

Perceptions on the Effectiveness of HBCU Budget Allocation Practices



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Abstract

This study examines the athletic department budget allocation process at HBCUs using an institutional isomorphism lens and will contribute to current scholarship regarding HBCU athletic departments, specifically addressing budget challenges HBCU athletic department heads face when setting budgets and allocating funds. A phenomenology approach was used and participants in this study were interviewed to obtain their unique perspective of the current budget challenges facing HBCU athletic departments. This study helped athletic department administrators understand how leaders in HBCU college athletic departments allocate funds and offer suggestions for future budget allocation. Results indicated HBCUs may not be spending operating funds on creating the best experience for their student-athletes, this includes spending on hotels, transportation, and meals. Recommendations and suggestion for future research are discussed.

Keywords: HBCU, budget, institutional isomorphism, administration

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1.Introduction

Research has shown that in comparison to those of Historically White Institutions of Higher Education (HWIHEs), the athletic departments of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) generate significantly less revenue, and as a result, have fewer resources to allocate toward athletic aid, recruiting, operating, and head coach salary expenses (Elliott & Kellison, 2019). As illustrated in Table 1, HBCUs are spending

significantly less on athletic aid, recruiting, operating, and head coach salary expenses.

An interesting argument presented in the table above is that although HBCU peer groups are earning significantly less compared to their peers in the majority of cases examined, HBCUs reported similar revenues and expenses in each category. The similar spending pattern could support institutional isomorphism in the budget allocation process at HBCU athletic departments.

Table 1 *Averages for Expenses Between all HBCUs and HWIHEs*

	Athletic Aid	Recruiting Expenses	Operating Expenses	Head Coach Salary
Total				
HBCU	\$2,017,406.84	\$70,547.62	\$825,112.79	\$556,053.03
HWIHE	\$4,043,471.83 <i>F</i> (1, 380) = 7.87, <i>p</i> < .001	\$220,739.63 <i>F</i> (1, 380) = 26.20, <i>p</i> < .001	\$1,827,771.96 <i>F</i> (1, 380) = 31.53, <i>p</i> < .001	\$1,182,698.63 <i>F</i> (1, 380) = 29.61, <i>p</i> < .001
DI FCS				
HBCU	\$3,267,285.73	\$130,336.45	\$506,475.71	\$854,080.68
HWIHE	\$5,583,352.72 <i>F</i> (1, 122) = 13.64, <i>p</i> < .001	\$378,861.92 <i>F</i> (1, 122) = 26.16, <i>p</i> < .001	\$2,779,005.86 <i>F</i> (1, 122) = 27.88, <i>p</i> < .001	\$1,609,738.02 <i>F</i> (1, 122) = 16.92, <i>p</i> < .001
DI No FB				
HBCU	\$1,500,418.50	\$82,409.50	\$946,368.00	\$552,537.00
HWIHE	\$4,892,775.95 <i>F</i> (1, 92) = 3.41, <i>p</i> = n.s.	\$279,083.22 <i>F</i> (1, 92) = 2.490, <i>p</i> = n.s.	\$223,6874.20 <i>F</i> (1, 92) = 2.78, <i>p</i> = n.s.	\$1,532,774.54 <i>F</i> (1, 92) = 2.78, <i>p</i> = n.s.

	Athletic Aid	Recruiting Expenses	Operating Expenses	Head Coach Salary
DII				
HBCU	\$1,072,286.89	\$22,723.39	\$393,247.79	\$322,139.61
HWIHE	\$2,314,031.92	\$62,680.20	\$837,600.90	\$625,603.03
	$F(1, 162) = 22.04, p < .001$	$F(1, 162) = 21.26, p < .001$	$F(1, 162) = 29.61, p < .001$	$F(1, 162) = 24.82, p < .001$

Note. Elliott, K. P., & Kellison, T, 2019

Institutional isomorphism occurs as institutions conform to expectations due to pressure in their environment (Mizuchi & Fein, 1999). However, although pressure may exist for institutions to structure their budget allocation process a certain way, it may not be the best practice for the institution. For example, an HBCU might structure budget allocation to seek legitimacy or survival in the NCAA membership. Institutions could adapt similar strategies to imitate what may be viewed as normal behavior (Deephouse, 1996). However, developing practices in an attempt to seek legitimacy might take away from the unique characteristics of each individual member institution, in this case HBCUs, and their ability to develop processes, especially related to the allocation of limited resources, to improve the assets of the athletic department.

