

## **ABSTRACT**

DAVIS, GEORGIA KAY. NCAA Athletic Conference Commissioners: Profiles and Career Paths. (Under the direction of Heidi Grappendorf.)

Previous studies (Deller, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1990; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Parrish, 2003; Radlinksi, 2003; Smith, 2005) have analyzed the career paths and backgrounds of intercollegiate athletic administrators. However, a limited amount of research has examined the backgrounds of athletic conference commissioners, a distinct and separate cohort of collegiate athletic administrators. The purpose of my study was to identify any commonalities and normative career steps that may exist among conference commissioners, as well as reveal any non-commonalities that exist between males and females. The research was executed through an online survey that investigated the demographic and educational profiles, as well as career path progression of NCAA athletic conference commissioners. Career path progression and access discrimination were used as the theoretical basis for my study.

Results indicated that the only normative career path step that existed for conference commissioners was in their start as student-athletes. Approximately 60% of participants reported starting their athletics careers as student-athletes, but beyond that there was no obvious order of career progression. Findings included the prevalence of journalism undergraduate degrees and experience in Sports Information that had not previously been noted for institutional athletic directors. Results revealed educational background and sport participation differences between males and females. However, other than the major underrepresentation of females in the commissioner role, there were no particularly obvious differences in their career paths. Overall, there appeared to be a difference between

institutional athletics directors and conference commissioners, in that the commissioners indicate a seemingly broader background in both educational degree area and experience.

There was evidence of continued access discrimination for females on the path to becoming conference commissioners.

NCAA Athletic Conference Commissioners:

Profiles and Career Paths

by  
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## *Chapter I*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Intercollegiate athletics began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century at what are now known as the Ivy League schools as a way to prove the schools' excellence at "all fields of intellectual labor and combat," including "manly sports" (O'Leary, 1992, p. 19). As these sports (especially football), grew in popularity, major regulation issues arose, such as verifying players' amateurism, establishing eligibility, and regulating the dangerous nature of football. Intercollegiate athletic conferences began as a way to continue to control and reform the still increasingly unruly and unregulated athletic competitions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1888, the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association was the first conference formed, and it is still recognized today as the oldest continuous conference. They were soon followed by the formation of the Big Ten and Ohio Athletic Conferences in 1895 and 1902. These conferences set out to address and create administrative control for problems like budgeting woes and excessive football injuries (O'Leary).

Since their formation conferences have become one of the most integral components of intercollegiate varsity athletics regulation, and today the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) boasts 133 conferences across its three divisions that encompass over 1000 member institutions of various sizes and academic rigor. An NCAA member conference is defined as a "...group of colleges and/or universities that conducts competition among its members and determines a conference champion in one or more sports" (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2008, p. 7). Additionally, a conference must have

at least six members in a single division and compete in a minimum of four sports. A conference is “elected to membership at the NCAA national convention or by majority of the NCAA Council” (Fleisher, Goff, & Tollison, 1992, p. 68).

All conferences within the NCAA require a commissioner, executive director or president to lead the organization. Even though this leadership position is well-established and is prominent in intercollegiate athletics, there has been very little research dedicated to understanding the backgrounds and careers of those who hold this position. The only known articles were published in the mid- to late-20<sup>th</sup> century (Quarterman, 1994; 1998; 1999). Therefore, my study was intended to examine the personal, educational, and career information including career paths to provide an understanding of those individuals in the roles of conference commissioners and the differences that occur between male and female commissioners.

Another component of my study was the analysis of differences in male and female profiles. Differences in their experiences may indicate access discrimination, which is defined as a process that prevents members of a particular social category from obtaining a job or entering a profession. Access discrimination is concerned with persons who differ from the majority being denied access to certain positions, jobs organizations or occupations. This puts limitation on the careers and jobs that one can pursue. Access discrimination can impact people who experience it, but also people who may be considering that career path. It is a significant factor in achieving career goals in athletics, especially for females. It is necessary to examine gender differences in conference office career paths to determine whether or not access discrimination is occurring in the conference offices (Cunningham, 2007).

### **Statement of Problem**

While previous research (Deller, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1990; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Parrish, 2003; Radlinks, 2003; Smith, 2005) has been devoted to the analysis and understanding of the career paths of intercollegiate athletic directors, and particularly to the difficulties that females face within those upper ranks, very little exploration has been extended to athletic conference commissioners. Conference commissioners are a group unique unto themselves with which specific research should be conducted to determine if there is a common career path or commonalities that allow individuals to reach those upper ranks in athletic conference administration. Thus, it is important to know the unique aspects of their career paths, including commonalities and dissimilarities of both male and female conference commissioners. Since a conference commissioner's role differs from that of an athletic director, it is also essential to find if there are key non-commonalities between those who work at the conference versus those who work at the institutional level.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purposes of my study are to: (a) determine any presence of demographic and educational commonalities among conference commissioners; (b) determine the presence of a normative career path that exists for both male and female conference commissioners currently in positions of power in athletic conferences offices; (c) determine any differences among career paths for male and female commissioners that could indicate the presence of access discrimination; (d) determine profile commonalities that exist between female commissioners and Division I female athletic directors in the Grappendorf et al.'s study

(2004); and (e) determine job barriers and challenges that may exist among conference commissioners.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ I:** What commonalities exist in the demographic and educational profiles of conference commissioners?

**RQ II:** What elements in the career paths of male and female conference commissioners present themselves as normative?

**RQ III:** What non-commonalities exist in the profiles and career paths of male and female conference commissioners?

**RQ IV:** What commonalities exist between the profiles and career paths of female conference commissioners and female Division I athletic directors?

**RQ V:** What consistencies exist between the job barriers and challenges faced by conference commissioners?

### **Delimitations**

1. My study was limited to athletic conference commissioners.
2. My study was limited to athletic conference commissioners who are members of the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

### **Limitations**

1. The results of my study were contingent on the willingness of conference commissioners to participate in the study.
2. The analysis of the differences between males and females were limited because of the small number of female conference commissioners compared to their male counterparts.

### **Definition/Description of Terms**

1. NCAA Member Athletic Conference – A group of colleges and/or universities that conducts competition among its members and determines a conference champion in one or more sports (NCAA, 2008).
2. Conference Commissioner – The Chief Executive Officer of the athletic conference; can also be referred to as the Executive Director. For the purpose of this study, all individuals will be referred to as “commissioner.”
3. Career path – A series of career moves over time following the trend that organizations no longer provide fixed career paths and employees seek opportunities for development and new career opportunities as they appear (Capellen & Janssens, 2005).
4. Normative career path – Steps that occur in a career progression with which over 50% of respondents report having in common. These steps traditionally include: college athlete, head coach, assistant athletic director, associate athletic director and athletic director. (Fitzgerald, 1990) but have also been expanded to include the senior associate athletic director position (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004).

### **Significance of the Study**

The analysis of the careers and gender differences of intercollegiate athletic administrators has been limited primarily to institutional athletic directors. My study will provide important career information to those sport administration professionals who are seeking positions and careers in athletic conference administration. Results of my study will show if there are certain normative career steps that would be more likely to lead to a career as an intercollegiate athletic conference commissioner. By comparing the results by gender, it could possibly be determined whether or not access discrimination is occurring to prevent women from gaining leadership opportunities at the conference level. Lastly, by comparing the profiles and career paths of female conference commissioners to female Division I athletic directors, it can be determined where qualifications differ between the two positions.

## ***Chapter II***

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The office of athletic conference commissioner is powerful and long-standing, but there has been little research committed to understanding what career choices lead to success in this position and the reasons behind the low number of female commissioners. The following sections will discuss athletic conference commissioners as well as discuss studies related to career path analysis.

### *Athletic Conference Commissioners*

In the early 1900's, United States President Theodore Roosevelt was aware of the dire need to create legislative bodies for collegiate athletics and thus, promoted committees in which institutions could work together to standardize sporting contests. Particularly, he was motivated due to the violence in football, a sport that had seen 18 collegiate players killed in the 1905 season (Swanson & Spears, 1995), and charged that the game must be reformed or it would be abolished (Crowley, 2006). There was also a need to organize intercollegiate sport in order to maintain a higher sense of ethics that would fit the educational mission of the institutions. Following President Roosevelt's encouragement, the previously formed National Football Conference of Universities and Colleges and the American Football Rules Committee worked to create a joint venture and the first constitution and bylaws of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States were approved in March, 1906 by over 60 institutions. The organization would change its name four years later to the NCAA and thus was created the dominant national governing body that exists in intercollegiate athletics today (Crowley, 2006).

The period of 1906 to 1920 was significant for the NCAA, as it began to increase its number of specialized committees and open its scope to sports beyond football. Membership was actively growing and had reached 135 schools by the mid-1920's (Fleisher, Goff, & Tollison, 1992). The Association developed a ten-point code in 1922 during the National Convention that covered the principles and objectives of the governing body: amateurism, freshman rule, ban on playing pro football, three-year participation, no graduate students, faculty control, anti-betting, ban on playing for non-collegiate teams and lastly, sectional

conferences (Crowley, 2006). Following legislation, in the 20 years before World War II, the number of athletic conferences grew tremendously, with continuous realignments and additions. These conferences were addressing many of the same troublesome issues, such as regulating play amongst member schools and sponsoring championship events (Garrison, 1992). The original mission of the NCAA was to regulate collegiate sport with strict rules and enforcement was deemed impractical to carry out on the national level; the NCAA's focus turned to educational and supportive methods and regional conferences were now charged with the responsibility of eligibility and enforcement (Swanson & Spears, 1995).

With all of the new rules and formations of these conferences in the late 1800's and early 1900's, there was a need for a new position in intercollegiate athletics, the conference commissioner. The Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association and the Big Ten were the first to adopt the position in 1922. The position of conference commissioner was formed in 1922 as an officer to focus on athletic problems such as eligibility and institutional disagreements. The forerunners in the commissioner position were given such duties as to finding solutions for various athletic problems, to assist in enforcing eligibility matters and to mediate disputes between member schools (Garrison, 1992). In a New York Times article (1922), that announced the appointment of Major John L. Griffith as commissioner of the Big Ten, it was stated that his appointment was "prompted by the growth of intercollegiate athletics to such a scale as to demand that one man give his entire time to the study of athletic problems and the administration of the activities which concern all Big Ten institutions" (p. 37).

Interestingly, not all conferences have the title of commissioner; some conferences' head officers have the executive director title (e.g. The Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference). Despite the difference in name, they all have a leader who is considered their "Chief Administrative Officer" (ACC Manual, 2007, p. 28). Job descriptions for these positions have long surpassed those early descriptions of the 1920's and conference commissioners are now expected to wear many hats. Their tasks today include: rule interpretation and enforcement, equity advocacy, committee oversight, problem solving, official coordination, award allocation, conference representation/ambassador, revenue generation, human resource management, task delegation and finance oversight (ACC Manual, 2007). The 2007 Membership Report published by the NCAA gives the revenues of its member conferences (2008). Major Division I conferences report yearly revenues of over to \$25 million. The responsibility of managing such a budget compares to that of senior level management in many large corporations.

