

The Business and Governance of College Sport: Practical Strategies for Thought Leaders in Athletics and Higher Education to Improve the Overall Student-Athlete Experience

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Recent discussions amongst scholars and practitioners with respect to current issues in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I college athletics have focused on areas such as the widespread commercialization of amateur sports, consistent corruption within athletics departments at NCAA member institutions, extensive exploitation of student-athletes, and the necessity of a “pay for play” employee compensation model for student-athletes (Benedict & Keteyian, 2014; Branch, 2011; Huma & Staurowsky, 2012; Nocera & Strauss, 2016; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013; Staurowsky et al., 2015). However, there has been minimal scholarly and industry discourse on how to leverage some of the revenues generated at the NCAA, conference, and individual athletics program levels in order to develop innovative and sustainable higher education solutions that would prepare all student-athletes for career and personal success after participation in college athletics.

A primary objective of this research note is to provide an accurate, timely overview of the business and governance of college athletics at the NCAA, conference, and member institution levels. Second, this research note aims to spotlight the significant issues and areas in which college athletics leaders presently seek change and improvement. The third objective of this research note is to encourage a more informed conversation about important issues in college athletics in part by proposing several practical strategies that would improve the overall student-athlete experience and further align participation in college athletics with the core goals of institutions of higher education.

The next section of this research note provides an overview of the college athletics business model at Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions within Division I of the NCAA. This research note then reviews the current NCAA Division I governance structure before providing an overview of current governance issues within college athletics. The next section spotlights innovative student-athlete career and professional development programs recently developed by the University of Central Florida, Oregon State University, and Vanderbilt University. The final section provides a series of recommendations for all stakeholders involved in college athletics to optimize the student-athlete academic and athletic experience as well as to improve the level of career preparedness of all student-athletes.

The College Athletics Business Model

One of the first college athletics contests took place in 1852—a crew race between Harvard and Yale sponsored by the Boston, Concord and Montreal Railroad (Smith, 1988). Since this sport event, college athletics has been a commercialized enterprise for more than 150 years. The NCAA, member conferences, and university athletics departments generate revenue within

the overall college athletics business model. The majority of the revenue generated at the NCAA and conference levels ultimately flows to individual athletics programs.

NCAA Revenue and Expenses/Distributions

The NCAA reported total revenues of approximately \$912 million for its fiscal year ending August 31, 2015. Approximately \$567 million (more than 60%) of the total revenue generated by the NCAA was distributed to Division I member institutions (NCAA and Subsidiaries, 2015). The NCAA distributes revenue to Division I member conferences and institutions based on three factors. The number of athletic scholarships and the number of NCAA sponsored sports are two factors that impact the amount of revenue each athletics program receives from the NCAA. The third factor, which resulted in the largest NCAA distribution of \$205 million in 2015–2016 (37% of total distributed revenue), relates to the performance of all teams in each conference in the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament over a six-year rolling period (NCAA, 2016).

One possible rationale why the NCAA revenue distribution formula heavily emphasizes wins in the March Madness basketball tournament is that each year approximately 80%–90% of all money generated by the NCAA is derived from its current 14-year, \$10.8 billion contract with Turner Broadcasting System (TBS) and CBS Corporation (CBS) for media rights to the men's basketball tournament (NCAA and Subsidiaries, 2015). In April 2016, the NCAA announced an extension of this lucrative media rights agreement. TBS and CBS will pay \$8.8 billion total during the eight-year multimedia rights extension period from 2025 to 2032 (NCAA.com, 2016). Media rights revenue and other event-related income from NCAA tournaments and championships accounted for over 98% of all NCAA revenue during its 2015 fiscal year (NCAA and Subsidiaries, 2015).

The NCAA reported a decrease in net assets of approximately \$9.2 million for the fiscal year ending August 31, 2015. This yearly deficit for the 2015 fiscal year is primarily attributable to unexpected losses associated with NCAA investment income. In years preceding the \$9.2 million loss (e.g., from 2012-2014), the NCAA reported significant positive changes in net assets. For instance, the NCAA reported an increase in net assets of approximately \$80.5 million for its 2014 fiscal year and an increase in net assets of approximately \$60.9 million for its 2013 fiscal year. Despite the \$9.2 million decrease in net assets for the most recent 2015 fiscal year, the NCAA reported total net assets of approximately \$698 million as of August 2015 (NCAA and Subsidiaries, 2014; NCAA and Subsidiaries, 2015).