Inquiry into athletic department budget allocation at HBCUs has been limited. On an institutional level, it has been suggested that HBCUs earmark funds for academics and remove funding for athletic programs (Savage, 2017). Removing athletic programs could ensure the survival of the institution, but could also take away from the stu-

dent experience in college. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the budget allocation process at HBCU athletic departments and examine if current practices are effective. The study aims to address the following research question:

How do challenges HBCU athletic department administrators face when setting budgets and allocating funds for revenue generating sports, non-revenue generating sports, and operating costs compare to HWIHE athletic departments?

In this study, the researcher interviewed participants that work at or with HBCU athletic departments. Participants discussed their perceptions of the budget allocation in HBCU athletic departments and gave suggestions for future budget allocation.

The next section will offer a review of current literature regarding HBCU athletic budget challenges and institutional isomorphism.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Budget Challenges at HBCUs

Budget shortages at HBCUs have been reported in the literature (Arnett, 2014; Trahan, 2016;

Elliott & Kellison, 2019, Elliott & Kellison, 2021) and the small budgets have been correlated with reported stress and heavy workloads for athletic administrators, coaches, and student-athletes (Cooper & Hawkins, 2012, Cooper & Hawkins, 2014; Robbins et al., 2015). Stress reported by administrators includes job security and meeting job expectations while working with limited resources (Robbins et al., 2015). Additional administrator stress was also reported in the recruiting process as administrators struggle to compete with peers to attract the best coaches and student-athletes (Cooper & Hawkins, 2012). The hardship reported by HBCU student-athletes competing in the small budget environment includes tough travel schedules and trying to balance athletics and academics in a limited resource environment (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014). Despite the reported budget shortages, expenditures have reportedly increased significantly among HBCU athletic departments (Jones & Bell, 2016). However, although there is a reported increase in expenditures, HBCUs are spending significantly less than peers in athletic department funding (Elliott & Kellison, 2019).

Studies regarding fiscal challenges facing HBCUs suggests the history of HBCUs was a challenge impacting the ability for the institutions to generate revenue. Specifically, data suggests minimal alumni giving at many HBCUs and staffing issues were common in HBCU athletic departments (Stuart, 2017; Elliott & Kellison, 2021). Specifically related to staffing, HBCUs are not hiring development employees for the athletic department (Jackson, et al., 2001; Li & Burden, 2009; Elliott & Kellison, 2021). With the limited

financial resources reported, the need to explore how HBCUs allocate the limited resources they have becomes apparent.

2.2 Institutional Isomorphism

Previous research has encouraged the study of institutional theory in sport management studies (Washington & Patterson, 2011; Nite & Edwards, 2020). This study seeks to expand the theoretical literature regarding HBCU athletics to include institutional isomorphism. Institutional isomorphism has been applied to the study of intercollegiate athletics (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001; Cooper & Weight, 2011; Ward, 2015; Kelley, et al., 2018; Lipsey, et al., 2021). As institutional isomorphism has been found in other policies and practices in the intercollegiate literature, it can be an important lens to use to analyze HBCU budget allocation as HBCUs might attempt to imitate the actions of successful organizations.

Mizruchi and Fein (1999) indicated organizations may adopt policies and practices only to conform to what is believed to be appropriate within their environment. HBCU administrators might not have the staffing resources to explore the best possible budget allocation for their unique needs and thus will adapt the practices of other institutions that have shown athletic success. However, in the attempt to seek legitimacy in their environment, athletic administrators may risk the establishment of distinction when mimicking peer policies and procedures (Ward, 2015). Creating budgeting practices specifically designed for an HBCU may take a back seat to ensuring practices mirror what may be considered best practice by peer NCAA member institutions.

