

Students Perceptions of Institutional Support for Athletics in NCAA Division I

Report Prepared For
the Knight Commission
on Intercollegiate Athletics

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Knight Commission
On Intercollegiate Athletics

Working to ensure that intercollegiate athletic programs operate within the educational mission of their colleges and universities since 1989.

We thank you for very much for granting us this award. We believe many interesting findings came from the research and could not have been accomplished without the funding to visit the schools in person. Additionally, the methodology used could easily be used at other institutions to both examine student fees and publicize the depth of information available in the Knight Commission database. Please contact us below with any questions or comments and thank you again for your time and funding!

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Proposal Details

title Students Perceptions of Institutional Support for Athletics in NCAA Division I

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abstract The central focus of this proposal is to explore student body awareness of, and reaction to, institutional support to NCAA Division I athletics departments. Recent popular media examples demonstrate that 1) student fees have long been used to subsidize athletics departments budgets and 2) there is reason to believe that recent NCAA legislation could lead to significant budgetary ramifications that could have repercussions for student fees. The tools on the Knight Commission's interactive online research database will be used to distinguish the athletics departments that spend the most money on each student athlete (defined as institutional spending per student-athlete). The requested funding will be used to travel to one institution from each of the three NCAA Division I tiers that falls in the top ten of institutional spending per student-athlete where semi-structured interviews will be conducted with members of the student body. Using data obtained from the Knight Commission for institutional spending per student-athlete, interview participants will answer questions about their knowledge, awareness, and feelings about institutional subsidies and campus fees for the athletics department at that specific institution. This line of inquiry is especially relevant as NCAA legislation that is affecting athletics department budgets could further increase athletics subsidies. Ultimately, this study dually demonstrates the need for awareness about institutional spending per student athlete while also showcasing the efficacy of the Knight Commission's online database for research with practical implications.

Overview of Study

1

Over the last decade, student bodies across the United States have begun to push back against student subsidies of university athletics departments (Longman, 2009).

2

Even with students becoming more aware of the interconnection between university and athletics department funding, the use of student fees and tuition reallocations to support athletics is still widespread, so much that state legislatures are proposing legislation to limit the practice (Minium, 2015).

3

Thus, the aim of this project is to provide an in-depth examination of student perceptions, beginning from general awareness all the way to the appropriate amount and mechanism of the subsidies provided by his or her university to support athletics department operations at institutions that rely the most heavily on students to fund athletics.

Review of Literature

Several studies have taken varying approaches to better understand the role of institutional support in athletics department funding. Specifically, Lombardi (2012) compared the athletics subsidy (for this study, athletics subsidy is defined as the combination of student fees and institutional support paid to the athletics department) to the expenses of the university library system.

Furthermore, like the consistency in reporting by *USA Today* on expenditures in college athletics, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has compiled data on campus library expenditures for decades (Lombardi, 2012).

Lombardi (2012) found that subsidy amounts in relation to library expenditures vary widely. For example, he noted that for one academic year, the University of Delaware spent \$18.7 million on library expenditures and the total sports subsidy was \$28.5 million. Therefore, the ratio of the athletics subsidy to total library expenditures was more than 1.5 (Lombardi, 2012). At the opposite extreme, The University of Texas at Austin spent \$46.2 million on library expenditures but did not receive any money via an athletics subsidy from the university. The author argues that, because library expenditures have remained relatively static over time, the varying impacts of athletics subsidies are a result of growing expenses in athletic departments across the Division I level (Lombardi 2012).

Lastly, other studies have examined student perceptions, opinions, and awareness of student fee subsidies to the athletic department at a mid-major Midwestern university (Denhart et al., 2011; Chapman et al., 2014). Overall, results indicated that students were (1) unaware of how much they pay in the form of an athletics fee, (2) unaware as to how this was specifically stated on their tuition and fees bill, (3) unwilling to pay more in an athletics fee, and (4) fearful that increased student fees could limit their opportunity to continue their academic pursuits.

Conceptual Framework

Of particular interest for this proposal, people's behavioral intentions are a function of their level of awareness of the target, comprehension of the attitudinal target, and their overall attitude toward the target (McGuire, 1973).

Participants' awareness level of student athletic fees and institutional support from the university (awareness) were assessed while also ascertaining the tangible and intangible benefits that athletics provides to the overall campus culture (attitude toward athletics) as well as their willingness to financially support (intentions to support athletics) their athletics programs on campus. Therefore, the impact that awareness level and attitude towards athletics has on their intention to support athletics was ascertained.