Although the NCAA's most recent consolidated financial statements depict a viable, financially healthy enterprise, one cannot automatically conclude that college athletics as a whole represents a profitable and sustainable business model. An analysis of revenues and expenses at the member conference and athletics program levels will reveal that the total expenses related to the operation of a Division I college athletics program usually exceeds generated revenues.

Conference Revenue and Expenses/Distributions

While basketball-related media rights agreements comprise the largest revenue source at the NCAA level, football-related media rights agreements function as the primary revenue source at the conference level. For example, ESPN currently pays the SEC over \$200 million per year primarily for the rights to televise a specific bundle of conference football games. The SEC reported approximately \$210 million in total media rights revenue for its fiscal year ending August 31, 2014; this \$210 million in media rights revenue represents more than 60% of the total

revenue (approximately \$326 million) generated by the conference in that year (Internal Revenue Service [IRS], 2014d). Similarly, ESPN and FOX cumulatively pay the PAC-12 approximately \$250 million per year for similar football driven media rights. The PAC-12 reported approximately \$282 million in total media rights revenue for its fiscal year ending June 30, 2014; this \$282 million in media rights revenue represents about 75% of the total revenue (approximately \$374 million) generated by the conference in that year (IRS, 2014c). Likewise, the Big Ten recently announced a package of new media rights deals that will commence in the 2017-2018 academic year and span six years each. Under these new football driven media rights agreements, the Big Ten conference will receive approximately \$430 million per year from FOX and ESPN combined. For comparison purposes, the Big Ten's basketball focused media rights agreement with CBS will only generate \$10 million in revenue per year during the same six-year period.

In addition to football driven media rights deals with major broadcasters, other primary revenue streams at the conference level include revenue generated from conference owned and/or operated networks, revenue generated at conference tournaments and championship events (e.g., money from tickets, corporate partnerships and concessions), distributions and grants from the NCAA, and distributions based on member school participation in college football bowl games (e.g., revenue from the media rights deal related to the College Football Playoff). Major expense items at the conference level include the salaries of conference commissioners and other executives, office rent, operating costs for events and other conference initiatives, and legal fees.

Conferences such as the SEC, PAC-12, and Big Ten typically distribute between 70%–90% of all generated revenue to athletics departments in each respective conference every year. During the previous two years, annual conference level revenues have exceeded expenses at the SEC, PAC-12, and Big Ten. The SEC reported net conference assets of approximately \$49.5 million for its 2014 fiscal year. Similarly, the Big Ten reported net conference assets of approximately \$52.1 million for its 2014 fiscal year. Based predominantly on costs associated with developing and operating its conference television networks, the PAC-12 reported \$7.2 million in total conference liabilities/debt for its 2014 fiscal year (IRS, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d).

The SEC, PAC-12, and Big Ten represent three of the five autonomous governance and well-resourced (i.e., “Power Five”) conferences along with the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and Big-12. Five additional conferences within the FBS often referred to as the “Group of Five” (i.e., American Athletic Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West Conference, and Sun Belt Conference) represent the remaining conferences within the FBS. These Group of Five conferences generate far less revenue compared to the Power Five conferences. For example, total generated revenue for all Group of Five conferences during each conference's 2014 fiscal year equaled approximately \$180 million, as compared with the more than \$300 million generated at each of the SEC, PAC-12, and Big Ten. In addition, media rights are not as significant of a revenue source for the Group of Five conferences. For example, the American Athletic Conference reported approximately \$21.1 million in total media rights revenue for its fiscal year ending June 30, 2014; this \$21.1 million in media rights revenue represents less than 25% of the total revenue (approximately \$93.8 million) generated by the conference in that year. The primary revenue source for the American Athletic Conference during its 2014 fiscal year was approximately \$54.9 million generated from conference tournaments and championships (IRS, 2014a).

Based on annual report filings with the IRS, total conference level revenue at all ten FBS conferences during each conference's 2014 fiscal year equaled approximately \$1.75 billion—as

compared with approximately \$989 million generated by the NCAA during its 2014 fiscal year (NCAA and Subsidiaries, 2014). As demonstrated in the next section, the majority of revenue generated within college athletics takes place at the individual athletics program level. For example, for the 2013-2014 academic year, FBS athletics programs reported approximately \$8 billion in total combined generated and allocated revenue.

