

FORECASTING ISSUES IN NCAA DIVISION I FBS ATHLETICS

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ABSTRACT

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its member institutions have been faced with significant changes in the recent past. This study was used to predict issues, caused by some of these changes, which will impact leaders of NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) athletic departments over the next five to seven years. The Delphi technique was employed to obtain expert opinions for the forecast. The expert panel consisted of sport management faculty who were surveyed over three rounds to determine what issues were likely to occur and whether or not those issues would have a significant impact.

The purpose of the study was to anticipate the issues stemming from the granting of autonomy to the Power 5 conferences and the recent litigation facing the NCAA and its member institutions. Further, the forecast is meant to aid in stakeholder management and strategic planning for athletic administrators at FBS institutions. The expert panel identified nine possible issues, deeming three of the issues likely to occur and four of the issues as having a significant impact. Based on these results, recommendations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) has undergone significant change in the recent past. For instance, between 2010 and 2015, out of the 128 NCAA Division I FBS schools, 43 of them (33.6 percent) changed conference affiliation (Mandel, 2015). This conference realignment was, in part, caused by the desire of the conferences to better position themselves for contract negotiations with television partners. As of 2016 the Power 5 conferences (Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big XII, Pacific 12, Southeastern Conference) collected an average of \$1.8 billion annually from television contracts (Smith, 2016). Also adding to the bottom line for FBS programs was the \$470 million per year ESPN agreed to pay for the rights to televise the College Football

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Playoff and the \$11 billion over 14 years CBS agreed to pay for the right to televise the NCAA men's basketball tournament (Smith, 2014). This influx of revenue has drastically altered the financial picture for intercollegiate athletics.

In 2004 the median revenue for FBS schools was \$28.2 million and ten years later the median revenue for FBS schools had grown to \$63.6 million (Fulks, 2016). In that same time, the school with the highest amount of total expenses in 2004 spent \$90 million with that number moving to \$173 million in 2015 (Fulks, 2016). With the substantial increases in the amount of money being brought in and spent in intercollegiate athletics, it is not surprising that current and former student athletes have been taking notice.

One of the former student athletes that took notice was Ed O'Bannon. In 2009 O'Bannon, a former men's basketball player at the University of California at Los Angeles, brought a lawsuit against the NCAA asking for compensation for the use of his name and likeness in a video game (O'Bannon v. National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2014). This was the beginning of what would become a trend of both current and former student athletes attempting to have more resources allocated to student athletes in one way or another. A notable attempt at this was undertaken by football players at Northwestern University who petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to be allowed to unionize. This desire to unionize came from the feeling that more resources should be used on student athlete health insurance, degree completion, and guaranteed scholarships of a higher value (Vint, 2014). Additionally, in 2017, the NCAA settled a class-action lawsuit, for \$208 million, in which former student athletes sued the NCAA for damages related to the value of their scholarship as compared to the actual cost of attending college (Berkowitz, 2017). These legal challenges and others similar to them have caused the NCAA and its member institutions to adopt some rule changes that are focused on student athlete well-being.

In 2014 the NCAA approved the use of full cost of attendance as the value for an athletic scholarship (Berkowitz, 2015). This generally amounts to \$2000 to \$5000 beyond the athletic scholarship, accounting for various miscellaneous expenses as decided by the institution (Prisbell, 2014). Prior to this change schools were only allowed to pay for tuition, room and board, and books. Another move aimed at student athlete welfare is the allowance of multi-year scholarships. From 1973 to 2012 the NCAA limited scholarships to one year grants, but with the rule change many schools are offering multi-year scholarships as a protection for student athletes from losing their scholarship for poor play (Solomon, 2014). These developments and others like them are possible due to the granting of autonomy to the Power 5 conferences (NCAA, 2014). This autonomy, which is focused on issues related to student athlete well-being, has been responsible for the aforementioned developments along with others that have changed and continue to change the landscape of intercollegiate athletics. This disruption to the intercollegiate athletics environment is what prompts this forecast, the purpose of which is to anticipate how these changes will impact how leaders in FBS athletics departments should manage strategic planning over the next five to seven years.

STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

One area in particular in which it is important to strategically plan is stakeholder management. A stakeholder is any group or individual that is affected by or can have an impact on the accomplished objectives of an organization (Freeman, 1984). "The desired

result of stakeholder management is to more closely align corporate priorities and actions with stakeholder needs” (Wolfe & Putler, 2002, p. 64). As such, it is important for an organization to recognize who their stakeholders are and how their needs and contributions affect the mission of the organization. In order to accomplish this, an organization must develop a strategy for how they will manage stakeholder relationships.

