

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS OF LOOSE COUPLING BETWEEN
UNIVERSITY SPORT CLUB SUBSYSTEMS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Within contemporary institutions of higher education, bureaucracy is still a common practice. Likewise, student development is still a consistent outcome for those carrying out work in student affairs. Conflict arises because bureaucracy is a rational process that seeks to normalize the actions carried out within an organization, while student development is an irrational process that requires individualized and creative approaches from student affairs professionals. This presents a problem regarding the ability of student affairs to achieve its student development goals. Thus, the purpose of this project was to understand how the structure, implementation, and interaction of club sport programs and individual sport clubs impact student development outcomes for sport club participants.

Using an embedded case study design, in-depth individual interviews were conducted with professional staff members, graduate assistants and sport club athletes to gain a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives on features of organizational structure in sport environments and their sport club experiences. Findings revealed tensions that emerged from loosely coupled interactions between the varied, informal structures of individual sport clubs and the formalized, bureaucratic hierarchical systems within which they fall. It appears that sport club officers are the primary operators in the overlapping space between their clubs and universities' administrative substructures in an effort to shield sport club athletes from the administrative burden associated with

bureaucracy and negotiate the bureaucratic influence of those substructures on the more laissez-faire approach adopted by many of the clubs.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite swift and widespread philosophical adoption among student affairs professionals and the proliferation of scholarly works stemming from the 1960s and 70s, student development – as a reform movement, philosophy, theory, and guide for professional practice – achieved limited success as a unifying logic for student affairs work (Bloland et al., 1994). Though Bloland and colleagues outlined multiple foundational issues with the student development movement and its acceptance in the field, one could argue that a compelling reason for its shortcomings was the absence of a corresponding shift in organizational structure to accommodate the goals of student development (Carney Strange, 1981; Crookston, 1972; Dickson, 1991).

The general purpose of higher education in the United States (US) comprises three functions: education, research, and service. While research and service tend to fall within the purview of academic affairs, education is typically more nebulous. On modern college and university campuses, education often encompasses both curricular and extracurricular learning environments and is seen as a shared responsibility of both student affairs and academic affairs (Keeling, 2004). Further, contemporary meanings of education, within the context of higher education, go beyond students' intellectual development, instead implying comprehensive development in a multitude of areas (e.g., psychological, sociological, emotional, physical, moral). This broader developmental focus has been a consistent theme throughout the history of American higher education

as evidenced by early colonial beliefs that higher education should simultaneously develop character and intellect (Belch & Racchini, 2017; Schwartz & Stewart, 2016).

Subsequently, the secularization and diversification of higher education, accompanied by faculty members' evolving role on campus, spurred the creation of a new component of higher education, student affairs, which has since expanded to encompass work involving increasingly complex forms of development (Belch & Racchini, 2017; Jones & Stewart, 2016; Schwartz & Stewart, 2016). Throughout student affairs' adolescent period, professionals continually sought to rationalize the field's existence beyond functioning as an auxiliary for academic affairs. The first attempt at achieving this objective was the adoption of the "student personnel orientation," which initially dichotomized curricular and extracurricular activities on campus, claiming that "student personnel work consisted of all non-instructional activities in which the all-around development of the student was of primary concern" (Crookston, 1972, p. 3). Eventually the detached service approach indicative of the student personnel orientation was replaced with the more proactive and collaborative student development approach as the *raison d'être* of student affairs work (Crookston, 1972).

Prior to the student development movement, US higher education was highly paternalistic (Crookston, 1972; Manning, 2017; Schwartz & Stewart, 2016). The focus for faculty and, eventually, early student affairs administrators (i.e., deans of men and deans of women) was to maintain order and adherence to rules on campus. Accordingly, rational systems like bureaucracy that emphasized conformity and formalization have been a prominent feature of the administration of American higher education for more

than a century (Birnbaum, 1988; Crookston, 1972; Manning 2017). This positioned administrative systems at odds with the irrational process of human development (Crookston, 1972; Dickson, 1991; Kuh et al., 1987; van Haaften & Wren, 1997). In this vein, Crookston (p. 3) aptly noted that “bureaucracy as a system of organization does not support the goals of student development.”

Furthermore, early theoretical assumptions about human development likely bolstered tensions between organizational structure and student development. When looking at the *first wave* of student development theory (i.e., foundational theories from the 1960s and 70s; Jones & Stewart, 2016), it is possible to categorize the majority of theories in one of two ways. First were those that adopted the genetic structuralist tradition of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson and portrayed human development as logical, progressive stages. Examples in higher education include Chickering’s Theory of Identity Development (1969), Perry’s Theory of Intellectual Development (1968) or Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development (1976). This approach dominated early student development work which conceptualized development as a mostly rational process induced through intentional interventions on the part of student affairs practitioners (Bloland et al., 1994; Evans, 1987; Kuh et al., 1987). Development was seen as transactional. In the same way that a professor imparts knowledge to their students, it was believed that student affairs professionals could design general intervention strategies capable of consistently ushering students from one stage of development to another.

The second approach, concerned with developmental environments, traces its lineage to the work of scholars such as John Dewey and Kurt Lewin. Examples specific to higher education include Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support (1967) and Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984), though there are others, such as Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology Theory (1979) and Holland's Person-Environment Theory (1997), borrowed from outside higher education. One could argue that theories in the environmental stream were largely viewed as complementary to genetic structuralist theories. In each edition of *Student Development in College: Theory Research, and Practice* (Evans et al., 1998; Evans et al., 2010; Patton et al., 2016), referred to simply as *The Book* by educators in the field given its importance in the socialization of new professionals (Harris, 2020), theories focusing on environmental factors influencing development are relegated to the introduction of the book and are described as "models [that] help the practitioner examine the different types of student development possible" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 12). Thus, from this perspective, the environment is seen as the context where development takes place instead of the driving force behind it.

The distinction here is subtle but important. When the environment is viewed as the context for development, interactions between individuals and the environment are seen as impacting development, but the environment is secondary to intentional interventions in terms of prompting development from one stage to another. In contrast, viewing the environment as the driving force behind development suggests that

understanding the environment is central to understanding how and why individuals undergo unique developmental pathways.

The summative impact of these theoretical orientations had profound implications for how organizational structures were viewed. The former draws less attention to the tensions between organizational structure (in particular, bureaucracy) and human development, whereas the latter views bureaucracy as something that needs to be addressed to achieve the goals set forth by the student development movement. Further, intentional interventions aimed at the *individual* give way to intentional interventions aimed at molding the *environment*.

Although student affairs' scope has expanded to encompass, and even prioritize, student learning and student success, student development remains central to achieving both and, appropriately, continues to play a significant role in achieving the mission of student affairs and directing the efforts of student affairs practitioners. Likewise, bureaucracy remains a prominent structural feature of higher education staffing and administrative practices (Manning, 2017). Consequently, tensions between development and bureaucracy persist, preventing student affairs professionals from fully accomplishing the mission set forth by their divisions and departments and limiting the impact of the extracurricular environment on students' development.

Thus, if we simultaneously accept the premise that bureaucracy will continue as a consistent feature of higher education and that bureaucracy is contra-student development, we are left with the task of determining how to best promote student development within the confines of a structure not built to produce individual,

developmental outcomes. How, then, do student affairs professionals create an optimal environment that both promotes student development and mitigates the impact of bureaucracy?

Student Organizations and Student Development

Student organizations present a potential context to begin answering this question as they were an early antecedent to the creation of the first student affairs professionals and continue to play a vital role on contemporary campuses around the US (Belch & Racchini, 2017; Conyne, 1983; Meyer & Kroth, 2010; Montelongo, 2002). Student organizations represent an environment where students can develop comprehensively (Montelongo, 2002). Depending on the organization type and degree of individual involvement, organizations provide a variety of opportunities to develop in areas that include interpersonal, intrapersonal, intellectual, leadership, occupational, physical, cultural, political, and emotional (Dickson, 1991; Patton et al., 2016).

The purpose, structure, and governance of student organizations vary from one organization to another. Further, organizations may not exhibit bureaucratic characteristics outside of those imposed by annual recognition standards. For instance, these standards might require organizations to have a chief organizational or chief financial officer, to recruit a staff or faculty advisor, or to keep an updated constitution on file. Regardless, student organizations operate within the universities' bureaucratic environment that "require adherence to policies and procedures" and, once mastered, "help student leaders to mature and prepare for survival in their careers" (Berman, 1978, p. 53). The types of organizations found on college and university campuses reflect the

growing diversity of student bodies across the US and include foci on academics, multiculturalism, service, socializing, sport, and religious affiliation, among others.

Of particular interest for this study is a subset of student organizations commonly referred to as sport clubs. An examination of sport clubs presents two potential outcomes regarding student organizations and student development. First, sport clubs present a context through which to view tensions between the organizational structures of sport club programs (i.e., more bureaucratic) and individual sport clubs/teams (i.e., less bureaucratic; Czekanski & Lower, 2019). Sport club programs are staffed by professional staff members, typically in a recreational sport department, and provide oversight for individual sport clubs and their participants. Interaction between student affairs professionals at the program level and sport club members at the organizational level is likely to be more direct because the ratio of administrators to participants is likely smaller than what would typically be seen with more general student organizations. Identifying structural features such as centralization, formalization, specialization and complexity at both the program and organizational level will allow for the examination of, and dynamics between, those levels (Slack & Parent, 2006).

Second, we lack a rich understanding of the nexus of sport and student development in American higher education. Much of the extant literature on college sport has narrowly focused on athletic programs affiliated with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), largely ignoring other formal sport contexts (i.e., club and intramural sport) that possess the capacity to actualize sport's potential to enhance non-sport outcomes (Springer & Dixon, 2021). College sport environments are comprised of

key elements (e.g., physical, personnel, structural; Carney Strange, 2003) that shape the sport experience and determine the types of outcomes that are valued within these contexts (Springer & Dixon, 2021). This is somewhat contrary to the prevailing idea that sport is an inherently good institution that innately promotes individual development regardless of context (Coakley, 2015). Consequently, the role and influence of the sport environment is, at times, taken for granted when looking at the potential impact of sport on participants and non-sport outcomes (Chalip, 2006; Halldorsson et al., 2014).

Purpose and Significance of Study

Within contemporary institutions of higher education, bureaucracy is still a common practice. Likewise, student development is still a consistent outcome for those carrying out work in student affairs. The conflict, however, arises from the fact that bureaucracy is a rational process that seeks to normalize the actions carried out within an organization. Conversely, student development is an irrational process that requires individualized and creative approaches from student affairs professionals. This presents a problem regarding the ability of student affairs and, by extension sport club programs, to achieve its student development goals given that bureaucratic systems strive for normalization, but student development is a non-normal process. Thus, the purpose of this project is to understand how the structure, implementation, and interaction of club sport programs and individual sport clubs impact student development outcomes for sport club participants.

A richer understanding of college sport environments, specifically their structure, would contribute to the conversation both in higher education and in sport management

about how to effectively leverage and deliver sport in various forms within American higher education, particularly toward individual student development outcomes. From a theoretical perspective, this study will provide insight into the interactions between bureaucracy and student development. Though the implications of this interaction have been hypothesized and hypothetically discussed throughout the literature, there are currently few, if any, studies that have sought to explicitly examine what those interactions look like or their impact on students' development. For practitioners, this study will provide insight into potential improvements to the way that sport club programs are structured and administered. More broadly, it has the potential to illuminate issues associated with the friction between bureaucratic practices and student development outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following sections provide an overview of relevant literature related to organization structure and systems, bureaucracy and student development. Given the focus of this project on explaining the structure of sport club programs and individual sport clubs, it is important to establish the specific components of organization structure to be examined. Likewise, the organization system literature provides the language necessary to examine the interactions between the program and individual organizations to better understand where tensions and possibilities, related to student development, exist.

Regarding college student development and bureaucracy, it is not the aim of this project to provide a comprehensive, historical overview of either topic. Rather, the goal of this literature review is to further describe the adoption and deployment of student development in higher education and to highlight the irrational, stochastic nature of human development. Similarly, the goal for bureaucracy is to further establish it as a rational system commonly employed in the administration of higher education and to describe structural features commonly associated with it. It is worth noting here that institutions of higher education are best conceptualized as hybrid organizations that employ multiple governance systems (e.g., collegial, bureaucratic, political) that flow alongside one another (Birnbaum, 1988). This study, however, specifically focuses on the bureaucratic portion of governance because it is a common feature of student affairs

work and because of the conflicts outlined between bureaucracy and student development in the introduction to this paper.

Organization Structure

According to Aquinas (2008, p. 94), organization structure “is the formal pattern of interactions and coordination designed by management to link the tasks of individuals and groups in achieving organizational goals.” Structure provides a mechanism to coordinate activities within the system that allow organizations to achieve goals and to respond to changes in the organizations external environment (Aquinas, 2008; Daft, 2016). Structure is the manifestation of rules, procedures, delegation and superordinate/subordinate roles that allow collective action by individuals to accomplish tasks that would otherwise be too complex (DeGregori et al., 1993). The structural possibilities for an organization will vary from one to another and depend on multiple factors (Aquinas, 2008; Mintzberg, 1980).

For Aquinas (2008, p. 94), four elements related to an organizations complexity, specialization, and centralization determine an organizations structure: 1) individual roles and units that correspond with specific tasks and responsibilities, 2) the formation of hierarchy through the collection of individuals into units and units into departments, 3) vertical coordination and 4) horizontal coordination. Conversely, Mintzberg (1980, p. 324), placing greater emphasis on formalization and standardization, identified five mechanisms that coordinate an organizations structure: 1) *direct supervision*, 2) *standardization of work processes* (i.e., rules and regulations), 3) *standardization of outputs* (i.e., performance standards), 4) *standardization of skills* (i.e., requisite

knowledge and skills) and 5) *mutual adjustment* (i.e., informal communication between individuals).

Complexity and Specialization

Complexity, according to Daft (2016, p. 18), is “the number of distinct departments or activities within the organization.” Organizational complexity can be *vertical* (i.e., levels of hierarchy), *horizontal* (i.e., the number of distinct units/departments) or *spatial* (i.e., geographic locations; Babiak et al., 2019). As knowledge and expertise become more extensive and intensive, the complexity of organizations increases and, thus, the scale of tasks that need to be completed also increase (Carney Strange, 1981). In this instance it might be necessary to divide the overall task into more specialized sub-tasks. Consequently, these tasks require individuals to possess specialized knowledge and expertise associated with their role.

Specialization refers to the “the degree to which organizational tasks are subdivided into separate jobs” (Daft, 2016, p. 18). According to Babiak et al. (2019, p. 84), those in highly specialized roles “carry out a limited range of tasks and duties” while those in less specialized roles “carry out a wide range of tasks.” The period between 1950 and 1970 witnessed greater specialization of student affairs roles to address increasing vertical and horizontal complexity and to accommodate growing enrollment and an increasingly diverse and restless student body (Carney Strange, 1983; Dungy & Gordon, 2011). This type of specialization is still evident across contemporary college and university campuses with the separation of a number of components that

impact students including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, student affairs, and academic affairs among others.

Formalization and Coordination

Hage and Aiken (1970, p. 43) defined formalization as the “the degree of codification of jobs in an organization.” The authors noted that the quantity and enforcement of policies, which can either be “formally written or informally understood” (p. 43), is directly related to the degree of formalization in an organization.

Formalization in the form of position descriptions, standard operating procedures, codes of conduct, and performance evaluations, among others, leads to the standardization of outputs and places constraints on what an individual can and cannot do in their role (Babiak et al., 2019; Mintzberg, 1980). Conversely, lower formalization allows for mutual adjustment where “individuals coordinate their own work, by communicating informally with each other” (Mintzberg, 1980, p. 324).

Mintzberg (1980) identified three types of standardization that each influence organizations and organizational actors differently. The first was the *standardization of work processes*. In this instance, standardization is imposed on the work itself through the creation of specific regulations regarding the process individuals can follow to complete tasks. The second focused on the *standardization of outputs* where the focus shifted from how the work is completed to what the work produced. In this case, standardization takes the form of performance measures or quotas. The final type of standardization, indicative of educational organizations, focused on the *skills and knowledge* required to perform tasks. In this case, standardization likely occurs prior to

an individuals' interaction with the organization, often through specialized training or requisite educational attainment.

Centralization and Decentralization

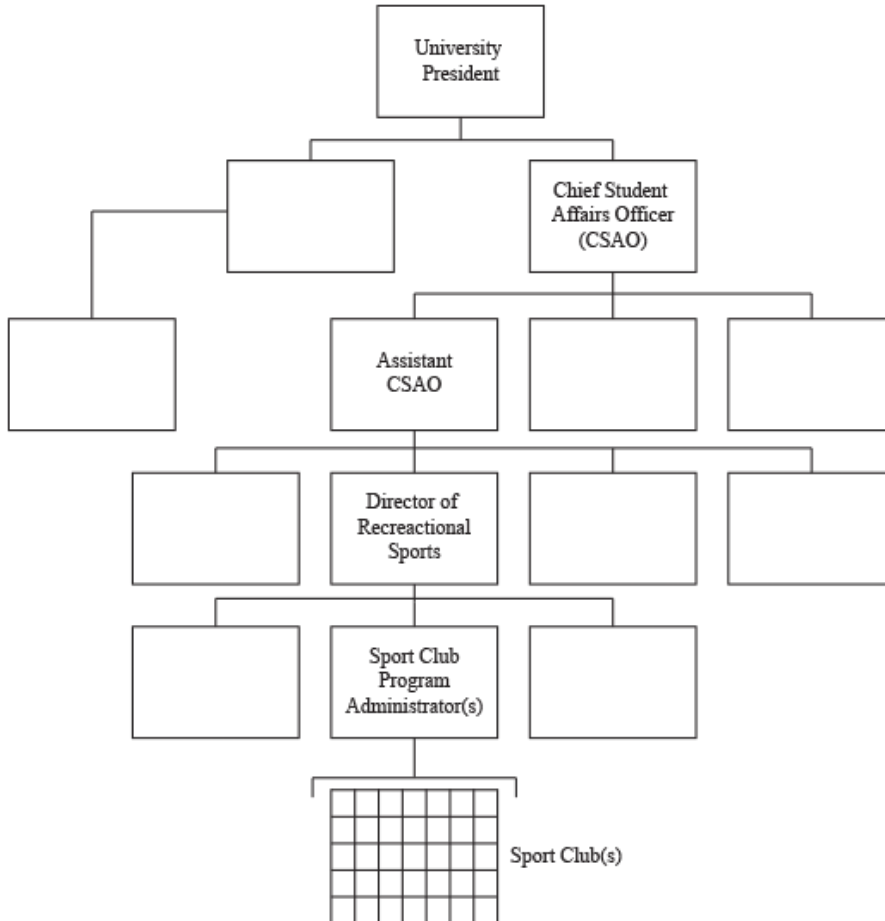
Centralization describes “the hierarchical level that has authority to make decisions” (Daft, 2016, p. 18). Organizations are characterized as centralized when decision-making is concentrated at the top of a hierarchy *vice* distributing decision-making throughout different levels of the organization (Babiak et al., 2019; Carney Strange, 1981). According to Babiak and colleagues, most organizations exhibit both centralized and decentralized decision-making depending on the type of decisions being made. They further noted that factors like the cost and timing of decisions along with the qualifications of the decision maker determine whether organizations skew more toward centralization or decentralization.

