

ABSTRACT

COLLINS, WILLIAM THOMAS. Key Actor Perceptions of Athletics Strategy. (Under the direction of Dr. Carol E. Kasworm.)

Athletics strategy refers to specific initiatives within the intercollegiate athletics program that are designed to meet the broader strategic goals of a post-secondary institution. This case focused on athletics strategy decisions that were enacted within the context of organizational change as Cartwright College, a pseudonym, transitioned from a liberal arts junior college to a four-year baccalaureate institution. The findings from this study are presented as a historical narrative based upon key actor descriptions of changes in athletics alignment, conference affiliation, administrative structure and sport sponsorship that were necessitated by the change in institutional mission.

Athletics strategy emerged from key actor interpretations of the environmental context as Cartwright College sought to find the appropriate structure and level of competition for its athletics program as a four-year institution. The interpretive role of key actors surfaced as a key finding from this study. Formal leadership also played an important role in strategy formation. Leaders were responsible for framing the issues, articulating vision, addressing resistance, and shaping the strategic process. Strategy was enacted through an iterative process of information sharing. Reliable information was critical as key actors considered alternatives, reached convergence, and collectively enacted strategic decisions. Interpretations were enhanced as participation in the decision-making process increased and new participants contributed information based on their unique experiences. Key actor descriptions of anticipated outcomes were framed by comparisons with aspirant

and peer institutions, or linked to prevailing perspectives that key actors held relative to the purpose of intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College.

A model of athletics strategy enactment is presented based on the findings from this study. Key actors are depicted at the center of strategy enactment. Collectively, their interpretation of the environmental context influences the emergence of athletics strategy, the information sharing process, and the anticipated outcomes. The model builds on Pettigrew's (1987) contextualist model and incorporates Weick's (2001) conceptualization of strategy formation as a three-stage interpretive process.

This study contributes to existing literature related to the reclassification of intercollegiate athletics programs, however it is unique in that it focuses on reclassification to NCAA Division II. Recommendations are offered for administrators considering Division II membership as an athletics strategy.

Key Actor Perceptions of Athletics Strategy

by
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BIOGRAPHY

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Tom Collins is married to Nancy, a 6th grade teacher at Brevard (NC) Middle School. They have two adult children: Krystle Collins Walden and William Collins.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Athletics Strategy	2
Statement of the Problem	4
Conceptual Framework.....	7
Pettigrew’s Model.....	8
Strategy Formation	10
Culture and Leadership.....	14
Purpose of the Study.....	15
Research Questions	17
The Case	17
Significance of the Study.....	18
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	21
Pettigrew’s Model.....	22
Context: Scanning the Environment for Cues.....	23
Process: Interpreting and Sharing Strategy	25
Content: Goals, Plans and Operational Objectives.....	28
Key Actors	31
Organizational Culture	34
Levels of Cultural Analysis.....	36
Cultures, Subcultures, and Countercultures.....	38
Functions of Culture	42
Creating, Communicating and Sustaining Culture.....	44
Analyzing Organizational Culture.....	46
Institutional Perspectives.....	48

Isomorphism	49
Rationalized Myths	51
Legitimacy	52
Context.....	52
Historical Perspectives.....	52
Athletics Classification	53
Hierarchical Context.....	56
Content	57
Direct Benefits.....	58
Operational Objectives	59
Branding and Institutional Image	60
Enrollment Management.....	63
Fundraising.....	65
Campus and Community.....	67
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	71
Qualitative Methodology.....	71
The Case	72
Institutional Review Board Approval	75
Data Collection.....	76
Documents and Records.....	77
Interviews.....	78
Selection of Participants	79
Interview Procedures.....	80
Follow-Up Telephone Interviews	82
The Interview Guide.....	82
Data Analysis.....	84

Presentation of Findings	86
Actions for Quality and Trustworthiness	86
Researcher Bias Statement	88
CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORICAL NARRATIVE	91
Key Actor Descriptions of the Environmental Context	93
Cartwright College at the Crossroads	95
Institutional Culture: In a State of Flux	97
Resistance to Change	101
Looking for the Right Fit	103
The Role of Intercollegiate Athletics at Cartwright College	106
Athletics as an Enrollment Management Strategy	108
Athletics vs. Academics	112
Key Actor Descriptions of Athletics Strategy Formation	115
The NAIA	117
The NCAA	119
The Division II Membership Process	123
Four Applications for Membership	125
The First Application	125
The Second Application	126
The Third Application	129
Frustration with the Membership Process	132
The Fourth Application	134
Division II Candidacy	139
Descriptions of the Goals and Objectives of Athletics Strategy	141
Alignment with Aspirant and Peer Institutions	141
Increase Visibility	145

Competitiveness as an Athletics Objective.....	147
Conclusion	152
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	154
Key Findings	156
The Emergence of Athletics Strategy	157
The Role of Leadership in Strategy Enactment.....	158
The Interpretive Role of Key Actors.....	162
Anticipated Outcomes of Athletics Strategy Decisions	165
Conclusions	169
A Model for Athletics Strategy Enactment	170
Emergent Strategy	172
Information Sharing	176
Anticipated Outcomes	180
Implications for Practice	186
Recommendations for Future Research	189
REFERENCES.....	192
APPENDICES	205
APPENDIX A Intercollegiate Athletics Participation - 2008.....	206
APPENDIX B Guiding Principles for a Model Division II Athletics Program.....	207
APPENDIX C Minimum Requirements to be Considered for DII Membership	213
APPENDIX D List of Pseudonyms	216
APPENDIX E IRB Approval	217
APPENDIX F Initial Contact Letter	219
APPENDIX G Follow-Up Letter to President.....	221
APPENDIX H Informed Consent Form	222
APPENDIX I Interview Guide	225

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Pettigrew’s Contextualist Model	9
Figure 1.2	Weick’s Interpretivist Model	14
Figure 4.1	Cartwright College Division II Membership Timeline	140
Figure 5.1	Model of Athletics Strategy Enactment	171

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

College sports occupy a prominent place in American culture. More than 70 million spectators attended NCAA-sanctioned sporting events in 2008-09, watching 412,000 student-athletes representing 1,055 institutions (NCAA). Millions more followed these contests on radio, television, and the Internet. Every day, national, regional, and local newspapers devote pages specifically covering intercollegiate sports programs. Each year consumers spend more than \$4 billion on licensed collegiate products enabling them to wear school pride on their sleeve and the institution's registered logo on their chest.

Higher Education leaders, conscious of the public interest and mass media visibility afforded intercollegiate sports, will often implement a specific course of action within their athletics department designed to meet the long-term goals and objectives of the collegiate institution as a whole. Such athletics strategy may include the addition of new sports, the construction and expansion of athletics facilities, changes in conference affiliation, and the reclassification of the athletics program to a different level of competition.

This study examines the conditions and contexts perceived to influence the adoption of athletics strategy from the perspective of key actors, those individuals with the capacity to make and shape policy decisions, establish operational objectives, and implement long-term strategic plans for the institution. The specific case focuses on a private, church-affiliated college's adoption of athletics strategy as part of the institution's transition from junior college to senior college status.

Athletics Strategy

Athletics strategy refers to a specific course of action implemented within the athletics program designed to meet the long-term goals and objectives of the institution as a whole. Washington and Ventresca (2004) employ the term “athletics strategies” to describe the incorporation of sports programs on college campuses throughout the 20th Century. Examining the growth of college football during this period, they, and other researchers identified a prevalent strategy that became a standard for higher education leaders seeking to advance their institutions. Schools poured resources into the development of their football teams, based on the widespread belief that a successful football program would lead to general perceptions of prestige or to increased financial resources that might in turn, be used to increase academic prestige (Toma & Cross, 1998; Rudolph & Thelin, 1990; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). The successful implementation of this football strategy facilitated the incorporation of other team sports (e.g., basketball, baseball, ice hockey, and lacrosse) on college campuses.

By historically fulfilling a variety of needs for universities, including the acquisition of money and students, intercollegiate sports became rationalized into the socially defined and accepted charter of American higher education (Chu, 1985). Certain scholars suggest that it has become part of a romanticized collegiate ideal (Toma & Kezar, 1999). College athletics, particularly the marquee sports of football and basketball, have also been referred to in the literature as the “front porch” of the institution, the place where potential

stakeholders first experience the university (Toma, 1988; Toma & Cross, 1998; Toma & Kezar, 1999).

Beyond the curb appeal of college sports, associational linkages are formed whenever colleges group into athletics conferences and national organizations for the purpose of competition. Cross (1999) observed, "If it is true that a university's athletics program acts like the front porch on a house, then a university's athletics classification and conference act as the neighborhood for the house, giving context by which to judge the entire school" (p. 236).

As an organizational field, intercollegiate athletics is hierarchical in nature, with schools competing for prestige (status) and legitimacy based on their national association and conference affiliations (Washington, 2005). The same holds true for higher education, where competition among schools is positional and limited to overlapping bands of similarly positioned institutions. An institution's prestige and status are defined relative to other institutions of comparable wealth, geographic location, and ideology (Winston, 1999). Membership migration, the transition of conference membership or the reclassification of the entire athletics program to a different level of competition, is an on-going trend for schools attempting to improve their position in the hierarchy of intercollegiate athletics. Such maneuvering is often part of an athletics strategy for enhancing the overall visibility and prestige of the institution.

The athletics strategy employed by an institution may also include the construction and expansion of athletics facilities. As colleges and universities group into conferences for geographical, ideological, and athletics reasons, they appeal to local pride and civic boosterism to support their competitive ambitions. Since it is essential to supporters that their institution appears to match or even outshine their neighbors, schools will often seek to maximize prestige through the construction of new facilities. Stadiums, field houses, fitness facilities, and athletics academic centers provide tangible evidence of program advancement. Indeed, they are significant factors in student-athlete recruitment and the acquisition of donative resources (Toma, 2006). This strategy of facility development has given rise to what has been described as an “arms race,” as schools engage in an ongoing struggle to gain advantage over their competition (Knight Commission, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

An institution’s decision to implement an athletics strategy generally represents some form of organizational change: change in the structure of the athletics department (e.g., staffing and sport sponsorship), change in conference membership, or change in the level of athletics competition. Such change does not occur in a vacuum. In addition to the economic costs, the adoption of athletics strategy may have consequences on the culture of the institution, its mission and ultimately its academic reputation (Duderstadt, 2003; Sperber, 2000; Thelin & Wiseman, 1989). The impact of athletics strategy decisions may be felt throughout the entire institution and beyond the campus, as membership changes

create a “domino effect” which affects the competitive balance of conferences and athletics associations (Wolverton, 2005; Stern, 1981).

Likewise, athletics strategy decisions are not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Although colleges and universities appear similar in many ways, especially when compared with their peers; no two institutions are identical, just as no two people are identical (Birnbaum, 1988). Each has a unique personality in the form of organizational culture – the system of shared values, beliefs and assumptions that distinguish one organization from others (Robbins, 1992). Organizational culture contributes to the environmental context in which athletics strategy decisions are formulated; the process by which they are communicated and interpreted; and the content of athletics strategy in terms of specific goals and objectives. Existing culture helps to shape athletics strategy and the organization’s future culture is shaped by its athletics strategy decisions.

When considering an athletics strategy, higher education leaders [key actors] are faced with a unique set of internal and external variables that influence their decision-making. Unfortunately, other than a handful of NCAA-sponsored reports (Fulks, 2009; Orszag & Orszag, 2005), there is a notable lack of research data on athletics strategies available to guide these key actors in their decision-making. Existing research on strategy formation tends to focus on content - the specific goals, plans and outcomes of a particular initiative (Caza, 2000) or on the strategic planning process. Those studies that address process traditionally employ a rational, linear approach that portrays strategic planning as a

formal, organizational activity (Mintzberg, 1994). Such approaches do not fully consider the influence that the environmental context has on the decision-making process or the impact of strategic change on organizational culture. Key actors play a critical role in interpreting the environmental context (Pettigrew, 1987), framing the issues (Hira & Hira, 2000), and managing meaning (Birnbaum, 1992), yet very little is known about their individual perceptions and how those perceptions influence athletics strategy. This study of key actor perceptions considers athletics strategy decisions as “strategic,” based on the long-term nature of the decisions, the required commitment of institutional resources, the management level at which decisions are ultimately made, and the potential of these decisions to impact the structure, operations, and culture of the institution.

Athletics strategy appears to be more than merely incremental decision-making. It represents a plan, a consciously intended course of action to deal with a situation; however it also describes a pattern, a stream of action that collectively develops into a realized or enacted strategy (Mintzberg, 1987; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Strategy enactment may be described as a form of organizational learning (Weick, 2001), where patterns of decisions represent perspectives, deep-seated beliefs about the organization and its environment. Once perspectives are established and strategy is enacted, it becomes ingrained into the behavior of an organization, as part of organizational culture (Mintzberg, 1987).

Pettigrew (1985) states, “Theoretically sound and practically useful research on strategic decision making and change should involve the continuous interplay among ideas

about the context of change, the process of change, and the content of change ..." (p. 269). This contextualist approach treats decision-making and change as, "a continuous process for organizations, one whereby strategic changes can be a product of and an enabler of many consequent decisions" (p. 271).

In summary, athletics strategy decisions affect the entire institution and may have significant consequences on organizational culture, institutional mission, and academic reputation. There is only limited research data available to guide key actors as they consider athletics strategy and few studies that explore strategy enactment from a contextualist perspective. This study of athletics strategy enactment provides opportunity to examine organizations within their environmental context and to focus attention on key actor perceptions. Such a study contributes to greater understanding of organizational decision-making that may be useful to practitioners and transferrable to other situations.

Conceptual Framework

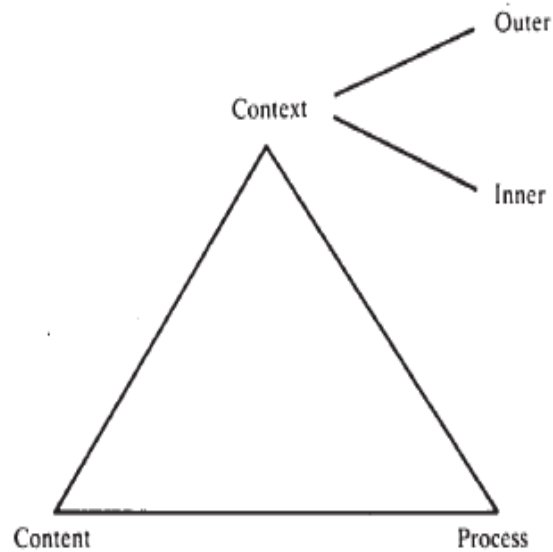
This study of athletics strategy formation and implementation is framed by contemporary understandings of strategic planning as a dynamic process, one that is enacted by key actors as a response to perceived environmental conditions. The process of strategic planning and its content (e.g., goals, plans, and anticipated outcomes) are closely linked to the environmental context in which strategies are developed and implemented.

In this particular case study, athletics strategy formation and implementation are taking place within the context of momentous organizational change: the college's

transition from a junior college to a four-year institution. Specific athletics initiatives have been incorporated into the college's strategic plan that may have significant implications in terms of organizational structure, campus politics, and institutional culture. Thus, it is necessary to have a conceptual framework that permits full consideration of both the internal and external contexts in which strategy decisions are formed.

Pettigrew's Model. Pettigrew's (1987) model provides a structure that depicts strategic change as a dynamic, multi-level process: one shaped by its content, expressed in terms of anticipated outcomes, and operational objectives; and its context, identified as the political, cultural, economic, and institutional environment. In addition, this model allows for consideration of the role that leaders [key actors] play in terms of defining the linkages between the content, the context, and the process of strategic change.

Pettigrew's contextualist paradigm portrays content, process, and context as interdependent areas of analysis. The formulation of the content of strategic change is dependent upon managing its context and its process. Process involves the legitimization of content within the ever-evolving inner and outer context of the organization. There are forces within the organization's environment that serve to either enable or constrain strategic initiatives – context receptors and context barriers. The manner in which key actors manage these structural, cultural, and political forces; and the manner in which they respond to changes in the external environment are important considerations when applying this model.



Source: (Pettigrew, 1987, p. 657)

Figure 1.1 Pettigrew's Contextualist Model

This study of athletics strategy formation and implementation focuses on the perception of key actors. "Organizations do not have mechanisms separate from individuals to set goals, process information, or perceive the environment. People do these things." (Weick, 2001, p. 243). Key actors are the "who" of organizational change. Reacting to perceived internal and external influences, they have the capacity to make policy decisions, establish operational goals, set formal agendas and develop coalitions which ultimately define the content of change (the "what"), the process of change (the "how"), and the context (the "why") (Pettigrew, 1987).

Individual and organizational learning play an important role in strategy formation, because it is a process that requires insight, creativity, and synthesis (Mintzberg, 1994). It is also an interpretive process, in which managers compile information from the environment, make interpretations of that data and formulate the organization's plan of action (Weick, 2001). Finally, it is a reflective process, one in which perceptions of future actions and possible consequences are considered in light of prior experience (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Key actors play important roles in the implementation of strategic initiatives. They serve as a symbol of the organization and its actions. In addition, key actors can adjust and alter the social context around the organization or can facilitate the organization's adjustment to its context (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Pettigrew's model makes no attempt to portray strategy formation as a rational, linear process with carefully analyzed outcomes. While acknowledging that strategic initiatives may be publicly justified based on economic efficacy and operational objectives, Pettigrew states, "it is too narrow to view strategic change as merely a linear problem-solving process" (1987, p. 658). By employing a contextualist paradigm, this study examines athletics strategy as a continuous process where individual perceptions, group interests, and organizational structure have the potential to shape operational objectives and desired outcomes.

Strategy Formation. Strategy refers to long-term plans that are designed to achieve specific end results. Strategic plans, typically set by top management, are usually broad in

scope and require a commitment of resources over a period of time. In comparison, tactical plans are usually the responsibility of middle management. These often include the operational objectives needed in order to reach strategic goals. (Yow, Migliore, Bowden, Stevens, & Loudon, *Strategic Planning for Collegiate Athletics*, 2000; Bridges & Roquemore, 2004). This understanding is just one of the many distinctions offered by practitioners and researchers alike to differentiate between these two terms. Mintzberg suggests that distinction in terminology about what is strategic and what is tactical can be “arbitrary and misleading.” Suggesting that, “there is good reason to drop the word ‘tactics’ altogether” (1987, p. 14), he offers five interrelated definitions of strategy as plan, ploy, pattern, position, and perspective. Recognizing that the term strategy has been used in a number of different ways. Mintzberg’s (1987) broad understanding of strategy is incorporated into this framework, which also includes multiple perspectives of strategy formation.

This study conceptually frames athletics strategy as strategic to the extent that decisions relative to athletics alignment, conference affiliation, sport sponsorship and changes in administrative structure are typically set by top management, are broad in scope and require a significant commitment of resources over a period of time. As noted by Chandler, “Strategy is the determination of the basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out those goals” (1962, p. 13).

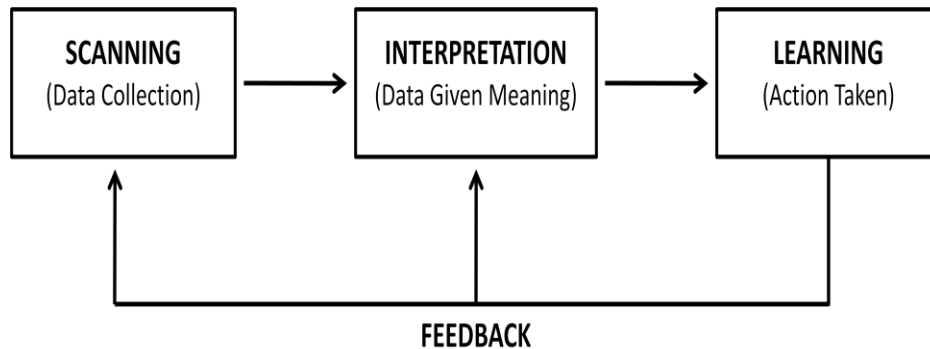
Three distinct phases of strategy formulation are identified in Chandler's classic definition: the determination of goals, the adoption of a course of action, and the implementation of the strategic plan through the allocation of necessary resources. This traditional perspective distinguishes strategic decisions, those concerned with the long-term health of the enterprise, from tactical or operating decisions that focus on the day-to-day activities of the organization. Because the implementation of strategic plans requires the allocation or reallocation of resources, this approach to strategic planning centers on the actions of top managers, those key actors actually involved with resource allocation.

The traditional view of planning is a rational, linear approach focused on content (the determination of desired goals and outcomes), and on process (the adoption of a course of action and the allocation of necessary resources). Mintzberg (1994) suggests that while the "road map" approach to strategic planning, with fixed destinations and predetermined routes, may be helpful in stable environments, this approach has limited usefulness in turbulent times or ambiguous environments.

Mintzberg (1994) replaces the concept of strategic formulation (strategic planning) with the idea of strategy formation, in order to allow for consideration of emergent strategy (unintended patterns of action that develop as the deliberate strategy is implemented). "The process of strategy formation is a dynamic one that corresponds to the dynamic conditions that drive it. It unfolds at its own pace, through what is best described as a form of learning" (p. 241). Few strategies are purely deliberate, and few are purely emergent.

Organizations often pursue what Mintzberg labels “umbrella strategies” (p. 25), those where the broad strategic outlines are deliberately planned while the details are allowed to emerge over time.

Weick (2001) conceptualizes organizations as interpretation systems that obtain, filter, and process environmental cues as a basis for their action. Organizations attempt to make sense of their environments by interpreting what they have done, defining what they have learned and solving the problem of what they should do next. Weick’s theoretical framework identifies three critical stages – scanning, interpretation, and learning, all interconnected through a feedback loop. Scanning is the process of monitoring and acquiring environmental data; interpretation occurs as individuals make meaning from the information that is collected; and organizational learning is the process by which the interpreted knowledge is put into action. It is a continuous process, where the act of learning provides new data for interpretation.



Source: (Weick, 2001, p. 244)

Figure 1.2 Weick's Interpretivist Model

Culture and Leadership. Pettigrew's (1987) contextualist paradigm provides for the consideration of institutional culture and leadership as components of the organization's inner context. Culture is a descriptive term that refers to a system of shared assumptions, beliefs and values held by members of an organization. This shared understanding is developed and validated over time as the organization solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration to the point that it is taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (Schein E. H., 2004). Culture provides both the lens through which participants interpret their world and the glue that holds organizations together; it influences what people do, what they think, and how they interact with each other (Birnbaum, 1988; Toma J. D., 2003). For colleges and universities, organizational culture serves to guide the behavior of individuals and groups;

and it provides a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of events, both on and off campus (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Culture provides organizations with personalities: key characteristics that create distinctions between organizations; convey a sense of identity for organization members; and shape attitudes and behaviors (Robbins, 1992). Just as people have individual personalities; all organizations have a unique culture. That culture may be strong or weak, consistent or inconsistent, and it can restrict, as well as enable strategic decision-making and change (Robbins, 1992; Birnbaum, 1988). The strength of an organization's culture is characterized by the intensity with which basic assumptions are accepted and shared by members of that organization.

Pettigrew (1979) integrates the leadership role of key actors into his concept of organizational change. Leadership and organizational culture are viewed as intertwined. Leadership, as a part of culture, induces purpose, provides meaning, and clarifies behavioral expectations. Institutional forces both internal and external, also contribute to the contextual environment. Additional factors within the environment context that serve to either coerce or constrain change in organizations are institutional forces such as isomorphism and legitimacy. These topics are further discussed in Chapter Two.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines athletics strategy at a private, church-affiliated college that has added new sports programs, built and expanded athletics facilities, changed conference

affiliation, and applied for NCAA Division II membership, all as integral parts of its transition from a junior college to a four-year institution. The selected case provides an information-rich setting for exploring the influence that an organization's environmental context, including its culture, has on the process and content of strategic change; and the resulting impact of change on organizational culture. Examining this phenomenon from the perspective of key actors contributes to greater understanding of the role that these individuals play in the formation and implementation of strategy.

The perceptions of key actors are influential in the formulation and implementation of athletics strategy initiatives. Key actors define the linkages between the content, the context and the process of strategy formation and implementation (Pettigrew, 1987). Outcomes of athletics strategy decisions are shaped by their interpretation of the environment (Weick, 2001); their individual interests and commitments (Pettigrew, 1987); their management style and consistency (Nelson, 2005; Caza, 2000); and the manner in which they address the unique structural, political and cultural structures of their organization (Schein E. H., 2004). Key actors communicate goals, build consensus, and establish standards of performance (Schein E. H., 2004). Their focus and intense action may influence the strategic process to the point that self-fulfilling prophecies, where the expectation of an event or behavior actually cause it to happen, may result (Weick, 2001; Bridges & Roquemore, 2004).

Research Questions

1. How do key actors describe the environmental context of athletics strategy implementation at their institution?
2. How do key actors describe the process for forming athletics strategy?
3. How do key actors describe the goals, plans and operational objectives of the athletics strategy adopted by their institution?

The Case

Cartwright College, a private, church-affiliated, liberal arts college located in a remote mountain village provides the setting for this case study. The college, currently in the process of transitioning from junior college to four-year status, provides an information-rich, purposeful sample for examining the content, process and context of athletics strategy from the perspective of key actors (Creswell J. W., 1998; Patton, 2002). Athletics strategy initiatives, including the addition of men's and women's basketball as varsity sports; the construction of a 1,000 seat competition arena; hiring of a full-time athletics director; expansion of the athletics staff; and reclassification to NCAA Division II are an integral part of the institution's 10-year strategic plan. The formation and implementation of these initiatives represent strategic change and pose potential consequences for the institution in terms of finances, structure, mission and culture.

Significance of the Study

This study is unique in that it examines athletics strategy collectively as part of the institution's overall strategic plan. While there are a number of studies which explore specific initiatives (e.g., adding sports programs, constructing athletics facilities, increasing athletics staff, changing conference affiliation, and reclassifying to a higher level of competition), few consider these actions as a collective institutional strategy.

Research on college athletics in general and athletics strategy initiatives in particular disproportionately focuses on those high profile institutions that compete in NCAA Division I (Football Bowl Subdivision). These 125 institutions represent only a small percentage of the more than two thousand colleges and universities that field intercollegiate teams (see Appendix A – Intercollegiate Athletics Participation). This case study contributes to existing literature related to the reclassification of intercollegiate athletics programs (Cross, 1999; Tomasini, 2005; Weaver A. , 2007); however, it is unique in that it focuses on reclassification to NCAA Division II. Although Cross (1999) did include the downward reclassification of one institution from Division I to Division II in his study, most of the research pertaining to athletics strategy has focused on the upward migration of institutions from Division II to Division I. This study helps fill the gap in the literature.

Like Weaver's research (2007; 2010), this study is conceptually framed by Pettigrew's (1987) model to examine strategic change in terms of the context, the process, and the content of change. Weaver found that institutional history played an important

role in the decision to reclassify to NCAA Division I. Although the contextualist model has been used to examine strategic change in business and industry, with the exception of Caza (2000) and Nelson (2005), it has not been widely employed in the context of sport organizations. Slack & Parent (2006) observe that while few studies within sport management have used this model, the richness of data provided by the contextualist approach make it a viable method for enhancing the understanding of sport organizations.

Existing research tends to focus on the outcomes of athletics strategy decisions in terms of the direct benefits and operational results realized. Research that focuses on the content and process of strategic change is limited in that it does not adequately consider the environmental context in which change takes place. Research tends to overlook the important role that key actors play in linking the content, process, and context of strategic change. Little is known about key actor perceptions and how those perceptions influence athletics strategy. This study is significant in that it considers the effect of culture and the interpretations of key actors in strategy formation.

This research is significant from a practitioner's perspective. There is a lack of research available to administrators considering the transition to Division II membership. This study considers key actor perceptions of the inner and outer context in which decisions were made, the process in which available information was interpreted, and the content objectives associated with those decisions. In addition, this study provides practical recommendations that may be useful to those going through the membership process.

The case study has significance in terms of its usefulness for educators and students in the field of sport management. Embedded in key actor descriptions are perspectives relating to planning, structure, strategy, staffing, leadership, culture, change and organizational decision-making. Review and discussion of organizational theory in the context of intercollegiate athletics contributes to better understanding of sport organizations from a managerial perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Athletics strategy is a collective term that describes a specific course of action within the intercollegiate athletics program, one intended to meet the long-term objectives of the institution as a whole. Such initiatives include the addition of new sports programs, construction of athletics facilities, changes in conference affiliation, and even reclassification of the entire athletics program to a different level of competition. This case explores this phenomenon within the context of organizational change as a private liberal-arts junior college transitions to a four-year baccalaureate institution.

Based in the study's context and the conceptual framework, this investigation will explore:

1. How do key actors describe the environmental context of athletics strategy implementation at their institution?
2. How do key actors describe the process for forming athletics strategy?
3. How do key actors describe the goals, plans and operational objectives of the athletics strategy adopted by their institution?

Pettigrew's (1987) model, introduced in Chapter 1, provides a conceptual framework that depicts athletics strategy formation and implementation as a dynamic process: one shaped by its content, expressed in terms of anticipated outcomes and operational objectives; and by its context, the political, cultural, economical and institutional

environment of the organization. In addition, this model allows for consideration of the role that leaders, or key actors, play in terms of defining the linkages between the content, the context, and the process. The first section of the literature review will elaborate on this model.

The second section of the literature review draws on the field of organizational behavior to provide background on the role of key actors in the strategic process. The third section will focus upon organizational culture. Subsequent sections will discuss literature relative to institutional perspectives, the context and the content of athletics strategy, which is often expressed in terms of direct benefits and operational objectives.

Pettigrew's Model

Pettigrew's contextualist model depicts strategic decision-making and strategic change as "almost, but not entirely, interchangeable notions" (Pettigrew, 1985, p. 270). Decision-making and change are described as streams of activity that occur because of environmental change and that can lead to alterations in the focus, structure, technology, and culture of the organization. The term 'strategic' is used to describe the magnitude of these alterations; it represents planned change that is both proactive and purposeful (Pettigrew, 1985). Strategic change essentially seeks to improve the ability of an organization to adapt to changes in its environment and to alter the attitudes, behaviors and performance of individuals and groups within the organization (Robbins, 1992).

Pettigrew depicts change as a dynamic process: one shaped by its content, expressed as anticipated outcomes; and by its context, the political, cultural, economical and institutional environment of the organization. Key actors play a key role in linking the context, process and content of strategic change. Weick's (2001) theory of strategy formation as a three-stage interpretive process was integrated into the conceptual framework used for this study. These three stages – scanning, interpreting, and learning are aligned with Pettigrew's three categories of analysis to form the subheadings for this section.

Context: Scanning the Environment for Cues. Pettigrew (1987) suggests that there are two categories to be considered when analyzing the environmental context of strategic change, the inner context and the outer context. The inner context refers to structural, cultural, and political environment through which ideas are developed, interpreted and implemented. This may include the institution's management structure, campus traditions, organizational culture, and internal political structures. The outer context refers to the external social, economic, political, and competitive environment in which the organization operates. For this study, the outer context includes the environment of intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA governance structure, conference opportunities, the higher education environment and community, as well as state and national governments (Weaver, 2007; Pettigrew, 1987).