The importance of stakeholder management in the sport industry and specifically intercollegiate athletics is illustrated in the various ways in which scholars have employed the concept in research. Chelladurai (1987), while not applying the term stakeholder explicitly, advocated for the assessment of various stakeholder groups in order to determine organizational effectiveness. He put forth that to discern among the needs of multiple constituencies an organization must identify its prime beneficiary. Put another way, for an organization to be its most effective, it must identify its different stakeholder groups and determine which of those groups’ needs are most salient.

Wolfe and Putler (2002) added to the notion of the importance of identifying and prioritizing stakeholders when they examined role-based stakeholder groups in the setting of intercollegiate athletics. They argued that it is necessary for an organization to determine whether or not self-interest is actually creating a homogenous set of priorities for a stakeholder group and if not, what sub-groups exist and how do their priorities differ. They applied this idea empirically to an NCAA Division I athletic department and found that priorities were not always homogenous among role-based stakeholder groups. Their findings suggest that it may be necessary to classify stakeholder groups based not on their role, but rather on their perceptions of the issues the organization is facing.

The idea of issues management and stakeholder theory was also investigated by Friedman, Parent, and Mason (2004). They developed a framework for issue analyses based on the tenets of stakeholder theory. Specifically, they pointed to the necessity of managers to identify the issues important to stakeholders in order to determine how to allocate resources, develop strategic plans, and accomplish the goals of the organization. Walters and Tacon (2010) also underscored the importance of issue and stakeholder management through the examination of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. They found that in order for an organization to have a relevant and engaging CSR program it must identify its stakeholders and their needs.

Similar to Wolfe and Putler (2002), Covell (2005) examined stakeholder theory in setting of intercollegiate athletics. Specifically, he attempted to bridge the theory-practice gap by showing sport marketers that they could use stakeholder theory to better understand who they are marketing to. His investigation found that multiple stakeholder groups continued donating to an athletic department despite a lack of success for the football team. Covell demonstrated that an athletics department’s success can be directly impacted by understanding who its stakeholders are and identifying those stakeholders’ motivations for becoming and staying a financial contributor.

Also using intercollegiate athletics as a research setting, Welty Peachy and Bruening (2011) examined organizational change through the lens of stakeholder theory. They found that in order for an athletic department to best manage change it is paramount to identify the different stakeholder groups that will be involved in the change and gauge what their responses will be to that change. This allows for the formulation of a change plan that can differ from group to group.

As evidenced by past research, the identification of stakeholders and the issues that will affect them is an important task for organizations. This is especially true in intercollegiate athletics due to the large number of stakeholder groups that exist in that environment. The list of potential stakeholders includes, but is not limited to, students, faculty, donors, media, alumni, administration, and community members (Chelladurai, 1987; Covell, 2005; Wolfe & Putler, 2002). This forecast can serve to help college athletic administrators in the evaluation of stakeholder salience. The identification of future issues and the stakeholders involved with them will aid in prioritizing stakeholder needs. Further, the ability to compare current stakeholder needs with future needs will allow decision makers to assess the movement of various stakeholders' salience as it relates to the goals and objectives of the organization.

SPORT MANAGEMENT FACULTY

Sport management faculty are involved in intercollegiate athletics in myriad ways. One of the most prominent ways they are involved is through research. There are a number of peer reviewed academic journals that publish the scholarly works, focused on intercollegiate athletics, of sport management faculty. These include, but are not limited to the *Journal of Sport Management*, the *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, and the *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*. Through this research, many faculty gain a distinct vantage point of how intercollegiate athletics operates and will operate into the future.

In addition to conducting research on intercollegiate athletics, many sport management faculty are also directly involved in the enterprise through their role as a faculty athletic representative (FAR). The role of FAR is to serve as a liaison between the athletic department and the faculty on campus (Munger, 2014). This is an NCAA mandated position and for the sport management faculty who serve in this role, there is an up close view of both the positives and negatives of intercollegiate athletics.