Mintzberg (1980) outlined four parameters of decentralization: vertical, horizontal, selective, or parallel. In the case of *vertical*, “formal decision-making power is ‘delegated’ down the chain of line authority” while *horizontal* “refers to the extent to which power flows informally outside this chain of line authority” (p. 326). *Selective* occurs when “power is dispersed to different places for difference decision process,” whereas *parallel* is when “power over various decision is dispersed to the same place” (p. 327).

Based on interactions between these four parameters, Mintzberg hypothesized five distinct forms of decentralization: 1) *vertical and horizontal centralization* (i.e., power is retained at the strategic apex), 2) *limited horizontal decentralization* (i.e.,

Figure 1

Example Student Affairs Hierarchy



selective disbursement of informal power), 3) *limited vertical decentralization* (i.e., selective disbursement of formal power), 4) *horizontal and vertical decentralization* (i.e., power flows down and out) and 5) *selective decentralization* (i.e., diffusion of decision-making throughout the organization). Figure 1 illustrates a typical organizational chart in student affairs and includes both limited vertical and horizontal decentralization. Certain aspects of decision-making are reserved for individual

occupying higher levels of the hierarchy, but there are a number of decisions made at the lower levels of the hierarchy and in various divisions and departments.

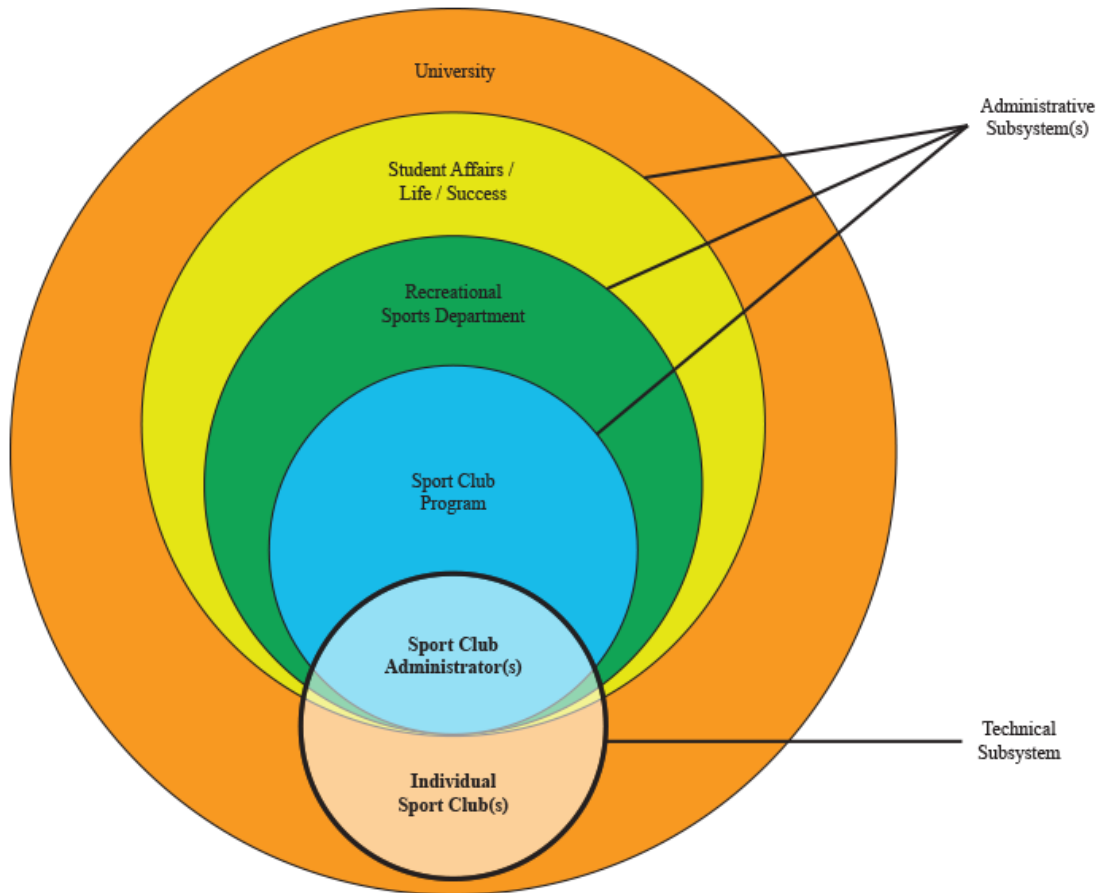
Organizations as Systems

When examining organizations, it is helpful to conceptualize them as systems with component parts that interact with one another rather than monolithic entities. Systems can either be open or closed. According to Birnbaum (1988, p. 34), closed systems “have boundaries that are relatively rigid and impenetrable and that limit the kinds of interaction that take place with the environment.” In closed systems, cause and effect relationships are typically easy to delineate. Conversely, in open systems “boundaries are relatively permeable, and interactions of many kinds are likely to occur between the environment and many of the system elements” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 34).

Figure 2 provides an example of how to conceptualize a university as a supersystem that encompasses multiple administrative subsystems and a single technical subsystem. The subsystems have clearly defined boundaries that separate them from the environment of the supersystem but also impact one another through their interaction (Birnbaum, 1988). The technical subsystem is where inputs are received from the environment, undergo a transformation process and, as is typical in an open system, return to the environment as outputs (Birnbaum, 1988). In this case, each individual sport club represents a technical subsystem. Thus, students represent the inputs that go into the technical subsystem where they participate as a member of a sport club and, for the purposes of the current study, are theoretically returned to the university (i.e., environment) as developed students.

Figure 2

Theorized University Sport Club System



Administrative subsystems are responsible for coordinating and directing the organization (Birnbaum, 1988). In Figure 2 there are multiple administrative subsystems that encompass one another to represent the hierarchical relationship between them. These subsystems determine the rules and regulations that guide participation in the technical subsystem. The overlapping area between the administrative and technical subsystems signifies the interaction between the two (Birnbaum, 1988). Sport club administrator(s) serve as the conduit for this interaction given their dual role as a member of each of the administrative subsystems and as overseer of the operations of

individual sport clubs. To better understand the dynamics of the connection between subsystems, it is pertinent to turn to the concept of coupling.

Coupling

Coupling refers to the “precise correspondence between system elements” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 36). Coupling can either be tight and deterministic or loose and probabilistic (Birnbaum, 1988; Weick 1976). Weick (1976) characterized loose coupling as the retention of separateness despite the responsiveness between (sub)systems. To convey their meaning, the author provided an example:

it may be the case that the counselor’s office is loosely coupled to the principal’s office. The image is that the principal and the counselor are somehow attached, but that each retains some identity and separateness and that their attachment may be circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual affects, unimportant, and/or slow to respond (p. 3).

Following from this conceptualization of loose coupling, Birnbaum (1988) outlined two criteria for determining where (sub)systems fall on the spectrum between tight and loose. The first considered the number of shared variables between (sub)systems and the second, the importance of those variables to those (sub)systems.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the technical and administrative subsystems share one element between them. One could argue that the sport club administrator(s) is tightly coupled to the administrative subsystem given their formal employment within each component of the subsystem. They are expected to adhere to standard operating procedures and human resource policies implicit from employment in an organization.

The opposite could be said for their relationship with individual sport clubs. As Birnbaum noted, if an individual “is tightly coupled to one subsystem, [they are] almost certainly loosely coupled to the other” (p. 39). The interactions between sport club administrator(s) and sport club participants are less frequent and do not necessarily adhere to a supervisor-supervisee dynamic. Further, each maintains its separateness despite their interaction with one another. Sport club administrator(s) are not integral to the daily operations of individual sport clubs. Moreover, it is likely that changes in administrative subsystems only sometimes result in changes to the technical subsystem (Birnbaum, 1988).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) described a similar process called decoupling in which organizations maintain distance between themselves and external oversight and practice ceremonial conformity. In other words, organizations adhere to institutional rules in so much as it provides them access to resources and confers legitimacy to their organization, but maintain enough distance to ensure that their organizations are able to maintain internal flexibility to accomplish their goals. As Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 341) explained, “[t]o maintain ceremonial conformity, organizations that reflect institutional rules tend to buffer their formal structures from the uncertainties of technical activities by becoming loosely coupled, building gaps between their formal structures and actual work activities.”

It may be the case with individual sport clubs that they engage in this process of ceremonial conformity in so much as it gives them access to the resources provided by their university and, to some degree, provides them with legitimacy through their

connection to well-established institutions. Thus, clubs are willing to participate to some degree in the bureaucratic processes required by the university to establish that relationship but also strive to maintain their autonomy as a club to govern their clubs in the manner they see fit.

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is a common feature in the administration of American higher education (Crookston, 1972; Birnbaum, 1988; Kuh et al., 1987; Manning 2017). In simple terms, bureaucracy presents a systematic way to organize complex tasks and break them down in such a way that they become more manageable. Bureaucracy, however, has come to be viewed as a slow and cumbersome practice given its strict adherence to maintaining power through hierarchy, rationality, formalization and conformity (Crookston, 1972; DeGregori et al., 1993; Garston, 1993). Further, individuals in bureaucratic organizations are seen as interchangeable and replaceable like parts in a machine (DeGregori et al., 1993). DeGregori and colleagues (p. 92) explained that bureaucratic organizations:

are structured so that individual members can be replaced without the system being impaired so that the organization can theoretically exist and function in perpetuity. The impersonal nature of bureaucratic relations, about which many people complain, is an essential characteristics [*sic*].

This type of impersonal approach is necessary for some divisions of student affairs such as student conduct where fairness and impartiality are necessary. The same cannot be

said in areas that deal with human development and require personal and particular attention.

Weber (1947, p. 337) described bureaucratic organizations as being “from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human beings.” He further outlined his view of authority in bureaucratic organizations, explaining that such authority should be formalized, hierarchical, specialized and decentralized. Garston (1993) felt that this definition was flawed based on Weber’s assumptions about human behavior in organizations and pushed back on the mechanistic illustration of individuals, noting that “[p]eople... may not act as mere efficient instrumentalities, mechanically carrying out well-defined orders and policies” (p. 5). Thus, Garston (p. 5) offered his own definition of bureaucracy as:

an organizational structure characterized by a hierarchy whose occupants are appointed, whose lines of authority and responsibility are set by known rules (including precedents), and in which justification for any decision requires reference to known policies whose legitimacy is determined by authorities outside the organizational structure itself.

This definition maintains some of the structural tenets outlined by Weber (e.g., formalization and hierarchy), but allows for the possibility of irrational action on the part of individuals within the system, provided those actions are legitimized by an outside entity (e.g., board of directors, stockholders).

Garston (1993) further identified two features of bureaucracy germane to the present study. The first pertains to isomorphism and the influence one organization, or in this case organizational subsystem, can exert over another. Garston (p. 7) explained that “systems invented for one party may be adopted in another... because the process of bureaucratization itself begins to demand conformity to different organizations in the same system to a common set of rules and procedures.” Thus, in the case of club sports, the influence of bureaucratic characteristics at the program level require conformity at the individual organizational level through informal (e.g., student-administrator interactions) and formal (e.g., recognition requirements, funding models) means. This type of isomorphism is what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) referred to as coercive isomorphism given the role that club sport programs play in clubs’ affiliation with their respective universities and in providing resources that assist the club with their operations.

The second addressed issues that may arise over time when bureaucratic organizations are asked to adapt to changes in their environment. According to Garston (1993, p. 17), organizations “may persist in behavior, and structures may be maintained, when neither serves the current interest of participants. This persistence may be prolonged, even when it is detrimental to those interests.” This is noteworthy because it provides a possible explanation for the lack of structural shift accompanying the philosophical shift from the student personnel orientation to the student development orientation. Despite the obstacles it imposed on student development, bureaucracy was so engrained in the structure and administration of higher education that student affairs

professionals may have struggled to see the trees for the forest. When the environment changes, or when new technologies become available (in this case we can think of philosophical approaches to student affairs as technologies), attachment to previous approaches (i.e., student personnel) and self-reproducing nature of bureaucracy make it difficult to produce the individual and organizational changes necessary for the implementation of new approaches (DeGregori et al., 1993).

This attachment, according to DeGregori and colleagues, is characterized as ritual or ceremonial. As the authors explained, the technological realm is where “we make valuational judgements about problem-solving efficacy” while the ceremonial realm is where “judgements are made about the status value of a technological endeavor” (p. 87). While these concepts can be explained apart from one another, they are “inextricably intertwined” in the human mind. In the case of student affairs, one could argue that the student development movement was ceremonially accepted, but not technologically assimilated.

The shift from the reactive and remedial student personnel orientation to the proactive and developmental student development orientation was complicated by the assimilation of the technological process involved in student personnel being at odds with the technological process needed to achieve student development. Student development was ceremonially acknowledged as the answer to many of the struggles student affairs professionals had experienced prior to the 1970s, but the technological shift needed to accomplish the goals set forth by student development was missing. It is important to note that this notion implies that structural change is possible within

bureaucratic systems. To do so requires the disruption and reconfiguration of the underlying bureaucratic order to meet the demands of new technologies (DeGregori et al., 1993). Unfortunately, given the inherent nature of bureaucracy to formalize and standardize behaviors and practices, this theoretical change is difficult to actualize when the need arises.

Development

Adoption in Higher Education

For more than 200 years, paternalism characterized the faculty-student relationship on small, residential, religiously affiliated campuses (Belch & Racchini, 2016; Manning, 2017; Schwartz & Stewart, 2016). Early colonial colleges numbered in the few and served a small, selective group of students (Schwartz & Stewart, 2016). By the mid-eighteenth century, however, antecedents to the formal creation of student affairs began to arise. These included the secularization of education, the organization of students into extracurricular groups, the increasing disciplinary specialization of faculty and the growing complexity of college campuses (Belch & Racchini, 2016). Thus, the advent of administrative staff in the mid-to-late nineteenth century was seen as a necessary step to integrating the evolving social culture and traditional intellectual initiatives “so that the social aspects did not overgrow the academic mission” (Gerda, 2004, p. 19).

The earliest examples of student affairs professionals came in the form of deans of women and deans of men “who were primarily responsible for the welfare and behavior of students” (Hevel, 2016, p. 847). By the 1920s the student personnel

movement, theoretically rooted in industrial psychology, had taken shape (Belch & Racchini, 2016; Schwartz & Stewart, 2016). This established an “infrastructure designed to address the non-intellectual, nonacademic needs of college students” (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2011, p. 12). In 1937 the American Council on Education (ACE) codified the student personnel movement with the release of the *Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV)* which outlined an array of student services and emphasized an individualized approach to meeting students’ needs both within and outside the classroom (American Council on Education, 1937). Full adoption of the student personnel movement across American higher education was prolonged given the geopolitical issues of the time (e.g., the Great Depression, World War II; Schwartz & Stewart, 2016).

The 25 year period following the conclusion of World War II in 1945, however, is what Schwartz and Stewart (2016) referred to as the “Golden Age of Higher Education” (p. 27). The authors explained that intentional efforts were made to avoid another depression by creating opportunities for those returning from war to enroll in the growing number of colleges and universities in the US. Thus, the number and diversity of students enrolled across the country continued to rise sharply in the post-war period culminating in the 1960s as the generation known as “baby boomers” reached college age and began to stress the American higher education infrastructure (Schwartz & Stewart, 2016). This latter half of this period was also rife with civil unrest resonating from the civil rights and women’s rights movement and discord with the Vietnam War as well as a changing legal landscape, particularly for institutions of higher education, following the verdict from *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* which marked

the beginning of the end of *in loco parentis* and paternalism as a common educational practice (Belch & Racchini, 2016; Schwartz & Stewart, 2016).

It was also during this latter period that the roles and responsibilities of student affairs personnel began to change (Bloland et al., 1994). As Bloland and colleagues explained (p. 17):

Members of the student affairs staff became the frontline troops for the universities because they had claimed to be experts on students and student behavior and had carried as one of their functions a responsibility for the oversight and control of student behavior—one among many other duties to be sure—but now a key one as students now began to flout university regulations and to question the authority of university staff.

This period of unrest led leaders across student affairs to question the efficacy of the student personnel orientation to meet the needs of colleges and universities whose student bodies and daily operations were rapidly evolving.

Consequently, the early 1970s saw the adoption of the student development orientation as the *raison d'être* for student affairs work (Bloland et al., 1994; Belcher & Racchini, 2016; Crookston, 1972; Kuh et al., 1987; Schwartz & Stewart, 2016).

Crookston (1972, p. 4) noted key differences between the two, describing the student personnel orientation as authoritarian, reactive, passive, remedial, corrective, controlling, cooperative and status oriented. Conversely, they depicted the student development orientation as egalitarian, proactive, encountering, developmental, preventive, confrontive, collaborative and competency oriented. Most notably, this shift aimed to

reposition student affairs as more than an auxiliary to academic affairs and claimed that student affairs practitioners could provoke student development through theory-based, intentional interventions (Bloland et al., 1994; Crookston, 1972; Kuh et al., 1987).

Student Development

As Bloland et al. (1994, p. 8) aptly noted, “[s]tudent development is a slippery term.” When one invokes the term student development, they might be referring to any one of the following: a reform movement, philosophical approach, collection of theories, area of research, body of literature or guide for professional practice (Bloland et al., 1994). For the purposes of this section, student development is referred to in terms of an evolving collection of theories and as an outcome of American higher education.

The *first wave* of student development theories, as Jones and Stewart (2016) referred to them, were those typically adopted or created in the 1960s and 70s following the transition from the student personnel orientation to the student development orientation. These theories, often rooted in positivist epistemological assumptions, sought to individualize students to such a degree that prompting student development was seen as a process of intentional, individual intervention (Jones & Stewart, 2016; Smithers & Eaton, 2017). Smithers and Eaton (2017, p. 72) explained that “[f]irst wave theories embed individual rational choice as a teleological, normative, and desired outcome of the college student experience.” In this way, fully developed students are evaluated against the backdrop of the normalized behaviors of, often homogenous, studied populations (Jones & Stewart, 2016; Smithers & Eaton, 2017).

The proliferation of a *second wave* of student development theories in the 1970s and 80s sought to address the homogeneity of first wave theories by centering the development of populations historically marginalized in American higher education (e.g., students of color, LGBT+ students, women; Jones & Stewart, 2016; Smithers & Eaton, 2017). Despite the assertion by Jones and Stewart (2016) that these theories adopted a constructivist epistemological stance, Smithers and Eaton (2017, p. 75) argued that “[e]ven through these theories recognize[d] race as a social construct,” they still shared the same “rational, scientific, empirical, epistemological approaches” to understanding development as those in the first wave. It is in the *third wave* of student development theories that we see a clear departure from positivism. Many theorists in the most recent *third wave* have employed a number of critical and poststructural frameworks (e.g., intersectionality, critical race theory, queer/quare theory, feminist theory) that acknowledge hegemonic norms and seek to address the role of unearned (dis)advantage on learning and development (Jones & Stewart, 2016; Smithers & Eaton, 2017).