The emphasis on athletic department personnel decision making was established as decisions made by key personnel in an athletic department have a stronger influence when compared to other forces acting on the organization (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001). The high influence placed on personnel decision making further stresses the need to help HBCU athletic administrators make decisions that may better position their athletic departments for success. Previous research has examined the thought process of athletic administrators when it came to Olympic and non-revenue sports in the NCAA membership and found administrators across divisions shared similar values, indicating the presence of institutional isomorphism in athletic departments (Cooper & Weight, 2011). The similar thought processes across the NCAA membership could extend to HBCUs as athletic administrators allocate resources to both Olympic and non-revenue sport programming. Although HBCUs might attempt to seek legitimacy in their organization by adopting similar budgeting practices as peer NCAA member institutions, the budgeting practices may not meet the unique needs of the institutions.

The next section will include the methods used to explore the budget allocation process at HBCU athletic departments and examine if current practices are effective.

3.Methods

To begin the analysis of the budget allocation process at HBCU athletic departments and examine if current practices are effective, qualitative methods were used to explore both insider and outsider views of the HBCU athletic depart-

ment financial picture, specifically, interviews were conducted with participants to collect data related to their perception and experience working at or with HBCUs. The outsider perspective was included in this study to provide an unbiased assessment of HBCU athletic departments' financial opportunities and challenges. All individuals selected to participate in this study have worked with or currently work with both HWIHEs and HBCUs. Key individuals were selected using purposive sampling whose knowledge and opinions would provide important insight to the research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The consideration of the independent perspective was based on an NCAA association-wide proposal during the NCAA 2019 Convention that added five independent members to the Board. In the proposal it was stated, "major nonprofit associations typically include outside board members to provide objectivity, relevant experience, perspective, and wisdom" (2019 NCAA Convention, p. 2). Interviews in this study were conducted with participants from two groups, one giving an insider perspective and one giving an independent perspective. Each group had five participants. When selecting the number of participants, the researcher focused on the opportunity for in-depth interviews with each participant, thus fewer participants were necessary for the study to ensure little saturation in the data collected (Taylor, et al. 2016). The first group of participants provided an insider perspective and was composed of participants that worked at HBCUs (athletic directors, senior-level staff, and vice presidents). The second group gave an independent perspective and did not work at an HBCU, but had a role working with HBCUs.

This group included conference office employees, NCAA staff, and consultants that work with HB-CUs. Table 2 outlines a description of each of the participants.

Table 2 *Overview of Participants*

Participant Type	Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Highest Level of Education	Working Role
Independent	Eleanor	4+	Master’s Degree	Director
Independent	Francis	18+	Master’s Degree	Consultant
Independent	Penelope	20+	Master’s Degree	Consultant
Independent	Olivia	20+	Master’s Degree	Consultant
Independent	Theodore	4+	Bachelor’s Degree	Director
Insider	Fitz	20+	Master’s Degree	Vice President
Insider	Finn	18+	Master’s Degree	Assistant Athletic Director
Insider	Lynn	20+	Master’s Degree	Director of Athletics
Insider	Josie	20+	Master’s Degree	Director of Athletics
Insider	Briel	20+	Bachelor’s Degree	Associate Athletic Director/ Senior Woman Administrator

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants based on the questions below:

- a. What budget challenges have you seen on HBCU campuses?
- b. If challenges, are these challenges similar and/or different from budget challenges you have seen in HWIHE athletic department.
- c. Do you notice budget differences between revenue generating and non-revenue generating sports at HBCUs?
- d. If differences, do these same differences occur at HWIHE athletic departments?
- e. How have you seen HBCUs allocate their operating costs? Do you agree/disagree with these allocations?
- f. Do you think the way HBCUs and HWIHEs allocate funds are similar or different? Please explain.
- g. What would you recommend to HBCU administrators allocating funds and setting budgets?
- h. Would you give the same advice to HWIHE athletic departments?

Phenomenology was used in this study as participants all come to the table with different perspectives of an event or culture. Phenomenology intends to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of participants (Crotty, 2007). This research used the methodology to interview participants and find themes that emerge about administrators in HBCU athletics and identify current budget allocation practices and the perception of the current practices.

