

An examination of athletic alumni giving behavior: Validation and interpretation of the former student-athlete donor constraint scale

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Abstract 56**

Charitable donations have become an essential source of revenue for college athletic departments. From 1993 to 2002, average college athletic department expenses at the Division I level increased from \$13 million to \$27.3 million (Fulks, 2002). Generating revenue through fundraising is one of the primary strategies used to offset these expenses. It is pivotal that athletic development officers understand the intricacies of specific donor populations in order to recruit and retain donors.

Former student-athletes are a donor population that has not been successfully cultivated. However, there has been limited research on former athlete donor behavior (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro & Giannoulakis, 2007; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). O'Neil and Schenke (2007) found that the student-athlete experience and the perception that athletes had already given while competing significantly impacted contributions. These results provide evidence that there are unique experiences and attitudes that affect donation behaviors for athletic alumni. Shapiro and Giannoulakis (2007) conducted a qualitative investigation of donation barriers for former athletes in an effort to develop a donation constraints scale for athletic alumni. Four general themes that can be considered donor constraints for former student-athletes were identified: Importance (former athletes' feelings that other causes were more important), Connection (a lack of connection or identification after graduation), Communication/Knowledge (lack of information about the donation process provided to athletic alumni), and Experience (a poor or indifferent student-athlete experience).

Due to the fact that research on donor constraints for former student-athletes is virtually non-existent, related literature on constraints from similar fields, such as leisure and recreation participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991), was reviewed to provide a theoretical foundation for donor constraints. Some of the elements that make up Crawford et al.'s (1991) hierarchical model are applicable in terms of donation barriers for athletic alumni. Leisure constraint factors, such as importance of an activity and participation experience, were also found in O'Neil and Schenke's (2007) examination of athletic alumni donation behavior. We propose that the leisure constraints model can be modified to provide a conceptual framework specific to athletic donations. An investigation of athletic alumni donation barriers will provide a foundation for the Former Student-Athlete Donation Constraints Scale (FSADCS).

The purpose of this study was to extend the previous research on athletic alumni donor behavior through the development and validation of the FSADCS. Data collection took place in the spring of 2007. A pre-pilot and expert review of 41 constraint items reduced the scale to 34 items for the current study. A total of 750 former athlete non-donors from a Division I-A public institution were invited to participate in the study, and 243 usable surveys were returned for a response rate of 36.4%.

Data analyses for the present study included: Item Analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Internal Consistency Analysis. EFA with principle components extraction and promax rotation techniques were used to identify specific constraint factors. The results revealed a 6 factor structure with 60.55% of the variance explained. A total of 6 items were eliminated from the analysis. Two items were excluded due to double loading issues. The other four factors were dropped because they did not fit into the factor structure. The final FSADCS contained 28 items loaded on six factors.

The first factor, Experience (7 items), consisted of items related to aspects of the student-athlete experience that acted as a barrier to donating. The second factor, Communication (7 items), is related to a lack of donor information received by athletic alumni. The third factor, Detachment (6 items), is defined as a separation between former athletes and their athletic department. The fourth factor, Prioritization (3 items), refers to former athletes ranking other causes higher than their athletics department in terms of financial need. The fifth factor, Satisfaction (3 items) refers to the fulfillment of student-athlete expectations both during and after their years of competition. Finally, the sixth factor, Control (2 items), is defined as the perceived lack of control that former athletes have on the specific direction or utilization of their donation. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was satisfactory with scores from all six factors ranging from .74 to .92.

The newly developed FSADCS provided interesting results. The six constraint factors present a foundation for future research. Some of the barriers identified, such as Experience and Detachment, may be unique to former athletes, where Communication,

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Satisfaction, Prioritization, and Control could be barriers for other potential donor populations as well. In addition, specific constraints, such as Detachment, appear to differ based on age and type of sport played. Athletic alumni in different age groups and sports may feel less of a connection to the athletic department and therefore are less likely to donate. Athletic departments must work to cultivate relationships with former athletes so the feeling of connection is not lost when student-athletes leave the institution.

This study was conducted with former athletes from one institution. In order to enhance the validity and reliability of the FSADCS, it will be important to cross-validate the instrument with athletic alumni from multiple institutions at varying levels of competition. Due to the limited research on donor constraints and athletic alumni, this examination must be extended in order to provide an in-depth understanding of former athletes' attitudes and behaviors towards athletic donations.

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