Along this vein, Kuh et al. (1987) touched on this paradigmatic transition within student affairs work when they compared what they called the *Conventional* and the *Emergent Paradigms*. The conventional paradigm, which aligns with positivist epistemological assumptions, is defined as “a set of assumptions and beliefs about the nature of the physical world” where “a single reality exists that can be discovered” and “is like a machine, the parts of which are identifiable and have a predictable, sequential relationship with one another” (p. 121). Conversely, Kuh et al. (p. 122) defined the

emergent, or postmodern, paradigm as having “qualities of mutually shaping, multiple realities, holonomy, heterarchy, indeterminacy, and morphogenesis.”

Of particular interest for the current study is the shift from viewing student affairs work—which at this point was synonymous with student development—as determinate to indeterminate or, in other words, from characteristically rational to irrational. This shift undermines the assumption that one can simply employ an intentional intervention to promote a specific developmental trajectory from one individual to another. Further, it characterizes the process of student development in a far more ambiguous light. On the whole, the paradigmatic shift from conventional to emergent marked a transition away from objectivity and predictability toward subjectivity and ambiguity.

Sport Clubs

Students’ extracurricular involvement in student organizations has long been associated with student development in American higher education (Astin, 1984; Conyne, 1983; Montelongo, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Student organizations are part of the fabric of higher education in the US with instances of students organizing for social purposes dating back to the early 18th century (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). By the late 19th century, campus life was changing and the strict religious oversight that had been indicative of antebellum educational institutions began to relax which gave rise to fraternal organizations and sport clubs (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Students took it upon themselves to lead, fund, and administer early sport clubs during their leisure time which provided a number of opportunities for them to develop and hone various vocational skills (Hyatt, 1977; Stewart, 1992).

This tradition of self-governance in sport clubs persists across modern US campuses suggesting that sport clubs continue to provide opportunities to achieve a variety of student development outcomes (Czekanski & Lower, 2019; Springer & Dixon, 2021). Unfortunately, there is limited research on sport clubs and existing research often conflates sport club participation with other forms of involvement in recreational sport departments. Haines and Fortman (2008) examined extracurricular learning through club sport participation and noted that participants “showed significant gains across learning outcome areas” (p. 57). Flosdorf et al. (2016) found that individuals who invested physical/psychological time and effort through leadership roles within their club developed “attitudes and skills that translate to future employment” (p. 115). Dugan et al. (2015) examined data from just under 30,000 recreational sport participants, including both intramural and sport club participants, and found that their participation led to the development of various leadership skills (e.g., efficacy, perspective-taking, resilience).

Further, various scholars have theorized sport club participation as a mechanism to promote a greater sense of belonging and increased persistence among club sport athletes based on time spent at practices, travelling to competitions, representing the institution, and the social nature of the clubs (Flosdorf et al., 2016; Haines & Fortman, 2008; Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020; Warner & Dixon, 2013). Lower-Hoppe and colleagues (2020), however, discovered that the attachment to both the university and the club that resulted from participation was driven exclusively by formal and informal social inclusionary tactics, compared to competition or travel, which they defined as “the ways

in which the experiences of an individual in transition from one role to another are structured for him/her by others in the organization” (p.8; see also Van Maanen & Schein, 1977, p. 34).

Sport Club Organizational Structure

In a recent study, Czekanski and Lower (2019) sought to generate a better understanding of the structure of individual sport clubs at a large, public university in the Midwest. Using qualitative group interviews with sport club leaders representing 13 different sport clubs, their work revealed insights about sport clubs’ centralization, specialization and formalization. The authors found that a majority of the clubs adhered to a centralized structure where the clubs’ leadership was asked to govern operations and makes decisions on behalf of the other members of the organization. Consequently, clubs required a low degree of specialization for their officers given the diverse tasks they were asked to address. As Czekanski and Lower (2019, p. 238) explained, “the responses from participants revealed the executive board and those members on it were required to perform multiple tasks across the organisations [*sic*] resulting in a degree of generalisation [*sic*] in responsibilities.” It should be noted here that both of these findings are contradictory to the structure of the administrative subsystems described in the previous section on bureaucracy.

Finally, the authors determined that the degree of formalization varied by club and resulted from friction between maintaining formal and informal structures within each organization. Formal structures included governing documents, organizational structure, leadership roles and standard operating procedures, while informal structures

encompassed relationships, communication, norms and behaviors amongst members of the club. This last finding is key because it gives credence to the key tension between sport club programs and individual sport clubs hypothesized in this study. That is, many of the formal structures identified by Czekanski and Lower (2019) are imposed on sport clubs by the club sport program, recreational sport department, student affairs or, perhaps, the university at-large. While it would be difficult to say with certainty whether those same structures would be in place were it not required, the fact that they led to friction for the clubs studied suggests that at least some clubs might not employ such structures unless they were required.

Summary and Research Questions

The purpose of this review was to provide an overview of relevant literature related to organization structure and systems, bureaucracy and student development. Having reviewed each of these topics, it is now possible to outline the objectives of this study and formulate formal research questions to be answered through data collection and analysis. Keeping in mind that the purpose of this project is to understand how the structure, implementation and interaction of club sport programs and individual sport clubs impact student development outcomes for sport club participants, there are three primary objectives I aim to achieve. The first two relate to determining the structure of organizational components associated with sport club programs. To this end, I endeavor to map out the structural features (e.g., formalization, specialization, centralization, complexity) of individual sport clubs and sport club programs. My third objective

focuses on the student development implications of the interaction between the program and individual sport clubs. Thus, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ1: What is the structure of individual sport clubs?

RQ2: What is the structure of sport club programs?

RQ3: How does the implementation of and interaction between the two lead to tensions or possibilities with respect to student development?

METHOD

Before proceeding with an overview of the methodological approach for this study, I believe it is first important to situate myself within the research and provide an overview of my positionality as it pertains to student development and sport clubs. Over the past 8 years I have worked as a student development specialist and an undergraduate academic advisor. In both roles I have worked closely with student organizations and to support individual students in both their curricular and extracurricular endeavors. These roles allowed me to explore various approaches to student development and represent the foundation for many of my current assumptions regarding development and its role in higher education. With respect to sport clubs, I have never formally participated in a club, but have engaged with a number of current and former members to educate myself on their outcomes and inner workings.

To address the research questions germane to this study, I implemented a qualitative embedded case study design (Eisenhardt, 1989) that included in-depth individual interviews with professional staff members and graduate assistants at the program level and with sport club athletes at the organization level. This approach allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives on features of organizational structure at both levels and allowed participants to communicate and attach meaning to their sport club experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Originally, the intent was to conduct group interviews with sport club athletes. In theory this would have

allowed for an additional dimension within interviews where participants could share ownership of the interview space, the power dynamic between the researcher and research participants was level, natural social interaction was approximated, and knowledge gaps that may manifest in individual interviews were addressed by tapping into the collective memory of the group (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013).

In practice, however, the logistics of coordinating and carrying out group interviews in a virtual environment proved to be more challenging than initially assumed. Thus, after consulting with my dissertation committee and weighing the pros and cons, I decided to switch to strictly individual interviews with all participants. This allowed me to gain a greater depth of understanding of sport club athletes' experiences and to further explore themes that emerged during interviews. It also ensured that the participants who indicated their willingness to participate were not lost due to the lag time necessary to meet the conditions to conduct group interviews.

Cases included eight club sport programs across a Division I Power 5 conference, providing rich data across organizations with similar campus cultures and academic foci. Examination of each universities' recreational sport website revealed that all eight programs fall under the umbrella of Divisions of Student Affairs or Student Life and house an average of 40 different sport clubs with an average estimated number of participants just over 2,000. Student enrollment across these institutions averages just over 27,000 and all are public institutions with one exception. All eight schools are academically designated as Research 1 institutions suggesting similar educational

environments across institutions (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.).

Participants

The participants in this study included nine recreational sport employees and 17 sport club athletes purposively selected for their experience with sport clubs. Employees working directly with sport club programs from each school in the conference were contacted to inquire about their willingness to participate in in-depth individual interviews. The total number of participants was ultimately determined by the point at which theoretical saturation was reached. This was driven by the amount of novel data being collected as subsequent schools were added. Employees consisted of either full-time professional staff members ($f = 6$) or part-time graduate assistants ($f = 3$) depending on the staffing structure of each program. Inclusion criteria for these participants was employment in recreational sport departments at a university in the conference; no other criteria were used for their selection. The invitation to participate in the interview process was sent through e-mail addresses, collected from each school's recreational sport website, to inform participants of the details associated with the study and their participation (see Appendix A).

I recruited 17 athletes based on criteria relevant to the research questions in this study (Mack et al., 2011). My aim was to recruit a diverse sample of students that included members and officers, various classifications (e.g., freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate student), heterogeneous demographic backgrounds (e.g., gender, race, sexuality) and that represent a broad range of sports. I coordinated with sport club

professionals at each institution to send an e-mail (see Appendix B) to all sport club members inviting them to participate in individual interviews. Additionally, I made the necessary adjustments for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to account for the virtual interview environment (e.g., modifications to informed consent forms, protocols, digitizing written materials; Marques et al., 2020). Table 1 shows a breakdown of participants along with their classifications and the positions they have held at either the program or club level. Demographically, 15 athletes were White, one was Asian, and one was Latinx; 12 were female, four were male, and one was non-binary. Additionally, participants represented 14 different club sports: baseball ($f=2$), cheer ($f=1$), climbing ($f=1$), crew ($f=1$), cycling ($f=1$), eSports ($f=2$), gymnastics ($f=1$), lacrosse ($f=2$), rugby ($f=1$), running ($f=1$), sailing ($f=1$), softball ($f=1$), triathlon ($f=4$), ultimate frisbee ($f=2$), and water polo ($f=1$).

Following approval by the IRB, data were collected through a combination of document analysis, questionnaires, and semi-structured individual interviews with participants (Eisenhardt, 1989). Document analysis consisted of culling websites for each university to glean information on the organizational hierarchy, mission statements at the club sport, recreational sport and student affairs level, and information about staff members and sport clubs at each institution.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour and consisted of conversations around participants' personal biographies, curricular and co-curricular experiences, and their understanding and outlook on their sport club experiences. In observance of restrictions posed by COVID-19, all interviews were conducted synchronously in a virtual

environment using video conferencing software licensed and made available by Texas A&M University. In addition to providing a safe environment to conduct data collection,

Table 1
Study Participants

Pseudonym	School	Position(s)	Classification
Athletes			
Alex	University A	Treasurer; President	Senior
Taylor	University A	Secretary; President	Sophomore
Kennedy	University A	President	Junior
Jordan	University A	President	Senior
Ryan	University A	Treasurer	Freshman
Landon	University A	Treasurer; President	Senior
Cameron	University B	President	Junior
Morgan	University B	Apparel; Vice President	Senior
Riley	University C	President	Senior
Jessie	University D	None	Graduate
Kendall	University G	None	Graduate
Max	University G	Treasurer; President	Graduate
Harley	University G	Captain; President	Sophomore
Peyton	University G	Social Officer	Junior
Jackie	University G	Vice President; President	Senior
Parker	University E	Co-President	Junior
Shannon	University E	Vice President	Sophomore
Administrators			
Shawn	University A	Assistant Director	Full Time Staff
Leslie	University B	Associate Director	Full Time Staff
Ali	University C	Graduate Assistant	Graduate Assistant
Channing	University D	Coordinator	Full Time Staff
Adrian	University F	Director	Full Time Staff
Micah	University G	Associate Director	Full Time Staff
Sam	University G	Graduate Assistant	Graduate Assistant
Tracy	University G	Graduate Assistant	Graduate Assistant
Jamie	University H	Coordinator	Full Time Staff

it was likely that participants were familiar with the video conference platforms given their rise in popularity following the onset of COVID-19 (Marques et al., 2020).

Platforms also provided features that aided in the data collection process such as audio recording, the ability to control the interview environment, real-time closed captioning, screen sharing, and audio transcription. Prior to each individual interview, a questionnaire (see Appendix C) was sent to each participant via Qualtrics to collect informed consent, an initial profile, interview availability, and to build rapport between the interviewees and myself prior to conducting the interview.

Data Collection

Questions (see Appendix D & E) were informed by findings from Czekanski and Lower (2019), provided boundaries and orientation to the interview, and were meant to measure factors associated with organizational structure, interactions between organizational levels, and student development outcomes. In addition to hand-recorded and electronically recorded interviews, the researcher will engage with each interview reflexively to allow for thought and reflection between interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Interviews

Edwards and Holland (2013), citing earlier work by Kvale (1996), established a metaphorical distinction between two approaches to interviewing: the miner and the traveler. On the one hand, the former seeks “to uncover nuggets of truth through interviews to access a seam of knowledge that is ‘out there’, ready to be gathered up” (p. 12). On the other, the latter, and better aligned with this study, “embarks upon an

interactive and reflective interpretation of how [participants] came to ‘see’ and transform particular ‘sights’ into knowledge” (p. 12). In line with the constructivist leanings of the traveler, interviews present a way for individuals to make sense of their lived experiences and to attach meaning to those experiences (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Simultaneously comparing the internal structure of those interviews and between multiple interviews across a single context allows for the emergence of common themes that better contextualize the setting of interest (Chase, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989).

Qualitative interviews typically take a semi-structured or unstructured form (Edwards & Holland, 2013). I chose semi-structured interviews for this study because they simultaneously provided structure and flexibility. As Edwards and Holland (2013) explained, semi-structured interviews usually follow a pre-determined protocol that outlines specific questions or topics to be covered during the interview, but also allow the researcher to adapt to the flow of the interview, ask probing questions and pursue lines of inquiry uncovered through the interview process. According to the authors (p. 72), “[p]robing and following up in interviews are means by which qualitative interviewers attempt to get an interviewee to open up, provide more information, elaborate and expand on what they have said.”

Addressing specific concerns with conducting virtual interviews, Edwards and Holland (2013) noted the inability of the interviewer to obtain the full range of information about the setting of the interviewee, their appearance, and their non-verbal communication. Holt (2010), however, countered this notion, observing that the lack of ‘ethnographic’ information and non-verbal cues during phone interviews led to enhanced

verbal communication from both the interviewer and interviewee. Further, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) found no difference between the data they collected in face-to-face interviews and that collected *via* phone interviews, suggesting that telephone, or in the case of this study virtual, interviews are a viable substitute for face-to-face interviews when necessary. Finally, Salmons (2012, p. 2) noted that *information and communications technologies*, “allow for an interview that closely resembles the natural back-and-forth of face-to-face communication, including verbal and nonverbal signals.”

Data Analysis

Data was transcribed, checked for accuracy, and analyzed through constant comparative analysis using both open and closed coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Eisenhardt, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Open coding ensured that emergent themes in the data were not lost, while closed, theoretical coding provided a framework to identify aspects of each participants narrative that aligned with aspects of organizational structure identified in the literature (e.g., formalization, complexity, specialization, centralization). Constant comparison allowed me to adjust the interview protocol to intentionally explore new and interesting areas of inquiry that emerged during previous interviews while simultaneously adding validity to the final results through multiple iterations of data analysis throughout the process (Eisenhardt, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, in an attempt to engender both fairness and tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I shared the final manuscript with participants for member checking. The purpose of this was two-fold. First, it was to provide participants with a chance to review the information they provided and ensure that their voice was

accurately represented in the final product. Second, it was to distribute those findings back to stakeholder groups (i.e., administrators and participants) in the hopes that they will use that information to address gaps and make improvements to their respective sport club programs.

Given the amount of qualitative data collected in this study, I used NVivo software to assist with the constant comparative analysis process (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). NVivo is designed to provide qualitative researchers with a means to store, analyze, and visualize raw data (Phillips & Lu, 2018). NVivo assisted with constructing codes, themes, and categories using data collected from individual interviews. Feng and Behar-Horenstein (2019) noted some of the advantages of using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, like NVivo, including limiting researcher bias, increased confidence in conclusions, and comparison of data within and between categories. Conversely, it is important to understand and account for possible positivistic assumptions baked into the foundation of such software and that conclusions reached by NVivo may occur prematurely (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Y. Lincoln, personal communication, October 13, 2020).

FINDINGS

Overall, the findings from this study revealed tensions that emerged from loosely coupled interactions between the varied, informal structures of individual sport clubs and the formalized, bureaucratic hierarchical systems within which they are embedded. The data reveal that sport club officers are the primary operators in the overlapping space between the universities' administrative subsystems and the individual club. Officers effectively shield sport club athletes from the administrative burden associated with bureaucracy and negotiate the bureaucratic influence of those substructures on the clubs, which operate with a more laissez-faire approach. To better understand how and why these tensions arise, it is important to first examine the structural characteristics of the individual clubs, and then examine them in comparison to the programmatic structures in which they are embedded. With this understanding, we can then explore the intrinsic differences between the two: where tensions arise and how administrators and athletes manage them.

Given the quantity and richness of the qualitative data collected across each of the 26 participants in this study, it would be difficult to share each individual participant's full insights for each of the identified themes. Thus, I have selected quotes from participants that I feel best represent their collective insight, a practice that Creswell (2013, p.184) referred to as *winnowing*. To better represent the degree to which participants agreed, or in some cases disagreed, with those themes, I will also indicate the frequency that participants mentioned each theme (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Miles

& Huberman, 1994). As Dixon and Bruening (2007, p. 389) explained, “[t]his serves to present a sense of the scope of each theme, or a precise number of how many participants commented on any given theme” while “including instances of ‘outliers,’ or where small numbers of participants or even individual participants, shared dissenting views.”

Findings are organized hierarchically by research questions, themes, and subthemes that emerged throughout the data analysis process. The following Research question 1 and 2 focused on the structural characteristics of individual sport clubs and sport club programs, respectively, while research question 3 was concerned with the tensions and possibilities that arose from the interaction between those two with respect to student development outcomes.

Research Question 1: Structural Characteristics of Sport Clubs

Research question 1 was concerned with identifying the structural characteristics (e.g., complexity, specialization, centralization, formalization, coordination) of individual sport clubs. Participants revealed that, while their structures were diverse, the majority of clubs exhibited non-bureaucratic characteristics through limited horizontal and vertical complexity and varying degrees of specialization among officers.

Participants also described the need for club leaders to possess generalized knowledge of the club’s various positions should the need arise for them to address gaps in leadership given inconsistent commitment levels and competing responsibilities (e.g., school, club, work, other organizations) amongst student leaders.

