

# 2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

## CSR in NCAA Athletics: Strategic Focus and Core Competencies

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**Management/leadership**

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**20-minute oral presentation  
(including questions)**

**Abstract 2013-177**

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**(Room 404)**

There is little question that sport organizations are invested in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. As the link between CSR practices and financial rewards has proven tenuous, scholars have suggested sport organizations support CSR initiatives for a number of reasons beyond direct financial gain (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Such reasons to engage in CSR include stakeholder management, advancing the organization's primary business objectives, and using CSR practices as risk management in times of crisis (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). These broad rationales for adopting CSR initiatives are reflected in the myriad of CSR practices highlighted in the academic literature, including environmental, health-related, and educational initiatives (Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Walker & Kent, 2009). With the varied focus of CSR practices in sport and the organizational resources funneled into these activities, clarifying the strategic focus of an organization's CSR program guides academic inquiry and allows organizations to refine their CSR program.

Babiak and Wolfe (2009) proposed a particularly useful framework to delineate the strategic focus of CSR practices. This framework, grounded in the resource-based view of the firm and stakeholder management, builds upon the internal and external influences on CSR practices in the context of professional sport. Within this framework, the authors specifically identify three strategic orientations of CSR: stakeholder-centric CSR, corporate-centric CSR, and strategic CSR. Stakeholder-centric CSR focuses on societal needs to address the expectations of stakeholders (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Corporate-centric CSR aligns with the strategic management literature, such as Porter and Kramer (2006), which suggests CSR practices should further the primary purpose of the organization (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Babiak & Wolfe (2009) suggested strategic CSR to be ideal, as it both addresses societal needs, as expected by stakeholders, and leverages the organization's core competencies.

While Babiak and Wolfe (2009) utilized professional sport in their exploration, they suggest that their framework could be applied to other contexts within sport. Thus, their research serves as the conceptual framework for this study, a preliminary exploration of the strategic focus of CSR practices in the context of NCAA Division I athletics. Similar to professional sport, anecdotal evidence reveals a broad variety of CSR practices across the NCAA and its member institutions. However, the two contexts differ when examining the core competencies of their member organizations. As supported by the NCAA mission statement, NCAA-member athletic departments differ from professional organizations in that athletic departments are expected to balance the dual competencies of athletics and academics (National Collegiate Athletics Association, 2010). While there is no denying the corporate influence at NCAA Division I athletic departments, the educational emphasis remains prevalent throughout the NCAA message, most notably on the organization's website (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2012).

As such, this study explores the strategy behind CSR practices at NCAA Division I member institutions guided by the following research questions:

1. Are the core competencies of athletics and academics present in CSR practices at NCAA Division I institutions?
2. What is the strategic focus of CSR practices at NCAA Division I institutions?
  - a. Does this focus align with the mission of the NCAA?

Following the recommendations of Bernard (2005), a content analysis is employed to explore the types of CSR practices engaged in by NCAA Division I athletic departments, the particular parties involved in the execution of these practices, and the timing of these practices as they relate to the academic calendar. Specifically, the authors are detailing the CSR activities, both internally and externally-focused, of athletic departments from three NCAA Division I conferences, the Big 12, the West Coast Conference, and the Patriot League, over the fall 2012 academic semester. The researchers are utilizing a number of secondary data sources, including department websites, social media, and university newspapers. Furthermore, each author will independently code the data to ensure intercoder reliability (Bernard, 2005). Along with clarifying the strategy behind these CSR practices, this work also has

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implications as to the role of student-athletes in CSR practices, the impact on their academics, and how these results align with the NCAA mission. Given the emphasis the NCAA, its member conferences, and its member institutions are placing on CSR initiatives, the results of this study will offer direction for practical evaluation of CSR efforts in this context and will serve as a foundation to further exploration into the social outcomes of CSR.