programs at numerous universities throughout the country. Dr. Barnes lives in Logan, Utah with his wife, the former Mary Beth Justice, and their two children, Caroline and William.

# DAVID “COLEMAN” BARNES JR.

157 Quail Way, Logan, UT 84321

(513) 280-7222

coleman.barnes@usu.edu

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**July 2017 – Present** **Utah State University** **Logan, UT**

*Assistant Vice President / Deputy Director of Athletics for External Affairs*

- Under the direction of the Vice President/Director of Athletics, responsible for the overall administration, management and supervision of all athletic department areas that touch external constituents, as well as the associated personnel for the Athletics Department
- Member of the Vice President/Athletics Directors’ Executive Staff and is engaged in creating direction and management for the Athletics Department
- Represent the Vice President/Athletics Director in meetings/events when the Vice President/Athletics Director is unable to attend, and includes functioning in the Vice President/Athletics Director’s role in his absence
- Create a coordinated, consistent plan to further enhance the USU Athletics brand across all external areas, including development, ticket operations/sales, advertising/marketing, video, events, and media relations
- Liaison with Aggie Sports Properties, the multimedia rights partner for USU Athletics
- Assist in building an understanding of the University’s vision and strategic plan with key constituencies
- Promote maximizing the student-athlete experience by generating revenues, increasing attendance, enhancing the fan experience, building the brand, and student-athlete integration

**July 2013 – July 2017** **Miami University** **Oxford, OH**

*Senior Director of Development / Executive Associate Athletic Director (January 2017 – July 2017)*

*Senior Director of Development / Associate Athletic Director (July 2013 – December 2016)*

- Chief development officer, providing leadership with the Deputy AD/Campaign Manager for the \$80M Graduating Champions Campaign to support capital projects, scholarships, and other athletics priorities
  - Collaborated with University and Athletics Leadership to establish strategy for major gift prospects, leading to \$68M raised, including 18 seven figure and 41 six figure gifts
  - Raised a record \$28.3M in gifts and pledges in FY15, including \$5.02M cash
  - Experience with case statement, feasibility study, campaign interviews, campaign plan, gift pyramids, campaign steering committee, leadership prospects, regional campaign events, silent/public phase, etc.
- Metrics (7/1/13-4/30/17):
  - Directly raised \$7M+ from more than \$12M in solicitations and ~800 Personal Contacts (face-to-face)
  - Directly booked 122 gifts of \$5K+, including 4 at \$1M+, 2 at \$250K+, 10 at \$100K+, 16 at \$50K+
- Oversaw 4 major gift officers and a development coordinator; collaborated with 6 regional development officers
- Increased annual scholarship support by 32% from \$708K to \$931K, and membership by 92% from 1,233 to 2,364
- Managed donor based seating and reseating for hockey, generating more than \$100K in new revenues annually
- Assisted with search for Director of Swimming & Diving (Spring 2016)

**July 2011 – July 2013** **University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)** **Birmingham, AL**

*Associate Athletics Director – Development*

- Chief development officer generating more than \$3 million annually (\$1.4 million for scholarships)
- Introduced Gene Bartow Fund for Excellence, a major gifts program to support capital and operational needs, directly securing 10 gifts at \$10K+, including 2 at \$100K+ and 4 at \$50K+
- Launched “Grand Initiative” membership drive increasing the donor base by 54%, from 567 to 876 donors
- Established “110% Blazer” and “Next Level” programs to encourage philanthropic giving; 31% of donor base participated generating \$94,000 in new revenues in 2012
- Provided oversight for the Athletics Auction and Belles & Whistles Luncheon to support student-athlete scholarships, generating \$223,000 (2011, 2012) and \$85,000 (2012, 2013), respectively
- Led sales until outsourcing to the Aspire Group in 2012
  - Increased football club level sales by 160% (2012)
  - Assisted with the increase of season ticket sales for football by 49% and men’s basketball by 5%
- Managed development staff of four and numerous volunteers

