Administrators’ Perceptions of Success at NCAA Division III Institutions

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Previous research has explored the ambiguous role of athletics on an institution's campus (Brand, 2006). Central to this research is the complex relationship between athletics success as defined by wins and losses, potential monetary gain and the educational mission of the institution. Given the increased revenues and expenditures in Division 1, studies have primarily observed the role of athletics on these campuses. However, this complex relationship is evident across all three divisions in the NCAA. Prior research has suggested that Division III institutions view athletics through an integrated lens, often emphasizing the importance of the experience of student-athletes over that of performance (NCAA, 2018). Further, other factors are essential to a Division III institution, including increased sports offerings, upgraded facilities, and increased student enrollment (Katz, Pfleegor, Schaeperkoetter, & Bass, 2015). These previous studies have shed light on the differing factors used to define success in Division III qualitatively.

The purpose of this study is to explore how university presidents and athletics directors at NCAA Division III institutions perceive success within their athletics departments. A 28-item instrument to assess the perceptions of success was developed based on prior research as well as the investigators’ expertise in Division III athletics (Katz et al., 2015) and was piloted to thirty participants. Upon statistical analysis of the results, six items were removed to improve the Chronbach’s alpha (.859). The remaining 22 items were placed in subsections in the final survey to address internal validity of the instrument. Subsections were split between factors within the athletic department and those external to the athletic department. An analysis of the means from the pilot study (N=14) indicated that retaining student-athletes at the institution (M = 4.79, SD = .41) and recognition of athletics by the institution (M = 4.69, SD = .46) were key elements of perceived success by participants. In contrast, the removal of sports from the athletic department (M = 2.36, SD = .89) and the addition of sports in the athletic department (M = 3.36, SD = .89) were seemingly less important factors of perceived success. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be utilized to analyze the data in the follow up study. Investigators will submit the final survey to all NCAA Division III athletics directors and university presidents in the coming months. Final results will be presented at the 2020 NASSM conference.

This study will expand on previous research addressing athletics and NCAA Division III institutions, particularly in regard to understanding how administrators and athletics directors perceive athletics success. Implications will benefit those working in this realm of college sport as well as student-athletes who compete at this level.