Exploring the Role of Educational Institutions in Student-Athlete Community Engagement

Matthew R. Huml  
University of Louisville

Per G. Svensson  
University of Louisville

Meg G. Hancock  
University of Louisville

Student engagement has become a priority in higher education with the increased urgency for institutions to improve the citizenship of their student body (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). This emphasis has been echoed by the NCAA, who views community service as a means to providing additional development to student-athletes (NCAA, 2007). Additionally, community service has shown to improve academic development, interpersonal skills, and civic responsibility for the participants (Astin & Sax, 1998). With athletic departments motivated to provide community service opportunities for their student-athletes both athletically and academically, this study employed content analysis to explore similarities and differences among NCAA Division I and Division II athletic departments in how they communicate community service efforts both internally (student-athlete handbook) and externally (mission statement). The results show a relative lack of community service within athletic department mission statements, while those that did mention community service were not always indicative of the amount of service efforts communicated via department websites. Additional concerns include student-athlete handbooks mentioning community service as punishment and too few NCAA Division II institutions mentioning community service, especially after the implementation of the Division II Philosophy Statement.
In recent years, corporate organizations and institutions of higher education have emphasized the importance of a strong mission statement. Mission statements are “an opportunity to get employee buy-in on a company or organization’s goal, to get all involved passionate about why they do what they’re doing” (Kiley, 2011). Internal and external stakeholders have increasingly scrutinized the content of mission statements as accreditation organizations are assessing how higher education institutions are implementing mission statements. As such, American colleges and universities must contend with the diverse interests of their accrediting bodies, faculty and staff, students, and community stakeholders. Within the university are departments that are intended to support not only the academic mission, but also the economic realities of higher education. This study focuses on one such department, intercollegiate athletics.

No stranger to controversy, college athletics has received increased attention for the amount of financial resources diverted from academic endeavors to subsidize athletic department growth (e.g., facilities, staff) (Getz & Seigfried, 2010). In an effort to justify athletic expenditures, athletic departments have crafted mission statements to reconcile disconnect between the perceived “academic and leadership-development missions of an institution” (Sternberg, n. d., para. 28). With regard to a university mission, Sternberg defined leadership-development as activities that promote planning, risk-taking, self-discipline, time management, teamwork, sportsmanship, and a desire to make a “positive, meaningful, and enduring difference to the world” (para. 5). Thus, Sternberg argued that colleges and universities are responsible for fulfilling and integrating academic and leadership-development missions.

Because athletic departments are often distinguished from their academic counterparts on campus, the mission statement presents an opportunity to further define the unique contexts and experiences athletic departments provide to student-athletes and stakeholders (e.g., fans, donors, sponsors, community)(Ireland & Hirc, 1992; Szymanski, 2009). In an effort to promote student athlete involvement and uphold aspects of leadership-development, university and athletic department mission statements alike have suggested the importance of student engagement in community service (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) emphasizes service for student athletes as “instrumental to the total development of the student athlete” (NCAA, 2007, p. 2).

This proposed commitment towards community service provides a favorable circumstance for the inclusion of civic engagement within departmental mission statements. Explicitly including language in mission statements that encourages student athlete community involvement has the power to not only endear the university to the community (Bruning, McGrew, & Cooper, 2006), but may also have positive cognitive and psychosocial benefits for student athletes (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). While previous research on athletic department mission statements has investigated recurrent themes (Ward & Hux, 2011) and community service at NCAA Division I institutions (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011), research remains scarce on their implementation within NCAA Division II institutions and other departmental documents, such as the student-athlete handbook. Previous research indicates the presence of service-focused mission statements among NCAA Division I departments while language in student-athlete handbooks appear to primarily regulate student-athlete conduct (Southall & Nagel, 2003). However, no prior studies have explicitly examined how athletic
departments communicate community service via mission statements and student-athlete handbooks nor if this information varies between NCAA Division I and Division II departments.

**Literature Review**

*Mission Statements*

The purpose of mission statements has been studied by several scholars and has produced a multitude of definitions (Baetz & Bart, 1996; Bart, 1997b, 2001; David, 1989; Falsey, 1989; Ireland & Hirc, 1992; Pearce & David, 1987). Although these definitions vary in their scope, the purpose of mission statements is commonly considered to be a means for communicating the identity and purpose of an organization (David, 1989; Falsey, 1989; Pearce & David, 1987). For example, Pearce and David defined mission statements as “the fundamental, unique purpose that sets a business apart from other [organizations] of its type and identifies the scope of the business’s operations” (p. 109), while Ireland and Hirc defined a mission statement as describing “the [organization]’s fundamental, unique purpose” (p. 35). More simply, “A mission statement tells two things about [an organization]: who it is and what it does” (Falsey, p. 3).