The negative aspects of intercollegiate athletics also bring sport management faculty in contact with the NCAA and its member institutions. Over the last few decades faculty groups have formed with the goal of reforming intercollegiate athletics. Groups such as the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics and the Drake Group have sought to lessen the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics and increase the academic integrity involved (Ridpath, 2008). Again, not all of the membership of these groups is sport management faculty, but the members that do come from the discipline offer yet another view point on intercollegiate athletics. Through these different involvements, the sport management faculty stakeholder group can offer a unique perspective on the many facets of intercollegiate athletics and what the future might hold for the enterprise.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study is to forecast issues for NCAA Division I FBS athletic programs stemming from the granting of Power 5 autonomy and the current legal actions against the NCAA and its members. To facilitate this forecast the Delphi technique was employed. The Delphi technique originated at the RAND Corporation in the 1950s and was used by their researchers to identify potential Soviet Union bombing targets in the United

States (Davidson, 2013). The purpose of using the Delphi technique is “to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts” (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963, p. 458).

In order to conduct a study using the Delphi technique and obtain credible results, there are four essential characteristics that must be involved: anonymity in the process, controlled feedback, iteration, and statistical aggregation of group response (Gnatzy, Warth, von der Gracht, & Darkow, 2011; Yousuf, 2007). Qualtrics, an online survey tool, was used to help ensure the anonymity of the participants. Using Qualtrics allowed the expert panel to participate in the study without having to interact with any of the other panelists. Further, no individual identifying information was gathered from the participants. Taking these steps ensured that the respondents were free to give answers without fear of ridicule or intimidation by other members of the panel (Rowe & Wright, 1999).

Controlled feedback was also accomplished through the use of Qualtrics. The researcher received answers through the survey tool and disseminated the necessary feedback throughout the process. This control allowed for the elimination of extraneous conversation that might take place during a face to face group meeting. It also helped to make sure that panel stayed focused on the subject or subjects that are being studied (Rowe & Wright, 1999).

The third characteristic necessary in the Delphi technique is iteration. The purpose of iteration is to allow for the determination of consensus by the experts (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). The feedback provided to the expert panel took place in between each iteration or round of the study. This study consisted of three rounds. The first round used an open-ended questionnaire. The answers to the first round were used to create an instrument that allowed the expert panel to rate issues on likelihood to occur and level of impact. This instrument was then used for the second and third rounds.

The final characteristic used for the Delphi technique is statistical aggregation. The main statistics used in this technique are central tendency measures (Rowe & Wright, 2001). This study used 5-point Likert scales and as such, median scores were used to determine consensus as they are less susceptible to extreme scores (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). These medians were reported back to the panel as part of the controlled feedback to facilitate convergence of opinion to consensus. For this study consensus was a score above three for any item.

Sample and Participants

For this current study, experts were defined as sport management faculty who represented on their curriculum vitae that since 2007 they had published at least five peer-reviewed articles with intercollegiate athletics or NCAA in the title, abstract or key words. Using this time frame ensured that the scholars are currently studying or have recently studied intercollegiate athletics. This group was chosen due to the amount of research necessary to have five peer-reviewed articles published on a single subject in that time period. Faculty participating in the study had also served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics* and/or the *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport* during that same time span. This service allows a faculty member to review research articles related to intercollegiate athletics, which further adds to their knowledge base. Additionally, this group of scholars represents research that covers multiple aspects of intercollegiate athletics. These aspects include, but are not limited to, student athlete well-being, marketing, athletic-academic balance, organizational behavior within athletic departments, and leadership. Using

this criteria, 21 experts were invited to participate, with nine experts completing all three rounds of the study.

While studies of this nature have used intercollegiate athletic administrators to fill the expert panel in the past (Branch & Crow, 1994; Drain & Ashley, 2000), obtaining opinions from a different group of stakeholders allowed for a potentially contrasting view point helping to facilitate the recognition of previously unforeseen challenges for intercollegiate athletics. This particular stakeholder group should be invested in outcomes of this study as they are responsible for training the future administrators who will one day run the athletic departments currently being studied. The better sport management faculty understand future trends in intercollegiate athletics, the more equipped they are to provide the tools necessary for students to enter the intercollegiate athletics workforce prepared to make meaningful contributions. Furthermore, researchers who have a comprehension of future trends are better armed to conduct relevant research that can contribute to the field.

To analyze the data from the first round a content analysis was performed on the answers to the open-ended questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The content analysis was used to identify issues which were then turned into the items that comprised the instrument used for the second and third rounds. After the instrument was created, it was sent to the expert panel and they rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale on likelihood to occur in the next five to seven years and level of impact if the issue were to occur. The responses from the second round were collected and the results were aggregated. For the third round the experts were given the aggregated results from the second round comparing the group score on each item with their individual score. They were then asked, based on this comparison if they would like to adjust their rating.