Participants participated in either a one hour phone or in-person interview. Following interviews, transcripts were coded for common themes using a data driven coding process so the researchers would not bring any preconceived ideas to the coding process (Brinkmann, 2013). Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants during the coding process to protect the participant's identity. To ensure validity of the data collected, participants were emailed a copy of their interview transcript to check for accuracy and select informants were asked to review a draft of the final report to ensure a thorough understanding of collected data (Taylor et al., 2016). To address reliability of the data, the results include great detail of the phenomena described by participants in the study to allow for future comparisons of the data (Shenton, 2003). Additionally, interviews with multiple individuals from each of the two groups—insider and independent—were conducted.

4. Results

4.1 Independent Perspective

In the empirical material collected from the independent participants two overarching themes were identified, issues and solutions. Overall, the independent participants noted HWIHE (Predominantly White Institutions) and HBCU athletic departments allocate funds similarly between revenue and non-revenue generating sports. However, there might be differences in the issues HBCU athletic departments face. The following sections outline the themes of issues and solutions that emerged from the discussion of budgets with the

participants.

Issues: Beginning with issues HBCU athletic administrators face when setting and allocating budgets, sub-themes of game day, scholarships, and priorities developed. In the next sections, the results of each sub-theme are discussed.

Priorities: Of the sub-themes identified, priorities were the most common discussion. To start, the participants seemed to suggest that HWIHEs appeared to focus more on student-athlete experience in comparison to their HBCU peers. Although it is important to report that all independent participants mentioned that budget issues are not unique to HBCUs. Penelope stated that one of the major differences she noticed between HBCUs and HWIHEs is the budget allocation of the entire institutions as it is more of a priority to struggling HBCUs to keep their doors open with the low enrollment numbers. With this discrepancy, Francis indicated that the issues causing the budget challenges cause the president and athletic administrators to have different priorities. Specifically, the presidents might be more concerned with allocating funding toward academic programming whereas athletics would rather allocate funds toward building successful athletic programs. Eleanor described that one of the issues with lack of funding is because HBCUs try to keep holding onto the success they had in the 60s and 70s, they are trying to rely on the same budgets and allocations that they did 30 years ago. Eleanor reported, “At HBCUs, they try and stick to what they are familiar with.”

An overarching challenge that most participants identified that was similar between HBCU and HWIHE athletic departments was the strug-

gle between the priority to generate ticket revenue and put “butts in seats.” Ensuring consistent attendance can create a better atmosphere for student-athletes and fans. However, the athletic department might have to be satisfied with less revenue to make that happen. Additionally, the participants indicated they agree with both HBCU and HWIHE athletic departments investing in football because of the potential for revenue.

When it comes to the budget allocation between revenue and non-revenue generating sports, it could be concluded from discussion with participants that HBCUs tend to spend the majority of their budget on revenue sports. Participants report evidence of differences between revenue and nonrevenue sports and how they might be biased in terms of budget allocation. Eleanor noted this allocation can “create a rift between coaches of different sports and even student-athletes of different sports.” In comparison, participants noted that although there are similar allocations to revenue sports at HWIHEs, the allocated funds are more equal across the board. The statements of equal allocation of funds across the board at HWIHEs perhaps indicate that HWIHEs may be allocating budgets more consistently to non-revenue generating sport programs. Theodore had similar remarks to Eleanor: “The difference comes in the reinvestment portion. HBCUs have the belief to reinvest the majority of those funds in the revenue sports, while non-revenue sports get a small cut of the profit.” Most participants noted HWIHEs have a more consistent model to redistribute funds across all of the sport programs. Additionally, examples were provided illustrating that there are numerous cases in HBCU athletic

departments where the non-revenue generating sports are the department's most successful programs. Theodore gives one example below:

Just thinking of my alma mater, football, and basketball, basketball didn't get good until my senior year, but my first couple of years, football and basketball were not winning anything. All the championships came through cross country, and track and tennis and golf were competitive, they were always in a position to compete for a championship. Yet, they really didn't have half the resources that the football or the basketball team were getting. No matter how much money you are generating as an athletic department, the football team and men's basketball team are still going to get that revenue sport privilege.

The majority of discussion surrounding revenue and non-revenue generating sports appeared to lean toward HBCUs and HWIHEs having a similar allocation structure although there appeared to be a difference in the amount of funds allocated to the non-revenue sports at HBCUs compared to HWIHEs.

