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A Pilot Study on the Retention and Turnover of NCAA Division II Sports Information Directors

David Albrecht
Winona State University

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A Pilot Study on the Retention and Turnover of NCAA Division II Sports Information Directors

A Thesis

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David Albrecht

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Abstract

This study reports on sports information directors (SID) at the collegiate level limited to NCAA Division II athletic programs. An online survey was used for all participants, and select respondents completed follow-up interviews. Surveys were intended to determine the impact of work-life balance and overall workload of the SID role. Survey questions sought to find perceptions of SIDs by athletic administrators, including the athletic director (AD), and if their role provided opportunities for career advancement within collegiate athletic administration. The results of the study showed that institution/department culture, family, and professional growth factored heavily on retention. Adversely, turnover was linked to individuals seeking career advancement, better support staffs, or improved workplace cultures. Additionally, this study found that work-life balance was particularly disrupted by hours required, lack of support staff, and the growing demands of the role. Each of those factors impacted the results showing that a majority of SIDs in this study have considered leaving the profession. Furthermore, this project discovered the important link between the relationship of AD and SID in seeking an improved work-life balance and professional advancement opportunities. A majority of this study's participants indicated they were considered to be senior-level athletic administrators, and a notable portion of the respondents had career goals to be an athletic director. The majority of this study's participants were veterans of the profession, had held only one top-ranking SID job, and had been at their current institution for a prolonged period of time. Despite those demographics, that segment shared similar concerns and issues in the role as other groups. Finally, this study revealed that perceptions of the SID role have begun to change, and positive trends are emerging among its professionals who no longer want to be viewed as technicians, but as senior-level leaders with aspirations of continued growth in collegiate athletic administration.

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Introduction

Collegiate athletic departments across the country exist to serve student-athletes at their institutions through academic and athletic opportunities. These athletic departments are led by the athletic director (AD) and are comprised of support staff members serving in specialized roles for day-to-day administrative operations while coaching staffs oversee on-field operations for their respective teams.

Athletic departments across the country have unique strategic plans carried out by all members of the staff which align with university goals and values to promote student-athlete success. In Winona State University's 2015-2020 Athletic Department Strategic Plan, it is the department's mission, as an integral part of the university, to offer opportunity to experience academic and athletic excellence for its student-athletes (Winona State Warriors, n.d.).

Objectives laid out in an athletic department's strategic plan are carried out by its various administrative staff members. Common administrative positions within collegiate athletics include: academic services, compliance, development/fundraising, facilities/operations, marketing, and sports information/athletic communications.

According to Winona State's Plan, there are six Strategic Goals, each which can be associated with one or more of the specific departments in mind: 1) Student Success (academic services), 2) Governance and Structure (compliance), 3) Facilities (facilities/operations), 4) Finances (development/fundraising), 5) Marketing & Reputation (marketing & sports information), 6) Successful Competition (coaches).

However, not all athletic departments are created equally. Among NCAA Division I institutes, the Power Five conferences generated six billion dollars in 2016 – which is a

staggering difference of nearly four billion dollars when compared to all other schools combined (Lavigne, 2016). There is clearly a vast divide between the have and have-nots in collegiate athletics. The NCAA is made up of three divisions (I, II and III), comprised of 1,113 member schools – 315 of which are Division II institutions. Resources, particularly of a monetary nature, can vary greatly between the divisions and even within those segments.

Despite their institutional differences across the board, a staple in every athletic department is the sports information department. Athletics is said to be the front porch of a university due to the notoriety and grandeur sports carry. If this is true, the sports information director (SID) is the doorman at that front porch.

Roles of the SID include, but are not limited to: award nominations, broadcasting, game day operations, marketing, media relations, promotions, statistical and record keeping, social media, sponsorship fulfillment, and website design and maintenance. SIDs are tasked with most facets of the athletic department's public and community relations efforts while serving as a liaison to national, and local media outlets to publicize their athletic teams.

In today's age of rapid technological advances, social media and 24-hour news coverage, the role of the SID continues to evolve and expand. The rise of the internet and digital media has touched every aspect of operations in athletic departments, specifically for sports information offices. The very essence of how SIDs work has undergone marked and rapid changes (Bollig, 2017). The transformation of the SID role has also seen new titles assigned to the position throughout the industry which include Director of Athletic Communications, Digital Media Manager and Media Relations Director. These alterations can be seen as a universal understanding that the role at its core has changed as the list of job responsibilities continue to grow.

College athletic communication professionals have taken the lead in leveraging new forms of social media, and digital media to elevate entire athletic departments in areas of marketing, fundraising, recruiting, and ticket sales. Most of these did not originally fall under the SID umbrella when the role first came about. No other member of the athletic department has the internal and external touch of the SID (Bollig, 2017).

It is clear that the role of the SID is vital to the day-to-day operations of the athletic department, and its progress toward achieving broader strategic goals. With that understood, the industry's growing systemic issue of high turnover rates and poor retention among SIDs is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Long hours can lead to burnout, and the financial compensation is rarely in line with the work load compared to other administrative roles in the athletic department. Sports information departments are typically understaffed, and sports information directors are more often than not viewed as employees with technical skills rather than regarded as upper-level administrators. Despite having daily interactions with coaches and student-athletes, SIDs are typically left out of senior-level discussions and executive decision making.

It has been well-documented that turnover is costly to an organization's bottom line. Sahai (2018) suggests that turnover also negatively alters an organization's overall culture, and notes that 87% of leaders found employee retention was crucial to a company's strategic plan due to the loss of experience and productivity that is associated with rehiring and retraining a new employee. While unique in many facets, athletic departments are just like any Fortune 500 company in that consistency breeds success.

Retention of student-athletes is a critical issue among college admission staffs, coaches, and athletic directors as enrollment ultimately impacts the institution's bottom line. Considering the significance of retention on organizational success, ADs would be well-served to provide the same attention to retention among their staff members, specifically, sports information directors.

The remainder of this chapter will include the problem statement, which focuses on turnover and retention among SIDs, the purpose of the study, a background of the problem, research questions and method, the study's limitations, a definition of terms, and a final summary.

Problem Statement

As the job responsibilities of an SID have swelled over the past decade, there has been an increased rate of turnover among college athletic communication professionals. Few studies have been conducted on sports information directors, and there is even more limited research to illuminate the problems associated with poor retention and high turnover in the industry. A gap in the knowledge exists in understanding how issues such as career advancement, work-life balance, and overall job satisfaction correlate to a SID's decision to remain at one institution or seek employment elsewhere.

Organizational turnover, and retention have long been studied in the business world, but there is a limited amount of research on these matters in college athletics. The existing research focuses on job satisfaction, burnout, turnover and retention in collegiate sports for coaches, athletic trainers, academic advisors, and other segmented populations of athletic administrative positions.

A Gallup report suggests that millennials are more likely to move from one job to the next in a shorter window than any other generation in the workforce, citing that 21% of millennials changed jobs within the past year with estimated turnover costs of $30.5 billion annually to the U.S. economy (Adkins, 2016). The Millennial Generation, born between 1980 and 1996, make up a significant population of professionals working in collegiate athletic communications.

No matter the industry or sector, employees want to feel valued by their direct supervisors, co-workers, and organization collectively. An employee value proposition (EVP) articulates what an individual can expect to gain by working for their employer. Defining and communicating this EVP enhances both recruitment and retention rate of employees. Turnover can be decreased by nearly 70% when an organization delivers on its EVP (Collins, 2019).

Attributes of EVP include compensation, work-life balance, and career development opportunities. This study aims to find how these factors affect retention and turnover among NCAA Division II sports information directors. Studies on work-life balance and employee well-being in athletics have increased in recent years, and have been the focus of professional development seminars in the athletic communications profession over the past decade, but the issues remain prevalent in the industry. Few scholarly studies have been carried out to focus on SIDs, and even fewer have attempted to discovery any patterns that pertain to retention/turnover.

In a study of collegiate athletic academic advisors, Rubin (2017) found that 91% of survey respondents have noticed a colleague experience burnout in the profession while, 60% answered "yes" in response to having considered leaving the profession themselves. Noteworthy themes emerged from this study include feeling a "lack of respect" and that they perform a "thankless" job.