Even though there are currently over 120 individuals who hold this office within the NCAA, very little research has been devoted to understanding the careers of intercollegiate athletic conference commissioners. Two of the three articles that were found focused solely on the type of managerial roles and leadership skills that commissioners used in their day to day tasks (Quarterman, 1994 & 1998). Quarterman's initial study focused on the job position of conference commissioner more so than the individual by using Mintzberg's ten managerial roles. These roles are believed to be the ten most significant job-related behaviors of managers and are classified into three areas: interpersonal roles, informational roles and decisional roles. Quarterman adapted these pre-determined roles for sport managers and

used them to examine the importance commissioners placed on their job activities (1994). The purpose of the second study (1998) was to determine the perceptions of time and effort commissioners associated with the leadership and management tasks in their work. It was found that commissioners rated their time efforts toward management as greater than their efforts put into leadership skills, but since both were highly rated, he concluded that commissioners felt both leadership and management were important components of the position.

### *Profiles of Athletic Administrators*

Quarterman (1999) began to answer the question of who exactly the individuals were who held that powerful role in an exploratory investigation of the position, but stopped short of defining any type of career path similarities among the leaders. His latest study (1999) analyzed basic characteristics and demographics of the leaders and their respective conferences and included basic demographics, such as age, race, gender and years of experience. He found that 89.3% of respondents were white American males and 4 % were white American females. Commissioners holding only their bachelor's degree represented 20% of the group while Master's degrees were held by 48%. Approximately 20% of the study population had earned their Doctorate degree as well.. Of those doctoral degrees, 40% were Jurist Doctorates, attributed to increased litigation in intercollegiate athletics. All respondents had at least 10 years of administrative experience and over half had at least 15 years experience.

While this look at commissioner profiles and demographics was insightful and the first and only of its kind, the study did not attempt to find the difference between males and

the few females who held the position. The disparity in female representation was noted, as Quarterman stated that only three of 74 participants in his study were reported as female. The author called for further investigation to explore why members of certain groups are not represented as intercollegiate athletics commissioners (Quarterman, 1999)

In the early 1970's, research (Youngberg, 1971) began to examine the qualifications necessary to lead intercollegiate athletic programs, with analysis of the athletics director position continuing into the 1980's and 90's, as more studies delved into the appropriate preparations for becoming an athletics administrator. The following sections will look at what various studies found in regards to different aspects of athletic director profiles.

### *Age*

Age has been a mainstay in the basic profiling of intercollegiate athletic directors as researchers try to determine the amount of life experience and seasoned wisdom that impact a person's success in the administration role. Parrish (2003) reported that the majority of athletic directors are considered middle age as overall the age for athletic directors has generally been found in the 36-50 range. Fitzgerald (1990) summarized that "males tended to be older than the females, and the Division I directors generally were older than the Division II and especially the Division III directors" (p. 94). In her 1990 study of NCAA Division I, II and III athletic directors, Fitzgerald saw male athletic directors reporting a mean age of 50.6 and female athletic directors reporting one of 43.8. In their analysis of preparation patterns, Williams and Miller (1983) found similar results as in their study the average age for male athletic directors to be 47, while females had an average age of 40.

Female athletic directors tend to also reflect the pattern noted by Fitzgerald, in which those athletic directors found in larger Division I programs tend to be older. Radlinski (2003) looked solely at women who were in athletic administration at community colleges and found their overall age to be younger, with 42.1% falling in the 36-45 range. In looking at only the larger Division I programs, an older average age is found, with 50.21 years of age for merged programs and 52.2 for women's only programs (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006). In earlier analyses of female athletic directors only, Rice (1984) found the average age of women in higher education administration of athletics and Physical Education programs to be 43 while women at all divisions of NCAA intercollegiate athletics administration were found to have an average age of 46.2. In the most recent look at female directors, Smith (2005) found the largest response category in her analysis of female athletic administrators to be 46 to 55 at 32.4%.

### *Race*

Of those studies that included race in their profiles of intercollegiate athletic directors, a common theme can be found. It seems that these positions are dominated by those who classify themselves as "Caucasian" or "White." Fitzgerald reported that of 200 respondents in her 1990 study, all but 15 (92.5%) were identified as White. Numbers did not change much by 2004: 94.7% of Division I female athletic directors reported themselves to be European/American Caucasian (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin), with the same being reported in 2006 for those female administrators of female only departments (Grappendorf & Lough). A 2006 study of female athletic directors in all NCAA divisions further solidified those findings, for 95% of the respondents classified themselves as White-Americans

(Quarterman, Dupree, & Willis). The numbers did not change for those female administrators at community colleges, for 91.2% of the respondents in that 2003 study were “Caucasian” (Radlinski).

### *Sport Participation*

A number of researchers examined the backgrounds of individuals and analyzed the youth, high school and collegiate sport participation of athletic directors. Youngberg (1971) determined that competing in a varsity collegiate sport and in a varsity high school sport were statistically significant in the common backgrounds of athletic directors. Deller (1993) also found participation in varsity athletics at a high school and college level, with the major three sports being basketball, softball, and field hockey. A 2003 study (Radlinski) also reported that 77.2% of female community college athletic administrators played high school sports and 82.5% played college varsity. Goodloe (1978) reported that sport participation did not seem to vary significantly between different age groups, experience levels or types of female athletic directors.

While Grappendorf, Lough, and Griffin (2004) reiterated the significance of high school and collegiate sport participation, with 84.2% of their respondents playing at least one prep sport and 89.5% playing a varsity collegiate sport, they also reported on youth sport participation as well. They found that 78.9% of the responding Division I female athletic directors also played organized youth sports. Their findings further affirmed Deller’s study (1993) which had concluded that participation in basketball was important. Grappendorf et al found that 73.3% played youth basketball, 87.5% played high school basketball, and 58.8% played collegiate hoops.

### *Education*

One of the most analyzed aspects of athletic directors' profiles is educational background and was found to be ranked at the top of experiences listed as most impactful to careers (Smith, 2005). As early as 1971, Youngberg reported on the importance of having a bachelors and Master's degree, as found in his study on qualifications for intercollegiate athletic directors. This opinion was reaffirmed by Goodloe in her 1978 study of women athletic directors. The necessary level of degree continued to get attention from researchers, as numerous studies reported on the overwhelming percentage of respondents who had Master's degrees (Deller, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1990; Gerou, 1977; Grappendorf, Lough & Griffin, 2004; Parrish, 2003; Quarterman, Dupree & Willis, 2006; Radlinski, 2003; Smith, 2005; Williams & Miller, 1983). Fitzgerald's study (1993) found that all of the female respondents had Master's degrees and 79% of males had obtained one.

Some studies continued past the Master's degree to find those administrators who found it important to obtain a doctoral degree. Rice (1984) analyzed females in higher education athletic administration and found that 10% had obtained their doctorate; Gerou (1977) concluded that having such a degree was "imperative" (p.81). Many other studies reported the prevalence of doctorate degrees, ranging anywhere from 5% to 36.8% of their respective respondents. Fitzgerald (1990) also reported that the average age of those holding a doctoral degree was 48.4, which led her to conclude that it wasn't only a new trend that up and coming young professionals receive their Doctorates.

Studies not only focused on the level of the degree, but also the concentration or curriculum in which the degree was based. Many of the studies found that physical education

was the dominant degree area, particularly for undergraduate degrees (Deller, 1993; Gerou, 1977; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Radlinski, 2003; Rice, 1994; Smith, 2005; Youngberg, 1971). Other areas that were found to be beneficial or recommended for the future included athletic administration or other sport related majors, business, public administration, public relations, education, personnel management, and business administration (Deller, 1993; Gerou, 1977; Goodloe, 1978; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Parrish, 2003; Smith, 2005). Parrish (2003) found that a business focus to be a new trend in graduate studies for sport administration.

In a study that looked at the difference for preparation in NCAA Division I and Division II administrators, a difference was found in the type of course work on which they placed emphasis (Cuneen, 1988). Those curricula taken by future Division II administrators should emphasize more physical education management, higher education administration, and sport behavioral courses, while those taken by Division I administrators should focus more heavily in athletics and business management, marketing, and personnel management. A law degree was also indicated as a viable possibility for the intercollegiate athletic administrator's Master's degree (Smith, 2005).

### ***Career Paths in Athletic Administration***

Career path analysis is a more in-depth approach to understanding careers in administration, as well as a way to examine the variance in gender throughout those careers. Career path analysis allows researchers to examine the typical, and possibly necessary, career steps needed for aspiring athletics administrators to obtain those experiences that previous research has found to be necessary for success. As previously mentioned, with the multi-

million dollar budgets that are prepared and managed each day by conferences within the NCAA, conference leaders can be compared to the senior managers at major corporate firms. Because of this comparison, similar studies in the business management field that have analyzed career paths of senior managers are relevant (Baruch, 2003; Cappellen & Janssens, 2005; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005; NBER, 2004; Oakley, 2000).

The National Bureau of Economic Research (2004) found that in 2001, 89% of top business executives were males with an average age of 51 years old. On average, it took 24 years to reach the top position while holding five positions during their career. Studies also reported that positions that provided line experience, or those positions that put them in line for direct upward advancement, were important to promotion (Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Oakley, 2000) and that men were more likely to hold these positions than women. It was found that to be successful, geographic mobility was an essential component to a career, as well as having experience with important projects. Career paths to top management positions for females were found to differ from males. Whereas, 60% of females were found in human resources or public relations positions that did not put them in line for promotion to top executive (Oakley, 2000) it has also been noted that males were more likely to be given the developmental assignments and international jobs that led to quicker promotion as well (Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

A study completed in 1990 (Fitzgerald) used a sociological career trajectory model to determine patterns in athletic directors' career patterns and to see if they differed based on division or gender. Fitzgerald proposed a career path of five steps: college athlete, high

school coach, college coach, assistant or associate athletic director, and athletic director. It was found that 94.5 % of responding athletic directors tend to follow a distinct progression of experiences, with differences indicated in division and gender. Parrish (2003) examined career paths as well. He proposed three main routes to becoming a Division I-A athletic director: (a) college athlete, assistant coach, head coach, athletic director; (b) college athlete, private business/law practice, athletic director; or (c) college athlete, athletic department employee, director of an external affairs department, assistant athletic director, associate athletic director, athletic director. He also spent time looking at a career path based on internal or external operations experience. He classified external experience as those areas like marketing, sales and development that deal with the public, while internal experience includes daily administrative operations within the athletic department. Three main career paths that Parrish found athletic directors to follow were: External to External, meaning the individual spent time in an externally focused faction of the athletic department before being hired as an athletic director; Internal to External, or having time spent in a more internally focused part of the department before becoming director; or External to Internal to External, which means they worked in both internal and externally driven parts of the athletic department before becoming director..

Grappendorf, Lough, and Griffin (2004) conducted a study that examined and updated Fitzgerald's projected career path based upon their study of female Division I athletic directors. They found that being a high school coach was no longer necessary, that being an assistant AD and associate AD were two separate steps, and that the new step of senior associate athletic director was added. Therefore, a new career path trajectory was suggested

that included: college athlete, college coach, assistant athletic director, associate athletic director, senior associate athletic director and athletic director.

Experience as a college athlete is considered the first step of a career in athletics. Previous literature on sport participation has been discussed previously so the following sections will continue forward to examine the other various career experiences that have been found to contribute to the careers of athletic administrators.