**August 2008 – July 2011**      **California State University, Fresno – The Bulldog Foundation (BDF)**      **Fresno, CA**  
*Associate Athletics Director – Development / Executive Director – BDF (September 2009 – July 2011)*  
*Assistant Athletics Director – Development / Executive Director – BDF (July 2009 – August 2009)*  
*Assistant Athletics Director – Development (August 2008 – June 2009)*

- Oversaw the Bulldog Foundation, raising more than \$5 million annually for Fresno State Athletics
  - Closed 2008 with record setting annual fund revenues of \$4.1 million
  - Increased Green V Society members (\$10,000 donors and up) by 116% from 38 in 2007 to 82 in 2011
- Directly secured 3 \$100K+, 4 \$50K+, 12 \$25K+, and 32 \$10K+ gifts, supporting a \$6M Sports Medicine Center, \$1.2M turf project, the Green V Society, and other capital projects
- Supervised development staff of 12, managed 100 volunteers, and oversaw 15 sport clubs
- One of six on Athletics Executive Group
- Sport Supervisor for Men's and Women's Golf; Led search for Interim Head Women's Golf Coach (Spring 2011)
- Assisted with search for Men's Basketball Coach (Spring 2011) and Women's Lacrosse Coach (Spring 2011)

**April 2005 – August 2008**      **University of Mississippi**      **Oxford, MS**  
*Assistant Director of Athletics Development (April 2006 – August 2008)*  
*Athletics Development Associate (April 2005 – March 2006)*

**June 2004 – March 2005**      **University of Miami**      **Coral Gables, FL**  
*Athletics Development Associate*

**August 2003 - May 2004**      **Harvard University**      **Cambridge, MA**  
*Athletics Ticket Intern*

#### **Other Relevant Development Experience**

Introduced major giving programs to support the student-athlete experience; Launched annual membership campaigns to build the donor base and encourage philanthropic giving; Focused on creating demand to increase revenues; Implemented donor based seating and parking programs to maximize revenues; Priority point implementation; Website creation; Emphasized staff and student-athlete giving; Enhanced stewardship giving platforms; Managed volunteers; Oversaw special events; Member of various athletics and development leadership teams; Collaborated with multi-media rights partners Learfield and IMG, and ticket sales partner Aspire; Utilized Banner and Advance donor databases and Paciolan and NeuLion ticketing systems.

### **EDUCATION**

**December 2017**      **University of Mississippi**      **Oxford, MS**  
*Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education*

**May 2004**      **University of Kentucky**      **Lexington, KY**  
*Master of Science, Major - Kinesiology and Health Promotion, Emphasis – Sport Management*

**May 2002**      **University of Kentucky**      **Lexington, KY**  
*Bachelor of Arts in Education (Cum laude); Dean's List (4 semesters); Major - Kinesiology, Minor – Business*  
*Football Student-Athlete (1999-2002); walk-on, earning scholarship for 2 years*

- 3x letterman and starter as team's longsnapper; Johnny Unitas Foundation Scholar Athlete Award - Walk-on of the Year for Kentucky (2000)
- 3x Academic All-American candidate; 2x Academic All-District IV team; 2x SEC Academic Honor Roll; Athletic Director's Honor Roll, 4.0 GPA (Spring 2001)

### **VOLUNTEER SERVICE**

- Mentor and speaker for sport management classes at Belmont, Fresno State, Temple, and Miami
- NACDA convention (2007, 2011)
- Guest lecturer for College Athletics Today course at Miami University (Spring 2014)
- NCAA Emerging Leaders Seminar (2014)

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## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- NACDA member (2004-Present); NACDA Mentoring Institute (2013, 2015, 2016)
- NAADD Conference Representative: Conference USA (2012-2013), Mid-American Conference (2015-Present)
- Art and Science of Donor Development (2013)
- Big Ten Fundraising Institute (2015)
- Collegiate Athletics Leadership Symposium (2016, 2017)