Gopalakrishnan and Damanpour (1994) and Suranyi-Unger (1994) outlined organizational innovation as involving the introduction of original and/or novel product(s), process(es), and/or system(s) into an organization. As the product of desired change, Ahmed (1998), Damanpour and Schneider (2006), and Wolfe (1994) further asserted organizational innovation is the result of strategy implemented by transformational leaders within a highly developed organizational climate and their prompts to discuss and try novel approaches for the resolution of organizational problems, environmental concerns, and/or institutional challenges. Research on institutional diffusion also suggests that “highly institutionalized organizations can become resistant to innovation” (Chacar & Hesterly, 2004, p. 409). Appropriately, organizational innovation has been identified as a significant point to study for the firm. However, this topic has received limited attention in the sport industry (Chacar & Hesterly, 2004; Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012). We find this point interesting because a lack of organizational innovation undermines the ability of the firm to sponsor and manage its activities, create high quality products, and overall secure the ability of the organization to fulfill its goals, mission (Chacar & Hesterly, 2004), and long-term survival (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). The purpose of this study is to examine organizational innovation through reviewing innovation strategies used by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and specifically within the men’s basketball tournament since it’s beginning in 1939.

The NCAA men’s basketball tournament is the main source of revenue for the association (i.e., roughly $11 billion total from 2011 to 2014) and interpreted broadly across a wide cross-section of academics as representative of the professionalization of amateur sport. The proposed research will examine organizational innovation and strategies through reviewing the creation and maintenance of the tournament since its inception in 1939. This study involves an on-campus experience at the NCAA headquarters in March of 2014. Already the researchers have arranged for the documents they desire to be ready for their visit with the NCAA archivist. Within, the researchers will concentrate on the evolution of the men’s basketball tournament through components highlighted as critical for studying innovation. Specifically, the researchers will analyze: 1) changes in leadership; 2) activities associated with the resolution of crisis; 3) the creation/use of novelty; and 4) the willingness to adapt. To highlight the importance of the aforementioned components and the potential of this topic, we can review one of the major goals of the NCAA men’s basketball tournament (i.e., secure exclusive status as one of the United States’ annual mega events). Inherent in the concept of ‘exclusivity’ is the exclusion of business rivals who desire to advertise or market their products, goods, or services as legitimate (i.e., championship quality). Peer organizations electing to challenge the NCAA historically have met interesting fates due to organizational innovation. For example, the National Invitation Tournament (NIT) once held a national reputation as the more significant postseason tournament but is now owned by the NCAA.

The type of historical analysis proposed here honors the call of Ostroff, Kinicki, and Tamkins (2003) and Sarros et al. (2008) who argued for more studies to examine the concept of innovation and strategies used by organizations. This pursuit is also consistent with Barrett and Sexton’s (2006) proposition that innovation is a means to achieve or maintain success and more investigation should be completed which highlights examples related to the important pursuit of innovation. Finally, the collective information produced by this academic pursuit aims refine the identification of the determinants of innovation and the process of intra-firm diffusion previously requested by Sarros et al. (2008). Further, this study will respect the ‘process of innovation’ which focuses on the "temporal sequence of activities" that organizations go through when developing and implementing innovations (Wolfe, 1994, p. 409). A common link between the process of innovation and the determinants of innovation concerns an
applicable unit of adoption, which “can refer to an individual, a group, an organization, an industry, or the world as a whole” (Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012, p. 214).

Historical case research requires researchers to provide reviewers with the explicit assumptions and logics guiding the establishment of their specific ontological and epistemological positions and is gaining support among the academy (Lamond, 2006, Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker, 2014). This investigation will draw on a wide range of NCAA primary and secondary sources and take an historical institutionalism-based approach to examine the leadership, resolution of crisis, creation of novelty, and adaptability/flexibility of the NCAA. Within this conception, the institution (i.e., NCAA) is assumed to be comprised of “both formal structures and informal rules and procedures that structure conduct” as an interest-based association (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992, p. 2). Furthermore, historical institutionalism would position the NCAA as the aggregate of individual and collective actions resulting from the surrounding environment capable of producing some unintended consequences (Pierson, 2004; Scott, 2008). Innovation is, thus, an activity which generally results from constraints provided by the institution and society.

Reviewing archival data housed in the NCAA headquarters (Indianapolis, IN) specific to the men’s basketball tournament and general NCAA organizational activities from this orientation will provide the researchers the opportunity to reveal the use of innovation in order to show how the NCAA evolved and likely what they will become.

When the discussion of theoretical concepts (e.g., organizational innovation) is in a developmental phase for an industry or field, inductive case studies have been shown to be useful and powerful communicative tools (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Rowley, 2002). Siggelkow (2007) further noted that historical case studies, in particular, often provide more compelling understandings regarding the study of theoretical constructs than sole empirical studies can do alone. Moreover, historical case studies present the opportunity to create a rich detailed supply of evidence to support deductive empirical approaches (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

We recognize individual activity is regularly dictated by the institution and the goals set by their organizational mission/agenda. The mission is frequently observed as the product of internal competition between internal stakeholders against those of the presented by the environment (Campbell, 2004; Pierson, 2004; Scott, 2008). Scott, Ruef, Mendel, and Caronna (2000) and Berger and Luckmann (1967) supported this notion through their arguments that organizations and individuals within will seek out strategies that improve credibility (i.e., legitimacy) against peer groups and activities. We similarly believe this can happen through connecting the NCAA’s activities and materials to relevant points of reference or established standards. This connection is also a feature of the historical case study analysis. Upon completion of the data collected, a comprehensive content analysis will occur, which will be followed by the researchers’ preparation of a historical case study report. Within, a discussion of implications and strategies for utilizing the information for developing and enhancing organizational innovation across the firm will be presented.