#### *Coaching Experience*

Williams and Miller (1983) found that 41% of athletics directors had previously coached and 51% had teaching experience. Other researchers also discovered that a number of their athletic director respondents reported previous coaching experience (Grappendorf, Lough and Griffin, 2004; Radlinski, 2003; Rice, 1984; Williams & Miller, 1983; Youngberg, 1971). Even though quite a few studies emphasized the importance of a coaching background, a Gerou (1977) reported that administrative experience was more important than teaching and coaching experiences and that time spent in teaching and coaching was declining. Cuneen (1988), however, concluded that previously being a head coach of a college varsity sport was important because of the insight it offered to the administrator while Youngberg (1971) actually found that coaching experience was ranked higher than administrative experience.

#### *Previous Collegiate Administrative Experience*

Fitzgerald proposed that a normative career path to becoming an athletic director would also include time as an assistant or associate athletic director. Gerou (1977) found administrative job experiences labeled as the most valuable. Grappendorf, Lough, and Griffin

(2004) found that 68.4% of the respondents in their study on NCAA Division I female athletic directors had similar job experiences, while Williams and Miller (1983) found that 40.5 % of athletic directors from all divisions had previously held those positions. In an analysis of female community college athletic administrators, only 29.8% had been assistant athletic directors and only 8.8% had been associate directors (Radlinski, 2003), showing such experience is not as necessary as that of the larger, more specialized athletic departments at the NCAA Division I levels. In an examination of Division I-A athletic directors, personnel who have experience in external relations were seen to have a quicker route to their position. In fact, 73.7% of the population reported time in areas such as development, fundraising, marketing, or alumni relations (Parrish, 2003).

Time accumulated in collegiate athletics administration has also been found to impact successful appointment to the athletic director position. A number of studies listed one year or at least one year of athletic administration experience as crucial to success (Deller, 1993; Smith, 2005; Youngberg, 1971). Others found that their respondents reported a much higher average time of experience, including nine years (Rice, 1984) and 12.7 years (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004).

Career path analyses have also been used as a way to analyze the barriers that occur along the way in the career paths of females that may prevent them from reaching higher administrative positions. A study in corporate business management found that female executives faced greater barriers and used strategies for advancement that varied from the men in their profession (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). The women in this study reported a heavier reliance on developing relationships and achieving a good track record. Conley

(2005) analyzed the differences between men and women faculty career paths in academia and found that women experience different paths than men and suggests that family commitments by the women may interrupt their set career path.

A number of studies since Fitzgerald's have studied the various career paths of just female collegiate athletic administration cohorts (Deller, 1993; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Radlinski, 2003; Smith, 2005). Deller studied female directors in the NCAA and determined there are a number of keys to attaining top status: academic preparation, athletic administration experience, head coaching experience, respect for college football and awareness of time commitments. Radlinski, in her analysis of those in community college athletic administration, concluded that the entry into sport management continued to be the player-coach-assistant route, but found no single predominant path. Grappendorf, Lough, and Griffin (2004) continued that examination by analyzing the career steps of those females in NCAA Division I institutions who were able to become top administrators. They echoed Radlinski's sentiments, as they found that a normative career path existed, but suggesting one career path would be too restrictive.

### ***Access Discrimination***

After Title IX had been in place for almost two decades and it became apparent that females were not gaining access to athletic administration positions, studies on the profiles of athletic directors began to focus on the differences in males and females and more significantly – why females were less likely to gain those top administration positions. This disparity is important when attempting to discuss and understand the career paths of athletic administrators; a lack of females in the profession indicates that career paths and profiles

may differ by gender and, more significantly, might contain more barriers for females. One contributing factor to this difference is access discrimination, a process that prevents members of a particular social category from obtaining a job or entering a profession (Cunningham, 2007). This can be illustrated by a conference looking to hire an associate commissioner who has a background in coaching football. Such a job requirement would systematically disqualify females because a very few have ever played or coached football.

Barriers reported by women in athletic administration include: lack of inclusion in the “good old boys” network, perception that women are not able to lead, men being given the highly prized Division I positions or decision making level jobs, and job descriptions (Acosta & Carpenter, 1988; Fink, Pastore, & Riemer; Friend & LeUnes, 1989; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Lovett & Lowry, 1995; Quarterman, Dupree, & Willis, 2006; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002; Williams & Miller, 1983).

Concentration on the commonalities and differences that exist for female athletic directors is justified as factual data within the sports administration profession is clear on the disparity that exists for female representation within those higher ranks. Acosta and Carpenter have conducted an ongoing 31-year longitudinal study on how women are faring in various fields of intercollegiate athletics. Their most recent report (2008) found that in all NCAA Divisions, only 21.3 percent of Athletic Directors are female, with the majority of those found at the less powerful Division III schools. They also found that currently 11.6 percent of NCAA member institutions have no female athletics administrator at all (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006). Additionally, the NCAA released participation fact sheets (2006), showing that only 18% of athletic directors in member institutions are female. Lapchick (2006)

published a 2005 Racial and Gender Report Card for college sports and in it he gave all three NCAA Division institutions and NCAA Division IA Conference offices failing “F” grades when it came to gender diversity. High school athletics have even been found to be male dominated and also difficult for women to find success (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Whisenant, 2003).

The “good-old boys” network is best described as the informal social network through which men create an exclusive inner circle that allows them to support each other while excluding women (Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). When listing perceived causes of declining representation, it was reported that women perceived success of ‘old-boys-club’ network and failure of ‘old girls club’ network as the highest and third-highest reasons, respectively, (Acosta & Carpenter, 1998). Exclusion from such a support network often prevents women from making the social connections necessary to improve their job status. Williams and Miller (1983) had female respondents describe the overwhelming power of the network as an apprentice program and the exclusion from it prevented them from experiencing the free flow of thoughts and ideas that happened within. Likewise, Grappendorf and Lough (2006) had female athletic directors cite the absence of an “old girls” system to provide similar mentors. Division IA females listed exclusion from informal networks as a major barrier (Fink, Pastore, & Reimer, 2001). Sagas and Cunningham (2004) found that men in intercollegiate athletic administration were more likely to benefit from their investments in social relationships at work than were women. Most recently, in 2005, a study found that although “good ole boys” network was ranked fifth in order of importance.

It received the most number of comments on the open-ended portion of the survey (Smith).

The lack of such a network for women clearly has a significant impact on their careers.

Another potential barrier to females that has been consistently noted in the research is males' perception of female being unable to lead. Athletic leadership positions are male dominated, so therefore females are often not viewed as capable of leading major athletic programs. Grappendorf and Lough (2006) reported that 25% of Division I female athletic directors cited "perception that a woman cannot lead" as a barrier (p. 12). Williams and Miller (1983) found that even though in their surveys, it was indicated that either gender was considered qualified to direct combined collegiate athletic programs, most of those top positions were still held by males. They also noted that women were not put into power positions of merged programs because they were not seen as qualified to administer revenue producing sports that are seen as having high-power, such as football, because they had not played or coached the sport. Another study (Fink, Pastore, & Reimer, 2001) that reviewed barriers to females reported male stereotyping which included perceived inability of females to lead.

Related to the perception of women's inability to lead is the fact that men dominate major decision making positions within intercollegiate athletics. Whisenant, Pedersen, and Obenour (2002) found that females who were able to get positions in Division I intercollegiate programs were often relegated to positions that are seen as support roles and the power that was associated with revenue producing sports was saved for males. Even under the broad administration of the NCAA, it was found that the majority of decision making positions on national NCAA sport committees were held by men (Lovett & Lowry,

1995). As a result of a lack of women seen in critical power positions, many young girls may understand those positions to be off-limits for females and never pursue them for themselves (Whisenant, Vincent, Pedersen, & Zapalac. 2005) Ultimately, according to Cunningham and Sagas (2005), this is a consequence of access discrimination.

Lastly, an access discrimination barrier that may be preventing women from obtaining positions in intercollegiate athletics relates to job descriptions. Specific language and tasks that are described in athletic administration job descriptions may work to discriminate against females seeking career advancement. Many interscholastic descriptions for athletic director openings often pair the position with the head football coach which, most likely rules out females based on experience (Whisenant, 2005). The position can be stacked with head football coaches, which will systematically eliminate women (Whisenant, Miller, & Pedersen, 2005). These job descriptions may be unconscious or conscious discrimination, both of which were listed as secondary reasons women representation in athletics was declining (Acosta & Carpenter, 1988). As indicated in the previous illustration of access discrimination, if conferences describe certain job experiences in football or baseball to be prerequisites for filling their assistant or associate commissioner ranks, females can be removed from the pipeline all together. Females' chances of being hired in the administrative roles that provide invaluable experience for future commissioners are severely diminished simply because they were unable to play or coach a male driven sport.

Fink, Pastore, and Riemer (2001) also cited jobs based on unclear ideals as possibilities for discrimination suits, as well as a factor that could destroy trust and satisfaction. Smith (2005) noted that job descriptions for females in athletic administration

often pair two positions or titles. She concluded that the number of females in administration could be increased in positions such as Senior Woman Administrator weren't simply tacked onto job descriptions.

There are many barriers that may be preventing women from moving into the higher ranks of athletic administration, including the position of conference commissioner. As aforementioned, these barriers can include access discrimination and can be varied. "The potential reasons for women's under-representation and men's overrepresentation in influential positions in sport management can be described as overwhelming" (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003, p. 348). Thus, it is important to examine if these same barriers apply to NCAA conference commissioners.

Many of the studies regarding women in leadership focused on the institutional athletic director position. The inequitable numbers reported in the 2004-05 Race and Gender Demographics of NCAA Member Conferences' Personnel Report (NCAA, 2005) that the same type of discrepancy holds true for the conference commissioner position. The report indicated that 13% of all member conferences have female commissioners. This breaks down to 13.2% of Division I commissioners being female, 0% of Division II commissioners being female, and 20.6% of Division III commissioners being female. While some may agree that studying the careers of athletic directors will provide a microcosm of all intercollegiate athletic administrators, they are two distinct groups that require their own analysis. Ultimately, what may hold true for the career paths of conference commissioners could be completely different for athletic directors.

### *Chapter III*

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Sample**

The NCAA is made up of 133 member conferences (NCAA, 2008). Each of these conferences is directed by a commissioner, executive director, or president. It should also be noted that some individuals are commissioners of several conferences. For example, one individual may be a commissioner of a conference of geographically similar institutions, as well as a sport specific conference that serves a few of their schools. These administrators were sent the online survey just once.

A non-probability sample is one in which the sample population is not chosen through random selection (Trochim, 2005). My survey was sent to each of these specific 133 conference leaders, so it would fall into this category. By giving all known athletic conference commissioners an opportunity to complete the survey, it would increase the external validity of the study.

Snowball sampling was also utilized in developing the sample population. Snowball sampling occurs when individuals who have been identified for a study recommend others they know who also meet study criteria (Trochim, 2005). So to increase the potential sample size and number of respondents, initial recipients of my survey were asked to forward the email to former conference commissioners with whom they kept in touch and for which they had email addresses.

