Go Big Red!: Assessing Outcomes of Student Attendance at Indiana University Bloomington Athletic Events

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This study focused on the relationship between student attendance at intercollegiate varsity athletic events and overall student satisfaction and sense of belonging at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). The sample included 327 quantitative questionnaires distributed to IUB students. These questionnaires focused on the connection between student satisfaction and sense of belonging and attendance at intercollegiate varsity athletic events. Findings indicate a statistically significant relationship between student attendance at athletic events and a sense of belonging to an institution.

Introduction

Intercollegiate athletics have been a visible part of college and university environments since their establishment in the early nineteenth century (Smith, 1998). Recently, however, some athletic programs have increasingly come under intense scrutiny over a few of the outcomes associated with them. For example, several authors and administrators have criticized the University of Maryland basketball program over the rowdy behavior exhibited by fans against rival Duke University (Argentesinger, 2004). Rowdy behavior and other highly publicized instances of negative press are forcing Division I athletic programs to justify their existence, especially in light of budget cuts on campuses nationwide (Sperber, 2000). This study examines positive outcomes of attendance at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) intercollegiate athletic events.

IUB presents a unique laboratory for study: it has a history of national success in basketball and soccer that is well-known throughout the campus and beyond. The men’s basketball program has won five national championships, while the men’s soccer team has won a total of seven national championships, including recent back-to-back national championships. In the 2004 Summer Olympics, six individuals from IUB represented the United States in various sports (Board of Trustees of Indiana University, 2004a). In all, 167 IUB athletes have competed in the Olympic Games, which has made IUB well-known throughout the international sporting community (Board of Trustees of Indiana University). Alternately, however, both the men’s basketball and football programs suffered disappointing seasons in recent years, including the firing of a prominent coach. Many discussions on campus centered on students’ reactions to the firing and losing seasons. The recent addition of a $30 mandatory athletic fee on all IUB students also brought a variety of questions and concerns from faculty, students, and staff to the athletic department and their programs (Board of Trustees of Indiana University, 2004b). The concerns of athletic accountability and student benefit have made athletics a prominent issue on campus.

Researchers in higher education have focused heavily on student satisfaction and sense of belonging with college environments (Astin, 1993a). Current trends in higher education research are increasingly focused on specific environments on campuses such as residence halls, student unions, and classrooms (Kuh, 2000). National research projects, such as the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) and the College Student Survey (CSS), concentrate on college students’ behavior and overall opinions and ideas about their college experience (CSEQ Research Program, 2004).

Bringing these two environmental issues together, this study looks at the concept of student satisfaction and sense of belonging with a college or university in connection with attendance at intercollegiate athletic events.

The researchers will assess student satisfaction and sense of belonging in the environment in relation to student attendance at athletic events at IUB. The researchers asked the following research question: How does attendance at intercollegiate athletic events relate to student satisfaction and sense of belonging with a college environment? While several studies have focused on the experiences of student athletes (see, for example, Chelladurai & Reimer, 1997), outcomes of athletics including increased admissions applications to the university following successful seasons (Toma & Cross, 1998), or factors contributing to fan attendance (Laverie & Arnett, 2000), research is lacking in the area of assessing attendance at athletic events and tying it to outcomes such as student satisfaction and sense of belonging to a university. These issues demonstrate a pressing need to study this environment. This research will first examine literature relating to the study. It will then outline the methods and procedures used to collect data and the limitations of the study. Finally, the results will be explained and implications for practitioners will be discussed.

Literature Review

Student Satisfaction, Sense of Belonging, and Development

Student affairs practitioners and researchers spend considerable effort attempting to identify and understand what factors help students succeed in college. Several studies have investigated what contributes to student satisfaction and what outcomes result (Astin, 1993a; DeWitz & Walsh, 2002). Understanding what factors relate to student satisfaction and develop-
ment enables administrators to foster an environment most beneficial to the students they serve.

Satisfaction has been described using a number of variables including rewards for effort, social life, perception of physical environment, positive feedback from others, and quality of education received (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002). For this study, attendance at athletic events is theorized to have an impact on a student’s social life. Together, the results of these measures create the students’ satisfaction levels with the campus around them, and contribute to students’ connection to the university while enrolled as well as commitment after graduation. Similarly, Astin (1993a) argued that different students find satisfaction with college based more on one factor than another. Astin added contact with faculty and fellow students, college administration, and facilities as factors that lead to student satisfaction. This research is focused on satisfaction gained by having the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, which can include attendance at athletic events as a way to build relationships among peers. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) argued a student’s level and quality of academic, social, and extracurricular participation and engagement is instrumental in determining how much a student learns. The presence or absence of these factors can influence whether or not an environment is conducive to student learning.