The environmental context of an organization exists at multiple levels and affects both its behavior and outcomes. Numerous internal and external factors exist that may affect organizational outcomes, some of which may be invisible to key actors and therefore not considered when formulating strategy and determining organizational action. While all levels of the organization's environment are interrelated, it is the enacted environment that influences organizational actions (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Enacted environments are constructed realities based on the perceptions, reflections, and interpretations of key actors. Individuals and organizations "real-ize," or create their own understandings of the environment from their experiences and the sense that they make of those experiences (Weick, 2001).

Key actors constantly scan the environment, collecting information that influences their strategic decisions (Cunningham, 2002; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Weick, 2001). Differences in how organizations interpret their environmental context can be partially explained by key actor perceptions about the "analyzability of the environment" and "the extent to which the organization intrudes into the environment to understand it" (Weick, 2001, p. 245).

Some organizations actively search the environment for answers, while others passively accept whatever information the environment gives them. Some organizations attempt to test and manipulate environmental boundaries, while others respond only when a crisis occurs. The type of information that is available to key actors, and the manner in

which it is collected and analyzed, provides insight into what is considered organizationally important. Environmental scanning is not necessarily a formal practice and relevant information may not always be in the hands of key decision makers (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Critical data may be widely dispersed throughout the organization, with each functional area using different collection methods and terminology.

There are receptive forces within the environment that appear to support or enable strategic change, while other forces may be perceived as barriers that serve to block or constrict change initiatives (Pettigrew, Ferlie, & McKee, 1992). Context receptivity is a continuum that reflects how amenable a given setting is to any particular innovation (Caza, 2000). As they scan the environment, key actors appraise the presence and the intensity of various context receptors and barriers. These perceptions influence their interpretation of the environment and ultimately their actions. Pfeffer & Salancik (1978) observe, “How an organization learns about its environment, how it attends to the environment, and how it selects and processes information to give meaning to its environment are all important aspects of how the context of an organization affects its actions” (p. 14).

Process: Interpreting and Sharing Strategy. Process refers to the actions, reactions, and interactions of key actors as they collectively formulate athletic strategy, communicate athletics strategy decisions to stakeholders, and then proceed to enact the chosen strategy. This is the interpretation stage of strategic formation, where data is given meaning, perceptions are shared, and events are translated throughout the organization (Weick,

2001). Key actors perceive the environmental context based on their experiences and the meaning that they make from those experiences; however, interpretation is something more than what occurs in the minds of individuals. It is an interactive process, one best understood in light of the organization's contextual environment.

The formation and implementation of athletics strategy can have significant implications in terms of resource allocation, institutional culture, and intra-campus relationships. Rowley, et al. (2001) observe, "Competition over who controls resources and the allocation of goods and values is at the core of campus politics and consequently it is an important consideration in the strategic planning process of a college or university" (p. 69). They recommend that key actors conduct a political assessment of campus culture as they formulate and introduce strategic initiatives.

Key actor perceptions of the political and cultural context influence the process used to formulate strategy, the manner in which the strategy is articulated and shared throughout the organization, and ultimately the consensus necessary for effective enactment of strategic initiatives. Nelson (2005) employs a contextualist approach to examine the process of strategic change from the perspective of employees in the processed food industry. Nelson's study found that strategic change requires the adoption of new organizational behaviors that need to be accepted, even enforced. Management style in terms of communication, formal meetings, and feedback are important

considerations in terms of presenting the content of strategic change and addressing participation or resistance issues during the process.

Communication, collaboration and consensus lie at the heart of the interpretation process, where key actors present strategies and address operational issues. In practical terms, broad-based participation in strategy formation and implementation translates psychologically, as individuals within the organization feel more valued and connected with the action of change, rather than resisting change inflicted upon them (Nelson, 2005). Nelson found that a management style supportive of employee participation, empowerment, and feelings of joint ownership contributed to a positive change in organizational culture and increased employee engagement.

Leadership behavior is a central ingredient in the change process, but only one of several institutional, political, and cultural factors that affect the core beliefs, structure, and strategies of an organization (Pettigrew, 1992). Key actors identify and mobilize context receptors that enable strategic change, while addressing environmental barriers that may inhibit their initiatives (Pettigrew, 1992; Caza, 2000). Leadership, organizational culture, management style, inter-organizational networks, clarity of goals and priorities, and the external context are among the factors that can contribute to context receptivity for strategic change (Pettigrew, Ferlie, & McKee, 1992).

Key actors communicate their basic assumptions and influence organizational culture through what they say and what they do during the interpretation process. They

implicitly and explicitly impact culture through what they pay attention to and reward; through the organizational structure that they establish; through the ways in which they allocate resources; through role modeling; through ritualized activity, stories, and formal statements; and through the criteria they use to select, promote, and reward subordinates. Many strategic change initiatives fail because leaders fail to consistently use the entire set of communication mechanisms available to them (Schein E. H., 2004).

Caza (2000) employed Pettigrew's model and the concept of context receptors and barriers (Pettigrew, Ferlie, & McKee, 1992), to examine strategic change within the Canadian Amateur Boxing Association (CABA). Leadership style and consistency were viewed as critical factors in determining the ultimate success of strategic initiatives. In Caza's study, a lack of consistent and effective leadership contributed to frustration, inefficiency, and ultimately the failure of some strategic initiatives, despite the presence of environmental forces that appeared conducive to change.

The main product of an organization is interpretations rather than decisions. Once strategic-level managers produce an interpretation, people at other levels make their own customized use of it. Thus, interpretation precedes decision-making and shapes the larger context, which serves to either enable or constrain strategic action (Weick, 2001).

Content: Goals, Plans and Operational Objectives. The adoption of a planned course of action and the allocation of necessary resources (Chandler, 1962) is traditionally viewed as the intended end of strategic planning. Top-level managers evaluate alternative

strategies and develop plans to meet specific goals and operational objectives. Goals and objectives provide a road map, or sense of direction for the organization. They also serve as yardsticks, or standards, for evaluating performance. This is the “action” or “doing” stage of strategic planning (Yow, Migliore, Bowden, Stevens, & Loudon, 2000, pp. 69-70).

Weick (2001) labels it “learning,” a third stage that is distinguished from scanning and interpretation by the concept of action. Learning involves a new response or action based on interpretation, and learning provides new data for future interpretation. He also associates strategic plans with maps. The benefit of a written plan is that it provides a relevant purpose, direction, and an opportunity for people to act, learn, and create meaning. “Once people begin to act, they generate tangible outcomes in some context, and this helps them discover what is occurring, what needs to be explained, and what should be done next” (p. 346).

Key actor perceptions of content influence the context and process of strategy formation and ultimately, the outcomes of strategic initiatives. Likewise, key actor perceptions may be influenced by political and cultural forces within the environment and anticipated outcomes. Pettigrew (1987) observes, “The content of strategic change is ultimately a product of a legitimation process shaped by political/cultural considerations, though often expressed in rational/analytical terms” (p. 659).

An organization cannot achieve its goals and fulfill its mission unless there is clear consensus on the means by which those goals will be met. Disagreement and conflict that

may emerge among different groups or subcultures within an organization can work to undermine the effectiveness of strategic initiatives. Consensus is derived from a shared concept of the core mission, primary tasks, and fundamental problems faced by the organization. For strategic planning, consensus includes shared assumptions about the relationship of strategic goals, plans and objective to the core mission, the tactics to be used to obtain strategic goals, and the criteria used to measure success (Schein E. H., 2004).

Content, or the athletics strategy itself, is analyzed based on the anticipated outcomes that key actors associate with strategic initiatives, their description of the effects that the strategy may have on the institution, and their perception of future implications. The beliefs and attitudes of key actors define the process for implementing strategic plans, the allocation of roles and resources, the schedule for implementation and the methods that will be used to measure results.

The manner in which an organization measures its activities and accomplishments – the criteria it chooses and the information system that it develops – become central elements of its culture as consensus develops around these issues. Complexity between different departments in an organization sometimes makes it difficult to achieve consensus on measurement criteria. Should consensus fail to develop and strong subcultures form around different assumptions, then the organization will find itself in serious conflict that can potentially undermine its effectiveness (Schein E. H., 2004).

Key Actors

Key actors play a critical role in interpreting environmental context (Pettigrew, 1987), framing the issues (Hira & Hira, 2000), and managing meaning (Birnbaum, 1992). They are the individuals with the capacity to make and shape policy decisions, establish operational objectives, and implement long-term strategic plans for the institution. Key actors constantly scan the market environment collecting information that influences their strategic decisions (Cunningham, 2002).

Action is not disembodied; it comes from organizational actors who have positions, skills, commitments, and histories that are primarily found in the groups of which those actors are members. Change and stability are understood through the ways in which organizational group members react to old and new institutionally derived ideas through their already existing commitments and interests and their ability to implement them or enforce them by way of their existing power and capability. (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996, p. 1048)

To gain background understanding of key actor perceptions, it is helpful to examine literature related to college presidents and their role in strategic planning. Although presidents are not the only key actors in this process, they are perhaps the most visible.

Key actors are influenced by perceptions that they and others have about their position and their responsibility in the strategic planning process. A number of metaphors have been developed to describe the college presidency and the differing expectations that

trustees, students, administrators, business leaders, and the public have for the position (Robbins, 1992; Cohen & March, 1986). Although few would disagree that presidents must have the respect of each of these groups, it becomes obvious that the various perceptions and objectives of these constituents are often contradictory. Because of the ambiguity associated with the governance structure of colleges and universities, they have been described to as “organized anarchies,” and their presidents portrayed as “the driver of a skidding automobile” (Cohen & March, 1986, p. 203). Thelin & Wiseman (1989) observe, “nowhere is this ambiguity more striking for presidential authority than in intercollegiate athletics” (p. 79).

Key actors are influenced by perceptions that they and others have about the role and value of intercollegiate athletics. “Depending on one’s perspective, athletic programs are seen as having important positive or negative effects on universities” (Putler & Wolfe, 1999, p. 302). As an interpretive strategist, the college president is concerned not only with their individual perception, but is also aware of how other important stakeholders (e.g., trustees, alumni, faculty, and students) may view the role of intercollegiate athletics within the culture of the institution. Birnbaum (1992) observes that college presidents are the key actors who manage meaning:

The legitimacy conferred by their hierarchical positions enables presidents to provide interpretive leadership by highlighting certain aspects of the institution while muting others, by relating new ideas to existing values and symbols, and by

articulating a vision of the college in idealized form that captures what others believe but have been unable to express. (p. 154)

In this role, they interpret institutional culture – the norms, values, beliefs and assumptions – as a frame of reference for understanding events and actions. College presidents and other higher education leaders run great risks when they attempt to defy the governance systems and culture already in place at an institution. “It is more likely that culture controls leaders than leaders control culture” (Birnbaum, 1992, p. 10).

Key actors develop a social identity with groups that they perceive themselves as belonging to and they compare the group to which they belong with rival groups (Washington, 2005). Normative forces within the organizational fields of higher education and intercollegiate athletics may sway key actor’s perceptions as they observe, and often mimic, the behaviors and practices of other key actors and institutions (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). In turn, these perceptions influence their enactment of the environment and their interpretation of the context surrounding athletics strategy formation (Weick, 2001). Their perception may be based on how they perceive the environment, as well as how they perceive that others interpret the environment. Cohen and March (1986) suggest that the presidency is parochial. College presidents tend to evaluate themselves and are evaluated, based on norms established by their region, the size of their college, the type of institution, and its status.

Key actors have the ability to frame issues by presenting problems and alternate solutions to them in a subjective manner that affects the decision-making process (Hira & Hira, 2000). They articulate their views of strategy and have the power to implement actions based on those views (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Understanding the development of athletics strategy from the perspective of key actors requires some consideration of institutional forces (e.g., mimetic isomorphism, rationalized myths and legitimacy) that may influence their beliefs and actions.

Key actors are influenced by internal political processes and agendas. Holdsworth (2004) explores the policy development process at four public universities that made the decision to eliminate men's sports teams, in part because of gender equity issues. This qualitative case study examined how key actors become subject to the political process and emphasized the significance of formal power and informal agendas in the development of coalitions. The research employed a theoretical framework based on organizational theory, policy analysis, and conflict management.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture contributes to the environmental context within which athletics strategy decisions are formulated: the process by which they are communicated and interpreted; and the content of athletics strategy in terms of specific goals and objectives. Culture can influence athletics strategy; and likewise, an institution's athletics strategy decisions may affect its organizational culture.

Organizational culture refers to a system of shared assumptions, beliefs and values widely held by members of an organization. This system of shared meaning provides organizations with personalities; key characteristics that distinguish one organization from others (Robbins, 1992). Culture provides both the “lens” through which participants interpret their world and the “normative glue” that holds organizations together (Kuh & Whitt, 1988); it influences what people do, what they think, and how they interact with each other (Birnbaum, 1988; Toma J. D., 2003). For colleges and universities, culture serves to guide the behavior of individuals and groups; and it provides a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of events, both on and off campus (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Schein (2004) provides a classic definition of organizational culture: “A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 17).

Although culture affects attitudes and behaviors, it is often invisible to participants in an organization; in the same manner as the sea is invisible to the fish swimming in it. Members tend to become aware of their organization’s culture only as they have the opportunity to compare it to other organizations (Carpenter, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2009).

Organizational culture emerges, and is sustained, as individual members develop distinct ways of perceiving, interpreting and explaining their environment. Although each

member perceives the world in their own unique ways, their world views will tend to be more like each other than like those of those from another organizational culture. Member perspectives may be integrated to the point that even those individuals with different backgrounds and at different levels within the organization tend to describe the culture in similar terms (Conrad, 1994; Robbins & Judge, 2010).

Organizational communication in the form of rituals, symbols, story-telling, specialized vocabulary and ceremonies enact culture, transforming mundane events into roles, norms and standards that guide member behaviors and interactions (Shapiro, 2006). Through this cultural communication, organizations (and their members) learn who they are, what their roles are, and what actions are expected of them (Conrad, 1994)

Levels of Cultural Analysis. Schein (1998) suggests that culture should be analyzed at different levels based on the degree to which it is visible to the observer. These levels range from artifacts, those overt manifestations of culture that one sees, hears, and feels; to basic assumptions, those deeply embedded core beliefs that may be taken for granted and are often treated as non-negotiable. From his perspective, these basic assumptions form the essence of an organization's culture.

Artifacts can include the physical environment of the organization, its language, its technology, its published list of values, its observable rituals, and so on (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Schein E. H., 2004). Sometimes insight into culture can be gleaned from an analysis of

organizational structure (Clark & Trow, 1966), and from written statements of institutional philosophy (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Driskill and Benton (2005) identify twelve distinct cultural elements and divide these elements into five categories: values, symbolic elements, role elements, interactive elements, and context elements. Employing the metaphor of a drama, they advise that elements are often “nested” within one another and that multiple cultural elements should be considered before drawing conclusions

Cultural artifacts may be difficult to decipher. “Part of the richness of cultural elements is their ambiguity and their ability to convey multiple meanings simultaneously (Driskill & Brenton, 2005, p. 55).” While observers may be able to describe what they see and feel, they are not able to reconstruct from observation alone what those things mean to a given group, or whether they even reflect underlying assumptions. “It is especially dangerous to try to infer the deeper assumptions from artifacts alone because one’s interpretations will inevitably be projections of one’s own feelings and reactions (Schein E. H., 2004, p. 27).”

An intermediate level of analysis considers the espoused beliefs and values of the organization. As an organization deals with various tasks, issues and problems, it tests beliefs about what will or will not work; accepting or rejecting these assumptions through the process of social validation. Schein suggests that, although espoused beliefs and values

may predict much of the behavior that is observed at the artifacts level, there may be incongruence in what people say in a situation versus what they actually do.

Espoused beliefs and values often leave large areas of behavior unexplained, leaving us with a feeling that we understand a piece of the culture but still do not have the culture as such in hand. To get at that deeper level of understanding, to decipher the pattern, and to predict future behavior correctly, we have to understand more fully the category of basic underlying assumptions. (Schein E. H., 2004, p. 30)

At the very deepest level of cultural analysis lie those basic assumptions about human nature and reality that are often taken for granted by individuals and organizations. These core values and beliefs are widely shared and consistently reinforced to the point that one finds very little variation within the organization.

These basic assumptions, fundamental beliefs shared by a majority of the members, form the dominant culture of the organization. The dominant culture provides an organization with its distinct characteristics and is the one generally referred to when describing 'organizational culture'.

Cultures, Subcultures and Countercultures. All organizations of any significant duration have a culture. That culture may be strong or weak; it may be consistent or inconsistent; and it can inhibit, as well as facilitate institutional development and effectiveness. The relative strength of an organization's culture is measured by the intensity with which basic assumptions are accepted and shared (Birnbaum, 1988).

A strong culture is one where there is agreement among members about the nature of the organization. “Such unanimity of purpose builds cohesiveness, loyalty, and organizational commitment” (Robbins & Judge, 2010, p. 233). Strong cultures have greater influence on the behavior of members because the high level of agreement creates normative standards and an internal climate of high behavior control. They tend to experience lower employee turnover. One limitation of a strong culture is the difficulty of accepting change. In an organization where certain values are widely shared, if the organization decides to adopt a different set of values, unlearning the old values and learning the new ones can be a challenge, because employees will need to adopt new ways of thinking, behaving, and responding to critical events. (Carpenter, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2009)

Complex entities such as colleges and universities will generally have a dominant culture as well as numerous sets of subcultures that reflect common problems, experiences, and perceptions of different groups within the organization (Robbins, 1992). Subcultures that arise within different departments, disciplines or groups on campus may stem from the personal characteristics of individual members and managers, as well as the different conditions under which work is performed.

Academic disciplines often have varying cultures that are based on differences in research methodologies, common vocabularies, and codes of ethics. “These differences are significant enough that a campus composed primarily of a liberal arts faculty and their

students would be expected to have a very different culture from that of one inhabited primarily by engineers” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 74). Kuh and Whit (1988) conclude that the perception of a “small homogeneous society” is not realistic when examining culture at contemporary institutions of higher education. Colleges and universities are, “comprised of many different groups whose members may or may not share or abide by all of the institution’s norms, values, practices, beliefs and meanings” (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 161). They propose that it is more realistic to analyze these subgroups from a multicultural context, taking into consideration their different priorities, traditions and values.

Sometimes, a subculture may take the form of a counterculture, with values and beliefs that are in direct opposition to those of the [dominant] organizational culture. A counterculture may be tolerated by the organization as long as it is bringing in results and contributing positively to the effectiveness of the organization. However, its existence may also be perceived as a threat to the broader organizational culture, creating the potential for a divisive culture clash (Carpenter, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2009; Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

If the patterns of behavior of those in the dominant group are considered normal, then different activities performed by a subgroup [counterculture] may be judged abnormal. Clashes of subcultures may highlight conflicting core assumptions within the organization. These differences increase the possibility that misunderstandings and disagreements will occur (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Attitudes toward college sports differ according to the type of institution, the dominant culture, and the various subcultures that may exist on campus. Sperber (2000) builds on Clark and Trow's (1966) typology of four student subcultures traditionally present in American higher education: the collegiate, the academic, the vocational, and the rebel (non-conformist). He describes a prevailing "beer and circus" collegiate culture on the campuses of major research universities; "a world of football, fraternities and sororities, dates, drinking, and campus fun" (Sperber, 2000, p. 3).

Sperber identifies a growing gap between the academic culture and collegiate culture, especially as it relates to intercollegiate athletics. "A large majority of faculty have little or no interest in college sports; moreover, they tend to disparage their colleagues who do, including those professors who serve on Faculty Intercollegiate Athletic Boards (or Committees), often terming them jock-sniffers" (Sperber, 2000, p. 105).

Organizational culture creates identity for members by providing them with a sense of what is unique or distinctive about their organization. When communicated externally, it can create an image and establish legitimacy with constituents outside of the organization (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Campus culture plays an important role in student recruitment, as students tend to filter their perceptions of an institution through the subculture to which they belong, or aspire to belong.

A school's reputation may be tied to its identity as a "jock school," a "party school," an "arts school," or an "academic school." Peer groups serve as a powerful influence on

college students. As new students are socialized into campus life, their attitudes, values and beliefs tend to shift in the direction of their peer groups and the prevailing campus culture (Sperber, 2000).

Functions of Culture. Culture performs a number of functions within organizations, particularly within colleges and universities. Culture conveys a sense of identity for organization members by creating distinctions that differentiate one organization from others (Birnbaum, 1988; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). A normative mechanism that shapes attitudes and guides member behavior, culture encourages commitment to an entity other than self, and enhances stability through the socialization of new members (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Birnbaum, 1988).

The culture of a college or university provides members with a sense of organizational identity, creating an image and establishing legitimacy with outside constituencies (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Culture affects curriculum and administration on college campuses (Masland, 2000) and it reduces ambiguity during turbulent periods by reminding students and faculty of institutional values (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Toma identifies community as the paramount norm, value and belief for institutions fostering the collegiate ideal. He suggests that distinction in American higher education has traditionally been closely intertwined with community – “something analogous to a collection of neighbors in a village” (Toma J. D., 2003, p. 74). Spectator sports present colleges a platform from which to express institutional culture. These events provide

meaning and context to groups of people and instill in them a collective sense of purpose and fellowship.

Events like Football Saturday are important to building community on large campuses. The community that is such a substantial part of college football is the essence of the collegiate ideal – and is thus a clear expectation at these institutions. It is how things are done at American institution – or how things should be done. (Toma J. D., 2003, p. 75)

While a strong culture serves to reduce ambiguity and provide consistency, this stabilizing feature of organizational culture can become a liability when an organization is faced with a changing environment. Culture may become a problem when the shared values do not agree with those that will further the organization's effectiveness.

“Consistency of behavior is an asset to an organization in a stable environment. It may, however, burden the organization and hinder its ability to respond to changes in the environment (Robbins, 1992).” Strong cultures that have served organizations well in the past may well become barriers to change.

A strong culture may also be a liability during a merger. During mergers and acquisitions, companies inevitably experience a clash of cultures, as well as a clash of structures and operating systems. Culture clash becomes more problematic if both parties have unique and strong cultures (Carpenter, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2009).

Creating, Communicating and Sustaining Culture. An organization's culture often begins with its founders, individuals who have a vision of what the organization should be. Unconstrained by previous customs or ideologies, these founders select and hire employees; indoctrinate and socialize employees to their way of thinking; and serve as role models (Schein E. H., 2004; Robbins, 1992). As individuals within the organization continually interact with each other and their environment, their interpretations of reality become consistent. They create organizational culture as they develop common understandings, a common language, and a common history (Birnbaum, 1988).

Key actors play a major role in creating and sustaining organizational culture. Through their words and deeds, senior executives set the climate of what is and is not acceptable behavior. They establish standards and norms that filter down through the organization (e.g., when to take risks, how much latitude is given to subordinates, and what is appropriate dress for the workplace). Their management style influences what is valued, and what is rewarded within the organization (Robbins & Judge, 2010).

These senior executives also influence the criteria used in hiring new employees. New members are indoctrinated into the organization's culture through a process of socialization that begins with the selection of prospective employees that will be the "right fit." Once on board, they go through a metamorphous stage as they internalize the values and norms of the organization (Robbins, 1992).

Organizational cultures are communicative creations. They emerge through communication, they are maintained through communication, and they change through the communicative acts of their members. Simultaneously, communication is a cultural creation. Persons' perceptions of the cultures in which they live (both their overall culture and their organizational cultures) form the situations that guide and constrain their communication. (Conrad, 1994, p. 31)

It is important to note that organizational culture emerges, and is sustained, by communicative acts of all members and not just the persuasive strategies of upper management. Individual members develop distinctive ways of perceiving, interpreting, and explaining their environment. As they interact within the organization, members learn who they are, what their roles are, and what actions other members of their culture expect of them. By articulating its values, paying homage to its heroes, and making decisions based on its key assumptions, individuals demonstrate that they are legitimate members of the culture (Conrad & Poole, 1998). Although each member will perceive the world in their unique ways, their world views will tend to be more like each other than like those of people from another (organizational) culture.

The culture of an institution may influence, and may be influenced by the culture of the larger systems of which it is a part. There is a tendency for institutions to adapt to their external environment, thus the hierarchical structure of higher education can serve to shape the organizational structure of a collegiate institution. Peer groups of comparable

institutions exert isomorphic forces that tend to make these all look alike in some ways, and while other forces make them look quite different (Birnbaum, 1988).

Cultural differentiation may be noticeable between subsets of institutions (e.g., research universities, small liberal arts colleges, or community colleges). Key actors in these different groups (i.e., trustees and administrators) are apt to use different vocabularies, belong to different associations, read different journals, and emphasize the importance of different missions and purposes, and their faculties are likely to have different interests and training (Birnbaum, 1988). These cultural differences among colleges and universities typically originate from basic assumptions and beliefs, not from superficial differences in administrative structure and academic program (Birnbaum, 1988; Schein E. H., 2004).

Analyzing Organizational Culture. Although the deeper layers of culture may not be immediately observable, identifying a set of visible characteristics (i.e., artifacts and espoused values) enables us to identify, measure, and describe culture more effectively. One typology is the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) where culture is represented by seven distinct characteristics: innovation and risk taking; attention to detail; outcome orientation; people orientation, team orientation, aggressiveness and stability (Caldwell, 1991; Chatman & Jehn, 1991; Robbins & Judge, 2010).

Johnson and Scholes (1999) provide a paradigm for analyzing cultural assumptions and practices within organizations. Their “Cultural Web” identifies six interrelated elements graphically represented as six semi-overlapping circles. These elements collectively

influence the culture of the organization: stories; rituals and routines; symbols; organizational structure; control systems; and power structures.

Johnson and Scholes suggest a four-part process for addressing cultural change using the Cultural Web: analyze culture as it is now, looking at each element separately and determining the dominant factors; analyze the culture as you want it to be, repeating the process with each element; map the differences between the two; and prioritize changes using a master plan.

Bergquist (1992) identifies four cultural types found in higher education: the collegiate culture, centered around the academic disciplines; the managerial culture, which values economic efficiency; the development culture, focused on enhancing personal and professional growth; and the negotiating culture where value is placed on the ideals of fairness and equity.

Tierney (1988) used a six-part framework to analyze the “essential concepts” of organizational culture at one public college. Data drawn from participant observation and interviews was categorized using the following headings: Environment, Mission, Socialization, Information, Strategy, and Leadership. “The rationale for this cultural framework is not to presume that all organizations should function similarly, but rather to provide managers and researchers with a schema to diagnose their own organizations (p. 17).” By assessing their organizational culture, key actors are in a better position of addressing issues and effecting orderly change, without creating unnecessary conflict.

Driskill and Benton (2005) identify twelve cultural elements and divide these elements into five categories: values, symbolic elements, role elements, interactive cultural elements, and context elements. These elements serve as “windows” that reveal the culture of the organization and stress that conclusions about a culture should be based on more than one element. Instead, a multiple frame approach should be employed in order to gain deeper understanding of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Driskill & Brenton, 2005).

Values are the common beliefs and priorities of a group of people. Symbolic elements include symbols, stories, language and metaphors. While there are numerous cultural roles within an organization, Driskill and Benton identify two distinct role elements – Heroes, those individuals who are respected by a large number of individuals within the organization because they embody group values; and Outlaws, those individuals who seem to be paradoxes in the organization. Interactive elements include rituals, informal rules, and organizational communication style. Finally, context elements (i.e., history and place) recognize that culture is substantially shaped by its placement in time and space (Driskill & Brenton, 2005, pp. 42-53).

Institutional Perspectives

New institutional theory expands on the traditional institutional perspectives of rational goals, formal policies and bureaucratic structure by taking into account the environmental context of the organization. Cultural elements (e.g., symbols, ceremony,

rituals and rationalized myths) are considered along with other institutional forces such as isomorphism and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983).

Baxter and Lambert (1990) apply new institutional theory in their analysis of intercollegiate athletics, arguing that it allows for consideration of the symbolic resources that confer legitimacy on the intercollegiate athletics program. Cross (1999) adds, “for colleges and universities, an intercollegiate athletics program may have ritual significance, signaling that the institution is healthy, growing and similar to other institutions it considers its peers” (p. 49).

Greenwood and Hinings (1996) use the term “neo-institutional theory” to describe the convergence of old and new institutionalism as it relates to organizational change. They present a model of change that goes beyond an analysis of the institutional field to consider internal dynamics of the organization, such as value commitments, power dependencies and capacity for action. This model provides an understanding of change that considers the interaction of key actors within the institutional context. They identify isomorphism, rationalized myths, and legitimacy to be among the institutional forces that serve to either coerce or constrain change.

Isomorphism. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify isomorphism as a constraining process, one that compels organizations to become homogeneous with others in their organizational field facing the same environmental conditions. They observe that

organizations sample from available models in their field, managing uncertainty by emulating those organizations that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful.

DiMaggio & Powell identify three types of institutional isomorphism:

1. Mimetic isomorphism may be viewed as a contagious process that spreads fashionable features from one organization to another. If key actors, particularly CEOs, are in contact with each other, they are likely to evaluate issues in their environment similarly (Glaskiewicz & Wasserman, 1989). As key actors change jobs and move from one organization to another, they take with them established norms and problem-solving strategies (Haveman, 1993).
2. Normative isomorphism may occur among key actors in a particular role (e.g., college presidents, athletic directors, professors, coaches). Individuals in these roles tend to share similar backgrounds, career paths, and homogeneity in terms of dress, vocabulary, and behavior. They are likely to view policies, procedures, and structures as normatively sanctioned and typically approach decision-making in much the same way (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).
3. Coercive isomorphism results from formal and informal pressures exerted by other organizations and by cultural expectations within the society where an organization functions. Change in an institution's athletics classification or conference affiliation may be influenced by both normative expectations and by formal rules governing the membership application process.

Glaskiewicz and Wasserman (1989) expand on DiMaggio and Powell's concept of mimetic isomorphism with a theoretical rationale for a "network effect," in which organizational decision makers (key actors) are likely to mimic actions of colleagues whom they know and trust. Social networks established across organizational boundaries can serve as conduits, disseminating ideas and innovations throughout an organizational field. These network ties allow key actors to see how other organizations cope with environmental conditions similar to their own, and thus get some ideas as to how to respond themselves. Research suggests that, "when faced with uncertainty, decision makers will mimic the behavior of other actors in their environment. If clear criteria do not exist, decision makers will try what others have done and found to work." (Glaskiewicz & Wasserman, 1989, p. 475).

Rationalized Myths. Rationalized myths refer to institutionalized concepts regarding appropriate organizational structure or behavior. These are rule-like constructs, based on widely shared beliefs disseminated by individuals or groups that have been granted the authority to determine such matters (Scott & Meyer, 1983). Such rationalized behaviors serve to maintain appearances and to validate the legitimacy of an organization by defining the right and proper way to do things (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) observe that organizations in highly institutionalized contexts are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures perceived to be appropriate for their organizational field. Such rationalized behaviors serve to maintain

appearances and to validate the legitimacy of the organization independent of the immediate efficacy, or any empirical justification, for their action. Even uninformed and irrational decisions may have a rational basis when interpreted for the purpose of legitimacy.

Legitimacy. Legitimacy is the driving force among organizational actors (Selznick, 1996). “Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Colleges and universities are viewed as “legitimate” when their programs and structures are perceived by internal and external constituents to be appropriate. Thus, the functions of peer emulation (isomorphism) and conformity with rationalized myths become especially important in motivating organizational behavior.

