Promoting Institutional Values through Intercollegiate Athletics

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Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the processes by which a university uses its athletic programs to promote institutional values within the community in which it resides.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research includes institutional and organizational theory with a specific focus on neoinstitutional theory. Neoinstitutional theory examines the cultural norms within higher education institutions with regards to the normative, regulative and cultural-cognitive perceptions of the institution. This study will focus primarily on the sociological impact of institutional values using Richard Scott’s (2001) three pillars of institutions. Using the idea that institutions consist of regulative, normative, and cognitive structures will offer meaning to the social behavior of organizations and how that behavior is understood and reproduced throughout the outlying community. The regulative pillar emphasizes rules, laws, and sanctions. “Norms specify how things should be done; they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends” (Scott, 1998, p. 37). Scott also said that norms limit social behavior but simultaneously promote social action. The cognitive element of institutions constitutes the nature of reality and how meaning is created in regards to symbols, language, and cultural meaning. “Mediating between the external world of stimuli and the response of the individual . . . is a collection of internalized symbolic representation of the world” (Scott, 1998, p. 40). D’Andrade (1984) also supported Scott by indicating that what a person does is mostly a representation of his environment. Through the three pillars outlined by Scott (1998), culture formation can be examined. Although each pillar represents a specific area of organizational knowledge, it is the relationship between the pillars that outline the creation of culture (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009). For athletic programs and the surrounding communities, this culture creation is individualized to the type of institution, program history and tradition, location, and athletic affiliation.

Methodology and Data Sources

There are three guiding questions for this study: (1) What are the institutional values of the home institution, (2) How is community defined in regards to institutions, and (3) Can athletics be utilized to promote institutional values within the community? To answer these questions the researchers will conduct a case study analysis by exploring the revenue producing athletic programs at a mid-sized institution in the Southeastern United States. The case study will utilize interviews and document analysis. Using Seidman’s (1998) approach to in-depth interviewing, the researchers, as the interviewers, will use “primarily, open-ended questions” (p. 9) that will allow us to “explore the participants’ responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic study” (p. 9).

This study will use the native commonsense categories described by Scott (1998) as proposed by Parsons (1967) to define the organizational community. Therefore, in order to develop categories, the researchers will examine this division one athletic program by accessing institutional web sites, conference websites, relevant literature and personal experience to explore the concept of institutional values. Through this process, the researcher will break down the data, make comparisons, and re-categorize the data according to general similarities and differences. During this stage of analysis, the researchers may develop some initial categories that are abstract enough to include all the data. Once the institutional values have been established, the researchers will examine the methods in which these institutional values may promoted through the use of institutional athletic programs.

Significance
This study will contribute to the literature on athletic programs by offering a unique viewpoint of how institutions are connected to their surrounding communities. Examining the cultural development of the institution within the community allows the researches to understand the process by which institutional values can be promoted. The identification of the community through the athletic program further enhances the ability of the institution to use the athletic program as a means of promoting institutional values.