Gameday: The participants also discussed budget issues facing HBCU and HWIHE athletic departments in terms of game day expenses. These expenses included travel, gear, and meals. Most participants indicated HBCUs appeared to spend less on overall travel costs. The empirical material collected supported the idea that HBCUs are not giving their student-athletes the same travel experience in comparison to HWIHEs. For example, Olivia noted that HBCUs tended to look

more for hotel deals in comparison to ensuring a better student-athlete experience. Reflecting on her time working with HBCU championships she noted, "It appears as though HWIHEs spend more money on their travel as far as going in charter buses versus vans and the types of hotels they stay in. We had lots of teams staying 15–20 miles away just to get a better price." Additionally, Penelope mentioned athletic directors would have to continue to make trips between campus and the hotel as the team did not have a credit card available to them to put room charges on.

Meals were another topic discussed by each of the participants. All participants noted there seemed to be a difference between how administrators planned meals for student-athletes on the road and post-game between HBCUs and HWIHEs. Theodore gave an example from his experience traveling with an HBCU football team, "We were eating Golden Coral or Little Caesars before the game and then Popeyes after the game. Plenty of times the football team would complain about it." The discussion of HBCUs not having funds to give student-athletes a proper meal following games was highlighted by the majority of participants. Penelope made the comparison, "They (HBCUs) don't have an after game meal where HWIHE schools would never consider that." One important note regarding meals made by Theodore was the difference between a regular season game and the football team participating in a classic, "Just traveling with the team we never had a buffet for the team to eat from or use the hotel catering, so the student-athletes are not getting a real meal, unless it was a classic. Specifically, the

Tuskegee Morehouse Classic was the only time where we are here. We are having a real dinner.”

The number of participants traveling with the team was another common issue discussed by the independent participants. Both Penelope and Olivia noted that it appears that HWIHEs have more consistency in their travel parties. HBCUs seem to have a very widespread number of student-athletes that travel on each team with some having more than enough players and others barely having enough to compete. The participants reported that not all HBCUs were able to take full rosters of student-athletes on the road because of the expense. However, beyond the student-athletes traveling with the team, it was noted by some participants that there seemed to be an unnecessary number of staff that would travel with the team. Theodore explained his perception of the phenomena that happens with HBCU travel parties:

One of the issues we had when I was on an HBCU campus, we had all these trainers, but not everyone was working. We give away opportunities or jobs for people looking for you know a way out. They are looking to be part of something – I just want to travel, or I just want to get gear – and then that team goes through the whole season without having the things they need. These trainers who really weren't doing their job, but the football team didn't have enough film guys, or they didn't have enough camera. They had to rely on these two little cameras that seemed like they just went to target real quick and dropped \$50 on them

and there it is. But they really could have had 4–5 guys helping put together film.

The travel party issue seemed a common perception of HBCU athletic departments.

Athletic gear was another game expense discussed during the interviews with the independent participants. Participants mentioned the lack of consistency across team apparel and gear. From discussion with participants, shoes, travel bags, and jerseys did not seem to have a consistent brand. Additionally, participants mentioned the student-athletes at HBCUs being responsible for buying their own shoes. When it came to fundraising for gear, one common theme was lack of funding from alumni associations to increase the quality of team gear. Theodore mentioned the teams having to go to Walmart or Target to get t-shirts for their student-athletes.

Scholarships: The final sub-theme that emerged from the discussion of budget and budget allocation was scholarships. Participants all noted that there was a difference between revenue versus non-revenue sports in the number of scholarships and the amounts of scholarships. This case seemed to be prevalent at both HBCUs and HWIHEs. However, one of the differences between scholarship distribution to non-revenue generating sports between HBCUs and HWIHEs was the perceived amount of funding for scholarships at HBCU non-revenue sports. Through the interviews, it could be gathered that the perception was that many HBCUs seem to fund revenue sports competitively with HWIHEs, but they may only give one or two scholarships to non-revenue generating sports to split amongst all student-

athletes on the team.

In summary, the budget issues discussed by the independent participants included priorities, game day expenses, and scholarships. In the next section, budget solutions discussed by the participants will be presented.