Context

Historical Perspective. Washington and Ventresca (2004) employ the term “athletics strategies” to describe the incorporation of sports programs on college campuses throughout the 20th Century. The development of newspaper sport pages in the early 1900s enhanced the public visibility afforded to intercollegiate sports, particularly college football. From Rudolph’s (1990) perspective, it provided a new outlet for alumni and community boosterism that replaced the waning denominational fervor that had characterized the growth of American higher education in the early 19th century.

As star players were elevated to celebrity status, new stadiums and field houses were constructed, and high profile coaches emerged, college administrators began to view athletics contests as an opportunity for increased visibility and student recruitment (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990).

An 1895 trip to the East by the University of California track team developed into a series of great victories and was widely recognized as a major public-relations achievement. Intercollegiate athletics at Notre Dame were consciously developed in the 1890s as an agency of student recruitment. Land-grant colleges and state universities discovered that athletic victories often were more important than anything else in convincing reluctant legislators to open the public purse. (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990, p. 385)

Chu (1985) suggests that intercollegiate sport, by historically fulfilling a variety of needs for universities and their external stakeholders, including the acquisition of money and students, has become rationalized into the socially defined and accepted charter of American higher education. Colleges continue to pursue athletics strategies in order to meet the long-term objectives of the institution as a whole.

Athletics Classification. Intercollegiate athletics is a complex organizational field in which prestige and status are defined relative to an institution's association, division, and conference affiliation. While competition is generally between institutions of similar size, location and ideology, the landscape of college athletics is one that has recently been

marked by dynamic change as institutions strive for upward mobility within a perceived hierarchy.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the largest and most prominent governing organization for intercollegiate athletics. It is federated into three competitive divisions (Division I, Division II and Division III), each with its own unique philosophy regarding the scope and structure of intercollegiate athletics. Division I and Division III represent the extremes in terms of athletics scholarships, while Division II can be categorized as a hybrid of the other two (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2005). Division I is further stratified into subdivisions based on an institution's investment in football; the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS). Until recent years these subdivisions were identified as Division I-A and I-AA, respectively.

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and the National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA) are much smaller and less significant organizations that cater primarily to private, religious-affiliated colleges (Rosner & Shropshire, 2004). Since 1979, the NCAA has grown in membership from 738 member institutions to 1,055, with the greatest portion of this growth coming at the expense of the NAIA.

In addition to the influx of new members from other athletics organizations, there has been a significant membership migration within the NCAA as institutions reclassify from one division to another. Since the mid-1980s, more than 50 schools have made the switch

from NCAA Division II to NCAA Division I. Membership migration is a trend that shows little sign of slowing and one that threatens to dilute the level of competition in all three divisions. For this reason, each of the three NCAA divisions has enacted some type of membership moratorium within the last decade.

A decision to reclassify an institution's athletics program has financial implications for the entire institution. Only 25 of 335 Division I institutions report positive net revenues from athletics for 2008, and all of these are well-established FBS programs that receive significant revenue from conference television contracts, bowl games, and football ticket sales (Fulks, 2009). The remaining 1,025 NCAA member institutions rely heavily on direct institutional subsidies and student fees to fund their athletics programs.

Orszag & Orszag's (2005) economic analysis of athletics spending and net revenues indicates that schools switching divisions experienced an average decline in net operating revenue of over \$1.2 million dollars including changes in institutional support, state government funding, and student fees dedicated to athletics. Their examination of 20 universities that made the move from Division II to Division I reveals that every transitioning institution experienced a decline in net operating revenues, with some losses exceeding \$3 million dollars.

Despite the high costs associated with a change in athletics classification and recent legislative efforts aimed at controlling membership migration, a considerable number of colleges and universities have elected to make such a move and it is anticipated that this

trend will continue. A dozen institutions that were in the process of transitioning from NCAA Division II to Division I are exempt from the current moratorium, and it is anticipated that more Division II schools will migrate once the moratorium is lifted in 2011.

Hierarchical Context. The organization of intercollegiate athletics may be compared with the hierarchal structure that exists within higher education. Winston (1999) describes the hierarchy of higher education as one differentiated by access to donative resources and what those resources will buy. At the top are wealthy institutions with large endowments that enable them to offer high subsidies to attract a disproportionate number of high quality students. Movement down the highly stratified hierarchy brings a decrease in student quality and a decrease in demand. Toward the lower end of the spectrum, schools with limited donative resources become more tuition-dependent and less selective. In order to reach enrollment objectives, less prestigious colleges must develop strategies that do not rely on peer quality. "A school's position, vis-à-vis its competition, both signifies its "excellence" and its ability to attract scarce student quality" (Winston, 1999, p. 27).

Winston (1999) observes that competition among schools is positional and limited to overlapping bands of similarly positioned institutions, that is, an institution's prestige and status are defined relative to other institutions of similar wealth, geographic location, and ideology. Schools tend to compete within their current stratum, or with their aspirant group. While there are more than 3,300 colleges and universities in the country, institutions tend to focus their competitive energies on the ten schools directly above them

and the ten directly below them in the hierarchy. Thus, schools accumulate wealth both to overtake those above them in the pecking order and to fend off those who would overtake them from below (Winston, 1999).

In the competition for relative positioning, where success is judged in respect to other institutions, there is never too much of a good thing. Colleges and universities risk becoming trapped in an arms race to provide what Winston describes as “expensive competitive amenities that do not produce sufficient benefit to justify their cost directly, but are important to an individual school because others are offering these amenities” (Winston, 1999, p. 30).

Content

This case study is unique in that it examines athletics strategy collectively as an integral part of an institution’s overall strategic plan and in that it examines the context and process of athletics strategy decisions from the perspective of key actors. In contrast, existing research related to athletics strategy tends to focus on content; the outcomes associated with reclassification initiatives such as the move from NCAA Division II to Division I and the reclassification of football programs from Division II-AA (FCS) to Division I-A (FBS). These outcomes are often expressed in terms of direct financial benefits or in terms of operational objectives, including indirect benefits related to institutional branding, enrollment management, fund-raising, and social identity.

Direct Benefits. The potential of direct financial benefits from increased commercialization partially explains the migration of schools from NCAA Division II into Division I and the recent trend to reposition football programs from Division I-AA (FCS) to Division I-A (FBS). More than a dozen institutions have made the move from I-AA (FCS) to I-A (FBS) in the past decade; however only a few have enjoyed a high level of success in terms of winning percentages or bowl appearances (Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008).

Frank (2004) reviewed findings of several empirical studies attempting to measure the relationships between athletics success and increases in applications, student quality, and alumni giving. He concludes that the direct effect of athletics success is small, at best, when viewed from the perspective of any individual institution. Although alumni donations and applications for admission sometimes rise in the wake of conspicuously successful seasons at a small number of institutions, such increases are likely to be both small and transitory.

Studies of the direct financial impact of college athletics on the university are “muddled” by the not-for-profit setting of higher education, a lack of detailed data, and the idiosyncratic accounting practices employed by colleges and universities. As a result, the reported losses for intercollegiate athletics programs may be misleading (Goff, 2000). Goff provides a review and extension of empirical studies related to the university-wide effects of intercollegiate athletics. He concludes that, for most Division I-A (FBS) programs, the direct revenues from football and basketball are greater than the direct expenses.

Operational Objectives. There are a number of factors that influence strategic decisions concerning athletics programs that cannot be obtained solely from economic impact analysis and other quantitative methodology (Goff, 2000). The public rationale for reclassifying is often tied to concerns about the institution's external environment, such as institutional competitiveness, image, and exposure; or is based on operational objectives, such as expected benefits for undergraduate admissions, alumni support, community relationships, campus life, visibility and university association (Cross, 1999; Orszag & Orszag, 2005). Other considerations that have been identified include a desire to increase school spirit or the concern that a school was "out of place in Division II," by virtue of its enrollment size or because nearby rival schools were in Division I. In these cases, the decision to change athletics classification appears to be motivated by the broader needs of the university as opposed to athletics concerns or economic impact (Cross, 1999).

Cross (1999) employs a conceptual framework adapted from Meyer and Rowan's (1977) model of organizational survival in a comparative case study that examines the effects of change in athletics classification at four public universities. Using principles of institutional theory, Cross describes the rationale for changing classification in terms of rationalized myths (including institutional self-perception) and operational objectives (e.g., the need to enhance undergraduate admissions, donative resources, campus life or visibility). Cross observes, "For colleges and universities, an intercollegiate athletics

program may have ritual significance, signaling that the institution is healthy, growing and similar to other institutions it considers its peers” (p. 49).

Branding and Institutional Image. Colleges and universities often look to their athletics programs as a means to enhance the awareness, positioning and value (equity) of their institutional brand. Successful athletics programs cultivate distinct perceptions in the mind of the public, create a favorable brand image and facilitate widespread brand identification (Lee, Miloch, Kraft, & Tatum, 2008). This favorable brand image is perceived to have a positive impact in terms of student recruitment, undergraduate admissions, student retention and alumni giving.

“Athletics is an integral source of name exposure for almost every university and often the only frequent source of exposure for schools possessing little in the way of academic reputation” (Goff, 2000, p. 91). Clotfelter (2011) identifies precedents which support the notion that successful athletics programs can help elevate an institution’s status relevant to peer and aspirant institutions. He cites the University of North Carolina at Charlotte’s decision to add football as one example. Quoting the adage, “You are judged by the company you keep,” the UNCC chancellor indicated that the football team would strengthen community support, “thereby creating secondary benefits for our university in terms of political and financial support, research partnerships, employment and internship opportunities for our students” (p. 154). The feasibility study placed particular emphasis on the potential for football to become a significant element in the branding of the University.

Sports programs, particularly NCAA Division I-A (FBS) football teams, create public awareness for a college or university that would be expensive and difficult to achieve through traditional mass media channels. However, building and maintaining a favorable brand image can be challenging, especially for those smaller institutions that are not affiliated with a major conference (Lee, Miloch, Kraft, & Tatum, 2008).

The branding objective extends beyond mere awareness of the institution through its athletics programs and has significant implications in terms of secondary brand associations and brand positioning (Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008). It is difficult for many people outside of the institution to assess the quality of the core product offered by a college or university. As a result, the associations created by an institution's athletics quality can become the basis for secondary associations about its academic quality. By repositioning their athletics program in a certain conference, or realigning athletics programs to a higher level of competition, universities can use product category as a basis for brand positioning, benefitting from shared associations with peer institutions (Roy, et al., 2008).

Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) employ a conceptual model which views brand equity, the relative strength or value of a brand, as the combination of four components: perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations, and brand loyalty. Athletics success can potentially raise the value of the university's brand and enable the institution to

generate revenues through game attendance, fundraising, and the sale of licensed merchandise (Judson & Carpenter, 2004).

Lee, Miloch, Kraft and Tatum (2008) observe that “colleges and universities are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial in nature as schools seek various strategies to generate additional revenues and exposure” (p. 178). They provide a case study of athletics strategy employed by Troy University as the institution attempted to redefine its overall brand image through specific initiatives, including the reclassification of its football program to NCAA Division I-A (FBS), the enhancement of its football facilities, and the development of licensed logos for the athletics department and the institution.

Clark, Apostolopoulou, Banvold and Synowka (2009) provide a case study of athletics strategy employed by Robert Morris University (RMU) as part of a comprehensive branding campaign designed to extend the visibility and awareness of the institution. RMU’s Strategic Plan makes specific reference to intercollegiate athletics as a vehicle for student recruitment and as a potential source for publicity, revenue, and students. “The athletics program alters some people’s perception to one where RMU is a ‘real’ university” (p. 61).

As a private institution, RMU is “tuition-driven” and faces financial constraints that force university administrators to choose only one or two sports as focal points for their branding strategy. The selected “flagship” sports were chosen based on their performance potential; for their ability to compete for conference titles, advance to NCAA championship play, and garner media attention at the national level.

Flagship sports are those that have the best chance of “standing out” among their peers. Schools may prioritize funding and competitive expectations for their various athletics teams, placing them in levels, or tiers. Boyle and Magnusson (2007) identify flagship sports as those sports that have a significant effect on the overall financial stability of a school’s athletics program. They examined three fan groups (students, alumni, and general public) and found that social identity with one sports team contributes to the perceived value (brand equity) of the athletics program as a whole.

Enrollment Management. Closely related to branding and institutional image are operational objectives focused on enrollment management for colleges and universities, specifically increases in student recruitment, undergraduate admissions, and student retention. Whether or not it can be scientifically proved, many university leaders say they believe athletics is effective in terms of generating resources for the institution. The notion that athletics success boosts applications for admissions can be traced back to 1901, when Harvard president Charles Eliot conducted a statistical analysis comparing admission trends with results of athletics contests between Harvard and Yale (Clotfelter, 2011). More recent studies have supported the idea that a successful athletics has positive effects on student applications and alumni contributions (Grimes & Chressanthis, 1994; Toma & Cross, 1998).

The “Flutie Effect” is often referenced in discussions related to college athletics and undergraduate enrollment. Boston College experienced a significant increase in applications and undergraduate enrollment in 1985 following quarterback Doug Flutie’s

Heisman Trophy and the team's participation in the Cotton Bowl. Flutie's game winning pass against the University of Miami in a nationally televised game on Thanksgiving Day 1984 generated a flurry of media attention. Similar increases in applications and enrollments were experienced following George Mason's participation in the 2005 NCAA Final Four and Gonzaga's recent string of success in the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament (Johnson G. , 2006). Increases in applications at [State] Tech and Northwestern University following successful football seasons in 1991 and 1995, respectively, are also cited as anecdotal evidence supporting this phenomenon (Goff, 2000).

McCormick and Tinsley's (1987) study of "big time" athletics programs indicate that successful athletics programs provide cost-effective advertising that results in more student applicants. The media exposure that institutions experience as a result of their athletics success can have an effect similar to that gained through an effective advertising campaign (Frank, 2004). Goff (2000) observes that "athletics success, particularly significant improvement, can substantially increase national exposure for universities regardless of their academic reputation" (p. 100). His examination of one highly-selective research university disclosed that 70% of all newspaper articles written about the university pertained to athletics, while only 5% of the articles were research-related.

Lucas & Lovaglia (2005) conducted a quantitative study to test their hypothesis that high-visibility athletics programs may increase the value of a university's degree, and thus increase the prestige of its graduates in general. Their study, limited to the University of

Iowa, supported the hypothesis. They proposed that students prefer universities with high visibility athletic programs in part because they associate increased prestige with academic degrees from those institutions.

Fundraising. Success in intercollegiate athletics is often perceived as having a positive effect on institutional and athletics department giving. Empirical data to support this common perception is mixed and often inconclusive. Goff (2000) states that “achievements in athletics (e.g., bowl trips, basketball tournament wins, College World Series appearances) appear to substantially increase general giving to universities” (p. 101). On the other hand, Tomasini (2005) examined institutions reclassifying to Division I-AA (FCS) and concluded that the reclassification did not result in significant increases in terms of donative resources.

Sigleman and Carter (1979) analyzed alumni giving and big-time sports. They found that no relationship existed between an institution’s success in football or basketball and subsequent alumni donations to the institution. They confirmed that, though most schools only obtain a small portion of their support from alumni, many people believe such a relationship does exist and that the perception that alumni giving is impacted by athletics success will continue regardless of empirical data or the lack of it.

Baade and Sundberg (1996) employ quantitative methodology to examine the impact of successful football and men’s basketball programs in the context of a comprehensive model of alumni giving. They find that while winning records do not

necessarily translate into increased alumni giving, bowl game appearances and NCAA basketball tournament participation result in some increase. They conclude that, though colleges and universities may seem to be rewarded for successful sports programs, the uncertainty of postseason participation, even for teams with winning records, makes investing in athletics a risky strategy for increasing alumni giving. Money spent on building sports programs may, in fact, reduce alumni giving, if it is spent at the expense of academic quality.

Gladden, Mahoney, and Apostolopoulou (2005) suggest that athletic fundraising is largely motivated by a desire to attain tangible benefits (e.g., tickets, priority seating, and reserved parking). This is especially true for Division I institutions with consistently successful football and basketball teams. Their findings suggest that fund-raising in athletics is different from fundraising in other areas. In addition to the unique tangible benefits available to athletics donors, there is evidence that supporting and improving the athletics program and social identity serve as significant motivators.

Stinson & Howard (2008) examined giving patterns at NCAA Division I-AA (FCS) and I-AAA institutions. They found a positive correlation between athletics success and increased giving for athletics and academics. "It is clear that successful athletics programs often lead current donors to make larger gifts, and perhaps more importantly, attract additional donors to the institution" (p. 17). This symbiotic relationship is unlike the crowding-out effect observed in prior studies of giving patterns at Division I institutions (Stinson &

Howard, 2007). The findings support the institutional investment in developing successful, high-profile sports at lower-levels of NCAA Division I competition. The authors conclude that “any institution choosing to compete in Division I athletics at any level should understand the important role of intercollegiate athletics in influencing donor behavior” (Stinson & Howard, 2008, p. 17).

Campus and Community. Intercollegiate athletics can become a rallying point for the campus and the community. The operational objectives for athletics strategy may be linked with social identity theory and are often expressed in terms of school spirit and community engagement.

The success of a team or an athletics program rubs off on the fan. Social identity theory suggests that individuals may seek to raise their self-esteem by identifying with others they perceive as highly successful. “Basking in Reflected Glory,” or BIRGing, is viewed as a key motivator for sports fans who seek to enhance their self-esteem by associating themselves with a successful team or player (Cialdini, 1976). This may help explain why university stakeholders seek Division I status, even in the face of negative financial ramifications (Tomasini, 2005). By the same token, fans may also engage in “Cutting Off Reflective Failure,” or CORFing, by disassociating themselves after a loss or a poor performance (Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986).

Judson and Carpenter (2004) examine community identification with an institution’s athletics program and underlying motives for fan participation in the context of athletics

strategy initiatives implemented by a newly-elected college president. The strategic objective of these initiatives was to “raise the profile of the athletics program and, through that, the profile of the institution” (p. 223). Their findings support previous research which suggests that the greater the individual’s identification with the athletics program, the more events they will attend, the more money they will spend on licensed merchandise, and the more they will perceive the program as value for money.

NCAA Division II, recognizing the value of social identity, has formulated a “community engagement initiative,” as part of its comprehensive branding strategy (NCAA). The initiative focuses on building relationships that encourage the community to share in the campus experience. A clear distinction is made between community service, where student-athletes reach out to help those in the community, and community engagement, where intercollegiate athletics becomes like the “town square,” the place where the campus and community connect and interact. The overall quality of the game day experience is viewed as an integral part of this town square analogy.

Individual perceptions play an important part in the development of identity with an institution’s athletics program. Putler and Wolfe (1999) examine perceptions of intercollegiate athletics using a sample of six stakeholder groups (students, prospective students, student-athletes, alumni, faculty, and athletics department employees) at a Division I-AA (FCS) institution. They observe that priorities concerning intercollegiate athletics may differ based on geographic region, as well as the academic mission and

athletics history at an institution. Competing priorities exist, and depending on the stakeholder's perception of these priorities, intercollegiate athletics are viewed as having important positive, or negative, effects on universities. Putler and Wolfe note an absence of research that directly examines stakeholder perceptions of intercollegiate athletics. They suggest that greater understanding of 1) the relative priority placed on various aspects of the intercollegiate athletics program, 2) the competing priorities of different stakeholder groups, and 3) relative importance placed on program outcomes is necessary for the effective management of intercollegiate athletics programs.

Roy, Graeff, and Harmon (2008) examined the effects of an institution's move to NCAA Division I-A (FBS) on marketing variables such as the prestige of the university, attendance at sport events, and donations, by exploring perceptions of three key stakeholder groups. All three groups expressed favorable perceptions of Division I-A (FBS) football. Students and alumni identified football's contribution to school spirit and involvement as a significant factor, and community members indicated that the university's image was more influenced by its football program than by its academic program. While perceptions were greatly affected by the move to Division I-A (FBS) football, anticipated consumer behaviors (e.g., intentions to attend games, donate money, and purchase licensed merchandise) were comparatively modest.

College athletics have become integrated into the culture of higher education and they provide a vehicle through which colleges and universities can connect with students,

alumni, and their community. People who do not have formal ties with a school's academic program may identify with that institution through its athletics teams. This can have strategic implications for colleges and universities in terms of institutional branding, student recruitment, fundraising and campus-community relations.

A gap in the literature exists in that athletics strategy has not been explored from the perspective of smaller, non-Division I colleges and universities. This case study seeks to contribute to the body of literature by examining the content, context and process of athletics strategy at a private, church-affiliated institution from the perspective of key actors, those individuals that play an important role in interpreting the environmental context, developing strategic plans, and implementing those plans.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This case study examined the athletics strategies of a private, church-affiliated college from the perspective of key actors: those individuals with the capacity to make and shape policy decisions, establish operational objectives, and implement long-term strategies. Pettigrew's (1987) model of organizational change provides a conceptual framework for this qualitative study and influences the three core research questions:

1. How do key actors describe the environmental context of athletics strategy implementation at their institution?
2. How do key actors describe the process for forming athletics strategy?
3. How do key actors describe the goals, plans and operational objectives of the athletics strategy adopted by their institution?

Researchers have identified the critical roles that key actors play in interpreting the environmental contexts (Pettigrew, 1987), framing the issues (Hira & Hira, 2000) and managing meaning (Birnbaum, 1992) for organizations. This case study proposes to expand on the current literature by focusing on the context, process, and content (anticipated outcomes) of athletics strategy implementation from the key actor's perspective.

Qualitative Methodology

Creswell (1998) suggests that a qualitative study should describe "what is going on," as opposed to quantitative studies which seek to establish a cause and effect relationship

between variables. This approach is appropriate when “a topic needs to be explored further, when variables are not easily identified, and when existing theories do not fully explain the behavior of organizations and individuals” (p. 15). The three research questions above presume that such an institutional phenomenon (athletics strategy) exists. By employing a qualitative approach, the researcher is able to dig deeper in search of the background experiences, environmental contexts, and underlying perceptions that may influence the implementation of athletics strategy at a collegiate institution.

Qualitative methodology provides an opportunity for research that is descriptive, that assumes the value of context, and that searches for a deeper understanding of participant perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Through interviews with key actors, the researcher seeks to develop thick descriptions of athletics strategy decisions and to gain greater understanding of the context – the internal and external factors that influence those decisions. The case study format allows for the examination of a bounded system at a specific point in time. This approach allows examination of key actor perceptions with no attempt to make broad generalizations beyond the particular case being studied (Stake, 1995).

The Case

Cartwright College (a pseudonym) is a private, liberal arts institution affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The college currently has an enrollment of 800 undergraduate students. In 2007, the college began the transition toward four-year status

and earned approval to begin awarding baccalaureate degrees. The college received accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in December 2008 and the first baccalaureate degrees were conferred in May 2011.

In 2009, Cartwright College adopted a 10-year strategic plan that called for expanding the student body to as many as 1,500 students, adding faculty, and developing as many as 20 new majors. The plan also called for an aggressive building campaign, including new residence halls, a library, a student center, and a dining facility. The intercollegiate athletics program figures into these strategic initiatives with the construction of a new 1,000-seat competition arena that was completed in August 2010, the addition of men's and women's basketball as varsity sports for 2010-11, and the reclassification of the athletics program to NCAA Division II.

Cartwright College currently fields 12 intercollegiate sports. The men's baseball, women's softball, and women's soccer teams have been frequently ranked among the top junior college teams in the region. The women's soccer team won the National Junior College Athletic Association national championship in 2006. Men's and women's basketball teams began competition in November 2010.

This specific case represents an information-rich "purposeful" sample that can contribute to our understanding of the context, content, and process of athletics strategy at a private, church-affiliated college from the perspective of key actors (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). The case study format was selected because it allowed for the in-depth

exploration of a bounded event (the institution's application for NCAA Division II membership) and consideration of the social, historical, and economic setting.

Previous studies of athletics strategy have tended to focus on public, state-supported universities that may function in a different contextual environment than the private, church-related schools. Patton (2002) suggests that "it makes strategic sense to pick sites that will yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (p. 236). Cartwright College was purposely selected as an information-rich case because the transition to NCAA Division II inherently requires multiple athletics initiatives, including the addition of new sports programs, construction and renovation of athletics facilities, alignment with an athletics conference, and the expansion of athletics department staff.

Cartwright College also represents a "typical case" sample that describes and illustrates athletics strategy implementation to those unfamiliar with this phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Although it is not possible to develop definitive conclusions or generalized statements from a single case, the perceptions of key actors in this case contribute to the historical context and a broader understanding of athletics strategy. The use of multiple informants provided an opportunity to reveal different perspectives and to explore the availability of alternative strategies and viewpoints (Coffee & Atkinson, 1996).

Institutional Review Board Approval

Institutional Research Board approval (Appendix E) was finalized on September 29, 2011, prior to commencing research activity involving human subjects. As part of this process, the informed consent statement served two purposes: it identified potential risks connected with this study and enabled participants to make an informed participation decision, and it documented their decision to participate.

Because this study focused on individual perceptions about their workplace, there were inherent risks that responses might be damaging to a participant's financial standing, employability, or reputation. Pseudonyms were used for individuals and institutions throughout this case study in order to protect the confidentiality of participants (Appendix D contains a List of Pseudonyms). Although individuals were not identified by name in any reports, it is possible that they may be identified by their responses or by use of their job title in association with a response. Because of the open-ended format of the interviews, there was a risk that third parties might be identified in responses. Finally, because authorization for the study was received from senior level administrators, there was a risk that employees may feel coerced into participating.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the risks associated with the study, measures taken to minimize risks and protect confidentiality, and the time demands in the Initial Contact Letter. Participants were advised that participation in the study is voluntary and that they may decline to answer any question and may withdraw from the

study at any time. The Informed Consent Form (Appendix H) was provided along with the Initial Contact Letter (Appendix F).

Data Collection

The specific case of Cartwright College provided the primary unit of analysis for this study and a specific structure for gathering, organizing, and analyzing data (Patton, 2002). Multiple data sources are typically used in the case study format, including document analysis, personal interviews, and observation. Understanding of the content, process, and context of this case was constructed based on the perceptions, recollections, and descriptions provided by key actors. The researcher examined documents submitted to the NCAA Membership Committee in May 2010, including: the *Application for Division II Membership*, with Appendices; the *2010-11 Athletics Procedures Manual*, and renderings of the new campus recreation facility.

Qualitative studies such as this one are people-oriented and require the researcher to understand in depth the details of what goes on by capturing individual perceptions with descriptive data and direct quotations (Patton, 2002). Since each type and source of data has strengths and weaknesses, the use of multiple sources of information provides a more comprehensive perspective of what is going on, as one approach can compensate for weaknesses in another approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002).

A letter describing the proposed study and requesting permission to conduct this research at Cartwright College was forwarded to the President through the Executive Vice

President (Provost). In addition to formal authorization for on-site interviews with institutional staff members, the letter requested access to planning documents and institutional records (Appendix F).

Concurrently, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) form was prepared for submission as part of the research proposal. The prospective participants in this study were administrators and coaches at Cartwright College and were not members of any vulnerable population. The study examined individual perceptions of the institution's athletics strategy and the potential risks associated with participation in the study appear minimal. To protect anonymity, individuals were referred to by position rather than by name, and a pseudonym was used for the institution in published versions of the case study.

Once approval of the study proposal, IRB authorization, and site access was received, the researcher scheduled mutually convenient dates, times, and locations for on-site interviews. On-site interviews were conducted in October 2010.

Documents and Records. Minutes of meetings, planning documents, press releases, and archival data constituted a particularly rich source of information that provided insight into the rationale, the role of key actors, and the anticipated outcomes associated with athletics strategy implementation. Examination of documents and records provide clues as to what is considered important to the organization and they often include critical information that decision-makers rely on (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Patton (2002) instructs that “documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing” (p. 294). For this study, document analysis served as a foundation upon which in-depth interview discussions were constructed. The researcher requested access to the following types of documents:

1. Feasibility studies, minutes of meetings and other reports associated with the institution’s decision to reclassify its athletics program to NCAA Division II.
2. Memoranda, announcements, press releases and other correspondence containing the public rationale for athletics strategy decisions.
3. The institution’s 2010 Application for Division II Membership and supporting documents.

Most of the documents reviewed were part of the public record. Participants also shared confidential internal planning documents that proved helpful in the study. Patton (2002) observes that document analysis “provides a behind-the-scenes look at the program that may not be directly observable and about which the interviewer might not ask appropriate questions without the leads provided through documents” (p. 307).

Interviews. In-person interviews with administrators and head coaches directly involved in institutional governance and athletics decision-making were the primary source of data for this study. A sixty-minute taped interview was scheduled with each subject at a mutually-convenient location, generally on-campus in the subject’s office. Interview

questions focused on key actor perceptions of athletics strategies implemented as part of the institution's 10-year strategic plan. A total of eighteen in-person, on-campus interviews were conducted in October 2010.

Selection of Participants. The following administrators were initially identified as prospective subjects for in-person interviews. These positions were part of the institution's administrative structure and were presumed to have responsibilities in overall strategic planning for the institution:

1. The President (CEO)
2. Executive Vice President (Provost)
3. Vice President – Academic Affairs
4. Vice President – Advancement
5. Vice President – Enrollment Management
6. Vice President – Finance
7. Vice President – Planning, Assessment & Registration

In addition, the following athletics department personnel were identified as prospective subjects for in-person interviews:

1. Director of Athletics (AD)
2. Senior Woman Administrator (SWA)
3. Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR)
4. Compliance Coordinator

5. Baseball Coach
6. Men's Basketball Coach
7. Women's Basketball Coach

The AD, SWA, FAR, and compliance coordinator positions are those recognized by the NCAA and athletics conferences as the primary governance officials for intercollegiate athletics. In the course of data collection, other individuals were identified as key actors that played a significant role in the implementation of athletics strategy. Interviews with these individuals were scheduled based on the following criteria:

1. The subject was actively involved in planning and implementing the institution's athletics strategy and is able to provide a personal perspective that broadens understanding.
2. The subject was able to provide additional artifacts (e.g., notes, memoranda, and reports) that may contribute to the case study.
3. The subject was responsible for a functional area that was affected by the implementation of an athletics strategy.

Interview Procedures. Two weeks prior to the on-campus interviews, the researcher made contact with each participant in order to establish the date, time, and location for the interview. This also provided an opportunity to complete the necessary demographic information on the interview guide (Appendix I). A confirmation letter and a copy of the

informed consent form (Appendix H), was forwarded to the participant by email, after the interview was established.

Interviews were held in a private setting where participants could speak confidentially without fear of being overheard. The location was either in the participant's office or a private room that was reserved for this purpose. Following a brief overview of the interview format and a review of the consent form, each participant was encouraged to describe those specific actions within the athletics department that were designed to meet the long-term goals and objectives of the institution. A semi-structured interview guide, with specific prompts and probes focused on the major research questions, was used for the in-person interviews. The research questions sought to obtain the participant's perspectives on the context (including institutional culture), the process and the content (outcomes) of athletics strategy decisions. The semi-structured interview is a format that provided the structure of a standardized interview while allowing the interviewer to expand on participant responses and to pursue subjects in greater depth.

Two digital recorders, a primary and a back-up, were used to record the first round of interviews. Although some notes were taken on the interview guide during the course of the interview, the researcher's attention was focused on interaction with the subject and not on recording data. These notes were limited to significant points made by the respondent and key terms that suggested additional questions, or that may have facilitated subsequent data analysis. The researcher checked on the quality of the recordings at the

conclusion of each interview. Summary observations reflecting on the setting, the interview, and the data were documented following each interview.