Savage (2014) found that the number of hours worked and correlating compensation among college athletic trainers left those professionals conflicted between enjoyment of the work itself, and the desire to have a certain quality of life outside the workplace. Participants in this study noted that monetary reward in the industry was not equivalent to workload, and their work schedule significantly interfered with their personal/social life.

These studies are important to show preliminary findings of what causes burnout, and can lead to job turnover among two underrepresented segments in college athletic departments. It also highlights the gap in knowledge in the athletic communications field, and can draw parallels in what to expect from this study. In particular, SIDs and athletic trainers face a lot of the same challenges in their jobs when it comes to being under resourced in a profession that demands countless hours and below average compensation in comparison to other college athletic administrative positions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand what specific variables lead to high turnover or sustained retention among collegiate sports information directors working at the NCAA Division II level, particularly in regard to job satisfaction, leadership opportunities, and work-life balance. The goal is to establish what patterns emerge among SIDs who have changed jobs multiple times, or remained at one university for a prolonged period.

Upon completion, this study can be useful to sports information directors to understand the challenges, and issues their peers face in the industry, and perhaps how to better cope with those, and put themselves in more prominent leadership positions within their own athletic departments. This research could also prove beneficial to athletic directors who have seen high

turnover in their departments, and how to best serve their SIDs as most ADs do not come from a background in athletic communications.

This will be a mixed methods study that focuses on sports information directors working at the NCAA Division II level. Survey questions will be disseminated digitally for the quantitative portion of the study and phone interviews will be conducted for the qualitative portion.

Background of the Problem

Sports information directors are the lifeblood of the collegiate athletic department's marketing, and publicity efforts. SIDs are responsible for creating content, and maintaining information throughout all athletic communication channels (website, social media, etc.), however, these professionals face a number of growing challenges which can result in poor retention and high turnover in the position.

Rolsen (2018) cites testimonials from SIDs who left the profession due to overwhelming hours on the job, increased job demands and lack of resources, poor work-life balance, and the lack of professional growth opportunity afforded to those in the profession. In a study, completely unrelated to the field of athletic communications, Maslach (2003) describes a multidimensional model of job burnout which nearly mirrors the aforementioned responses by SIDs: overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism toward the job, and the sense of a lack of accomplishment.

Widely discussed amongst peers, burnout is a sweeping problem within the industry. Shirom (2009) conceptualizes burnout as an adverse reaction to chronic stress in the workplace. Over time, burnout leads to the depletion of mental, emotional, and physical resources in an

individual. Mental and physical health concerns arise when studying professional burnout, and can contribute greatly to job satisfaction in turn leading to rapid job turnover and poor retention.

Herb Vincent, assistant commissioner of an NCAA Division I Power Five conference, comments that evolution of the digital-age has in turn made the SIDs job more complex and diverse. Traditional media does not cover college athletics in the depth, and breadth that it used to, especially at smaller schools, which creates more demands for the SID in their efforts to gain exposure for their institute (Bollig, 2017).

These increased job demands, coupled with the lack of resources, and limited staffs at smaller universities can increase burnout, and lead to poor work-life balance among SIDs. Poor work-life balance can be directly related to the theory of work-family conflict as Hafield and Johnson (2012) studied among NCAA Division II sports information professionals. This conflict emerges when the work demands of a SID negatively interfere with the demands of that individual's personal life. This is of particular note at the NCAA Division II level where the organization's mantra is "life in the balance".

The NCAA has taken several initiatives to help guide its employers and employees to find this balance including Lange's (n.d.) *Matter of Balance handbook*. Effective work-life balance can not only positively contribute to an employee's state of mind, but providing cost saving to institutions by measures of recruiting, retention and reduced absenteeism (Baker-Watson et. al., 2016).

One area of perceived concern about athletic communication professionals is the notion of a glass ceiling in the industry in regard to moving up the administrative ladder within collegiate administration. Very few athletic directors come from a SID background, and typically

get their start in college athletics in areas such as facilities/operations, development/sponsorship, or compliance. However, this area has not been defined by scholarly research to prove or discredit this general sentiment. Of note, Kowal (2019) comments there is general business research that shows a majority of employers would rather hire, incentivize, and promote individuals with good soft skills and fewer hard skills.

Sports information directors spend a majority of their time working on technical, and labor-intensive tasks behind the scenes before, during, and after athletic contests. There are fewer opportunities for these professionals to demonstrate soft skills such as leadership, salesmanship and executive decision-making. This deficiency in the job itself could lend itself to the belief amongst SIDs that they, in fact, have limited upward mobility within college athletic administration. Furthermore, not all SIDs are viewed as senior staff members, and have limited access to the overall decision-making process within athletic departments. An area of concern that again can limit growth and opportunity.

Simply stated, a satisfied employee is a retained employee who serves as an ambassador for the brand, both internally and externally (Bathena, 2018). Sports information directors control the brand message of both the athletic department and the institution which is why retention and high job satisfaction are critical to this position.

Research Method & Questions

This study will follow an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. This design begins with quantitative data collection which is first analyzed before following up with selected participants for qualitative questioning. The aim of this approach is to use the qualitative phase to expound upon findings in the quantitative data (Creswell, 2014).

The College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) database and university athletic websites will be used to access contact information for the top-ranking SID at each NCAA Division II institute. Quantitative surveys will be distributed via email. Demographic information (sex, age, marital status, etc.) of each participant will be collected along with responses to survey questions. Participants will also inform the researcher if they are willing to conduct a follow-up phone interview. Selected participants will be utilized to conduct the qualitative phase of this project.

 The following questions guided the research in this study:

Q1: In what ways has your institution shown it values you and aided in retaining you on staff? Conversely, what has factored into your decision to leave a previous institution?

Q2: Is your position considered to be "senior" level within your Athletic Department, and do you feel your current role affords you the opportunity for future promotion in athletic administration (i.e. Assistant AD or Athletic Director)?

Q3: What are the biggest challenges you face in your role that cause burnout, and negatively affect work-life balance, and have these factors forced you to consider leaving your current institution or leaving the profession entirely?

Limitations

This study was initiated during the COVID-19 global pandemic. This world health crisis has established a new normal for everyone, and disrupted sports (both professional and collegiate) in ways never before seen. College athletic departments across the country from Division I down have been forced to reduce staff through furloughs and layoffs due to significant budget cuts. This could affect survey results in that job security in the industry is uncertain. SIDs

who had previously explored leaving their current institution, or the industry in general, may be less inclined to do so now that department sizes have further diminished and other job opportunities are scarcer than ever before.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the most common operational terms used throughout this paper are listed below.

AD – Athletic Director (typically the direct supervisor of SIDs, who oversee the entire university athletics department).

CoSIDA – College Sports Information Directors of America (the professional development, education and advocacy organization for SIDs).

NCAA – National Collegiate Athletic Association (the governing body of college athletics).

SID – Sports Information Director also referred to as athletic communication professionals (job title for individuals at the heart of this study – other titles include Director of Athletic Communications, Media Relations Managers, etc.).

Summary

This chapter highlights the critical role served by sports information directors in college athletic departments, and sheds light on current issues facing those professionals in the athletic communications industry. Chapter one lays the foundation for this research project that seeks to find correlations between retention and turnover rates among NCAA Division II SIDs. This introductory chapter includes the problem statement, purpose of the study, background of the

problem, questions that will guide the research, limitations to the study, and definitions of

commonly used terms.

Review of the Literature

This chapter contains a literature review of prevailing issues combating sports information directors in the industry. Included are sections reviewing literature on retention, turnover, work-life balance, career advancement, compensation, and career satisfaction. The literature review summarizes current scholarly research and pertinent connections to athletics and SIDs that have increased in studies over the past twenty years. While some of these topics are based on findings of business studies, and other professions, there is also prevailing research and current literature within the college athletics field. This literature review will serve as a framework to guide the research questions in this study in an effort to better understand retention and turnover among NCAA Division II sports information directors.