Multiple studies have examined whether a mission statement influences organizational performance. For example, organizations with a mission statement including declarations about public image (Pearce & David, 1987; Stallworth-Williams, 2008), employee behavior (Bart, 1997a), importance of internal stakeholders (Blair-Loy, Wharton, & Goodstein, 2011; Stallworth-Williams, 2008), aspects of diversity (Bartkus & Glassman, 2008), environment (Bartkus & Glassman, 2008), innovation (Bart, 1996), or employee turnover (Sufi & Lyons, 2003) were associated with increased performance. Organizations also appear to perform better if their mission statement includes specific goals rather than abstract statements of their vision (Pearce & David, 1987). Conversely, previous research suggests organizations with a mission statement that specifically mentioned financial performance (Bart, 1997a; Bartkus, Glassman, & McAfee, 2006; Sufi & Lyons, 2003) or organizational performance (Bart, 1997b) were not associated with increased performance. These findings suggest that more descriptive assertions are more likely to impact organizational results than mission statements that remain more ambiguous.

*Mission Statements in Higher Education*

While corporations are focused on strategic management and customers (David, 1989), higher education institutions have different goals for their mission statements. According to Meacham (2008), most university mission statements highlight student development goals: attaining a liberal education, contributing to their community, achieving life-long learning, appreciating diversity, and pursuing social responsibility. Collegiate mission statements provide “a sense of its educational vision, particularly what it expects its students to learn and how that learning can be used to benefit the social order” (Meacham, 2008, p. 8). Higher education institutions may also be assessed by their regional accreditation associations to highlight, and execute, specific goals stated in their mission statement (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, & Rajadhyaksha, 2007). Additionally, institutions are challenged to achieve an effective mission statement representing the interests of students, staff, faculty, alumni, and other stakeholders (Meacham, 2008).
Previous research also suggest the rhetoric of the mission statement is influenced by the type of institution (Ayers, 2002; Berg, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2003; Firmin & Gilson, 2009; Wang, Gibson, Salinas, Solis, & Slate, 2007). For example, Morpew and Hartley (2006) found a discrepancy in the use of service within the mission statement of public and private institutions whereby private institutions used it in a context of promoting humanity addressing social issues whereas public institutions used service in more abstract statements of promoting students to become active citizens. The impact of mission statement also depends on the university’s ability to balance a multitude of interests among internal and external stakeholders (Berg et al., 2003; Woodrow, 2006). Some internal stakeholders and departments including the intercollegiate athletic department may also have their own mission statements to identify their purpose within the university (Ward & Hux, 2011).

While there are differences between mission statements in higher education and corporations, both are plagued by ambiguity (Ayers, 2002; Morpew & Hartley, 2006; Woodrow, 2006). As noted by Woodrow, several institutions can improve their current statement by “creating mission statements… that are concise, well-written, and distinctive” (p. 326). Similarly, Meacham and Gaff (2006) found mostly abstract statements and a lack of specific goals in their content analysis of the mission statements of 105 institutions listed in the Princeton Review. Evidence on the influence of mission statements within higher education is scarce, but institutions with a missions statement containing ethical content have been associated with increased ethical orientation among students (Davis et al., 2007). Moreover, a perceived sense of community among administrative and academic staff has been associated with positive perceptions of the university mission (Ferrari, Cowman, Milner, Gutierrez, & Drake, 2009). These studies indicate the potential importance of including specific language about community engagement in mission statements of higher education institutions.

As mentioned previously, identifying a mission statement that will personify each constituent at a university can be challenging. Thus, departments within higher education often create their own mission statement to more accurately define their departmental goals and objectives. Empirical research on the mission statements of departments within higher education is scarce. Palmer and Short (2008) investigated the mission statements of college of business’ at accredited U.S. universities and found that they included language that specified the student population they were currently serving. Hammer (1992) emphasized that international student advising offices should create mission statements to support the psychosocial development and cultural adaptation of international students at American universities. Previous research on mission statements in intercollegiate athletics is scarce, but studies have explored the content of athletic department mission statements (Ward & Hux, 2011) as well as the concept of “service” in mission statements (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011).

Mission Statements in Intercollegiate Athletics

Because athletic departments are perceived as non-academic, they face an increased challenge in aligning with the remainder of the university, but also presenting the uniqueness of their department (Brand, 2006). Ward and Hux (2011) found eight major themes in their content analysis of the mission statements of 131 athletic department mission statements across all three levels of the NCAA: (a) complying with rules; (b) being a constituent of the university or community; (c) describing the culture of the athletic department; (d) facilitating excellent departmental or individual-level performance; (e) promoting the personal development of
student-athletes or others; (f) developing favorable public relations; (g) generating departmental or individual-level success; (h) achieving unity between various groups both on and off campus. Whether these mission statements actually influence the activities and performance of respective intercollegiate athletic departments remains unknown. Andrassy and Bruening (2011) found discrepancies between mission statements and actual service efforts communicated via athletic department websites. Forty-two out of 70 athletic departments mentioned community outreach in their mission statement, but almost 20% of those athletic departments did not show the same level of tangible commitment towards community service.