Solutions: Based on the interviews with the independent participants, the sub-themes of travel, experience, strategic planning, and revenue emerged. The following sections offer the results grouped by each of the sub-themes identified.

Strategic planning: Strategic planning was the most common sub-theme that emerged among participants. Throughout the interviews, all participants mentioned the need for HBCU athletic administrators to evaluate objectives and their target audience. Specifically, administrators may benefit from understanding if their target audience is similar to the older fan base that has been reported to attend their athletic contests in previous literature (Cianfrone et al., 2010). Eleanor suggested HBCU athletic administrators should start from ground zero when re-evaluating. The suggestion from Eleanor seems to imply HBCU athletic administrators might find it useful to start from scratch when creating a strategic plan. The suggestions from the participants included looking at what the institutions are currently doing, find where there are opportunities for revenue generation, and where there are opportunities to make cuts. Olivia noted that as an athletic administrator, “you don’t get to have the best of everything, so you need to prioritize.” Prioritizing was a common suggestion made from most participants. Francis suggested talking with coaches

because they would have a better understanding of where budgets might be able to be cut for their programs. Theodore also noted that institutions need to make sure that what they are paying for is worth it.

In the majority of interviews, participants mentioned HBCUs could do more to take advantage of free improvements to their athletic departments. These free improvements involved just making sure facilities were clean. Olivia noted:

Taking things for free when you can. For example, with us, just making sure the locker room was clean. That doesn’t cost anything. Just spruce it up the best you can. If you get those things that don’t cost anything, and you do that 100% then you certainly will increase their (student-athlete) experience.

Empirical material collected suggested HBCUs were not taking advantage of these free solutions to help make the student-athlete experience better.

Experience: In the discussion of student-athlete experience, the interviews from independent participants indicated HBCUs were not prioritizing student-athlete experience. However, most participants acknowledged how increased student-athlete experience could be an investment. The participants noted that keeping student-athlete experience at the front of the list of priorities can keep current donors happy and maintain relationships with graduated student-athletes for future donations to the athletic program.

Travel: When it comes to travel, there were a few solutions discussed by participants to help

HBCUs improve travel for student-athletes. Francis mentioned a policy at a previous conference she worked for that required teams to make return trips if they were traveling less than 250 miles. Additionally, the travel party was highlighted by participants with the suggestion to reevaluate who needed to travel with the team. Extra hotels and meals on the road cost money, and it was suggested that the travel budget is reevaluated to ensure the money spent on the road is worth it.

Revenue: Revenue was the final sub-theme that emerged from the discussion of budgets and budget allocations. Booster clubs were highlighted by the majority of participants, with the supposed perception that booster clubs were not as prevalent at HBCUs in comparison to their HWIHE peers. The discussion around booster clubs included involving the local community, not just alumni, in campaigns to raise funds for the athletic department. The perception gathered from the interviews was this is happening at HWIHE athletic departments, but not HBCUs.

An additional solution Francis discussed in her interviews was to re-evaluate the current camp and clinic structure on campus at HBCUs. Francis detailed her experience with sport camps on campus:

Every camp and clinic was an institutional camp. They were allowed to pay themselves or assistant coaches. But when I got there, camps were operating in the red, which didn't make any sense to me. So we made sure all camps were operating in the black and that there was a certain percentage of the money they earned that would go into

their fundraising account if they needed to handle some of these things.

Similar to the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments, the discussion from the participants indicated that although HBCUs do have some challenges, there are solutions to help them improve their athletic department and the student-athlete experience. The next section will discuss the results from the interviews with the insider participants.

4.2 Insider Perspective

In the empirical material collected from the insider participants two overarching themes were identified; program operations and strategic planning. The sections below will outline program operations and strategic planning as it relates to budget challenges facing HBCU athletic departments.

Program operations: Beginning with program operations, the sub-themes of travel, scholarships, and operation costs emerged. Each of the sub-themes regarding program operations are discussed in the following sections.

Travel: It could be gathered from discussion with participants that they believed many HBCU athletic departments had travel operations that were more taxing on student-athletes and coaches. Participants mentioned teams having to travel all night because they can't afford to stay in hotels, playing multiple road games in a row to ensure they are making travel efficient, and traveling and playing games in the same day. Briel had an example of what she has noticed, "At HBCUs, we are getting on the bus at 5:00...in the morning

to travel to play a game and then coming back at 2:00...in the morning. So, there is definitely a difference in how funds are allocated and what you can spend on.”

