Corruption is a persistent feature across the sport industry and in particular, within National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I intercollegiate athletics (Yost, 2009). During the past decade, 122 instances of corruption (major violations) within Division I intercollegiate athletics were reported (NCAA, 2015). Despite this consistent pattern, sport management scholars have yet to engage in an in-depth empirical analysis of understanding why these malfeasant behaviors occur and persist. The organizational corruption literature has sought to understand the causes of corruption from either a micro (individual and personal factors), a meso (organizational factors), or a macro (environmental) level perspective. However, much of this literature tends to focus on one (e.g., Soltani, 2014) or two levels (e.g., Pinto, Leana, & Pil, 2008) of analysis, which does not adequately explain how many instances of corruption manifest. The sport management literature, has mainly examined the micro or macro level causes of corruption. Micro levels of analysis have examined athletes’ motivations for engaging in specific types of corruption (i.e., doping and match fixing), where they seek improved health or faster recovery from injury, a perceived low risk of being caught, a perceived threat posed to an elite career, and players nearing end of career (Aquilina & Chetcuti, 2013; Hill, 2009; 2015, Overbye et al., 2013). Macro level analyses have studied the economics of sport corruption (i.e., match fixing and gambling) and found unregulated gambling, high liquidity in betting markets, low salaries, competition among bookmakers, international crime syndicates have all contributed to the increase and global nature of corruption in sport (especially, match and spot fixing) (e.g., Bag & Saha, 2011; Forrest, 2012). Studies engaging in a two level analysis—meso and macro—have explored the causes of match fixing in particular sports (i.e., football, cricket, Sumo wrestling) within specific countries (e.g., Finland, Greece, Malta) where a lack of accountability and transparency, links to organized crime, commercialization of sport, and unregulated online gambling allow for this form of corruption to occur (e.g., Aquilina & Chetcutti, 2013; Hill, 2009, 2015; Peurala, 2013).

Despite this evolution in understanding the causes of corruption in sport management research, many cases of corruption result from the combination of individual, organizational and environmental influences - for example, the University of North Carolina’s academic fraud case. Huberts (2010) argues that “corruption manifests itself at different levels” thus warranting a multi-level analysis. Absent in the empirical work is understanding why corruption occurs in different sport organizations and contexts (e.g., forms of corruption, sports, countries). This study seeks to address these shortcomings by conducting a multi-level analysis of the causes of corruption within Division I intercollegiate athletics. Through cross-case examination, we sought to understand what central individual, organizational, and environmental features contribute to the occurrence of malfeasant activities in intercollegiate athletics.

Corruption is conceived as those practices that violate organizational rules and norms for personal or group gain (Zyglidopoulos & Fleming, 2008). Context is deemed crucial as individual, organizational, and environmental factors interrelate and should be considered in understanding the causes of corruption (Hubert, 2010). Given this, our study was informed through multi-level framework consisting of three interrelated levels (Huberts, 2010; Huettees, 1982). Micro level or individual and personal characteristics, and their work groups; meso level or the formal organization, including leadership, organization structure, policies, and organization culture; and macro level or environmental, including policies (rules and laws), economics, society, and politics. The magnitude of specific level influences and the relationship among them will vary by the nature of the malfeasant activity.

Given the study’s aim, a multi-case sampling technique (Miles & Huberman, 2010) was used. This technique adds confidence to the findings through examining a range of similar and contrasting cases to gain new knowledge about why corruption occurs within Division I athletics. Data were collected from the NCAA’s Legislative Services Database (LSDBi). In order to address the research questions, twenty cases of major infractions that occurred during the past 10 years were randomly selected. The rationale for selecting NCAA infractions cases was: a) to gain insight
into understanding the causes of corruption in an intercollegiate sport context, and b) the availability of detailed infractions reports that include documentation of the causes of corruption. The decade timeframe was chosen to gain a contemporary cross analysis of corrupt cases within this intercollegiate setting. Data analysis is ongoing and was guided by Miles and Huberman’s (2014) qualitative data analysis process. First, the major infractions reports for each selected case were downloaded and read for familiarity. Codes were then deductively created from the causes of corruption literature (e.g., Frost & Tischer, 2014; Huberts, 2010). Third, using the qualitative software ATLAS.ti (Scientific Software Development, 2015), the reports will then be deductively coded identifying micro, meso, and macro level causes of corruption. Fourth, content analysis summary tables will be created for each case that will be followed by the generation of a meta-analysis matrix to condense all the data into one table. Using constant comparative method analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 2007), similar and different characteristics among cases will be noted, where content will be recorded and themes identified regarding the causes of intercollegiate athletic corruption.

Results will be presented and discussed. This research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the multiple causes of corruption and their relationships within the context of Division I intercollegiate athletics. The study advances the scope of scholarly investigation on the causes of corruption in sport into a new context and will enrich our understandings of how these multi-level characteristics help manifest corruption within this intercollegiate context. Thus, ultimately aiming to identify more effective reform strategies. The presentation will conclude with recommendations for future research in this domain as well as highlight the implications for practice.