

## Factors Affecting Donor Activity in Ontario University Athletics

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As operational costs increase and internal funding decreases, athletic departments within Ontario University Athletics (OUA) are faced with financial uncertainty for the future. As a result, athletic departments are seeking funding opportunities from outside the university governance. Fundraising, specifically from individual donors is one opportunity that athletic departments seize. Unfortunately, from a Canadian perspective little is known about factors that affect donor activity. Therefore, university athletic departments in Canadian conferences, such as the OUA, have no research to validate or support the methods and marketing tools used to generate donations.

Despite the lack of literature from a Canadian perspective, research pertaining to athletic donations is widespread within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This illustrates the importance of understanding factors affecting athletic donor activity. From the existing literature, four distinct factors that affect athletic donor activity in the NCAA emerged: donor motivations, environmental influences, demographic influences and communication strategies. Early literature pertaining to donor motivations measured philanthropy, social, success and benefits motives for athletic donor activity (Billing, Holt and Smith, 1985). Researchers built upon the pioneering framework of Billing et al. to uncover additional motivations and developed subsections of existing motives. Most recently, Gladden, Mahony and Apostolopoulou (2005) found the top four motivations for Division I athletic donations to be: support and improving the athletic program, ticket orientated benefits, helping student athletes, and entertainment.

Literature pertaining to the environmental influences of university athletic donation has included the size of the school, the status of the school (public versus private) (Hall & Mahony, 1997), the location of the school (urban versus rural) (Gladden et al., 2005; Mahony et al., 2003) and achievements (winning record, prestige) of the school (Brooker & Klastorin, 1981). Steir and Schneider (1999) found that it is easier to generate outside resources when the image, reputation and recent achievements of the school are positive. Understanding the environmental differences at universities may allow for unique donor characteristics to be uncovered.

Demographic influences on athletic donations in the NCAA have included gender, race, age, location, alumni/non alumni, income (Mahony, Gladden & Funk, 2003) and education (Staurowsky, 1996). Significantly, NCAA donor literature primarily focuses on the fact that the majority of donations come from males, leaving female donors as an untapped resource for athletic departments. Staurowsky (1996) noted the importance of understanding the relationship between athletic donor behaviour and gender to aid in relieving financial pressures in athletic departments as well as the projected costs associated with gender equity. Research surrounding the communication strategies for athletic donation is limited. Identified communication mediums include direct mail, telemarketing and one-on-one solicitation. Absent from literature is an effective evaluation of donor programs offered by institutions including what method of communication is used for promotion. Communication needs to be further analyzed to see if athletic departments are marketing and designing programs that fit the motivations of their donors.

The purpose of this study is to examine factors affecting athletic donor activity in the OUA based on the four factors developed within NCAA literature: donor motives, environmental influences, demographic influences and communication strategies. The intention of the investigator is to gather an understanding of athletic donor activity in the OUA to potentially aid in development of strategies to improve donor solicitation, relationships and retention for athletic departments in Canada.

In phase 1, a pilot study is set up to develop the survey instrument for the main study. Since all background literature pertaining to donor activity came from the NCAA, it is important to conduct preliminary research with Canadian university athletic donors to ensure the four factors identified are applicable to a Canadian perspective, and/or whether other factors or subsections, not identified by NCAA literature, play a role in the Canadian context. Ten athletic donors of a Canadian university are invited to participate in the pilot study. Each donor is interviewed based on a semi-structured questionnaire pertaining to demographic, communication and motivational factors associated with donating to the athletic department. The environmental factor is not included in the interview as this information for the larger study will be gathered directly from the institutions and not through the donors. The semi-formal structure of the interview allows the researcher to probe further into the key questions asked and also enables the participant to make additional comments throughout the interview. The audio tape dialogues from the 10

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interviews are to be transcribed for analysis. The results of the pilot study are designed to lay the foundation for construction of the survey instrument in phase 2 of the project.

Phase 2 of the research involves constructing a written questionnaire in order to empirically analyze factors affecting donor behaviour in the OUA. The questionnaire is based on the aforementioned four existing NCAA athletic donor factors (Gladden et al., 2005; Mahony et al., 2003) as well as any additional factors or subsections emerging from the pilot study interviews. Ideally, the questionnaire will be electronically distributed to individual athletic donors at all nineteen OUA member universities. The presentation will illustrate the results of both the pilot and the main study. The qualitative and quantitative measurements of each study will be presented and summarized in order to convey both the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. As there is no prior research in Canada looking specifically at factors affecting donor behaviour, it is important to take the lead established by the NCAA in order to maximize contributions to athletics. Understanding who is donating, why they are donating, what programs are available for athletic donations and institutional factors associated with athletic donations will employ practical and theoretical implications. Practically, athletic departments will be able to see if the athletic donor programs in place are effectively targeting donor preferences or patterns. The empirical findings of this study will hopefully highlight the most prevalent factors associated with athletic donation in the OUA. Theoretically, this study will further our understanding of factors affecting donor behaviour from a Canadian perspective. As funding from internal resources decreases, it is important that research uncover methods to improve revenue generation for athletic programs in the OUA.