Additionally, when it comes to travel, Lynn mentioned how in most cases men’s and women’s teams are traveling on the same bus. She described her experience learning how travel is different at an HBCU:

For example, when I got to my current institution, I could not believe we put our men’s and women’s basketball teams on a charter bus for a ten-day road trip to three different states. A HWIHE, from what I have experienced, their men and women, a lot of those times those programs travel separately. HBCUs because we are crunching numbers and trying to survive, we do it the best way we can. Which puts out coaches and student-athletes in a little bit of an uncomfortable situation taking those trips for that long using that type of transportation mode.

When looking at the best way to allocate funds for travel, the participants noted the importance of meeting conference obligations first and to play more regional competition. Participants noted it could be beneficial to play the teams that were in the same division in your same region as this saves on travel costs.

Game guarantees were offered as a suggestion to off-set travel cost. However Fitz noted that the travel costs to play those games could outweigh the benefit from playing in the guarantee game. It is important to note that one of the participants

believed travel was pretty consistent across peer HBCU and HWIHE athletic departments.

Scholarship: From a scholarship perspective, participants noted that very few HBCUs fund scholarship budgets to the allowable NCAA limits. From discussion with participants, it could be implied that the limited scholarship budget impacts the product the athletic departments are able to put on the field. Specifically, participants noted the most discrepancy in non-revenue generating sports. For example, Finn believes the commitment from the institution to scholarship athletes directly impacts the type of kid they can attract:

They (HWIHE student-athletes) play baseball, or they play soccer. We have kids who the first time they pick up a tennis racket is when they get to college because we are just trying to field a team. We have a tennis program and one scholarship, and you need to put a team with 8-10 kids on the court. How many skilled tennis players can you attract with one scholarship?

One specific note participants had between the difference between HBCUs and HWIHEs when it came to scholarships was the inability of HBCUs to scholarship student-athletes that have no eligibility remaining, but are still trying to complete their degree programs. Participants mentioned some student-athletes taking more than four years to complete academic programs with athletic commitments, but the institution not being able to fund their final year due to budget constraints.

Gameday: In the discussion regarding game day budget challenges, participants indicated there was a noticeable difference in a HWIHE

and HBCU. Specifically discussing uniforms, the participants mentioned that HWIHEs could look more well put together whereas HBCUs had to decide between purchasing warm-ups or uniforms each year for their student-athletes. The participants also highlighted how they had experienced difficulties attempting to upgrade facilities on campus, such as gymnasium floors, because of the shortage of budget.

However, the majority of participants acknowledged operating and game-day expenses were similar between similarly sized HBCUs and HWIHEs. Additionally, participants mentioned they believed the allocation of funds between revenue and non-revenue generating sports were similar for HBCUs and HWIHEs regarding game-day expenses. However, it was noted that HWIHEs that do have more successful Olympic sports that are able to make national championships might be more fully funded. The next section will discuss the theme of strategic planning highlighted by participants.

Strategic planning: In the discussion between participants regarding budget challenges, under the theme of strategic planning, the sub-themes of assessment, staffing, revenue, and budget allocation emerged. The sub-themes identified are discussed in the sections below.

Assessment: Beginning with the sub-theme of assessment, all participants believed athletic administrators needed to evaluate spending. Specifically, participants highlighted looking at ways to increase revenue streams, ways to cut the budget, and ensuring the athletic department is sponsoring the right sport programs for the institution. Josie noted that from her experience, she has

noticed that when a new athletic director takes the helm of a program, “They have things in their mind that they want to change, but you really have to assess where the program is.” The majority of participants also noted that it was important to keep a spreadsheet of all projected expenses throughout the year, so the athletic department knows what each game will cost, to include travel expenses. One of the challenges noted by participants was the responsibility of athletic administrators to make the athletic department run without people knowing there are funding challenges.