Retention

The retention of students on college campuses is paramount. Just as businesses subscribe to the proven model that retaining employees is easier and more cost effective than recruiting new ones, college officials are tasked with retaining members of the student body. College admission employees work diligently to recruiting new students each year, while it is the efforts of ancillary members of the college faculty and staff that are tasked with retention. The same holds true in collegiate athletic departments. While coaches are typically tasked with retention on their individual rosters, athletic administrators also play a vital role in retention by providing the best possible student-athlete experience. With the understanding that retention of student-athletes is a top priority, the same could be said about retaining members of the athletic administrative staff who provide their time and efforts behind the scenes to amplify the student-athlete experience.

There is limited research on the retention of employees working in college athletic administration, but there are plenty of common themes found in exploring best business practices that parallel the findings of studies focusing on other professional fields. The Wall Street Journal (n.d.) estimates the cost of employee turnover costs nearly twice the amount of an employee salary to select and train a replacement. Additionally, it is noted that turnover can damage morale of employees remaining with the organization. Olenski (2015) provides seven key elements employers should focus on to improve employee retention, which begins with a vigorous hiring and selection process. Other elements include: a competitive salary and benefits package, providing a comfortable work environment and culture, professional development, providing an open line of communication where managers truly listen to employees, performing quarterly reviews, and recognizing employee accomplishments.

The basic psychology and desires of an employee in any industry can generally be linked to effective communication, organizational culture, engagement, personal fulfillment, and professional opportunity. Eller and Eller (2018) comment that a critical component related to teacher retention is the support from their principal. The study also notes the importance of a principal's interest in the teacher's success, professional growth opportunities, and fostering a teacher's sense of purpose. A study on retention in the nursing workforce found that turnover can be linked to how satisfied staff are in their work environment, the level of connection to cultural values, or how those values affect the employee's ability to perform their job (Banaszak-Holl, et. al., 2015). Retention can perhaps be best summed up by McCammond-Watts (2013) who states, "Most employees don't quit their jobs – they quit their bosses." This study on librarian retention emphasizes empowerment and engagement, and notes the best work cultures thrive on employer compassion, honest employer-employee communication, and challenges that foster growth.

The study found which is most closely associated to this project focused on recruitment, hiring, and retention of female collegiate coaches. The research by Lavoi (2018) again pointed to workplace culture in that coaches wanted to be valued, supported, and cared for by their direct supervisor (the athletic director). One of the aims of this present study is to better understand the athletic director's perceived value of the SID role, if SIDs are viewed as department leaders, and if SIDs are positioned to advance in their careers.

Turnover

Organizational turnover has long been studied but has only began to garner research in college athletics in the past two decades. Most of those studies are focused on coaches, athletic directors, and demographically segmented populations of senior athletic administrators. While the research on turnover among sports information directors is limited, useful information from existing studies can serve as benchmarks to this study. Notably, Wilcox (2018) found that job satisfaction is a reliable forecaster to turnover intentions among collegiate athletic administrators.

The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) is a metric used to analyze nine sub-categories of job satisfaction. This metric has been widely used in scholarly research projects. Important areas to highlight of the JSS, in regard to sports information directors, including pay, promotion, supervision, co-workers, nature of work, and communication. These subsections are important as they are noted throughout this literature review as potential reasons that lead to turnover or poor retention in the field of college athletic communications professionals.

Dilts (2016) used the JSS to conduct a preliminary study on job satisfaction among NCAA Division I sports information directors. The studied yielded results that showed pay and promotion were the two lowest-scoring facets of job satisfaction. Those results are noteworthy

for this study because Division I schools typically have more robust resources than Division II or other levels. If Division I SIDs were dissatisfied with pay and promotion, those results can also be expected to emerge in this study.

Factors negatively affecting job satisfaction are natural stimuli to seek out new employment. Feelings of detachment or lessened value within an organization will motivate an employee to seek out greener pastures. Employees with heightened levels of commitment to an organization are less likely to actively seek alternate employment (Peachey, Burton & Wells, 2018). Furthermore, Andrew et al. (2011) points to the importance of leadership qualities in athletic directors with their direct reports in building commitment to the organization within athletic departments. The relationship between SIDs and ADs could serve as an important variable in determining retention and turnover in this study.

Work-Life Balance

A topic that has been widely documented in scholarly research, and has great implications on the turnover rate of sports information directors is the issue of work-life balance. This has been a hot topic in the CoSIDA community in publications and professional development conferences over the past decade. The term work-life balance takes into account the relationship between work and non-work facets of one's life, realizing a satisfactory work-life balance is dependent on restricting one aspect, typically work, to obtain more time for the other (Kelliher, Richardson, Boiarintseva, 2019).

Horne (2019), suggests that work-life balance consists of both controllable measures (actions and decision) and some that are beyond a person's control (obligations). This is an important distinction when thinking about the role of the SID. As has been discussed, athletic

communications professionals typically work longer hours than other members of college

athletic departments – which is certainly not the result of a decision. The workload (or

obligations) assigned to SIDs simply requires a substantial amount of time to complete. Finding

a satisfactory work-life balance, and avoiding burnout, is important to all members of the college

athletic communications profession.

Sports information directors face long hours due to the high volume and variety of job

duties. Typical days are few and far between, and there is no offseason in the profession (Angst,

2018). A recent comprehensive study on compensation and career satisfaction among collegiate

athletic communication professionals found that nearly 85% (247 of 292 respondents) of

Division II SIDs estimated they worked an average of 46-70 hours during a typical week

(CoSIDA, 2020). Among those respondents, the highest polling answer (22%) for a typical work

week sat at 56-60 hours.

Benefits of proper work-life balance include reduced absenteeism and turnover, stronger

retention and improved productivity (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013). These organizational

benefits, coupled with personal benefits such as mental and physical well-being, make the

importance of work-life balance vital to both employer and employee. However, the question

remains whether or not the nature of work, and demands, placed on an SID allow for work-life

balance in the profession. Professionals in every industry struggle to find this balance. And,

while the demanding hours required to fulfill the duties of an SID may make a blissful work-life

balance a challenge, the goal remains to find some level of personal happiness and satisfaction

(Vance, 2018).

The number of sports assigned to cover, availability of support staff, event preparations,

event coverage, postgame assignments and deadlines, social media engagement, and travel are

just a few examples of the time demands SIDs attempt to navigate on any given day. Hancock, et al (2019) found that the quantity and quality of relationships among athletic administrators may suffer due to nontraditional work hours and travel schedules. The study also noted that administrators prone to work addiction prioritize their careers over health issues or relationships.

Work-Family Conflict

With the idea that improper work-life balance can subsequently effect personal relationships in a negative manner, it's important to note studies that have explored work-family conflict broadly and within the scope of college athletics.

Dixon (2007) states that work-conflict is inevitable solely based upon the long nontraditional hours required by jobs in the sports industry. This theory was supported by Hafield & Johnson (2012) who found a staggering 84% of Division II SIDs said they had high levels of work-family conflict whereas only 8% indicated that work did not conflict with their family life.

With the evolution of digital media and social media, the already taxing hours of a sports information director (regular office hours, working events, and postgame coverage) has expanded even further. There are not set hours, and essentially no "off switch" to the day because of 24/7 news coverage and online connectivity. Fans, student-athletes, parents, community members, donors, and other stakeholder want constant coverage with the most up-to-date information possible. If they do not receive it from official university outlets (website, social media, etc.), they will turn elsewhere and that is a lost opportunity for engagement which could inevitably affect the athletic department and university bottom line.

Work hours bleeding into home or family time become an unavoidable byproduct of the profession. The SIDs responsibility as a liaison to external media is another example of this. With traditional newspaper deadlines going by the wayside, media members have noted around the clock availability of an SID to be essential (Walsh, 2017). This mindset from media members is parallel to the desire of all internal and external constituents who have a vested interest in receiving timely information – no matter the time of day or night that may be. This is another area of importance when it comes to the relationship of an SID and the AD – setting boundaries and realistic expectations – as to not create work-family conflict.