Subsequent to each site visit, the researcher transcribed the recording and coded field notes and interviews. While the decision for the researcher to perform all of the transcribing was in large measure influenced by the limited availability of financial resources, the researcher was also aware that the transcription process affords the opportunity to more deeply immerse himself in the data as a first step of analysis (Patton, 2002). Participants in the study were provided with a copy of the transcript from their in-person interview and asked to review the document to ensure accuracy.

Follow-Up Telephone Interviews. Two follow-up telephone interviews of approximately 30 minutes each were conducted with the athletics director. These telephone interviews allowed the researcher to review findings and discuss developments that occurred since the first interview. These telephone interviews were conversational and open-ended. Handwritten notes were used to record data.

The Interview Guide. A semi-structured interview guide was developed for the on-campus interviews, with consideration given to Kvale's (1983), "twelve aspects" of qualitative interviews during the design process. Such a framework provided for specificity and focus, while at the same time offering latitude for the subject to shape the content and direction of the discussion. The interview guide was constructed using the basic rule that question items should be clear, singular, and focused. Using the guide enhanced the

probability of descriptive responses that would advance understanding of the subject's perspective.

This interview guide was structured around the three basic research questions, with attention given to avoiding "why" questions, those that would presume a cause-effect relationship (Patton, 2002). The researcher understands that "the task of the interviewer is to focus upon, or guide towards, certain themes, but not to guide the interviewee towards certain opinions about these themes" (Kvale, 1983, p. 178).

Open-ended descriptive questions designed to elicit the participant's perceptions were followed-up with probing questions aimed at encouraging detailed responses and ensuring thick descriptions relating the perceptions of content, context and process. The guide was flexible enough to allow the researcher to pursue issues that were not anticipated when the guide was developed, however, as a general rule, the interviewer did not go into areas not covered by the framework of the interview guide.

In developing the interview guide, the researcher was mindful that the interview is an interaction between two people (Kvale, 1983), and that inter-personal dynamics within the interview affect the outcome. Patton (2002) suggests that the use of an interview guide provides for efficient use of time, minimizes variation in data attributable to interview questions, and facilitates locating data during the analysis and coding process. This particular interview guide was designed to serve as a prompt and was limited to one page (front and back) so that it would not be a distraction in the interview.

Data Analysis

This study adopted a non-linear, interactive approach to qualitative data analysis, in which data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand, in order to build a coherent understanding of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Creswell J. W., 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Data analysis is viewed as “three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 21).

Data reduction, the process of selecting, focusing, and transforming raw data into useful “data chunks,” is an ongoing process throughout the qualitative study. “In fact, even before the data are actually collected, anticipatory data reduction is occurring as the researcher decides which conceptual framework, which sites, which research questions, which data collection approaches to choose (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 21).

Once in the field, interviews were transcribed, field notes were organized, and data was arranged into different categories, depending on the sources of information (Creswell, 2009). This process was guided by Marshall & Rossman’s (1999) observation that:

The process of preserving the data and meanings on tape and the combined transcription and preliminary analysis greatly increased the efficiency of data analysis. The researcher’s transcription, done with the literature review, previous data, and earlier analytic memos in mind, became a useful part of the data analysis and not mere clerical duty. (p. 149)

In addition to interview transcriptions, the researcher maintained records throughout the data collection process that included field notes, descriptions of observations, and post-interview contact summaries. These records also included notes reflecting the researcher's own feelings, reactions, insights, ideas and judgments (Creswell, 1998). Contact summaries, "a single sheet containing a series of focusing or summarizing questions about a particular field contact" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 50), were used as a "rapid, practical way to do first-run data reduction" (p. 51).

Coding is a form of analysis in which data is organized into categories, themes, and patterns. The initial categories and themes were established from the contextual framework, the research questions and the literature review; then revised as additional themes and participant perspectives emerge (Creswell J. W., 2009; Coffee & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Coding was an ongoing process.

Drawing and verifying conclusions, or making meaning from the data and data displays, is a key prong of the interactive process of data analysis. Marshall and Rossman (1999) instruct, "reading, reading, and reading once more through the data forces the researcher to become familiar with those data in intimate ways" (p. 153). Categories, themes, and patterns emerged as data was transcribed, read, reduced, coded, and displayed. This emerging understanding was ultimately integrated into the case study narrative.

Presentation of Findings

This case study examined athletics strategy as part of the overall strategic plan of private, church-affiliated college from the perspective of key actors. It explored the content, context, and process of athletics strategy implementation from the perspective of key actors, at the time of the institution's application for Division II membership.

Case study reports are designed to transport the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail that is not typically found in analytical reporting formats (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The case itself is not a problem or hypothesis (Stake, 1995), however it does serve as the primary unit for analysis. Bogden and Biklen (1998) suggest that the report be built around the major themes that emerge from data analysis. The data, properly collected, analyzed, and coded provide the substance of the case study.

Case study reporting is not storytelling (Stake, 1995) , however, a narrative style (Creswell J. W., 2009) was employed. Data is reported in words, rather than numbers, and quotations from key actors are used to describe their perceptions and experiences.

Actions for Quality and Trustworthiness

Although validity does not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research, it is important to take steps that verify the accuracy and credibility of the case study. Two basic strategies include carefully checking transcripts to ensure that they do not contain obvious errors and constantly checking codes to ensure that a shift in meaning does not occur during data analysis (Creswell J. W., 2009). For this

study, there are a number of intentional actions for quality and trustworthiness that have been incorporated into the methodology, including the use of multiple data sources, member checking, and peer debriefing. In addition, the researcher maintained an audit trail that includes: (1) raw data (e.g., digital recordings, interview notes, and documents), (2) products of data reduction and analysis (e.g., interview transcripts and field notes); (3) products of data reconstruction; and (4) process notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As expected, the use of multiple data sources provided a “fuller understanding” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) of athletics strategy development and implementation at a private, church-affiliated college. Informal observations from the site visit; institutional planning documents and applications for Division II membership; and interviews with key actors were the primary sources of data. The triangulation of data sources allowed the researcher to compare the different perspectives of individual participants and also check for consistency with the published rationale presented in planning documents (Creswell J. W., 1998).

Member-checking afforded participants the opportunity to review interview transcripts and case report drafts where their actions and words were featured (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). Once transcription was completed, participants had the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy.

Peer debriefing was used to enhance the trustworthiness of the case study report. Professional colleagues in the fields of higher education and intercollegiate athletics

reviewed draft copies of the case study report and subsequently posed questions about the study in order to ensure that the account resonates with people other than the researcher (Creswell J. W., 2009). A colleague experienced in qualitative research reviewed the raw data and assessed the conclusions drawn from data analysis. The research has benefitted from their insights.

Researcher Bias Statement

To effectively produce high quality research that is trustworthy, authentic and fair (Patton, 2002), it is necessary that the researcher acknowledge and disclose any presuppositions and bias that he or she may bring from their professional background and prior studies so that they do not unduly influence data collection and analysis. To this end, the researcher strives to position himself as observer (Patton, 2002), one seeking to better understand the phenomenon of athletics strategy at a private, church-related institution. In this role, the researcher is an impartial onlooker concerned with recording the perspectives of individual key actors and accurately describing those perceptions in a meaningful case study report. At the time of this study, the researcher did not have any direct role in the development, implementation, or outcomes of the athletic strategy of the institution.

The researcher's professional background as a former collegiate athletics director and a sport management instructor does require acknowledgement of some inherent bias at the outset of this research. I have served as a part of the NCAA governance structure and

have implemented athletics strategies (e.g., changing conference affiliation, adding sports programs, constructing facilities) at other institutions. My professional experience positions me as a resource for administrators considering such strategies. In this capacity, I have had prior meetings with the President, Executive Vice President, and Athletics Directors at the selected institution discussing the NCAA Division II membership process. The current and former athletics directors have been guest speakers for my Sport Leadership classes.

The researcher is an instrument in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002), thus my presence in interview sessions could influence the reactions of participants. A conscious attempt was made to adopt a position of neutrality throughout the data collection process. The researcher was aware that the process of taking notes may pace the interview by providing non-verbal cues about what is important, while the failure to take notes may send the unintended message that nothing of particular importance is being said (Patton, 2002). For this reason, the researcher relied on tape recordings and attempted to minimize note-taking during interview sessions. The focus was toward engaging the participant in reflective conversation, providing only the prompts and probes necessary to achieve thick, rich data.

In addition to the role of an observer during data collection, the researcher assumed the role of interpreter in the data analysis and report writing phases of this case study. In this role, I adopted a constructivist paradigm (Stake, 1995), attempting to provide readers with meaningful descriptions enabling them to draw their own interpretations from the

perspectives of the key actors. My intent was to allow the data to bear the weight of interpretation: “The data that are collected provide a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 34).

Finally, the researcher casts himself in the role of a learner throughout this case study. My goal was to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon for my own personal and professional growth. There was no hidden agenda in terms of proving any particular theory; rather I sought only a greater understanding of strategy decisions from multiple perspectives in order to enhance my abilities as an educator and administrator.

CHAPTER FOUR

Historical Narrative

The purpose of this study was to examine athletics strategy initiatives that were implemented as an integral part of Cartwright College's transition from a liberal arts junior college to a baccalaureate institution. Specifically, this case study examined changes in athletics alignment, conference affiliation, administrative structure and sport sponsorship that occurred between September 2007 and July 2011. This case study was based in a period of institutional change as the college transitioned from a two-year to a four-year institution. The findings are presented as a historical narrative based on key actor descriptions of the environmental context, the strategic process, and anticipated outcomes of athletics strategy decisions. Three research questions were used to guide this study and provide the framework for this chapter:

1. How do key actors describe the environmental context of athletics strategy implementation at their institution?
2. How do key actors describe the process for forming athletics strategy?
3. How do key actors describe the goals, plans and operational objectives of the athletics strategy adopted by their institution?

A summary of key findings, based upon analysis of the case study in relation to the research questions, will be presented in Chapter Five. Because of the confidential nature of this research, efforts have been made to mask the identities of institutions, athletic

conferences and key actors throughout this report. Nine participants that were significant, by virtue of their leadership positions and their individual influence on strategy formation, are identified by pseudonyms. The remaining participants are identified by their positions, roles or by an alpha-numeric code. A list of the pseudonyms is contained in Appendix D. References to geographical locations have been removed to the greatest extent possible. The dates for key events and other data that is critical to establishing the context of the study have been retained and are included in these findings.

The setting for this study is Cartwright College, a coeducational, church affiliated, liberal arts junior college. In the late 1800s, an itinerant preacher established a residential academy in a quaint village nestled among the tall mountains that form the state border. Attracting students from the surrounding region, the school grew rapidly and, by the turn of the century, had begun offering degrees in business, music, humanities and the arts. In 1915, Cartwright College became a coeducational, liberal arts junior college and formally established its ties with the United Methodist Church.

The history and geography of Cartwright College provide context for understanding the internal environment in which athletics strategy decisions, the focus of this study, were made as the college transitioned from a junior college to a baccalaureate institution. In addition to providing a picturesque backdrop for the campus, the precipitous terrain had served to isolate Cartwright College and significantly influenced the campus culture that was in place in April 2007, when the Board of Trustees named Kelly Clark as the new

President and announced that Cartwright College would become a four-year institution.

Clark, a charismatic state politician with a reputation for transformational leadership, became responsible for leading Cartwright College through a period of dramatic change in institutional mission, organizational structure, and campus culture.

Key Actor Descriptions of the Environmental Context

From President Clark's perspective, her assignment was to return Cartwright College to its roots as a residential liberal arts college. "This is a very historic college and since its inception, it has always been a residential liberal arts college. Campus life, from the very beginning, has been a very important part of the educational program here," she explained. "If you look back several decades, before the highway systems were good, it was truly a remote area. If students were going to come here and thrive, and enjoy life, there had to be a robust campus life and a lot of campus activities."

Early on, college administrators had discovered that a vibrant campus environment was necessary in order to attract and retain students to this remote region of the state. Intramural and intercollegiate athletics had been a part of campus life since those early days, with records of baseball and tennis contests dating back to 1916. Through the years, the small size and remote location of the campus contributed to a strong sense of community, a reputation for academic success, and to alumni loyalty. Faculty members emphasized the unique niche that Cartwright College occupied as a private, church-affiliated institution; the focus on liberal arts education; and a low student-to-faculty ratio

as distinctive cultural features. “Students take to us, they always have,” observed a history professor. “We have a comfort zone that a lot of students really thrive within. You get tremendous brand loyalty from students that come to Cartwright College, it clicks with them.” Another professor describes it in this way:

It is much different from larger schools where you try to keep that distance always between the students and the faculty, and I would presume the staff as well. It is not so much here; it is very different in that way. You know people even if you have not had them in class; you probably know their names, you certainly know their faces. That to me was the biggest difference from other schools where I had been, in terms of the culture. It is a very close knit and very tight little community.

Cartwright College operated in this fashion for nearly a century. Key actors, many of whom are now alumni, were overwhelmingly nostalgic as they provided idyllic descriptions of the campus culture and shared stories of how the local community had rallied to support the college during lean times. Multiple participants repeated the saga of a local boy that attended Cartwright College as a student, participated on the athletic teams and later returned to the college as the baseball coach. This young man would go on to serve as Governor, U.S. Senator and ultimately became a major benefactor for the college. Others shared stories about former students that had gone on to successful careers in the entertainment industry, yet still retained an affinity with the college.

Cartwright College at the Crossroads. Student enrollments and the fiscal viability of private, church-affiliated colleges ebbed and flowed throughout the Twentieth Century. During the lean times, Cartwright College survived by being flexible. Academic programs were added and dropped as dictated by student demand and available funding. On at least four occasions, the Board of Trustees considered the feasibility of abandoning the junior college model and becoming a four-year institution. Each time (in 1945, 1951, 1962 and 1996), the Board reaffirmed the college's commitment to remain a two-year liberal arts institution, even though several private, church-affiliated colleges were making the switch.

As the college entered the new millennium it found itself in a unique position as one of just a handful of private, church-affiliated, two-year, liberal arts schools that remained in operation. Enrollment was stagnant, and students were clamoring for course offerings that were beyond the scope of a junior college. In the words of one faculty member, the college was an anachronism, the relic of a by-gone era. Others on campus refer to the metaphor offered by Dr. Michael Mills, a former provost and the interim president at the time. Dr. Mills noted, "It's like offering people a black and white television. Why would someone pay all this money to come up here for two years?" It was at the urging of Dr. Mills that the college embarked on a comprehensive study and in 2005 issued a report, "*Cartwright College at the Crossroads.*"

This comprehensive study was conducted by a select committee that included faculty members and administrators. Their final report proposed four possible scenarios for

the future of Cartwright College. The first scenario was to remain a two-year liberal arts college; a second scenario proposed a partnership with another four-year college; the third scenario was to become a technical school; and the fourth was to make the transition to a four-year institution. The committee's recommendation to the Board of Trustees was to make the transition to the four-year college model. The Vice President for Institutional Planning, who served on the select committee, recalled that there was some initial resistance to the "*Cartwright College at the Crossroads*" report.

There was quite a bit of pushback for that, not only internally on campus, with some professors who had been here quite a while and were very proud of what we did, because we did it well. But also, the trustees weren't quite ready, they had to be convinced. We had a group, chaired by a state senator who is also an alumnus, help take that conversation to the trustee level and get them comfortable with it.

After more than a year of deliberation, the Board of Trustees approved the recommendation to transition the college from two-year to four-year status and to begin offering baccalaureate degrees. In April, 2007, the Board selected Kelly Clark to serve as incoming president and to lead the change effort. Dr. Michael Mills, the interim president, remained in his role as Executive Vice President and Provost and aided in the transition before leaving to accept another position in the summer of 2009. The leadership of President Clark and Dr. Mills is credited with overcoming the apprehension of alumni and trustees. "They were very careful," recalled one faculty member. "I would say, unrelenting,

in their positive view of the transition to four year – that we could bring everything with us.”

Other participants also shared the perception that President Clark played a critical role in building a consensus for the change. One professor expressed it this way:

Some people were a little concerned about changing the model that drastically from two-year to four-year. Some of the alumni were sort of, ‘I don’t know, because I loved Cartwright College the way it was.’ I believe it was very much due to the leadership of President Clark, who with her political savvy was able to make things happen, I think, in a very positive light. She was able to convince everyone that we could hang on to the culture and the traditions, and bring in the four-year model, which was absolutely necessary. So I think the people who were hesitant – alumni, maybe even some board members and such, were won over by that.

Institutional Culture: In a State of Flux. Since the Board’s decision in April 2007, Cartwright College has been an institution in transition. Key actors describe the internal environment as being “in a state of flux.” The college has added thirteen baccalaureate majors, doubled the size of its faculty, and hired additional staff to support record enrollments. Facility improvements during this period include the construction of a 200-bed residence hall and a new 57,000 square-foot Recreation and Fitness Center. “We are a little overwhelmed with change,” proclaimed one veteran faculty member.

The campus culture was changing as new people bring new programs and new ideas to the campus. A faculty member that arrived on campus in the fall of 2008 observed, “One of the difficulties that I have in trying to identify the culture is that the culture is in flux. You get a sense of where the college was before and you get a sense of where the college is going. It is very difficult to get a sense of the culture of the place at this point.” That faculty member, a music professor described the transition from his perspective:

We are just bombarded on all sides with the amount of work to be done. We’ve almost doubled the number of faculty that we have on campus since I have been here. So, whatever the culture was before, it has been saturated with new faces, new ideas, and new focuses on different degree programs. The institution itself, its former culture, is drifting and going in a new direction.

The creation of new academic programs, the construction of new facilities, the growth in enrollment and the addition of new faculty and staff are visible artifacts of the change that has taken place since the college embarked on the transition to senior college status. Beyond the noticeable shifts in size and mission, are underlying changes in the organizational structure and routine operation of the institution. Roles were redefined and new procedures developed as the college sought accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to award baccalaureate degrees.

The transition to four-year status was well underway when Dr. Ray English, a former college president, replaced Dr. Mills as Executive Vice President and Provost in the summer

of 2009. Dr. English recalled that the campus policy-making procedures were sometimes lacking and that a lot of decisions were being made on an *ad hoc* basis.

This is not unique to Cartwright College ... nothing illegal or anything else; but it was a small institution and sometimes decisions were made and were not widely distributed on campus. Policies were rarely codified; they just sort of popped up. Because we were so small, everybody knew what the policy was. Now we have a procedure whereby policies go up to the President's Leadership Council for adoption and then are put into our electronic policy and procedures manual. That is a little bit of culture change.

The President's Leadership Council (PLC), composed of nine senior-level administrators that meet on a bi-monthly basis, has emerged as the primary policy-making body for the institution. Faced with an increased workload because of the transition, the PLC has developed a formal system for reviewing, formulating and reporting its policy decisions. "We were policy deficient before we went four-year and went through SACS reformation," stated one senior administrator. "I can't tell you the number of policies that we had to redo."

Three new administrators with four-year college backgrounds have joined the PLC since President Clark's arrival in 2007. They brought their professional backgrounds at four-year institutions and their individual perspectives to the planning table, where they interacted with those veteran administrators that remained from the junior college era. "It

really helps to have this influx of outsiders with experience coming in, but you need a balance” declared one veteran administrator, who is also an alumna of the college.

“Without us, none of them know how it was. There are intangible and valuable things to the heritage of the institution, to the culture, that would be totally lost if we weren’t at the table. We would really lose sight of who we were.” Key actor descriptions of the PLC meetings identified communication as a key factor when balancing new perspectives with institutional history. They credit President Clark with establishing an environment that sought input and encouraged dialogue. “We discuss everybody’s area,” explained one administrator. “She will spend as much time as necessary on topics to get full discussions. She challenges us to get out, to meet with people, and to bring recommendations to her. This brought a different dynamic to the campus because we all have our own experiences.”

Coupled with changes in the way that policy is developed and communicated on campus, institutional planning has become a centerpiece of the administrative structure at Cartwright College during the transition period. Prior to 2005, there was no systematic process for planning; the President had appointed planning committees on an *ad hoc* basis, but had not traditionally participated as a part of those committees. The Vice President for Academic Affairs recounts how he and Dr. Mills, the interim president and Provost, sketched out the original structure for the Planning and Assessment Committee (PAC) on a napkin while returning from a SACS meeting in 2005. “Institutional planning was one of the

first things that we realized we had to change if we were going to enter into this experiment to add baccalaureate degree programs,” he explained.

The Planning and Assessment Committee was formed as a standing committee in 2005, with representation from administration, faculty and staff. Under this new structure, the president serves as a part of the committee, but not as the chair. Committee members suggested that having the president involved as *primus inter pares* (first among equals) is valuable, not only symbolically, but in terms of her support, her input, and her ownership of the plans that are developed. “That was a huge shift here for our culture,” asserts one administrator. He adds that although this structure was in place prior to President Clark’s arrival on campus, she has seamlessly assumed this role. “She has done a great job of making everyone comfortable around that table, from the staff representatives, to the faculty, to the administrators; making them feel like we are all peers in this planning process.”

Resistance to Change. Although there were originally faculty members, alumni and trustees that opposed the move to four-year status, the vast majority were ultimately persuaded to come on board. Of the key actors interviewed, none expressed any dissatisfaction with the transition. Most conveyed an attitude of excitement and optimism, even if they did feel a bit overwhelmed by the pace of it all. One veteran faculty member explained, “I wouldn’t say that everyone is delighted with the pace of change which we are

dealing with now. However, I would say that no one I know is saying ‘Gee, I wish we hadn’t done that.’”

While there appeared to be consensus for the transition, there was the recognition that change can be unsettling. “It just turns the institution upside down,” observed a new member of the faculty. “I can’t say that the old culture has been tossed out the window, but there is no way that it can avoid being changed. You would hope that the best things in that culture are surviving.”

Among some of the older faculty, there remained a fear that Cartwright College’s unique identity as a church-affiliated liberal arts college would be lost in the change process. There were those early on who chose to leave the institution rather than stay through the transition. One professor labeled them “old snapping turtles.” He explained that they would go around saying, “This is how it is, this is what we’re doing, and I don’t like this or that.” Some of these veteran faculty members chose to retire rather than go through the transition. The professor concluded, “They thought they were making a major statement by retiring, but it was barely a ripple in the pond. It was just a small handful of those that left; if they thought that was making a big statement it really wasn’t. It was sort of like, OK, bye.”

The Vice President for Academic Affairs observed that anytime an institution goes through a major shift, such as the transition from two-year to four-year, they can expect to experience personnel changes for a variety of reasons:

We were warned about this before we did it, by people who had been through it. There will be some who are near retirement and they will say, "Heck, this is too much work, I'm getting ready to retire." There will be others who don't have the credentials or the abilities to make the shift from two years to four years, and we have to look to replace them. There are others who say, "Darn it, I want Cartwright College to stay the way it was." We saw a little bit of all that. We saw a number of people retire or transition out. That was needed; it helped us to strengthen our faculty. You had some of that element, as opposed to staying here and fighting, they moved out; which helped.

Looking for the "Right Fit." The exodus of old faculty members and the creation of a number of new programs provided an opportunity to bring a number of new people into the institution. The size of the faculty has doubled since 2007, with as many as two dozen new people arriving on campus each fall. This changeover also created an opportunity for the college to be selective in looking for faculty and staff who seem to "fit" the desired culture. A veteran professor expressed it this way, "This isn't free-for-all change, but it is big change that is going to require a lot of transition. It brings opportunity because we want to more or less bring in the good things that we were into this new paradigm." He continued:

One of the things that I would say in our favor is that we look for people who understand that while we are in transition, we are bringing a lot of things with us. I

have been on a lot of search committees, and I am chair of the department, so I have also been looking for some of my own people. You don't just look at their credentials. You look at how they feel about change, and how they feel about the culture of the institution. We intentionally looked for individuals, or tried to determine from individuals in their interviews if they understood what we were doing. It's a big change, but we are also very concerned about our particular institution's culture ... It is very encouraging to have new people come in here with a broader perspective, but then apply it in a much narrower scope by coming here.

According to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, finding the right organizational fit begins with the interview process. The college attempts to interview at least three people for every position that is hired. He elaborated:

One of the important components of the interview process is to talk to them about our mission and the kind of college we are. I think that helped people from the very beginning, who were in the hiring process, to understand, "This is what this college is about, this is what this college is trying to be and to become." I have seen across the board where people are hired, that their goal is in line with ours, they believe in this mission, they bought into it. The orientation retreat prior to school starting helps support that.

Other participants refer to the orientation retreat as a meaningful assimilation activity. For the past three years, new faculty members have met with veteran faculty

members prior to the beginning of classes in the fall. It is an opportunity for them to review the liberal arts mission of the college, to learn something of its traditions and history, and to discuss the strategic vision for the institution. Participants at this retreat meet with the president and senior administrators, and they are introduced to the governance and planning processes. “I would say that’s where they really begin to understand the culture, the environment of the college,” suggested one faculty member. The involvement of senior faculty and staff in the new faculty retreat, particularly the presence of the president, is perceived as symbolic and meaningful according to the Vice President for Academics. “I don’t think you can over estimate the value that comes when you have support from the top down,” he explained.

[President Clark] comes to the retreat and takes the time to get to know new faculty and staff. I have had a lot of faculty say to me, ‘At my former institution, we never had this kind of time with the president.’ It creates that sense of camaraderie from the very beginning and yet you realize this is the leader. She is casting the vision of the college in a very clear way. Yet, there is that sort of feeling that we are in it together, as a team.

Key actors described the environmental context and organizational culture in three distinct frames: the past, the present and the future. They referred to the college as it was, a close knit campus community focused on providing a quality liberal arts education. They described the college as it is – an institution in a state of flux; where the campus culture is

changing as new people are added, new policies are developed, and new systems are put into place. They anticipated what the institution could become as they sought to balance new programs and ideas with core values and time-honored campus traditions.

The Role of Athletics at Cartwright College

This study examines key actor perceptions of athletics strategy, specific actions implemented within the athletics program that are designed to meet the long-term goals and objectives of the institution as a whole. The realignment of the intercollegiate athletics program from the National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA) was inherent in the Board's 2007 decision to become a four-year institution. This necessary change in athletics affiliation sparked a series of strategic actions that are the primary focus of this study. Full examination of athletics strategy from the perspective of key actors requires consideration of the environmental context within which those initiatives were formed and implemented.

The history of intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College dates back to 1916, when the college fielded teams in basketball and tennis. In the 1920s, the college became a member of the Southeastern Athletic Association and, in 1940, joined the National Junior College Athletic Association. Athletics was viewed as an extracurricular activity, and student involvement, as participants and spectators, was considered an essential part of campus life. Basketball was especially popular on campus and received strong community support. "For years basketball was a very important part of our culture," explained a veteran faculty

member. “Old-timers, faculty and alumni, still talk about attending those games. It was a lively part of this community.”

Larry Rogers coached the men’s basketball team from 1947-1969, guiding competitive teams to six state championships during that period. A local student-athlete from that era, later became a faculty member and served as the baseball coach from 1960-1964. This distinguished alumnus, who would ultimately go on to serve as Governor and U.S. Senator, is credited with raising the funds to build the baseball stadium at the college. The tennis team also experienced success during this period, capturing a state title in 1965.

Although athletics has long been a part of campus life at Cartwright College, the commitment to the athletics has been inconsistent. Throughout much of the Twentieth Century, the college did not award athletics scholarships, its athletics facilities were rudimentary, and program funding was meager. Participation fluctuated based on student interest and the availability of coaches. The college did not field baseball teams for nearly thirty years following the 1964 season, and the basketball team was disbanded after Coach Roger’s death in 1969. Key actors depicted institutional support for the intercollegiate athletics as mixed, with professors and administrators often characterized as either “pro-athletics” or “anti-athletics.” A physical education professor described the state of the program when he arrived on campus in 1987:

When I came to Cartwright College, I was a faculty member that did a little bit of everything – men’s soccer and tennis coach, athletic director, intramural director,

and professor of physical education. Athletics when I came here was basically club. They were members of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), but it was club [sports]. That was the way they looked at it, that was the way they treated it. The soccer team my first two years of coaching was on everybody's homecoming schedule. We were awful. It was thought of by the students as a club program. I would have days when we would load up, going five hours to play, and one of the guys would say, 'Oh, I don't think I am going today.' It was awful.

Athletics as an Enrollment Management Strategy. When Dr. James Wayne became president at Cartwright College in 1991, the intercollegiate athletics program was limited to the men's soccer and men's tennis teams. While he is not generally remembered as being "pro-athletics," a number of significant changes were made to the sports program during Dr. Wayne's ten-year tenure. In the 1990s, the college began offering athletics scholarships, its sports facilities were improved, and several new varsity teams were added. Perceptions of the role of intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College also changed under President Wayne's administration. With the allocation of increased financial resources to fund new sports programs came the expectation that the athletics program would contribute to the recruitment and retention of students, or more precisely, of student-athletes. In addition to its traditional role as an integral part of campus life, intercollegiate athletics became increasingly viewed as a component of the overall enrollment management strategy of the institution. Andy Anderson, the baseball coach described this new perspective:

When I first got here the guy who hired me, President Wayne, was not an athletic person at all. He probably had no interest in athletics other than from the business end of it. He was a business guy and he understood that you have to have athletics, and it has to be a money maker for the college. We have got to show a return from the number of students that we are bringing in.

In retrospect, this new paradigm of athletics as an enrollment management strategy was not the result of formal planning, but rather it evolved from a series of separate administrative decisions to add scholarships and fund additional sports. Cartwright College added softball as a varsity sport in 1991, baseball was re-established in 1994, and women's soccer was established in 1997. Often, these decisions to add sports were made at the executive level, and subsequently enacted without broad campus participation. Coach Anderson points to President Wayne's description of the re-establishment of baseball as an example:

He [Wayne] made this statement all of the time. 'When I decided to start baseball, the way I announced it was to go out on the back porch of my house and announce it ...' To me that means that he really didn't want the faculty to be involved in the decision. Basically, it was an under-cover type approach.

Since the 1990s, Cartwright College coaches have been able to combine, or "package," athletics aid from their scholarship budgets with academic scholarships awarded by the financial aid office in order to recruit student-athletes to the institution. This

approach provided coaches with a built-in incentive to recruit prospects with good grades and high SAT scores, while allowing them to offer a more attractive financial aid package to the prospective student-athlete. The availability of competitive financial aid packages has opened the door to a number of talented prospects that desired the opportunity to gain competitive playing experience at a junior college, prior to ultimately competing at the NCAA Division I level.

Since arriving at Cartwright in 1999, Coach Andy Anderson has effectively packaged athletics aid and academic scholarships to build one of the top baseball programs in the National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA). Coach Anderson's teams have won eight conference titles, five regional championships and competed in the NJCAA World Series. During his tenure as head coach, more than 30 baseball players have advanced to the professional level, and an even larger number have gone on to complete their collegiate careers at NCAA Division I institutions.

Recruiting and roster management have become critical responsibilities for coaches operating within this enrollment management paradigm. Coach Anderson maintains spreadsheets that track athletics aid awards and the academic scholarships of his current players and prospective student-athletes. He is attentive to the amount of total institutional aid that is being awarded to current players, the amount that is available for recruiting, and the total revenue that accrues to the institution as a result of the baseball

program. “It’s a numbers game,” he says, producing a computer-generated report. “And right there are all my numbers.”