Andrassy and Bruening’s (2011) study provided valuable insight into information communicated by athletic departments to external stakeholders on student-athlete community service efforts via their department website. However, previous research on how athletic departments communicate service opportunities to internal stakeholders remains scarce. Investigating community service information disseminated in student-athlete handbooks could help fill this gap in literature on how departments are communicating service opportunities to student-athletes and whether the information is congruent with service-focused mission statements. Additionally, no prior research has explored the mission statements of athletic departments at the NCAA Division II level. While Division II athletic departments may not have the resources of many NCAA Division I institutions (Nite, Singer, & Cunningham, 2013), the NCAA Division II Philosophy Statement explicitly mention service as one of the core values of its members (NCAA, 2008).

Student-Athlete Handbooks

Although mission statements provide an overview of the purpose and identity of an institution of higher education, student handbooks are typically one of the first resources students are provided to learn about university policies, procedures, and academic opportunities (Gordon, Wesley, & Habley, 2008). Similarly, student-athletes annually receive a student-athlete handbook with from their respective athletic departments, which include additional policies and procedures. In their content analysis of student-athlete handbooks, Southall and Nagel (2003) found common themes including: behavior regulation, elitism, entitlement, coaches’ authority and power, academics, and NCAA compliance. Behavior regulation was identified as publishing the athletic department’s rules and punishment if they were not followed. Elitism was the “right” of student-athletes to receive preferential treatment at the university, while entitlement was receiving access to resources, such as athletic academic support, that is not available to other students. Coaches’ authority and power referred to the freedom of coaches to create their own rules and regulations. Another theme was the importance for student-athletes to be successful in the classroom. Lastly, NCAA compliance was the litany of rules and regulations required by the NCAA for student-athletes to maintain eligibility. In other words, student-athlete handbooks were characterized by language designed to control student-athlete conduct while highlighting the importance of intercollegiate athletics and the privilege of being a student-athlete. With such strong language presented in student-athlete handbooks, they become a tangible extension of the athletic department culture (Adler & Adler, 1991; Schroeder & Scribner, 2006; Southall & Nagel, 2003). Southall and Nagel also noted student-athlete handbooks often mentioned university or athletic department’s mission statement, but did not investigate whether the handbooks showed conviction in their message beyond academics. Considering student-athletes are more often viewed as public figures in the local community compared to other college
students (Benford, 2007), athletic departments have an opportunity to seize the call for greater community engagement within higher education and bring positive public relations onto their department and the university as a whole.

Although Southall and Nagel’s content analysis provided evidence of the type of information communicated in student-athlete handbooks, the public interest in community engagement has arguably increased considerably since the publication of their study. Furthermore, their analyses did not compare how departments communicate information to internal and external stakeholders nor how the information relates to their mission statements. The student-athlete handbook being provides an ample opportunity for the athletic department to highlight their mission to one of their fundamental stakeholders. These handbooks also provide departments an opportunity to communicate how they plan to fulfill their mission. For example, if the department has a service-focused mission statement: Will the student-athlete handbook mandate community service? Will student-athletes be introduced to specific examples of service opportunities? Or is information disseminated in the handbooks incongruent with the mission statement?

**Community Service**

The current higher education system is committed to a stronger connection with their local/national community and ensuring that students become active citizens upon graduation and into the future (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Universities have voiced their recommendation for students to perform community service while completing their degree as a means to achieve this greater sense of citizenship and solidifying the university’s connection with local/national organizations (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Dalton & Crosby, 2011). College students perform community service as a requirement for class, with student organizations, or by pursuing projects on their own (Checkoway, 2001). As such, college students are frequently dependent on their respective universities to create connections with organizations in their local communities. This “connection” often requires a genuine relationship between the university and the organization, with sufficient support from university administration, to create potential community service opportunities (Chupp & Joseph, 2010).

Current students in higher education are also displaying a commitment to community service. A study by Franke, Ruiz, Sharkness, DeAngelo, and Pryor (2010), found that nearly three of every four students reported performing community service at least “occasionally” while in college (Franke, Ruiz, Sharkness, DeAngelo, & Pryor, 2010). Another study suggested more than half of students reported being introduced to community service during their undergraduate experience (Boyer, 1987; Marks & Jones, 2004). College students were also more likely to volunteer than non-college participants during their traditional college years and beyond (Astin & Sax, 1998; Burns et al., 2005; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000). Additionally, community service has shown to provide a positive impact beyond the student’s college experience (Avalos, Sax, & Astin, 1999). These studies suggest that a healthy relationship between the institution, the student, and the community is imperative for continued engagement of students in the community once they graduate.