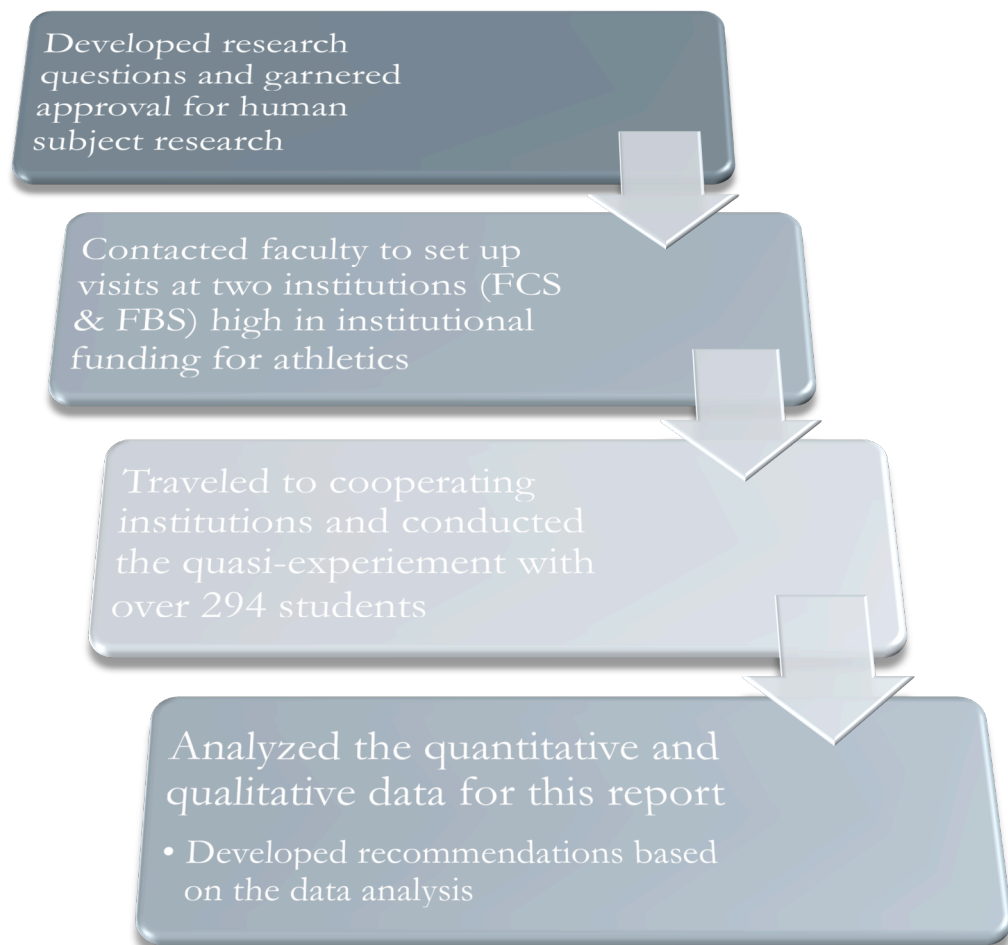
More importantly, after this initial inquiry, participants were informed of how much they pay in student athletic fees as well as educated on how much institutional support is provided to athletics via the Knight Commission website.

As McGuire (1973) indicated, people are more likely to engage in a behavior if they have an awareness of the target, comprehend what the target entails, and have a favorable attitude toward the target.

It will be of considerable value to practitioners to determine how much their willingness to support athletics changes once they are aware of and comprehend how much support students and the institution provide to athletics currently.

Methods and Procedures

The custom reporting option on the Knight Commission website was used to first order institutions by “Institution Funding for Athletics per Athlete” (Athletic & academic spending database for NCAA Division I, 2015). Next one institution from FBS and FCS that is within the top ten subsidizers of intercollegiate athletics was chosen based on accessibility. Participants were recruited by contacting faculty at the institutions prior to the campus visit to distribute surveys in medium or large-sized lecture classes.



Survey Instrument

Questions before participants view specific institutional data on student fee allocations

- How important is it to you that [school name] teams win?
- How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of [school name] athletics?
- How important is being a fan of [school name] athletics to you?
- How aware would you say you are of the student athletics fees charged on top of tuition at your school to support the athletics programs at [school name]?
- Given the choice, how willing would you be to pay a student fee to ensure the athletics programs exist on your campus?
- How much, roughly, would you say you pay each year in athletics fees?
- What would be the maximum amount per year you would feel comfortable with paying in athletics fees?