Generally speaking, research has supported the presence of a glass ceiling for employees who are perceived to have conflict between the family and work domains. (Hoobler, Hu, Wilson, 2010). This can lead to barriers in obtaining promotions, and ultimately result in job turnover by the employee. For sports information directors, who are prone to work-life imbalance, which can directly lead to work-family conflict, and already have a perceived glass ceiling in place in regard to upward career mobility, this is an issue of key concern.

Career Advancement

The evolution of the sports information field has been thoroughly documented throughout these chapters. Sports information directors have taken on more responsibilities as athletic departments have grown, and their general responsibilities continue to expand, typically without any added support staff. While there is limited scholarly research from the past decade that speaks to the leadership abilities of SIDs, earlier research points to collegiate athletic communication professionals as the blue-collar workers of the industry. Sports information directors are widely regarded as technicians rather than managers or leaders (Stoldt, 1998). Studies have found this view to be self-reflective, held among peers and co-workers, other

athletic department administrators and even in academia by public relations educators (Neupauer, 1999). As research continues to develop in the field of athletic communications professionals, this notion may be dispelled by the evolution of the modern day SID, but until then, SIDs continue to face adversity when it comes to upward career mobility.

Within the industry, CoSIDA memberships are recognized as a powerful professional development tool. CoSIDA (2020) found that 98% of survey respondents had their membership dues paid for by their employer, and 73% of Division II SIDs received funds to attend the annual CoSIDA Convention. However, only 35% indicated they received funds to attend any other local/regional/national conferences or meetings, and just 5% felt they received any sort of additional internal or external executive coaching opportunities. The lack of executive training opportunities again speaks to the idea that SIDs are not viewed as valid candidates for leadership positions.

Swalls (2004) found that ADs predominately come from backgrounds of coaching, compliance, and fundraising, and few have been SIDs in their career ascent to the athletic director's chair. Nonetheless, parallels exist between the positions as Swalls contends that ADs and SIDs are the only members of an athletic department that must be universally fluent in all areas of athletic administration to properly execute their given jobs.

Sports information directors are the mouthpiece, both internally and externally for athletic departments, hold close relations with coaches and student-athletes, contribute to marketing and fundraising efforts, oversee game management, and must understand compliance rules. Given the complexity of the job, and breadth of knowledge required to perform in the role of SID, it can be argued that athletic communication professionals are well-versed to sit in the AD chair one day. Stoldt, Miller and Comfort (2001) support this by asserting that SIDs are more

than just technicians, and possess leadership and management skills that ADs may not know about.

Scholarly research on the profession has begun to increase in the past two decades. CoSIDA formally addressed the lack of professional advancement in the industry in 2008 when its Board of Directors revamped its Strategic Plan to further shine the light on contributions made by SIDs. Included in the plan's core guiding principles were efforts to improve the self-image of the profession and its professionals, and aid in its professionals ability to quantify value within the collegiate community. The latter based upon the rising stature among those in marketing and fundraising positions in college athletics which has coincided with the fall in perceived value brought by athletic communication professionals (CoSIDA, 2008).

These strategic initiatives inside the industry may have influenced the findings by Moore (2011), who noted a positive trend in the perceived influence of sports information directors in athletic departments. However, the study also produced respondents who felt their influence had decreased in recent years, citing administration did not understand the importance of the role, or seek their console in decision making. Interestingly, one survey response noted that newer athletic directors better understood the value of the sports information director, and the positions overall influence to the department and institution. This would point to previous assertions that the overwhelming majority of tenured ADs do not come from a communications background and fail to comprehend the value of their SIDs, or even effectively utilize their influence when making high-level decisions.

Adversely, Dilts (2016) reported that limited opportunity for career advancement and pay were the two lowest-scoring variables among SIDs in a study on job satisfaction in the

profession. Both of these factors can be seen as contributing factors to turnover or lack or retention in the job among athletic communication professionals.

Compensation & Career Satisfaction

In the studies carried out by Dilts and Swalls, each found that sports information directors generally enjoy the work they do, but find the work to be both underappreciated and undercompensated. SIDs play a crucial role in the day-to-day operations and strategic plans within collegiate athletics, and often do so by putting in more hours than any other position in the athletic department. However, a disconnect exists in the perceived value of athletic communications professionals, which can point to dissatisfaction in wages.

CoSIDA's (2020) most recent membership initiative also polled SIDs on salaries and overall career satisfaction. Among Division II SIDs, nearly 83% of respondents said they were either paid slightly well, moderately well, or very well. The largest number of respondents polled they were compensated moderately well (44%). The outliers included 14% who said they were paid not well at all, and 3% who said they were paid extremely well. Additionally, 35% or respondents strongly agreed they were satisfied with their total benefits package, 47% somewhat agreed, and the remaining respondents were either neutral or in disagreement.

The same survey looked at compensation in comparison to workload, an area in which some of the troubling industry trends emerged. Among Division II SIDs, over 88% or respondents indicated their personal responsibilities had increased in the past three years, and 75% of those answered that their increased workload did not result in increased compensation. Bonuses are common in college athletics for coaches and senior-level administrators based upon

team or department success, respectively, however, 86% of Division II SIDs polled said they were not eligible for any sort of bonus.

Finally, the CoSIDA survey sought to find a baseline on overall career satisfaction by using a Net Promoter Scale (NPS). The NPS determines those who are promoters, passive, or detractors. NPS scores below zero are a considered a concern (more detractors that promoters), scores of 0-49 deemed good (more promoters than detractors), 50-70 viewed as excellent, and above 70 to be truly exceptional. The CoSIDA survey results for Division II SIDs were alarming with an overall score of -41.44 of respondents who said they would recommend a career in athletic communications, and -14.48 of those who would recommend a career in college athletics. Over 57% polled as detractors in recommending a career as an SID with just 12% polling as promoters of the job.

Summary

The preliminary research on retention and turnover will help guide what this study aims to find among NCAA Division II sports information directors. This literature review also shed light on a number of prevailing issues in the profession that can lead to turnover or poor retention rates.

Understanding the relationship between ADs and SIDs appears to be an important construct as it pertains to retention and turnover in the role of the athletic communications professional. Does the AD understand the job of the SID, and does the SID have influence in the department – or are they simply viewed as technicians rather than leaders and members of the administrative team?

Along those same lines, this study will aim to find if SIDs have perceived upward trajectory in their careers or if they feel they are facing a glass ceiling. This study will also look at how work-life balance affects retention and turnover in the position.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to provide a framework of common themes in relation to turnover and retention among NCAA Division II sports information directors. The research questions aim to better understand the value of SIDs, their job satisfaction, retention, the perception of SIDs within athletic administration in regard to leadership and promotion, and SIDs challenges which could lead to burnout or turnover. This chapter will discuss the study's research design, sample, setting, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis procedures.

Research Design

The chosen research model for this study is an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The research begins with quantitative data gathered utilizing an online questionnaire delivered by email. The online survey will contain open-ended questions, questions utilizing a Likert scale and multi-choice questions. After analysis of the quantitative data, selected willing participants will be contacted for a follow-up phone interview to gather qualitative data. The aim of this approach is to use the qualitative phase to expand upon findings in the quantitative data.

Sample & Setting

The sample selected in this study includes sports information directors working at the NCAA Division II schools. The NCAA Division II membership consists of 315 schools. Only the highest-ranking SID from each institution will be asked to participate. The setting for the study will be remote, utilizing an online survey for participants and one-on-one follow-up phone interviews for selected participants.

Instruments

An online survey will be distributed via email to all participants. The initial contact email to participants will also include a letter from the researcher expressing the nature and rationale of the study, explaining risks, confidentiality, and seeking permission from the subjects to participate. The survey will include demographic questions to help better organize and analyze the data. Participants will be asked if they are willing to be contacted for a follow-up phone interview, and 10 that express interest will be called by the researcher to expand upon the survey data collected. Those selected to participate in phone interviews will represent an equal cross-section of those who have indicated prolonged retention at their current institution and those who have shown a pattern of high turnover in the profession. Selection of the 10 participants will also cover the broadest range of demographics possible.