Athletics Program Revenue and Expenses

Revenue distributed from the NCAA and conferences to individual athletics programs within the FBS, combined with revenue generated at the athletics program level, is rarely sufficient to cover the costs of operating an athletics program based on the current expense priorities and perceived competitive financial pressures at the majority of FBS member schools—even though generated revenue significantly exceeds expenses for many of the football and men’s basketball programs within the Power Five conferences. Stated differently, in each year since 2008, only about 15–25 of the 125 current FBS athletics programs have demonstrated self-sustainability from a financial perspective in terms of reporting annual revenues that exceed expenses; for example, 24 FBS athletics programs reported positive net revenues for the 2014 fiscal year (NCAA, 2015). The majority of FBS athletics programs (including every athletics program within each of the Group of Five conferences) rely on subsidies such as student fees as well as institutional support to cover athletics program operational expenses.

Examples of core revenue generators for athletics programs include NCAA and conference distributions (as previously discussed in this research note), ticket sales and other event-related revenue, fundraising/donations, corporate partnerships, licensing and merchandise revenue, money from contracts with apparel companies, and investment income. The largest expense areas for college athletics programs include salaries for athletics administrators and team coaches, scholarships and related stipends for student-athletes (e.g., tuition, required fees, course related books, room and board, and cost of attendance stipend), and costs related to operating and maintaining athletics facilities. The amount of financial support that an athletics program is permitted to provide each student-athlete is governed by NCAA rules. As the above analysis demonstrates, many FBS athletics programs would need to shift spending patterns and priorities away from line items such as coach salaries and facility renovations in order to create additional resources related to student-athlete learning and career development. Increasing the amount of student fees and increasing an athletics program’s reliance on institutional support are not ideal solutions. The next section of this research note examines the Division I college athletics governance structure and provides information on who makes decisions within college athletics as well as an analysis of how and why those decisions are made in order to understand which solutions are viable.

Overview of NCAA Division I Governance Structure

In 2014, the NCAA redesigned its governance structure at the Division I level. Important structural changes involved the size, composition and function of the Board of Directors and other NCAA decision-making groups. Another significant change was the decision to grant the Power Five conferences more autonomy related to rules that impact student-athlete wellbeing (e.g., requiring a cost of attendance stipend for student-athletes). This new governance model was designed to allow key decision makers to “operate in a more nimble and streamlined manner, and to be more responsive to membership needs throughout the division, particularly those of student-

athletes” (NCAA, 2014, p. 5). The executive summary of the recommended governance model proposed by the Division I Steering Committee on Governance acknowledged that “the proposed model contains elements that range from relatively noncontroversial items to concepts that may be more complex.... additional process and culture changes will further enhance the division’s ability to meet membership needs and navigate future challenges” (NCAA, 2014, p. 5).

The Steering Committee recognized that the new governance structure does not completely address all needed process and culture changes, and that some components of the proposal are controversial or potentially overly complex (which may end up meaning unclear and/or unenforceable). While this proposed new governance model is a step in the right direction, it does not address or resolve many of the most pressing challenges and opportunities in college athletics. For example, the new governance model fails to increase meaningful input and involvement of student-athletes, which is essential to improving the overall student-athlete athletic and academic experience.

It is important to note that “the NCAA” does not—and, staff members at the NCAA headquarters in Indianapolis including NCAA President Mark Emmert, do not—directly make most of the important and impactful decisions within the Division I college athletics landscape. Therefore, criticisms of “the NCAA” are oftentimes misguided as well as misinformed.

University presidents, conference commissioners and athletics directors represent three constituent groups that directly influence most of the significant policy and governance decisions within Division I college athletics. Student-athletes do not have nearly the same level of input and influence with respect to shaping major rules and policies within college athletics. For example, university presidents represent 20 of the 24 Division I Board of Director positions. One student-athlete serves on the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is responsible for strategy and policy decisions as well as legislative and management oversight (e.g., the primacy of academics and the health and safety of student-athletes) (NCAA, 2015).

In addition, athletics directors are required to represent at least 24 (60%) of the 40 Division I Council positions. Two student-athletes serve on the Council. The Council is responsible for the day-to-day business operations of Division I college athletics and serves as the primary legislative and operational group that reports to the Board of Directors (NCAA, 2015). Without much meaningful representation on the Board of Directors and Council, student-athletes must rely on advocates and allies such as faculty members, athletics directors, university presidents, and conference commissioners to facilitate governance and policy changes. The following section of this research note spotlights several current business and governance issues within college athletics before proposing practical, innovative strategies to address these issues.