Studies on college student participation in community service also indicate numerous intellectual, social, and personal benefits. For example, community service participants have shown improved academic and life skill development, civic responsibility, and cultural understanding (Astin & Sax, 1998; Avalos et al., 1999). Additionally, other benefits to
Community service participation include development of interpersonal skills, community involvement, relationship building with new acquaintances, and positive impacts on identity (Gallini & Moely, 2003; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000; Jones & Abes, 2004). College students also self-reported increases in personal development stemming from academic experiences outside of the classroom (Kuh, 1995). In fact, students appear to spend almost twice as much time “reflecting” on their volunteer experience than on the activity itself (Primavera, 1999).

Although community service appears to have many benefits for students and universities, it can also have drawbacks. Simply participating in community service does not ensure that the participant will reap the benefits (Ferreira, Azevedo, & Menezes, 2012). Moreover, if a college student believes the activity is required (by a class, team, or participation in a club), they may be less inclined to perform community service in the future (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999; Warburton & Smith, 2003). These studies suggest that community service can be a positive experience for college students and provide a lasting, positive impact on their lives, but service also needs to be an experience that college students are willing to perform of their own free will.

Higher education prioritizes community service for students and there is an understanding that students gain more from participation when it is voluntary. Research has identified a desire to help others, a desire to improve the community/society, and personal interest in a specific service as motivations for participation (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). Additionally, motives for community service include opportunities to: connect with others, improve self-confidence, and improve career prospects (Burns et al., 2005; Clary et al., 1998; Gage III & Thapa, 2012). In addition, the physical distance the community service organization was from their residence and the organizational mission are also associated with college students’ motivation to perform community service (Lee & Won, 2011). These findings suggest that many of the motivations for college students to perform community service are academically oriented, but also include personal ambitions. They also suggest that college students care about their surrounding community and want to help those that are less fortunate.

Community Service for Student-Athletes

Student-athletes, like other college students, also perform community service during their undergraduate experience. Unlike other college students, student-athletes may have additional challenges when including community service into their academic experience. Time requirements of intercollegiate athletic participation can limit a student athlete’s ability to engage in community service efforts. Student-athletes participate in at least 20 hours a week of intercollegiate athletic activities (Benford, 2007). These requirements along with academic responsibilities can make it difficult for student-athletes to seek out community service projects and to connect with the mission of the event and/or organization (Jarvie & Paule-Koba, 2013). Student-athletes have reported challenges to perform community service due to practice and game schedules, however, studies have found student-athletes to report similar service engagement as the general student body (Gaston-Gayles, Rockenbach, & Davis, 2012; Richard & Aries, 1999). Student-athletes are also at-risk of having a stronger identity as an athlete than a student, which can potentially lead to them minimizing any time spent on activities outside of their sport (Adler & Adler, 1991). In addition, challenges faced by the athletic department can also hamper student-athlete’s ability to perform community service. Athletic departments, especially at lower NCAA levels, have limited resources that can inhibit their
ability to hire a full-time staff member to develop relationships within the community for potential service projects (Nite, 2012). Regardless of these findings, student-athletes self-report satisfaction with their level of community service participation (Kamusoko & Pemberton).

While college athletics provides challenges for student-athletes for performing community service, it provides benefits as well. College coaches have been known to play a key role in connection student-athletes with promising community service projects (Jarvie & Paule-Koba, 2013). In addition, athletic departments have also utilized their connections with the local/national community to organize community service projects (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013). Although concern has been raised to the autonomy that student-athletes have in choosing their own projects, coaches and athletic department staff are two resources that are not available to other college students.

Student-athletes have similar motivations and benefits to perform community service as other college students. Their motivations include social responsibility, career opportunities, and the change to participate in a group setting (Chalk, 2008). They are benefitted by the personal satisfaction of giving back to the community and improving their leadership skills (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013; McAfee, 2009).