Data Collection and Analysis

The initial questionnaire was sent to 21 sport management faculty members. Of the initial requests, nine participants responded with answers to the first round questionnaire. Among the nine participants were seven Whites, one Hispanic, and one Other. Additionally, this group of experts had five representatives from Power 5 conferences and four representatives from Group of 5 conferences.

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 6 questions, with the first three questions pertaining to demographic information and the following three open-ended questions related to the research questions. The first of these three questions was meant to obtain respondents' general thoughts on what future issues NCAA Division I FBS athletic department administrators would need to prepare their departments for. The following question's purpose was to elicit future issues related to the granting of autonomy to the Power 5 conferences. The final question was asked in order to obtain the expert panel's prediction of issues related to the current legal disputes involving the NCAA and its member institutions.

A content analysis was performed on the respondents' answers to the three open-ended questions and nine issues were revealed. These nine issues were then used as the basis of the instrument that was sent to the expert panel for the second round of the study.

For the second round of the study, the participants were asked to rate each of the nine issues on the likelihood of occurring and level of impact if the issue were to occur. A scale of one to five was used with one being low and five being high. After the participants rated the

issues for the second round, three of the issues reached the consensus criteria of a median score above three on likelihood of occurring. There were four issues that reached the consensus criteria of a median score above three on level of impact. There were no issues that reached consensus on both likelihood of occurring and level of impact.

The third round of the study involved sending the expert panel the aggregated results from the second round. Each panel member was alerted to the issues for which their rating fell outside of the consensus of the group on either likelihood to occur or level of impact. They were then asked if they wanted to change their score and if not, to explain why they continue to disagree with the group in order to articulate the minority opinion. After the third round there was no change in consensus on any of the issues, leaving three issues that reached consensus on likelihood to occur and four issues that reached consensus on level of impact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The expert panel identified nine possible future issues based on their responses to the open-ended questionnaire used in the first round of the study. Descriptive statistics were run using SPSS 24 to obtain the median score for each issue on likelihood to occur and level of impact. Among the nine issues (Table 1), the expert panel reached consensus on likelihood to occur for three of the issues (Table 1). The panel reached consensus on level of impact for four of the issues (Table 1). Finally, there were a no issues that reached consensus on both likelihood to occur and level of impact.

Table 1.

Issues Generated by Expert Panel	Consensus
Student fees allocated to FBS athletics will decrease over the next five to seven years.	
The revenue gap between the Power 5 Conferences and the Group of 5 conferences will widen over the next five to seven years.	Likelihood to Occur
Expenses will increase faster than revenues for FBS athletic programs over the next five to seven years.	Likelihood to Occur
Further FBS conference realignment will take place over the next five to seven years.	Likelihood to Occur
There will be a decrease in favorable rulings for the plaintiffs in lawsuits against the NCAA and its member institutions over the next five to seven years.	
FBS football players and men's basketball players will receive compensation beyond a scholarship and cost of attendance in the next five to seven years.	Level of Impact
FBS student athletes will be classified and treated as employees in the next five to seven years.	Level of Impact
FBS television revenues will decrease over the next five to seven years.	Level of Impact
FBS student-athletes will begin to be allowed to receive compensation for use of their name, image, and likeness from external entities (e.g. sponsors, booster clubs) over the next five to seven years.	Level of Impact

Issues Likely to Occur

The expert panel identified three issues that are likely to occur for NCAA Division I FBS athletic programs over the next five to seven years. All of the issues are related to revenue generation and resource allocation. When combined, these issues provide a forecast that does not bode well for lower resourced programs, especially those that reside in the Group of 5 conferences.

The expert panel reached consensus on the revenue gap separating the Power 5 conferences and the Group of 5 conferences. With a median score of 5 on this issue, the panel is predicting that the revenue gap between these groups will widen over the next five to seven years:

“As the financial gap grows larger and larger, non P5 schools will need to make decisions about whether they want to keep spending to compete.”

“Cost of attendance will continue to rise and that will create a greater divide between top programs and the rest of the pack.”

This prediction is supported by a comparison of recent television contracts signed by the Big Ten Conference, a Power 5 conference, and Conference USA, a Group of 5 conferences.

