

The Need for Content Analysis Methodology in Examining Student-Athlete Reinstatement Cases

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Presentation (25-minute)**

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National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I (NCAA DI) definitions of Amateurism have undergone significant changes over the past decade. Crucial policy changes in the NCAA Student-Athlete Reinstatement (SAR) process shifted toward a "less bureaucratic-more responsive" approach. The student-athlete (SA) - first philosophy implemented by the new NCAA administration, led by Dr. Myles Brand, has worked to achieve a balance between the Association's Constitutional principles of SA Welfare, Competitive Equity, and Institutional Control. These principles conflicted in the past, and critics in both popular press and academic research have argued that the Association is not serving its purposes by its contemporary policy. This research investigates the contribution of the SAR staff and Committee in shaping the Association's decision-making, rendering SAs eligible or ineligible, applying the letter of NCAA law, being attentive to case-specific circumstances, serving SA's welfare, at the same time promoting competitive equity among DI member institutions. In order to examine the impact of the NCAA's new SA-first philosophy, content analysis methodology was selected to examine SAR cases documented in the NCAA's Legislative Services Database (LSDBi).

This presentation examines the content analysis process and its usefulness in studying NCAA policy. Content analysis was selected because of its ability to efficiently and unobtrusively organize and identify trends in large amounts of data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Content analysis allows researchers to find the core of policy application and the interpretations of the NCAA DI regulatory framework. Researchers and NCAA staff benefit from this research by reflecting on precedent cases, which offers the opportunity to understand the precise application of a legislative amendment, a policy interpretation, new standards of review, the timeframe of change, and the initiation of a new philosophical approach to decision making.

Content analysis is used to examine student-athlete reinstatement cases involving Division I amateurism violations in Bylaw 12. Data was collected from the Legislative Services Database (LSDBi) on the NCAA website. The study involved the analysis of case summaries written by NCAA staff members. The case summaries yielded 18 variables for analysis including the NCAA's final eligibility decision, the circumstances leading to the violation, reinstatement conditions imposed on the SA, and the rationale used by the NCAA in making its decision. Prior to selecting the cases used in this study, the authors conducted a pilot study to become familiar with content analysis methodology, develop coding protocols, and create a codebook. The pilot study process allowed the authors to design a codebook that reflected the purpose of the research, create mutually exclusive and exhaustive classification systems, and establish independence of variables (Riffe, Lacey & Fico, 2005).

In addition to presenting the codebook developed for the purpose of examining SAR cases involving violations of Bylaw 12, data selection and analysis processes and coding procedures will be explored. Specifically, two individuals, trained in content analysis methodology and the coding protocols used in the study, independently coded SAR cases (Riffe, Lacey, & Fico, 2005). Intercoder reliability was tested by each coder examining the same cases. Twenty percent of the sample size was selected (Pedersen, Whisenant & Schneider, 2003), which also represents five percent of the entire population (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). All variable categories were coded at above eighty percent agreement, which is the standard minimum acceptable level (Riffe, Lacey, & Fico, 2005). Scott's Pi test statistic was calculated to test for chance agreement (Riffe, Lacey, & Fico, 2005). Only one variable, staff imposed reinstatement conditions (.57), significantly fell below Krippendorff's (2004) minimum acceptable Scott's Pi level of .80. The high level of agreement between coders indicates that the coders were familiar with content analysis methodology and fully understood the coding protocols and codebook used in the study (Riffe, Lacey, & Fico, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004).

One collects much more than hard data after studying these cases. One observes the way decision-making shapes the Association's character (and vice-versa), the way it serves the membership, and most importantly the way it shapes SAs' lives. Content analysis research serves a multi-faceted purpose: it allows for conclusions to be drawn on NCAA policy; it provides detailed findings on case handling in each area of decision-making; it tests whether policy and its interpretations by staff members are following the stated objectives set forth by the collective body voting and key administrators; it provides valuable data to NCAA member institutions without staff members engaging in time consuming research. Moreover, it offers procedural strategies to institutional staff members engaged in pursuing a case for the benefit of the SA and the institution, based on the considerations from precedent; hence, eventually this research leads to considerations of policy that may allow for conclusions to be reached based on the actual decision-making taking place, and not merely critical reasoning of policy that would not be

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safe as the sole motivation behind any new policy drafts.

What the NCAA staff's own experience shows in regard to such research (SAR staff deals with approximately 2,000 cases a year) is the realization of it forming into a system of checks and balances in regard to the Association's policy. Especially the way by which the Brand administration shaped the Association's philosophy and the SA-first approach it assumed is analyzed and significantly clarified in regard to the balance among frequently conflicting principles the Association attempts to serve. Focusing on policy analysis and critical theory studies of NCAA administration issues simply does not offer the full picture. Without the actual research on cases handled and their particular peculiarities where policy practically assumes a meaning and is applied considering many variables at a time, the researcher might be misled to conclusions that are not truly capturing what takes place in NCAA policy implementation.

In conclusion, this research offers service of practical use to policy-makers. This contribution is emphasized by the fact neither NCAA member institutions' nor conferences' staff members can afford the time that needs to be invested in understanding the complexities of such research. Unfortunately, these administrators, however, are the ones who need research to be conducted on matters of policy when drafting an amendment or considering a vote before the membership's collective body. On the other hand, the Association's staff and administrators possess the explicit familiarity needed to fully analyze the concepts this research investigates. Without fundamental changes to the Association's structure, nonetheless, the resources and infrastructure do not allow for these shareholders to fully exploit their policy research, drafting, and implementation potential. Closing, this research may prove instrumental in contributing to the Association's policy considerations, by means of identifying emerging trends via the cases under examination, thus forecasting toward future problems the membership and Association's staff may be called to handle while attempting to maintain the delicate balances 21st Century intercollegiate athletics policy entails.