While findings have reported the potential benefits of the coaches and the athletic department fostering connections within their community to provide tangible community service projects to their student-athletes, there is a gap on how important community service is to the athletic department, and how their constituents communicate these service opportunities to their student-athletes. Previous research has labored on the challenges that student-athletes face academically, especially during their first and second year in intercollegiate athletics (Espenshade, Chung, & Walling, 2004; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2002). With student-athletes facing additional academic challenges that many other college students do not encounter, athletic departments should seek out opportunities to augment their academic development during the student-athlete’s athletic eligibility. With so many positive benefits associated with performing community service, including many academic benefits, volunteering could provide an opportunity for student-athletes to improve academically at an increased rate (Astin & Sax, 1998; Gage III & Thapa, 2012; Gallini & Moely, 2003). On the other hand, student-athletes have additional support systems that provide connections to community service projects that are not available to other students (Jarvie & Paule-Koba, 2013; Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013). Additionally, community service has shown to improve team chemistry and cohesiveness when community service was performed as a group (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013). These findings highlight the importance for student-athletes to participate in community service. Athletic departments can advance student-athlete engagement in local communities by providing ongoing community service opportunities. Therefore, investigating how athletic departments communicate service is especially important because of potential benefits that community service provides to student athletes and the community.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how athletic departments communicate community service efforts via mission statements and student-athlete handbooks. To achieve the purpose of this study, content analysis was used to examine athletic department mission statements published on athletic department websites and student-athlete handbooks for communication of student-athlete service efforts. A prior study used content analysis to examine
prevalence of service among NCAA Division I athletic department mission statements and congruency with community service programs (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011). Building on their findings, this study employed content analysis to explore similarities and differences among NCAA Division I and Division II athletic departments in how they communicate community service efforts to external stakeholders (mission statements) and internal stakeholders (student-athlete handbooks).

Sample

A stratified purposeful sampling technique was used to identify the participating NCAA conferences from the Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), Division I Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), and Division II during the spring of 2013. According to Patton (2002), stratified purposeful sampling allows the researcher to explore samples nested based on a dimension of interest. In the current study, NCAA intercollegiate athletic conferences were purposefully considered based on geographical locations and stratified based on their divisional affiliation. Additionally, NCAA Division I athletic departments were considered due to their increased athletic budget that allows them to offer additional academic programming specific to their student-athletes as well as the potential of hiring full time staff member to specifically assist student-athletes with their academic responsibilities and community engagement opportunities (Nite, 2012; Zimbalist, 2013). NCAA Division II athletic departments were also considered due to the recent introduction of the NCAA Division II philosophy statement, which emphasizes the importance of community of their student-athletes. The final sample was comprised of 88 schools in six conferences (Table 1). The NCAA Division I and Division II conferences were purposefully chosen based on their matching geographical locations to minimize potential geographical differences. Prior content analyses of athletic department mission statements and websites have used comparable sample sizes (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011).

Table 1 - Sample Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big East</td>
<td>I-FBS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Ten</td>
<td>I-FBS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>I-FCS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Lakes Valley</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania State Athletic</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There have been a myriad of university movement between athletic conferences in recent years. Specifically, there are athletic departments that were examined as members of the Big East Conference at the time of data analysis, but are now members of another athletic conference. None of the other athletic conferences were in midst of changing institutional membership.
**Data Collection**

The researchers completed a web search consisting of the following terms: “[University’s name] athletic department mission statement” and “[University’s name] athletic department student-athlete handbook”. If the search did not reveal any relevant results, the authors visited the university’s athletic department website and searched for “mission statement” and “student-athlete handbook” through their website search bar. If the athletic department did not have a search function on their website, the researchers reviewed the menu options and searched for any links relevant (e.g., about us, mission, student-athlete handbook, compliance) to the purpose of this study. If none of these attempts yielded any relevant results, the search was terminated.

The data collection produced 64 mission statements. Three NCAA Division I FBS athletic departments, one NCAA Division I FCS athletic department, and 20 NCAA Division II athletic departments did not have a mission statement accessible through a web search or on their respective department websites. In addition, the researchers identified student-athlete handbooks for 57 of the 88 athletic departments. The data collection did not yield a handbook for six Division I FBS athletic departments, three Division I FCS athletic departments, and 22 Division II athletic departments.

**Data Analysis**

Departmental mission statements were analyzed for whether or not they mentioned student-athlete involvement in the community. The researchers defined mission statements highlighting service as any statements containing language related to community service, outreach, or engagement of student-athletes in the local community. Mission statements containing ambiguous language related to community (e.g., “engage our community”; “enhances community”) or preparing future leaders (e.g., “fostering future leaders in society”; “improve personal attributes such as discipline, leadership, teamwork and sportsmanship”) were excluded considering the lack of specific mention of student-athlete involvement in community service efforts. The three researchers coded departmental mission statements independently using in vivo coding to capture the appropriate context (Saldaña, 2013). In vivo coding involves the use of a word or short-phrase from the actual language used in the data as codes (Saldaña). The researchers discussed the initial coding and reduced the number of codes following second cycle coding to whether or not departments mentioned student-athlete involvement in community service. Student-athlete handbooks were independently coded using descriptive coding for categorizing how departments mentioned community service or outreach in regards to student-athletes (Saldaña). Community service in regards to student-athletes was identified in 19 contexts (See Table 2). The researchers discussed their individual coding until 100% agreement was reached.