Data Collection Procedure

Following approval from the Winona State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher will begin initial contact of the subject group via email. The researcher will initiate follow-up emails to members of the sample group after a period of time who have not responded to the initial request. A total of 10 selected participants who indicated willingness for a follow-up phone interviews will be contacted to arrange interviews. All data collected from the online surveys and phone interviews will be kept confidential. Names, institutions or any identifying information will be withheld from the results that follow.

Data Analysis

The survey questions being asked to the participants each correlate to a specific research question posed in this study. The quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the online

surveys and corresponding select phone interviews will be organized and analyzed to determine if specific emergent patterns and themes can be linked to retention or turnover. The collective data obtained will produce results, discussions, and conclusions stemming from this study's research questions.

Summary

Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the aim of this study is to find and explain themes that emerge among NCAA Division II SIDs in relation to retention and turnover in the profession. Top-ranking NCAA Division II SIDs are the subject sample of this survey. Quantitative data will be gathered through email distribution of an online questionnaire and select follow-up phone interviews will be conducted with willing participants to supplemental qualitative information. The compiled data will be organized and analyzed for notable conclusions and discussion of future research.

Results

The purpose of this study is to uncover prevailing issues facing sports information

directors which lend themselves to a perceived high turnover rate in the profession. Adversely,

this study also sought to decipher reasons related to prolonged retention at institutions among

some SIDs. In this chapter, the study's sample and results will be provided. Data was derived

from a combination of an online survey and one-on-one follow-up phone interviews with select

participants. The one-on-one interviews were conducted in an effort to further expound upon the

results collected in the online survey. The online surveys produced raw data from multiple

choice questions as well as common themes gathered from open-ended questions.

Description of Sample

This study focused on the top-ranking sports information director at each of the 314

eligible NCAA Division II institutions. Of those 314 institutes, the online survey was sent out to

299 SIDs. The 15 institutions that were not accounted for in this study were due to either a

current vacancy in the position or no direct head SID listing on the school website. A link to the

online survey was sent out on three occasions over a three-week period. The 299 email addresses

yielded a response rate of 42.8% (128 fully completed surveys). Finally, 10 follow-up phone

interviews were conducted by select participants.

Out of 126 respondents, nearly 90% were male (112) with 11% identifying as female

(14). The majority of the responses (46%) were recorded by those aged 41 or older. Accordingly,

the largest number of respondents (43.75%) have spent 15 years or more working in the

collegiate athletic communications field. Among 127 responses to tenure, 40 answered they had

been at their current institution for 12 years or more, followed by 31 responses of two years or

fewer, and 30 responses of three to five years at their current institute. Additionally, over 55% of participants (71) indicated their current post was the only top-ranking SID job of their careers. A total of 55 participants had held at least one other top-ranking SID position in their career.

When asked their intention to remain at their current institution in the next five years, 46 of 128 participants answered "somewhat agree". Thirty-one respondents answered "strongly agree", followed by 26 answering "somewhat disagree", and 25 answering "strongly disagree". Lastly, 50 of 128 participants answered "somewhat agree" to having considered leaving the SID profession entirely and changing career paths. An additional 41 respondents answered "strongly agree", with 18 answering "strongly disagree", and 13 polling "somewhat disagree".

Data Analysis

This study's three guiding research questions are listed below with corresponding raw data from the online surveys, emergent themes, and comments from open-ended survey questions, and supporting information from the follow-up phone interviews. Two of the research questions are further broken down into sections which directly correlate to retention and turnover.

Research Question 1: In what ways has your institution shown it values you and aided in retaining you on staff? Conversely, what has factored into your decision to leave a previous institution?

Retention. The survey asked, "In which of the following ways has your institution shown it values your work?" Fifty-three participants answered "increased compensation", 36 answered "promotion", 23 selected "institutional recognition/awards", and ten stated "bonuses". An additional 34 answered the open-ended option of "other". The most common answerers in that

group included: none of the above (9), verbal praise/general appreciation (5), growth of staff/additional help (5), and flexibility in hours/schedule (4).

The survey asked "if you've been at your current institution for five or more years, explain some of the reasons you've chosen to remain there".

Emergent Theme #1: Culture & Support. Forty-three of 70 respondents indicated they felt personally supported in some way by their co-workers, athletic directors, coaches and student-athletes, and/or the institution had a culture or vision that was a good fit.

"I love our leadership. Obviously, not everyone is fortune to have the full support of their AD. I also value our administration's vision. I support it and work hard to reach it. In short, I feel valued and heard," one participant said. "Great student-athletes who are a joy to work with. Great coaching staff who understands the job and what I can do," another noted.

Emergent Theme #2: Family. Twenty-six participants answered the open-ended question by stating they were either in close proximity to their family/home town, or they had rooted their family near the institution upon starting the job.

Emergent Theme #3: Professional Growth Opportunity. Fifteen participants indicted they have been given opportunities to grow professionally at their current school, received prior promotions at their institution, or are on track to continue advancing their careers.

"I've chosen to remain at my current institution because they support development where I look to grow as an administrator," one participated commented. "So far, every time I've gotten to the point where I'm ready to look at moving on, I've been promoted and/or been able to take on new responsibilities and challenges," another said.

Emergent Theme #4: Lack of Desirable Alternatives. Five of the respondents answered they have simply remained at their current institution due to a lack of other opportunities.

"Lack of ability to move. I spent several years actively pursuing positions at other institutions, but was unable to secure them," said one respondent. "Finding difficulty getting hired outside the business," another participated noted.

Turnover. The survey asked, "If you've changed institutions in the past five years, please explain your rationale."

Emergent Theme #1: Career Advancement. Twenty-three of the 52 participants noted they had left previous institutions to take jobs that were higher profile or a "step up" in the profession or based on better opportunities for future career advancement. Additionally, six respondents specifically mentioned monetary reasons for leaving a past institute.

"I was the Associate Sports Information Director and aspired to be the head of my own department," one participant said. "Was stuck with no chance for advancement at my previous job," another commented.

Emergent Theme #2: Better Support Staff. Eleven respondents commented that they had left their previous institution for a new opportunity that provided better support staff for the athletic communications office.

"Moved once to take an opportunity with more staff; moved again for a school that offered even more staff assistance," one participant said. "I was looking for an athletic department with more staff support," mentioned another.

Emergent Theme #3: Poor Relationship with Administration. Five participants mentioned a dysfunctional relationship with their overall athletic administration staff, some directly mentioning the athletic director.

"Bad leadership and being undervalued, and was presented another opportunity," said one. "Didn't see eye-to-eye with the way our new administration was going at my previous institution," another commented.

Research Question 2: Is your position considered to be "senior" level within your Athletic Department, and do you feel your current role affords you the opportunity for future promotion in athletic administration (i.e. Assistant AD or Athletic Director)?

Of the 128 respondents to the question, "Is your position as SID considered to be a member of the 'senior level' athletic administration staff?" 92 participants answered "yes". Twenty-five answered "no", and the remaining 11 respondents answering "unsure". The survey also produced 125 answers to the statement, "My AD views me as more of a technician that a senior-level leader". The majority of participants (49) polled "somewhat disagree". Thirty-two answered "strongly disagree", followed closely by 29 answering "somewhat agree". The final 15 responded "strongly agree".

Additionally, 127 participants responded to the statement, "The AD (and other senior-level athletic administrators) seek my console in high-level decision making." The largest polling group (58) answered "somewhat agree". Forty-four participants answered "strongly agree", 16 answered "somewhat disagree", and the final nine respondents answered "strongly disagree".

In regard to career advancement, and future growth within collegiate athletic administration, SIDs were asked, "Do you have any desire to one day become a senior-level

athletic administrator or AD?" Fifty-four of 127 participants answered "maybe", followed by 48 responses of "yes", and 25 answering "no". Responding to the statement of, "I feel my current role affords me the opportunity for growth to one day become a senior-level athletic administrator or AD", 48 of 128 SIDs answered "somewhat agree". Forty-five responded "strongly agree", followed by 25 answering "somewhat disagree", and 10 responding "strongly disagree".