### **Instrumentation**

A 20-question survey was constructed to determine the demographic, educational and career progression backgrounds of current conference commissioners. The survey was derived from the previous work of researchers Grappendorf, Lough, and Griffin (2004) have previously analyzed the profiles and career paths of female Division I athletic directors. Questions regarding age, ethnicity, education, participation in organized sports, and steps in the career path were taken from their study. Number of children and greatest influence on career choice were eliminated for this survey as those questions went beyond the scope of the study. Quantitative data about basic demographics, education history, sport participation and previous positions made up the remainder of the survey.

The first portion of the questionnaire dealt with basic demographics and educational histories of the respondents, asking for: (a) NCAA division classification for their conference (b) title within conference (c) age (d) gender (e) race (f) area of study for bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degrees. The middle portion provided respondents with a list of sports to select the organized sports in which they participated prior to and during high school, as well as at the college varsity level. Respondents could also type in sports that were not included on the original list.

Career progression inquiries constituted the last third of the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to identify their age when first named commissioner, as well as number of years in athletics administration, work at the conference level and in current position. Specific career paths were determined by listing possible positions in athletics and having the respondents number the positions in order by which they were held. These

positions were: collegiate athlete, graduate assistant, educator, high school coach, assistant college coach, head college coach, director of an athletic department program, assistant AD, associate AD, senior associate AD, athletics director, assistant commissioner, associate commissioner and commissioner. To determine if there was any movement between NCAA divisions, respondents were asked to indicate if they had worked in multiple divisions and in what order. (See Appendix A)

The last question on the survey was open-ended, asking commissioners to list what they felt were their greatest barriers and challenges. Open ended questioning is qualitative in nature, which allows the respondent to provide insight into possible barriers not previously considered by the researcher, which gives the investigator a deeper understanding of the situation (Trochim, 2005).

### **Data Collection**

The NCAA lists the websites of all of their member conferences. This was used to access the staff directory of the conferences and obtain the contact information for their commissioner/executive director (Ncaa.org, 2008). These email addresses were cross-referenced for accuracy with the 2005-06 NCAA Directory and by correspondence with a conference administrative assistant. For ease of set-up and administration, the survey was placed online, using the data collection service, Survey Monkey. An email providing the link to only the survey and explaining its purpose was sent to each conference commissioner requesting their participation. One month was allocated for response time, with two reminder emails containing the survey web-link being sent out during that response time.

Previous articles have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of using online surveys (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Granello & Wheaton, 2004). Web-based surveys have great benefits because of their flexibility in formatting, timeliness of distribution and convenience in gathering and analyzing data. They also can save a great deal of money involved in administration of the survey. Unfortunately, online surveys are also associated with low response rates depending on the sample. . Email users in the United States tend to be predominantly highly educated White males. There can also be measurement errors that occur when translating paper-and-pencil questions to electronic format and as with most electronic devices, technical difficulties can play a role in hindering data collection.

Once the survey timeline had expired, a data file of all results was provided by the online survey provider. The results were then used to complete statistical analysis of the data to determine what career and demographical similarities were statistically significant.

### **Analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 16.0 for Windows, was used to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to determine mean, range, standard deviation, and frequency of the educational, participation and employment responses. Qualitative data was obtained from the final open-ended question of the survey, which queried participants on what they perceived as their challenges and career barriers. This was an unobtrusive measure that allowed the researchers to perform a content analysis on the participants responses once they had completed the questionnaire. The information was coded by two independent coders, a process in which the information was listed out and divided into categories based on the main purpose in the response. The assignment of

responses to categories was done independently to assure the confirmability of the results (Trochim, 2005).

## *Chapter IV*

### **RESULTS**

Of the 120 emails sent out to NCAA conference commissioners, 86 completed online survey, yielding a 71.6% response rate. The responses were representative of all NCAA Divisions, with 44.4 % coming from Division III ( $n = 36$ ), 24.7% coming from Division II ( $n = 20$ ), 9.9% coming from Division I-Football Champion Subdivision (DI-FCS) ( $n = 8$ ), 8.6% coming from Division I-Football Bowl Subdivision (DI-FBS) and Division I-AAA ( $n = 7$  for each) and 3.7% being of all classifications/combination conferences ( $n = 3$ ). When considering classifications as separated by gender, females reported only representation in Division III ( $n = 10$ ), Division I-FCS ( $n = 3$ ) and combination conferences ( $n = 1$ ); one chose not to answer.

Individuals who identified themselves as holding the office of “Conference Commissioner” were recorded at 87.2% ( $n = 75$ ); six were labeled as “Executive Director”(7%), three classified themselves as having another title (3.5%) and two chose not to respond (2.3%). The following sections will discuss the demographic, educational, and career profile break-downs for these respondents, reported as a whole group and then segmented by gender as it relates to the research questions.

#### *Distribution by Gender, Age and Race*

Of the 86 responses, 67 were male (77.9%), 15 were female (17.4%) and 4 chose not to respond (4.7%). When indicating the race that best described them, 97.6% ( $n = 82$ ) of the entire sample indicated “White”, 2.4% ( $n = 2$ ) indicated “Other” and two chose not to respond. The two that selected “Other” as their race described themselves as “mixed race” and “German American.” When segmented by gender, 100% ( $n = 15$ ) of female commissioners described themselves as “White”.

The 50 to 59 age group was by far the largest cohort of commissioners, with 38.1% ( $n = 32$ ) of respondents responding with this category. The next largest group was 30 to 39 age group at 20.2% ( $n = 17$ ), followed by the 40 to 49 age group at 19% ( $n = 16$ ) (See Figure 1).

Regarding the female commissioners, 33.3% ( $n = 5$ ) were in the 50 to 59 year old category, 26.7% ( $n = 4$ ) were in the 40 to 49 year old category and 20% ( $n = 3$ ) were in the 30 to 39 year old category (see Figure 1).

### *Educational Profiles*

When indicating the area of study for their bachelor’s degree, 23.2% ( $n = 19$ ) of responding commissioners chose Physical Education. Business degrees and degrees in the journalism/communications fields followed next at 19.5% ( $n = 16$ ) each. History/Political Science studies represented 7.3% ( $n=6$ ), with both English and sociology/psychology degrees representing 6.1% ( $n = 5$ ) each. Other fields of education (other than physical education) were reported 4.9% ( $n = 4$ ) of the time. Sport management was indicated 3.7% ( $n=3$ ) of the time. All “other” degrees were grouped together and totaled 9.8% ( $n = 8$ ) of the commissioner group (see Figure 2).

Regarding breakdown by gender, business degrees represented 21.5% ( $n = 14$ ) of male commissioners but only 6.7% ( $n = 1$ ) of female commissioners. Physical Education degrees held for 20% ( $n = 13$ ) of males and 40% ( $n=6$ ) of females.

Journalism/communications majors were next in rank for both genders with 18.5% ( $n = 12$ ) of males and 26.7% ( $n = 4$ ) of females earning their undergraduate degrees in this field (see Figure 2).

A master's degree was earned by 56 of the commissioners, representing 65.1% of respondents completing their graduate degree. Of these, 40.7% ( $n = 24$ ) were in sport management, 13.6% ( $n = 8$ ) were in physical education, 11.9% ( $n = 7$ ) were in other fields of education , 10.2% ( $n = 6$ ) were an MBA, and 8.5% ( $n = 4$ ) were in education administration (see Figure 3).

When broken down by gender, 42 out of 67 male commissioners had their master's, representing 62.7%, while 14 of the 15 female commissioners had a graduate degree (93.3%). Approximately one-third of males (34.9%,  $n = 15$ ) and 60% ( $n = 9$ ) of females with their master's had earned it in sport management. Next in rank was 14% ( $n = 6$ ) of males and 13.3% ( $n = 2$ ) of females had earned it in physical education (see Figure 3).

A small portion of conference commissioners had obtained doctorate degree, as 17.4% ( $n = 15$ ) of responding commissioners indicated having a post-graduate degree. All except one of these commissioners were male, resulting in 20.9% ( $n = 14$ ) of male respondents having their doctorate and 6.7% ( $n = 1$ ) of females having one. The areas of the degrees are:

43.8% ( $n = 7$ ) of male doctorates were Juris Doctorate degrees, 31.2% ( $n = 5$ ) were education degrees and 14.3% ( $n=2$ ) fell into the “other” category (see Figure 4).

### *Sport Participation*

Commissioners listed the organized sports in which they participated prior to high school, with 86 % ( $n = 74$ ) of responding commissioners played at least one sport. When analyzed by number of sports played, the majority played either two, three, or four sports: 15.8% ( $n = 13$ ) played two sports, 17.4% ( $n = 15$ ) played three sports, and 22% ( $n = 19$ ) played four sports (see Figure 5).

The top three youth sports in rank order by participation were 69.8% ( $n = 60$ ) in youth baseball, 68.6% ( $n = 59$ ) in youth basketball, and 47.7% ( $n = 41$ ) in youth football. There was a gap before the next cluster of sports, as only 24.4% ( $n = 21$ ) participated in youth tennis, 19.8% ( $n = 17$ ) in youth track and field/cross country, 18.6% ( $n = 16$ ) in youth soccer and 16.3% ( $n = 14$ ) in youth swimming and diving (see Table 1).

When broken down by gender, the top three sports by participation for male commissioners remained the same: 86.6% ( $n = 58$ ) played youth baseball, 80.6% ( $n = 54$ ) played youth basketball and 58.2% ( $n = 39$ ) played youth football. For females, the top three sports by participation differed: 33.3% ( $n = 5$ ) did swimming/diving, 26.7% ( $n = 4$ ) did track and field/cross country and 20% ( $n = 3$ ) played soccer, basketball, softball and tennis each (see Table 2).

Commissioners then listed the organized sports in which they participated during high school, and 88.4 % ( $n = 76$ ) of responding commissioners played at least one sport. Again, the highest numbers were seen in two, three and four sport athletes as 21% ( $n = 18$ ) played

two sports, 31.4% ( $n = 27$ ) played three sports, and 24.4% ( $n = 21$ ) played four sports (see Figure 6).

The top three in rank order by participation were 61.6% ( $n = 53$ ) in basketball, 48.8% ( $n = 42$ ) in baseball and 36% ( $n = 31$ ) in football. The next three were track and field/cross country at 31.4% ( $n = 27$ ), tennis at 16.3% ( $n = 14$ ) and soccer at 11.6% ( $n = 10$ ) (see Table 3).

Similar with the youth sports, when high school sport participation was analyzed by gender, the rank order of sports for male commissioners remained the same as 64.2% ( $n = 43$ ) played basketball, 61.2% ( $n = 41$ ) played baseball, and 43.7% ( $n = 31$ ) played football. For female commissioners 53.3% ( $n = 8$ ) participated in high school basketball, 46.7% ( $n = 7$ ) in high school tennis and 33.3% ( $n = 5$ ) in high school softball (see Table 4).

Lastly, the commissioners listed the varsity sports in which they participated during college, with 55.8% ( $n = 48$ ) of responding commissioners played at least one sport. Of all commissioners, 26.7% ( $n = 23$ ) played one collegiate sport, 25.6% ( $n = 22$ ) played two sports, and 3.5% ( $n = 3$ ) played three sports (see Figure 7).

The top three in rank order were 20.9% ( $n = 18$ ) in basketball, 19.8% ( $n = 17$ ) in baseball and 14% ( $n = 12$ ) in football. The next three were field hockey at 5.8% ( $n = 5$ ), volleyball at 5.8% ( $n = 5$ ), and soccer at 5.8% ( $n = 5$ ). (see Table 5).