Potential divisional differences were further examined using cross-tabulation chi-square tests. The researchers completed the statistical analysis to examine the significance between frequencies in division level and context of service mentions in student-athlete handbooks. Chi-square tests are commonly used to assess significance of differences between observed and expected frequencies (Shavelson, 1996).
Table 2 - Student-Athlete Handbook Code Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Division I</th>
<th>Division I</th>
<th>Division II</th>
<th>Overall Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FBS</td>
<td>FCS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service as part of SAAC</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service in Life Skills Program</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service as Punishment</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Examples of Service Opportunities</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Team Competition</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCAA Division II Statement</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Athlete Support Services</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award Criteria</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics Mission</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Values</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter from Administration</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Contact for Service Opportunities</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service as Hazing Alternative</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Mission</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Service</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Do List</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision Statement</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Service on Social Media</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Mission Statements

The data collection revealed 64 of the 88 athletic departments in this study had a mission statement that was discovered on the athletic department website or search through a web browser. Thirty-four NCAA Division I schools (90%) had an athletic department mission statement. Of the 48 Division II schools, only 27 (56%) were found to have an athletic department mission statement. Among schools with mission statements, references to community service or engagement in regards to student-athletes varied considerably. For example, five (36%) Big East Conference members with a mission statement mentioned service in their mission. In contrast, only one (9%) Big Ten Conference members and no (0%) Northeast Conference members with a mission statement mentioned community service. The percentages of NCAA Division II mission statements were more consistent. Department missions mentioning service ranged from one (17%) Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference member and one (12.5%) Great Lakes Valley Conference member mentioned community service or engagement. Furthermore, two (22%) Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference also mentioned community service.
Student-Athlete Handbooks

Electronic handbooks were found for 57 of the 88 schools in the current study. The majority of the NCAA Division I FBS schools, 21 of 28 (75%) had a handbook (Big East Conference, \( n=11 \); Big Ten Conference, \( n=10 \)). The researchers found student-athlete handbooks for 9 of 12 (75%) NCAA Division I FCS institutions. In contrast, only 26 of the 48 NCAA Division II schools had an electronic handbook (Pennsylvania State Athletics Conference, \( n=10 \); Great Lakes Valley Conference, \( n=9 \); Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, \( n=7 \)). The results of the content analysis can be examined from two perspectives. The results of the coding will first be presented based on the overall grand percentage of our sample followed by a comparison of similarities and differences among the three NCAA Divisions.

Overall, community service was most frequently mentioned in regards to the Student-Athlete Advisory Council (SAAC). These statements highlighted the role and responsibility of the SAAC in organizing and promoting community service opportunities for student-athletes to help serve the local communities. For example, Notre Dame mentioned, “The [SAAC] committee meets every other week to coordinate community service opportunities”.

Community service was also frequently mentioned in regards to Student-Athlete Development and Life Skills programs. Service was mentioned in terms of educational opportunities and volunteer opportunities for student-athlete development. Several athletic departments also offered or required completion of a non-credit bearing course in life skills. For example, University of Nebraska requires all incoming student-athletes to complete a pass/fail Husker Life Seminar for Student-Athletes Course, which includes alcohol education, resume building workshop, and engagement in community service.

The use of community service as a punishment for violation of rules and regulations was the third most frequently mentioned communication of service in the electronic handbooks analyzed. Some athletic departments listed community service as a punishment for minor violations while repeated violations would result in dismissal from the team while others increased the required number of hours of service for each violation. For example, Sacred Heart required student-athletes testing positive in their institutional drug-testing program to complete 20 hours of service for their first positive test and 40 hours for a second positive test.

Specific examples of community service opportunities for student-athletes in local communities emerged as fourth most frequently mentioned communication of service. These statements included details on specific organizations and programs (e.g., Big Brothers/ Big Sisters, YMCA, Special Olympics) and in some instances even the number of hours of service completed. For instance, University of Minnesota listed a considerable number of opportunities with local school programs and instructs student-athletes to check their email every Sunday for additional weekly community service opportunities.

Several athletic departments also mentioned competitions among their athletic teams in regards to community service. These competitions involved point systems for volunteer hours and/or number of community service projects. Most athletic departments limited these specifically to community service. Some, however, such as Lock Haven University included their service competition as part of the CHAMPS Cup whereby student-athletes could earn points by attending various student-athlete development workshops and activities.