Using these measures, several researchers have discussed outcomes of student satisfaction including retention, school spirit, and graduation rates (Astin, 1993a; DeWitz & Walsh, 2002). Astin (1993a) found that students who are more satisfied with the campus environment are more likely to persist to graduation than those who are unsatisfied. Specifically, Astin stated that student satisfaction played a role in student retention, success, and connection to the university. This literature supports the need to study factors relating to student satisfaction with a university.

Understanding sense of belonging for college students is another important factor to consider. A sense of belonging to an institution is when a student can associate and feel welcomed in the campus environment. In the moving through phase of Schlossberg’s Transitional Theory, students develop a sense of belonging with the institution they attend (as cited in Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The support they receive from groups in which they identify can strengthen a connection to the institution and the experiences a student will have in college. The student may focus more on belonging to the institution rather than just living on campus or attending classes. Thus understanding the factors that influence students’ sense of belonging to campus can be vital for practitioners to create environments for students to succeed and grow.

Student Involvement with Athletics

Oftentimes, identification with an athletic team can have a powerful effect on the culture of a college and students’ sense of belonging (Toma, 2003). This effect on identity can influence the clothing fans wear and the descriptors they use to describe themselves (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976; Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002). After an athletic team’s success, Sperber (2000) noted that a typical response included the student referring to him/herself as a part of that team. Instead of saying, “I wanted my college team to win the championship,” a student may say, “I wanted to win a basketball national championship” (Sperber, 2000). This demonstrates the power an athletic team can have with regard to a student’s identification with his/her institution. Further, by connecting with an athletic team on a college campus, students start to examine issues beyond individualism; they begin to identify themselves within an entire community (Chu, 1989). This association makes it easy to identify students who are “committed to their education and those who merely go through the motions” (Chu, p. 161). Sports have become a common ground that can unify the many populations within a college campus (Toma, 2003). Students ignore differences between their social or academic standing and become solely focused on the university athletic team and their success (Toma, 2003).

Past studies also examined factors that contribute to fan attendance and how behavior is manifested in fans. Laverie and Arnett (2000) developed a model in which situation involvement, attachment, enduring involvement, identity salience, and satisfaction contribute directly or indirectly to whether students attend sporting events. The presence of these factors are more likely to be found in students who attend athletic events. Similarly, Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, and Jacquemotte (2000) found males tend to identify more strongly as fans than females. However, such studies do not examine the outcomes of fan attendance, including satisfaction with and sense of belonging to the university.

Environmental Assessment and Student Typologies

An investigation of a campus environment should take into account the student subcultures that exist. Kuh (2000) argued, “…different affinity groups develop and perpetuate their own distinctive interaction patterns and norms that influence how their members behave and are to relate to others” (p. 56). Subcultures exert a powerful force on student interactions as they shape students’ expectations and attitudes toward their collegiate experience.

According to Kuh and Whitt (1988), “Student cultures … affect the climate and culture of their institutional contexts and in turn the experience of all participants in higher education” (p. 92). The ecological interpretive frame of environmental theory asserts that students both shape their environment,
and are reciprocally shaped by it (Kuh, 2000). A particular campus environment will affect participants regardless of individual differences. Research into the different potentially shaping factors in this area provides additional insight into the process students and campus cultures go through in being shaped by each other.

Through assessment of the environment, action can then be taken to “reduce the negative impact of poor experiences on students and accentuate the positive ones” (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 170). This illustrates the need for an environmental assessment of student cultures and the subcultures within them to better identify what influences students’ satisfaction with their college experience (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). By investigating and understanding the subcultures that exist on campus, administrators will be better able to respond to those students and intentionally create an environment that supports the mission and values of the university.

One way researchers have identified and investigated subcultures is through typologies. In the 1960s, several theories classifying students by type began to emerge in an attempt to better understand the interaction of peers. These typologies relied on personality, interests, values, or behavior to identify differences between student peer groups (Astin, 1993b). By developing typologies, researchers are better able to understand differences among students on college campuses (Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 2000).