Both administrators and athletes discussed predominantly centralized decision-making that fell to the club's leadership, with selective decentralization driven by the decision's scope and potential individual impact on club members. Finally, in terms of formalization and coordination, participants indicated that clubs relied heavily on informal governance and past precedence while simultaneously resisting more formal means of governing through documents like a constitution. The informal nature of clubs was also evident through officer's preference to maintain continuous communication through informal channels (e.g., text messages, Discord, GroupMe, Slack) rather than schedule and conduct periodic meetings to coordinate their oversight of their club.

Simplicity and Generalization

Sport club administrators and athletes described low levels of horizontal and vertical complexity and varying degrees of specialization when talking about the governance practices within individual clubs. 10 athletes indicated that beyond the primary group of officers, very few clubs employed additional layers of leadership within the organization. Instead, clubs relied on a core group of leaders to oversee the day-to-day operations of the club and ensure the completion of administrative tasks to maintain their standing with the university. When vertical complexity did arise, it was primarily through informal leadership roles or *ad hoc* organizational practices. In some instances, participants alluded to both slight vertical and horizontal complexity when differentiating between on- and off-field roles and responsibilities.

Regarding informal leadership roles, six athletes described the type of leadership that happens beyond the primary officer group. One participant connected time spent in the club to one's ability to lead without a formal position:

We have one guy who comes out to every single practice, not much of any leadership or Exec type, but he'll run the infield practices because a lot of the Exec members, we found, have been outfielders somehow. So, it's like, hey, we're going to split up infield/outfield, you take over the infield. He's been here for four years and seniority takes over there. (Riley, Senior Athlete)

Members ability to step up to fill gaps, should the need arise, allows clubs to maintain their simple structures by avoiding the creation of additional formal leadership roles.

Another athlete echoed this when discussing the *ad hoc* nature of leadership within the club when it comes to planning practices:

We do some stuff ad hoc; I definitely do not have an official role. We don't even have formalized practices anymore, everything's just done ad hoc. We'll initiate [practices] randomly like, hey, going to [practice] this weekend, this many miles, here's the route, we're meeting here at this time. In that sense, everyone's a practice coordinator, but it's not an official title. (Jessie, Graduate Athlete)

In addition to informal layers of leadership within the clubs, there were six administrators and athletes that also discussed the differentiation between "on field leadership and administrative chores," (Adrian, FT Staff) suggesting slight vertical and horizontal complexity in some clubs.

In general, however, both administrators and athletes described clubs as having a core group of officers that were tasked with overseeing the clubs' operations. Even within those core groups, participants did not talk about governance in terms of hierarchy. While participants differentiated the roles and responsibilities that fell to each position, they did not discuss those positions in terms of a chain-of-command within clubs or any type of hierarchical reporting structure. The only time reporting structures emerged was in discussing how club athletes communicated with club sport administrators.

When describing the roles and responsibilities associated with the club's core officer group, 15 administrators and athletes generally indicated that those positions were highly specialized on paper. Beyond universal roles like president, vice president, and treasurer, participants described myriad other positions that their clubs might employ for one reason or another such as secretary (Landon, Kennedy, Shannon, Taylor) or social media chair (Harley, Jordan, Landon, Max, Taylor). 14 participants attributed the variation between clubs to the club's size or activity level. For example, Max (Graduate Athlete) stated, "any significant decision-making is going to be the officers, probably, because we are a very large club." Additionally, Sam (Graduate Assistant) explained, "I think the more active a club may be, the more positions it may require".

In those instances where clubs employed a larger number of specialized officers, athletes expressed their discord with those practices noting that their clubs "had an excessively large board" (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete) or had "too many officers" which led to "terrible unit cohesion" because "leadership doesn't really communicate

with leadership” (Parker, Junior Athlete). The majority of athletes indicated that they had not noticed issues with filling positions, even in those instances where clubs had larger officer groups. 12 did, however, note difficulties with officers failing to do their part in running the club or absenteeism following their election. One athlete explained:

We had two vice presidents this season and two weeks into the season they both went dark, they stopped showing up. So, me and the treasurer are just like, alright, let’s just pick up the slack ourselves. (Riley, Senior Athlete)

Another shared a similar experience:

This year, myself, I was the treasurer, and the vice president were the only two active officers. The other two weren’t actively participating in the club, so I was kind of doing the role of president rather than treasurer because we weren’t really making any club purchases [because of COVID] and I didn’t end up actually getting access to our club bank account this semester, so I did not really do much as a treasurer. (Kennedy, Junior Athlete)

Thus, despite many of the clubs having specialized roles outlined in their governing documents, in practice, officers were expected to juggle multiple roles to ensure the club continued to move forward regardless of whether their leadership was at full capacity. Further, few participants indicated that officers needed to possess specialized knowledge or skills prior to obtaining a leadership position. One athlete explained:

It’s more about interest and commitment than technical knowledge. We are very much of the mindset that if you want to learn something and you want to do

something, you will get the knowledge and training you need to do that. You just need to want to do it. (Alex, Senior Athlete)

In another instance, an athlete discussed the need for officers to be knowledgeable regarding the sport, given safety concerns, but not in terms of their administrative responsibilities:

It was great because we're so excited to get help and we love all these people but in terms of who is experienced enough to really be able to say much, you just need time to get that experience and they just hadn't been there yet. We could teach them things, but there's only so much you can do without building experience over time. So, at the end of the day, we had people on the board that did good jobs for what they needed to and honestly weren't the most experienced, but you don't need to know how to set a repel, to send out emails to the team, you know. (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete)

Centralization

Given the lack of vertical complexity within individual clubs, it is not surprising that 25 participants indicated a high degree of centralization with decision-making in clubs. The overwhelming majority of administrators and students described decision-making primarily falling to the officers of the club; although 21 noted that it was dependent on the scale of the decisions and their potential individual impact on members of the club:

I think it varies pretty heavily on the decision itself. We try to keep things as democratic as possible; little things like what jersey should we wear. It's like, all

right, should we send out a whole GroupMe for this, or should we just say we're wearing our navy jersey? But in terms of something like, hey, should we change dues for the semester? That's something we want to bring out. We don't want to make a huge change without consulting people on the team because me and the officers' opinions could be biased for whatever reason. (Riley, Senior Athlete)

On occasion, if it were a date that we would have a team dinner, we might put a vote in the GroupMe or something and be like, which date works best for you guys? Then that would be how the decision would get made. But in terms of competitions, outdoor trips, practice times, and things, that was all determined by us on the board. (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete)

One administrator alluded to the personal financial investment that athletes put into their clubs as the impetus for this selective decentralization occurring:

That's generally just because of the amount of money each individual person is investing. Our lacrosse club's or hockey club's dues are upwards of \$1,000 per member, so when they're investing that much into the club they feel like they should have a say, which is totally reasonable. (Ali, Graduate Assistant)

Eight attributed the ability of club's decision-making abilities to be more or less democratic to the size of the organization. Kennedy (Junior Athlete) explained, "we definitely try to be inclusive with our members since we are a smaller club, it's not so formal all the time." Shawn (FT Staff) echoed this observing that, "depending on the

size of the club, sometimes they make that [decision] as a whole club.” Taylor

(Sophomore Athlete) provided further support for this notion:

We are a larger club. We have, I think, 50 plus members so for smaller decisions, it is difficult to get that many people’s opinions and create something that works for everybody, so with those we talk amongst the officers, the six of us.

In one instance, an athlete provided an example of a time where the leadership of the club attempted to provide a voice for the members, but then undermined the process by making the decision themselves:

We were committed to going to tournament A. It’s a really high-level tournament and we already paid our deposit. Then the captains were like, what about tournament B because it’s closer? They put out a poll and tournament A won, by a lot, and then they were like, oh we’re going to tournament B. I was super upset because you can’t ask us and then do the opposite. If you’re going to do something, just say it. Don’t pretend we have a choice. (Parker, Junior Athlete)

Thus, club officers should exercise caution when they decide to elicit feedback from their members and ensure that they are prepared to follow the direction indicated by the majority. If not, they should exercise their ability to decide for the club and communicate to members what they plan to do.

Seven participants indicated that they felt that when centralized decision-making was employed, it was still a democratic way of making decisions given that “when they’re selecting officers, most of their constitutions reflect a vote of some sort and a

majority win” (Shawn, FT Staff). One athlete explained, “we’ve definitely moved towards a more democratic process, at least, people vote on the officers every year” (Landon, Senior Athlete). In this way, they felt that because the club members had voted to put those individuals in their positions, they had conferred those decision-making responsibilities to club’s leadership. As one administrator observed, the officers “make decisions because the other members are just there to play, they don’t want any responsibility” (Channing, FT Staff).

Informalization

When posed with questions regarding the formality of club’s governance practices, administrators and athletes were consistent in their responses. By and large, it appears that clubs resist formalization (e.g., governing documents, periodic meetings, formal communication) to a high degree, instead relying on past precedent to determine how to operate clubs from one year to the next. Because of this, 23 administrators and athletes continually returned to the idea of “tradition until there’s friction” (Adrian, FT Staff). Athletes noted that “we are required to have [a constitution] for instances where maybe there’s conflict or something like that” (Kennedy, Junior Athlete), or that “it’s not really something we refer to unless there’s some sort of big administrative problem” (Taylor, Sophomore Athlete), or “that’s something in the background, that if we need it, it’s there. If we get into a situation where I don’t really know what to do here, we can go refer to it” (Riley, Senior Athlete).

In lieu of formal governing documents, 21 athletes and administrators indicated that clubs relied much more heavily on past precedence when determining how to

govern their clubs from one year to the next. For example, one athlete illustrated this point when discussing how methods of communication were passed down from one group to the next:

We are using the exact same GroupMe chat that we were using seven years ago when I was in the club. Nothing has changed. Everything is literally passed from person to person, there's never really a question on what's going on. Everything is so straightforward on what you have to do, it's the same old, same old. (Jessie, Graduate Athlete)

Clubs' informal nature were also evident through their preferred methods of coordination and communication. In terms of communication, athletes overwhelmingly described using informal methods of communication to communicate with organization members like GroupMe (Kennedy, Taylor, Riley, Jackie, Jessie, Parker, Shannon, Kendall, Max), Slack (Shannon), Discord (Alex), or group text messages (Kennedy, Riley, Parker). Students described e-mail as a more formal, less frequent communication method: "e-mail is usually sent out every couple of weeks, whenever there's big stuff happening like there's a race coming up or we just finished a race to congratulate people who ran, that sort of thing" (Taylor, Sophomore Athlete); "[e-mail is] definitely more official where it's like, these are our practices, this is the events, here's our GroupMe link. You wouldn't get e-mails every day, once a week maybe" (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete). Another athlete indicated that their club no longer used e-mail; instead they relied on the application called Discord: "everybody is in the main server because that is

where all of the main communications come through. We don't use e-mail; we found it's just kind of a waste" (Alex, Senior Athlete).

Coordination

11 athletes and administrators described a process of mutual adjustment with infrequent formal meetings and constant exchange between officers via less formal communication methods. Riley (Senior Athlete) explained, "we have a group chat that we talk in frequently. We haven't really found that we need to meet up and go on the whiteboard and do all this stuff." Others reflected similar processes in their own clubs, "we don't really do leadership meetings. Mostly it's just the two captains. We text each other and we decide and then we just say, hey, this is what we're doing" (Parker, Junior Athlete). "We will sometimes have officer meetings; we have not been super consistent about it. Like I said, there's only the two of us so it's usually a five minute conversation, or text each other" (Kennedy, Junior Athlete). There were those, however, that indicated that they "would have a board meeting once a week" (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete) or "have an official sit down for an hour meeting once a week" (Ripley, Senior Athlete) to coordinate the clubs affairs.

Altogether, the stories and experiences shared by athletes and administrators lent support to the notions that 1) sport clubs generally employ more organic, less bureaucratic structures for organizing and governing their clubs and 2) the structure and organization of individual clubs varies from one to the next depending on various internal and external factors. Internal factors include things like the age, size, or complexity of the club, the makeup of its membership, or member's goals for the club.

External factors focus much more on the relationship between individual sport clubs and their environment (i.e., supersystem and subsystems; Birnbaum, 1988). Each of the 17 clubs discussed in this study fell within a sport club program, Recreational Sport Program, a Division of Student Affairs, Student Life, or Student Success, and, more broadly, an institution of higher education that, together, exhibit mechanistic, bureaucratic characteristics and exert hierarchical influence on the ways individual clubs organize and operate.

Research Question 2: Structural Characteristics of Sport Club Programs

Research question 2 was concerned with identifying the structural characteristics (e.g., complexity, specialization, centralization, formalization, coordination) of sport club programs. Unlike individual clubs, participants described relatively similar bureaucratic structures across the eight campuses. There were slight variations from one campus to another, but generally participants described complex vertical hierarchies and vertical differentiation (especially in comparison to individual clubs). Even within the lowest substructure, in many cases the program level was horizontally divided between intramural and club sports. Participants discussed staffing in terms of specialization and specific division of labor to improve efficiency. Of the nine administrators interviewed, each was working on, or had completed, at least one advanced degree – four in Higher Education, two in Sport Management, two in Business Administration, and one in Recreation Administration.

Participants described decision-making by contrasting pre- and post-COVID processes. Pre-COVID, administrators at the program explained that they were the

primary decision makers and only rarely was there a need to elevate decisions in the hierarchy. Conversely, post-COVID decision-making illuminated the implicit bureaucratic structure inherent in each university as decisions were required to continually proceed up the chain and back down before administrators could take action. This suggests that decision-making is typically decentralized under “normal” circumstances, but that the intricacy of decisions made during COVID required greater authority and coordination between multiple divisions, departments, and programs. Lastly, participants noted a number of formal features at the program level and various forms of standardization (i.e., outputs, work, and skills) used to coordinate work at the program level and the work done by clubs in their interaction with the program level.

Complexity and Specialization

Complexity was evident throughout conversations with both athletes and administrators, particularly in terms of external partnerships leveraged for training and educational purposes. Six administrators discussed outsourcing components of the training they provided for students to external partnerships with other departments or divisions that specialized in various topics such as fitness services (Shawn, FT Staff), the career center (Ali, Graduate Assistant), or the leadership and service center (Channing, FT Staff). To diversify content and better serve club sport athletes, administrators felt that it was beneficial to leverage external relationships to gain insight from individuals in those various units with specialized knowledge in their topic areas.

Beyond external partnerships, seven administrators also explained the inner workings of their own department, often referring to the concept of a “competitive

sport,” or “integrated,” model that combines oversight of intramurals and sport clubs under one individual, in some instances, or multiple individuals in others. One administrator depicted the balance required to oversee this type of program as they transitioned into their current role:

When I got here, it was an intramural program with some sport clubs, so we’ve been working towards a competitive sports program. It’s much more about advocacy for clubs and why they deserve time and effort, not an us versus them kind of conversation. It’s much more about now we are here to work together to accomplish the goals we set. I would still say that there is some cultural struggles with either current staff or past staff that only worked in intramurals in grad school, so trying to broaden their horizons a little bit. It’s essentially two programs areas that I am responsible for. (Shawn, FT Staff)

Another voiced similar considerations in terms of how they and their supervisor compensated for one another’s strengths and weaknesses regarding the competitive sport model:

My boss’ background is almost exclusively in club sports and my focus has almost exclusively been intramurals, so it balances out. We’ve had a go-to person within our program area, but it is nice because there is that shared responsibility; like today he’s out of the office so I’m handling all the things that he normally would for sport clubs and, vice versa, if I’m ever out. (Jamie, FT Staff)

This horizontal differentiation combined with the vertical hierarchy evident in each university’s organizational chart suggest that sport club programs are one

component of a complex structure. In each of the eight cases, the sport club program was nested within some form of a Department of Recreational Sport, which was nested within a Division of Student Affairs, Student Life, or Student Success, which was nested within the broader university. This was evident in one administrator's explanation of a recent reorganization at the university:

We're now Student Success. We were Student and Academic Life for maybe two or three years as part of a disastrous reorganization. Student Affairs picked up some academic stuff and it became Student and Academic Life. Now we're still Student and Academic Life rebranded as Student Success. The way we were divided up, was they tried to arrange organizational units and student affairs into pillars. They created a wellness pillar where recreation is situated alongside the Violence Intervention and Prevention Center, and the Counseling Center, and Financial wellness. We absorbed the Alcohol Education people so that we became Campus Rec and Wellness at that point. (Adrian, FT Staff)

At a more macro level, 22 administrators and athletes indicated that there were specific staff members employed by recreational sport departments responsible for overseeing sport clubs and intramurals among other program areas like athletic training (Leslie, FT Staff), outdoor recreation (Adrian, FT Staff), or leadership and service (Channing, FT Staff). Administrators often depicted their responsibilities in terms of percentages.

For example, one administrator explained, "it's me at 50% because of the outdoor director thing. So, on paper, it's one half of a professional staff [member] plus a

graduate student” (Adrian, FT Staff) or another said, “if I had to describe my split, I live around 80 to 85% under Campus Recreation and then around 15 to 20% under the Leadership and Service Center” (Channing, FT Staff). 15 participants also described administrative approaches to dividing labor amongst professional staff members, graduate assistants, interns, and student employees as a means to improve efficiency. For instance, Jamie (FT Staff) explained that “day-to-day decisions, I would say, is split three ways because all three of us, the assistant director, myself, and our GA, advise a third of our clubs.” Others shared similar thoughts about their own programs:

Because of the number of staff we have and the number of sport clubs, we can have our undergraduate students working on a very low level with clubs that don’t need a lot of effort and energy. That frees up time for people at my level to work with clubs that require more intensity, more energy, more practice, all that kind of stuff. (Leslie, FT Staff)

The strength is having us delegated out, so everybody does have about five sport clubs. I think that that’s really beneficial. It doesn’t feel overwhelming for anybody and that way everybody is getting a little bit of sport club experience every single year. (Ali, Graduate Assistant)

Decentralization

Administrators generally described decision-making as a top-down process where the authority to make decisions, set priorities, and develop new policies rested with them at the program level. When asked about who drove policy decisions, multiple

administrators spoke of collaborative decision-making in terms of consulting their co-workers and peers: “I’d say it’s me and the rest of my professional team” (Leslie, FT Staff). Additionally, Shawn (FT Staff) described:

I would set those priorities, but I’m a very consensus driven manager, if you will. It’s very typical for the four of us, so me, two coordinators, and the graduate assistant, to sit in the conference room for a couple hours or a couple weeks even each summer to make sure that we’re going the direction that we want to go in and if we’re not, let’s pivot, and let’s be on the same page, and let’s all make that decision.

Thus, policy decisions were discussed in terms of collaboration to the extent that it was discussed horizontally at the administrative level, but few if any talked about providing a direct role for students to have a voice in those decisions. 12 students echoed this, observing that policy decisions were made above them and then communicated down as expectations moving forward. One athlete explained:

I think it’s definitely more of the administrators made the choice and here’s what’s going on. I don’t think there’s really any voice at all that the students have in those situations. It’s definitely more of, we’ll decide and we’ll tell you than we’ll have a discussion about it. (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete).