In 2016 the Big Ten signed a television deal that would earn the conference \$440 million annually over a six-year time frame (Facher, 2016). Alternatively, in the same year, Conference USA signed a television deal that would provide the conference with \$2.8 million annually over the length of the contract (Minium, 2016). While television contracts are not the only revenue source for FBS programs, they are a significant one and are a good indicator that the forecast made by the expert panel in this study was an accurate one.

Coinciding with this widening gap is the next issue the expert panel predicted: expenses will increase faster than revenues over the next five to seven years for members of the FBS:

“...increased pressure to pay revenue athletes.”

“...FBS revenues are nearly flat.”

“Expenses will continue to outpace revenues in all FBS departments -with the exception of 10-12 schools.”

This is a logical prediction for the panel to make in light of the aforementioned issue of the widening revenue gap. There are only a small number of FBS programs that bring in more revenue than they spend (Hobson & Rich, 2015). As these programs spend their increasing revenues on new facilities, coaches, and recruiting, they essentially drive up the costs of competing at the FBS level because the other FBS programs will inevitably attempt to “keep up with the Joneses” in attempt to stay or become competitive with the few elite programs.

This prediction, and the one prior, supports the framework presented by Cheslock and Knight (2015) in which they describe this phenomenon as cascading expenditures. Within this framework, cascading expenditures are the result of diverging revenues which aligns with the first prediction detailed in this section. When combined, these two predictions naturally lead to the idea of realignment, the third issue predicted by this expert panel:

“Increase efforts of Group of 5 schools to join Power 5 collectively or individually.”

“The Power 5 will become the Power 4 with the demise of the Big 12. Texas and Oklahoma will be OK by moving into a Power 4 conference.”

Between 2004 and 2014 the FBS saw 40 percent of its 128 members change conference affiliation (Campbell, 2014). This shuffling of schools was largely based on conferences’ maneuvering to become more attractive to their television partners by increasing their geographic footprint. The idea was that the more media markets a conference had within its footprint, the more valuable its rights would be to television partners. For example, Rutgers University and the University of Maryland moved to the Big Ten Conference during this time. These moves allowed the Big Ten, a traditionally Midwestern conference, to now include New York City and Washington DC, locations with large numbers of television households, when negotiating their television contracts.

With this recent past in mind, it is easy to see why this panel has predicted that there was more conference realignment over the next five to seven years. Realigning to command larger media rights contracts is one way in which schools and conferences might try to generate more revenue to keep up with increasing expenses. Additionally, Group of 5 members may see realignment as the only way in which they was able to slow the widening revenues gap between themselves and their counterparts in the Power 5 conferences.

Interestingly, the panel did not reach consensus on any of these issues for level of impact. As a collective they are forecasting a challenging economic environment over the next five to seven years for FBS programs, however they do not feel this was a significant departure from the current challenges facing these programs. With that said, the expert panel did identify four issues they felt would have a significant impact on how FBS programs would have to operate if they were to occur over the next five to seven years.

Issues with Significant Impact

The expert panel focused mostly on student athlete issues in identifying the issues that would have significant impact on FBS programs if they were to come to fruition. While this group of experts did not reach consensus on likelihood to occur on any of these issues, the potential impact is enough to have collegiate athletics decision makers take them into account when constructing strategic plans. It is also important to bear in mind that this panel was only asked to take the next five to seven years into consideration. It is quite possible that these issues could come to pass further into the future. This is especially true as it applies to the issue of television revenue.

A decrease in television revenue was the one issue this group of experts felt would have a significant impact that did not directly relate to student athlete issues:

“Media right deals could change dramatically.”

“...revenue streams are changing and so must rights fee contracts evolve.”

The combination of individual conference deals, the College Football playoff television contract, and the NCAA men’s basketball tournament television contract, provides billions of dollars in media rights revenue (Smith, 2013; Zimbalist, 2009). It is clear to see that there was a significant impact on how these programs operate if they were to see a decline in this revenue source.

One reason this panel did not predict television revenues to decrease could be due to the length of current television contracts. Most of the Power 5 contracts will not expire during this prediction window (Wilner, 2017). The same is true for the NCAA basketball tournament and College Football Playoff (Smith, 2013). However, the television industry is currently undergoing significant change (Waterman, Sherman, & Ji, 2013) and it bears watching by leaders of FBS athletic departments, as the possibility of a decrease in television revenue is both possible and highly impactful. The other issues the panel identified as having a significant impact, if they were to occur, were all related to student athletes. Specifically, the issues centered on how and if student athletes would be compensated beyond an athletic scholarship.