Clark and Trow’s (1966) typology of college students was one of the first theories, and remains one of the most popular (Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 2000). Clark and Trow (1966) grouped students into four subcultures based on two variables: identification with the college and intellectual effort. The Collegiate subculture is “the most widely held stereotype of college life...a world of football, fraternities and sororities, dates, cars, drinking, and campus fun” (Clark & Trow, p. 20). Students in this subculture identify with the college, but lack significant academic energy. The Vocational subculture consists of students who attend college in order to gain experience and knowledge that will prepare them to obtain a higher paying job after graduation. For these students, the university experience serves as a means toward an end. Students in the Academic subculture engage in activities that stimulate them intellectually. They meet with professors outside of class, continue discussions begun in class, and work hard to earn good grades. Finally, students who are classified as Nonconformist are highly involved with ideas, but lack identification with their college. They remain informed on current social and intellectual trends, but are wary of administrators. Some critics alleged, however, that the typology developed by Clark and Trow does not constitute actual student subcultures; instead, the categories describe general student orientation to college, but lack key criteria, such as persistent interaction, that prevent them from being accurately termed subcultures (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Since this seminal work was published in 1966, several similar typologies have been devised to classify students (Astin, 1993b; Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 2000). Astin used data collected from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) to define seven subcultures of students. Based on the student attitudes and expectations gathered, Astin named the resulting types: Scholar, Social Activist, Artist, Hedonist, Leader, Status Striver, and Uncommitted. These types display similarities to previous typologies, thus leading Astin to conclude that student types are stable over time (Kuh, Hu, & Vesper).

More recently, Kuh, Hu, and Vesper (2000) used data from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) to categorize students into ten types based upon “patterns of engagement in educationally purposeful activities and the progress they reported making toward important outcomes of college” (p. 228). Realizing that student behavior has changed in the 30 years since Clark and Trow’s study, Kuh et al.’s focus on identifiable behavior differs from Astin’s model. The resulting categories: Intellectual, Individualist, Scientist, Conventional, Collegiate, Disengaged, Grind, Recreator, Socializer, and Artist, differentiate based on the amount and type of gains the students’ behaviors contribute toward or prevent certain identified educational goals. Of these, the Recreator emerged as a new type, not previously included in typologies. Kuh et al. concluded that students in the Recreator subculture, who focus on sports and related athletic activities, reflect how students have changed in the 1990s. One weakness of the Kuh et al. study is that the instrument used to identify the subcultures focuses on behavior previously identified as contributing to student learning and fails to address behaviors that may be common in college but which have not yet been directly correlated with positive outcomes. In short, “...the information used to create the groups does not encompass the full range of contemporary college study behavior, such as partying, drinking, watching television, playing video games, and so forth” (Kuh et al., p. 242).

One of the major criticisms of type theory is the lack of practical application in higher education (Astin, 1993b). Astin noted, “Although these research-based typologies have been discussed in the literature from time to time, they have seldom been used in institutional practice or policy-making” (1993b, p. 36). Traditionally, the practical use of typologies in higher education has focused on placement decisions and individualization of treatment for students (Astin). Stage (1988) and Kuh (1995), however, both tied the use of typologies to the study of student outcomes. Stage claimed typologies based on more than simple demographic data can be useful in understanding
outcomes in students. Kuh similarly called for more “high-stakes” research to strengthen administrators’ confidence in the outcomes gleaned from typological-based research.

Methods

This study used quantitative methods to explore the relationship between students who participate as spectators at intercollegiate varsity athletic events and their satisfaction and sense of belonging to the university. By using survey research, a relationship between gender, sense of belonging, and frequency of participation as a spectator at intercollegiate varsity athletic events was investigated. The researchers hypothesized that attending intercollegiate athletic events will contribute to students’ satisfaction and sense of belonging to the university. Based on previous research (Sperber, 2000), the researchers anticipated that males will be more likely to report that attending athletic events contributes to their sense of belonging. Last, the researchers expected grades to have a significant impact on student satisfaction with athletics and whether or not athletics contributes to their sense of belonging to the university (Clark & Trow, 1966). The higher the grades received, the less likely students will be to report attending athletic events contributes to their sense of belonging.

Participants

The participants in the study consisted of a convenience sample of 327 students who were enrolled in classes offered at the Career Development Center (CDC) at IUB. The CDC is located on campus and is accessible to the undergraduate student body of 28,559 students (The Thomson Corporation, 2004). IUB is a Division I school and a member of the Big Ten athletic conference. Additionally, more than 600 athletes compete on varsity athletic teams at IUB (Board of Trustees of Indiana University, 2004a).