Other sports programs enjoyed paralleled success since the 1990s, by effectively packaging athletics and academics financial aid to recruit student-athletes. The softball team has claimed two regional championships and advanced to the NJCAA national tournament. The men’s soccer program reached the NJCAA regional tournament on five occasions, earning national rankings in 2008 and 2009. The women’s soccer team has compiled an overall record of 224-39-9 since the program began in 1997, reaching the national semifinals on four occasions. Cartwright College won the 2006 NJCAA Women’s Soccer National Championship.

“We have set target numbers for all of our sports because of the school’s need for enrollment,” explains Susan Shepherd, the women’s soccer coach. “We are helping them [the college] not just athletically, but we are bringing students here that are paying money to be here. We are helping them to survive financially.”

Although success at the national level was rewarding for the players and has brought recognition to the school, Coach Shepherd questions the importance of athletics competitiveness as an operational goal for the athletics program. From her perspective, contributions to campus life and enrollment management remain the primary objectives for intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College.

We have been successful [competitively] in the past, but there were times when I don't know if it really mattered, because ultimately when you had good students, making good grades, that were bringing in money to the school - that was important, and that was success in the school's eyes. That your kids stay out of trouble, that they make the grades, and that your rosters are full."

As the intercollegiate athletics program expanded between 1991 and 2007, it developed its own identity as an athletics department, separate from physical education and the other academic programs on campus. A veteran coach would be identified as the athletics director and given responsibility for the general supervision of the athletics program; however the perception on campus was that each coach was responsible for managing their own program, within the scholarship and budget limitations established by the administration.

The expansion of the athletics program as a strategy for enrollment management did not eliminate the traditional paradigm of athletics as a part of campus life. Student-athletes were integrated into the campus culture; however, as the sports program developed, athletes became increasingly identified by their respective sports teams as "baseball players," or "soccer players," etc. Key actors identified the presence of a dichotomy, which was occasionally manifested in the form of stereotypes.

Athletics vs. Academics. The prevailing attitude on campus toward the athletics program at the time of this study was described as generally supportive, yet certainly not

unanimous. Participant interviews identified distinctions between “the athletics side” and the “academic side” of the institution. Various individuals, particularly administrators and faculty, were described as “pro-athletics,” “non-athletic,” and “anti-athletics” based on their perceived support. These distinctions and labels were often attributed to prevailing public stereotypes of overzealous coaches, indolent athletes, and intolerant faculty members. While generally perceived as inaccurate, there are times when these stereotypes have played out in the form of self-fulfilling prophecies. “I think it is like any college campus,” explained one faculty member. “You’ve got those that are very supportive of athletics, those that will attend the games; even those that don’t attend are very supportive and very understanding of athletics. And you have some that think that athletics has no place in the academic setting whatsoever.”

Student-athletes were identified by their team membership, and that may have served to perpetuate these stereotypes. “Athletics is obviously an easy target,” observed a physical education professor who was the soccer coach. “If Joe of the soccer team is caught drinking the night before, it is going to be, ‘a soccer player was out drinking.’ That is the problem. You are identified by your team. Of course we had our problems. But, I don’t think it was any more than the normal student population.”

Melissa Hilton serves as the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR). She plays a role in the oversight of the intercollegiate athletics program and serves as the liaison between the athletics program and the faculty. Professor Hilton observes that stereotypes can often

be traced back to a negative experience that a professor has had with a particular student-athlete; or encounters with students who were perceived to be student-athletes.

That perception will color their view of student-athletes from then on. If they are built like an athlete; maybe the kid played high school sports but isn't playing here, so that person has an athlete aura. I have heard stories, down the line, of where a professor was upset by a kid's behavior and it would get back to me, 'so and so is perpetuating stereotypes about student athletes.' I would say, 'I have never heard that name before. I am not sure if he is really a baseball player or a soccer player.' I would look them up and sure enough, they would not be a student-athlete.

Although there is agreement that the athletics vs. academics dichotomy, and its accompanying stereotypes, does exist at Cartwright College, key actors suggested that the institution's size is an advantage in terms of bridging the divide between the athletics department and the faculty. "One thing that has helped us here in the past, when we were a two year college, is that there was always a very close working relationship between the faculty and the coaches," explains the Vice President for Academic Affairs. "I have always had the sense from the athletics department that academics came first. That has helped the faculty buy in – to have that sort of support from athletics."

The primary concern of the faculty is the academic performance of the student-athletes, and the general perception is that coaches have done a good job in recruiting student-athletes that fit the institution's admission standards and perform well in the

classroom. The administration, led by President Clark, has been intentional in sharing data that supports this perception, particularly the fact that the retention rate of student-athletes is higher than that of the student body as a whole. When meeting with the faculty prior to the beginning of school each year, she highlights the academic performance of student-athletes and the role of athletics at Cartwright College. The baseball coach notes, “When your president stands up and talks about the value of athletics to the college community, I think that the faculty is going to be more apt to buy into it.”

Key Actor Descriptions of Athletics Strategy Formation

Inherent with Cartwright College’s evolution from a two-year to a four-year institution was a necessary change in the alignment of the intercollegiate athletics program from the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) to either the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) or the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). As the college began discussing options for athletics alignment prior to the fall of 2007, there were very few individuals on campus that had any actual experience working with four-year college athletics. Early conversations related to athletics alignment were muddled, with participants relying largely on anecdotal information. A handful of individuals took it upon themselves to make phone calls and to gather information on the different competitive opportunities that might exist for Cartwright College as a four-year institution; however there was no clear leadership or direction.

President Clark formalized the process in the fall of 2007 by establishing a task force of administrators, faculty and coaches to collect data, gather input and ultimately make a recommendation from among three options for athletics alignment: the NAIA, NCAA Division II and NCAA Division III. One faculty member that served on this task force, also known as the “Transition Committee,” recalls the initial context:

I am not sure that everyone was fully aware of the enormity of what had to happen in athletics. I don’t know that it means they would have hesitated, because we couldn’t hesitate anymore; we needed to make the change to four-year. However, it seemed to me that maybe some of the administrators didn’t quite grasp how huge this component was going to be. This is not something that is stapled on to the process, it is as critical as getting SACS to approve degree programs.

One person who was aware of the enormity of this decision was the athletics director, Mark McNally. McNally had considerable experience with intercollegiate athletics and the NCAA as a referee, a coach and an administrator. Prior to his appointment as coach/athletic director at Cartwright College in 2003, McNally had served 18 years as coach/athletic director at a college in New England, where he guided that school through the transition from NAIA to NCAA Division III. He understood the significance and the complexity of the athletics alignment decision and he had distinct ideas about the proper course of action. Coach McNally and Susan Shepherd, the assistant athletics director and women’s soccer coach, represented the athletics department on the task force.

The committee met during the fall semester, reviewed the alternatives for athletics alignment, made site visits to a number of schools, and, in December 2007, made a recommendation to President Clark. She approved the findings and forwarded this recommendation to the Board of Trustees. The following section describes key actor perceptions of the available alternatives for athletics alignment and the committee's recommendation.

The NAIA. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), founded in 1940, is composed of 282 member institutions - mostly small, private colleges and universities. It is generally perceived as inferior to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Since the mid-1970s, the NAIA has lost nearly half of its members and has had difficulty attracting sponsors, leading many to question its long-term viability (Woverton, 2007). Over the past decade, the NAIA has attempted to differentiate itself from the NCAA with its "Champions of Character," program; however the perception of lower academic standards and loose enforcement policies still persist.

Susan Shepherd, who had played at an NAIA member college, was among the group that researched the NAIA. She presented a report to the committee and the option of NAIA membership was discussed. It was quickly dismissed as less desirable than membership in the NCAA. "I don't have a negative taste for the NAIA," stated Shepherd. "I played at an NAIA college, but that was a long time ago. It was different then and people are jumping out now."

Other members of the coaching staff were more adamant in their disdain for the NAIA. “We didn’t want NAIA; we didn’t fit the NAIA because of the academics. We looked at the NAIA as four-year junior colleges because of their academic requirements,” stated one of the coaches. “I don’t think it was ever seriously considered.”

There was strong consensus among the task force that membership in the NCAA offered more in terms of prestige and the opportunity to align with both peer and aspirant institutions. The public recognition of the NCAA brand was perceived to be an asset in terms of overall student recruitment, as well as attracting a higher quality of student-athlete to the campus. “You are going to get more respect,” explained compliance coordinator Erika Freeman. “Whether it is deserved or undeserved, there is a higher level of respect from the general public for the NCAA institution.” An administrator summarizes the task force’s position on the NAIA:

[NAIA] never emerged as a strong contender because, for one thing, most of our peer institutions and those peer institutions that we want to be like, as we develop as a baccalaureate degree granting institution, were not NAIA. We saw the NAIA in a state of decline, as more and more schools pulled out of it. We also looked at the number of schools in our area that we could play if we were NAIA. It became very clear that the NCAA would be the best fit on all of those levels.

The NCAA. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the oldest, largest and most prominent governing organization for college athletics. It has 1062 member

institutions federated into three competitive divisions (Divisions I, II, and III), each with its own philosophy regarding the scope and structure of intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA sponsors 88 championships in 23 sports and provides participation opportunities to more than 400,000 student athletes.

Division I, the most visible of the three divisions, consists mainly of large, public institutions (NCAA). Stringent membership requirements precluded Division I as an option for Cartwright College, thus it was not explored by the task force. The task force did explore, in depth, the options of Division II and Division III membership.

Division III. NCAA Division III, commonly referred to as DIII, consists of 447 members. Most of these institutions (80%) are private colleges and universities that emphasize intercollegiate athletics as part of a well-rounded collegiate experience and emphasize broad-based participation. While there was overwhelming agreement that the NAIA was not the best fit for Cartwright College, the consideration of NCAA Division II (DII) and Division III was somewhat more contentious. A number of faculty and administrators were attracted to the Division III model which does not offer athletics scholarships and was perceived as being more in line with the academic mission of private, liberal arts colleges. On the other hand, the coaches rallied around Division II because they felt it was the least radical change from what they were accustomed.

In the beginning there was a great deal of support for Division III, particularly its emphasis on the integration of student-athletes into the general student-body and the

opportunity to align with other liberal arts colleges, “aspirant institutions,” that the college sought to emulate as it transitioned to four-year status. However, the task force identified two significant barriers to Division III membership: the scarcity of DIII members in the South and the college’s historic use of athletics scholarships as an enticement in student recruitment.

While there were large numbers of Division III institutions clustered in the Northeast and the Midwest, there were fewer than 10 DIII members within a 250-mile radius of the Cartwright College campus, and only five within a two-hour drive. Several of the private, liberal arts universities that had been identified as “aspirant institutions,” were members of the Division III Southern Collegiate Athletics Conference (SCAC). However, the geographical footprint of the SCAC, at that time, ranged from Atlanta, Georgia to Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The availability of like institutions and conferences has implications in terms of associational benefits (with aspirant schools), convenience of scheduling, travel costs and missed class time. The Vice President for Academics recalled the discussion:

I think initially there was a lot of momentum both in the administration and the faculty to move toward Division III, because there was a real sense that perhaps it better fitted our liberal arts mission. We saw a number of other colleges with good academic profiles that were moving toward DIII or who were in DIII. We visited several different colleges throughout the [region] and beyond as part of our

planning process. A number of those were DIII and spoke very positively about their experience in DIII. So, there was a lot of that momentum up front. But as this task force got into it and actually started looking at what that would look like. 'What are the other DIII schools in our area? What are the conferences that we could be a part of?' It became very clear that, whatever we thought about the academics, the travel would be prohibitive if we went toward DIII.

Division II. Division II is often described as an intermediate level of NCAA competition that exists between the highly competitive programs of Division I and the non-scholarship philosophy of Division III. Its 302 members are almost equally divided between public (52%) and private (48%) institutions. Balance is viewed as the characteristic that distinguishes this level of competition and "Life in the Balance," has been adopted as the Division II strategic positioning platform. Division II awards athletic scholarships and most student-athletes receive some form of financial aid, yet few receive full athletics grants that cover all of their college expenses.

Coach McNally played a pivotal role in pushing Division II to the forefront of the task force discussions. "McNally had been in Division III and he didn't like Division III. His big push and his tilt on the whole thing was Division II," recalled one of the coaches. Coach McNally researched a Division II athletics conference within the region, the Private Colleges Athletic Conference (PCAC). He compiled budget data from those schools and was able to demonstrate that the scholarship costs of going to DII and the PCAC would not be a

substantial increase for Cartwright College. McNally felt strongly that Division II was the appropriate level of competition for Cartwright College as it transitioned into a four-year institution and that going into Division III would be a step backward:

I was in Division III at my former school for twenty-some years. I like the idea of Division II for Cartwright College, because of what we have. We have great facilities, we gave great supporting budgets, and we have great scholarship budgets. I don't think we need to lose that to go to a Division III philosophy, which obviously, is totally different.

Cartwright College had been offering scholarships for student-athletes as part of its overall enrollment management strategy. The coaching staff was experienced in working with the Financial Aid staff to "package" these athletics scholarships with other institutional aid, specifically academic grants, in order to successfully recruit student-athletes. These coaches, several of whom had been at the school for more than a decade, had worked hard to develop their recruiting base and their financial aid strategies. They aligned with Coach McNally and unanimously supported Division II as their preference.

In December 2007, the task force made its recommendation that NCAA Division II provided the best alternative for Cartwright College. The prevailing arguments for Division II were those presented by Coach McNally and the athletics staff: reduced travel costs, less missed class time, the continued ability to award athletics scholarships, and the opportunity to align with the PCAC institutions. With President Clark's endorsement, the

recommendation was presented to and approved by the Board of Trustees in February of 2008.

The Division II Membership Process

With the Board of Trustees' decision that NCAA Division II membership was the preferred strategy for athletics alignment, Cartwright College began the application process for Division II membership in the spring of 2008. By this time, Mark McNally had clearly assumed the principal role in terms of leading the college through the Division II membership process. He had authority by virtue of his position as athletics director, he was the most experienced person on campus in terms of working with the NCAA, and he had greater access to information than anyone else involved in the membership application process.

McNally had made site visits to a number of schools that had recently transitioned from NAIA to Division II as he conducted research for the task force in the fall of 2007. Based on his conversations with those athletic directors and discussions with the NCAA membership services staff, McNally felt encouraged to submit an application and get into the membership pipeline immediately, even though Cartwright College had not been accredited as a four-year institution. After receiving Board of Trustee authorization to pursue Division II membership in February 2008, Coach McNally began preparing the application packet that was due on June 1, 2008.

NCAA Division II Bylaw 20 outlines the membership process and the general requirements for membership. Division II membership is available to four-year colleges and universities accredited by the appropriate regional accrediting agency. General requirements for member institutions include: sponsor a minimum of 10 varsity sports (including at least 5 for women); sponsor one sport in each of three seasons (fall, winter and spring); meet minimum scheduling requirements; and meet minimum financial aid requirements (\$250,000). Schools must apply for membership by June 1 each year. The Membership Committee reviews all applications and has the authority to accept or not accept an institution's application to enter the Division II membership process (2010-11 NCAA Division II Manual).

In 2007, Division II restructured its membership process beginning with those institutions entering after August 1, 2007. Institutions desiring membership in Division II must be accepted into and complete a two-year candidacy period before being invited to enter provisional membership. The provisional membership period is a minimum of one year. In addition, the new legislation allowed the Management Council, on recommendation of the Membership Committee, to establish an annual limit on the number of eligible institutions that may enter the process. The legislation required that all applications for membership be sponsored by an active member institution or conference.

In addition to the general membership requirements, Division II has established certain expectations regarding the proper organizational structure for prospective

members. In 2002, the Division II Athletic Directors Association developed the *Model Division II Athletics Program* document that outlines 21 guiding principles. Among these 21 principles are: a full-time athletics director without other major responsibilities; the identification and involvement of a Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR); the creation of a Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC); a full-time athletics compliance officer; and a strategic plan that identifies how athletics enhances the mission of the campus (Appendix B – Guiding Principles). This model was linked to the Division II Strategic Positioning Platform that was adopted in 2007 and the 21 principles evolved into expectations that were included as part of the membership application as “minimum requirements” for schools applying to candidacy.

Four Applications for Division II Membership

The first application, submitted in June 2008, was denied, as were subsequent applications in 2009 and 2010. In June 2011, the college submitted its fourth application for membership, one which demonstrated that it met all minimum requirements and was in full compliance with each of the 21 principles. At this point, Cartwright College was advanced into the two-year candidacy stage. This narrative describes each of the four applications and key actor perceptions of the membership process at each stage.

The First Application. The NCAA Membership Committee denied the first application, on the basis that Cartwright College was still operating as a junior college and had not received SACS accreditation for its baccalaureate programs. The perception

expressed by some on campus was that this first application was hastily assembled. The information was incomplete and the finished presentation was “really amateurish.” Apparently the required materials were submitted in bulk, bound by rubber bands.

Although not completely surprised by the NCAA decision, administrators were disappointed because they felt that they had been encouraged to apply by NCAA staff.

President Clark reflected on the first application:

We explained to them that we have submitted our documentation to the accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), but that it would not be acted on until December 2008. But they encouraged us to go ahead and apply, which is part of this frustration you will hear me express because, in hindsight, I guess they laughed at us. But we would have never applied had we not gotten encouragement directly from NCAA staff. So we submitted our first application in June 2008 and were summarily turned down because we were not a four-year school yet. We were in the pipeline [for SACS accreditation], but it hadn't been approved.

The Second Application. In December 2008, Cartwright College received SACS accreditation and began to offer baccalaureate programs in the fall of 2009. With the accreditation barrier removed and a full year to prepare their application materials, administrators were optimistic that Cartwright College would be admitted into candidacy for Division II membership. In January 2009, Coach McNally and Dr. Mills, the former

Provost, attended a membership meeting with NCAA staff in conjunction with the NCAA Convention. Although the NCAA does not generally provide specifics outlining why applications are denied, McNally and Mills were advised of some specific requirements that had to be in place prior to consideration for membership. Some structural changes in the athletics department were required, including: a Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR); a full-time Sports Information Director (SID); and a full-time athletics compliance officer. The college was also made aware of the requirement for a winter sports program, which it lacked.

In preparation for its second application, the college addressed these deficiencies, as well as the other criteria identified in the 21-point model program. Melissa Hilton, a new communications professor who had experience working with the athletics academic support program at her previous institution, was named as the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR). In February 2009, the "Transition Committee" evolved into the Intercollegiate Athletics Advisory Committee (IAAC) and was formally added to the institution's standing committee structure. Other committees required by NCAA legislation were formed: the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), the Athletics Compliance Committee, and the Athletics Aid Appeals Committee. Coach McNally, using models obtained from other Division II institutions, developed a Student-Athlete Handbook and an Athletics Policies Manual. During the spring, the college announced the SID and Compliance Coordinator positions, interviewed candidates, and hired individuals to fill

those positions in July 2009. The college also announced plans to construct a new recreation facility that would include a basketball arena. Head coaches for men's and women's basketball were hired for the 2009-10 academic year to recruit players and to prepare for competition during the 2011 season.

Cartwright College submitted its second application for Division II membership in June 2009 and was again denied. Indirectly and unofficially, the college received word that the application had been denied because they did not have the required winter sport and, although the staff positions had been budgeted, the people were not in place. Coach McNally was frustrated by the membership committee's decision:

I come from the NCAA of years back when they gave you time. They took you in and they gave you time. Now, you weren't always guaranteed full membership, but you had a period of time to get your program to the model that they were looking for. Somewhere along the line, in these most recent years, the NCAA has changed this philosophy. The NCAA will tell you that growth is what they want; they want to grow, but they want just so much in place right now. Our reason was lack of the sport, but other schools have been rejected for other reasons. The committee is made up of athletics directors and conference commissioners, so they know what they are looking for. They can compare us to their own institutions and say, 'They are just not there.' Everything can be in place – who knows what the next reason may be.

Cartwright College appealed the decision in the summer of 2009, thinking that perhaps the membership committee did not fully understand the college's plans to add men's and women's basketball as winter sports. "We put into our application that we had hired the basketball coaches, therefore we thought we had met the criteria," recalled President Clark. "In our appeal we submitted the blueprints of our building and the contract for financing it. Is this what we are missing? We were stabbing in the dark, we don't know. Well, they denied our appeal."

The Third Application. The structure of the athletics department changed considerably during the summer of 2009, as a number of new positions were filled. Head coaches for men's and women's basketball, each with NCAA Division I coaching experience, were hired to begin the process of building those two programs. A full-time Sports Information Director was hired and public relations efforts, notably the institution's athletics website, were enhanced. Erika Freeman joined Cartwright College as compliance coordinator in July 2009, coming from Sunbelt State University where she had served as compliance coordinator during that institution's transition from NAIA to NCAA Division II.

The changes that were taking place in the athletics department mirrored the environment across the entire campus. New systems and structures were emerging with the addition of new administrators, their divergent experiences and their perspectives. Ray English came on board as Executive Vice President and Provost in the fall of 2009, bringing with him a wealth of experience as the former President at Border State University, a NCAA

Division I institution. Dr. English assumed administrative oversight over the athletics program and immediately became an influential voice in athletics-related matters. The new Vice President for Advancement, a former student-athlete and an advancement officer at the Division I level, also contributed to discussions among the President's Leadership Council. He observes:

I think it helps the people that were here for so long to see a different side of something that they weren't used to. The people that were here, and especially Kelly Clark as a new president, really have never dealt with athletics before.

President Clark needed a lot of input from people that knew what they were talking about, so she could make some decisions.

In February 2010, President Clark made the decision that the Director of Athletics would become a full-time, stand-alone position without any coaching responsibilities. The appointment of a full-time administrator to serve as AD has been a prevailing trend within all levels of NCAA athletics for some time, especially as the emphasis on institutional control has strengthened in recent decades. While there remain a handful of Division II schools with ADs that serve dual roles, these are isolated cases involving existing members. The requirement that the AD be a full-time administrator without other major responsibilities is one of the 21 guiding principles (Appendix C) and has become an expectation for new members. "By this time, the only thing perhaps we are missing is that we didn't have a full-

time athletic director,” recalls President Clark. “Although that had not been emphasized as much to us, you could see that was coming.”

Coach McNally, given a choice, reluctantly elected to relinquish his athletic director responsibilities in order to continue coaching:

The NCAA model calls for a stand-alone athletic director. I don’t know that is necessary, but that is the system and that is the model. I knew when we first started this, at some point or time it was going to come to that decision. Had we gotten in the first year, then I don’t know that I would have made the decision that I made.

But, with a stand-alone AD right now, the total focus is on NCAA Division II and running a DII athletics program. So, from that standpoint I can understand it.

I still would have liked to have kept both hats. But it was my decision to take softball and keep that. I look at it from a selfish standpoint, because I liked being an athletic director and having coaching responsibilities. I had done both at a Division III institution for over 25 years and we were able to get it done. However, I can say it [being AD] is a full-time job.

In March, the college announced the search for a new Director of Athletics. After conducting interviews with several candidates, Rusty Erwin, the AD at neighboring North Shore University (NSU) was selected to fill this position. Erwin had successfully guided the transition of NSU’s athletics program from the NAIA to NCAA Division II and the Regional Athletics Conference in 2006. With more than 20 years of experience as a coach and

athletics director, it was anticipated that he would bring local recognition, a solid reputation, and a wealth of knowledge about the NCAA membership process and the RAC to the position.

The transition in leadership to a full-time AD would not take place until July 2010, thus the responsibility for coordinating the 2010 membership application still rested with Coach McNally. However, there was broader campus involvement in the preparation of supporting documentation with members of the IAAC, the Planning and Assessment Committee, and the President's Leadership Council all contributing to the effort. The Vice President for Planning helped organize the presentation, "I went through and looked at every single question, every piece of evidence, and linked the appendices. I felt we answered every question – budget information, admissions, even the contests that we were about to play. You name it, it was there." President Clark herself played a direct role in completing the application and reviewing the final product:

We really went all out to make sure we had this perfect binder and everything was organized and tabbed. We thought "absolute no-brainer," now we've got basketball teams, we have submitted our roster with players, the facility is built – we submitted pictures of all of that, we've got a full-time athletic director. We are ready to finally get in. They turned us down, again.

Frustration with the Membership Process. In July 2010, Cartwright College received word that their application for Division II membership had been denied. Once again there

were no specific reasons for the Membership Committee's decision; however *ex parte* communications with committee members suggested that the decision was made because the basketball teams had not yet completed a season of competition. "I am personally so aggravated and frustrated at the process, because it is so ridiculously unhelpful to an applicant," declared President Clark as she recounted the ordeal. Others on campus echoed this frustration, describing the NCAA as mysterious and even capricious. "It's like your old-timey good ol' boys club – the cigar clubs," explained one coach. "If they want you to be a member, then you are going to be a member. If they don't want you to be a member, they don't have to give you a good reason why they don't want you to be a member."

Administrators and faculty contrasted the NCAA membership process with their recent experience with SACS accreditation. "SACS isn't fun to deal with, but they have a very clear list of core requirements and comprehensive standards that you have to meet. Both can be very frustrating," explains the Vice President for Institutional Planning. "However, SACS at least lets you know, if you are not up to par, where they expect you to be. They give you feedback and opportunities to address your issues."

Failure to gain entry into the NCAA membership process on the third attempt left the athletics program in a unique position as "neither fish nor fowl." With upper classmen on their rosters for 2010-2011 season, the college could no longer compete as a member of the NJCAA; however they had no athletics affiliation as a four-year institution. Without some affiliation, scheduling the necessary number of contests against four-year institutions

would be challenging. “We right now are a school without a country, we have no place to hang our hat,” declared Coach McNally. “Until we can hang our hat with the NCAA, we can’t take the next step which is to find a viable conference for our athletics program.”

Three years into the transition from junior college to a four-year institution, key actors were frustrated that they had been unable to secure alignment for the athletics program. Three times the college had applied for membership in NCAA Division II, and three times they had been denied. During this process, significant changes were implemented to bring the athletics program into alignment with the Division II membership requirements and the expectations for a model program outlined in the 21 Guiding Principles document. The addition of new administrators and staff that had experience working with the NCAA governance structure provided different perspectives and broader understanding of the process. Erika Freeman, the new Compliance Coordinator who had been a part of Sunbelt State University’s transition from NAIA to NCAA Division II described it as “black and white.” She explained, “We were still in the process of adding our winter sport and until that happens, until we have a season of competition, there is no leeway. It has been an interesting kind of up and down, where we have done everything that we can. We have no control over the fact that it just takes time to start new programs.”

The Fourth Application. The new athletics director, Rusty Erwin, arrived on campus in July 2010, just days before the college received word that the third application for Division II membership had been denied. He had recently guided North Shore University

through the Division II membership process and that experience gave him instant credibility as he assumed leadership of the athletics program at Cartwright College. Erwin provided a new perspective and a different interpretation of how to best navigate the membership process. It was a different approach.

Rusty Erwin had an immediate impact on the day-to-day operations of the athletics department, the perception of the athletics program throughout the campus, and on the Division II membership application process. The hiring of a full-time athletics director had symbolic significance because of his increased visibility on campus, his participation in strategic planning and policy formation, and his oversight responsibility for all sports programs. “It makes things a little more formal,” explained Melissa Hilton, the Faculty Athletics Representative. “I think it allows the entire campus community, faculty and otherwise, to see that this is a serious change. That it is more than just talk. It lends credibility to the program and to the changes that we are making.”

The athletic department’s voice on the Planning and Assessment Committee and the President’s Leadership Council was enhanced with the regular participation of a full-time AD on those committees. Erwin’s administrative background and his experience working with the NCAA and the Regional Athletics Conference added to his credibility. The baseball coach asserts that having Rusty Erwin at the table increased the respect that the athletics department received across campus: “It gives you someone that the administration already trusts. They are the ones that hired him; they trust him.”

Along with changes in the day-to-day operations and the perception of the athletics department, came changes in the way that the college approached the membership application process. “There is a shift,” states the women’s soccer coach. “I feel a shift in the competitive drive in wanting us to be there. He [Erwin] is steering the ship and he has got ideas that our administration is open to listening to. I feel like it is taking us to a completely new level that maybe we didn’t have before; there is a lot more direction. When he speaks, they are listening.”

Erwin’s experience with the NCAA membership process and his contacts with the Regional Athletics Conference (RAC) were influential in determining three new tactical approaches as the college prepared to submit its fourth application for Division II membership: 1) outside consultants would be employed to guide the college through the application process; 2) the athletics program would immediately begin operating in full compliance with NCAA Division II legislation; and 3) Cartwright College would enlist the endorsement of the Regional Athletics Conference (RAC) in the application process.

“One thing that you have got to do, that you need to do is hire consultants – somebody that knows what they are doing, this is critical,” explained Erwin. “You need somebody with the expertise. Someone that has had experience with it time after time, and someone that has been successful at it, giving you advice.” In the fall of 2010, the college retained the services of Athletics Consulting Services (ACS), an established firm that

specializes in guiding schools through the Division II membership process. North Shore University and Sunbelt State University were among their former clients.

The second tactic Erwin recommended was a mandate to immediately begin full compliance with NCAA Division II legislation. Erwin had successfully employed this approach at North Shore University during that institution's transition from NAIA to NCAA Division II. A rules education program was established for the athletics staff and coaches were required to pass the NCAA Coaches' Certification Test prior to recruiting off campus. Athletes that did not meet NCAA eligibility standards for the 2010-11 academic year were withheld from competition. Although this stringent action was not required, and it would negatively affect a few athletes, senior administrators were persuaded that the mandate demonstrated the institution's full commitment to operate as a Division II institution. Describing the decision, President Clark explained, "We are going to be able in our application next summer to say that we have already had a full year of playing under these [Division II] rules, and here is the documentation to show that we have done that."

The third tactic was to establish relationships with an athletic conference that would sponsor the college's membership application. As a Division II athletic director, Rusty Erwin recognized the political advantages that having a conference endorsement provides for institutions as they are being considered by the membership committee. While conference membership is not a criterion for Division II membership, it is a factor that may be used to differentiate between institutions applying for membership. The current expectation is that

institutions provide a plan to be affiliated with a Division II conference by the end of candidacy year two, however, Erwin was aware of growing sentiment among the Division II leadership that conference affiliation should become a minimum requirement for membership.

Erwin had been a part of the Regional Athletics Conference and had established contacts throughout the league. The RAC had supported North Shore University during its transition to Division II, and smoothly integrated NSU into the league once they received NCAA status. Once on board as Athletics Director, Erwin began refocusing attention toward the Regional Athletics Conference the membership destination for Cartwright College. He sought to have the conference's endorsement when the fourth application was submitted to the membership committee. "We have completely shifted our focus now toward the RAC," stated President Clark. She elaborated:

The RAC has been very encouraging and open to having us as a member because of their current expansion plans, where they think that we will fit in well. We had looked at the RAC a bit fearfully, because you could see that the RAC schools were all significantly larger than we were. Most of them were state colleges. And we had this perception, which turns out not to be accurate, that they could have just trounced us in resources. Rusty really helped us evaluate the facts about the RAC. While many of the schools, most of the schools, were a good bit larger than us in

enrollment, the truth is that we were ahead of the majority of schools in our budgets – our scholarship budgets and our program budgets.