At all but one of the universities, there was a group of students that operated in a council or board type capacity and existed, to some degree, in the space between the individual clubs and the sport club program. While each university had slight differences in the size or make up of the council, most were made up of current club sport athletes

that were either elected by their peers or selected by some combination of current council members and administrators. There were instances where athletes and administrators attributed the student voice in administrative policy decisions to those on the council given that they represent the athletes in various capacities. As one administrator explained, “when we’re making policies about club sports, a majority of the time we will at least get advice from the [council]” (Jamie, FT Staff).

Additionally, councils were tasked with various administrative responsibilities that ranged from allocating funds, disciplinary decisions, long-term planning, or facility reservations. Interestingly, multiple administrators talked about their ability to oversee decisions in terms of magnitude:

Anytime there is a conduct issue, it is heard by the council unless it truly needs to be sent to conflict resolution/student conduct, we just send that along. If it’s just breaking a policy such as traveling without a safety officer, not filling out the travel notification two weeks prior, or the most recent one we did is improper social media use. (Ali, Graduate Assistant)

It seemed like administrators were referring their decentralized decision-making to students in these positions to provide opportunities for them to practice decision-making in lower stakes situations, but placed certain boundaries on what the council could and could not decide:

Sometimes we’ll let [the council] make the decision if it’s not something that the university would then be involved, so things like compliance about how many budget points would a club lose if they forgot to turn in paperwork. That kind of

decision our [council] makes. The bigger picture, they might have a say in what we do but at the end of the day it's my boss' decisions. (Jamie, FT Staff)

Finally, given the events that have transpired over the past 15 months, it was inevitable that comparisons to pre- and post-COVID would emerge. Many of these conversations underscored the tenuous nature of decentralized decision-making in bureaucratic structures. Given the complexity and continually evolving nature of the COVID situation and administrators' lack of expert knowledge in contagious diseases, 13 of administrators and students noted how decisions that would typically be decided at the sport club program level were now required to go up multiple levels in the hierarchy and then back down before, in a best case scenario, action could be taken.

More typically, administrators were forced to communicate with their students about restrictions that were passed on from upper administration. As one administrator lamented, "as an administrator, it felt like all I was saying was no you can't do that, no you can't do that, sorry we're not doing that right now" (Shawn, FT Staff). Given the safety implications inherent to decisions on how to navigate COVID and the need to ensure consistent implementation across the board, decision-making was temporarily recentralized further up in the hierarchy until enough information was available to allow decentralized decision-making once again. Tracy (Graduate Assistant) described this shift:

With COVID, all of our activities or any proposals that we created to get our students onto the field and practicing, or even just conditioning, we had to internally submit to our Associate Director of Programming, who submitted to

the Director of Recreational Sports, who then submitted to the Division of Student Affairs Vice President. Since August, that's how it has been. Just recently, the university told us that when it comes to events, we can now make the decision internally.

Formalization

The formal nature of the program level was evident given the repeated references to codified policies and rules, measured outcomes, and the type of communication described by administrators and athletes. 19 of administrators and athletes described the rules and regulations put in place to establish boundaries and collect various administrative information from clubs. One administrator explained collecting constitutions and risk assessment plans as a way to hold clubs accountable:

We collect documents that basically constitute an agreement; this is how you agree to operate. If for some reason we find out there's an incident where you haven't operated that way, we will route that through the correct disciplinary channel. (Adrian, FT Staff)

Additionally, there were numerous references to administrative red tape, particularly in terms of what clubs could or could not purchase with the funds allocated by the university. Those conversations revealed stipulations that required purchases "be tied to something specific" (Adrian, FT Staff). For example, Sam (Graduate Assistant) discussed differentiating between items bought for personal use versus those purchased for team use:

We try to tell them there's certain things they can spend the money on and certain things they can't. It essentially has to go towards the whole team and the betterment of the team and not individuals. Jerseys is one that can kind of go both ways. If you give this jersey to this person and they keep it, they're not allowed to use their allocation because it would be going to the individual. But if it stays with the team and they're checking them out, even if it's at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the year you're getting them all back, then that would be okay to use it on.

Thus, while clubs can obtain resources from the university, those resources often come with stipulations attached on what they can be used for or processes attached to their use, such as when "you're planning a trip there are required pieces of paperwork, because we do have to have certain things reported to campus" (Shawn, FT Staff).

Another example of formality at the program level was references to strategic planning and measured outcomes. Six administrators referenced in some form the need to quantify or measure outcomes related to their job responsibilities or outcomes associated with club participation. One administrator explained:

I also implemented, this year, some things I want to make sure are happening in term of a program planning outline. So, it's "I want you to lay out some specific things you want to accomplish this year and why and how." Our director is new in his position and priorities of his were diversity and well-being. So, it's like, what are you going to do this year in terms of diversity, what are you going to do this year in terms of well-being? How are you going to measure it? How are we

going to know what it did? And so, I put some external requirements on that. We have a departmental strategic planning process, we have a departmental budgeting process, and also put some rules, and I don't want to say rules, but also provide some framework to the planning process.

Interestingly, despite the repeated references to measuring outcomes, none of the universities tracked the specific number of athletes participating in sport clubs. Each of the administrators interviewed was only able to provide an estimate of the number of students participating in their program because they "don't do attendance tracking at practices and things like that. Our metric for counting is if you signed a waiver, that means you had to have been involved with the club at least once" (Leslie, FT Staff). The same method was used almost exclusively across institutions.

Finally, administrators and athletes described administrators' preferences for more formal meetings at the program level that provided consistent touchpoints with club officers through required trainings, programming, and periodic meetings between club officers and administrators disseminating information through e-mail. 22 administrators and athletes discussed periodic, required trainings and meetings that offered consistent touchpoints for administrators to provide information or education and check in on clubs' progress. For example, Sam (Graduate Assistant) discussed monthly meetings with advisors in their program:

Every club has monthly meetings with their advisor. Our clubs are split; half the club's, a main advisor is the Assistant Director, and the other are with the Director. They're both advisors, but as far as their monthly meetings go, half of

them schedule with one professional staff and then the other half, with the other staff.

Six participants noted the redundancy that resulted from meeting with individuals lower in the organizational hierarchy given their need to have further conversations to secure answers or obtain clearance for things beyond their authority. In one such instance, the program allowed student employees to serve in a liaison capacity for clubs:

There are questions that our undergraduate students are never going to be able to answer, so they still do have to work with a professional. Sometimes they have to go up a level to get an answer on something or something needs to be purchased.

There's an extra layer of time that goes into that. (Leslie, FT Staff).

Another participant described a similar issue when graduate assistants were assigned advising responsibilities:

As far as graduate assistants go, after a semester you get to pick 4, and then you kind of take them on and start advising them. [Full time staff] still have final say and signatures and all that kind of stuff. I can't sign off on purchases and all that, so they're like "Oh, you're my advisor, can you sign this?" and I was like, "I am but I'm not, but we'll get it taken care of" (Sam, Graduate Assistant)

In response, Cameron (Junior Athlete) explained how they dealt with this issue by bypassing their point of contact and going higher up the chain to expedite the information they needed:

I emailed one of the pro staff to order equipment and any big questions I need answered semi-quickly. My liaison might not know the answer, because my

liaison will have to go to pro staff anyways. So I jump them and go to the pro staff.

As an alternative, Shawn (FT Staff) expressed their preference to build organic relationships with students, opposed to formal, periodic meetings, to generate authentic conversations and create an informal space where they felt supported in self-disclosing their successes and their failures:

I don't require officers to do any type of meetings. I don't require officers to check in or anything, it's much more of an organic conversation. We're not meeting to just to have a meeting because we need to check this off a list. I think that's part of building rapport with the officers, which is incredibly imperative, especially the way that we host our sport club program. I expect organizations to be self-governing, but at the same time I expected them to also be self-reporting. If y'all win the SEC championships, awesome, come tell me that, but on the same token, if y'all trash a hotel room on a trip and something bad happens, I need y'all to come and tell me. I don't want to hear from a colleague or from the hotel.

In terms of communication methods, seven athletes and administrators described administrators use of e-mail as a primary mode of communication. One athlete described their feelings on e-mail when they explained, "I also know that if they send out like multiple emails, I'd start ignoring them," while also noting that "sometimes [administrators] can take a long time to respond to emails, that is occasionally a bit frustrating" (Kennedy, Junior Athlete). Conversely, there were instances where athletes

and administrators discussed using less formal modes of communication to communicate with students such as Slack (Parker, Junior Athlete) or GroupMe (Jamie, FT Staff).

Though Jamie noted, “it’s not always the greatest thing as an administrator because you always feel like you’re on the clock.”

Coordination

Coordination at the program level reflected a high degree of standardization across work, outputs, and knowledge, particularly regarding how sport club programs coordinated sport club operations. Standardization of work was communicated in terms of the processes in place for clubs to gain recognition and association with recreational sports. Often, these processes were in addition to the typical process that student organizations undergo to gain association with the university. One administrator described, “an organization has to apply to get into our sport club program. There are different models I’ve heard, where if it’s sport related, student activities department ships them off to Rec Sports and says, here you go” (Micah, FT Staff). Another explained, “clubs wanting to start out, one of the very first things that they have to do is come up with a constitution. We provide a template for them and then they just plug in their information” (Ali, Graduate Assistant).

Three administrators indicated that they also had a gatekeeping process in place for organizations to join their program. Additionally, five administrators talked about standard operating procedures required of their clubs, Adrian (FT Staff) explained:

Our office provides them a list of 10 areas of concern from some basic disclosure about what is your mission, organization, to who’s providing practices, to what

are your emergency action plans for all of these categories. Even though it's only 10 headings, the details of that can get pretty long and we require a club submit a draft of that every September. Then, I have a face to face with at least one officer where I read over the plan, I make recommendations, and keep notes about what we recommended.

Participants also described standardization of outputs, particularly relating to the allocation of financial and facility resources. 14 participants described a budget presentation process that club officers were required to participate in before they could receive financial allocations. Sam (Graduate Assistant) outlined what their process looked like:

We go through the allocation process every March. Essentially they run through their budget, their revenues, their expenditures. It's a budget presentation and then we kind of score them based off of that and then off of that scoring a point gets associated to a dollar amount. If every point is \$2 and they had 100 points, they get \$200. It's literally to the penny; some clubs, it's like they get \$3,873.72. So, it's to the penny.

While athletes generally found these processes to be somewhat burdensome, one athlete felt that the structure that these processes provided was useful:

You have to submit travel notifications, paperwork, stuff like that. It's a lot of stuff to keep you structured, keep waivers in one place, keep everyone knowing what's going on. There's a lot of oversight that gets put on us, which some people find as a burden. For me, it's nice to know that, hey, they're there, we

have everything situated because if it was just everything on your own, it's like, wait, do we travel this weekend? It's like. Alright, yes, we do travel this weekend. There's a lot of stuff like that. Sometimes it's nice to have. (Riley, Senior Athlete)

Lastly, athletes and administrators discussed numerous processes meant to standardize officers' skills and knowledge. 23 participants spoke about onboarding training to educate officers on the policies and procedures associated with operating in the sport club program and gaining access to resources, transition meetings meant to pass knowledge from outgoing to incoming officers, and "booster" trainings "recapping the information with the transition training since they just had a whole summer to forget it" (Ali, Graduate Assistant).

Athletes' perceptions of these trainings varied. Some felt they were useful and that "it was nice to know where all the forms are located, when I need to have those in by, how to fill them out, where to go for those sorts of resources" (Taylor, Sophomore Athlete). Another athlete explained that "the trainings were very effective" for knowing "this is how I start this process, and this is something I can do, so I can reach out and get more information on how to do that 100% properly" (Alex, Senior Athlete). Conversely, others felt that, "we have to force people to go. They just sit there and wait for it to be done and then do the required quiz at the end" (Morgan, Senior Athlete) or that "it was much more for a treasurer than anything else. If you weren't dealing with money, it wasn't even relevant" (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete). Another athlete described:

I wish that there would have been a little bit more highlighting what teams actually do on a day-to-day basis. It felt very, well whenever you travel, here's what you do. Whenever someone breaks the rules, here's what you do. (Peyton, Junior Athlete)

There were two athletes that also described ways that they felt administrators could use, or were already using, to improve the content delivered through trainings. The first talked about using a pre-assessment tool to gauge how well they had been transitioned into their role by their predecessor:

Previous officers weren't very involved, so it was me and this other [person] who were new officers running the club. We didn't get that knowledge of these are great resources that you should take advantage of. There's a knowledge check at the end of [the training] to make sure you watched the video and have the knowledge. There isn't a pretest or any sort of way to ask about how the previous officers trained you and I think that actually might be a good idea. (Kennedy, Junior Athlete)

Cameron (Junior Athlete) described a new process used at their university to deliver better programming through their monthly seminars:

Something they changed, and I like how they changed it, this year was they did a poll two weeks before the seminar. They were like, what do you want to know from the athletic trainers? Do you want to know injury prevention? Do you want to know warmups? Do you want to know nutrition? There's different things that

you could pick from and then based on the majority, they went and did a presentation on that. So, it was what people wanted and felt they needed.

There were also multiple instances where both administrators and athletes expressed frustration with the lack of consideration for outliers that resulted from standardization. This was particularly evident when some clubs discussed the COVID protocols required by their universities. Jessie (Graduate Athlete) explained, “when the university pushed back on us and said no, you can’t travel out of state I said okay, well, we won’t register as collegiate, we’ll just register as individual athletes.” Another athlete competing in a similar sport further contextualized this:

When we [compete] it is not a team sport. We go as a team, we travel as a team, but the actual [competition] has nothing to do with your team. So, individuals can participate. [I] can go sign up to race by myself and not be affiliated with [university]. (Max, Graduate Athlete)

Another athlete shared their frustration regarding the monthly required trainings:

They have different kinds of training, you know, concussion testing training and different kind of physical sports things. Unfortunately, I don’t really utilize those that much since [club] is a little bit different. We don’t have the same problems or needs as other traditional sports. (Alex, Senior Athlete)

Even administrators alluded to some frustrations with the standardization inherent in their roles. Shawn (FT Staff) mentioned issues with the timing of their annual training given that it was during the busiest part of their year and they “were kind of killing ourselves trying to train these officers for stuff that was already happening.”

Another alluded to frustration with balancing policy, precedence, and stakeholder desires, “it’s like we’re caught between the president and policy and then what we’ve always done and how students feel” (Channing, FT Staff). In another instance, Adrian (FT Staff) expressed reluctance to educate students on a policy that would allow clubs to host events with alcohol:

I don't want to do this, but I'm going to have to let them know that the alcohol rules actually apply to them and that there is a system where they can host an off campus party with an alcohol vendor if they want. I think that's a bad fit. I was stunned when our management office told me that they could do that.

Collectively, administrators and athletes supported the idea that the program level, which constitutes individual club’s external environment, exhibited a number of bureaucratic characteristics. This was evident in the vertical and horizontal complexity described in and around sport club programs, the specialized roles of staff members, decentralized decision-making, formal policies and procedures, and coordination through standardization. Thus, the possibility for tension to arise as individual clubs interact with the administrative program level become evident given the inherent differences between them. Given that the program level creates formal, mechanistic expectations, individual clubs may struggle to adhere given their informal, organic nature.

Research Question 3: Outcomes of Interactions between Individual Sport Clubs and Sport Club Programs

Research question 3 was concerned with the interaction between individual sport clubs and sport club programs and the resulting student development potential. The interaction between the two creates a dynamic that requires individual club officers to negotiate the mechanistic, isomorphic influence of their external environment with their desire to operate their club in a more fluid, organic manner. To achieve this, officers and clubs engage in the practice of loose coupling and ceremonial conformity to gain access to resources by satisfying the minimum requirements to be associated with the university while simultaneously resisting the full adoption of those bureaucratic practices in their own clubs.

Additionally, input from administrators unexpectedly revealed that they also engage in this practice at the program level to ensure that clubs have the freedom to operate in the manner they see fit and to establish the necessary distance to enforce policy and compliance. Regarding student development, feedback from administrators and athletes revealed that the space that results from the tension between individual clubs and the sport club program challenge students to develop in various ways including interpersonal, intrapersonal, leadership, vocational, and political. Further, the informal, social nature of clubs allowed space for participants to develop physically, emotionally, and interpersonally.

Coercive Isomorphism

Isomorphism occurs when “the process of bureaucratization itself begins to demand conformity to different organizations in the same system to a common set of rules and procedures” (Garston, 1993, p. 7). In the case of sport clubs, this results from the minimum requirements and various policies established by administrators at the sport club program level which exert influence over the ways that clubs organize and govern, to a certain extent. It was evident throughout participant interviews that individual clubs exhibited low levels of standardization across clubs. Descriptions of clubs ranged from highly recreational to what one administrator described as “para-varsity” (Adrian, FT Staff), low to high membership (Shawn, FT Staff; Jamie, FT Staff), less to more active (Leslie, FT Staff), and simple to complex (Alex, Senior Athlete). As one administrator explained, “we have 50 different clubs and they go at things 50 different ways” (Leslie, FT Staff).

Despite these low levels of standardization, there were many similar features described across clubs primarily resulting from the minimum requirements imposed by sport club programs. For example, almost every institution required clubs to have a constitution, with one exception where “the [center] got sick of dealing with [constitutions] here, so they were just like, yeah, you don’t have to have a constitution” (Channing, FT Staff). Further, seven programs required clubs to have a minimum number of officers, participate in community service components, or event hosting requirements among others. Administrators most commonly achieved compliance with

these policies and procedures by attaching stipulations to the various resources (e.g., financial, facility, administrative, educational) provided by the sport club program.

The quantity and type of resources provided by programs varied, but there were some consistencies across institutions. Each university provided need-based funding for clubs, although there was a large range (i.e., \$20,000 to \$275,000) between institutions. Some also provided competitive funding, for when teams made it to higher levels of competition than expected, and compliance funding where clubs earned “points” (Jamie, FT Staff) or “cash” (Shawn, FT Staff) for completing tasks and requirements. Each university also provided access to indoor and outdoor facility space for their clubs and some went as far as to offer financial assistance for those clubs that required the use of off campus facilities (e.g., ice hockey).

All but one program had a liaison system where clubs met regularly or semi-regularly with administrators. Some programs offered access to event staffing, vehicles, athletic trainers, and officer trainings and many programs discussed access to the universities branding for clubs. These less quantifiable resources add up. As one administrator noted:

If you look at it in terms of a dollar figure that the club gets allocated it’s probably going to be 3, 4, or \$5,000. It’s probably not like winning the lottery, at least not the big lottery, but by the time you add in facilities, staffing, equipment, things like that, I think it would be a bigger number. (Micah, FT Staff)

Across the board seven sport club administrators discussed using resources to incentivize clubs “to do the things that we need them to do for our reporting and

administrative structure” (Shawn, FT Staff). Another administrator echoed this, pointing out that clubs “are not eligible [to access resources] unless we feel that the club’s making a good faith effort to give us what we need” (Adrian, FT Staff). Thus, the tension arose when clubs simultaneously attempted to operate autonomously and conform to administrative expectations to the extent needed to maintain university affiliation and access to the resources they provided. This led club officers to engage in loose coupling and ceremonial conformity in their interactions with the program level.