The issue of how to compensate student athletes has been prominent throughout the history of intercollegiate athletics (Clotfelter, 2011; Smith, 2011). It has gained more attention in recent years with the rapidly increasing budgets of FBS programs. These budget increases stem largely from the public's interest in football and men's basketball. As such, this panel identified compensating football players and men's basketball players beyond an athletic scholarship as a potential issue:

“May force schools to pay more than cost of attendance to revenue producing athletes.”
“NLRA scrutiny, as well as current litigation will continue to apply pressure to more fairly (e.g., market value) compensate some FBS players athletes. The pressure will continue to mount for revenue sport athletes to be compensated differently than Olympic sport athletes.”

While the panel did not reach consensus on it happening in the next five to seven years, they did reach consensus on the issue having a significant impact if it does occur.

If the NCAA and its member institutions were to allow an increased compensation to men's basketball and football players it could have far reaching ramifications. In order to pay these athletes without a significant increase in revenues, money would have to be diverted from other areas. One of those areas could be Olympic sports. These sports generally do not earn a profit and could be eliminated in order to increase the resource allocation to men's basketball and football. Additionally, there could be Title IX implications. Increasing the compensation of only male athletes would require a balance of resources allocated to women's sports which would also have a significant impact on both scholarship opportunities and department budgets. Paying these athletes could also lead to student athletes being classified as employees.

The classification of student athletes as employees was another issue identified by the expert panel:

“Pay student-athletes and treat them as employees could allow unions to exist.”
“The pending (very real) chance that student athletes will be declared employees.”

Similar to the issue of paying football and men's basketball players, the panel did not foresee this coming to fruition in the next five to seven years, but did feel there would be a significant impact if it did. If student athletes were to be classified as employees it would allow for the possibility of unionization, collective bargaining, and/or free market compensation for student athletes. All of these possibilities are currently unavailable to students participating in NCAA sports, but would certainly change the operating model if

they became available. At the most risk would be the scholarship limit that is currently in place and drives the whole structure of college athletics in the United States. The value a full scholarship that is allowed to be given to a student athlete is capped at the amount of money it takes to pay tuition, books, fees, room, board, and cost of attendance (Berkowitz, 2015). If this cap were to be removed as a consequence of student athletes being employees, the entire way college athletics is operated would have to change. The ramifications could include changing or removing academic eligibility requirements, the lessening of the scholarship opportunities, a change in how much coaches are compensated, and quite possibly the exit of universities from the FBS level of the NCAA.

Another possible ramification stemming from student athletes being classified as employees would be the ability for them to receive compensation for their name, image, and likeness from entities outside the university. This is the last issue identified by the panel that could have a significant impact on how FBS athletic programs operate. Current NCAA rules do not allow student athletes to profit off of their name image and likeness, but if changed would potentially increase the power of student athletes in the system. They would be able to negotiate endorsement deals before deciding where to attend college, lessening the impact of traditional recruiting inducements, both within and outside the NCAA rules. This would also allow some student athletes to have some financial freedom, which would lessen the power of the institution because the student would not be solely reliant upon their scholarship for financial means.

When the issues the expert panel predicted as likely to happen and to have a significant impact are combined two major themes emerge. The first theme revolves round revenue generation and economic structure. The second theme is the role of student athletes in the operating model of the NCAA. Examining these issues through the lens of these two themes informs how stakeholder theory can be applied to future stakeholder management strategies.

Stakeholder Management

This expert panel is predicting a challenging economic future for FBS programs over the next five to seven years. As such, it was important for the leaders of these programs to identify and prioritize stakeholders that have an impact on revenue generation. These conclusions drawn by the expert panel support the instrumental approach to stakeholder management.

The instrumental approach to stakeholder theory holds that the result of attending to stakeholder needs leads to organizational effectiveness (Jones, 1995). Under this approach to stakeholder management, stakeholder needs are prioritized based on their impact on an organization accomplishing its goals. In this case, based on the predictions made by the expert panel, college athletic administrators will need to focus on donors and media rights partners as two significant stakeholder groups that contribute a large portion of athletic department revenues (Fulks, 2014).