With the leadership of a full-time athletics director, the guidance of a reputable consulting firm, a mandate for Division II compliance, and the endorsement of the Regional Athletics Conference, Cartwright College prepared to submit its fourth application for Division II membership. Cartwright College played a full four-year college schedule in all sports during 2010-11. On November 13, 2010, the men's basketball team played their first game. The women's team opened the season two days later, hosting North Shore University. Both teams played complete schedules against four-year institutions, with the men finishing 5-21, and the women compiling an 11-13 overall record. On May 7, 2011, Cartwright College conferred its first baccalaureate degrees to a class of 40 graduating seniors.

Division II Candidacy. On July 12, 2011, Cartwright College received notification that the NCAA Membership Committee has accepted their application and that the institution was approved to enter the first year of candidacy for Division II membership. In making the announcement, President Clark stated: "Our athletic department has worked diligently in leading this endeavor, and this achievement is a significant milestone in our on-going transformation to a four-year college. We know that NCAA membership will attract many talented student-athletes to Cartwright College."

“Many individuals worked long and hard to make this happen, but President Clark should be the person most recognized for her vision, commitment and support during this process,” remarked Rusty Erwin. He added, “The next step for Cartwright College is to immediately begin work to complete the process for membership in the Regional Athletics Conference.

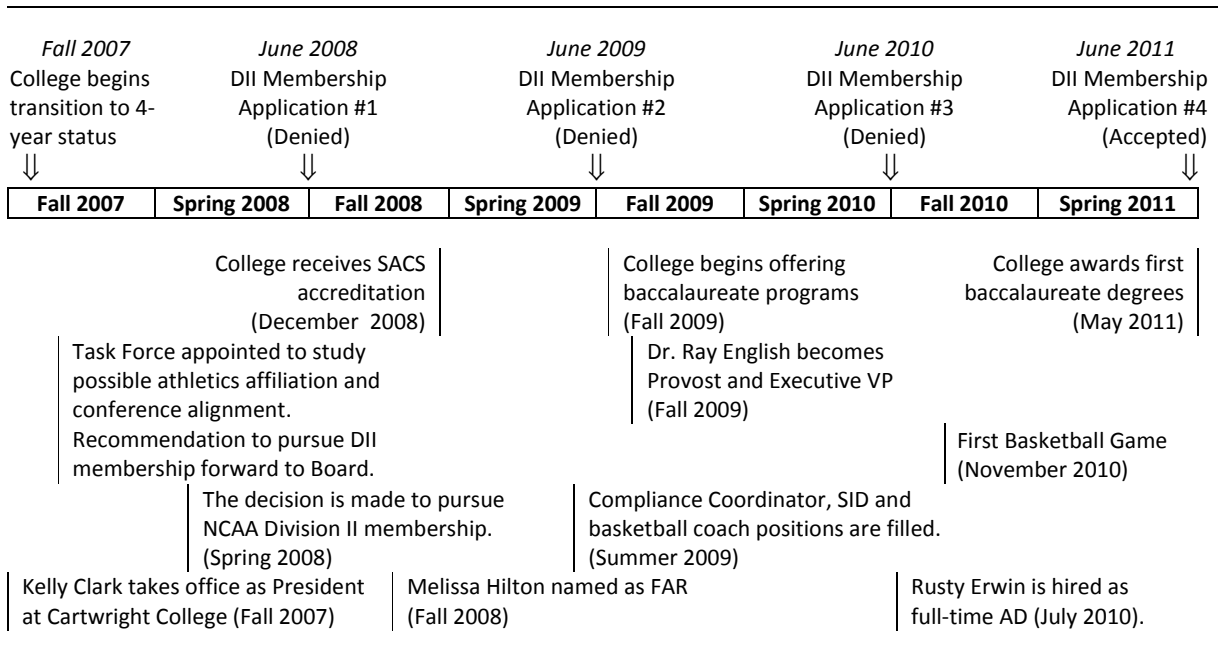


Figure 4.1 Cartwright College Division II Membership Timeline

Key Actor Descriptions of the Goals and Objectives of Athletics Strategy

For Cartwright College, the formation and implementation of athletics strategy was a dynamic and continuous process. Key actors explored available alternatives for athletics alignment, selected NCAA Division II as their preferred membership destination, and submitted four applications before being approved for candidacy in July 2011. This process occurred within the context of momentous institutional change as the college concurrently transitioned from junior college to four-year status, increasing in enrollment size and expanding the academic program. The organizational structure and internal procedures also changed as new faculty and administrators, with four-year college backgrounds, were added to the college. Their divergent experiences and perceptions blended with those of original actors to create new understandings of the athletics strategy and its desired objectives.

Key actors described the anticipated outcomes of athletics strategy in terms of three operational objectives: 1) the desire to align with aspirant and peer institutions, those that Cartwright College sought to model both academically and athletically; 2) the increased visibility associated with membership in the NCAA and the Regional Athletics Conference; and 3) competitiveness as measured by athletics results versus conference opponents.

Alignment with Aspirant and Peer Institutions. The desire to associate with other private liberal arts colleges became an important consideration in early discussions pertaining to athletics alignment and conference affiliation. Key actors used “aspirant

institutions,” to describe those schools that the college sought to emulate as it transitioned to four-year status. “What we are trying to do is position Cartwright College with ...,” explained the Vice President for Advancement while reciting a list of aspirant colleges. “In this region, there is not a really good small college that stands out. I think that is the kind of niche we are trying to fill here.”

The task force formed to explore the available alternative alignment expressed little interest in the NAIA largely because none of the institution’s aspirant institutions were members of the NAIA. “It was just sort of staying on par with where we were without giving us a lot of challenge, incentives to get better, to rise to a higher level of competition,” stated President Clark. Although there were a number of aspirant institutions identified among the private, liberal arts colleges that compete in NCAA Division III, the task force concluded that the geographical separation would require undue missed class time and excessive travel costs.

The label “peer institutions,” is a much broader term that key actors employed to identify those schools that share a similar mission (e.g., private, church-related liberal arts colleges); a common geography (e.g., in-state schools); or those institutions that they regularly compete against for recognition and resources. It is a relative term, one based on key actor perceptions and one that may shift in relation with changes in context.

The Private College Athletics Conference (PCAC) is a group of ten private, liberal arts colleges, similar in size and athletics philosophy, that compete at the NCAA Division II level.

Although Cartwright College is situated outside of the conference's current three-state footprint, its close proximity to the confluent border of these three states made it the "right fit" from Coach McNally's perspective. His presentation for Division II membership was supported with financial data obtained from his visits to PCAC institutions, and it was the opportunity to align with these "peer institutions," that helped to influence the task force's recommendation. A member of the task force recalled, "Those schools seemed to be a lot more like us in the size, the costs, and the academics. We looked at the travel, the costs, all of those things. We felt as though we fit the PCAC, and we thought they fit us more."

Whether it was due to the geographical location, the fact that the college did not field a football team, or perhaps some other factor, the PCAC did little to encourage Cartwright College as a prospective member. Administrators complained that they received the "brush-off" from the PCAC, and that the new PCAC commissioner would not even return their telephone calls. Cartwright College submitted its first three applications for Division II membership without the endorsement of a conference sponsor. In 2010, the participation of Dr. Ray English and Rusty Erwin in concert with emergent interest from the new RAC commissioner, led to a shift in focus toward the Regional Athletics Conference. Susan Shepherd, the women's soccer coach, described this change in focus:

Once we hired Rusty Erwin, our new athletic director, the RAC would take a look at us, and their commissioner is interested in us. All of a sudden, there is a new conference that we shied away from for a while, simply because it was mostly public

schools and we didn't think that we fit that. All of a sudden they are interested in us ... We have changed our mind back and forth just depending on the information that has continued to come in when meeting with the conference.

The RAC currently has 13 members, 12 public universities and 1 private, located in five southeastern states. Seven of these institutions are located in the same state as Cartwright College. The conference currently sponsors championship competition in thirteen NCAA Division II sports, but does not compete in football. The RAC endorsed the college's 2011 membership application, and has indicated its intention to add Cartwright College as its fourteenth member. With this addition, the RAC will be able to segment into two divisions with six public schools and a private institution in each. Cartwright College and neighboring North Shore University are expected to become travel partners, an arrangement which is viewed as advantageous in terms of scheduling and cost containment.

Key actors perceive that the geographic proximity of the RAC members offers benefits for Cartwright College in terms of student recruitment. "Right now, 85% of our students come from in-state," explained President Clark. "From a competitive standpoint, our students are going to know the RAC schools better than they would know the PCAC schools." The men's basketball coach suggested that affiliation with the RAC offers advantages in the recruitment of student-athletes:

If we are talking with a student athlete and we mention schools in the state, they can relate to that. But if we start expanding our membership in terms of athletics,

into conferences outside of the state where these student-athletes who we are recruiting do not recognize those schools, it may become a more difficult recruit for us. So, I think we are going to have to establish who we are, what we want to be, and where we want to go. And if that is going to be to stay in the state, and become a conference member in this state, then that may be a positive for us.

Increased Visibility. Key actors also identified increased visibility as an anticipated outcome for the intercollegiate athletics program as Cartwright College pursued membership in NCAA Division II and alignment with the Regional Athletics Conference. Visibility was described not only in terms of media exposure for student-athletes and athletics teams, but also in terms of increased awareness of the institution as a four-year college. To some, increased visibility equates to growth, with tangible outcomes for institutional advancement, community involvement, and student recruitment. A faculty member described his perspective of the college's athletics strategy:

Looking at this somewhat pragmatically, I believe that a lot of what is behind the administration's reasoning is visibility. That you are going to be on more people's radar screens, where it would not normally be. Even though it is in very small point size, if Cartwright College's name is showing up in the weekly basketball stats, in the newspapers, and on internet sites around the state – that is the type of advertising that many institutions don't feel that they can afford to do without.

Administrators identified the college's decision to add basketball as a varsity sport as an opportunity to increase visibility for the athletics program and the institution. Basketball was the flagship sport on campus in the 1960s, and there is anticipation that the reinstatement of basketball will resonate with alumni, faculty and the community. "We had quite a successful program here. Old-time faculty members and alumni still talk about those days," recalled one administrator. "Just think about the community enhancement that comes through a sport like that during those winter months. You get a large portion of the student body together along with the faculty and community at large in that arena. It helps to build community. It's a social event."

The Vice President for Advancement expressed his excitement for the enthusiasm that has accompanied the reinstatement of the basketball program, and his perception that increased visibility from membership in the RAC will generate growth in institutional giving. "Increasing athletics visibility is great for the campus in general, but especially for advancement. It opens you up to some other donors, or potential donors, that may be able to help you," he declared. "It just gives you a better opportunity to sell yourself as a college and also to connect with people that were not connected in the first place."

The increased visibility of the athletics program is perceived to be a valuable tool for student-recruitment. The athletics program is noticeably featured on the school's website and in recruitment literature. "This institution wants to grow, it needs to grow. Athletics is certainly a way that most institutions assist that growth," observes a faculty member. He

goes on to add that a well-rounded sports program, particularly baseball and softball, draws large numbers of students to the campus. It also provides a conversation topic for admissions recruiters, and serves as a point of entry into the high schools, particularly into some of the private high schools in the Capital City area. One administrator explained how a successful athletics program can contribute to student recruitment in general: “You know, athletics is usually the first way in. You start getting some baseball players, and then other players coming and then other students. It is kind of a trickle effect.”

Competitiveness as an Athletics Objective. Competitiveness, measured by athletics results against conference opponents, emerged as a stated objective for the intercollegiate athletics program as key actors explored membership in the Regional Athletics Conference. Although Cartwright College experienced competitive success as members of the NJCAA, winning conference games and advancing into the regional and national play-offs, coaches realized that they face a different level of competition as a four-year institution. “It is going to be harder to compete, it is going to be harder to win,” said Andy Anderson, the baseball coach, as he discussed the change. “When you go into the Regional Athletics Conference, it is like the best in Division II. They fully-fund [athletics scholarships], they win national championships, they do it all.”

Coach Anderson explained that the transition from a junior college baseball program will take time and that it requires a paradigm shift. Players will now be recruited with the idea of retaining them for four years, rather than advancing them to Division I programs

with their associate's degree. Recruiting and eligibility requirements will be governed by NCAA regulations that are more stringent, and more complex than those of the NJCAA. And, the model for packaging athletics aid with institutional academic aid that has been used to attract baseball players in the past is being revised. Anderson likens it to having a totally new job. "It is a totally different animal," he stated.

Key actors anticipate that the level of competition will increase and expectations will be higher as the college moves to a higher level of athletics competition. "I don't want to be everybody's homecoming game," declared Rusty Erwin. "When you talk about the Regional Athletics Conference, everyone knows how strong the RAC is. Well in my mind, if we are going to have a strong athletics program, I want to be able to compete one day for national championships."

This goal of competing for national titles is consistent with the objectives of most upper echelon RAC members, public institutions that fund athletics scholarships at the maximum level. In contrast, the PCAC, composed entirely of private schools, places a cap on athletics aid that is perceived to place its teams at a disadvantage in regional and national competition. This distinction is introduced because the emphasis on athletics aid represents a paradigm shift for Cartwright College.

As the institution explored alternatives for athletics alignment, the institutional objectives for the athletics program at Cartwright College were often expressed either in terms of the program's contribution to campus life, or as part of the college's enrollment

management strategy. Administrators recognized that the increased excitement and visibility which accompanies successful teams contributed to overall public perception of the institution. “We have always considered athletics a big part of our campus life and a big recruiting draw” stated President Clark. “Our admissions recruiters will tell you that if they go out of state to college fairs, the two things that people will generally come up to the table and ask about are our baseball and music programs, which have just phenomenal reputations.”

This does not suggest that competitiveness was in any way de-emphasized. However, the addition of basketball as a varsity sport and the shift in focus toward membership in the RAC has sparked discussions concerning the allocation of athletics scholarships and the ability of the college to successfully compete against public institutions.

Like many private institutions, Cartwright College had traditionally limited the allocation of athletics aid and encouraged coaches to package academic scholarships and other institutional aid in order to recruit student-athletes. The coaches were familiar with this packaging model and originally believed that they would be unable to compete head-to-head against the public institutions in the RAC because of the differences in financial aid. As an athletic director in the RAC, Erwin recognized the differences in the competitive levels and the significance that financial aid policy has on competitiveness. He emphasized the need to restructure the allocation of athletics aid in order to better align Cartwright College

with the other institutions in the RAC. President Clark was receptive to the goal of regional and national competitiveness and the need to re-evaluate the athletics aid model.

One thing that I learned from Rusty, that I had not really appreciated, was the caps that the PCAC put on various sports compared to the RAC and what that really meant for the competitiveness of the program. Rusty was helpful in saying that you might do well in a conference with those caps, you could win your conference, but once you got out of the conference your ability to win a national championship is going to be hindered. And all of our coaches are sitting around the table saying – “We want to win a national championship.”

While they endorse competitiveness as a desired outcome, some coaches worry that changes in the way that financial aid is distributed and awarded may alter their ability to attract the quality of athletes they need to be successful. Among this group are coaches that have served at the college for several years. “I think that you will find divided opinions of what we would like to see,” states one veteran coach. “Some of us are very strong about maintaining the total package of academic, athletics, and state aid.”

Although providing athletics scholarships at the NCAA maximum equivalency (10 scholarships) enables men’s and women’s basketball to equitably compete with the public schools in the RAC; the implications for other sports remains unknown. Baseball, softball and soccer have lower scholarship equivalencies in relationship to their squad sizes. For example, the NCAA Division II maximum equivalency for women’s soccer is 9.9 scholarships,

whereas there may be 22 or more players on the team. “That completely changes what we do, and to tell you the truth, for me and my program, I was really nervous to hear that,” stated the Susan Shepherd, the women’s soccer coach. She further notes:

Some sports feel better about it than others, simply because of the numbers that the NCAA gives them. If you are fully funded and you have scholarship athletes on the bench, you are going to be OK. Half of our players are walk-on. The ones filling up our rosters have been non-scholarship kids that get academic monies. If that changes, rosters are going to get smaller. I think that will happen across the board for most sports. Then I think it is going to be a talking point – if that is a negative when the school sees our rosters getting smaller.

The women’s soccer coach explains that a change in the allocation of athletics aid may have unintended consequences not only in terms of roster size, but also in the type of student-athlete that is recruited. “Athletically, it is going to change our level of play. We are going to see transition to stronger, faster, tougher, bigger bodies and stronger mindsets. We are seeing a little bit of that already.”

These discussions of competitiveness as an objective of athletics strategy appear limited to the athletics staff and senior administration. There was little discussion of changes in the financial aid model among the faculty; however coaches expressed the concern that changes in the recruiting philosophy could have an impact on the academic qualifications and ultimately the classroom performance of student-athletes. The increased

attention to competitiveness and changes in the allocation of financial aid may ultimately serve to promote the athletics vs. academic dichotomy and could have consequences in terms of campus culture.

Conclusion

This chapter examined key actor perceptions of athletics strategy at Cartwright College between 2007 and 2011, as the institution transitioned from a junior college to a four-year institution. Perception influences the way that individuals organize and interpret information in order to give meaning to their environment and to explain their actions. Athletics strategy decisions at Cartwright College were developed and implemented based on key actor perceptions of reality; interpretations that differed depending on individual personalities, motives, experiences and expectations.

The findings indicate that athletics strategy was not the result of a single idea, or action. Likewise it was not the work of one group or individual. Strategy emerged as the result of a number of independent decisions that were influenced by perceptions of the internal and external environmental context. Each strategic decision had impact on subsequent decisions that were made. For example, the decision to transition to four-year college status necessitated a change in athletics affiliation. The decision to pursue NCAA Division II membership required changes in the administrative structure of the athletics department. The decision to hire a full-time athletics director is associated with a shift in

focus toward the RAC as a membership destination, an increased concern for competitiveness, and proposed changes in financial aid allocations.

There was a link between key actor perceptions and athletics strategy formation. As key actors considered available alternatives for athletics alignment, they relied on information that was gleaned from the environment. However, key actors at Cartwright College did not always have accurate and reliable information available upon which to base their decisions. Sometimes the amount of available information was sparse; at other times the information was filtered, distorted, and even inaccurate. When the college began exploring alternatives for athletics affiliation, in the fall of 2007, there were few individuals on campus that had experience with four-year college athletics or the NCAA. As new coaches and administrators were added, their individual experiences and ideas merged with those of incumbents. Revised understandings of the environmental context resulted in new tactics and a subsequent shift in athletics strategy.

Strategy formation did not end with the acceptance of the college's application for Division II membership in July 2011. It is an on-going process and many of the outcomes of the athletics strategy decisions made at Cartwright College between 2007 and 2011 remain unknown. The key findings from this study and their implications for theory and practice will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussions and Implications

Athletics strategy refers to specific initiatives within the intercollegiate athletics program that are designed to meet the broader strategic goals of a post-secondary institution. The decision to implement an athletics strategy generally represents some form of organizational change. Key actors, those organizational leaders with the capacity to make policy decisions, establish operational objectives, and implement long-term plans for the institution play important roles in the formation and implementation of athletics strategy.

This qualitative case study examined key actor perceptions of athletics strategy decisions that were enacted as Cartwright College transitioned from a liberal arts junior college to a four-year baccalaureate institution. Changes during the period of this study, 2007-2011, include reclassification of the athletics program, a change in conference membership and changes in the structure of the intercollegiate athletics program (e.g., staffing and sport sponsorship). Organizational culture contributed to the environmental context in which these athletics strategy decisions were formulated; the process by which they were communicated and interpreted; and the anticipated outcomes in terms of specific goals and objectives.

Pettigrew's (1987) contextualist model, and Weick's (2001) perspective of strategy formation as a three-stage interpretive process provided a conceptual framework for

exploring the influence that an organization's environmental context, including its culture, has on the process and content of strategic change. The conceptual framework, introduced in Chapter 1, depicted athletics strategy formation and implementation as a dynamic process: one shaped by its content, expressed as anticipated outcomes; and by its context, the political, cultural, economical and institutional environment of the organization. In addition, this framework allowed for consideration of the interpretive role that key actors play in terms of defining the linkages between the content, the context, and the process of strategic change (Pettigrew, 1987). The framework suggested that outcomes of athletics strategy decisions were shaped by key actor interpretations of the environment (Weick, 2001); their individual interests and commitments (Pettigrew, 1987); their management style and consistency (Nelson, 2005; Caza, 2000); and the manner in which they addressed the unique structural, political and cultural structures of their organization (Schein E. H., 2004).

This contextualist/interpretive perspective of organizational change influenced the three core research questions that guided this case study:

1. How do key actors describe the environmental context of athletics strategy implementation at their institution?
2. How do key actors describe the process for forming athletics strategy?
3. How do key actors describe the goals, plans and operational objectives of the athletics strategy adopted by their institution?

Key actors described the environmental context and organizational culture in three distinct frames: the past, the present and the future. They referred to the college as it was, a close knit campus community focused on providing a quality liberal arts education. They described the college as it is – an institution in a state of flux; where the campus culture is changing as new people are added, new policies are developed, and new systems are put into place. They anticipated what the institution could become as they sought to balance new programs and ideas with core values and time-honored campus traditions.

Athletics strategy decisions emerged within this dynamic environment as the college transitioned from a two-year to a four-year institution. The change in college mission required key actors to consider and select a new level of competition for the intercollegiate athletics program. That decision influenced a number of subsequent decisions that were made as the college sought acceptance into the NCAA Division II membership process. It was, and is, an iterative, on-going process.

Key Findings

The emergence of athletics strategy is a key finding from this study. Other key findings focus on the role of leadership in strategic enactment, the interpretive role of key actors in the strategic process, and the anticipated outcomes of athletics strategy at Cartwright College. These key findings are presented in the next section and are further discussed in light of the conceptual framework and implications for theory and practice.

The Emergence of Athletics Strategy

Key actors describe a number of separate decisions that were made as Cartwright College sought to acquire the appropriate structure and level of competition for its athletics program. Strategy emerged from these decisions that were necessitated by the transition from a two-year to a four-year institution. It was not the result of a single action, idea or plan. Athletics strategy was shaped by key actor perceptions of the environment, their interests, their understandings, and their prior experiences.

Cartwright College athletics teams had enjoyed success as members of the National Junior College Athletics Association in the years prior to the decision to transition to a four-year college. However, the change in college mission necessitated a change in the alignment of the intercollegiate athletics program. A task force formed in the Fall of 2007 to consider the available alternatives for athletics alignment was initially divided between some faculty members that preferred the non-scholarship NCAA Division III model and the coaches that preferred NCAA Division II. In the end, Division II emerged as the chosen alternative because it provided reduced travel costs, less missed class time and the continued ability to award scholarship packages for prospective student-athletes.

The decision to pursue NCAA Division II membership led to other athletics strategy decisions. The college submitted three applications for membership between 2008 and 2010 which were denied, prior to the acceptance of a fourth application in 2011. Changes in the structure of the athletics program were made following each unsuccessful application

as the college sought to meet the Division II membership requirements. New participants to the strategic process brought different insights and broader understandings that subsequently altered the content of athletics strategy.

New perceptions of goals and anticipated outcomes for athletics strategy emerged as new participants were added. Key actors describe a shift in focus toward an emphasis on competitiveness as the college pursues affiliation with the Regional Athletics Conference. This perceived shift will be discussed in greater detail as anticipated outcomes are presented later in this section.

The Role of Leadership in Strategy Enactment

Key actors are those individuals with the capacity to make and shape policy decisions, establish operational objectives and implement long-term strategic plans for the institution. The faculty members, administrators and coaches that participated in this study were each in a position to exert leadership, the process of influencing other members toward the attainment of defined group or organizational goals (Yukl, 2002). However, the majority of references to leadership in this study were descriptions of the behaviors of formal leaders – presidents, athletics directors, and other senior level administrators who held executive positions within the college.

Key actors identified formal leadership as an important factor in the formation and implementation of athletics strategy at Cartwright College. Although strategy decisions were not directly linked to any one individual or group, the influential role of formal leaders

was prevalent in key actor descriptions of the strategic process. These individuals framed the issues, articulated vision, addressed resistance and shaped the strategic process. Leadership began at the executive level and filtered down throughout the organization.

Previous presidents, by virtue of their formal positions, were often linked to strategic decisions that were implemented under their administration. Key actors attributed a major shift in the college's approach to intercollegiate athletics during the 1990s to President James Wayne. During Dr. Wayne's ten-year tenure, the college began offering athletics scholarships, improved sports facilities and added several new sports. Others credit Dr. Michael Mills, the provost and interim president in 2005, with authorizing the study that ultimately led to the *"Cartwright College at the Crossroads"* report. Dr. Mills' metaphor of Cartwright College as, "a black and white television," was often repeated by key actors as they described college prior to the transition.

In 2007, the Board of Trustees named Kelly Clark as president and charged her with the responsibility of leading the transition to four-year college status. Key actors acknowledged President Clark's formal role as a transformational leader or "change agent." She was credited with effectively articulating the new vision for Cartwright College as a four-year institution, as well as establishing the objectives for intercollegiate athletics within the four-year model. Clark framed this transition as, "a return to the college's roots as a residential liberal arts college," and was deliberate in involving the campus community in the transition process. Her formal presentations to the faculty and staff each semester

were viewed as influential in setting the climate for organizational change and in framing the role of the athletics program within the mission of the college.

In addition to framing the issues and articulating a new vision for the college, President Clark's participative leadership style and political savvy helped to build consensus and overcome resistance to change at Cartwright College. At the beginning of the transition, there was some "push-back," or resistance from alumni, trustees and faculty who feared that the college's unique identity would be lost in the conversion. Some of the veteran faculty members that were opposed to the change chose to retire, while others left the college for different institutions. Others were persuaded that the college could make the transition and still retain its traditions, its culture, and its academic reputation. One faculty member observed, "She was able to convince everyone that we could hang on to the culture and the traditions, and bring in the four-year model, which was absolutely necessary."

Key actors indicated that Clark's participative style is reflected in the decision-making structures that have emerged during the transition process. As a small, two-year college much of the planning and decision-making was done on an ad hoc basis. Significant structural changes were required if the college was to successfully navigate the SACS accreditation process and add baccalaureate degree programs. The Planning and Assessment Committee (PAC) was formed as a standing committee for the purpose of strategic planning, and the President's Leadership Council (PLC) was established as the

formal policy-making body for the college. The hiring process became more formalized, with greater attention given to the selection of new faculty and staff whose values and goals were consistent with the defined vision for the college. Key actors suggested that Kelly Clark's presence at the table during committee meetings facilitated communication, encouraged collaboration and helped to ensure broad participation. Participants perceived her involvement at the orientation retreat, held prior to the beginning of each academic year, to be meaningful in terms of transmitting the culture of the institution. One faculty member explained, "She is casting the vision of the college in a very clear way. Yet, there is that sort of feeling that we are in it together, as a team."

Key actor descriptions of the strategic process revealed the significant role that President Clark played in terms of framing the transition, articulating a vision, addressing resistance and facilitating a participative structure at Cartwright College. Her role was important, but not necessarily dominant. The findings indicate that other formal leaders, particularly athletic directors Mark McNally and Rusty Erwin had considerable influence over athletics strategy formation and implementation. McNally and Erwin both used their formal authority, their administrative experience, and their access to critical information to frame the issues, articulate a vision for the athletics program, address resistance issues, and shape the strategic process. McNally assumed a principal leadership role in promoting Division II as the preferred option for athletics alignment and leading the college through the membership process from 2007 through June 2010. Erwin became the full-time athletic

director in July 2010 and had an immediate impact on the day-to-day operations of the athletics program and the membership process. Key actors described having a full-time athletic director as symbolically significant. It added credibility and enhanced the athletic department's presence on the Planning and Assessment Committee and the President's Leadership Council.

The Interpretive Role of Key Actors

Although the findings in this study identify the role that formal leadership played in the formation of athletics strategy at Cartwright College, it is too simplistic to view strategy development as merely a product of leadership behavior. While key actors used a number of labels (e.g., inspirational, symbolic, transitional) to describe leadership style, no one characteristic sufficiently explained the role of leadership in the strategic process. No single individual was acknowledged as the architect of the strategic plan and, in fact, no one plan was identified.

It was the interpretive role of a collective group of leaders, key actors, which surfaced as a significant finding from this study. Athletics strategy was shaped by a number of individuals, including newcomers whose backgrounds and perspectives blended with those of incumbents to form new interpretations of the environmental context. Strategy emerged as the result of a number of separate decisions that were made as the college determined to pursue NCAA Division II membership. These decisions were shaped by key actor perceptions of the purpose of intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College, the NCAA

Division II membership requirements and the availability of conference opportunities within the geographic region. Each decision influenced subsequent decisions that were made as key actors interpreted the environmental context and enacted strategic initiatives based on their perceptions of previous actions.

Reliable Information for Interpretation. Key actors indicated that reliable information was not always readily available particularly in the early stages of strategy formation. Cartwright College applied for Division II membership on three different occasions and was thrice denied, largely due to a lack of understanding concerning the requirements and expectations that the Division II Membership Committee places on applicants. Organizational decision-making was hampered because the information available to key actors for interpretation was limited, inaccurate, and filtered.

President Clark had no direct experience with four-year college athletics at the time that the decision was made to pursue NCAA Division II membership. In fact, there was no one on campus with any administrative experience in Division II, thus the college relied almost exclusively on Coach McNally's prior experience as an administrator/coach in Division III to navigate the Division II membership process. The information that was used in the decision-making process was filtered through the experiences, perceptions and interpretations of one individual. It did not appear that there was broad-based discussion of the specific expectations described on the membership application, particularly the stipulation of a full-time director of athletics. Although Coach McNally was aware of this

expectation, he admittedly desired to maintain his dual role as Athletics Director and Head Softball Coach, and did so through the first three applications.

The information available for interpretation was limited in that it did not fully consider on-going changes in the external environment. In 2007, Division II revised the process for institutions seeking membership. With an increasing number of schools seeking to transition from NAIA to Division II, the membership committee had become more attentive to the qualifications of prospective members with each class of applicants. Thus, it was a much more competitive environment than it was previously. As a non-NCAA institution, key actors at Cartwright College had no formal means of acquiring current information related to these environmental changes (e.g., committee minutes, new legislation, etc.).

The information that was gathered and used in the decision-making process was sometimes inaccurate. It was difficult to determine whether the institution was misinformed by NCAA staff or if the information that school officials received was misinterpreted. With each application, key actors believed the college would be accepted for membership, even though the college did not meet the minimum expectations for membership contained on the application at that time. One factor that may have contributed to misunderstanding is the change in NCAA legislation that occurred in 2007. Discussions with administrators of institutions that had gone through the membership process prior to those changes provided obsolete information.

Participation Enhances Interpretation. Some of the frustration expressed by key actors was attributed to the lack of campus-wide participation in the early stages of the membership process. While there was some involvement of college administrators in preparing the 2010 application; it appears that the majority of the work on the first two applications was done primarily within the athletics department. Participation expanded in 2010, with the President's Leadership Council (PLC) becoming increasingly involved in the process.

New administrators with experience in four-year college athletics and the Division II membership process enhanced the interpretation of environmental data for the later applications. As they assimilated into the institution's culture these newcomers became insiders; insiders with an outsider's perspective. In the fall of 2010, the college employed a consulting firm that specializes in guiding schools through the NCAA Division II membership process. The unique experience and expertise of these consultants contributed information from an external perspective that was previously unavailable to key actors within the organization.

Anticipated Outcomes of Athletics Strategy Decisions

Key actors frequently described the anticipated outcomes of athletics strategy initiatives in terms of obtaining the "right fit," or the "proper form" relative to alignment with organizational culture, institutional mission, and perceptions of the purpose of intercollegiate athletics. They sought organizational fit as they interviewed candidates for

new positions and held orientation retreats to assimilate new employees into the cultural environment. They also sought fit while evaluating alternatives for athletics classification and when considering opportunities for conference affiliation.