Of the 327 students who completed the survey, 123 were male and 204 were female. Forty percent of the respondents were first-year students, and sixty percent were upperclass students. Thirteen percent of the sample indicated they had transferred to the institution.

Procedure and Instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) (Pace & Kuh, 1998) and the College Student Survey (CSS) (Astin, 1993b) to research the relationship between participation as spectators of intercollegiate athletics and overall satisfaction and sense of belonging to an institution. The CSEQ and CSS did not focus on involvement particularly with intercollegiate varsity athletics and a student’s overall satisfaction and sense of belonging with the university. As a result, this study was designed to capture the missing elements. The Environmental Assessment Questionnaire consists of 39 questions. These questions were designed to gather demographic information as well as assess student satisfaction in various areas of the university. Questions were also developed to evaluate the frequency of attendance at intercollegiate varsity athletic events. Using a five point Likert scale, researchers assessed satisfaction levels of the participants from very satisfied (1) to very dissatisfied (5). The dependent variables for the questionnaire consisted of participants’ rating of satisfaction with athletics, overall satisfaction, and response to whether attending athletic events contributed to their sense of belonging at the university.

Data Analysis

Correlations, t-tests, ANOVAs, and chi-square analyses were run to test for statistical significance. Correlations between respondents’ satisfaction levels with various components of their experiences were examined to determine the strength of relationship between items. One-way ANOVAs and t-tests were run to determine significant differences in satisfaction levels for different groups. Chi-square analyses were run between nominal variables and how students responded to the question, “Do you feel attending IUB intercollegiate varsity athletic events contributes to your sense of belonging to the university?” The dependent variables for this study consisted of participants’ responses the question, “Do you feel attending IUB intercollegiate varsity athletic events contributes to your sense of belonging to the university?” and participants’ reported overall satisfaction level with IUB athletics.

Limitations

This study has some limitations which should be acknowledged. First, the survey contained a weakness which prohibited the researchers from precisely distinguishing the frequency of attendance. The questionnaire contained overlaps in the response categories for the question, “How many IUB intercollegiate varsity athletic events have you attended in the last month?” Students responded by selecting “0-1,” “1-3,” “3-5,” or “5 or more.” A more precise response would strengthen the questionnaire.

Moreover, the timing of this study is a limiting factor. This research was conducted in the fall semester of the school year, meaning some students may have not yet attended athletic events. However, some of these students may have attended athletic events throughout other seasons. Examining student attendance throughout the academic school year could provide more definitive results.
Additionally, the sample included many first and fourth year students, but disproportionately fewer second, third, and fifth year students. The focus on these two classes of students does not provide a comprehensive view of how attitudes may differ between classes. The students in this research study were also primarily from the College of Arts and Sciences, which might also be a limiting factor in the research. Students majoring in other disciplines might display different behaviors not gathered in this study. Thus, the results of this study might not generalize to all students.

Results

Demographics

From the data gathered through the questionnaire, several descriptive statistics were compiled. First, 233 participants (71.2%) reported they currently attend intercollegiate varsity athletic events at the institution, and 120 students (36.7%) stated they had attended intercollegiate varsity athletic events at the institution prior to enrolling. Two-hundred and eighteen respondents (67.2%) indicated they feel as though attending athletic events contributes to their sense of belonging at the university. Finally, just over half of respondents (50.5%) indicated they are involved with student activities and organizations at the university.

Attendance at Athletic Events

Statistical tests comparing satisfaction and sense of belonging for multiple variables resulted in several significant findings. First, the study illustrated differences between students who report they currently attend athletic events versus those students who report they do not currently attend athletic events. Students who currently attend athletics report a higher satisfaction level with intercollegiate varsity athletics (M=2.32) than those who do not currently attend athletic events (M= 2.87, t=2.96, p<.01). Attendance at athletic events as a factor increasing a student’s sense of belonging to the university is also related to whether he or she currently attends athletic events. Eighty-one percent of students who currently attend athletic events reported that attending athletic events contributes to their sense of belonging, while thirty-two percent indicated that although they do not currently attend athletic events, attending athletic events does contribute to their sense of belonging. Further, students who currently attend athletic events say they are more likely to frequent athletic events if they are free (70.4%) than are those who report they do not currently attend athletics (44.4%, χ²=16.124, p<.001). Students who currently attend athletic events are also more likely than those who do not to support a $30 mandatory athletic fee that was recently implemented at the university (24.5% and 8.8% respectively, χ²=10.066, p<.01), even though more students in both categories are more likely to report not supporting the fee at all.