Finally, the survey asked "Has your AD ever discussed with you the possibility of being promoted at your current institute to Assistant AD/Associate AD for Communications, etc.?" The majority of participants (73 of 128) answered "no". Thirty-one responded "I have previously been promotes at my current institution", and the final 24 answered "yes".

Research Question 3: What are the biggest challenges you face in your role that cause burnout, and negatively affect work-life balance, and have these factors forced you to consider leaving your current institution or leaving the profession entirely?

The survey asked participants to respond to the following statement, "I have given consideration to leaving the SID field entirely and changing career paths." Over 75% of respondents indicated they have given thought to changing professions with 56 of 128 participants answering "somewhat agree", and another 41 answering "strongly agree". Eighteen participants responded "strongly disagree", and the remaining 13 polled "somewhat disagree".

Lastly, participants were asked two open-ended questions on the online survey pertaining to work-life balance. The first sought to find out about the daily challenges SIDs face which deterred their ability to strike a satisfying work-life balance. The second asked SIDs about the aspects of their job that aid in obtaining a satisfactory work-life balance. One-hundred and 23

participants responded to the question about job hindrances to work-life balance, and 116 answered the question pertaining to job aspects that supported in obtaining work-life balance.

Work-Life Balance Cons – Emergent Theme #1: Hours Required. Nearly 65% of the respondents (79 of 123) mentioned the excessive hours required to work as a sports information director. The requirements include office hours, event coverage after office hours, extended office hours following events, and work that is often required from home at all hours of the night. These hours typically persist six to seven days a week when sports are competing from August through May.

"The amount of work that needs to be done on the weekends and 'after hours' at home during the traditional playing seasons," one participant said. "Always 'on call'. Hard to just walk away from the job at 5 p.m. or even at the end of the night," said another.

Work-Life Balance Cons – Emergent Theme #2: Lack of Support Staff. Forty-one participants commented on the lack of support staff for their office with regard to volume of work required to cover all of their institution's sport programs. Some respondents mentioned they were a "one-man shop", with other solely relying on part-time help or student workers.

"We have 24 total sports and I'm the only full-time staff member, so there is constant turnover with graduate assistants and student-workers which requires lots of time to re-train," commented one participant. "I'm a one-person shop with five sports being added in the last five years and no additional help," another noted.

Work-Life Balance Cons – Emergent Theme #3: Growing Job Demands. Twenty-two respondents mentioned the ever-increasing demands placed on sports information directors. These comments included the growth in number of sports, increased demands for extra coverage

with social media and game streaming, and unrealistic expectations by coaches and administrators.

"Growing number of sports, ever-changing technology, greater demands from superiors, coaches, and parents," noted one participant. "Events seven days a week. Constant meetings during the week. Additional duties that have nothing to do with traditional SID work constantly being assigned that I'm solely responsible for," said another.

Work-Life Balance Pros – Emergent Theme #1: Flexibility in Hours/Schedule. While 79 out of 123 respondents mentioned their long hours which bleed into nights and weekends hindering their ability to achieve work-life balance, 61 of 116 commented on their ability to have flexibility in their schedule and time off when games were not being played as an aid in achieving quality/better work-life balance. Nineteen of those participants directly commented on having a lighter work load in the summer months.

"The ability to come in late and sometimes leave early. Also, my AD understands that there are days when I need to take a mental health day just to get away and refresh," responded one participant. "The freedom of the work place, being able to come and go as I please and not required to constantly be in the office due to the sometimes hectic work schedule we have," another said.

Work-Life Balance Pros – Emergent Theme #2: Supportive AD/Staff. Twenty-one participants said that having supportive and understanding supervisors allowed them to have a better work-life balance. Comments ranges from having a robust staff to feeling supported by their coaches and/or administration, with 13 directly mentioned the support of their AD.

"My administration. I feel like their support is the biggest aid for a satisfactory work-life balance," said one. "We have strong leadership. My AD gives me freedom. Coaches are helpful and take stress away from me," commented another.

Work-Life Balance Pros – Emergent Theme #3: Nothing. Nineteen respondents commented that nothing about their job lends itself to achieving a satisfactory work-life balance. Four participants specifically mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic as a silver lining to finally finding some sort of work-life balance as an SID.

"I don't have (work-life balance) in my position. My AD doesn't understand the logistics behind being an SID," one participant commented. "None really. The sad thing is the pandemic is the best thing to ever happen to my work-life balance," said another.

Summary

This survey had a strong response rate and produced a lot of clear themes. Each of this study's research questions were answered with ample support. While a majority of the participants were veterans of the profession, and were holding the only top-ranking SID position of their career, common themes produced by this group echoed those found in other age categories, and those who have held multiple SID roles. Those themes related to retention and turnover included: work-life balance, leadership opportunities and career advancement potential, AD-SID relationships, and general job challenges. These emergent themes, and their impact on SID retention and turnover will further be explored in the next chapter.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study was aimed to shine light on the importance of sports information directors as members of collegiate athletic administration staffs. The goal was to present industry issues facing SIDs, and correlate those problems to a perceived growing trend of turnover in the business. Conversely, this study also discovered best practices in college athletic departments which have helped enhance retention in the SID position. Finally, this study revealed positive trends within college athletics in relation to the standing of sports information directors on an administrative level that will prove beneficial to the profession as a whole. This chapter will include discussion and conclusions based upon quantitative and qualitative surveys, leadership implications of this study, recommendations for future research projects, and a final summary.

Discussion and Conclusions

Retention/Turnover. The first research question sought to find in what ways an institution showed value towards the sports information director, and aided in retaining the SID on staff. And, on the other hand, what influencing factors led SIDs to leave a previous institution. The surveys produced multiple themes related to both retention, and past turnover or intended turnover.

The most common emerging theme among participants in regard to positive retention was feeling supported or appreciated in the workplace by bosses, peers, and/or co-workers. This affirms the research of Banaszak-Holl, et. al. (2015), Eller and Eller (2018), Lavoi (2018), McCammond-Watts (2013), and Olenski (2015). While none of those noted studies pertained to the SID profession, and only one to college athletics, the general principle of support and a strong culture in the workplace are evident as prevailing factors to aid in retaining sports

information directors on staff. Additionally, a handful of participants mentioned poor culture or leadership as a direct reason for past turnover.

Notably, all 10 of the follow-up phone interviews conducted directly pointed to the athletic director as a powerful influence on their job satisfaction in regard to retention or turnover. An athletic director's lack of respect or understanding of the SID role mentioned in past research by Moore (2011), Stoldt, Miller and Comfort (2011), and Swalls (2014) was confirmed by this study.

"Job satisfaction as an SID all hinges on having an AD who understands what it is we do. With that understanding, comes respect and value," one responded said. "I have an AD who does not understand or support the shift that is happening in our profession," another commented. "My AD has no idea what I do," stated another.

There were also participants who had positive things to say about their relationship with their athletic director. "I have a great relationship with my AD, they respect what I do and respect my experience," one said. "My AD trusts me a lot and understands the value of the SID role," noted another.

Furthermore, this research question found that professional advancement opportunities significantly affected both retention and turnover among SIDs. Upward career trajectory emerged as a link to both prolonged retention at one institution, or conversely as a driving force to SIDs leaving previous institutions. Sports information directors who found themselves pigeon-holed in the role, or were perhaps assistant SIDs at past schools, sought out similar roles at new schools where there was better room for career growth or to become the head SID. Likewise,

SIDs who were well positioned for growth, or already members of senior-level athletic administration teams, were more likely to remain at one institution.

   SID Status as Senior-Level Administrators. The second research question was designed to find out the status of NCAA Division II SIDs regarding department hierarchy at their respective institutions in respective to being viewed as senior-level athletic administrators. Furthermore, this question was used as a baseline to ask participants if they felt their role as sports information director afforded them the opportunity to one day be considered a senior-level administrator, and receive promotions such as assistant athletic director, or one day athletic director.