The goals of athletics strategy for Cartwright College were often expressed as operational objectives, including the desire to align with aspirant and peer institutions, those that the college sought to model both academically and athletically; and expectations of increased visibility gained through membership in the NCAA and the Regional Athletics Association. Key actor descriptions of these operational objectives were closely linked to prevailing perspectives that key actors held relative to the purpose of intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College.

Two dominant, or prevailing, perspectives surfaced as key actors described the history of athletics at Cartwright College: athletics as a part of campus life and athletics as an enrollment management strategy. The findings suggest the emergence of a third perspective, athletics as a strategy for institutional advancement, as the college transitions into NCAA Division II and membership in the Regional Athletics Conference.

For much of the college's history, athletics was viewed as a part of campus life. It was integrated into campus life as a co-curricular activity, closely aligned with the college's physical education and intramural programs. Coaches were faculty members, and athletics team members were recruited from within the student body. Participation and financial support for particular programs ebbed and flowed based on interest. The second

perspective, athletics as an enrollment management strategy, surfaced beginning in the 1990s. Several new sports programs (e.g. baseball, softball, and women's soccer) were formed during this period, 1990-2007. Full-time coaches were hired to manage each of these sports programs and to recruit student-athletes using financial aid packages consisting of both athletics and academic scholarships. During this era, Cartwright College teams achieved competitive success as members of the National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA).

These prevailing perspectives of the purpose of athletics influenced the discussions that took place as the college considered athletics affiliation and conference membership. The task force appointed to consider options for athletics alignment was divided based on their individual perceptions. Several faculty members believed that NCAA Division III would better align the college with other liberal arts colleges that appeared to be similar in mission and athletics philosophy. On the other hand, coaches and administrators promoted the idea that Division II would provide greater visibility in the region. In addition, they believed that the athletics scholarship policies of Division II would be more consistent with the institution's current financial aid and recruiting practices. In the end, the decision to pursue Division II membership hinged largely on key actor perceptions of the external environment - the geographical proximity of competitors and anticipated costs in terms of missed class time and travel expenses.

Key actors identified a “shift in focus,” as new participants were added to the strategic process and the college moved toward alignment with the Regional Athletic Conference. Discussions of increased visibility and competitiveness extended beyond the recruitment of students and student-athletes, giving rise to the possibility that a new purpose for intercollegiate athletes may be emerging – one focused on institutional advancement and measured in terms of media exposure, fund-raising opportunities, attendance at athletic events and ultimately win-loss records. A third perspective, athletics as a strategy for institutional advancement has emerged as a purpose for athletics at Cartwright College. This emergent perspective reflects a key finding of this study and could represent a significant change in expectations for the athletics program at Cartwright College.

The perception of intercollegiate athletics as an institutional advancement strategy did not surface immediately as a result of a single strategic decision. In fact, except for references to fund-raising, it is not expressed in those terms. Like the shift that was experienced during Dr. James Wayne’s tenure in the 1990s, when the college upgraded facilities, added sports, and began offering scholarships, this perspective has developed with a series of separate decisions; however, the shift in focus is widely identified by coaches and administrators who indicate a growing concern for “competitiveness.” Competitiveness in this context refers to the ability to win athletics contests. Inherent in approaching athletics as an institutional advancement strategy is the increased importance

of winning. Key actors perceived that winning teams attract students and student-athletes to the school; winning teams generate media coverage; winning teams encourage donations to the institution; and winning teams generate more excitement and increased attendance at athletics contests. On the other hand, losing was believed to have negative consequences for each of those operational objectives.

Conclusions

The findings in this study focused on the perceptions of key actors and their descriptions of the environmental context, the process and the anticipated outcomes for athletics strategy decisions that were implemented between 2007 and 2011, as Cartwright College transitioned from a junior college to a four-year institution. Athletics strategy emerged as key actors interpreted the changing environmental context, described as a “state of flux,” and enacted decisions related to athletics classification, conference affiliation and sport sponsorship. Each decision influenced subsequent decisions as key actors sought to obtain the “right fit” or the “proper form” relative to alignment with the organizational culture, institutional mission, and perceptions of the purpose of intercollegiate athletics at the college. New participants to the process brought different insights and broader understandings that enhanced the collective interpretation of the environmental context and influenced the anticipated outcomes of athletics strategy. The interpretive role of key actors surfaced as the key finding and has implications for both theory and practice.

A Model for Athletics Strategy Enactment

A model of athletics strategy enactment (Figure 5.1) is introduced based on the findings from this case study. Key actors, the “who” of organizational change, are depicted at the center of this model. Collectively, their interpretations of the inner and outer context influenced the enactment of strategy initiatives relative to athletics alignment, conference affiliation, administrative structure and sport sponsorship. In like manner, key actor interpretations also shaped the content, or anticipated outcomes of athletics strategy at Cartwright College. In their individual leadership roles, key actors framed the strategy, articulated vision, shaped the process and addressed resistance issues as athletics strategy emerged during the period of this study.

Weick’s (2001) conceptualization of strategy formation as a three-stage interpretive process is integrated into the understandings of strategic change that emerged from this study. The model portrays strategic change as an iterative, ongoing, interpretive process; as opposed to a sequential, linear progression. The arrows depicting the interpretive role of key actors in the strategic process are multi-directional. They illustrate the continuous interaction between the context of change, the process of change, and the content of change. Weick’s (2001) concept of a feedback loop is also contained within this representation. Whenever key actors take action and enact their strategic initiatives, they generate consequences, or feedback, that then informs their future decision making. Cartwright College’s decision to pursue Division II membership in the Spring of 2007, gave

rise to a number of subsequent decisions relating to the athletics program. Modifications in structure and strategy were made following each rejected application, as key actors sought to address their perceived deficiencies.

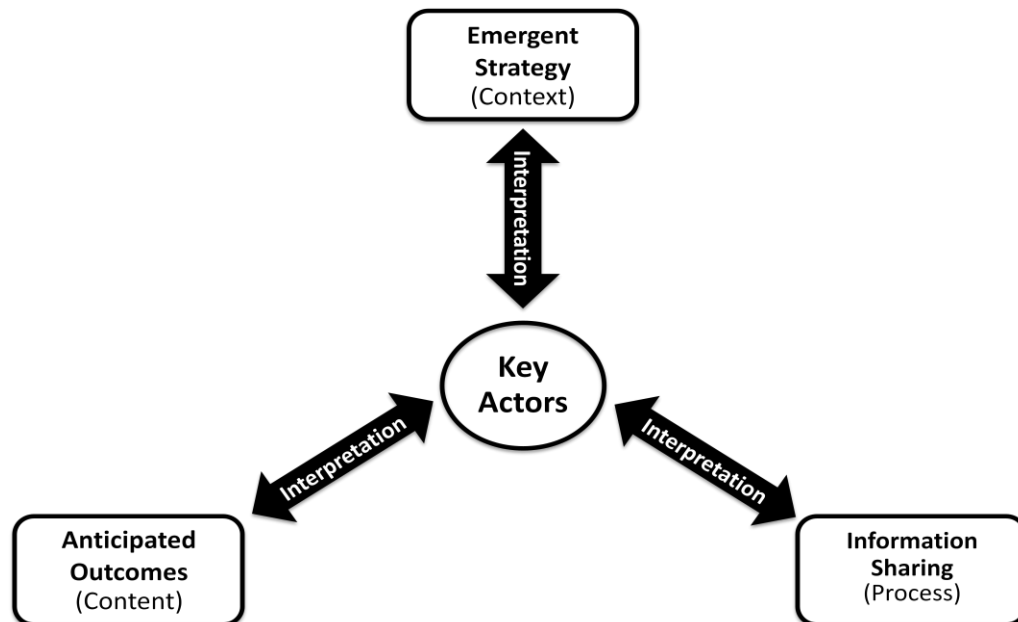


Figure 5.1 Model of Athletics Strategy Enactment

Pettigrew's (1987) model of strategic change provided the conceptual framework for this study. His contextualist approach depicts decision-making as a dynamic, multi-level process: one shaped by its content, expressed in terms of anticipated outcomes; and its context, identified as the political, cultural, economic, and institutional environment. The findings from this study support Pettigrew's description of strategic change and the

resultant model of athletics strategy enactment incorporates his perspective that key actors define the linkages between the content, the context and the process of strategy formation and implementation.

In addition to highlighting the interpretive role of key actors, the model for athletics strategy enactment correlates Pettigrew's three aspects of strategic change with three key conclusions from the study. Emergent strategy, information sharing, and anticipated outcomes are each linked by key actor interpretations. Emergent strategy (context) describes the decisions that were made as key actors interpreted the inner and outer environmental context, and the role of formal leadership in strategy implementation. Information sharing (process) encompasses key actor dependence on reliable information, as well as contributions from new participants in the process. Anticipated outcomes (content) represent the content of athletics strategy based on key actor descriptions of operational objectives and their perceptions of the purpose of intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College.

Emergent Strategy. A key conclusion of this study focused upon an understanding of emergent strategy, as opposed to traditional understandings of deliberate strategy that proceeds along a linear, pre-planned course. This conclusion is compatible with Mintzberg's (1994) description of emergent strategy, decisions that arise from fundamental changes in the organizational environment. Mintzberg replaced the traditional concept of strategic planning with the idea of "strategy formation." He observed, "Strategies are changed

because conditions change, not cyclically or regularly, so much as discontinuously. In other words, strategy typically gets changed because something fundamental has changed in the environment, on a one-time basis" (p. 240).

Rowley, Lujan and Dolence (2001) define strategy as "an agreed-upon course of action and direction that changes the relationship or maintains an alignment that helps assure a more optimal relationship between the institution and its environment" (p. 15). This study focuses on decisions relative to athletics alignment, conference affiliation, sport sponsorship and changes in administrative structure that were made as part of the institution's transition to senior college status. These decisions were conceptually framed as strategic, rather than tactical, because they were set by top management, were broad in scope and required a commitment of institutional resources over a period of time (Yow, Migliore, Bowden, Stevens, & Loudon, 2000; Bridges & Roquemore, 2004; Chandler, 1962).

Athletics strategy at Cartwright College was not the result of a single action, idea, or plan. It emerged from a number of separate decisions that were necessitated, in part, by the transition from a junior college to a four-year, baccalaureate institution. Strategic initiatives were fashioned within a dynamic environment. The structure and the culture of the organization were changing, as new people, new programs, and new policies were being added throughout the college during this time of transition. Changes in the structure of the athletics program were made following each unsuccessful application for Division II

membership. New participants to the strategic process brought different insights and broader understandings that subsequently altered the content of athletics strategy.

This conceptualization of emergent strategy also represents Weick's (2001) presentation of strategy formation as a three-stage interpretive process. Key actors continuously scan the organizational environment, interpret environmental cues and retrospectively enact strategic initiatives based on their perceptions and their experiences. It is an on-going "sense-making" process where key actors, "interpret what they have done, define what they have learned and attempt to solve the problem of what to do next" (Weick, 2001, p. 241). Strategy is shaped by key actor perspectives – their attitudes, interests and their prior experiences.

This perspective is in contrast to the traditional view of strategic planning as a rational, linear approach that focuses on the determination of goals and the adoption of a specific course of action (Chandler, 1962). Deliberate strategy is typically fashioned as a prescriptive plan, one that is monitored and controlled from start to finish. The modified model for strategic change from this study allows for consideration of emergent strategy that incrementally develops from a series of separate decisions. Emergent strategy is helpful when making decisions in a changing environment and offers the advantage of increased flexibility. "It can provide an internal culture for managers to think and act creatively, rather than having to act within the rigid framework of deliberate strategy" (Campbell, Stonehouse, & Houston, 2002, p. 265).

Formal leadership was perceived to be influential as athletics strategy emerged during this study. In their formal roles, the activities of President Clark and the athletic directors (McNally and Erwin) were consistent with behaviors of leaders as described in the literature. They framed the issues (Birnbaum, 1992; Hira & Hira, 2000), articulated their views of strategy (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996), shaped the administrative structure (Schein, 2004) and addressed resistance issues (Birnbaum, 1992; Caza, 2000; Nelson, 2005). Their administrative style in terms of communication, formal meetings, and feedback were critical factors in the strategic process (Birnbaum, 1992; Hira & Hira, 2000; Caza, 2000; Nelson, 2005).

In part, these formal leadership roles are expected by internal and external constituents. The NCAA acknowledges the leadership roles that presidents and athletic directors play in terms of establishing vision for intercollegiate athletics, shaping the administrative structure in which plans and programs are developed, and influencing the allocation of resources necessary to implement athletics initiatives. Expectations for the active participation of the president in the oversight of the athletics program and the involvement of a full-time director of athletics are mandated by *NCAA Bylaws*, the *Application for Division II Membership*, and the *Guiding Principles for a Model Division II Athletics Program*.

Executive leaders, specifically President Clark and athletics directors McNally and Erwin, played an important role in the strategic process; however, the athletics strategy

that emerged is not ascribed to a few individuals. Athletics strategy was shaped by a collective group of key actors, including newcomers whose backgrounds and perspectives blended with those of incumbents to form new interpretations of the environmental context. Pettigrew (1987) identifies leadership as a central ingredient in strategic change, but only one of several institutional, political, and cultural factors that affect strategic change. He observes, "It is too narrow to see change as just a rational and linear problem-solving process" (p. 658). Strategy emerged as key actors scanned the environment and made decisions based on their interpretations of the environmental context. These interpretations were subsequently enacted (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and this action became the process of strategic change (Pettigrew, 1987).

Information Sharing. A second key conclusion identifies information sharing as a distinctive feature of the interpretive process that enables key actors to consider different perspectives, reach convergence, address resistance issues and enact a collective strategy for the organization. One of the key aspects of this conclusion is the importance of reliable information as key actors interpret the environmental context and enact strategic initiatives based on their perceptions. This conclusion supports Weick's (2001) position that information, communication and collaboration are at the heart of the information sharing process.

The findings from this study reveal that reliable information was not always readily available to key actors. Decision-making during the early stages of strategy formation was

hampered because the information available to key actors for interpretation was limited, inaccurate, and filtered. Interpretations were enhanced as participation in the decision-making process increased and new participants contributed information for interpretation based on their unique experiences. Outside consultants also contributed to the information that was available to key actors as they enacted the decision to pursue Division II membership.

A number of individual biases and heuristics, rule-of-thumb decision-making methods, may affect the information sharing process and lead to errors in interpretation. Among these are the framing effect, where decisions depend on how choices are presented or framed; the self-interest bias, where individuals make judgments that favor themselves, and the confirmation bias, where people seek and process information that confirms their existing attitudes and beliefs (Boatright, 2012). Boatright notes that individuals and organizations tend to make decisions using the information that is most readily available. Such information is typically diffused and fragmented, however once a strategy emerges as a course of action there is commitment that is difficult to stop, especially if it requires admitting that mistakes were made.

Decision making in this case was affected by the quality of information available to key actors, however it is unlikely that access to additional information would have changed the outcome of the first three applications. Cartwright College was not eligible until it met all of requirements and expectations for Division II membership. Much of the frustration

expressed by key actors can be attributed to incomplete information and the lack of broad-based participation in the early stages of the membership process. Information sharing was limited as the majority of the work on the first two applications was done primarily within the athletics department.

While the decision-making process within an institution may follow a formal sequence, a strictly linear understanding of decision analysis is misleading. Senior level administrators most often make decisions following widespread discussion and dialogue. It is a form of participative decision making, where open communication facilitates the process. In such an environment, even those executive decisions made in concrete may be perceived as building blocks upon which further, more participative decisions may be made (Tierney, 1988).

Tierney (1988) identifies the role that organizational culture plays in facilitating participative decision making. Executive leadership both influences and is influenced by the culture of the institution. The visibility of college presidents, their leadership style, patterns of communication, and their symbolic use of space are examples of leadership behaviors that create and reinforce organizational culture. Likewise, an administrator's correct interpretation of the cultural environment can provide critical insight about which of the possible avenues to choose in reaching a strategic decision. This includes consideration of why different groups in the organization hold varying perceptions concerning critical issues.

Among the minimum requirements for Division II members is the expectation that institutions involve multiple constituencies in campus-wide discussions related to athletics alignment (Appendix B). Such broad-based participation provides perspective that contributes to improved decision making and it translates psychologically, as individuals within the organization feel more valued and connected. Communication reduces resistance because it fights the effects of misinformation and misunderstanding. Likewise, it is difficult for individuals to resist a change decision in which they participate (Chelladurai, 2006). Nelson (2005) found that a management style supportive of participation, empowerment, and feelings of joint ownership contributed to a positive change in organizational culture and increased employee engagement.

Weick observes that, "Organizations exist largely in the mind and their existence takes on the form of cognitive maps" (2001, p. 309). He refers to these maps as aggregates of collective information that help key actors understand the environment beyond their immediate perception. This collective interpretation allows the organization to see more than any one individual alone would see. This study found that interpretations were enhanced as participation in the decision-making process increased. New participants made meaningful contributions based on their unique experiences and understandings of the environmental context.

Collective interpretations allow the organization to see more than any one individual alone would see; however, smaller, more homogeneous organizations may serve to limit

the range of information available to key actors. In these instances, the pooled information provides little more insight into the problem than what key actors know individually (Weick, 2001). This was the case at Cartwright College in 2007 as the college began to explore options for athletics alignment, there were few on campus with any experience in four-year college athletics. The information available to key actors was augmented with each unsuccessful application. The hiring of new administrators with experience in four-year college athletics and the Division II membership process enhanced the interpretation of environmental data. As they assimilate into the institution's culture these newcomers became insiders; insiders with an outsider's perspective.

Anticipated Outcomes. A third conclusion from this study is that normative forces within the environmental context influence key actor perceptions as they observe, and often mimic, the behaviors and practices of peer and aspirant institutions (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In turn, these perceptions influence their decisions, and ultimately the anticipated outcomes or content of athletics strategy.

This conclusion is consistent DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) description of isomorphism as a force that compels organizations to become homogeneous with others in their organizational field facing the same environmental conditions. DiMaggio and Powell suggested three types of isomorphism, each of which can be identified in the findings in this study. Peer emulation, or mimetic isomorphism, is a motivating factor as colleges and universities seek to implement strategy and acquire a form that will be perceived as

legitimate by internal and external constituents. Coercive isomorphism results from formal and informal pressures exerted by other organizations and by cultural expectations within the society where an organization functions. Normative isomorphism may occur among key actors in a particular role (e.g., college presidents, athletic directors, professors, coaches). Individuals in these roles are likely to view policies, procedures, and structures as normatively sanctioned and typically approach decision-making in much the same way. These isomorphic forces serve to shape the strategic decisions, the organization structure and ultimately the culture of the organization.

Key actors at Cartwright College sought to align with aspirant and peer institutions as they considered alternatives for athletics classification and conference membership. The structure of the athletics department was altered to fit with the *Guiding Principles for a Model Division II Athletics Program* and the model for financial aid was revised to better position the athletics program in comparison with other members of the Regional Athletics Conference.

Key actors frequently described the anticipated outcomes of athletics strategy in terms of obtaining the “right fit,” or the “proper form” for the athletics program at Cartright College. Their perceptions of fit and form were often framed by comparisons with aspirant and peer institutions. These findings are consistent with Winston’s (1999) observations regarding the hierarchical context within higher education, where competition is viewed as positional within an institution’s current stratum or aspirant group. Athletics classification

and conference membership provide associational linkages that offer a context by which to judge the entire institution (Cross, 1999). The focus on fit and form speak to perceptions of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Colleges and universities are viewed as legitimate when their programs and structures are perceived by internal and external constituents to be appropriate.

The internal environment, including the structure and the culture of an organization, is shaped by the perceptions of individuals within that organization. Organizational culture includes shared assumptions that guide behaviors and provide a frame of reference for decision-making (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Tierney, 1988; Schein, 2004). Culture emerges, and is sustained as individuals within the organization develop distinct ways of perceiving, interpreting, and explaining the environment.

Culture influences organizational decision-making. Tierney (1988) suggests that key actor interpretations of organizational culture provide critical insight when considering the varying perceptions of different groups within the organization. In this study, the descriptions of anticipated goals, or operational objectives, were closely linked to prevailing perspectives that key actors held relative to the purpose of intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College: athletics as a part of campus life and athletics as an enrollment management strategy. These two prevailing perspectives were identified in key actor descriptions of the history of athletics at Cartwright College, the deliberations related to athletics classification, and the perceived athletics versus academics dichotomy. They

represent contrasting, but not necessarily contradictory points of view concerning the role of athletics.

These prevailing perspectives regarding the role and purpose of intercollegiate athletics at Cartwright College resemble the explanations that are commonly given for the existence of intercollegiate sport in American universities (Clotfelter, 2011):

1. the education argument, where intercollegiate athletics is perceived as a component of a complete education;
2. the campus community argument, where athletics teams are perceived to foster a sense of community and social solidarity; and
3. the visibility argument, where athletics provides a source of public attention that in turn creates tangible benefits for the university (e.g., applications for admission, donative resources, and government support).

Clotfelter (2011) focuses exclusively on “big-time” sports, those programs competing at the NCAA Division I BCS level, thus his list also includes the revenue argument, where intercollegiate athletics as an ancillary operation is perceived to be a source of revenue for colleges and universities. Using these traditional arguments for intercollegiate athletics, he examines four perceived roles that athletics plays in American Universities: as a consumer good, as a business enterprise, as an instrument for institutional advancement, and as a component of campus culture.

At Cartwright College the discussions of increased visibility and competitiveness, as the institution moves toward Division II membership and alignment with the Regional Athletics Conference, suggest the possibility that a third prevailing purpose for intercollegiate athletes may be emerging – one focused on institutional advancement and characterized by an emphasis on winning.

Key actors identified a “shift in focus,” that may represent a significant change in expectations for the athletics program at Cartwright College and could present unanticipated outcomes that affect the culture of the institution. This shift in focus was widely identified by coaches and administrators who indicate a growing concern for “competitiveness,” the ability to win athletics contests. Key actors perceived that winning teams attract students, encourage donations, and generate more excitement in the community. On the other hand, losing was believed to have negative consequences for each of those operational objectives. These findings are consistent with those of Weaver’s (2007) study of athletics reclassification. Weaver reported conversations that centered on competitiveness and a commitment to winning, observing that winning appears to have more value whenever more is at stake.

Coaches tended to link competitiveness with financial resources, particularly the scholarship resources required for recruiting student-athletes. Successfully competing with the public institutions in the Regional Athletic Conference will require changes in the way that financial aid is allocated, with greater emphasis on athletics aid.

“It should come as no surprise that the pursuit of athletic success can lead to some inherent problems. In the winner-take-all environment of athletics competition, in which success is defined only in relation to the competition, there is no natural stopping point to spending. There will always be ways to spend more money that will increase the chance of coming out ahead. (Clotfelter, 2011, p. 42)

A philosophical shift in the purpose of intercollegiate athletics, with greater emphasis on competitiveness, could have implications for Cartwright College in the long-run. “Central to the ability to win is recruiting high value athletes,” observes Clotfelter. “In carrying out this all important function, the imperative to win makes it logical to push to the limit whatever rules exists. This imperative also heightens the importance of getting the best coach and having the best facilities” (2011, p. 42).

Although it is a problem typically associated with NCAA Division I, the college may become involved in a costly “arm’s race,” as they struggle to gain an advantage over their competition in the RAC (Knight Commission, 2001). In addition to the economic costs, the adoption of athletics strategy may have consequences in terms of the gap between the academic culture and the collegiate culture (Sperber, 2000). There is a risk that faculty perceptions of the emphasis and resources channeled toward improving the competitiveness of the athletics program may accentuate the athletics vs. academic dichotomy and negatively affect the campus culture.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this case study of athletics strategy formation and implementation at Cartwright College offer practical conclusions that may be helpful to administrators considering NCAA Division II membership as an athletics strategy.

Formal leadership is an important factor in the formation and implementation of athletics strategy. Leadership begins at the executive level and filters down through successive levels of the organizational structure. Executive leaders frame strategy, articulate vision, address resistance issues and shape the information sharing process. In addition, the NCAA assigns the President with responsibility for ensuring institutional control over the athletics program. By directly assigning roles and responsibilities to administrators throughout the institution, the President sets the tone for the membership process.

Reliable information is necessary for effective decision making. Key actors at Cartwright College expressed frustration with the Division II membership process, describing it as mysterious, ambiguous, and capricious. A great deal of that frustration can be attributed to incomplete information and the lack of broad-based participation in the early stages of the membership process. At the outset, there were few individuals on campus with any experience in four-year college athletics and no one with experience at the NCAA Division II level. Understandings and interpretations were enhanced as new

members with backgrounds in NCAA Division II athletics and the membership process were added to the decision making process.

This finding has practical implications for institutions pursuing NCAA Division II membership. The NCAA identifies four positions that are required for member institutions: a full-time Director of Athletics, an actively involved Faculty Athletics Representative, a Senior Woman Administrator (SWA), and a full-time Compliance Coordinator. When filling these positions, it is helpful if those individuals have experience in these roles at NCAA Division II institutions and familiarity with the NCAA governance structure.

Cartwright College's decision to employ outside consultants in advance of the fourth application also contributed to the information that was available to key actors. Outside consultants can offer objective perspectives that are often unavailable to those inside the organization. Because of the scope of their expertise and through their professional contacts, they may have access to information related to the process that is not readily available to those institutions that are not currently NCAA members.

Interpretations are enhanced as participation in the decision-making process is increased. The majority of the work on the first two applications for Division II membership was performed primarily within the athletics department. Participation was expanded in 2010, with the President's Leadership Council becoming increasingly involved in the process. Broad-based campus-wide participation contributed to better understanding of

the membership requirements and helped alleviate some of the frustration that key actors experienced earlier in the process.

Such broad-based campus-wide participation is identified as an expectation for prospective Division II members. The application instructions recommend that those institutional committees responsible for strategic planning be involved in the development of the required strategic plan for intercollegiate athletics. Their participation provides for consistency in the format of the plan and greater alignment with the strategic goals of the institution.

In like manner, all policy development and rules education efforts should involve key campus constituents with compliance responsibilities (e.g., Registrar, Financial Aid and Admissions). Attendance at Regional Compliance Seminars, while not specifically required, provides an opportunity for those individuals to gain greater understanding of the expectations of the NCAA in terms of institutional oversight of the athletics program.

The anticipated outcomes of athletics strategy were described in terms of obtaining the “right fit” or the “proper form.” This finding from the case study of Cartwright College has important implications for institution’s considering Division II membership. Cartwright College was not eligible to enter the Division II membership process until it met all of requirements and expectations for membership. The *Guiding Principles for a Model Division II Athletics Program* (Appendix B), and the *Minimum Requirements to be Considered for Division II Membership* (Appendix C), provide the proper form for the structure and

administration of a Division II athletics department. It was not until 2011, when Cartwright College completed a season of competition in men's and women's basketball and had a full-time athletics director, that they satisfied all of the requirements.

One of the tactics recommended by Rusty Erwin when he came on board as athletics director was a mandate to begin operating in full compliance with NCAA legislation prior to the membership application. It is a tactic that has been successfully employed by other institutions transitioning from NAIA to NCAA Division II. Operating in full compliance demonstrates a commitment to Division II, it provides an incentive for participation in rules education programs, and it offers an opportunity to gain familiarity with compliance procedures prior to entry into the membership process.

A second tactic that Erwin employed to demonstrate that Cartwright College had obtained the proper form was alignment with a Division II conference. Currently, the expectation that institutions provide a plan to be affiliated with a Division II conference by the end of candidacy year two is a criterion that may be used to differentiate between institutions that apply for membership.

Recommendations for Future Research

This case study contributes to existing literature related to strategic change, specifically the reclassification of intercollegiate athletics programs (Cross, 1999; Tomasini, 2005; Weaver A. , 2007); however, the study is unique in that it focuses on reclassification to NCAA Division II. Research pertaining to athletics strategy has typically focused on the

upward migration of institutions from Division II to Division I. There remains a noticeable gap in the literature as it relates to institutions seeking membership in Division II, and the organization of athletics programs at the Division II level.

This study found that athletics strategy emerged from a number of separate decisions regarding the athletics program that were made as a result of changes in institutional mission. Most of the existing research on strategic change in college athletics is focused on specific initiatives (e.g., adding sports, changing conferences, reclassification of the athletics program). There is an opportunity for additional research that examines athletics strategy collectively as part of the institution's overall strategic plan.

Slack & Parent (2006) observe that while few studies within sport management have used the contextualist approach, the richness of data make it a viable method for enhancing the understanding of sport organizations. The findings from this study support and extend Pettigrew's model and incorporate Weick's (2001) interpretivist perspective. Further, the conclusions of this study also suggest practical considerations that may be useful to administrators weighing similar athletics strategy decisions. Opportunities exist for additional case studies that examine key actor perceptions of athletics strategy, particularly the decisions of those NAIA institutions that seek NCAA Division II membership, even though the contextual distinctiveness of each case, may limit the ability to make cross-case generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The findings from this study also suggest additional opportunities for further research. There is an opportunity for additional research on the interpretive role of key actors in the strategic process and the effect of information sharing on their decision-making. In addition, there is opportunity for further analysis of how information is gathered and communicated during the information sharing process.

This case study is a snapshot in time. It examined key actor perceptions as Cartwright College explored options for athletics alignment and pursued entry into the NCAA Division II membership process during the four-year period, 2007-2011. The study concludes with the college's acceptance into the candidacy phase, although the formation and implementation of athletics strategy is on-going as the college completes the three-year provisional membership phase and seeks membership in the Regional Athletics Conference. There is an opportunity for further research that examines key actor perceptions once the strategic initiatives have been fully implemented.

It remains to be seen whether or not the anticipated operational goals for increased visibility, institutional advancement, community involvement, and student recruitment are realized; or if the college will achieve the desired level of competitive success against regional and national competition as a member of Division II. Likewise, the financial costs and long-term consequences of the perceived shift in focus toward "competitiveness," remain unknown. There is an opportunity for longitudinal study which examines the impact that athletics strategy has on the college and its culture.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Intercollegiate Athletics Participation - 2008

		Institutions			Participants		
		Public	Private	Total	Males	Females	Total
NCAA	Division I-A (FBS)	104	21	125	33,571	26,327	59,898
	Division I-AA (FCS)	76	45	121	29,987	20,919	50,906
	Division I-AAA	48	49	97	13,552	13,708	27,260
	Division I Total	228	115	343	77,110	60,954	138,064
	Division II (Football)	97	55	152	32,933	17,781	50,714
	Division II (w/o Football)	49	84	133	14,565	12,912	27,477
	Division II Total	146	139	285	47,498	30,693	78,191
	Division III (Football)	34	199	233	60,000	35,068	95,068
	Division III (w/o Football)	53	129	182	20,658	19,209	39,867
	Division III Total	87	328	415	80,658	54,277	134,935
	NCAA Totals	461	582	1,043	205,266	145,924	351,190
	NAIA	Division I	22	113	135	15,384	9,905
Division II		25	120	145	16,836	11,090	27,926
NAIA Totals		47	233	280	32,220	20,995	53,215
Other	NCCAA	0	46	46	1,757	1,037	2,794
	NJCAA	429	28	467	32,175	18,734	50,909
	Other	197	54	251	24,690	14,524	39,214
	All Others Total	626	128	764	58,622	34,295	92,917
Grand Totals	1,134	943	2,087	296,108	201,214	497,322	

The U.S. Department of Education collects data from all co-educational institutions that participate in federal student aid programs and field intercollegiate athletics teams. Data is collected annually as required by the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA). The data depicted in the table above is taken from the 2008 EADA report (<http://ope.ed.gov/athletics>). Of the 2,087 institutions reporting, 1468 are 4-year institutions. This number includes 552 public institutions and 916 private institutions. A total of 419,148 student-athletes (unduplicated headcount) participated in intercollegiate athletics at 4-year institutions (246,710 males and 172,438 females) according to the 2008 EADA report.