Loose Coupling

Coupling is defined as the “correspondence between system elements” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 36) and ranges from tight and deterministic to loose and probabilistic. With sport clubs, loose coupling occurred when club officers were asked to negotiate between the mechanistic, bureaucratic influence from the administrative subsystems and the more organic, non-bureaucratic governance they prefer in their own clubs. This was evident in the repeated instances among athletes where they discussed their lack of understanding of the “behind the scenes” work done by officers. 15 athletes described having little to no knowledge of the administrative work done by officers when they were members of the club. It was only when they were elected to their positions that they gained insight into what went on between the club and the sport club program. Taylor (Sophomore Athlete), summed up what many athletes described:

I know who the president was, and I believe the vice president, but other than that I wasn’t really super familiar with most of the officers and had no idea what

went on behind the scenes. I kind of just showed up to the runs and to the races and things like that.

There were also instances where athletes had either not held office or were newly elected to their office and struggled to provide insight into what resources were available through the sport club program. For example, Harley (Sophomore Athlete) explained that she was recently elected to their position and had not gone through officer training yet. When asked about financial resources provided by recreational sports, for instance, they responded, “not that I know of, but we might.” Kendall (Graduate Athlete), a non-officer, actually indicated that they “try to stay somewhat unaware of it,” when asked about the types of resources available to their club.

Administrators also indicated that they engaged in loose coupling to maintain oversight while allowing clubs to operate somewhat autonomously. Eight administrators used repeated language about clubs existing as individual entities and being self-governing. One administrator described:

I always tell these organizations that I’m not here to govern their club. I’m not here to tell you who to vote for president, I’m not here to tell you what tournament to go to. I’m not here to make those hotel reservations for you. I’m not a travel agent. So, understanding that I’m going to provide you with the resources and tools that you need to be successful, but again, I’m not going to hold your hand and do it for you. (Shawn, FT Staff).

Another explained that loose coupling was a byproduct of the way that their university viewed clubs, “we are as hands off as hands off can be when it comes to the inner

workings of the clubs. We can only be the way we are because of the way our university views sport clubs” (Leslie, FT Staff). Despite administrators making the case that they were exerting as little influence over clubs as possible, in reality they are exerting an incredible amount of pressure through the policies, trainings, and conversations they do, or do not, have with officers.

Evidence of loose coupling also emerged in discussions about communication between administrators and general club members. In both directions, communication was channeled through the officers. 10 administrators and athletes indicated that when correspondence was sent to clubs, it was sent to officers who were then expected to share that information with their club members. Peyton (Junior Athlete) described this process when talking about receiving updates from administrators about COVID policies:

I got one e-mail from the administration last spring, one last fall and then that’s all I heard from them. We really did not get updates about policies, they did not tell us anything or, if they did, they only told the president and the president was expected to disperse that among the officer team.

This was also evident during conversations about sending e-mail correspondence to recruit club athletes for this study; nearly every administrator expressed the ability to send e-mails to the club officers, but lacked the capacity to communicate to all club members. Similarly, 12 participants described feedback channels from club athletes to sport club administrators permeating through club officers. Ali (Graduate Assistant) described this process; “if a member has a concern, they probably go to the officer and

they come to the sport club contact. That would be probably the direct chain of events that generally happens.” Another explained:

I don't have every member's name. I don't have interaction with every single of the 1400 members, but I do talk and have a relationship enough with the officers to know what they're talking about with their members. I think, as an administrator, that's the type of support that I need to provide them. (Shawn, FT Staff).

This method, however, opens up the possibility for issues happening at the individual club level to germinate and grow, given that athletes may not be familiar with administrators or may not feel comfortable going to them to talk. Two athletes shared stories that illustrate these issues. Shannon (Sophomore Athlete) described an incident in which they tried to support a teammate who was having issues with a mutual antagonist:

This girl had this issue with the guy on the climbing team that bothered me. He was saying things that were making her uncomfortable. I remember one day she was just like, I don't know what to do, maybe I should talk to the guy who is the head of club sports about it. She was deciding about that. She was like, I would like to talk to him but I worry that no matter what I said, the club sports guy is just gonna take the other guys side, not matter what, and would have gotten [her] in trouble or been weird with [her]. From her perspective, she was really nervous about it and didn't feel like she was going to be valued or heard or helped in any way.

Earlier in the interview Shannon had shared that the antagonist in this scenario had formed a relationship with the administrator that he had leveraged in club discussions; “he would try to go to the administrative person, the person at the Rec, and [then] be like, oh well, I talked to him and he thinks this, so we’re just going to do that.” The second athlete shared their perception of club sport administrators which stemmed from their interactions with officers in their club:

A lot of the time club sports has been very intimidating to approach. People that were higher level on the team actually discourage you from reaching out to [administrators] because they were too busy or they have too much going on or they're not worried about it. I was told in an incident where a person used the word “retarded” to discuss a very mentally capable person that worked for Rec Sports. They told me that going to people that were higher up was not worth the time and that I was being overdramatic and that they wouldn't care about it. It created very much an intimidation factor. I feel like club sports at the highest level of administration has the perception with students and then that can facilitate among team members. (Peyton, Junior Athlete)

Later in the interview, Peyton expanded on the situation and the types of behaviors that were happening in the club:

There was so much peer pressure into drinking and so many, we called them “non team sponsored events,” but literally only people from the club would show up. I thought that that was a normal thing, was to go out with your friends and get absolutely trashed with them at someone's house and then have your academics

get worse. When I tried voicing my opinions to the vice president or the president above me and see what they have to say, it was never met with, okay let's take this to another level because this is not okay. It was, well this is how it's always been so that's how it's going to stay and if you try and do anything there are going to be consequences.

In both instances, athletes felt that they were unable to approach sport club administrators to seek help in dealing with issues happening in their clubs. This creates scenarios where negative behaviors might thrive in individual clubs. It is also worth noting that in both instances, these individuals ultimately left their clubs due to the issues they were experiencing.

Ceremonial Conformity.

Ceremonial conformity is a byproduct of loose coupling that occurs when organizations build “gaps between their formal structures and actual work activities” (Meyers and Rowan, 1977, p. 341). There were six athletes that discussed operating in the “gray area” (Alex, Senior Athlete) created by standardized policies and procedures. Ceremonial conformity allowed them to simultaneously reap the benefits of association with the university through the necessary adherence with their policies and to operate in creative ways given unique features of their clubs. As one administrator put it, “I think they want to play their sport and so I would imagine some of the administrative details happen as much as it needs to happen in order to meet the requirements” (Micah, FT Staff). For example, one athlete illustrated how they navigated issues stemming from travel policies and their clubs ability to compete:

There's still other things that are best left unsaid. There are some travel rules that we skirt that are just things like, we're not supposed to drive between midnight and 6 AM. Most of our races require that we're on the road before 6 AM. It's not because we're out doing something not appropriate in the middle of the night. It's just we're going to race at 6 AM and we have to be enrolled by 5 AM. We're not doing anything inappropriate, but I still don't tell him. (Max, Graduate Athlete)

Another described the benefits of being able to operate in this gray area:

For the most part, it's also a blessing in some ways. It would be great to be able to talk to administration, say, hey here's what we need, here's how you can help us, here's how you can harm us. At the same time, we kind of operate in this gray area of sometimes people not knowing what we are is nice. I don't want to sound bad, but we can kind of get away with some things. (Alex, Senior Athlete)

Student Development

Participants typically discussed student development outcomes in terms of the individual impact on sport club participants. Athletes and administrators tended to differentiate development between those outcomes associated with being a general athlete in a club sport and those associated with taking on leadership roles within the clubs. The former appears to be as a direct result of the tension noted in previous sections. As club sport athletes ascend into leadership roles, they are asked to learn and navigate the unfamiliar bureaucratic landscape from which they were previously shielded. This required them to learn “how to deal with people, how to deal with how to

run an entity that's led by rules and policies and documents, rather than shoot from the hip, and how to navigate a gigantic bureaucracy" (Adrian, FT Staff).

As officers, athletes were also expected to learn how to "manage conflict resolution" (Alex, Senior Athlete) and use "different management styles for different types of people" (Riley, Senior Athlete). There were also nine administrators and athletes that linked vocational development and leadership responsibilities in club sports. Alex (Senior Athlete) shared that "this sport club has gotten me more experience in what I actually want to do in my life than, frankly, any class I've ever had on campus. It has absolutely maximized what I've learned so far." Riley (Senior Athlete) reflected on similar outcomes from his time as an officer:

It led me to figure out what I wanted to do with the rest of my post college career. I found like, hey, there are jobs in the [sport] industry, so I can use this experience to build on my resume.

Conversely, the types of development attributed to general participation included physical, mental, and interpersonal. 17 administrators and students felt that participation in sport clubs allowed students to maintain physical health. Morgan (Senior Athlete) explained, "[my club has] pushed me to boundaries that I didn't know I could go to physically. I've gotten way stronger than I thought I could." 11 participants also discussed the potential for sport club participant to promote emotional development by providing a space for students to relieve stress "that doesn't involve going out to a bar on Thursday night" (Leslie, FT Staff). Jordan (Senior Athlete) echoed this sentiment when

he said, “having an outlet for stress is a really big thing for [club] because if I’m having a bad day I can go out and tackle a bag for two hours. It’s a great time.”

Interpersonal development was by far the most cited example of development resulting from club participation. 12 administrators cited sense of community and sense of belonging as a key outcome associated with sport clubs. 17 athletes also discussed the friendships and relationships they cultivated through their club sport participation. As one athlete explained:

The nice thing about sports clubs is that you know you automatically have something in common with every single member, which is you’re obviously passionate about the sport, enough to do it in your free time, so I think the friendships that I’ve made out of the sports clubs has been very fulfilling.

(Kennedy, Junior Athlete)

With the possible exception of leadership seminars and officer trainings, there were no administrators that discussed achieving student development outcomes in terms of interventions done on their part. This suggests that development ultimately results from the informal, organic nature of clubs. Clubs environments are more structured than intramurals, yet less demanding than varsity athletics. 17 athletes described this dynamic when discussing differences between sport clubs and either end of spectrum represented by intramurals and varsity sport on college campuses. Further, the leadership and vocational development often cited was frequently linked to processes required at the administrative level, implying that these were the direct result of environmental tensions between individual clubs and sport club programs.

When pressed on the potential negative outcomes, administrators and students outlined four general themes where club participation might lead to issues regarding development. The first revolved around intrapersonal development, particularly in terms of time management and athletes devoting more time to their club than other academic responsibilities. 13 participants described the potential conflict resulting from social pressures to fully participate in club activities and other pressures created by schoolwork or employment. Morgan (Senior Athlete) explained:

I probably could have done a little bit better in those subjects earlier on had I not dedicated so much time to [my club]. I'm one of the very few people that actually would show up every day to practice. I can count on two hands the number of practices that I missed in the three and a half years that we were [competing]. My learning has probably suffered at times because I'm just too tired to focus on an assignment or retain knowledge past an exam.

Another athlete described time management in terms of sacrificing other opportunities on to get involved on campus: "There's a few times where I wish I was in town this weekend for a huge [community event] weekend. That would be great, but we gotta travel to [school] this weekend for stuff" (Riley, Senior Athlete).

Next, nine administrators and athletes discussed the potential for exclusion when clubs employ gatekeeping practices like tryouts or relegating members to less competitive teams within the club that lead athletes to "self-select themselves out of that club" (Channing, FT Staff). Jamie (FT Staff) summed up the friction caused by those practices given club sport programs connection to student affairs:

We don't encourage people to cut players, but our more competitive clubs do have tryouts and you do have to say, I'm sorry, we didn't have space for you this year. I think that's probably where we most don't fit student affairs is that it's not always the most inclusive.

There was one student, however, that felt that not making the team their first semester motivated them to do better:

I didn't make the team the first semester, obviously, because I had never played. So I went to the captain's practices throughout the first semester and then I made the team my second semester. It was cool to have something I'm learning in the background that's not related to school. (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete)

It is worth noting that this student was involved in multiple clubs which may have eased the rejection from this specific club but that the club also had a system in place for individuals who did not make the cut to practice, improve, and continue participating in the sport.

The third theme dealt with internal discord between members. 14 athletes shared their experiences with "drama" (Kennedy, Junior Athlete), "cliquey issues" (Jessie, Graduate Athlete), or "toxicity" (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete) amongst club members. One athlete described issues that arise when leading a co-ed club compared to their experience with a single sex club:

I prefer a single sex club actually. There are definitely power dynamics that emerge [between sexes]. There have been different times where things have been

said in the group chat where I speak up. A lot of guys don't like to hear that.

(Kendall, Graduate Athlete)

Another discussed interpersonal tensions arising between officers and non-officers, particularly pertaining to the decisions they make:

I've gotten in numerous arguments in terms of playing time and having to get on to players who did something in a game. You're like, I get you're my friend, but as the person running the team, I can't just let it happen because you're my friend. Those things are hard. (Cameron, Junior Athlete)

Another athlete, Parker (Junior Athlete), shared their experience with a club that eventually led to them quitting the team:

When I came back to the team, they all gave me the cold shoulder and there's this general rumor going around like, [they] think [they're] better than us or we're not good enough for [them]. Even the coaches point it out, they were like, oh this is how you do this drill for everyone that wasn't here [Parker]! It was really isolating because even though I had friends on the team, it was more like oh, cry on my shoulder and I'll listen to you and I'll give you a hug and whatever. It wasn't I'm going to stand up for you in that moment and say something for you.

Finally, 10 administrators and athletes expressed concerns about organizational deviancy such as hazing, alcohol abuse, or other unhealthy or harmful behaviors. As Micah (FT Administrator) articulated:

My primary concern would be if somehow an organization got off track. Whether it was not following the rules, not doing things that were for the best interest of club members, or someone started to make poor decisions. I think that could lead to a poor experience.

Most typically, administrators were worried about hazing. One administrator expressed:

One thing we try to train them on the best that we can is the whole hazing concept. Sports in general I think it's kind of moved away from that some, but the first year players go and pick up all the trash or have to do this. I think that can have a very negative impact on feeling excluded in that regard. (Sam, Graduate Assistant)

Thus, while the overwhelming majority quipped that sport club participation often led to only positive outcomes, there were a number of examples of its potential to harm participants. Examples ranged from behaviors at the club level such as exclusionary practices, hazing, alcohol abuse, or other deviant behaviors, as well as individual risks that arose from athletes balancing multiple demanding roles (e.g., student, athlete, officer, employee) or managing toxic conflict with other individuals in their clubs. When left unchecked, these behaviors have the potential to reproduce themselves given clubs' reliance on past precedence to govern club affairs from one year to the next.

Other External Influences

Throughout the interview process, there were three additional environmental influences that consistently emerged: club alumni, coaches, and sport governing boards. To varying degrees, each of these external influences was separate from the university

and yet each possessed the potential to complicate the relationship between clubs and the university. For example, one administrator discussed the complicated relationship between active club members and club alumni, especially where financial investment was present:

Our ice hockey club and our rugby club have been around for a very long time, still have alumni in the area, very big donors, things of that nature. The more money you donate into something, the more say that you like to have in that organization. So, it's a learning curve for [new officers]. Our assistant director has more of those tough conversations because she is the one that handles those clubs. She is very much having a conversation with officers and walks them through how to talk to the donors without making them upset. (Ali, Graduate Assistant)

Another administrator provided an example of the way that national governing bodies might unintentionally exert influence on administrative decisions:

I think that's an added piece where, especially with COVID, was a huge reason why a lot of club sport programs weren't making decision until right before school started. We were looking at national governing bodies to say, are you going to have a schedule, because if so, then we'll fight for home events, fight for travel. The national governing bodies were like, we don't want to put in the work if you guys aren't gonna allow travel. They are very involved in the decision-making process, whether they realize it or not, because if they put out a

schedule including our clubs, there's that expectation that we'll make it happen as administrators. (Jamie, FT Staff)

The most complicated external influence stemmed from coaches' role with clubs. Eight administrators stressed that coaches were not supposed to be decision makers and that they had no official capacity as an agent of the university or the sport club programs.

One administrator explained:

That's one of the biggest problems that we sometimes have with our coaches is that this is very different, this is not like coaching at every other level. We get some coaches that understand that the coaching is instructional only and are great, but sometimes we have meetings where the coach thinks the organization should do one thing and the leadership thinks it should do something else and we always tell the leadership, this is your club, it's not theirs. They may have their own opinions. You can listen to them but at the end of the day it's a student led and run organization (Sam, Graduate Assistant)

Yet, five athletes described scenarios in which the coach played a central role in the oversight of the clubs' operations:

For [club], a lot of that was managed by our coach. The coach had a more prominent presence than in the other [clubs I was involved in]. She took control of what tournaments we're doing and where are we going and definitely what practices we'd have, when, how, all these things. It definitely had nothing to do with what the players were thinking. Even social events were weird, where it's

still the coach being like, we're gonna have some team bonding at this time and you all have to go. It was weird. (Shannon, Sophomore Athlete)

Collectively, participants discussed the potential impact that these external entities could have on clubs. Sometimes this impact was described as being outside of the influence of club sport programs, but there were times where one or more of the three brushed up against the administrative structures within the university. Further complicating this is the fact that none of the three were consistently present across clubs. Some clubs utilized an outside coach, others relied on athletes in their club or did without. There were clubs that belonged to external governing bodies that oversaw their competitions and those that did not. Similarly, not all clubs discussed having association with former club members. Thus, the degree to which these external entities either complicate or influence the tension already present between individual clubs and sport club programs remains unclear.

Overall, administrators and athletes supported the notion that tension exists between individual sport clubs and sport club programs. To deal with these tensions, both administrators and club officers engage, albeit for different reasons, in loose coupling to maintain distance from one another. For administrators, loose coupling presents a way for clubs to maintain their somewhat autonomous nature while still allowing for intervention regarding compliance issues that arise. For sport club officers, decoupling and practicing ceremonial conformity presented a way for them to engage in isomorphic requirements to maintain their association with the university and gain access to an array of resources. It also appears this tension simultaneously drives some

of the student development outcomes often attributed to sport club officers and allows individual clubs to maintain their informal structure which contributes to other forms of student development.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the structural characteristics of individual sport clubs and sport club programs to understand and unpack information regarding how the two interact and the implications of those interactions on student development outcomes. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with nine administrators and 17 athletes across eight universities belonging to the same Division I Power 5 athletic conference and analyzed within various components from the organization structure, organization systems, bureaucracy, and student development literature. The following sections unpack three primary takeaways from this study as well as relevant theoretical and practical implications for sport clubs and sport club administrators moving forward.