Other contexts involving mentions of community service included statements noting the student-athlete academic support services were responsible for coordinating community service opportunities. For example, Wagner University stated the responsibilities of their Assistant
Athletic Director for Academics & Compliance includes supervising the CHAMPS/Life Skills program, the SAAC, and coordinating team outreach initiatives. Several Division II members also highlighted the NCAA Division II Philosophy Statement, which highlights their commitment to developing community partnerships and student-athlete participation in service opportunities. A smaller amount of athletic departments also mentioned service in other contexts as indicated by Table 1. These contexts included compliance with NCAA rules and regulations, the promotion of community service as an alternative to hazing, and guidelines for social media usage. For instance, Edinboro University explicitly encouraged student-athletes to tweet pictures of their engagement in community service.

**Divisional Differences**

Although the previous sections noted the most frequently mentioned contexts of service overall, there were also noticeable differences across NCAA Divisions. Almost two-thirds of Division I FBS members mentioned service in the context of Life Skills programs compared to less than a quarter of Division I FCS and Division II institutions. Similarly, half of the Division I FBS departments provided specific examples of community service efforts compared to 22% of Division I FCS departments and only eight percent of Division II members. Competitions in community service engagement among athletic teams were also found to be more prevalent in handbooks of Division I FBS (27%) and FCS (22%) members compared to Division II (8%) institutions. Community service as a sanction or punishment for violations of rules and regulations was also slightly more common among Division I FBS (32%) and FCS (33%) compared to Division II (24%) departments. Statements regarding community service or outreach in the context of compliance were also considerably more prevalent among Division I FBS (18%) and FCS (22%) handbooks compared to Division II (4%) handbooks. Similarly, requirements of community service engagement were only found in Division I handbooks. Furthermore, mentions of service in the contexts of award criteria, specific contact person for community service opportunities, university mission statement, athletic department vision statement, and a yearly to do checklist for student-athletes were only discovered among Division I FBS departments. Interestingly, service was only mentioned in regards to social media among Division II departments.

The researchers further examined potential significant differences in the context of community service mentions within student-athlete handbooks and divisional affiliation (i.e., Division I FBS, Division I FCS, Division II) using cross-tabulation chi-square tests. The results of the chi-square analysis indicated statistically significant differences between NCAA Divisions in regards to specific examples of community service efforts ($\chi^2 = 11.093$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$), mentions of community service as part of awards criteria for student-athletes ($\chi^2 = 8.719$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$), service as part of Life Skills programs ($\chi^2 = 12.958$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$), and the Division II Philosophy Statement ($\chi^2 = 11.096$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$).

For the ten institutions that discussed community engagement within their athletic department mission statement we were able to locate eight student-athlete handbooks. Of these student-athlete handbooks: 63 percent mentioned community engagement as part of their SAAC. In addition, four of the eight handbooks mentioned community service as a form of punishment or sanction for violating rules and regulations. Furthermore, a quarter of the departments mentioning service in their mission statements also discussed service as part of student-athlete
support services, and provided specific examples of community service efforts in their electronic student-athlete handbooks.

Findings & Implications

Considering previous research on the private sector indicates the wording of mission statements can positively influence organizational behavior (Bart, 1997a, 1997b; Bartkus et al., 2006; Sufi & Lyons, 2003), it is important to further extend this research into the field of higher education, specifically, intercollegiate athletics. The purpose of this study was to explore how athletic departments communicate community service efforts via mission statements and student-athlete handbooks. Results of the current study offer insights into the relative lack of community service within athletic department mission statements at both the NCAA Division I and Division II levels. The results also showcase how community service information is disseminated within student-athlete handbooks for internal stakeholders. These findings are beneficial for administrators since regional accreditation bodies are increasingly requiring higher education institutions to implement actions for achieving their missions.

One of the major findings of this study was the lack of athletic departments specifically mentioning community service in their mission statement. There was a considerable discrepancy between Andrassy and Bruening’s (2011) findings and the results of the current study. Andrassy and Bruening found 42 out of 70 athletic department mission statements discussed community service, whereas only 10 out of 64 mission statements analyzed in the current study were considered service-focused. This discrepancy could be attributed to sample differences as well as the researchers’ interpretation of community engagement. Thus, a commonly accepted definition of community service and/or community engagement as they are presented in mission statements is warranted for future research.

The athletic department has an opportunity to foster an improved environment for student engagement and academic development as previous research highlights the potential benefits of having a concise and specific mission statement. By embracing community service in their mission statement, athletic departments can help student-athletes overcome potential hurdles in their social and cognitive development by improving their communication skills, connection with non-athlete students, promoting civic responsibility, and awareness of the local community’s needs (Astin & Sax, 1998; Avalos et al., 1999; Gallini & Moely, 2003; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000). A service-focused mission statement may also result in reciprocal benefits for the department as student-athletes could potentially improve their team cohesion by performing community service, which may lead to improved team performance on the playing field (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013). With the NCAA prioritizing a greater need for community service for student-athletes (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001), athletic departments should critically reflect on how they might better align their purpose with their governing body. These findings prompt the need for departments to create a committee tasked with reviewing and potentially revising their mission statement.

