Over the years, college and university athletic programs have received a number of criticisms. The criticisms has been directed at a number of issues including illegal recruiting practices and rule violations, excessive spending and funding on athletic programs at the expense of academic programs, unethical practices related to student-athlete grading and testing, alleged athlete exploitation in terms of pay and employment status demands, sexual abuse claims involving athletes and females on campus, misplaced priorities when head football coaches are paid more than college presidents, commercialization involving television money and athletics, conference re-alignment stimulated by the lure of TV money, and student athlete academic scandals including academic clustering (Coakley, 2016; Sage & Eitzen, 2016). Much of the criticism of college athletic programs has been directed specifically at Division 1 FBS revenue sports such as football and men’s basketball. The criticisms extend to the recruiting of selected athletes who are under qualified academically and allowed into colleges with high academic standards as special admits. Furthermore, a number of college athletic scandals have surfaced in recent years (e.g., University of North Carolina, Baylor University,…). An ongoing debate has existed for years as to whether college athletics and academics can co-exist and whether college athletic programs should be eliminated entirely or downsized. Others argue that college athletic programs are beneficial to the college or university in that they provide opportunities to teach student athletes valuable life skills and lessons related to teamwork, self-discipline, and leadership skills. Further, it is pointed out by supporters that college athletics can serve as a focal point to bring alumni, students, and communities together for a common cause. Some researchers have even suggested that successful athletic programs can enhance and increase student enrollments and student recruitment efforts (Pope & Pope, 2009).

During the past decade, a number of colleges and universities have initiated new or revived football programs (e.g., Georgia State, University of Texas at San Antonio, Old Dominion University,…). In turn, some schools have eliminated football programs (e.g., Hofstra University, Northeastern University,…) primarily because of budget concerns. A small number of colleges and universities have elected to keep certain revenue sports such as football but cut non-revenue sports (e.g., James Madison University). Efforts to comply with Title IX requirements and expand football have added to the athletic program discussion and decisions about whether to keep, modify, or eliminate athletic programs or specific sports.

The purpose of this study is to examine the potential fund-raising financial benefits of starting a college football program at the NCAA Division I level. One university will be used as a case study (single subject) to analyze the financial benefits of a new college football program to the university’s athletic fund-raising efforts. A longitudinal study approach will be used to analyze donations to the athletic fund-raising foundation for seven years before the start of football and seven years after the start of football at the case study university in order to analyze patterns and determine if differences exist.

Findings for this study revealed that the amount of money raised by athletic fund-raising efforts significantly increased after the start of football at the university being studied. For example, the average per year amount of athletic foundation fund-raising totals for the seven years prior to the start of football was $1,284,854. After football, the average per year fund-raising totals were $2,878,895. Additional statistical T-test analyses showed that these differences were significant at the .05 level.

Discussion for this longitudinal study suggest that football centered athletic fund-raising did provide tremendous fund-raising revenue increases for the athletic program being studied and that several residual positive effects were identified as well. In some instances, athletic fund-raising can help to fund female sport programs, student oriented recreational sport programs, library acquisitions, academic research efforts, etc. In other instances, increased revenues from athletic fund-raising have been used to fuel the further build-up of the football program in terms of
facilities, infrastructure improvements, expanded athlete recruiting efforts, endowed scholarships for specific positions on the team,…

It is suggested that follow-up studies be conducted to see if similar findings are found and what additional trends exist. Obviously, this particular situation has its own characteristics in terms of the size of the local population, student enrollments at the university, game attendance, potential to recruit new donors, number of alumni and businesses in the area, size of the stadium, type of ticket priority systems developed, overall organization and strategy of fund-raising efforts, etc. If other studies of new football programs can show similar results, then football benefits to athletic fund-raising may provide a positive light in an otherwise cloudy environment.