An Outcome Determinant Analysis of NCAA Rules Violations: An Application of Multivariate Statistics to the Committee on Infractions’ Decisions on Major Cases

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This project analyzes the sanctions imposed by the Committee on Infractions against NCAA member institutions which have committed major rules violations. In the wake of scandals involving major rules violations, the NCAA and Committee on Infractions have been denounced as being arbitrary in their punishment. Larger BCS schools believe the wrath is greater on their programs while smaller division schools believe the old adage that they are punished for the sins of their larger BCS brethren. This investigation empirically examines whether the Committee on Infractions has remained consistent across divisions and programs in deciding upon proper levels of punishment based on the culpability of particular infractions. Its conduct a series of outcome determinant analyses with respect to 126 cases of NCAA major rules violations.

While researchers have examined various aspects of NCAA violations and sanctions (Grimes & Chressanthis, 1994; Mahony, Fink & Pastore, 1999; Depkin & Wilson, 2006; Winfree & McCluskey, 2008; Clark & Batista, 2009), very little research has been conducted examining the consistency of NCAA sanctions based on outcome determinant analyses incorporating multivariate statistics. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate what aggravating and mitigating factors would be important to the Committee in order to explain the current trends in the NCAA sanctioning process. Secondly, the researchers compare those factors with the penalties across divisions and sports to analyze whether the sanctions are distorted in favor of or against a specific segment of institutions. In the process, the study will investigate whether the NCAA has followed through on its promise to increase the severity of sanctions for violations (Weiberg, 2008).

This study is conducted by using a data set consisted of all major violation cases between October 2004 and the present, October 2011. The data set includes violations committed by members of all three divisions and further broken into categories distinguishing between BCS, FBS-non BCS and FCS schools. A group of industry experts was contacted and consulted in order to determine the variables considered in the outcome determinant model. After rounds of discussion, the researchers selected four variables included in the model, i.e., the types and number of concurrent violations; the status as a repeat violator; the institutions’ self-reported violations and self-imposed sanctions. The types of major violations included in the study are academic fraud, unethical conduct, failure to monitor and lack of institutional control, which have been perceived the most serious violations. The outcome determinant model considers the aggravating effects such as multiple violations committed by institutions. In addition, self-reported violations, self-imposed sanctions, and repeat violator status are also taken into consideration in the model. The sanctions imposed by the Committee are weighted according to the perceived severity as determined by the NCAA and compliance directors. The penalties analyzed in the model range from the most severe such as television bans and postseason bans to show cause actions against employees and vacated records. The researchers weighed different types of sanctions in consideration of industry consensus, e.g., 2-year TV ban (4), 3-year postseason ban (4), reduction of financial aid more than 10% (3), 2-year postseason ban (3), reduction of financial aid less than 10% (2), recruiting limitation (2), show cause (1), vacating record (1), etc. In a case of multiple sanctions, an aggregated score was entered.

Being hypothesized, the aggregated score of violations is a statistically significant predictor for the aggregated score of sanctions (p<.05; R2 = .433). A series of logistic regression analyses tests whether repeat violator status, self-reported, and self-imposed sanctions are aggravating or mitigating factors. Repeat violator status is statistically significant in the logistic regression model relating to the aggregated scores of sanctions (p<.05; Wald=4.09). While self-reported violations is not significant (p>.5), self-imposed sanctions is significant in the logistic regression model relating to the aggregated scores of sanctions (p<.5; Wald=5.34). There is no group difference among BCS, FBS-non BCS, and FCS schools with respect to the severity of sanctions when the types of violations are controlled.
The results of this analysis may provide administrators and commentators with a snapshot of the Committee on Infractions’ decision making process relating to the various factors. The presentation of this study includes more detailed analyses of sanctions across different division and sports with respect to the severity of sanctions and violations. It further discusses how this empirical analysis would help collegiate administrators and practitioners make more informed decisions in dealing with their policy making and implementations related to NCAA regulations.