The results were again analyzed by gender. The top three sports for all commissioners are all male sports in collegiate athletics, therefore, the top three sports for male commissioners remained the same so that 25.4% ( $n = 17$ ) played baseball, 17.9% ( $n = 12$ ) played football and 14.9% ( $n = 12$ ) played basketball. For female commissioners, 46.7% ( $n =$

7) participated in basketball, 33.3% ( $n = 5$ ) in field hockey and 26.7% ( $n = 4$ ) in volleyball (see Table 6).

### *Career Path*

Commissioners were asked a number of preliminary career questions involving number of years experience and their age when becoming a commissioner. Within those responses it was found that 44.3% ( $n = 35$ ) of commissioners first assumed the title role when they were between the ages of 30 to 39. The next largest group was the 40 to 49 year old age group, in which 30.4% ( $n = 24$ ) of commissioners were when they became head of their conference. When segmented by gender, females followed a very similar pattern: 33.3% ( $n = 5$ ) assumed the role when they were 30 to 39, 33.3% ( $n = 5$ ) were 40 to 49 (see Figure 8).

Upon analyzing the total number of years of experience each commissioner had invested in intercollegiate athletics, it was found that 21.8% ( $n = 17$ ) of commissioners had 15 to 19 years in the field. This was followed by 15.4% ( $n = 12$ ) having 10 to 14 years and 14.1% ( $n = 11$ ) having either 20 to 24 years or 25 to 29 years. The years of experience differed slightly for female commissioners. Categories of those who had worked 5 to 9 years, 15 to 19 years, and 25 to 29 years each represented 21.4% ( $n = 3$ ) of female respondents (see Figure 9).

Respondents were then asked to indicate how many years of administrative experience they had in the athletic conference office. The range of 5 to 9 years was most prevalent at 26.9% ( $n = 21$ ), followed by 10 to 14 years at 20.5% ( $n = 16$ ), and less than 5 years at 19.2% ( $n = 15$ ). When separated by gender, females also reported 5 to 9 years as the

most common range of conference office experience at 46.2% ( $n = 6$ ). Next was less than 5 years with 23.1% ( $n = 3$ ) and 10 to 14 years with 15.4% ( $n = 2$ ). (see Figure 10).

Next, participating commissioners reported the number of years they had held their current position of leading the conference. It was reported that 39.2% ( $n = 31$ ) individuals had been commissioner less than five years. Those who had been in the position for 5 to 9 years comprised 23.3% ( $n = 20$ ), followed by those of 10 to 14 years' experience at 14% ( $n = 12$ ). When analyzed by gender, females indicated the same pattern, with six individuals holding the position less than five years or holding the position 5 to 9 years (42.9 %, respectively), (see Figure 11).

When indicating the positions held in their career and in what order those positions came within their career, there was a variety of responses (see Figure 12). For the first step in their athletics career, 60% ( $n = 45$ ) of respondents selected student-athlete, with graduate assistant in a distant second at 8% ( $n = 6$ ). For the second career step, high school coach was most popular at 21.3% ( $n = 16$ ) and Assistant AD being next with 20% ( $n = 15$ ) of all respondents reporting having this as a career step. Of the 13 completed female responses, 11 (84.6%) started out their career as student athletes. For the second step for females, six (46.2%) were educators" and eight (61.5%) were high school coaches. For all genders, the "commissioner" title was achieved anywhere from step four to step eight of the administrators' careers (see Figure 12).

Half ( $n = 39$ ) of the responding commissioners indicated that they had worked in just one athletic division their entire career, with the other half ( $n = 39$ ) indicating they had moved around between divisions. For those who had transitioned between different athletic

divisions, 34 reported a completed route of progression. Eight (23.5%) of those reported progression from a lower division with (i.e. Division II or Division III) upwards to the next highest division. A reverse path was followed by 11 (32.4%) individuals in which they went from the upper divisions to the lower divisions. For the females, five (35.7%) reported being stationary in one division. Of the remaining, two (14.3%) had a progression through divisions that went from smallest to largest while three (21.4%) had the reverse

### *Job Barriers/Challenges*

The last question on the survey asked commissioners to identify the greatest barriers or challenges in their role. Of the respondents, 66 chose to comment in this open-ended query. Structural issues in the conference were reported by 56.1% ( $n = 37$ ) of the respondents. These responses included “changes in the conference model,” “no set written guidelines,” “keeping so many people/institutions headed in ‘somewhat’ the same direction” and “scheduling and officiating issues.” Other observations found that the job demands conflicted with a life balance (21.2%,  $n = 14$ ). These included comments like “significant time demands”, “24/7 nature of the work,travel” and “prioritizing resources of time and energy.” There were acceptance or advancement issues (4.5%,  $n = 3$ ) such as “DIII applicants are rarely considered for appropriate DI level positions”. Various other concerns comprised 21.2% ( $n = 14$ ) of responses.

## *Chapter V*

### **DISCUSSION**

Research Question 1 sought to determine if commonalities exist in the basic demographic and educational profiles of current NCAA conference commissioners. Of the 82 respondents who provided information on their gender, 81.7% ( $n = 67$ ) were male. This mirrors a recent NCAA report (2008) that stated that 81.7% of NCAA member athletic directors were male. This indicates that the responses of the survey are representative of the population. When examining race commonalities among conference commissioners, of the 84 responding participants, 82 indicated they were “White.” This shows that an overwhelming 97.6% of commissioners are of the same race. This is consistent with, previous studies of collegiate athletic administrators (Fitzgerald, 1990; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Quarterman, 1999; Quarterman, Dupree & Willis, 2006; Radlinski, 2003) that reported group percentages ranging from 91% to 95% of “White” or “Caucasian” administrators. This evidence suggests the reinforcing of the hegemonic hold of white males that has been occurring within collegiate athletics administration and still exists from the institutional level up to the conference level. It is plausible to suggest that homologous reproduction (the tendency to hire those most like ourselves) may also be occurring as the numbers of female conference commissioners has remained somewhat stagnant. The continued lack of gender diversity should be a concern that gets some attention from administrators, as well as the NCAA. As Cunningham and Sagas (2005) reported, diversity

has positive benefits for the organization, from expanded group creativity, overall effectiveness and better understanding of the diverse student athletes they are serving.

When analyzing educational backgrounds, it was found that 95.3% of responding commissioners had a bachelor's degree. Of the 82 responding, 19 (23.2%) had undergraduate degrees in physical education, 16 (19.5%) had business degrees and 16 (19.5%) had degrees in a communication related field such as journalism or media, physical education, and business degrees have already been observed in previous studies (Deller, 1993; Gerou, 1977; Goodloe, 1978; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Parrish, 2003, Quarterman, 1999; Smith, 2005). However, the presence of communication degrees was interesting and otherwise previously unnoted. This may very well be indicative of the unique aspect of the conference commissioner's role as liaison between member institutions and the need to communicate well with all member schools. This is a role where one would find a communication background helpful.

Commonalities found within Master's degrees vary from that of the bachelor's degree. It was found that 66.3% ( $n = 57$ ) of participants indicated completed graduate degrees, with 24 (42.1%) of these degrees falling in the sport management/administration category. It is interesting that only three individuals earned their Bachelor's degree in the same field. This may indicate that individuals chose to specialize in athletic administration at a later age. It was noted in previous research on conference commissioners (Quarterman, 1999) that it was interesting that more Master's degrees in sport management were prevalent than bachelor degrees in the same field. It has been suggested that this occurs because many master's programs in sport management were started before bachelor programs had were. As

more undergraduate institutions continue to add sport management degrees, the dominance of physical education degrees may decline. This specialization in sport administration for a master's degree seems to be a rising trend. Previous research on the profiles of athletic administrators had found Physical Education to be the area of concentration for all levels of degrees (Gerou, 1977; Youngberg, 1971), but the results seen here corroborate the more recent findings of Grappendorf et al. (2004), who found that 77.8% of their population had sport-related Master's degrees. Only 17.4% ( $n = 15$ ) of respondents had earned their doctorate degree. This fits into the findings in previous populations studied (Deller, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1990; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Quarterman, Dupree, & Willis, 2006; Radlinski, 2003; Rice, 1984; Smith, 2005) where prevalence of post-graduate degrees ranged from 5% to 36.8%. It appears that of those doctorates earned, the Juris Doctorate was the most popular at 43.8% ( $n = 7$ ), which is similar to what was found by Quarterman (1999).

Research Question 2 sought to find if a normative career path exists for conference commissioners. Participating in organized sports appears to be a significant part of commissioner's backgrounds, as 86% ( $n = 74$ ) participated in sports prior to high school, 88.6% ( $n = 76$ ) participated in high school sports, and 55.8% ( $n = 48$ ) played a varsity collegiate sport. These results are consistent with the findings of other research that found an overwhelming percentage of NCAA athletic directors to have been involved in youth, prep and collegiate athletics (Deller, 1993; Goodloe, 1978; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Radlinski, 2003; Youngberg, 1971). From these results it can be further confirmed that participation in athletics occurs from an early age and stays a consistent component of the early years for athletic administrators. It could be suggested that participation in these

organized sports emphasizes the importance of athletics in these individuals' minds and molds the esteem with which they hold their careers.

With regards to career steps, there appears to be no normative path to reach the position of athletic conference commissioner. As it was defined previously, a "normative" career step is that position that was held by at least 50% of the sample population. The only step that was found to be that significant was participation as a collegiate varsity student-athlete, with 60% (n = 45) beginning their athletic careers as such. This significance has previously been noted for other athletic administrators as well (Fitzgerald, 1990; Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004; Parrish, 2003 Radlinski, 2003). While no other single career step could be considered normative, several observations can be made. The number of educators generally matched those who held the high school coach role in the same step. It therefore could be assumed that many of these educators held the popular dual role of school teacher and prep coach. The second career step indicated 41 (54.7%) of individuals held either a graduate assistant, educator or high school coach role indicating that, in their first position after being a student-athlete, many future commissioners held a very instructional and hands-on position. This echoes the findings of Williams and Miller (1983) who found that 41 % of athletics directors had previously coached and 51 % had teaching experience.

In the third career step, 19 (25.3%) had assumed a more involved coaching role at the collegiate level while 26 (34.7%) had already made their transition into a lower-tier administrative position (e.g. Sports Information Director, assistant or associate athletic director and assistant or associate commissioner). By steps four through eight, the career progressions for each commissioner had become almost completely administrative, as 69.3%

( $n = 52$ ) of commissioners had reached their pinnacle position in these steps. This mirrors a number of different research studies that indicated five career steps to be the average amount to reach the top position, both in athletics and the corporate world. (Fitzgerald, 1990; National Bureau of Economic Research, 2004), but is slightly different from Grappendorf, et. al, who found the average number of career steps to be a little higher at 6.57.

Research Question 3 sought to determine if there were significant non-commonalities that exist between male and female conference commissioners. A comparison of the two groups was statistically difficult because of the disparity in the number of males and females who hold commissioner roles. There were not enough female respondents in the study to create a large enough comparison group. This, again, speaks to the lack of diversity within the higher ranks of collegiate athletics administration.