Frequency of events attended is also related to student satisfaction and sense of belonging with the university. The more events students report attending in the last month, the more likely they are to report that attending athletic events contributes to their sense of belonging. Only 52.2% of students who indicated they attend athletics never or once in the prior month also said they felt that attending athletics contributed to their sense of belonging, while 78.0% of those who attended one to three events, 89.7% of those who attended three to five events, and 93.8% of those who attended more than five events in the last month indicated they felt their attendance contributed to their sense of belonging (χ²=58.894, p<.001). Similarly, satisfaction with athletics was higher in students who attended more events. Among students who rarely attended athletics events in the past month (0-1 events), satisfaction with athletics was lower (M=2.67) than those who attended sometimes (1-3 events, M=2.30), which was in turn lower than those who attended more than three events in the past month (M=2.24, F(2)=8.483, p<.001).

Extra-Curricular Activities

Through a Chi-square analysis, a relationship was found between involvement in student organizations and affirmative responses to the question, “Do you feel attending ... intercollegiate varsity athletic events contributes to your sense of belonging to the university?” Students who indicated they were involved with student organizations were more likely to report that attending athletic events contributes to their sense of belonging (73.2%) than those who were not involved with student organizations (59.2%, χ²=7.085, p<.05). More specifically, a Chi-square analysis of involvement in Greek organizations versus sense of belonging revealed that students who are involved with Greek organizations were more likely to report attending athletic events contributes to their satisfaction (84.7%) than students who are not involved with a Greek organization (63.2%, χ²=10.875, p<.01). No significant difference exists between students involved with Greek organizations and those not involved when comparing satisfaction with athletics (M=2.45 and 2.48 respectively, t=.055).

Gender and Grades

The researchers hypothesized a relationship between grades and gender, sense of belonging, and frequency of participation. However, the data indicate that no relationship between sense of belonging and attendance at athletic events exists based on gender. The researchers also hypothesized that grades would have an impact on student satisfaction and sense of belonging to the university based on attendance attending athletic events. Yet,
the data showed no difference in students' likelihood to report that attending athletic events contributes to their satisfaction or sense of belonging based on grades. Our results contrast other researchers' findings on gender and grades (Clark & Trow, 1966; Sperber, 2000). However, this difference could be attributed to the limitations including length and sample of the study.

Implications

The results of this study indicate that attendance at athletic events does contribute to many students' sense of belonging to a university. Various factors, including the number of events attended and what types of extra-curricular activities the students are involved in, are particularly useful when used to identify students who benefit the most from attendance at athletic events. These findings have significant implications for student affairs practitioners and administrators on college campuses.

Practitioners who work on issues of retention can benefit from these findings. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) argued that the level and quality of extra-curricular as well as social and academic experiences were instrumental in creating a learning environment. The current study found that almost two-thirds of students reported that attendance at athletic events contributed to their sense of belonging to a university. As students attend more athletic events and become more involved outside the classroom, their learning environment is likely to improve. The current study supports the majority response to involvement on campus in connection to athletic attendance and overall satisfaction with the university.

Tinto (1993) similarly contended that a student's persistence is largely dependent upon his or her academic and social integration into the university. Further, the experience of a student attending athletic events can be an informal interaction with the university, which Tinto argued also aids in student retention. Students in this study indicated the more athletic events they attended, the more they said attendance contributed to their sense of belonging to the university, especially for first-year students. Creating an event that would bring first-year students to an athletic program would introduce them to the athletic environment on campus. From this experience, students could build connections for further association with the athletic environment contributing to their satisfaction and sense of belonging with the university. Thus, athletics can serve a vital role in student retention by providing a means for students to connect to the university and creating a more supportive learning environment, increasing the chance they will persist to graduation.

Past work identifying student typologies is also supported through the results of this study. Kuh, Hu, and Vesper's (2000) study discussed the activities of the "Recreator" student type. These students, who were largely characterized by an involvement with recreation and athletics at a university, seemed to gain significantly from the interpersonal relationships they had with other students. "Perhaps many Recreators ... who might otherwise leave college use sport and exercise to connect with peers and, as a result, stay in school and gain at least more from attending college than they would have had they left college" (Kuh, et al., p. 240). Students who could be categorized as "Recreator" students might benefit greatly from clubs and organizations that would support athletic teams such as spirit groups or booster clubs. Creating these organizations would not only benefit students, but would also help athletic programs and fan attendance. Similarly, students in this study who were more involved with athletics, as indicated by attending more events, were more likely to say such attendance contributed to their sense of belonging. The type of student who becomes involved with athletic events may benefit from the sense of belonging that seems to accompany such involvement.