In 2014 over a billion dollars was donated to intercollegiate athletic departments (Wolverton & Kambhampati, 2015). The needs of athletic department donors have to be prioritized in order to maintain and grow the level of giving necessary to keep up with the escalating expenses this expert panel is predicting. It has been found that belongingness and trust are two important factors in athletic donor motivations (Tsiotsou, 2007) which gives

some insight into how the needs of this particular group of stakeholders manifest. Creating a welcoming atmosphere for donors while at the same time demonstrating that they are being good stewards with the donated funds, will allow athletic administrators to more effectively manage their donor relations. This will aid departments in generating the revenue necessary to stay competitive.

Another stakeholder group of college athletic departments that plays a major role in revenue generation is the media. Specifically, the television partners who pay for the media rights sold by the NCAA, the College Football Playoff, and FBS conferences. The NCAA signed a \$10.8 billion with its television partners to broadcast their men's basketball tournament (Wolverton, 2010) and the College Football Playoff, which is run by the 10 FBS conference commissioners, inked a \$7.3 billion deal to have the football championships televised (Hobson & Rich, 2015). Additionally, the FBS conferences themselves have sold their individual conference media rights for billions of dollars (Walsten, 2014).

With this much revenue coming from television partners, prioritizing their needs will continue to be necessary for FBS athletic departments and conferences. This means that televised games may have to be played on non-traditional days or less than ideal times in order for broadcast networks to fully optimize the inventory. For instance, the Mid-American Conference plays many of their intra-conference football games on Tuesdays and Wednesdays instead of on Saturdays because one of their television partners offered the most money in exchange for playing mid-week games. Additionally, PAC 12 Conference football games often start late in the evening due their schools being located in the Mountain and Pacific time zones and their television partners, who also televise other conferences, wanting to fill out the full day with programming. These are just two examples of concessions that are made in order to help satisfy the needs of this stakeholder group. Others include playing high profile opponents in football and men's basketball, making student athletes and coaches available for interviews, constantly monitoring conference membership, and building on-campus studios and infrastructure for broadcasting.

The predictions made by this expert panel support the instrumental approach to stakeholder management. Following this approach, managers prioritize stakeholder needs based on the ability of the stakeholder to directly impact the accomplishing of organizational goals. In the case of NCAA Division I FBS athletic programs over the next five to seven years, two stakeholder groups emerge as having a high degree of salience based on this criteria. Donors and media partners contribute a significant percentage of revenues to FBS athletic programs and based on the forecast provided by this expert panel should have their needs prioritized. This prioritization is what will help FBS programs to navigate the changes caused by Power 5 autonomy and increasing litigation and allow for the continued pursuit of success.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The Delphi technique offers researchers a fair amount of flexibility, but with that flexibility comes some fundamental limitations. The results of a study employing the Delphi technique are not generalizable. The need for a purposive sample to identify experts means that the results can only be attributed to that specific panel of experts used for the study and

that it is quite possible that another panel would come to different conclusions. The expert panel for this current study was limited to just sport management faculty.

The length and breadth of the forecast are also limitations of this current study. The expert panel was asked to forecast what issues would take place over the next five to seven years. It is certainly possible that, if the forecast window were extended, more issues would have been identified or there would have been a change to those issues that were. Additionally, the experts were only asked to identify issues resulting from Power 5 autonomy and current legal actions. Changing or adding to these antecedents could also result in different conclusions.

Despite these limitations, there is ample opportunity to build upon the results of this study. Intercollegiate athletics has an abundance of stakeholder groups. A future study could employ the Delphi technique using any number of those groups asking these same questions. For instance, donors were identified as a high priority stakeholder group. It would be interesting to find out what issues they see stemming from Power 5 autonomy and current legal actions. As noted earlier, this study was limited to two changes in the current environment. Expanding on those changes would help to give a fuller picture as to what future issues the leaders of intercollegiate athletics should be aware of as they produce their strategic plans. As noted earlier, the results of a study employing the Delphi technique are not generalizable. However, the second round instrument could be sent to a larger sample which would allow one to obtain generalizable results that would further enhance the conclusions that can be drawn from this current study.

Heading in any or all of these future directions will ultimately enable scholars to better inform their practitioner counterparts in intercollegiate athletics. The more context that can be provided around these types of forecasts, the more useful they are to those responsible for producing strategic plans. This will, in turn, give those using the information a better chance to help their programs attain success for their organization.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE

The authors have stated all possible conflicts of interest within this work. The authors have stated all sources of funding for this work. If this work involved human participants, informed consent was received from each individual.

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