   The majority of respondents (92 out of 128) indicated their SID position was considered to be a member of the senior-level athletic administration staff. However, 73 out of 128 participants noted their AD had never discussed with them a promotional title such as assistant athletic director. Thirty-one of those 128 did answer that they had already received a promotion in title.

   When asked for their official job title, the majority of participants (71 out of 128) noted they had assistant, associate, or deputy athletic director assigned to their role, and directly oversaw the athletic communications office. An additional 34 participants labeled their job title as SID with the final 23 commenting an equivalent title such as director of athletic communications or athletic media relations director. Based on this, it can be assumed that the majority of respondents with assistant, associate, or deputy athletic director in their title were either included in those who polled they had been previously promoted at their current institution, or they were simply hired into that job title, due to the fact that 73 out of 128 participants noted their AD had never discussed a promotional title change.

Participant surveys further revealed two pieces of interesting information in regard to NCAA DII SIDs possession advanced titles such as assistant athletic director. By looking at the makeup of Division II athletic departments, many universities have assistant athletic directors on staff in charge of specific areas as opposed to directors or managers in those positions. This may speak to the fact that a lot of DII schools attempt to operate, at least on paper, like Division I institutions, despite not having the adequate resources to fulfill such lofty goals. This can further add to the stress and work-load of DII SIDs.

"We try to churn out the same level of work/content as Division I schools, even as just a DII school. We try to accomplish goals that simply require a larger department," one participant noted in support of this notion. "There is an expectation to produce work at a level equal to that of a major DI office. That volume of work is constant and on-going, and we are not provided the resources needed to work at that level."

Secondly, multiple participants mentioned having received promotions in "title only". One said, "I had to explain to my AD that the assistant athletic director title for SIDs was common not only in our conference, but at the DII level. So, I got the title change, but not a boost in compensation or benefits." Another commented, "Yes, I have an assistant AD title, but I don't feel like it carries any weight. I still don't have a seat at the table in big-picture discussions."

Be that as it may, now more than ever, SIDs seem to gaining seats at the table with the athletic director and other senior-level athletic administrators. This would dispel past research by Stoldt (1998) and Neupauer (1999) who previously found that ADs viewed SIDs as simply technicians. This study showed that a majority of SIDs surveyed indicated their AD does not view them as just technician with hard skills as opposed to soft skills that pertain to leadership.

Nearly 65% of participants in this study disagreed with the statement, "My AD views me as more of a technician that a senior-level leader." Forty-nine of 125 respondents answered "somewhat disagree", followed by 32 answering "strongly disagree". Twenty-nine answered "somewhat agree" and the final 15 answered "strongly agree".

It cannot be understated how important the relationship is between athletic director and sports information director. Athletic directors that support, appreciate, and understand the role of the SID are paramount to not only affording their sports information directors professional growth, but aiding in achieving work-life balance. That support could be the key to SIDs breaking away from the traditional job mold and fast-tracking their careers as senior-level administrators. While a majority did emerge from this data, there were certainly outliers, including one who stated, "I feel that this position is the 'step-child' of the athletic department. Duties get dumped in their lap and there seems to be no support as to how crucial this position is."

Perhaps the most interesting data from this study was produced when looking at a cross-section of participant's age and their AD's view of them as a technician. The overwhelming majority of participants in this entire study (46%) were aged 41 or older. And, while 35 of 56 respondents aged 41+ disagreed with the statement, "My AD views me as more of a technician that a senior-level leader", the 21 total responses in agreement with the statement are by far the most of any age group. No other age group had more than 10 participants agree with the statement. Additionally, the age group with the highest percentage of "disagree" vs. "agree" was 26-30 years old.

This information is important because it shows the generational shift happening in the SID profession. Bollig (2017) makes note of the evolution of SIDs, whose ever-expanding job

roles have helped changed the perception of the position. Research by Stoldt, Miller and Comfort (2001) was also supported in their claim that that SIDs are more than just technicians and possess leadership and management skills that ADs in the past may not have known about. It's clear that CoSIDA's overall advocacy, coupled with young and ambitious SIDs, has begun to move the needle in properly recognizing and promoting athletic communications professionals up the hierarchy of collegiate athletic administration.

Work-Life Balance, Turnover Intention & Career Sustainability. Unfortunately, while there has been progress made in the profession, there is still a long way to go for SIDs to find proper work-life balance and sustained career satisfaction. The final research question served to find out the biggest challenges participants faced in their SID role that cause job burnout, negatively affected their work-life balance, and if those factors have led to considerations about leaving their current institution or the profession entirely.

Participants were asked an open-ended question about the biggest challenges they face in their role as the top-ranking SID. The common themes here mirrored those found when asking participants "What aspects of your job significantly hinder achieving work-life balance?" It's important to note the correlation because the first question did not directly mentioned "work-life balance", though the responses echoed the fact that sports information directors feel the biggest downside to the profession is a lack of work-life balance. Those deterrents to work-life balance included hours required, limited support staff, and unrealistic expectations of administration in regard to the ever-growing job demands coupled with limited resources.

This finding would support Angst's (2018) claim that SIDs face longer hours than other college athletic administrators, and there is nearly no "offseason" to the job. Those long hours are also evident in the CoSIDA (2020) survey that found SIDs work typical work weeks of

upward to 70 hours. According to Chimote & Srivastava (2013), benefits of proper work-life balance include reduced turnover and strengthen retention, which validates the notion that long hours causing negative work-life balance among SIDs directly result in higher turnover and poor retention.

The most common response (79 out of 123) to the biggest obstacle facing SIDs in obtaining work-life balance was a mention of the excessive hours required by the job. Although, another 61 of 116 commented on their ability to have flexible work hours on non-game days and the summer months as something that aided in achieving work-life balance. Obviously, there is a lot of give and take in the job, and while the hours required from August-May are certainly disproportionate to the flexibility offered in June-July, this is an area that again can be attributed to the relationship and understanding between the sports information director and athletic director. One participant commented, "My first AD was an hour counter. (The AD) wanted me in the office 40 hours on top of the added nights and weekend work."

This study found that over 75% of the participants have considered departing the SID profession with 97 out of 128 respondents polling "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" to the statement, "I have given consideration to leaving the SID field and changing career paths." Once again the 41 or older age group represented nearly half of those participants (43), with 20 answering "strongly agree" and 23 polling "somewhat agree". Only 16 participants in that age group answered either "somewhat disagree" or "strongly disagree". This continues to suggest that this older demographic is stuck in the "old school" way of the SID profession, and perhaps have ADs who do not see their value, and thus they feel there is a lack of professional growth opportunity within athletic administration. Additionally, the response by this age group shows the overall burnout that can be compounded after years as an SID.

The 75% of participants who have considered changing career paths away from the SID field would support the CoSIDA (2020) survey findings which showed an overwhelming majority of NCAA Division II SIDs would not recommend a career in college athletic communications. In this study, one participant commented, "At one time, I was somewhat encouraging to young people interested in this profession. Sadly, I can no longer recommend this profession as a good fit for anyone."

While many of this study's participants suggested they had given consideration to no long working in collegiate athletic communications, there was encouraging data produced to suggest changing career paths would not be overly daunting. Over 92% of participants agreed with the statement, "If I were to change careers, I feel my work as an SID and skillset is applicable to a broad range of job opportunities." Sixty-five of 128 respondents answered "strongly agree", and an additional 53 responded "somewhat agree". Only 10 participants answered "somewhat disagree", and zero answered "strongly disagree".

Still, there were those who mentioned feeling "pigeon-holed" as an SID and were unsure their skills could translate outside the business. "It's hard to get out of the field. People just don't understand exactly what a SID does, even though the field is so broad in today's modern age," one participated said.

Leadership Implications

A pair of themes emerged in this study in relation to sports information directors and leadership. First, it's evident that SIDs want to be viewed as leaders. Not only as leaders of their particular field, but in the broader context of athletic administration. Furthermore, there's a growing trend that SIDs one day want to sit in the AD chair. Second, there appears to be a new

generation of SIDs who not only want to be viewed as senior-level athletic administrators, but are getting that chance with a seat at the table in high-level discussions and decision making for the athletic department as a whole rather, than matters solely pertaining to athletic communications.