Even without the formal statistical analysis, a number of general observations can be made. When reporting race, minorities were very scarce in the responses; the one minority reported was male while all of the females were white. This is not surprising; a female who is a racial minority would have what is considered “double jeopardy” where as being a female and a racial minority would put that individual at twice the hardship for achieving a high position in athletic administration. When looking at educational profiles, males had more of a business background while more females had an educational based background for their undergraduate degrees. This is similar to findings by (Gerou, 1977) who found that females would traditionally hold educational positions in their career. The percentage of master’s degrees for each gender was interesting as well with 62.7% of males having their graduate degrees and all but one (93.3%) of females having theirs. It should be noted that the one

female who did not have her master's was actually in the process of completing that degree. This finding is consistent with those seen by (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004), who commented that females often felt the need to obtain advanced degrees to make themselves more competitive for Division I athletic director positions.

In analyzing differences in sport participation, it can be seen that the top three youth sports for males (football, basketball, and baseball) are all team oriented sports. The top three sports for females at a young age were swimming/diving, track and field, and soccer. Two of those sports are individually based sports, indicating that females may have been at a disadvantage when it came to garnering the early teamwork and leadership skills developed through team-based sports. Through prep and collegiate sports, the top three sports for participation remained baseball, basketball, and football. If participation in these sports provides an advantage to those wanting a career in collegiate athletics, females are at a systematic disadvantage since two of the three are provided for males only. Inexperience with football is often cited as a downfall for women (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005) in athletic administration and their limited ability and allowance to compete in the sport puts them at an obvious disadvantage.

For sport participation, there was heavy involvement for both groups. It is interesting to note, however, that while the highest percentage of female athletic directors participated in basketball and softball, female commissioners were more heavily concentrated in swimming/diving and track/field. This signifies a difference in the nature of sport participation experience. Athletic directors seem to have more youth experience with team sports as commissioners were more predominant in individual based sports. In high school

sports, female athletic directors had the highest numbers in basketball (87.5%), volleyball (62.5%) and softball (56.3%). Female commissioners report 53.3% participation in basketball, 46.7% in tennis, 33.3% in softball and 26.7% in volleyball. These numbers suggest that those who continued on to the conference office either participated less in high school athletics or were more diverse in their selection of activities.

In regards to general years of experience, number of years at the commissioner position and the time involved in moving up the career ladder, males and females tend to follow the same trend. The differences in career path actually were found in the type of positions that were held along that ladder of progression. Also found in the career path analysis is that 46.2% of female commissioners had experience as educators before reaching the conference leadership role. This may be an indication of the type of leadership style brought to the conference by females. A more didactic, mentor-driven leadership style may be apparent with them. Quarterman addresses this as “right brain” versus “left brain” styles in his 1998 article. Females may have more of a “right brain” leadership style while males may have a more “left brain” management style.

Research Question 4 aimed to use the research of Grappendorf, Lough, and Griffin (2004) to determine if there were any differences between female Division I athletic directors and female conference commissioners. In regards to basic demographics, race is similar as 94.7% of female athletic directors were white and 100% of the female commissioners responding in this report were white. Educational backgrounds fell along similar lines. All of the female athletic directors and commissioners had their bachelor's degrees; 94.7% of athletic directors had their graduate degree while 93% of responding female commissioners

also did. Of those graduate degrees, 77.8% of athletic directors' were in sport-related fields and 64.3% of commissioners had a sports-related Master's.

There was an apparent difference in the beginning steps of the suggested career path. Athletic directors reported working in education at some point in their career 78.9% of the time while only 58.3% of commissioners did. Likewise, 89.5% of athletic directors reported being a collegiate coach compared to 58.3% of commissioners. This may reflect the nature of their careers, as athletic directors are more likely to deal with student athlete issues on a day to day basis. This may cause them to draw on their teaching/coaching backgrounds while those in the conference office deal more with administration officials from member institutions are therefore have less face-time with the student-athlete. Earlier studies (Grappendorf, Lough, & Griffin, 2004) found that athletic directors reported significant experience gained as college coaches. While some of the commissioners in this study reported time as college coach, it was actually out-ranked by high school coaches. This lack of college coaching experience may speak to the nature of the commissioner role that removes them from more hands-on work with the student-athlete. It could be suggested that those institutional athletic directors who began with collegiate coaching experience may have enjoyed the daily interaction with the student athlete and wanted to stay closer to the athletes. Ultimately, this interaction can be continued more from an athletic director's position than from a commissioner's position.

Research Question 5 was designed to discover any commonalities that exist as barriers or challenges between conference commissioners. This issue was explored using an open-ended question on the survey, allowing commissioners freedom to express their

personal concerns. Structural components of the conference, such as adding new members, geographical spread of member schools and the broad scope of conference office duties made up the majority of concerns. These concerns only solidify what has been noted as the expansive nature of the commissioner's role and the duties that they must perform. Others noted that the demands of the job affect life balance. This is an issue on the forefront in the NCAA, especially with women professionals, as a special Executive Task Force has been created to investigate the issue (NCAA, 2007). If life balance issues are a particular problem for females who wish to be wives and mothers as well as commissioners, based on the responses of the survey it is clear that there are hurdles present within the conference office in maintaining that balance.

### **Conclusions**

The results of this study are fairly consistent with the previous research done with collegiate athletic administrators. While there appears to be no normative or set path to follow in order to obtain the esteemed commissioner role, there are common elements of experience and education that mirror that of athletics administrators across the board. Certain background components such as participation in sports beginning at youth level into collegiate varsity years, obtaining a master's degree and building a resume through positions that provide experience are commonplace. What seems to differentiate commissioners from other administrators is a broader background as quite a few current conference commissioners have degrees in nontraditional areas such as journalism and communication. Even when it comes to sports participation, commissioners seem to have a more diverse participation experience. This may very well speak to the wide-ranging nature of the

commissioner's position. Not only must he or she understand the inter-workings of every member institution and the variety of sports that may be offered among them, but communicate and negotiate the needs of each. Just as the position differs significantly from those early enforcement roles of the 1920's, as the nature of collegiate sports continues to change, so will the broad nature of the commissioner role. Commissioners will depend greatly on their expansive background to deal with emerging issues such as conference owned television networks, computer based marketing and programming and multi-billion dollar bowl deals.

Because of the seeming prevalence of journalism degrees and Sports Information Director experience within the conference commissioner ranks, it would be an interesting future study to see which faction of institutional athletic departments has the most interaction with their governing conference offices. If it is found that media relations has the most contact with the conference office, it would be a natural transition for those who work as institution SIDs to take a career step into the conference level.

Another glaring observation is the continued lack of women and ethnic minorities that hold high ranking athletics positions. Not only does such a discrepancy in numbers serve as an injustice to equity in athletics, but with such small numbers to study, it makes it almost impossible to adequately compare the different factions of leaders. To truly know what, if any, factors differ between male and female success stories in athletics administration, more females are needed as conference commissioners. While the number of female commissioners seen in my study in 2008 is more now than it was in Quarterman's study in 1999, the rate of growth has been slow. Current female commissioners, as well as males,

should reach out and mentor potential young administrators. As corporate diversity training programs, such as the NCAA's Diversity Education program, are becoming more common, conference offices should pay attention to the lessons taught and employ those practices in their hiring of officers. There may not be one direct path to follow to reach success, but each commissioner has undoubtedly gained the experience and knowledge in their own individual career that could be passed on to future leaders.

Another point of interest created by the results of my survey is how individuals who are not collegiate student-athletes overcome that barrier for breaking into the field of athletics administration. The one significant career step was found to be participation as a student-athlete, so those individuals who are not fortunate enough to be a member of a college sports team are missing out on a very important first step. Colleges and universities who provide sport management and administration programs should be cognizant of this important step and partner with their respective athletics departments to create opportunities as managers, assistants, or interns that would substitute for that time and social connection not achieved by being a varsity athlete.

### **Future Research**

There are points of interest brought up by my study that would lend themselves as future research topics. It would be an excellent follow-up study to analyze job advertisements and job descriptions of NCAA athletic conference commissioners to see if the formal publicized degree and experience prerequisites match experiences and degrees indicated by my results.

The prevalence of a journalism and communications background, as well as time spent as Sport Information Directors could lead to an investigation into which factions of institutional athletic departments have the most contact with the conference office. If media relations departments stay in the most constant contact with the conference offices because of information and publicity issues, it would explain a natural social network that would open doors for upward advancement for SIDs.

Also, my study did not attempt to analyze the differences between conference commissioners at the divisional level. A future study that would be beneficial would be to break down the needed qualifications to run athletic conferences from the “Big Six” Division I conferences to the smallest Division III conference

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**APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

Dear Respondent,

I am a graduate student in the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management Department at NC State University. As part of my Master's thesis, I am investigating the demographics and career paths of athletic conference commissioners.

You have received this email because you are in the position of commissioner, executive director or president of an NCAA athletic conference. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because I feel that someone in your esteemed position will provide a wealth of knowledge in further understanding the field of athletic administration.

Participation is voluntary and your responses will be completely anonymous; identifying information is neither requested nor recorded. This short survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

The survey may be access by clicking on the link:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=nsE4SrSnGmxWGZziYp8Ouw\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=nsE4SrSnGmxWGZziYp8Ouw_3d_3d).

If you are so willing, I would also like your help in gaining even more information and identifying additional participants for my study. I was unable to acquire the email addresses from the current NCAA directory of *previous* conference commissioners/executive directors/presidents. Since they are also bearers of insightful information, if you have the contact information for these former conference leaders, I ask that you please forward this email to them.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about being in this study, you may contact me at (919) 513-8038 or [georgia\\_davis@ncsu.edu](mailto:georgia_davis@ncsu.edu) or my thesis advisor Dr. Heidi Grappendorf at (919) 513-0060 or [heidi\\_grappendorf@ncsu.edu](mailto:heidi_grappendorf@ncsu.edu).