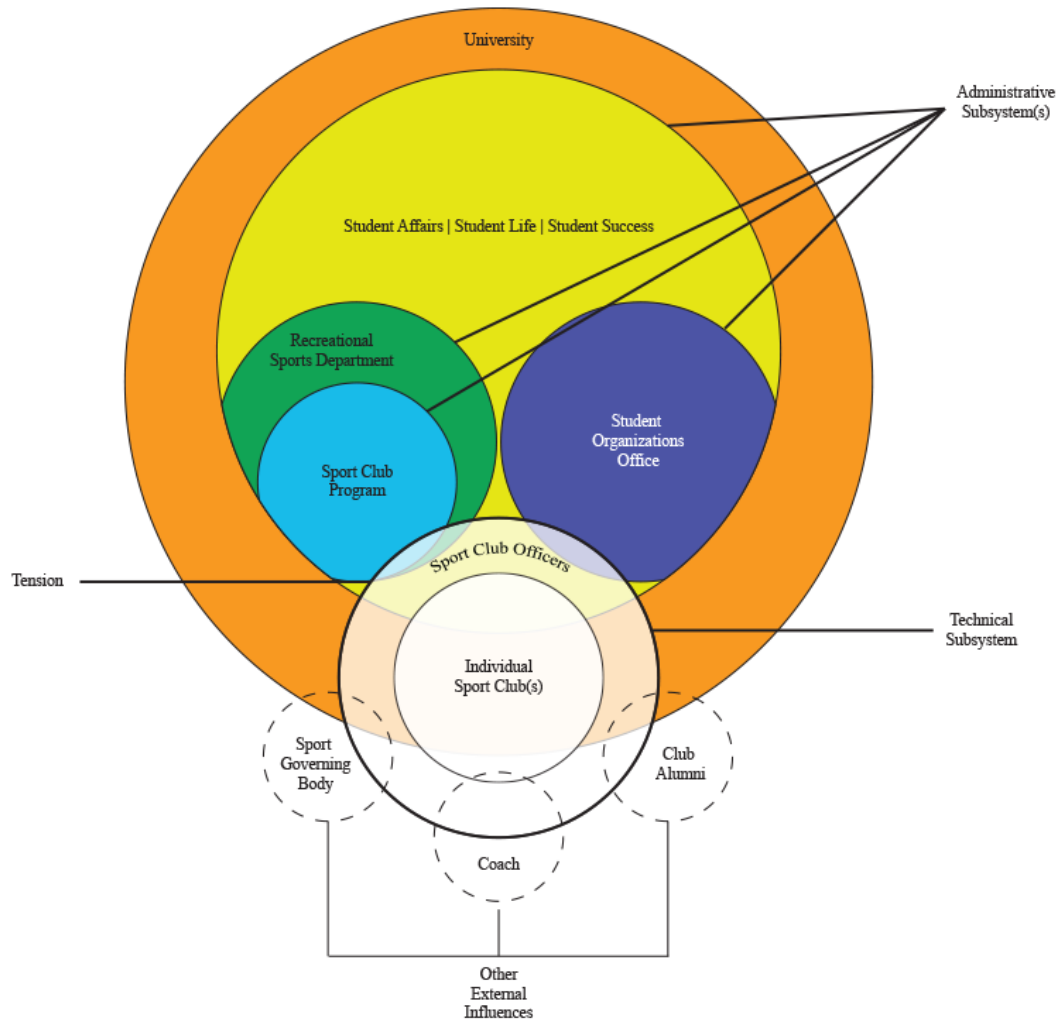
Tension as an Antecedent for Student Development

Data from this study support Czekanski and Lower's (2019) findings that individual clubs exhibit informal, organic structural characteristics including simple structures, generalized expectations for officers, centralized decision-making, and informal coordination through mutual adjustment. Conversely, sport club programs displayed mechanistic, bureaucratic structural features (Crookston, 1972; DeGregori et al., 1993; Garston, 1993) such as complex vertical and horizontal structures, specialized roles for staff, decentralized decision-making, and formal coordination through standardization. The structural differences and interaction between the technical and administrative subsystems (see Figure 3) led to tension through both administrators and

clubs officers engaging in loose coupling (Birnbaum, 1988; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976).

Figure 3

University Sport Club System Model



At the program level, evidence of this tension materialized through sport club administrators' description of a degree of disassociation between clubs and the university. This established clubs as semi-autonomous entities required to work within

the framework provided by their university to maintain recognition and access to resources. Additionally, both administrators and athletes described bottlenecked communication channels that flowed almost exclusively through club officers in either direction. In one direction, administrators directed information to officers with the expectation that they disseminate it to their members. In the other, the expectation for club athletes was that they filter any concerns about policy and procedures at the program level through their officers.

For individual clubs, decoupling was evident through the consistent language used by athletes about their lack of knowledge regarding “behind the scenes” work prior to acquiring a formal leadership role in the club. This resulted from officers effectively buffering athletes from interacting with administrative subsystems to the fullest extent possible. Further, athletes described engaging in ceremonial conformity which, at least to some degree, provided a mechanism for them to maintain their clubs’ autonomy and engage with the administrative level to the extent they saw fit. This practice aided club officers in shielding their clubs from fully succumbing to the mechanistic influence of the administrative subsystems that encompassed them. Without ceremonial conformity, clubs might lose the organic characteristics that produce an environment where various types of student development can thrive.

The resulting tension appears to drive much of the development attributed to sport club participation, particularly as it pertains to officers (Dugan et al., 2015; Flosdorf et al., 2016; Haines & Fortman, 2008). Because athletes have limited interaction with the administrative requirements originating from the program level, they

face a steep learning curve once elected or selected to fill those leadership roles. This may lead to scenarios where students are overwhelmed by their transition from athlete to officer. Accordingly, it is important that administrators create tools to gauge students' *readiness* to step into leadership roles and resist the urge to overly standardize the trainings that provide *support* in that transition (Sanford, 1967). For athletes, development seems to be the result of the insulation provided by loose coupling and ceremonial conformity. Club participation promotes various types of development because clubs are able to maintain informal internal environments by resisting the bureaucratic influence of the administrative subsystems.

Achieving Student Development

Assorted student development trends emerged throughout interviews with administrators and athletes. It appears that student development through sport club participation occurs in two ways, both contingent on the organizational environment and the level of participation (i.e., general athlete or club officer; Warner & Dixon, 2013). The first resulted from the interaction between individual clubs (i.e., internal environment) and the sport club program (i.e., external environment). This interaction required athletes—with limited prior exposure to the program level—to take on administrative leadership responsibilities to ensure their clubs remained in good standing and maintained access to resources (e.g., finances, facilities, university brand). By navigating the overlapping space between their clubs (i.e., the technical subsystem) and other administrative subsystems (shown in Figure 3), participants indicated that officers gained leadership, interpersonal, political, and transferable vocational skills.

It was also within this space that officers and clubs engaged in decoupling to limit the degree of isomorphism associated with bureaucratic pressures from the program level (Birnbaum, 1988; DiMaggio & Powel, 1983; Garston, 1993; Meyers & Rowan, 1977). This allowed for the second development pathway for general club participations to occur through the informal, organic, and often social environments created by resistance to bureaucratic influence from the program level. The willingness of club officers to shield general club athletes from the administrative chores associated with maintaining the clubs' relationship to the university created an environment that stimulated interpersonal, intrapersonal, emotional, and physical development (Warner & Dixon, 2013).

A number of administrators and athletes spoke about the sense of community and sense of belonging that club participation created (Flosdorf et al., 2016; Haines & Fortman, 2008; Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020; Warner & Dixon, 2013). According to participants, these were the direct result of the relationships that developed through consistent practices, traveling to competitions, bonding over shared interests in their sport, and social events hosted by clubs (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020). Further, they described the ability of sport clubs to act as an emotional outlet when school was stressful and a means to maintain physical fitness.

Thus, it would appear that student development, with the possible exception of vocational, is happening in these spaces not as a direct result of intervention by sport club administrators (Bloland et al., 1994; Kuh et al., 1987). Namely, outside of the bureaucratic policies and procedures that induce the vocational development (e.g.,

managing peers, budgeting, decision-making), development appears to be the result of the participants' interactions within and between the environment(s). On the one hand, interpersonal, intrapersonal, emotional, and physical development result from interactions within the often laissez-faire structure employed by individual clubs. On the other, interpersonal, leadership, political, and vocational development occur because of the interaction between the internal environment of the club and the external administrative environment.

This does not imply that club sport administrators have no role in promoting development. On the contrary, they play a significant role in shaping clubs' external environment and creating mechanisms that aid students in navigating it. Yet, as mentioned across administrator interviews, there appeared to be tension between balancing compliance and oversight with development and learning. In each of the eight cases examined in this study, however, sport club programs fell within the umbrella of either Student Affairs, Student Life, or Student Success. Consequently, sport club administrators, at least those within the scope of this study, do not operate outside the influence of that umbrella. Thus, even if there is no explicit directive, there is an implicit expectation that student development and student learning factor into the outcomes that sport club administrators seek to achieve.

In accordance with Bloland and colleagues (1994) and Kuh and colleagues (1987), this is not a call for an intervention model where the expectation is that club sport administrators are present at practices and meetings or traveling with the team, which some administrators indicated was the case at some institutions. This approach is

neither a realistic expectation of administrators, nor is it manageable without a significant shift in staff practices. Further, that would disrupt the development that occurs in clubs as a result of their less bureaucratic structures.

Rather, this is a call for administrators to create a collaborative space where policies and procedures purposefully exist as boundaries, but are not so restrictive that they smother the creative potential of individual clubs or are unable to account for the variation across clubs. Administrators should acknowledge the role of those processes in the sport club environment and seek to establish a dynamic where they are a resource for officers, to help them navigate administrative tasks.

Additionally, administrators should abandon assumptions that students enter their leadership roles with any preconceived notions of what they are engaging in. Instead, they should seek to gauge students' readiness to address those tasks and offer a corresponding level of support to assist students until they have a firm foundation for how to navigate the bureaucratic environment at the administrative level (Sanford, 1967). In other words, they should attempt to disrupt the sense of normalcy they inherently develop through their work in bureaucratic structures and understand that that normalcy does not exist for students attempting to navigate these processes.

COVID provides a potential catalyst for this process as it has simultaneously disrupted universities' day-to-day operations and exposed administrators to a level of bureaucracy they are perhaps less accustomed to. It was clear that COVID presented unexpected challenges at each level. There were instances where administrators alluded to, or explicitly acknowledged, the frustration they felt from top-down communication

and a standardized, centralized approach to dealing with COVID. Many felt like they had lost some of the autonomy to operate their program to a certain extent.

Athletes echoed this sentiment when talking about the policies and procedures required from the sport club program to maintain their recognition. For this reason, administrators might consider reflecting on their own experiences throughout the past year and the challenges they faced through that process, especially as individuals who routinely operate in a bureaucratic system. It would be helpful if they put themselves in officers' shoes to consider the degree of difficulty associated with navigating those processes for someone who has no previous experience leading in a bureaucratic environment. To a certain degree, that difficulty has developmental potential. Nevertheless, high degrees of difficulty or challenge without corresponding degrees of support through training and collaboration risks obstructing that development (Sanford, 1967).

Impeding Student Development

Beyond the positive implications of sport club participation, there were a handful of scenarios that emerged with the potential to impede student development. There were a number of instances where administrators and athletes described issues with balancing athletic participation with other academic responsibilities, similar to those identified in varsity athletic spaces albeit to a lesser degree (Springer & Dixon, 2021). Some athletes linked their decision to change majors to their participation early in their academic career and others felt that their participation may have slowed their progress towards graduation. Conversely, there were also athletes that believed the structured activities

associated with their club improved their time management early on and helped them establish a routine while navigating the increased free time often associated with the transition from high school to college. Time management was primarily framed as an individual issue, though there were some administrators and athletes that pointed to social pressures to “be a good at practice” and “be a good teammate” (Jamie, FT Staff).

The other issues appear to originate predominately from organizational customs and interactions between members. They ranged from exclusionary practices like tryouts or restricting playing time by relegating athletes to lower division or non-travel teams, to internal friction between members, to deviant organizational behavior such as hazing or alcohol abuse. These highlight an area of concern given the relationship between individual sport clubs and sport club programs. As a byproduct of loose coupling, there is potential for these behaviors to go unchecked in clubs and continue to reproduce year after year. Loose coupling allows for a dynamic where administrators maintain distance with clubs because they need to know what clubs are doing from a compliance standpoint, but may not want to know the full extent of what they’re doing. Likewise, pursuant to ceremonial conformity, students may limit what they tell administrators to what is required because they want to avoid divulging the full extent of what they are doing internally, especially if it goes against policy and procedure.

There were instances where administrators used language consistent with individual clubs’ success or development being beyond their purview. Instead, they felt those decisions and responsibilities should fall to the students in the club, and that their primary responsibility was to ensure their compliance with sport club policies and

procedures. There are benefits to this approach in terms of providing club members the requisite autonomy to make decisions and chart their club's trajectory. At the same time, this dynamic creates the potential for adverse organizational behaviors to thrive, especially when considering that communication channels flow in both directions through officers who may be the primary driver of these behaviors.

Administrators communicate with athletes *via* club officers and *vice versa*, athletes may be unfamiliar with administrators or unsure of whether administrators will give their issues the proper weight. Further, this gives officers the ability to regulate what information is communicate between athletes and administrators and, for the most part, to influence athletes' perceptions of administrators. This was evident in the stories shared by Shannon (Sophomore Athlete) and Peyton (Junior Athlete). In both instances there were issues happening at the club level and in both instances the athletes expressed a desire to communicate with administrators. Neither athlete, however, felt that that was an option and so they ultimately ended their membership with their club.

Practical Implications

The practical implications from this study center primarily around acknowledging and positively cultivating the tension that results from interactions between individual sport clubs and sport club programs. The following implications present considerations for addressing gaps in communication, training, assessing readiness, and shaping the environment. Further, Appendix F provides an outline of practical considerations for sport club professionals to consider in their approach to sport club administration. The primary takeaway for administrators is that they should resist

the pull to over standardize their oversight of clubs and seek to balance administrative oversight with student and organizational development. It is important to maintain loose coupling in this space to allow club officers the autonomy they need to effectively manage their clubs. There are ways, however, that administrators can simultaneously manage that space to further promote and maximize developmental outcomes occurring there and ensure they maintain the necessary level of compliance from clubs regarding policy and procedure.

Communication

There were two primary concerns regarding communication. The first originated from the need for athletes to channel communication with sport club administrators through their clubs' officers. This dynamic creates a buffer between athletes and administrators which, in most cases, shields them from the administrative influence of the bureaucracy that occurs in that space. It also, however, generates a potential barrier when instances of organizational deviancy happen. If an athlete has a problem with something happening in their club, the expectation is that they go through their officers to talk to administrators. If the club officers, however, are the individuals carrying out the deviant behavior, then athletes' communication chain is effectively cutoff. Thus, administrators should seek to establish pathways for members to voice concerns about club behaviors that are both well publicized and provide a mechanism to bypass organizational officers.

The second communication concern was the result of administrators' inability to disseminate information to all sport club participants. In multiple cases the expectation

was that administrators sent information to officers who, in turn, broadcasted it to the athletes in their club. This dynamic relies on formal communication methods, that club participants may less reliably monitor, as well as an inconsistent intermediary. To address this issue, administrators must grapple with the need to challenge students to acclimate to the professional expectations that await them after graduation (e.g., monitoring formal communication channels, routing information chains) and their desire to maximize the impact of the programs they offer through direct communication with a greater number of participants. In this specific instance, the potential positive outcomes associated with the latter likely outweigh the former.

Accordingly, administrators should seek to create informal, direct pathways to communicate with all participants more effectively in the sport club community. The benefits of this approach are potentially two-fold. First, this would likely necessitate more precise tracking mechanisms to maintain an accurate database of sport club participants, thereby providing administrators with an accurate portrayal of the size of the sport club community. Second, it would ensure that information about trainings and programs offered by administrators reaches a greater number of participants.

A number of participants noted that individuals with aspirations to obtain a leadership position in their club were more likely to attend these types of programs to build capital as they prepared to campaign amongst their peers. By ensuring that communication pertaining to these types of programs is delivered directly to all participants, clubs may see the added benefit of greater participation to meet requirements and an increase in the number of individuals looking to occupy leadership

roles in the club. Prior to COVID, this may have been unmanageable due to physical space limitations, but administrators and students now have extensive experience with platforms such as Zoom that provide synchronous virtual capabilities or subsequent recordings.

Training and Readiness

Many of the athletes communicated that the required trainings were helpful, to a certain extent, for addressing their knowledge gap during the transition from athlete to officer. It appears that athletes found trainings more useful when they provided a general framework to work within versus trying to achieve a nuanced understanding of intricate policies and procedures. Thus, administrators could create training programs that broadly introduce incoming officers to concepts associated with travel, funding allocations, risk management, and other areas. This would provide officers with the necessary framework to productively engage with administrators to gather more detailed information relevant to what they want to accomplish in their clubs. It could also alleviate issues caused by trainings skewing too heavily toward one specific officer (e.g., treasurer) and better correspond with club level expectations for officers to have a general understanding of each leadership role in the club.

Additionally, there should be ways for administrators to account for where officers are in their transition from athlete to officer and to have the flexibility to act accordingly. For example, a newly elected officer's needs are different than someone newly elected to a different position (e.g., former treasurer elected to future president) or an incumbent re-elected to the same position. For incumbents, administrators might

consider making training optional or offering them specifically designed trainings. Given the standardized nature of the trainings, officers who had held their positions for multiple years displayed similar adverse reactions when talking about sitting through the same or similar trainings year after year. Conversely, administrators might seek opportunities to intentionally integrate incumbents into trainings in a way that allows them to leverage their experience and provides a peer education component to trainings.

Regarding newly elected officers or officers newly elected to a new position, administrators may consider soliciting feedback from students on whether or not they have had transition meetings with their predecessor, how well that transition went, and the type of information officers are looking to gain for the purposes of their club. There are potential benefits for both officers and administrators that stem from gathering information on the front end of trainings and programming. It allows administrators to better understand where students are in the process and for some degree of flexibility and customization. Ideally, this should also improve engagement given that officers may feel that they had ownership in the creation of content and increases the potential that content is more relevant to their current situation.

Shaping the Environment

To better facilitate ceremonial conformity in a manner that is productive for both sport clubs and sport club programs, administrators might identify ways to create pathways for clubs to decide the extent to which they want to opt into the administrative requirements imposed by sport club programs. In other words, administrators should try to mold the sport club environment in a manner that balances compliance and creativity.

One way to do this is through a tiered process such as the one described at University B. Sport clubs fell into one of four tiers, three of which indicated they were in good standing, one of which communicated that they were in a probationary period and needed to adjust accordingly or risk losing their status with the sport club program.

From top to bottom, each subsequent tier required less administrative effort from the club. In exchange, resource allocations were capped for clubs in lower tiers. The requirements incapsulate: competitions clubs participate in or host, fundraising goals clubs need to achieve, fundraising events the club need to host, community service hours the club need to accrue, seminars for club members to attend, attendance as spectators at other clubs events, and alumni relations. One benefit of this system is that the process reset each year, allowing each subsequent officer group to determine which tier they wanted to strive for. This empowered club leadership to determine year to year the extent to which they wanted to participate in certain administrative tasks. Thus, club officers were given creative freedom to determine the threshold of compliance they were responsible for.