Current Business and Governance Challenges and Opportunities Within College Athletics: Moving Beyond the Limited and Limiting “Pay for Play” Narrative

An accurate knowledge of the business and governance realities within college athletics is essential to understanding that paying student-athletes an hourly wage or annual salary is untenable and only addresses the symptoms rather than the root of the problem of student-athlete advocacy. Paying a select subset of college student-athletes (e.g., football and men’s basketball players at a limited number of FBS athletics programs) an hourly wage or annual salary is not a sustainable framework or constructive solution to the wide-ranging challenges and opportunities facing college athletics leaders and higher education administrators. In addition to the potential logistical and legal issues associated with the “pay for play” concept, providing additional money

to student-athletes appears to be a short-term and perhaps shortsighted solution as compared with leveraging NCAA, conference and athletics program resources to provide student-athletes with the most practical and useful education possible as well as to equip student-athletes with the personal and professional skill sets required to excel in any career after graduating and exhausting athletics eligibility.

In recent years, leaders at the NCAA, university presidents, conference commissioners, athletics directors, members of the United States Congress and Senate, and student-athlete advocacy groups (i.e., the Drake Group, the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and the College Athletes Players Association) have developed a set of suggested priorities and specific proposals for reform and change within NCAA Division I college athletics. The remainder of this section spotlights some of the priorities and proposals identified by these vocal college athletics stakeholders.

In April 2016, the NCAA released a document titled “NCAA Division I Strategic Summit Principles.” This was the first set of NCAA priorities related to improving student-athlete career development. Areas of emphasis included “preparing student-athletes for a career and life after sport” and “helping student-athletes translate their skills” (NCAA, 2016, p. 1). Other key priorities pertained to enhancing student-athlete academic success and promoting the educational value of participation in college athletics.

In April 2016, the NCAA also confirmed that a Values-Based Revenue Distribution Working Group was created to examine the problematic incentives created by the current NCAA revenue distribution formula that incentivizes and rewards “basketball wins” (NCAA, 2016, p. 2). The Values-Based Revenue Distribution Working Group proposed changes to the current NCAA three-factor formula that would in part reinforce “the commitment to sound academic standards” in order to prioritize educational values over winning (NCAA, 2016, p. 2; Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). In October 2016, the Division I Board of Directors and the NCAA Board of Governors approved a new NCAA revenue distribution factor based on student-athlete graduation rates and academic success. Beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year, a portion of Division I media rights revenue from the men’s college basketball tournament will be distributed to member schools based on the academic achievement of student-athletes (Brutlag Hosick, 2016).

In addition to the priorities and proposals recently developed by NCAA leaders and influencers on various NCAA committees, university presidents in several FBS conferences have identified core areas of needed change. For example, in May 2014, university presidents representing all athletics programs in the PAC-12 identified a series of proposals that aimed to address “both the need to increase the funding for student-athlete driven initiatives and the restoration of academic primacy to the mission of intercollegiate athletics” (PAC-12 Conference, 2014, p. 2). Principal objectives outlined by the university presidents included the following: permit institutions to make scholarship awards up to the full cost of attendance; provide reasonable ongoing medical or insurance assistance for student-athletes who suffer an incapacitating injury in competition or practice; guarantee scholarships for enough time to complete a bachelor’s degree (provided that the student remains in good academic standing); further strengthen the Academic Progress Rate requirements for post-season play; and provide student-athletes a meaningful role in governance at the conference and NCAA levels (PAC-12 Conference, 2014).

The United States Congress and Senate have also expressed concern that the current college athletics business and governance model requires some student-athletes to “sacrifice their

educational goals for the financial interests of college athletics” (Congress of the United States, personal communication, May 20, 2014). For example, in May 2014, the United States Congress wrote a letter to NCAA president Mark Emmert. This letter indicated concerns about the overall quality of education provided to student-athletes and reiterated the “solemn obligation” of NCAA leaders and NCAA member institutions “to support the academic goals of students” (Congress of the United States, personal communication, May 20, 2014). The United States Senate has also expressed concern about the integrity of college athletics with a specific emphasis on the general wellbeing and academic success of student-athletes. For instance, in a September 2014 letter to Power Five conference university presidents, the United States Senate requested information on “the weak protections currently given to student-athletes” such as the “common failure to academically prepare young men and women for the workforce after their playing days are over” (United States Senate, personal communication, September 18, 2014).