APPENDIX B

Guiding Principles for a Model Division II Athletics Program

In 2002, the Division II Athletics Directors Association (DII ADA) identified a need to define a model athletics department at the DII level. Led by past presidents Mac Cassell, Bill Fusco and Jon Carey, the Association developed a document titled “Guiding Principles for a Model Division II Athletics Program”, and has as its base 21 guiding principles to assist Division II administrators as they strategically plan for program enhancements. The document was endorsed by the Management Council and the Presidents Council, and is being used to evaluate new and reclassifying institutions. Similar to the Division II Model Conference Office document that has done so much to advance the operations of Division II conference offices, it was the belief of the Management Council and Presidents Council that the Division II membership would appreciate receiving some general guidelines and strategic goals that might help to enhance operations for the athletics program.

The Division II Strategic Plan and the Division II Institutional Self-Study Guide have served as resources for development of the following documents. Some of the principles may reflect an institution’s current state of operations; others may be unrealistic to achieve. While Division II has a very diverse membership of varying sizes and institutional missions, most of the guidelines represent attributes that are found in successful Division II athletics programs and reflect real goals that, if achieved, should enhance an institution’s operations. Without exception, a Division II athletics program should be an extension of the educational mission of the institution and reflect the standards of higher education.

In 2006, the NCAA Division II Presidents Council adopted the NCAA Division II Strategic Positioning Platform, which more clearly defines the unique philosophy and position of Division II within the overall Association. The platform includes a Division II positioning statement that describes the student-athlete experience in Division II as “a comprehensive program of learning and development in a personal setting”. In addition, the platform also describes six Division II Attributes: Learning, Service, Passion, Sportsmanship, Resourcefulness and Balance.

With the adoption of the Strategic Positioning Platform, the Division II ADA was charged with modifying the original NCAA Division II Model Athletics Department document so that it is more closely aligned with the Division II Strategic Positioning Platform and the key attributes of the Platform. Parts of the former document remain unchanged; however, the revised document correlates the Model Athletics Department with the Strategic Positioning Platform. The various roles and responsibilities for athletics department staff and the 21

guiding principles are linked in the revised document to the six NCAA Division II attributes at the forefront of the platform.

The Division II ADA is committed to making the Division II Strategic Positioning Platform a dynamic document that will guide institutions in their future decision-making and further enhance Division II as a membership destination. A goal of the Model Athletics Department Document is to serve as a resource for specific guidelines for Division II institutions for implementing the strategic platform to their unique settings. The following guiding principles for a model Division II athletics department are intended to support and reflect the NCAA Division II Strategic Positioning Platform:

1. **Integration and Institutional Control.** A model Division II athletics program is integral to the educational mission of the institution, is fully integrated as an athletics department in the institution's budget and management operations, and is committed to the principle of institutional control. A model Division II athletics program should be an extension of the educational mission of the institution and higher education. A model athletics program is committed to ensuring that student-athletes learn in the classroom, on the field of play and through the overall experience of being a college student. (Learning, Service, Resourcefulness, Balance)
2. **Chancellor/President Oversight.** A model Division II member institution's Chancellor/President sets forth a vision for the institution's intercollegiate athletics program, that adequate resources exist for the athletics department to carry out this vision, ensures athletics is an extension of the educational mission of the institution, ensures the activation of the Division II Strategic Positioning Platform at their institution and in their community, emphasizes the importance of the institution's compliance system and the roles of various departments (e.g., financial aid office) in this system, and prioritizes self-reporting of compliance violations and compliance with Title IX. (Learning, Service, Passion, Sportsmanship, Resourcefulness, Balance)
3. **AD Management.** A model Division II athletics program shall feature a full-time administrator that takes responsibility for the academic and athletics success of the athletics department. As the manager for the department, the AD shall implement the institution's vision for intercollegiate athletics consistent with the institution's educational mission and philosophy. The AD is also responsible for creating an environment that prioritizes sportsmanship and civility, and establishing departmental goals that are aligned with the DII Strategic Positioning Platform including the role athletics can play in strengthening the bond between the institution and community. The AD should serve as a primary athletics administrator and should not have other major responsibilities (e.g., should not also serve as a compliance officer; should not

also serve as a coach). With the adoption of the Strategic Positioning Platform, and implementation of the six key attributes, the importance of having sufficient athletics department staff to promote the platform through its new community-engagement initiative is further demonstrated. (Learning, Service, Passion, Sportsmanship, Resourcefulness, Balance)

4. **FAR Involvement.** A model Division II member institution shall include the active involvement of the faculty athletics representative as the key institutional liaison to the athletics department, and should be supported and funded by the institution to perform these functions. The involvement of the FAR should include eligibility or academic related duties, maintaining an atmosphere of compliance and institutional control, and assisting in investigations of rules compliance. The FAR should also serve as a key contact for student-athletes. (Learning, Service, Resourcefulness)
5. **SWA or Fifth Representative to the Governance Structure.** An institutional Senior Woman Administrator is the highest ranking female involved with the management of an institution's intercollegiate athletics program. An institution with a female director of athletics may designate a different female involved with the management of the institution's program as a fifth representative to the NCAA governance system. A model Division II athletics program shall include active involvement of the fifth representative to the governance structure in decision making regarding key issues and in the general operations of the athletics department. The fifth representative to the governance structure should be a senior level administrator and she should have the title of assistant or associate athletics director. (Service, Balance)
6. **Coach's Role.** A model Division II athletics program shall feature an environment where head coaches understand their responsibility in establishing a culture of compliance with conference and NCAA rules within the program. A model athletics program also features coaches who have a clear understanding of the institution's emergency medical plans and are certified in CPR/AED operation and first aid. (Learning, Service, Passion, Sportsmanship)
7. **SAAC Involvement.** A model Division II athletics program shall feature an active institutional SAAC that represents the concerns and ideas of the institution's student-athletes in all sports and is committed to the overall welfare of the student-athlete. The institution should designate an athletics department administrator to serve as a liaison to the SAAC and have at least one student-athlete representative on the conference SAAC. (Learning, Service, Passion, Sportsmanship, Balance)
8. **Athletic Trainers.** A model Division II athletics program shall feature an adequate number of certified athletic trainers (per NATA guidelines) who are able to provide for

the safety and well-being of the student-athletes. Practices should adhere to the NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook. (Resourcefulness)

9. **Academic Success.** A model Division II athletics program shall be committed to the academic success of its student-athletes, measured in part by the total number of student-athletes that earn degrees within six years of initial collegiate enrollment and the fact that student-athletes graduate at least at the same rate as the institution's student body. (Learning, Balance)
10. **Diversity and Inclusion.** A model Division II athletics program shall be committed to the principle of diversity and inclusion. The athletics department shall promote an atmosphere of respect for and sensitivity to the dignity of every person. The department shall also value the opinions of all, initiate a leadership role on campus in this area, and, through diverse hiring pools, strive for gender and ethnic diversity in the institution's administrative and coaching positions. (Service, Resourcefulness)
11. **Compliance.** A model Division II athletics program shall feature a full-time compliance coordinator whose primary responsibility is the oversight of the institution's compliance system, the coordination of the institution's rules education and the monitoring of rules compliance. The compliance officer should not be a coach and should not be the athletics director. The athletics department should use an electronic or Web-based system for compliance monitoring. The department should also commit to a regular self-analysis to ensure Title IX compliance and a regular external assessment (e.g., Division II Compliance Blueprint visit) to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the institution's compliance systems. (Learning, Service, Resourcefulness)
12. **Institutional Self-Study Guide.** Each Division II institution shall conduct a comprehensive self-study and evaluation of its intercollegiate athletics program at least once every five years, using the NCAA's Institutional Self-Study Guide (ISSG). Note that the five-year cycle should be accelerated when there are personnel or administrative changes on campus. (Learning, Resourcefulness, Balance)
13. **Community Engagement/Game Environment.** A model Division II athletics program will emphasize that a "family friendly" environment should exist at all athletics department events and shall be active in promoting community engagement activities. A model program shall promote and support a positive game environment that will encourage all student-athletes, coaches and fans to respect each other, practice civility, encourage teamwork and understand citizenship responsibilities during the conduct of intercollegiate practice and competitions. An athletics department should develop a policy on sportsmanship and fan behavior for home events. The Student-Athlete

Advisory Committee could provide leadership with the development of such a policy. (Learning, Service, Passion, Sportsmanship, Resourcefulness, Balance)

14. **Finances and Sports Sponsorship.** A model Division II athletics program shall be administered with prudent management and fiscal practices to ensure financial stability. Sufficient operating and travel budgets should be maintained to allow for the effective operation of the athletics department. The current average for a Division II athletics department budget is posted on line in the NCAA Division II Membership Report. The model program should also feature participation opportunities that are consistent with the institution's mission and the interests of the institution's student-athletes. The minimum sports-sponsorship and financial aid requirements are legislated in the NCAA Division II Manual. (Resourcefulness, Balance)
15. **Continuing Education and Professional Development.** A model Division II athletics program shall be committed to sending its key personnel to educational events (e.g., NACWAA) and to the annual NCAA Convention to enhance the success of the institution and to further the professional development of the coaches and administrators in the athletics department. In addition, the athletics department should look for regional and national workshops or seminars to send student-athletes to enhance their leadership skills. (Learning, Resourcefulness)
16. **Life Skills.** A model Division II athletics program shall be committed to the total development of a student-athlete's life skills, as evidenced by implementing the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills or similar program. Life skills programming should effectively engage the community in preparing student-athletes for successes both concurrent with their athletics careers and after their collegiate experiences. A model Division II athletics program will assist student-athletes in developing, identifying and applying transferable skills such as citizenship and leadership in their careers and in their community. (Learning, Service, Passion, Resourcefulness, Balance)
17. **Assessment.** A model Division II athletics program shall feature a tool that is used as a written assessment each year to measure the student-athletes' experience. In addition, the athletics department should feature annual written evaluations by managers (e.g., AD, SWA) regarding the performance of coaches and administrators. (Learning, Service, Resourcefulness, Balance)
18. **Marketing, Promotions and Media Relations.** A model Division II athletics program shall feature a person responsible for promoting the institution's athletics department, and for building key relationships with the media and the community. The athletics program should include marketing strategies for the Division II Strategic Positioning Platform and the six key attributes of the platform. The task of implementing these marketing

strategies should be shared by all institutional constituencies. (Service, Passion, Resourcefulness)

19. **Communication/Campus Relationships.** A model Division II athletics program features a communication strategy to keep other key departments (registrar) and positions (financial aid director) on campus up to date regarding athletics department issues. Through communication and collaboration, a model athletics program will reach outward to communities as well as inward to other campus units. (Service, Resourcefulness)
20. **Strategic Plan for Intercollegiate Athletics.** A model Division II athletics program features a strategic vision for an integrated athletics model that specifies the goals and objectives for the intercollegiate athletics experience and identifies how athletics enhances the mission of the campus. A model Division II athletics department shall engage in long range planning and develop a long-range strategic plan that supports initiatives consistent with the Division II Strategic Positioning Platform. (Learning, Service, Passion, Sportsmanship, Resourcefulness, Balance)
21. **Fundraising.** A model Division II athletics program provides for an individual whose primary assignment is athletics fundraising and development. If that individual is the athletics director, an additional assistant athletics director would be necessary for the day-today operations of the department. If the function is handled outside the athletics department, the institution's development office should provide for an individual whose primary responsibility is athletics fundraising and development. (Service, Resourcefulness)

Source: NCAA Models for Success for a Division II Athletics Program.
National Collegiate Athletic Association. Indianapolis, IN. Revised 10/14/2008.

APPENDIX C

Minimum Requirements to be Considered for Division II Membership

In order for an application to be considered by the NCAA Division II Membership Committee for entrance into the Division II membership process, an institution must demonstrate that it meets the following minimum requirements. Ultimately, the committee has the authority to accept or not accept an institution's application to enter the Division II membership process, even if the institution is meeting the minimum requirements at the time of application. Class size will be determined by the committee annually. Every application pool is considered on its own merit. Recommendations for an institution's improvement provided by the committee post selection will not guarantee approval in the next cycle.

Analysis/Feasibility Study

The institution shall demonstrate that broad-based campus-wide discussions involving multiple constituencies which includes, but is not limited to the governing body of the institution occurred regarding membership in Division II, including a discussion of the necessary resources and personnel to operate a Division II intercollegiate athletics program. The institution should also demonstrate consideration of the overall fit and alignment with Division II philosophy, attributes and the strategic platform.

Accredited Four-Year Baccalaureate Degree(s) Granting Institution.

The institution shall demonstrate that it is accredited by one of the six regional accrediting agencies and has been offering four-year baccalaureate degree(s) for a minimum of one academic year prior to submitting an application to enter the Division II membership process. Canadian institutions must have applied to a United States regional accrediting agency prior to being considered for acceptance into the Division II membership process.

History of a Varsity Athletics Program.

The institution shall demonstrate that it has been offering an athletics program at the varsity level for a minimum of one academic year prior to submitting an application to enter the Division II membership process.

Strategic Plan for the Intercollegiate Athletics Program.

The institution shall provide a clear, detailed strategic plan for its intercollegiate athletics program, including an outline of key goals and priorities, associated timeline and commitment of financial and personnel resources. The institution must demonstrate the documented approval of the strategic plan by the institution's governance and implementation of the strategic plan will occur.

Financial Model for the Intercollegiate Athletics Program.

The institution shall demonstrate that it administers its intercollegiate athletics program with prudent management and fiscal practices to ensure financial stability, including, but not limited to, sufficient operating and travel budgets for the effective operation of a Division II department of athletics.

Commitment of Personnel and Current Staff.

The institution shall demonstrate that it has personnel to operate the intercollegiate athletics program at the Division II level, including, but not limited to, a full-time director of athletics and a full-time administrator whose primary responsibility is compliance and who does not have coaching responsibilities.

Facilities.

The institution shall demonstrate that it has adequate facilities to operate a Division II intercollegiate athletics program. If the institution is upgrading and/or building new facilities, the institution shall include a detailed plan, including a timeline and a commitment of resources (e.g., finances) to upgrading and/or building the facilities. If the institution is renting facilities the institution shall demonstrate that it has a long-term agreement in place for use in both practice and competition.

Sports Sponsorship.

The institution shall demonstrate that it is meeting the Division II minimum sports sponsorship requirements as outlined in Bylaw 20.10.3 and the three-season requirement as outlined in Bylaw 20.10.4 at the time of application. Institutions must demonstrate that the sports were sponsored per the applicable legislation in the academic year immediately preceding the application date. Plans to sponsor additional sports to meet the legislated requirements in the academic year after the application deadline will not satisfy the sports sponsorship requirement.

Athletically Related Financial Aid.

The institution shall demonstrate that it is meeting the Division II financial aid requirements as outlined in Bylaw 20.10.1 at the time of application. If the institution is not meeting the requirements as outlined in Bylaw 20.10.1 at the time of application, the institution shall include a detailed plan, including a timeline and commitment of resources (e.g., finances) to demonstrate that it will be meeting the requirements of Bylaw 20.10.1 by the time the institution begins the provisional period. The institution must show documented approval of the plan and the implementation of the plan by the institution's governance structure.

NCAA Division II Membership Committee

Additional Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria are important in determining an institution's fit for Division II membership. The criteria may be used to differentiate between institutions that apply for Division II membership.

Demonstrated Commitment to the Community.

The institution shall demonstrate that it is committed to the Division II Community Engagement Initiative for developing student-athletes and communities by actively engaging in shared experiences. The institution shall demonstrate with specific examples for each sport, a commitment to serving the community by the institution and department of athletics including coaches and student-athletes.

Success of the Varsity Athletics Program.

The institution shall demonstrate that the varsity athletics program has a demonstrated history of success as measured by the rankings in the conferences all-sports trophy or the Learfield Sports national all-sports ranking over the three years immediately preceding the application date.

Academic Achievement of Student-Athletes.

The institution shall demonstrate a commitment to the academic success of its student-athletes, measured by the graduation rate of the student-athletes in each sport being equal to or greater than that of the general student-body.

Operational Staff.

The institution shall demonstrate that it has adequate staffing to cover all responsibilities associated with operating a Division II athletics department to include but not limited to sports information, media relations and athletics training. The staff member(s) may have other duties within the department of athletics.

Demonstrated Commitment to Sportsmanship.

The institution shall have policies in place that demonstrate a commitment to the Division II game environment initiative, including good sportsmanship by all coaches, fans and student-athletes.

Conference Affiliation.

The institution shall demonstrate a plan to be affiliated with a Division II conference by the end of candidacy year two.

Source: 2011 Application for NCAA Division II Membership

APPENDIX D**List of Pseudonyms****Individual Participants**

Pseudonym	Position	Description
Kelly Clark	President	Attorney and former state politician; became President in 2007; charged with leading the transition to 4-year status.
Ray English	Executive Vice President & Provost	Retired as President at Border State University (a Division I-AA institution); has considerable experience working with NCAA governance structure.
Mark McNally	Former AD Softball Coach	AD and coach at Cartwright College from 2003-2010; has experience as a referee, coach and administrator.
Rusty Erwin	Athletic Director	Experienced administrator; arrived on campus in July 2010 from North Shore University (NSU); responsible for guiding NSU from NAIA to NCAA DII membership.
Erika Freeman	Compliance Coordinator	Arrived on campus in July 2009 from Sunbelt State University (SSU); was involved in SSU's transition from NAIA to NCAA DII.
Melissa Hilton	Faculty Representative (FAR)	Joined the faculty in Fall 2008 from a Division I-AA institution; was named as FAR in 2008.
Andy Anderson	Baseball Coach	In 12 years as head coach he established one of the top programs in NJCAA, winning five regional championships.
Susan Shepherd	Women's Soccer Coach	14 years at Cartwright College; team won the 2006 NJCAA National Championship.
Michael Mills	Former Provost	Interim President in 2005-2006. Remained in his post as provost until accepting another position in 2009.
James Wayne	Former President	President at Cartwright College during the 1990s. Credited with significant changes in the athletics program.

Organizations

Pseudonym	Description
Cartwright College	Subject of Case Study.
Private College Athletic Conference (PCAC)	NCAA Division II Conference composed entirely of private schools. PCAC members are located in the three border states.
Regional Athletics Conference (RAC)	NCAA Division II Conference composed primarily of public schools. Eight RAC members are located within the state.
North Shore University (NSU)	NCAA Division II institution; member of the RAC
Sunbelt State University (SSU)	NCAA Division II institution; member of the RAC
Valley College	NCAA Division II institution; member of the PCAC
Border State University	NCAA Division I-AA institution located in geographic region.

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval

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
Division of Research Administration**

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Sponsored Programs and
Regulatory Compliance
Campus Box 7514
2701 Sullivan Drive
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514

919.515.2444
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Carol Mickelson, IRB Coordinator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: September 29, 2010

Project Title: Key Actor Perceptions of Athletics Strategy

IRB#: 1580

Dear Mr. Collins,

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. **This protocol will expire on August 30, 2011 and will need continuing review before that date.**

NOTE:

1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.
2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.
5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,



Carol Mickelson
NC State IRB

North Carolina State University
 Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
 SUBMISSION FOR NEW STUDIES

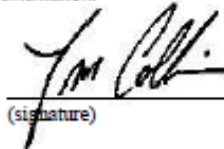
GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Date Submitted: <u>August 16, 2010</u>
1a. Revised Date: <u>September 28, 2010</u>
2. Title of Project: <u>Key Actor Perceptions of Athletics Strategy</u>
3. Principal Investigator: <u>William Thomas Collins</u>
4. Department: <u>Adult and Higher Education</u>
5. Campus Box Number: <u>Box 7801</u>
6. Email: <u>tomcollins@kw.com</u>
7. Phone Number: <u>828-577-5132</u>
8. Fax Number: <u>828-877-5151</u>
9. Faculty Sponsor Name and Email Address if Student Submission: <u>Dr. Carol E. Kasworm</u>
10. Source of Funding? (required information): <u>Personally Funded</u>
11. Is this research receiving federal funding?: <u>No</u>
12. If Externally funded, include sponsor name and university account number: <u>None</u>
13. RANK: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student: <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate; <input type="checkbox"/> Masters; or <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): <u>Ed. D.</u>

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

Principal Investigator:

William Thomas Collins
 (typed/printed name)



* 09/28/2010
 (date)

As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the principal investigator of record.

Faculty Sponsor:

Dr. Carol Kasworm
 (typed/printed name)

 (signature)

* _____
 (date)

***Electronic submissions to the IRB are considered signed via an electronic signature. For student submissions this means that the faculty sponsor has reviewed the proposal prior to it being submitted and is copied on the submission.**

Please complete this application and email as an attachment to: debra_paxton@ncsu.edu or send by mail to: Institutional Review Board, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (Administrative Services III). Please include consent forms and other study documents with your application and submit as one document.

For SPARCS office use only

Reviewer Decision (Expedited or Exempt Review)

- Exempt Approved Approved pending modifications Table

Expedited Review Category: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8a 8b 8c 9

Reviewer Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX F

Initial Contact Letter

March 21, 2010

Dear President [Clark]:

I am completing work toward an Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration at North Carolina State University and finalizing my dissertation proposal for submission later this month. As you are aware, my preliminary research and literature review focused on intercollegiate athletics and the role of key actors in the athletics reclassification process. Following-up on a passing comment that you made during my recent visit to campus, I would like to formally request your approval to conduct a qualitative case study of [Cartwright College] as the institution proceeds through the NCAA Division II membership application process. Over the past few months, I have refined and refocused my dissertation proposal:

The proposed case study examines athletics strategies, specific courses of action within the athletics program designed to meet the long-term objectives of the institution as a whole; from the perspective of key actors, those individuals with the capacity to make and shape policy decisions, establish operational objectives, and implement long-term strategies; at a private, church-affiliated college.

[Cartwright College] provides a “purposeful” sample for case study that allows for in-depth exploration of a bounded event (the institution’s application for Division II membership) and consideration of multiple environmental factors. [Cartwright College] is as an information-rich case in that the transition to NCAA Division II inherently requires multiple athletics initiatives, including: the addition of new sports programs; construction and renovation of facilities; alignment with an athletic conference, and the expansion of athletics department staff.

Data collection for this study will consist of on-campus observations, document analysis, and personal interviews with key actors that have played a role in making, shaping or implementing strategic decisions involving the intercollegiate athletics program. (Prospective participants, by position, and the types of documents requested are listed on a separate attachment). I hope to be in a position to conduct document analysis and

personal interviews in May and June of this year, pending approval of my dissertation proposal. Follow-up (telephone) interviews will be scheduled after all first-round interviews have been completed and transcribed. This will provide an opportunity to review findings with participants; to discuss developments that have taken place since the first interview; and to ask detailed follow-up questions on specific topics.

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) form has been prepared for submission as part of the dissertation proposal. Consent Forms will be provided for all participants. The prospective participants in this study are administrators and coaches at [Cartwright College] and do not appear to be members of any vulnerable population. The study examines individual perceptions of the institution's athletics strategy and the potential risks associated with participation appear to be minimal. To protect anonymity, individuals will be referred to by position rather than by name; and a pseudonym will be used for the institution in published versions of the case study.

The primary audience for the case study report is my dissertation committee at North Carolina State. Current guidelines call for the dissertation to be formatted in such a way that the final product can be easily submitted for publication after it has been defended.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. In addition to requesting authorization and access for the purpose of this research, I hope that you will be willing to participate in the study. The President's perspective on athletics strategies as they relate to the long-term plans of the institution are a critical consideration. My best wishes in every endeavor

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Collins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tom Collins

[Note: Cartwright College and President Clark are pseudonyms used to protect the confidentiality of individuals participating in this case study.]

APPENDIX G

Follow-Up Letter to President

Kelly Clark
President
Cartwright College

September 8, 2010

Dear President [Clark]:

As you are aware, I am completing work toward an Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration at North Carolina State University and I am hoping to conduct dissertation research at [Cartwright College] as the institution proceeds through the NCAA Division II membership application process.

The dissertation proposal has been accepted and I am awaiting Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before proceeding with data collection for this study. The IRB has expressed the concern that my initial letter to you requesting permission for the study did not indicate that participation in the study is voluntary. The possibility that an element of coercion may exist and the likelihood that respondents may be identified in written documents creates further concern. The IRB has requested that I write you, explicitly stating that participation (your participation and that of other key actors) is completely voluntary, and that the decision to participate or not will have no effect at all on the individual's employment at the college.

I anticipate receiving approval to collect data as soon as the modifications requested by the IRB have been completed; and hope to be in a position to visit [Cartwright College] in October 2010. It will be helpful if you will return a signed copy of this document, acknowledging your understanding that all participation in the study is voluntary, so that I may provide a copy to the IRB. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,



Tom Collins

APPENDIX H

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Key Actor Perceptions of Athletics Strategy: Intercollegiate athletics initiatives designed to meet the long-range goals of a private, church-affiliated college.

Principal Investigator: William Thomas Collins **Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Carol E. Kasworm

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to gain better understanding of the conditions and contexts that influence the adoption of an athletics strategy from the perspective of key actors at a private, church-affiliated college.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute, semi-structured interview conducted on the campus of your institution in a private area where you are free to speak without being overheard. The interviews will seek your perceptions of athletics strategy that has been implemented as part of the institution's 10-year strategic plan. Interview questions will focus on the influence that the organization's environmental context, including its culture, has on the process and content of strategic change. The interviews will be tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. You will be provided an opportunity to review these transcripts for accuracy prior to a subsequent 30-minute telephone interview. The total time commitment required for your participation in this study is less than two hours. There is a possibility that additional time (approximately 30 minutes) may be required for a final review in the unlikely event that the participant is identifiable in final written documents/reports.

Risks

There are potential risks associated with your participation in this study. Because this study focuses on individual perceptions about your workplace, there are inherent risks that responses may be damaging to your financial standing, employability, or reputation. Although you will not be

identified by name in any reports, it is possible that you will be identified by your responses or by the use of your job title in association with a response.

Because of the open-ended format of the interviews, there is a risk that third parties may be identified in responses. Finally, because authorization for this study has been received from senior level administrators, there is a risk that employees may feel coerced into participating.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and you may decline to answer any questions posed during the interview process. You may withdraw from participation in this study at any time.

Benefits

Although there may be no direct benefit to you personally for your participation, this research will contribute to understanding of how key actors perceive athletics strategy – specific courses of action within the intercollegiate athletics program designed to meet the long-term objectives of the institution as a whole. Awareness of key actor perceptions of the content, context and process of athletics strategy implementation may be of interest and benefit to administrators weighing similar decisions on other campuses. This study is significant in that research on intercollegiate athletics tends to focus on high-profile NCAA Division I programs, with sparse attention given to institutions in other classifications. There is a need for research that considers the distinctions in mission, management, and finances that exist at smaller, private, church-affiliated institutions.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. An alpha-numeric code will be assigned to each participant by the primary researcher. Participants will be identified by this code in data documents and study notes. Data, including tape recordings and transcripts will be stored securely in locked files and made available only to researchers involved in the study, unless written permission is obtained from the participant to do otherwise.

To protect confidentiality, participants will be referred to by position rather than by name; and a pseudonym will be used for the institution in published versions of the case study report. For instance, broad classification categories will be used when identifying responses (e.g., a senior administrator said, "..."). Should it be necessary to use your specific job title in published reports, you will have an opportunity to preview your responses prior to publication. As described above in the risk section, the researcher can not guarantee confidentiality and it is possible that you will be identified by your responses or by the use of your job title in association with a response. A pseudonym will be used for the institution and its location will be identified only in general terms (e.g., a liberal arts college located in the southeast) in all published versions of the case study report. Because of the unique nature of the institution's transition to 4-year status and the adoption of specific athletics strategies, it remains possible that well-informed readers will be able to identify the institution from the narrative.

To protect the privacy of others, you should not use full names or other identifiable information in your responses during the interviews. If names of others are captured on the audio tape these names will be removed or replaced with a pseudonym when the tapes are transcribed.

Compensation

You will receive no compensation for participation in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, William Thomas Collins at 115 Meadowbrook Circle, Brevard, NC 28712 or (828) 577-5132.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Due to the unique nature of the institution’s transition to 4-year status, and adoption of specific athletics strategies, it is probable that informed readers will be able to identify the institution from the narrative. I understand that there will be no attempt to mask the name/state of the college.

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX I

Interview Guide

Alpha-Numeric Code: _____ Date: _____

_____ Provided copy of consent form? _____ Signed consent form obtained?

Provide Brief Description of the Study and Obtain Background Information

Culture. *How do key actors describe the culture of the institution and the role of intercollegiate athletics?*

Based on your experiences, describe culture of the college as a 2-year institution, prior to the decision to transition to 4-year college status. How has the culture changed with the transition of the college to 4-year status?

Describe the role of intercollegiate athletics within the institutional culture. What cultural changes have been experienced as a result of athletics strategies adopted by the college – the move to Division II, the establishment of basketball, the expansion of the athletics staff?

Context. *How do key actors describe the environmental context of athletics strategy implementation at their institution?*

Based on your experiences, describe the decision to transition the college to 4-year status and the development of the college’s athletics strategies – the move to Division II, the establishment of basketball, the expansion of the athletics staff.

Describe the environmental factors, both those within the college and those external factors, that influenced the college’s athletics strategies. What were the major issues dominated the discussions?

Who was involved in making decisions relative to the transition of the college to 4-year status and the strategic plan? Describe their roles in the process. Was there specific data used to guide their decision-making? Were there other institutions that served as benchmarks or models?

Process. *How do key actors describe the process for forming and implementing athletics strategy? In what ways does the context enable or constrain the interpreting and sharing process?*

Based on your experiences, describe the process for forming and implementing athletics strategies – specifically 1) NCAA Division II membership; 2) the establishment of men’s and women’s basketball as varsity sports; and 3) the expansion of the athletics staff.

- Specific Prompts:**
- 1) The NCAA Membership Process
 - 2) Conference Membership Decisions
 - 3) Hiring of Coaches and Athletics Staff
 - 4) The development of athletics facilities

How were these athletics strategy decisions communicated to the campus and community?

How have different constituencies (students, faculty, trustees, alumni, community boosters) reacted to these athletics strategy decisions? Has there been either noticeable support or resistance.

Content. *How do key actors describe the goals, plans and operational objectives of the athletics strategy adopted by their institution? What specific outcomes do they anticipate?*

Overall, what effect will changes in the level of athletics competition and the expansion of the intercollegiate athletics program have on the college? What specific outcomes do you anticipate will be realized?

In what ways will the increased resources required by these athletics strategy initiatives affect other programs and the overall financial viability of the institution?

From your perspective, what lessons have been learned and what new knowledge has been gained as the college has transitioned to senior-college status and initiated these athletics strategies. What guidance would you offer to administrators weighing similar decisions in the future?