All of this culminates in the need for administrators to resist the pull to completely standardize their approach to overseeing sport clubs. In bureaucratic systems, there is a pull for administrators to standardize given the bureaucratic environment they operate within; standardization allows for greater efficiency which is then rewarded (Brunsson et al., 2012; Weber, 1947). Full standardization, however, does not allow administrators to adapt to the diverse needs of team versus individual sports, single sex versus co-ed clubs, highly competitive versus recreational clubs, or eSports versus

traditional sports. Instead, it creates an adversarial relationship between club officers and sport club administrators. Accordingly, administrators should seek to balance standardization and customization to better accommodate the similarities and, more importantly, the differences between clubs.

Theoretical Implications

At the outset, this study theorized that despite widespread philosophical adoption among student affairs professionals, student development achieved varied success as a unifying logic for student affairs work (Bloland et al., 1994). Student development supplanted the student personnel orientation as the *raison d'être* for student affairs work, shifting practitioners' focus away from paternalistic oversight and control, toward "proaction, collaboration, and other student developmental technologies" (Crookston, 1972, p. 5). Despite this paradigmatic shift, universities' lacked a corresponding shift in organizational structure to accommodate the goals of student development (Carney Strange, 1981; Crookston, 1972; Dickson, 1991).

Consequently, bureaucracy was, and still is, a predominant structural feature on college and university campuses (Birnbaum, 1988; Crookston, 1972; Manning, 2017). Bureaucracy is a rational process that seeks to normalize the actions carried out within an organization. In contrast, student development is an irrational process that requires individualized and creative approaches from student affairs professionals (Crookston, 1972; Dickson, 1991; Kuh et al., 1987). While scholars have theoretically discussed the immiscible nature of the two (Berman, 1978; Carney Strange, 1981; Crookston, 1972;

Dickson, 1991), there were no studies identified that examined the impact of bureaucracy on student development outcomes.

To address this gap, this study sought to gain insight into how the structure and implementation of, and interaction between, sport club programs and individual sport clubs impacted student development outcomes for sport club participants. By conceptualizing universities as systems composed of tightly or loosely coupled subsystems (Birnbaum, 1988; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976), this study allowed for an understanding of structural characteristics within, and interactions between, subsystems.

Findings from this study suggest that the interaction between organically structured sport clubs and mechanistically structured sport club programs creates the conditions that lead to certain types of student development (i.e., vocational, political, leadership, interpersonal). Further, the informal structures of sport clubs appear to foster an environment that allows for other types of student development (i.e., interpersonal, intrapersonal, physical, emotional) and provides an outlet for participants to further explore their athletic identity.

Student development theory has generally focused on the role of identity in development (Jones & Stewart, 2016; Patton et al., 2016). As Jones and Stewart (2016, p. 22) noted, “[f]irst wave theorists and many in the second wave assumed that consistency and stability of identity were indicators of positive development.” Environment has largely been taken for granted as the context where development happens (Evans et al., 1998; Evans et al., 2010; Patton et al., 2016). The results of this

study, however, suggest that understanding environments and environmental interactions are essential for discerning how and why individuals undergo unique developmental pathways. To fully unpack the individualized, aberrant, and intransitive nature of student development it is imperative that scholars recognize and account for both the immediate and distal environment that students operate within, interactions between that environment and adjacent environments, and the type of development that consequently transpires.

Future Research

There were themes that emerged beyond the scope of this study that warrant further consideration, particularly in the realm of institutional theory. These ranged from institutional power to legitimacy to hybridity. Institutional power dynamics were evident across cases in this study. In each case, sport club programs, acting on behalf of their respective universities, governed access to various resources (e.g., facilities, finances, staffing, branding) and wielded their power to either reward or punish clubs pursuant to their compliance with policy and procedures. Thus, individual clubs have very little power given their non-essential nature in terms of day-to-day operations of colleges and universities. There were several instances, however, where administrators described the ability for clubs to regain power by operating as a collective.

Concerning legitimacy, an interesting dynamic develops between individual clubs and sport club programs concerning association with the university and, subsequently, its brand. There were multiple athletes that identified the ability to represent the university or be associated with the universities brand as a coveted resource

given that each of the universities in this study possessed highly recognizable brands. When considered in terms of legitimacy, branding might be the most important resource that sport club programs and universities offer to clubs. Internal legitimacy (i.e., legitimacy on campus) through association with the university allows clubs to recruit and retain members, provides access to various other resources, and leads to external legitimacy (i.e., legitimacy off campus). External legitimacy then has the potential to generate individual legitimacy as club sport athletes are able to competitively represent their university in much the same way that varsity athletes do.

Finally, there were trends that emerged concerning the hybrid nature of sport club programs. Administrators appeared to operate under competing logics of compliance and development. Understanding the degree to which administrators in sport club programs identify as student affairs professionals or recreational sport professionals might provide insight into which logic dominates in those spaces and how to better balance the two for students' benefit. Similarly, there were administrators that discussed the attention given to sport clubs versus intramurals, particularly in a competitive sport model, as a byproduct of administrator's background. That is to say, if an administrator had a background in intramurals, they tended to devote more attention to intramurals and *vice versa*. Given that many of the programs in this study operated under the hybrid competitive sports model, it seems important to consider how best to prepare professionals in the field to manage these types of organizations.

Conclusion

We know that intentional design and delivery impact sport and non-sport outcomes and that scholars and practitioners often take organizational structure for granted (Chalip, 2006). This study demonstrates the importance of considering the dynamics created by internal organizational structures and their external interactions. The way that sport club administrators shape those environments and navigate those interactions is important. When designed well, sport club programs have the potential to lead to incredible opportunities for students to continue engaging with their athletic identities and develop in myriad ways such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, emotional, physical, leadership, political, and vocational development.

Beyond sport club programs, the findings for this study also present more general considerations in terms of other areas of extracurricular involvement. General student organizations operate under similar dynamics as those depicted between individual sport clubs and sport club programs in this study, albeit on a different scale given the administrator-to-organization ratio employed in the oversight of student activities. Intramurals, where students are very loosely coupled to recreational sport programs, and varsity athletics, where students are very tightly coupled to varsity athletic programs, also offer opportunities to examine the influential role of coupling student development outcomes.

Formal sport on college and university campuses comprises three areas: intramurals, sport clubs, and varsity sport (Springer & Dixon, 2021). Compared to intramurals, sport clubs serve fewer students but provide a more structured and

competitive outlet for participants. In relation to varsity sport, sport clubs serve more students and afford participants greater flexibility and ownership over their sport. Nevertheless, scholars have largely overlooked sport clubs outside of their propensity to improve retention or enhance participants' leadership capacity. Those are important contributions and outcomes associated with sport clubs. This study reveals that sport clubs offer a great deal more not only in terms of understanding student development outcomes, but also organizational environments, and institutional characteristics.

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APPENDIX A

Subject: Expertise Needed in University Sport Clubs

IRB Number: IRB2020-0462

IRB Approval Date: 03/05/2021

Dear Participant,

My name is Daniel Springer I am a doctoral student in the Sport Management program at Texas A&M University.

I am reaching out to you due to your expertise and experience in working with university sport clubs. I am working on a project to better understand the structures and dynamics of sport club programs and individual sport clubs and the potential impact of interactions between the two on participants' student development.

Specifically, I am asking if you would be willing to participate in a study entitled *Structure and Dynamics in University Sport Club Systems: Exploring the Student Development Implications of Interactions Between Organizational Subsystems*. I am conducting this study for my dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Marlene Dixon, with the purpose of better understanding university sport club environments and interactions between administrators and student participants.

In this study, you'll be asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire to collect preliminary information about your experience and then to participate in a virtual interview that will last anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes. Please note all of your responses will be kept confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please follow the link below to a Qualtrics survey and I will follow up with you soon about the date/time of the interview.

[Link]

Feel free to contact me directly at dspringer@tamu.edu if you have any questions.

Thank you for your consideration!

Daniel Springer
Doctoral Student, Sport Management
Texas A&M University

APPENDIX B

Subject: Please Share Your Experience As A Club Sport Athlete

IRB Number: IRB2020-0462

IRB Approval Date: 03/05/2021

Hello,

My name is Daniel Springer. I am a doctoral student at Texas A&M University in Sport Management.

I am hoping to recruit students participating in university sport clubs at [University] for a study entitled *Structure and Dynamics in University Sport Club Systems: Exploring the Student Development Implications of Interactions Between Organizational Subsystems*. This research is being done to examine the structure and dynamics of sport club programs and individual sport clubs and the possible impact of interactions between the two on participants' student development outcomes. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Marlene Dixon.

In this study you will be asked to participate in a virtual interview. Interviews will last anywhere from 90 to 120 minutes and cover topics pertaining to your experience in university sport clubs. This study is open to all sport club members at [University], you do not need to be an officer to participate.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please follow the link below to a Qualtrics survey and I will follow up with you soon about the date/time of the interview.

[Link]

Feel free to contact me directly at dspringer@tamu.edu, if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Daniel Springer
Doctoral Student, Sport Management
Texas A&M University

APPENDIX C

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. You can include your educational background, places you've worked, positions you've held or anything else you feel is relevant.
2. [If you] were you involved with sport clubs as an undergraduate, what was that experience like? How do you feel like that experience informs what you do in your current role?
3. Tell me about how you came to work with sport clubs and any specialized education or training you received to obtain your role.
4. In your own words, what do you feel is the mission of sport clubs at [university]?
What is/are the specific reason(s) the program exists?

APPENDIX D

1. How many students are involved in sport clubs? How would you describe the sport club presence within recreational sports? the larger campus community?
2. What type of resources are available for sport clubs? Facilities? Financial? Administrative? Mentoring? Educational? Developmental? Is there a process for clubs to gain access to these different resources and if so can you walk me through that process? What types of factors are valued in that process and why do you feel that is? Can you provide some examples that contextualize how clubs utilize and access those resources?
3. Who has a role in the administration of sport clubs at the program level? In what ways do they contribute? What are your thoughts about this setup? What are some strengths and weaknesses? Are there any changes you would make and if so what would those be and why?
4. What factors play a role in policy decisions and discussions at the program level? Who sets priorities and how are those priorities determined? What are your thoughts about this process? What are some strengths and weaknesses? Are there any changes you would make and if so what would those be and why?
5. What type of education and training programs are provided for sport club participants? Can you summarize each program, its goal(s) and who has access to it? How effective is each program in achieving those goals?
6. What role do students play in the administration of sport clubs at the program level? Describe the administrator-student relationship. Are there any ways for students to

voice concerns about how sport clubs are administered? In what ways do you feel like these outlets are effective in allowing students to have a voice in the program? In what ways do you feel they could be improved?

7. Generally speaking, how would you describe the decision-making processes used by sport club participants at the individual sport club level? How would you characterize individual sport clubs structures and operations (e.g., types of officers, frequency of meetings, etc.)? How would you characterize the importance of governing documents (e.g., constitution, bylaws) to clubs operations? How would you characterize the importance of past precedence to clubs operations?
8. How would you describe the impact of sport club participation on each individual? In what ways does participation positively impact the individual? In what ways does participation negatively impact the individual? In what ways does participation support the overall mission of [Student Affairs/Life]? In what ways does participation conflict with the overall educational mission of [Student Affairs/Life]?
9. [If time] Please talk me through the differences between sport clubs and other organized sport programs on campus (e.g., NCAA, intramural, etc.)?
10. Is there any information you feel is relevant to our conversation that I have not asked about?

APPENDIX E

1. To start, tell me a little bit about yourself. You can include your major, year at the institution, organizations/clubs you're involved with, positions you've held or anything else you feel is relevant.
2. Tell me about how you came to be part of your sport club(s).
3. In your own words, what do you feel is the mission of sport clubs at [university]? What is the specific reason(s) the program exists? In what ways do you feel the mission of sport clubs relates to the mission of student affairs? ... [university]?
4. Please talk me through the differences between sport clubs and other organized sport programs on campus (e.g., NCAA, intramural, etc.)?
5. What type of resources are available for you as members of sport clubs? Facilities? Financial? Administrative? Mentoring? Educational? Developmental? Is there a process to gain access to these different resources? If so, what are your feelings on this process? What types of factors do you feel are valued in that process? Can you provide some examples of how your club utilizes and accesses those resources?
6. What type of education and training programs are provided to you as a sport club participant? Can you summarize each program and its goal(s) as you understand them? Can you talk me through who is able to access each program? How effective do you feel each program is in achieving those goals?
7. Who is responsible for overseeing sport clubs at the program/administrative level? In what ways do they contribute? What are your thoughts about the current setup? What

are some strengths and weaknesses? Are there any changes you would make and if so what would those be and why?

8. In your opinion, what factors determine policy decisions and discussions at the program/administrative level? Who sets priorities and how do you think those priorities are determined? What are your thoughts about the current process? What are some strengths and weaknesses? Are there any changes you would make and if so what would those be and why?
9. What role do you play in the administration of sport clubs at the program/administrative level? Describe the administrator-student relationship as you see it (i.e., your interaction with Rec Sports professionals or your club advisors). Do you feel there are ways for you to voice concerns about how sport clubs are administered? If so, do you feel that these mediums are helpful and that your voices are heard? If not, what are some ways that administrators could provide those outlets?
10. How would you describe the decision-making processes used in your individual sport club? How would you characterize your sport clubs structure and operations (e.g., types of officers, frequency of meetings, etc.)? How would you characterize the importance of your governing documents (e.g., constitution, bylaws) to clubs operations? How would you characterize the importance of past precedence to clubs operations?
11. How would you describe the impact of sport club participation on you personally? In what ways does participation positively impact you? In what ways does participation

negatively impact you? In what ways does your participation support your overall education? In what ways does your participation cause conflict with your overall education?

12. Is there any information you feel is relevant to our conversation that I have not asked about?

APPENDIX F

Officer Training

- Pre-assessment to determine officer readiness:
 - degree of transition from predecessors
 - experience policy & procedures
 - understanding of sport club resources and corresponding processes
 - awareness of organizational & reporting structure
 - knowledge of sport club administrators
- Focus content on building an overall framework for officers, not content mastery of all policies, processes, and procedures
- Customize content to account for:
 - officer readiness
 - officer experience: newly elected, re-elected to new position, incumbent
 - position: president vs. treasurer vs. secretary vs. other
 - club characteristics: single sex vs. coed, individual vs. team, physical vs. virtual competition, recreational vs. competitive
- Balance content delivery methods. What content is best delivered:
 - prior to the training via pre-recorded videos or guided readings
 - by administrators (e.g., professional staff, graduate assistants)
 - by peers (e.g., incumbents, members of sport club council)
 - through facilitated conversations between intentionally designed peer groups
- Provide multiple opportunities for officers to attend to avoid sending alternates

- Divide training into manageable portions:
 - chunk training over multiple days; avoid six to eight hour block on one day
 - align trainings with calendar (i.e., do not train on topics simultaneously happening, conduct training beforehand)
 - late spring training to transition officers and prepare for early fall
 - early fall training to review previous training and prepare for late fall/early spring
 - early spring training to review previous training and prepare for officer transitions
- Utilize virtual delivery methods to address space limitations and generate recordings for archiving
- If certain officers require more specialized training, create additional trainings; do not allow those offices to annex the training and jeopardize buy-in from other officers
- Post-assessment to determine training effectiveness:
 - generate meaningful questions aligned with training content
 - incorporate less effective portions of training into periodic trainings or booster trainings

Periodic Developmental Programming

- Pre-assessment to inform content delivery method and areas of focus
- Leverage internal and external campus partnerships to bring in content experts from around campus to speak on various topics

- Generate content that is accessible and applicable to officers and athletes
- Vary the time and day trainings are offered to accommodate a diverse array of attendees
- Balance club-specific content with general wellness and university resource content:
 - club-specific content should be accessible to both officers and athletes
 - wellness content should focus on improving physical (e.g., nutrition, injury prevention), emotional (e.g., stress management, emotional intelligence), and social (e.g., positive relationships, managing conflict) well-being
 - university resource content should focus on introducing club officers and athletes to resources across campus that would be useful on an individual and organizational level (e.g., financial management office)
- Utilize virtual delivery methods to address space limitations and generate recordings for archiving
- Post-assessment to determine delivery and content effectiveness

Communication & Checkpoints

- Conduct periodic meetings (e.g., biweekly, monthly) with club officers to:
 - build rapport
 - check officers progress
 - ask probing questions about club operations
 - assess the goals of the club and provide administrative direction and support
 - refresh, reinforce, and augment concepts discussed during officer trainings
 - learn the unique features of each club

- Ensure that all club athletes are aware of who the club sport administrators are and that they are approachable
- Establish informal and formal channels of communication:
 - create informal channels of communication (e.g., GroupMe, Slack) to communicate with club officers but be sure to establish boundaries to ensure you are still able to maintain a healthy work/life balance
 - create informal opt-in channels of communication (e.g., GroupMe, Slack, Snapchat) to improve communicate with all club athletes that want to be in the know
 - disseminate announcements and save the dates through formal channels such as e-mails or a main hub (e.g., Campus Labs, IM Leagues)
 - disseminate reminders leading up to trainings and events through informal channels
- Elicit feedback from club athletes directly to:
 - ask probing questions about club operations
 - gain insight into athletes' perceptions of their officers to inform periodic meetings
 - identify deviant behaviors that need to be addressed
- Communicate development opportunities directly to club athletes to:
 - inform a greater number of individuals about the programs being offered
 - allow individuals with leadership aspirations to build leadership capital

- Avoid relying exclusively on club officers to disseminate information from administrators to athletes and from athletes to administrators

Governance & Oversight

- Elicit athlete and officer feedback on potential policy changes:
 - informally through conversations at trainings or periodic programming
 - formally through surveys that specifically address potential issues that might arise from club diversity (e.g., how policies might impact individual and team sports differently, coed and single sex teams differently, recreational and competitive)
- Clearly communicate policy changes, or policy delays, to officers:
 - provide officers with the why to help them understand and better communicate decisions to their clubs
 - especially important in times of uncertainty and rapid change like COVID
- Provide avenues for clubs to opt into and out of certain administrative expectations in exchange for access to resources. Consider:
 - community service hours
 - competitive events (e.g., matches, tournaments, championships)
 - non-competitive events (e.g., socials, alumni, fundraising)
 - fundraising expectations
 - attendance expectations (e.g., programming, other clubs events, periodic meetings)
 - required officer positions

- travel expectations
- Avoid imposing bureaucracy where bureaucracy is not needed:
 - ensure that policy and procedure creation happen only when necessary
 - policy and procedure creation should not be capricious
 - include enough flexibility in policy and procedure to account for club variation, but not so much that loopholes are abundant
 - recognize that club officers are participating in administrative processes to the extent necessary; they are likely not trying to implement bureaucratic practices at the club level
- Establish a balance between micro- and macro-managing
- Avoid doing for club officers what they can/should do for themselves