Research across various disciplines analyzed the need for social control and how understanding of the concept is critical in understanding the individuals within a community (Jetten & Hornsey, 2014; Chaskin & Joseph, 2013; Sampson, 2011; Dassopoulous & Monnat, 2011; Ross, 1901). Through his investigation, Ross (1901) set the foundation of social control through his evaluation of community and provided the initial framework of how society operates (Janowitz, 1975). More recently, Hollinger and Clark (2005) classified social control into two categories: informal and formal. Informal social control refers to the behaviors of individuals and group within a community which leads to conformity to norms and laws (Hollinger & Clark, 2005). Formal social control is utilized when informal social control is not adequate enough to assure conforming to the society’s norms (Hollinger & Clark, 2005). Formal social control is enforced by individuals or agencies that are in charge of enforcing rules and regulations of society, which are also known as social control agents (Hollinger & Clark, 2005). Palmer (2012) noted the examination of the role of social control agents is important to comprehensively understand the causes of organizational wrongdoing. Previous research has been conducted on organizational wrongdoing in a number of ways, yet there are few investigations into how social control agents handle instances of organizational wrongdoing (Greve et al., 2010; Palmer, 2012). The purpose of this study is to examine the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as a social control agent through analyzing major infractions and specifically the governance decisions made by the Committee of Infractions under each Executive Director.

An issue of social-control agents and organizational wrongdoing is the direct impact that agents have in determining what should be considered unacceptable or acceptable (Greve et al., 2010). The governing of member institutions has provided continuous challenges for the NCAA Council since the inception of the organization in 1910. Numerous strategies have been implemented by the NCAA, such as the reliance upon faculty members to willingly assist with the development of the NCAA and the utilization of students in the governance decision making of intercollegiate athletics (Smith, 2000). In spite of these adjustments, neither of these methods were successful in developing consistency in the governing of NCAA members (Smith, 2000). When NCAA athletic departments commit violations, the department is essentially engaging in organizational misconduct. As the value and influence of intercollegiate athletics continues to provoke conversation, the increased scrutiny on the growing number of violations committed by NCAA-affiliated athletic departments deserves discussion (Winfree, 2008).

The proposed research on social control seeks to ask the following questions: 1) how has the social control agents distributed sanctions to member institutions after committing major infractions and 2) how acts of misconduct vary under each NCAA Executive Director. To answer these questions, the proposed research examines the NCAA, Committee of Infractions (COI), and the individual cases of wrongdoing when a major infraction was committed and sanctions were administered. The NCAA currently serves as the primary governing body for intercollegiate athletics for over 100 years. The expansion and development of the NCAA is paramount in the association’s total membership, which includes over 1,200 member institutions and 460,000 student-athlete participants (NCAA, 2016). The NCAA appoints a group of individuals that serve as the Committee of Infractions (COI), which is in charge of utilizing proper judgment in regards to deciding on cases of organizational wrongdoing by NCAA member institutions (NCAA, 2016). The committee must work independently of the involved institutions and also separately from the NCAA (NCAA, 2016). Once the COI comes to a decision regarding a case, the NCAA ensures that the member institution adheres to the sanctions received and implements preventative strategies for the future (NCAA, 2016).

This study involves historical research which compels the gathering of primary and secondary documents (Booth, 2005; Seifried, 2010). When investigating the major infractions committed by NCAA members, resources from an
archival visit to the NCAA headquarters produced: official meeting minutes on the adoption and modification of enforcement standards, a detailed publicly available database regarding the punishment of member institutions that engage in misconduct, and notes from former association Executive Directors referencing enforcement issues within the association. One of the key primary sources utilized in this research is the paper inventories of Walter Byers (1951-1988), Richard Schultz (1988-1993), Cedric Dempsey (1994-2002), and Myles Brand (2003-2009) and folders on Infractions, Committee on Infractions, Infractions Case Commentary, Infractions Case Appeals, and Infractions Enforcement. As of September 2016, all of the necessary data has been collected and separated by the time frame in which each Executive Director served.

Following a source criticism of the various collected documents, information was analyzed in this proposed research on social control through the usage of an historical institutional frame, and then separated by the era of the Executive Director. Fioretos (2011) defined historical institutionalism as a scholarly approach attempting to understand the groundwork of legacy foundations, grasp the significance of new ideas, and interpret their effect on the status quo. Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003) and Pierson (2004) further noted that historical institutionalism seeks the discovery and identification of the discrete to establish substantive themes. Within this point, historical institutionalism necessitates considerable attention to the timing and sequence of events because challenges and opportunities provided by society and imposed upon institutions shape human decision-making processes (Pierson, 1996). Historical institutionalism is useful because it respects micro-level processes (Capoccia & Keleman, 2007; Fioretos, 2011) and behavior is viewed as a “function of preferences informed by point-to-point comparisons; that is individuals are thought to balance evaluations of the costs and benefits of adapting to new circumstances with the costs and benefits of maintaining or losing their investments in past arrangements” (Fioretos, 2011, p.373).

The results of this research will have implications for better understanding the evolution of the NCAA in regards to the development of enforcement, along with a comparison of how member institutions commit wrongdoing in different Executive Director eras. Utilizing this historical analysis will provide a better understanding of the focal points of governance under each President and how the regulations of intercollegiate athletics expanded from the inauguration of the NCAA to today. Academically, this research will provide a better perspective of the growth of the NCAA and an opportunity to better understand the NCAA as a social control agent. Through understanding the NCAA’s role as a social control agent, there is a potential area of research to discover key variables that reflect the likelihood of member institutions to engage in misconduct. The results from the proposed research will also provide an opportunity to examine the leadership of each Executive Director and correlate the evolution of NCAA enforcement under their guidance.