Sincerely,

Georgia Davis  
Graduate Assistant, NCSU Athletic Department

**1. Basic Demographics**

**Please select the category that best describes your athletic conference:**

- DI-FBS
- DI-FCS
- DI-AAA
- DII
- DIII
- All Divisions/Combination

**Please indicate your title:**

- Commissioner
- President
- Executive Director
- Other (please specify)

**Please indicate your age bracket:**

- 29 years old and younger
- 30-39 years old
- 40-49 years old
- 50-59 years old
- 60-69 years old
- 70 year old and older

**Please indicate your sex:**

- Male
- Female

**Which of the following best describes you?:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native   | <input type="radio"/> Asian American            |
| <input type="radio"/> Hispanic or Latino                  | <input type="radio"/> Black or African American |
| <input type="radio"/> Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | <input type="radio"/> White                     |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)              |   |

**Please indicate your marital status:**

- Never Married
- Single
- Married/life partner

## 2. Educational Background

Please Indicate your area of study for the following degrees:

### Bachelor's

Sport Management/Administration      Physical Education      Business

Other (please specify)

### Master's

Sport Management/Administration      Physical Education      MBA

Other (please specify)

### Doctorate

Sport Management/Administration

Education

Business

Juris Doctorate

Other (please specify)

## 3. Sport Participation

Please mark the organized sports in which you participated **PRIOR** to high school.  
Check all that apply:

Basketball	Football	Ice Hockey
Softball	Wrestling	Gymnastics
Tennis	Volleyball	Baseball
Field Hockey	Track & Field/Cross	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacrosse
Swimming/Diving	Country	
	Soccer	

Other (please list any others)

**Please mark the organized sports in which you participated DURING high school.  
Check all that apply:**

Basketball	Football	Ice Hockey
Softball	Wrestling	Gymnastics
Tennis	Volleyball	Baseball
Field Hockey	Track & Field/Cross Country	Lacrosse
Swimming/Diving	Soccer	

Other (please list any others)

**Please mark the organized varsity sports in which you participated DURING college.  
Check all that apply:**

Basketball	Football	Ice Hockey
Softball	Wrestling	Gymnastics
Tennis	Volleyball	Baseball
Field Hockey	Track & Field/Cross Country	Lacrosse
Swimming/Diving	Soccer	

Other (please list any others)

#### 4. Career Profile

**Please indicate your age when you first became a conference commissioner/executive director/president:**

29 years old and younger	40-49 years old	60-69 years old
30-39 years old	50-59 years old	70 year old and older

**Please indicate your total years of experience in intercollegiate athletics administration:**

Less than 5 years	15-19 years	30-34 years
5-9 years	20-24 years	Greater than 34 years
10-14 years	25-29 years	

**Please indicate your years of experience in administration at the conference office:**

Less than 5 years	15-19 years	30-34 years
5-9 years	20-24 years	Greater than 34 years
10-14 years	25-29 years	

**Please indicate the number of years you have held your CURRENT POSITION:**

Less than 5 years	15-19 years	30-34 years
5-9 years	20-24 years	Greater than 34 years
10-14 years	25-29 years	

Please indicate your career path by selecting the number of the order in which you held the position within your career.

For example, if you began as a college athlete, you would select the number "1" for that category. If you then taught and coached in a high school, you would indicate both high school coach and educator with a "2".

If you have not held a particular position, please select N/A. If you held two positions simultaneously, please check both positions under that number.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	N/A
Collegiate Athlete	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Graduate Assistant	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Educator (any level)	<input type="checkbox"/>																
High School Coach	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Assistant Collegiate Coach	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Head Collegiate Coach	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Director of Athletic Department Program	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Assistant Athletics Director	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Associate Athletics Director	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Senior Associate Athletics Director	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Assistant Commissioner	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Associate Commissioner	<input type="checkbox"/>																
Conference Commissioner/Executive Director/President	<input type="checkbox"/>																

Other (please list all other positions followed by the order in which they came)

Have you worked in multiple athletic divisions?

Yes

No

If you answered YES to the previous question, please indicate the progression of your career through divisions by selecting the number that corresponds with the order in which you worked in each division. If you did not work in a particular division, please select N/A for that category:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
DI-FBS	<input type="checkbox"/>										
DI-FCS	<input type="checkbox"/>										
DI-AAA	<input type="checkbox"/>										
DII	<input type="checkbox"/>										
DIII	<input type="checkbox"/>										
All Divisions/Combination Conference	<input type="checkbox"/>										

If your progression through divisions did not follow a linear path from lower to higher division, please elaborate here.

What are the greatest barriers and/or challenges that you personally face as a conference commissioner?

**APPENDIX B**

North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina

**Office of Research  
and Graduate Studies**

**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

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From: Joseph Rabiega, IRB Coordinator  
North Carolina State University  
Institutional Review Board

Date: May 19, 2008

Project Title: NCAA Conference Commissioners: Profiles and Career Paths

IRB#: 208-08-5

Dear Ms. Davis-

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

**NOTE:**

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please provide a copy of this letter to your faculty advisor.

Sincerely,

Joe Rabiega  
NCSU IRB

## TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.

*Commissioner Sport Participation Prior to High School*

Sport	Percent Participation	<i>n</i>
Baseball	69.8%	60
Basketball	68.6%	59
Football	47.7%	41
Tennis	24.4%	21
Track&Field/Cross Country	19.8%	17
Soccer	18.6%	16
Swimming/Diving	16.3%	14
Softball	10.5%	9
Golf	7%	6
Ice Hockey	4.7%	4
Gymnastics	3.5%	3
Wrestling	3.5%	3
Field Hockey	1.2%	1
Volleyball	1.2%	1
Bowling	1.2%	1
Boxing	1.2%	1
Ice skating	1.2%	1
Paddle/Platform Tennis	1.2%	1
Sailing	1.2%	1

Table 2.

*Youth Sport Participation by Sex*

Sport	Percent of Males	n	Sport	Percent of Females	n
Baseball	86.6%	58	Swimming/Diving	33.3%	5
Basketball	80.6%	54	Track & Field/XC	26.7%	4
Football	58.2%	39	Soccer	20%	3
Tennis	23.9%	16	Basketball	20%	3
Track & Field/XC	19.4%	13	Softball	20%	3
Soccer	17.9%	12	Tennis	20%	3
Swimming/Diving	11.9%	8	Gymnastics	13.3%	2
Softball	7.5%	5	Football	6.7%	1
Golf	7.5%	5	Volleyball	6.7%	1
Ice Hockey	6%	4	Baseball	6.7%	1
Wrestling	4.5%	3	Golf	6.7%	1
Field Hockey	1.5%	1	Ice Skating	6.7%	1
Gymnastics	1.5%	1	Paddle Tennis	6.7%	1
Bowling	1.5%	1	Sailing	6.7%	1
Boxing	1.5%	1			

Table 3.

*Commissioner Sport Participation During High School*

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
Basketball	61.6%	53
Baseball	48.8%	42
Football	36%	31
Track&Field/Cross Country	31.4%	27
Tennis	16.3%	14
Soccer	11.6%	10
Golf	8.1%	7
Softball	7%	6
Volleyball	5.8%	5
Ice Hockey	4.7%	4
Field Hockey	4.7%	4
Wrestling	3.5%	3
Swimming/Diving Gymnastics	3.5%	3
Lacrosse	1.2%	1
Bowling	1.2%	1
Boxing	1.2%	1
Kayak Racing	1.2%	1
Paddle/Platform Tennis	1.2%	1
Squash	1.2%	1
Water Polo	1.2%	1

Table 4.

*High School Sport Participation by Sex*

Sport	Percent of Males	<i>n</i>	Sport	Percent of Females	<i>n</i>
Basketball	64.2%	43	Basketball	53.3%	8
Baseball	61.2%	41	Tennis	46.7%	7
Football	43.7	31	Softball	33.3%	5
Track & Field/XC	32.8%	22	Volleyball	26.7%	4
Tennis	10.4%	7	Soccer	26.7%	4
Golf	9%	5	Track & Field/XC	20%	3
Soccer	7.5%	5	Field Hockey	20%	3
Ice Hockey	6%	4	Swimming/Diving	6.7%	1
Golf	4.5%	3	Golf	6.7%	1
Swimming/Diving	3%	2	Kayak Racing	6.7%	1
Softball	1.5%	1	Paddle Tennis	6.7%	1
Volleyball	1.5%	1			
Lacrosse	1.5%	1			
Bowling	1.5%	1			
Boxing	1.5%	1			
Squash	1.5%	1			
Water Polo	1.5%	1			

Table 5.  
Commissioner Varsity Sport Participation During College

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Percent Participation</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
Basketball	20.9%	18
Baseball	19.8%	17
Football	14%	12
Field Hockey	5.8%	5
Volleyball	5.8%	5
Soccer	5.8%	5
Tennis	4.7%	4
Track&Field/XC	3.5%	3
Softball	2.3%	2
Ice Hockey	2.3%	2
Lacrosse	2.3%	2

Table 6.

*Varsity College Sport Participation by Sex*

Sport	Percent of Males	<i>n</i>	Sport	Percent of Females	<i>n</i>
Baseball	25.4%	17	Basketball	46.7%	7
Football	17.9%	12	Field Hockey	33.3%	5
Basketball	14.9%	10	Volleyball	26.7%	4
Soccer	4.5%	3	Tennis	20%	3
Track & Field/XC	3%	2	Softball	13.3%	2
Ice Hockey	3%	2	Track&Field/XC	6.7%	1
Tennis	1.5%	1	Soccer	6.7%	1
Swimming/Diving	1.5%	1	Lacrosse	6.7%	1
Volleyball	1.5%	1			
Lacrosse	1.5%	1			

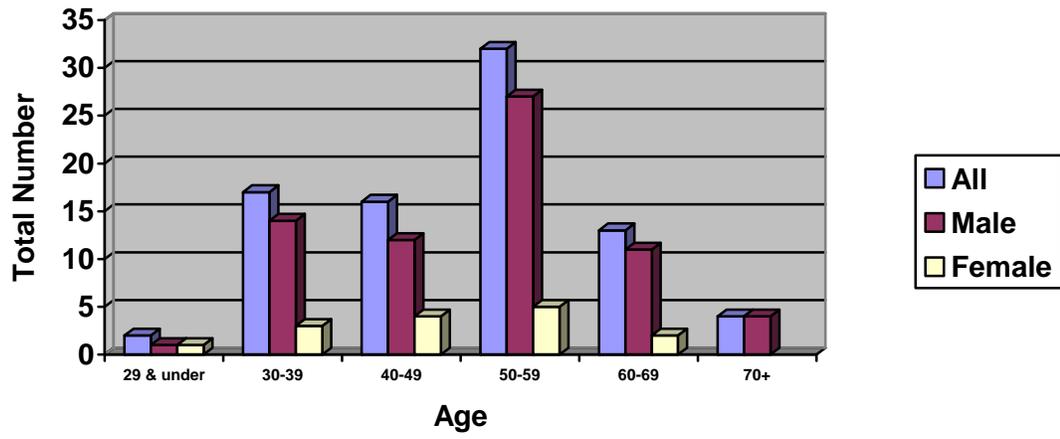


Figure 1. Commissioner age profiles by gender

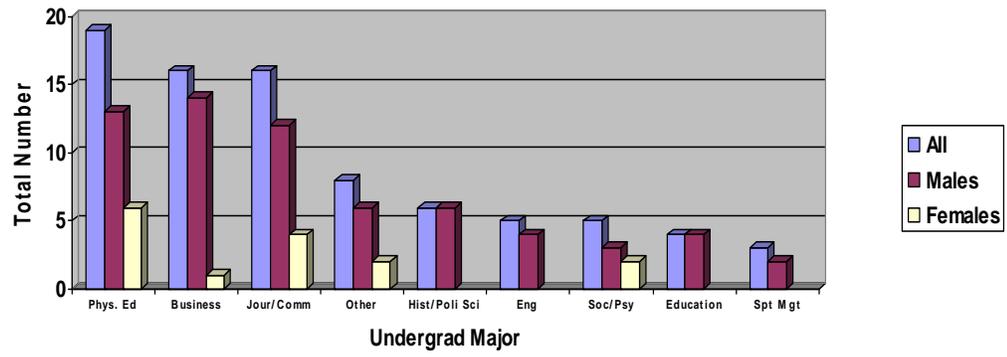


Figure 2. Commissioner undergraduate degrees by gender

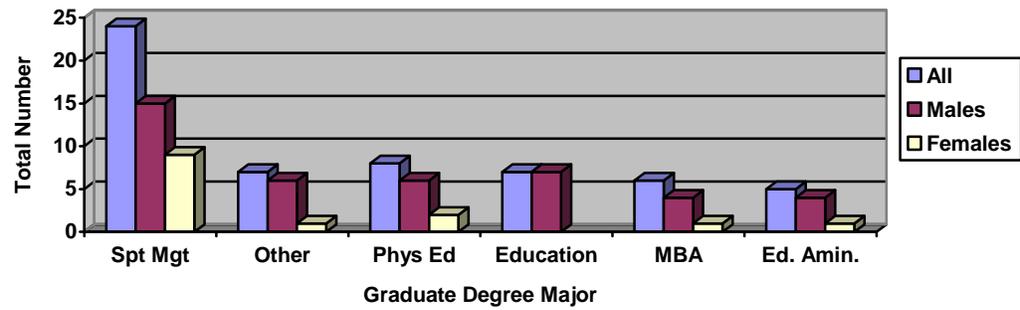


Figure 3. Commissioner Master's degree fields by gender.