Questions after participants view specific institutional data on student fee allocations

- What is your general reaction to the amount of fees you pay at [institution name]?
- What is your general reaction to the amount of athletics fees you pay?
- Has your opinion changed on how much you would be willing to pay in athletics fees? If so, how?
- What are the benefits you and/or the general campus community receives from having an athletics program on campus?

of classes visited Ten

of students surveyed 293

gender breakdown 133 female, 160 male

eligibility breakdown 85 SR, 133 JR, 60 SO, 12 FR, 3 GS

average institutional support per athlete at schools ~\$56,500

typical survey length Ten minutes

Data Collection Procedure

Any researchers interested in utilizing the Knight Commission Database could easily replicate the method employed in this study. The steps of the methods are laid out below.

- Students first completed demographic information, a scale measuring team identification, items measuring their awareness of BOTH general student fees and athletics fees, and items measuring their willingness to pay athletics fees.
- In the second step, the researcher showed the students three slides of information. First, the school profile on the Knight Commission website was presented and the different lines on the graph were explained. Next, the USA Today College Finances profile page for their school was shown. Finally, a listing of all the fees they are charged was presented (information taken directly from the school website).
- After being shown the three slides, students were directed not to talk amongst themselves and complete items measuring (1) their general reaction to the amount of fees, (2) amount of athletics fees, (3) and their opinion on the match between the benefits they receive from the general fees AND student fees and the amount they pay.

Cooperating Institutions

Students from two institutions were selected to participate in this study. Both schools were in the top ten in their division (FBS and FCS) in regards to institutional funding for athletics per athlete in the Knight Commission database. To protect the anonymity of the institutions, no further information is provided.

Main Takeaways

Awareness of Fees (Pre-Test)



Students stated they held an average awareness of both the general and student fees they are charged at their institution. Fifty-two percent stated they were moderately aware of the general student fees charged and 42 percent stated they were moderately aware of the athletics students fees. However, only 11 percent of the respondents indicated they were moderately or completely aware of the athletics fees compared to 25 percent for the general fees.

Willingness to Pay (Pre-Test)



Students were asked, “Given the choice, how willing would you be to pay a student fee to ensure the athletics programs exist on your campus?” They were not given a dollar amount (that comes later) and were shown the choices (1) not at all willing, (2) reluctant, (3) indifferent, (4) “normally” willing, and (5) excited/happy to do so. Thirty-two percent stated they would be normally willing, 28 percent were indifferent, 18 percent were reluctant, 13 percent not at all willing, and seven percent excited/happy to do so.

Main Takeaways

Amount Willing to Pay (Pre-Test)

Students were asked to guess how much they pay in athletics fees per year at their institution. In essence, the majority had little or no idea on the exact amount.



Responses ranged from zero all the way to the tens of thousands with many simply putting a question mark or “I don’t know.” These results fit with the previous question measuring their general awareness of athletics fees.

Additionally, students were asked what is the maximum they would be willing to pay if they were forced. Responses averaged around \$100 with others stating they wanted to pay the “bare minimum.”

Role of Athletics on Campus (Pre-Test)



A wide variety of answers were given when students were asked what role athletics plays on their campus. The main themes that emerged were athletics gives the university (1) something to be proud of, (2) visibility in the community and nationally, (3) school spirit and sense of community, (4) a rallying point/gathering space, and (5) social events on campus. Others stated athletics are overemphasized and/or not important to their campus experiences. Representative positive quotes include, “they bring the campus together,” “they bring out school pride,” “successful teams can bring national exposure,” and “What’s a university without athletics?” Negative quotes included “I don’t know if it actually has important impact on our society on campus” and “Not very important, I’ve been here a year and have not attended any athletic event.”

Main Takeaways

Benefits Match the Cost for Fees (Post-Test)

After students were shown the slides detailing the institutional support for athletics and how much they pay for both general fees and athletics fees they were asked to rate the match between the benefits they receive and the amount they pay in general and athletics fees. On a seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree as 1, neither agree or disagree as 4, and strongly agree as 7), students had a mean score of 4.72 when asked about the match between cost and general fees. However, when asked about the match between cost and athletics fees the mean score dropped to 2.93. If you take a deeper look at the frequencies for the athletics fees match the differences are even more striking.



- 1 (Strongly Disagree) – 31 percent
- 2 (Disagree) – 17 percent
- 3 (Somewhat Disagree) – 12 percent
- 4 (Neither Disagree or Agree) – 15 percent
- 5 (Somewhat Agree) – 8 percent
- 6 (Agree) – 7 percent
- 7 (Strongly Agree) – 3 percent

In general, it's clear students feel they are being charged too much for athletics student fees when compared to the amount of benefits they receive, especially when compared to the general student fees they pay for services like technology, the library, and health and recreation services.

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