Clark and Trow (1966) argued that a subculture based on football, fraternities, and campus fun exists at many universities. They found these activities were interrelated for some students, which brought them together. This study identified a link between Greek letter organizations, attendance at athletic events, and a stronger sense of belonging. This further supports the existence of this subculture on a college campus and how subcultures can contribute to a student's satisfaction and sense of belonging with a university. Student affairs practitioners could benefit from seeking to understand the relationship between Greek letter organizations and athletics, and then transferring these concepts to other student organizations and contribute to students' overall sense of belonging to a university.

The findings of this research also reinforce Chu's (1989) discussion of students identifying themselves within the community as a result of connecting with a college athletic team. If fans identify with a team, they have more enjoyment, which leads to greater satisfaction (Lavare & Arnett, 2000). Students in this study who attended more athletic events were increasingly likely to say athletics contributed to their sense of belonging on campus. Further, students who indicated they selected IUB due to its athletic reputation indicated higher levels of satisfaction and were more likely to report that attending athletic events contributed to their sense of belonging. Student leaders, such as resident assistants, Greek letter organization members, and orientation leaders, can introduce new students to school cheers and songs, which can also contribute to a sense of belonging at a university and a connection to student behaviors at intercollegiate varsity athletic events. These results support Chu's argument that students often identify themselves...
as a part of the athletic team. Identifying with that athletic team impacts their level of satisfaction with the university.

If the relationship between attendance at athletic events and a stronger sense of belonging to a university exists, the university needs to increase publication and recruitment efforts in order to get more students to athletic events, which might increase the connection other students feel to the campus. Additionally, despite earlier mentioned concerns over athletic budgets and scandals, the overall positive impact athletics has on some students’ means that administrative and financial support of athletic departments is necessary.

Future Directions for Research

Further research in this area would benefit from a comparison study of multiple campus environments including institutions with and without a prior winning season or strong athletic history. An expansion of the study to include a more representative sample of all classes at the institution would aid in generalizability of the findings. Further research would also do well to expand the study to a longitudinal format in which the sample of students’ satisfaction and attendance at athletic events could be tracked over their collegiate career. Finally, a study focused on Division II or Division III athletic programs might have different results, which could provide an alternative perspective. This would further explore the changes that occur in students’ development and open the research for exploration of a student athletic attendee typology.

To build on other research in the field, such as the study by Deitz-Uhler, Harrick, End, and Jacquemotte (2000) on fan characteristics, further studies could focus on the specific differences in attendance and satisfaction related to gender. Additionally, examining the impact of the newly implemented student athletic fee at IUB would be vital in analyzing future financial implications for athletic departments. Finally, since the athletic department is a major area of an institution and falls under its overall mission, further research would profit from an examination of how athletics contributes to or impacts the academic mission of a college or university.

It would also be beneficial to qualitatively analyze the experiences of attendees at intercollegiate athletic events in order to better ascertain the impact attendance has on satisfaction. While this study illustrates some of the outcomes associated with attendance at intercollegiate varsity athletic events, namely increased reporting of students’ satisfaction and sense of belonging with athletics, such a qualitative study could highlight how students’ experiences at athletic events vary, and how these differences could effect student outcomes. Further investigating how identification with an athletic subculture impacts student satisfaction and connectivity to the university would serve to provide additional insight into how college athletics affect students’ experiences. Finally, this study found a relationship between involvement in Greek-letter organizations and a sense of belonging derived from attending athletic events. A qualitative analysis of this relationship could provide useful methods to recruit other student organizations to attend athletic events which could positively impact their college experience.

Conclusion

This study indicates that attendance at athletic events can have a significant impact on students’ connection to the university. The more athletic events a student attends, the more likely he/she is to report that attending such events contributes to his/her sense of belonging. Since a sense of belonging and social integration to the university have been shown to have pronounced impacts on whether a student persists at an institution of higher education, athletics has the potential to contribute to students’ experiences and learning outcomes. While criticisms of athletics programs will most likely abound for some time, this study shows that athletics can play vital roles in some students’ experiences at a university.

References


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