The College Athletes Players Association is one of several student-athlete advocacy groups that has persistently advocated for college athletes’ rights in areas such as guaranteeing coverage for sports-related medical expenses for current and former college student-athletes, minimizing the risk of sports-related traumatic brain injury, improving student-athlete graduation rates, and securing additional process-related protections for student-athletes accused of NCAA rules violations (College Athletes Players Association, n.d.).

Other scholars such as Tulane Law School professor Gabe Feldman have authored White Papers for advocacy groups such as the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. In May 2016, Feldman drafted a detailed proposal related to the NCAA allowing student-athletes to enter into endorsement agreements with companies as long as the endorsement is not game-related (Feldman, 2016). Also in May 2016, the Knight Commission proposed that 100% of NCAA revenues received by member institutions “should be restricted to supporting athletes’ education and providing them with appropriate health and safety benefits and protections” (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2016, p. 1).

The Drake Group is another student-athlete advocacy group that focuses on academic integrity issues in college athletics. In August 2016, the Drake Group issued a Position Statement in which it recommended that the “NCAA adopt comprehensive legislation regarding time restrictions on athletics-related activities” (The Drake Group, 2016, p. 2). Similar to Gabe Feldman’s proposal to the Knight Commission, the Drake Group supports the concept of student-athletes “accepting remuneration for the commercial or charitable use of their names, images or likenesses in advertisements, appearances or speaking engagements, [and] endorsement of commercial products” (The Drake Group, 2016, p. 10).

As illustrated by the above examples of current business, governance, and policy issues within college athletics, paying student-athletes an hourly wage or annual salary is both a limited and limiting conceptualization. Leaders within college athletics are encouraged to focus less on how much compensation student-athletes receive while in school and focus more on strategies that prepare these student-athletes to earn compensation after college. The following section highlights several career preparation strategies and solutions designed to achieve this outcome.

Creating a “Meaningful Education and Career Preparation as Compensation” Model

Oftentimes, key influencers within college athletics continue to focus on reactive reform efforts instead of focusing on truly transforming its governance structure, rules and regulations, and business model so that universities are able to more effectively prepare student-athletes both

academically and professionally. Reforms are usually implemented to create an outcome that will fix a problem (for example, legal challenges and perceived lack of emphasis on student-athlete academic success). Transforming the culture and process can prevent future problems and perhaps eliminate the need for reform initiatives altogether. Instead of spending so much time and money defending its “collegiate model” (i.e., amateurism; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013), college athletics leaders should focus on developing a true “meaningful education and career preparation as compensation” model (Harrison & Bukstein, 2014, p. 117).

Examples of Innovative and Practical Programs at University of Central Florida, Oregon State University, and Vanderbilt University

Several universities have recently created policies and programming that attempt to emphasize academics and career planning. For example, bonuses to coaches and the athletics director at the University of Maryland are now linked to student-athlete Academic Progress Rate (APR) scores. This is a start. However, a focus on grades and graduating (i.e., meeting the minimum requirements) is different from a focus on the development of transferable skill sets that prepare student-athletes for career success (Fields, 2012). The NCAA and its member institutions need to devote more time and financial resources toward helping student-athletes gain practical industry experience in addition to developing proficiencies that are marketable to employers (Harrison & Bukstein, 2014). The University of Central Florida, Oregon State University, and Vanderbilt University serve as examples of athletics programs that are currently developing innovative and practical professional development programs for current and former student-athletes.

The University of Central Florida recently launched the Knightship Program in June 2016. This career and professional development initiative aims to “deliver transferable experiences in a work setting to provide student-athletes with a better understanding of the type of career they wish to pursue.” UCF athletics administrators believe that, by being immersed in a professional work environment, student-athletes will understand work etiquette and key communication skills essential for career success after participation in college athletics. Each academic semester, student-athletes participating in the Knightship Program are required to commit five hours a week over the course of eight weeks assisting with and learning more about business operations areas such as communications, video services, student-athlete welfare and development, fundraising, information technology, sports marketing, facilities management, and event operations.

Oregon State University recently developed the Everyday Champions Program, which is designed to enhance the wellbeing of student-athletes. A primary objective of the Everyday Champions Program is to provide student-athletes with “an opportunity to grow holistically, both personally and professionally, while developing the leadership skills to enter into the real world with poise, conviction and a drive to succeed” (Oregon State University [OSU], 2016, p. 1). This academic and professional development initiative at Oregon State includes practical workshops, community service/engagement, industry speakers, and career pipeline programming. For example, the SportUp Incubator provides student-athletes with the resources and industry mentoring required for developing and implementing entrepreneurial business ventures. Similarly, the Student-Athlete Investment Club provides an opportunity for student-athletes “to develop skills and knowledge related to the money market, through competition and instruction from faculty of the Oregon State College of Business” (OSU, 2016, p. 5). In addition, the Women LEAD (Limitless, Empowered, Authentic and Driven) Program is a platform for female student-

athletes “to develop mentorship relationships with female administrators and community leaders and foster a supportive network of empowered, driven females” (OSU, 2016, p. 5).