This study’s findings are also consistent with the findings from Andrassy and Bruening (2011), who found mission statements were not always indicative of the amount of service efforts communicated via department websites. Furthermore, while institutions in this study provided some information regarding community service opportunities, departments could noticeably improve the amount of detailed information of service opportunities disseminated in student-athlete handbooks.
Findings of the current study also indicate noticeable divisional differences regarding both department mission statements and student-athlete handbooks. NCAA Division I FBS institutions showed a greater prevalence of (a) having an athletic department mission statement, (b) including information in their student-athlete handbook about Life Skills programming, and (c) specific community service opportunities, than the NCAA Division I FCS and Division II institutions. This is especially concerning for the Division II institutions due to the recent implementation of the Division II Philosophy Statement, which reinforces the importance of community service to the academic development of student-athletes (NCAA, 2008). Athletic administrators, student-athletes, coaches, and staff could work together to create a mission statement identifying their strengths and divisional affiliation within the NCAA structure, especially with Division II institutions. It is important to note the creation or revision of a mission statement does not require considerable financial resources of an athletic department. Providing additional information on specific community service opportunities in the student-athlete handbook could also help student-athletes interested in volunteering to identify opportunities matching their interests. Student-athletes face additional time constraints due to their intercollegiate athletic obligations (Rothschild-Checroune, Gravelle, Dawson, & Karlis, 2012; Williams, 2007), which can make it problematic for seeking out volunteer opportunities without support from their coaching staff or athletic department (Jarvie & Paule-Koba, 2013). Athletic departments could potentially utilize a student-athlete committee (e.g., SAAC) for promoting service opportunities without having to hire an additional full-time staff member.

The overall use of community service as a punishment activity in approximately one-third of the student-athlete handbooks analyzed is also concerning, as it may decrease the likelihood of future service engagement of student-athletes (Stukas et al., 1999; Warburton & Smith, 2003). Stukas et al. found participants who do not feel ‘free’ to volunteer have a greater chance of having their future volunteer intentions negatively impacted when they are forced to volunteer. Performing community service as a form of punishment is likely to create a similar experience for student-athletes. Therefore, athletic departments should eliminate the use of community service as punishment. While the need of structure involving rules and sanctions for student-athletes is apparent, administrators should explore other options. Athletic administrators nor community partners may not necessarily want student-athletes violating rules and regulations to serve as role models representing the department in the local community. To alleviate these concerns, athletic administrators should consider alternative sanctions outside of community service. Examples for alternative sanctions could be additional time required on academics in a supervised study hall or loss of playing time.

On a positive note, more than one-third of the student-athlete handbooks examined included mentions of community engagement as part of the SAAC. Similarly, approximately one-third of student-athlete handbooks also mentioned community engagement in the section discussing their athletic academic support services. These findings indicate student-athletes are provided with multiple resources for seeking out community service opportunities inside their athletic department (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013). Athletic administrators should also encourage their SAAC to track volunteer engagement of their members and promote additional opportunities with other community service organizations.

Findings of the current study also revealed some departments have developed proactive efforts to “champion” the community service being performed by their student-athletes. One NCAA Division II student-athlete handbook mentioned the use of social media to chronicle the community engagement their student-athletes are performing during the school year. Although
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athletic departments have previously shown a willingness to incorporate social media into their websites for external stakeholders (Cooper, 2010; Ruhiely, Pate, & Hardin, 2012), promoting the use of social media could also create an opportunity for departments to share community engagement efforts of its student-athletes. Encouraging the use of social media also minimizes the need for additional staff members and resources.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was an analysis of athletic department mission statements and student-athlete handbooks, which places limitations for the athletic departments to publicize such information. Certain universities may see the potential benefits of providing this information to their external stakeholders, while others may feel it is better used as only available to internal stakeholders. Other institutions may not have the human capital to maintain this information on their website on a yearly basis. Additionally, other athletic departments may replicate mission statement themes that are publicized from well-esteemed institutions or have decided against having a mission statement specifically for their department.

A few athletic departments had student-athlete handbooks that were used in recent years, but not the current year. It is possible that a more recent copy would reflect different information regarding community engagement than the copy that was publically available. This study’s sample incorporated both Division I and Division II institutions, but did not include Division III or other collegiate sport organizations. Another limitation was the sample size, as the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population. Future studies may want to implement a more extensive approach by contacting the institutions directly about the location and content of their athletic department’s mission statement. Finally, universities are increasingly using social media as an outlet to connect with their fans. A future study would be an examination of athletic departments disseminating information on their student-athletes engaging in the community.
References