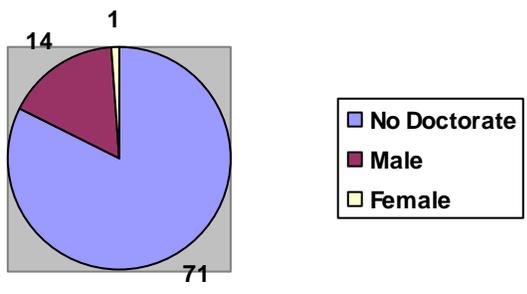


Figure 4. Commissioners with Doctorate degrees.

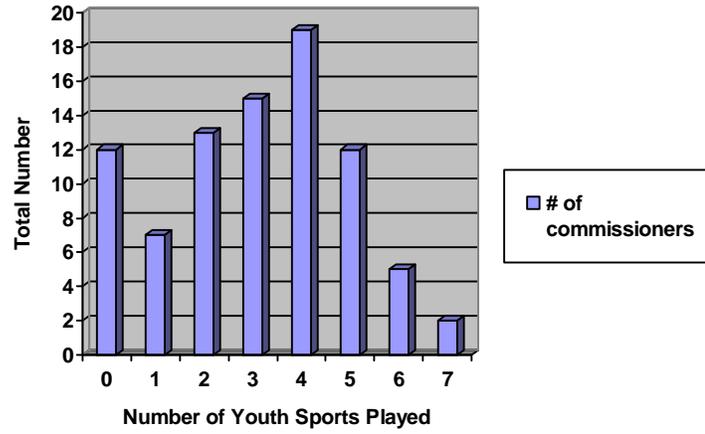


Figure 5. Number of sports played prior to high school.

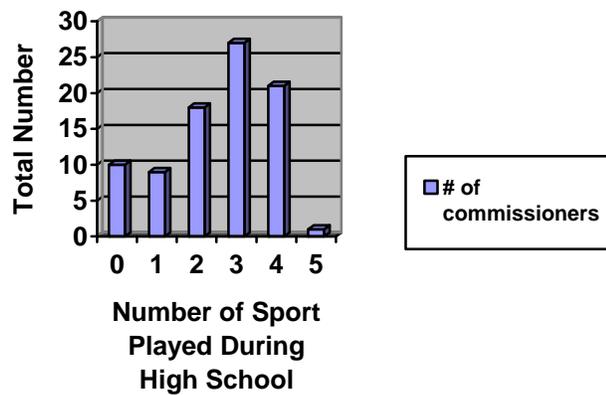
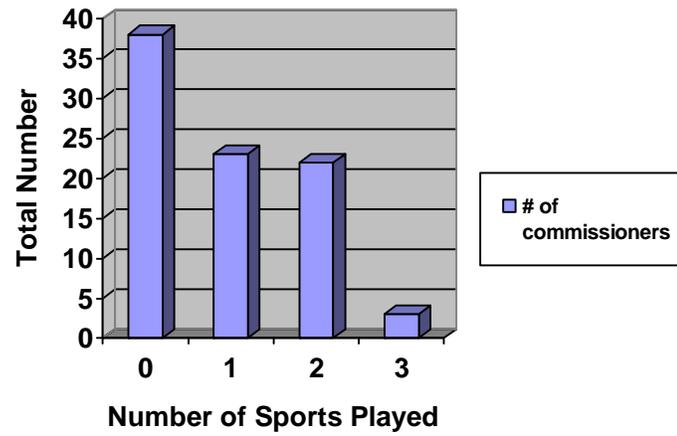


Figure 6. Number of sports played during high school.



*Figure 7.* Conference commissioner sport participation during college.

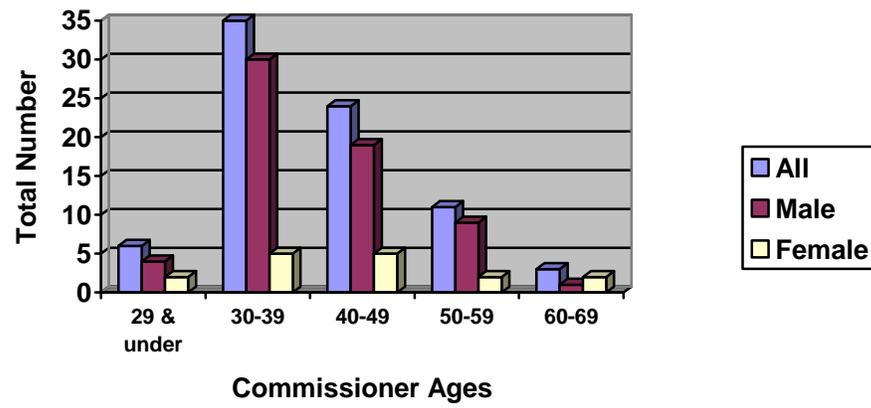


Figure 8. Commissioner ages when assuming title position.

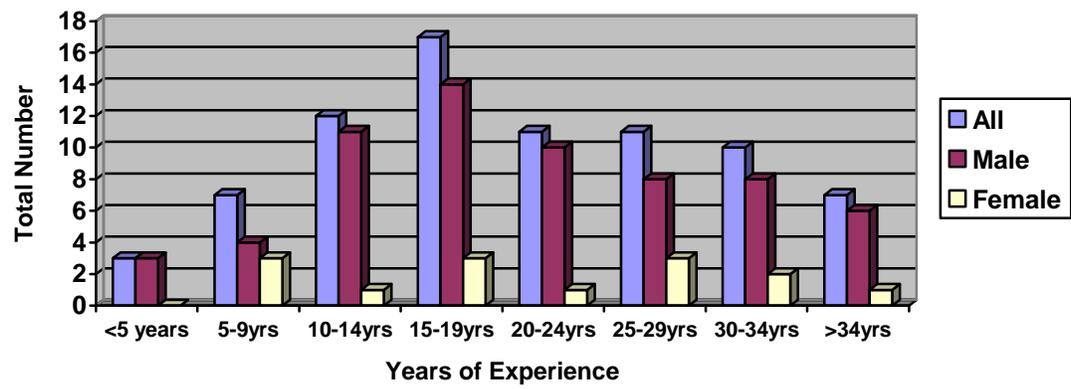


Figure 9. Total years of experience in collegiate athletics.

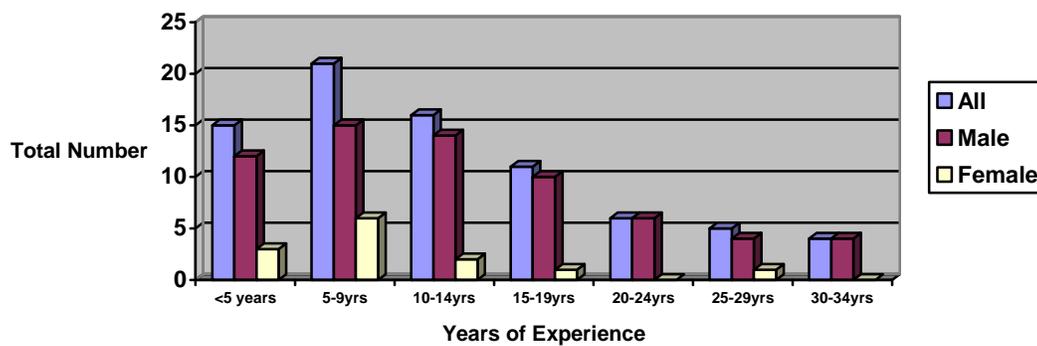


Figure 10.. Years of experience in conference office.

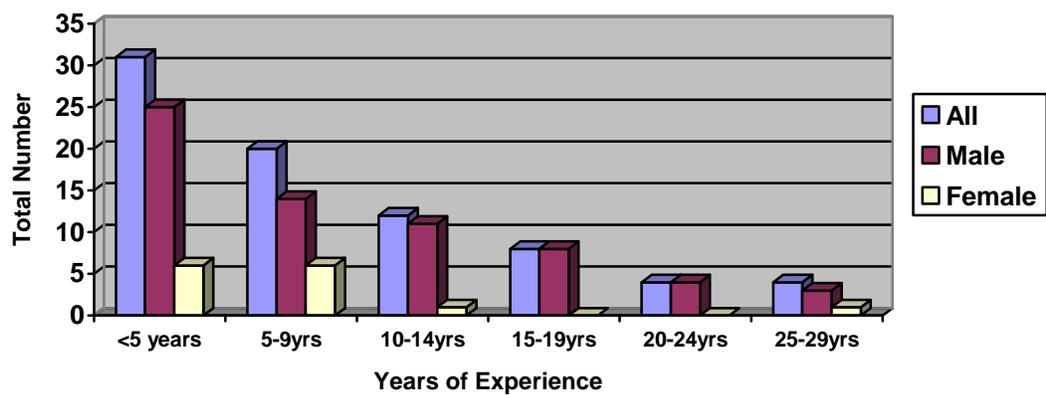


Figure 11. Number of years in current position.

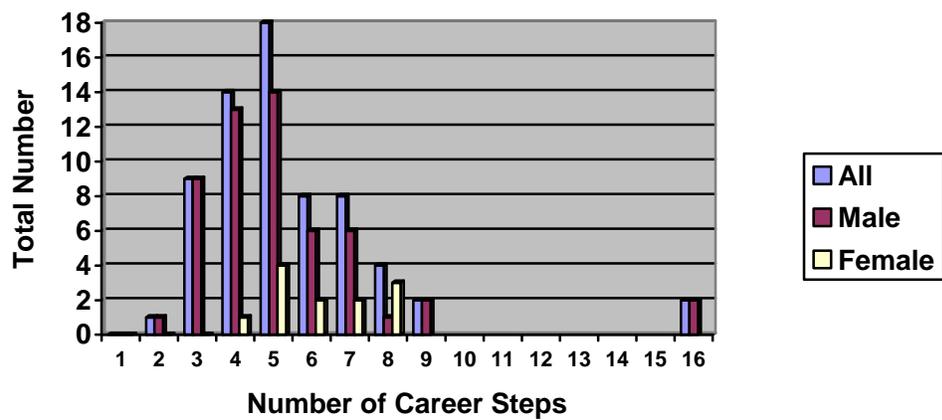


Figure 12. Number of career steps to achieve commissioner role.