In August 2016, Vanderbilt University athletics launched an innovative player development program called Operational Excellence. Student-athletes participating in this nine-week immersive program learn about “the core elements of streamlined organizational effectiveness” such as “how to reduce ‘lead’ time and ‘eliminate waste’ from any workplace” (Ellis, 2016, p. 1). As explained by Alison Wenzel, assistant athletics director for student-athlete development at Vanderbilt, “This is an experience that typical college students don’t get. They have to wait until they get into the professional world. Our student-athletes, having been exposed to this, it should give them a leg-up in a job interview” (Ellis, 2016, p. 1). Jason Grooms, Vanderbilt director of football operations, emphasizes that Vanderbilt athletics wants “to continue to provide opportunities for our student-athletes to be successful at all levels” (Ellis, 2016, p. 1). The following section of this research note provides additional recommendations related to preparing college student-athletes for long-term career success.

Additional Recommendations: Preparing College Student-Athletes for Career Success

The new career and professional development initiatives at UCF, Oregon State, and Vanderbilt provide a foundational framework for other athletics departments to implement and adapt. Student-athletes at all NCAA Division I member institutions should be encouraged (and perhaps required) to participate in a variety of experiential learning opportunities such as attending and presenting at industry conferences as well as participating in practical internship/apprenticeship programs with local organizations related to each student’s area of career interest so that they are able to effectively leverage access through athletics into a successful professional career beyond the playing field or court (Harrison & Bukstein, 2014). One of the major findings in a recent empirical study emphasized the “need for internship programs and other opportunities for college athletes to develop outside of [sport participation] and coursework outside of athletics entirely” (Haslerig & Navarro, 2016, p. 222). Haslerig and Navarro (2016) reiterated the importance of career development practitioners providing “meaningful exploration and choice processes” for student-athletes (p. 221).

In addition, the NCAA and its member institutions could create academic performance competitions such as entrepreneurship-based accelerator programs that would provide startup funding for viable business concepts developed by student-athletes (Harrison & Bukstein, 2014). This “academic performance competition” initiative could also include the development of an interactive website/forum in which current and former student-athletes are able to discuss and collaborate on career-related projects. It is imperative that these practical, timely and innovative strategies focus on the development of all student-athletes and not solely on those student-athletes participating in football and men’s basketball. In addition, all academic and career development initiatives must be culturally relevant with respect to embracing the learning styles and interests of today’s student-athletes, as the ultimate outcome is to ensure that all student-athletes understand that “[t]he opportunity to participate in college athletics requires participation in college education” (Osborne, 2014, p. 151). College athletics departments could engage current (and new) corporate partners to cover programming costs; these student-athlete development programs would function as an impactful corporate social responsibility investment opportunity for local organizations.

Finally, cross-departmental collaboration between athletics administrators, university presidents and faculty members is vital. As discussed earlier in this research note, university

presidents hold 20 of the 24 seats on the NCAA Division I Board of Directors. Further integrating university presidents into the development and implementation of new academic and career development programming would enable university presidents to more effectively and more knowledgeably advocate for increased professional development support for student-athletes. Involving faculty members in the development and implementation of new initiatives would allow student-athlete development programming to be driven by relevant empirical research and applicable pedagogical frameworks.

Suggestions for Future Related Research

Future research could examine the academic and career benefits related to student-athletes earning college degrees before exhausting athletic eligibility. As proposed by Haslerig and Navarro (2016), “the graduate(d) student-athlete population merits attention” (p. 221). In addition, future scholars could examine financially sustainable budgeting strategies that would allow athletics programs to operate in a more fiscally responsible manner in part by reducing dependence on subsidies such as student fees. Also, future research studies could track and analyze the career realities of former student-athletes at select universities five years after these student-athletes exhaust their athletics eligibility. Finally, future research could chronicle additional practical and innovative higher education programs that are similar to those initiatives recently developed at UCF, Oregon State, and Vanderbilt.

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