Forty-eight of 127 respondents indicated they have a desire to one day become a senior-level athletic administrator or athletic director, compared to just 25 participants who said "no". Ninety-two of 128 participants indicated their current position is considered to be a member of the senior-level athletic administration staff. And, 102 of 127 SIDs said their AD or other senior-level athletic administrators seek their console in high-level decision making.

Studies such as this, and the continued advocacy from CoSIDA, have helped shed light on the importance of SIDs not only in their specific areas, but as potential leaders whose external influence is arguably as impactful as the athletic director. While some data in this study revealed there are still plenty of sports information directors who are pigeon-holed in their role, there is also evidence that a noticeable shift has begun in the profession, and the perceived glass ceiling for SIDs in career trajectory is beginning to lift. The evolution of the job, coupled with breadth and depth of responsibilities of SIDs can continue to shatter the stereotype that sports information directors are simply technicians. Two factors that will continue to this change are support from athletic directors and self-advocacy.

"Unfortunately, SIDs can get pigeon-holed as glorified statisticians," said one participant. "But, if you want to be viewed differently, you need to carry and promote yourself as something bigger. I don't see myself as just an SID. I find ways to show my value to not only the AD, but other high-ranking officials on campus. Advocate for yourself as if you're a member of the senior staff."

Recommendation for Future Research

This study was limited to the top-ranking sports information directors working at NCAA Division II institutions. Because many DII schools attempt to staff their athletic departments in a parallel fashion to Division I schools, this study represented a veteran group of SIDs, a majority of which had only held one head SID job in their careers. Regardless of that, plenty of useful data and trends emerged. A future study similar to this, but focusing on assistant sports information directors at the DII level would be interesting to find if younger professionals, not working as the head SID, have similar leadership ambitious, and if turnover and retention factors differed from their veteran supervisors.

Studies such as this with top-ranking SIDs at the NAIA level, NCAA Division III or DI level could also be beneficial in finding out how the discrepancies in haves vs. have-nots in terms of resources impact retention and turnover at various school sizes. NAIA and NCAA DII institutions are staffed in similar manners due to financial constraints. However, their staffing structures rarely mirror those at the NCAA DI/II levels, and thus there is likely to be far less SIDs with assistant or associate athletic director titles. Institutions at that level also tend to have more sports in their athletic departments, so it would be interesting to find out if SIDs at that level are afforded some of the leadership opportunities their peers at the NCAA DII level receive. Additionally, a study like this at the NCAA DI level might reveal some differing results as resources are at the highest level.

Perhaps the most useful future study would be one with athletic directors as the subject participants which focuses on and their perceptions of and relationships with sports information directors. A project like this could help reveal what ADs truly think about their SIDs, if they see leadership potential in the role, and shed some light on the professional backgrounds of athletic

directors, while seeking to find how much they genuinely understand about the role of the sports information director.

Summary

Some of the findings produced by this study will come as no surprise to those familiar with the industry in regard to reasons behind retention and turnover in the SID role. There is no work-life balance, the hours are excessive, resources are scarce, support staffs are limited, and the demands of the job continue to grow. This inevitably leads to burnout and turnover. But, this study also served to recognize some of the positive trends happening in the industry that lend themselves to prolonged retention.

Over 50% of this study's participants had elevated titles beyond sports information director such as assistant or associate athletic director. That shows growth at the macro level that SIDs are now being recognize as integral members of senior-level athletic administration staffs. Some of those participants expressed that it was merely a title and didn't carry enough tangible weight. But, many others described having a seat at the table of senior staff and were included in high-level decision making beyond the scope of athletic communications.

Furthermore, this study revealed a desire for continued advancement in athletic administration by sports information directors. Many of which have a goal of one day become an athletic director themselves. Many participants commented on leaving past institutions where they were the assistant SID, moved on to take the head SID role, and still have desires of climbing the ladder. Others left what they felt were dead-end positions in terms of leadership growth, and have now found positions in which they are supported by the AD and have opportunities for improved career trajectory within college athletics.

With that in mind, this study helped to dismiss the negative connotation that SIDs are simply technicians. There are still some in college athletics, including athletic directors, who maintain that view, but it is no longer the universe perception. Change and advancement in the profession are evident. Sports information directors continue to prove themselves as vital components to an athletic department's achievement of strategic goals while continually taking on more responsibilities in the ever-changing landscape of the role in an effort to prove their worth and leadership potential.

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Appendix A – Online Survey

If you agree to participate, responding to the survey questions constitutes your consent. Participation is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time.

Click "Yes" if you agree to participate in this study. Click "No" if you do not wish to participate in this study.

Demographic questions

Is your institution public or private?

How many varsity sports does your institution offer (1-9, 10-15, 16-20, 21-25, 25+)?

How many student-athletes does your athletic department oversee (150 or fewer, 151-250, 251-350, 351-400, 400+)

What is the size of your sports information support staff? Number of FTE ___, Number of Graduate Assistants ___.

How many years have you worked in collegiate athletic communications? (Two or fewer, 3-6, 7-10, 11-14, 15 or more)?

How many years have you worked at your current institution (Two or fewer, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11, 12 or more)?

What is your official job title?

What is your age (25 or younger, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41 or older)?

What is your gender (Male, Female, Other)?

Are you married?

Would you be willing to have a follow-up phone call to discuss your answers?

Sports Information Director Questions

Q: How many other head SID jobs have you held prior to your current post?

Q: If you've changed institutions as an SID in the past five years, please explain your rationale.

Q: How many people held the head SID position at your current institution prior to your arrival in the past five years?

Q: In the next five years, I see myself staying at my current institution in my current role (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree)?

Q: I have given consideration to leaving the SID field and changing career paths (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree)?

Q: If I were to change careers, I feel my work and skillset as an SID is applicable to a broad range of job options (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree)?

Q: In which of the following ways has your institution shown it values your work (select all that apply):

Increased compensation

Bonuses

Institutional recognition/awards

Promotion

Other (please explain)

Q: If you've been at your current institution for five or more years, please explain some of the reasons why you've remain there.

Q: The coaches at my institution value the work I do for their program and show their appreciation (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

Q: The AD at my institution values the work I do for the athletic department and shows his appreciation (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

Q: Has your AD ever discussed with you the possibly of being promoted at your current institute (Assistant/Associate AD of Communications, etc.)

Q: Is your position as SID considered to be a member of the "senior level" athletic administration staff?

Q: The AD (or other senior-level athletic administration staff) seek my console in high-level decision making (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

Q: My AD views me as more of a technician that a senior-level leader (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

Q: Do you have any desire to one day become a senior-level athletic administrator or AD?

Q: I feel my current role affords me the opportunity for growth in one day becoming a senior-level athletic administrator or AD (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

Q: What aspects of your job aid in obtaining a satisfactory work-life balance?

Q: What aspects of your job significantly hinder achieving work-life balance?

Q: What are the biggest challenges in your role as the top-ranking SID (day-to-day at work, in life, etc. – please think broadly but try to be as specific as possible)?

Appendix B – Follow-Up Phone Interviews

You mentioned that you did/did not see yourself staying at your current institution in the next five years. Can you speak to the rationale behind that?

If you've left another institution in the past, can you please elaborate on that decision?

Have you ever considered leaving the SID profession entirely and if so, have you given any thought to what career path you may take next and how your skills obtained as an SID would best apply? What are some of the reasons you've considered leading the profession?

You mentioned you did/did not have the desire to one day become a senior-level athletic administrator or AD. Please explain the motivating factors behind this.

Can you please talk about your relationship with the AD at your institution? How often do you meet, does the AD seek your opinion on other matters outside the SID office, does the AD see you as a leader in the athletics department or solely as the leader of your direct reports?

You mentioned you were/were not considered a senior-level athletic administrator. Can you speak more about that? Do you feel like you are pigeon-holed working as an SID?

Please tell me more about the day-to-day or overall challenges your job presents with regard to job satisfaction, work-life balance, and burnout.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your position or your institution in regard to your intended retention or turnover?