Propensity to Give: An Analysis of the Giving Potential of Current Students to Athletic Departments

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Understanding the process, motivations and importance of donations to college athletic departments has been widely researched within the sport management literature. Early studies examining donations to athletic departments evaluated the importance of certain motivations and behaviors among individuals who made donations (Staurowsky et al., 1996; Verner et al., 1998). Included within this literature were attempts to develop instruments to understand donor motivations (Staurowsky et al., 1996) as well as trying to bring validity to these instruments (Verner et al., 1998). Additionally, the early lines of research into donor behavior in sport management also considered the relationship between gender and giving (Staurowsky, 1996). From this, it is rather evident that a great deal of focus has been placed on the development of instruments to understand the behavior of current donors. However, something which has not been fully investigated is the propensity to donate to a university and its athletic department by current students. With this in mind, this current research focuses on understanding the behaviors which play an important role in individuals considering donating money to athletic departments in the future.

The concept of donations to sport organizations has received a wide range of treatment within the literature, ranging from economics (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007) to marketing (Covell, 2005). Within this thought, the greater focus is placed on college athletic departments, because of the importance donations have to the operations and success of these programs. While it has been shown that revenue from donations to sport clubs can also be of high importance (Wicker et al., 2012), the focus of the literature has been on U.S. based college athletic institutions. Covell (2005) considered the importance of attachment to place as well as allegiance in examining donations to Ivy League athletic departments. In this, it was found that individuals did not change their amount of donation based on the performance of athletic department sport teams. The conception of team performance and donations was also investigated in prior research which found that while not all divisions of college sport were affected by football performance, there were some divisions (Division II and Division III) which saw increases in athletic donations when teams won football championships (Daughtrey & Stotlar, 2000). The importance of winning was additionally highlighted by Stinson and Howard (2008) who found that athletic and academic giving at I-AA and I-AAA institutions were increased when sport teams performed better. More recent studies into donor behavior have found that SPLIT donors, individuals who give to both academics and athletics, gave greater amounts to athletic departments than individual donors (Stinson & Howard, 2010).

From the greater research into donors, it is clear that there is a need to consider studying donor behavior, and the impact these donors have on schools. As noted before, the research into donor behavior has not fully considered the importance of future donors, and factors leading to their propensity to donate. This dearth in the literature served as the impetus for this research, which examined the thoughts and potential of future donations from current college students. For the purpose of this research, a survey with instruments measuring different campus behavior, as well as demographic questions and potential future donation information was distributed to the entire student body at a large Midwestern university. After removing incomplete surveys, a total of 203 entries were used for the data analysis. Male participants accounted for 41.9% of the responses compared to 58.1% female participants. Data was biased toward younger students between the age of 18 and 24 (86.7%), and toward Caucasian students (81.8%). 19.7% of participants were active members of intercollegiate sport teams. Given only 8.4% of participants made actual monetary donations to the university, donation intention was considered the primary outcome variable for data analysis. Six independent variables were utilized to investigate student participation in various social, academic and sport activities: recreational sport, organized/intercollegiate sport, student organizations, social events, academic panels and fine art events (Lara & Johnson, 2013, Skari, 2011). Place attachment was identified as potentially intervening (Okunde & Berl, 1997) to donation intention and served as an expected mediating factor between
campus participation and donation intention. Average scores for place attachment and donation intention indicators were used in the statistical analysis. Initial and mediating relationships among variables were identified using simple linear and multiple regression techniques via IBM SPSS Statistics (Barron & Kenny, 1986). No significant relationship existed between fine art event participation and place attachment or donation potential and was dropped from further analysis. Subsequent theorized and preliminary causal relationships were assessed with structural modeling for the remaining variables using IBM SPSS AMOS.

As expected, the formulated path model presented good data fit (chi-square = .728, p = .948, df=5, RMSEA<.001; PCLOSE = .979, CFI=1.00; NFI=.998). The model indicated significant direct influence of place attachment upon donation intention (.48, p<.001). There was also significant direct effects of academic panel participation on donation intention (.13, p<.05) and organized/ intercollegiate sport participation on donation potential (.13, P<.05). Only participation in recreational sport resulted in a significant effect to the mediator, place attachment (.32, p<.001). It should be noted that the current model is based on theoretical perspectives from existing donation literature and the procedural steps for determining mediation from Barron and Kenny (1986). The model serves as a preliminary evaluation for the future testing of donation behaviors and ultimately requires further sampling for model confirmation.

Prior research has established that individual involvement with a university through sport, social events and academic activities affect donation behaviors (Lara & Johnson, 2013; Tsiotsou, 1998; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). This study has taken steps toward differentiating the impacts of university involvement factors on the future donation intention of current students. Statistical results indicate that when compared to other types of involvement (social events, student organizations, and academic panels), sport involvement factors may be viable predictors for donation intention to universities both directly (organized/intercollegiate direct effect=.32) and indirectly (recreational sport indirect effect=.15). Given the focus of existing literature on the role of sport and attachment in actual donor behavior, this study provides support regarding the importance of sport and place attachment factors to future donation intention for current students.

Further, this study indicates place attachment as a potentially strong predictor for donation intention. This suggests a future direction for donation studies to further understand the role of place attachment in donor behavior. Overall, results indicate that organized/intercollegiate and recreational sport, among other factors, may play unique roles in donation intention to athletics departments and universities as similarly determined in the literature for current donors. Thus, the results presented highlight the need for model confirmation and further research on the role of sport on both attachment and donation to university giving behaviors.