Staffing: From a staff perspective, participants mentioned that coaches should be involved in the strategic planning. From discussion with participants, it could be gathered that they valued involving coaches in strategic planning to help have a better understanding of each team’s needs in addition to creating a better awareness for coaches for budget challenges within the department. Beyond coaches, participants advocated for senior administration of the institution to be involved and understand the financial needs of the athletic department. The majority of participants highlighted the challenge for athletic administrators to get senior-level administrators of the institution on board with initiatives. Additionally, participants mentioned the importance of having fundraising officers specifically for athletics to help the department grow their budgets. One of the dilemmas mentioned by Fitz was the challenge for senior-level administration of the institution to approve hiring new coaches when they are also tasked with hiring new faculty. Moreover, when HBCUs can get good coaches, it was Fitz’s perception that institutions were not able to

keep them because they are not paying competitive salaries.

When it comes to the athletic administrative staff, the participants noted that although there is a lack of funding to allocate to each sport program, the staff's visibility can ensure student-athletes that their sport is important. Specifically, Josie mentioned that she attends the majority of competitions, stops by practices, and even walks around the halls of the academic buildings to engage with students. She believes this helps create the perception that athletics is very supportive of all athletic programs, even though there is limited funding to each program.

Revenue: The discussion from participants on revenue generation under the theme of strategic planning indicated many HBCUs might be at a disadvantage. Reasons mentioned for the disadvantage included limited endowments and foundations, and the lack of outside financial resources. One suggestion made by multiple participants was to evaluate ticketing at both revenue and non-revenue sports. Fitz noted his perception of non-revenue versus revenue sports:

There is a bad perception because the sport doesn't generate revenue that it is not of interest to student-athletes, fans, or alumni. So, with that said, it is kind of out of sight out of mind because people are under the impression that a sport doesn't generate as much buzz. That is a bad perception to have because if you invest into any of the sport programs, you will see a difference. I have seen schools that have decided to commit to Olympic sports, and I have seen

those sports sometimes become bigger than the revenue generating sports because the one consistency is that team wins so people come and they want to see it because there is a commitment to the sport.

The participants acknowledged the investment needed to operate sport programs, but the challenge is getting others to see the value and invest in the program.

Budget allocation: The final sub-theme that emerged under strategic planning was budget allocations. All participants reported they believed the root of the budget allocation challenge is splitting a limited budget across all sport programs. From Briel's perception, "Essentially HBCUs are trying to keep up with the Joneses, and what everyone else is doing." Through discussion with participants, it could be implied that many HBCUs are trying to do more with a smaller budget and that money continues to move around to cover costs.

Although budget allocation challenges were heavily highlighted facing HBCUs, participants mentioned budget allocation between revenue and non-revenue sports was similar. Lynn described her perception of the allocation, "we do spread that funding out even though the revenue sports are making money, that is how we operate and help our non-revenue sports. So, it kind of balances out in my opinion at some point because you know football generally takes care of women's basketball, volleyball, and track and field." The perception from Lynn indicates that although HBCU athletic departments are working with smaller budgets, they are following a similar budget allocation model compared to HWIHEs.

4.3 Summary of Results from Independent and Insider Participants

Travel and game day operations appeared to be highlighted by both independent and insider participants when comparing HBCUs and HWIHEs. Participants indicated HWIHEs appeared to be more focused on the student-athlete experience and student-athlete well-being for travel in comparison to HBCUs focusing on having to ensure they have the funds to meet minimum travel requirements. Both independent and insider participants discussed meals, transportation and hotels. Scholarships were another highly discussed topic regarding budget allocation by participants. The discussion from participants indicated that although HBCUs might be competitive with scholarships provided for revenue-generating sports, they were not providing the same scholarship opportunities to non-revenue generating sports. Throughout the interviews, all participants noted the importance of strategic planning to help HBCU athletic departments facing budget challenges. The strategic planning discussion included athletic administrators completing an assessment to understand opportunities better and look for areas to cut. Additionally, it is important to note that both independent and insider participants emphasized the importance of including coaches in the discussion of budget allocations to have a better understanding of each program's needs.

5. Discussion and Limitations

The results of this study indicate that HBCUs are not allocating funds similarly to HWIHEs when it comes to program operations in most cases. Results from this study indicated HBCUs are

possibly not spending what HWIHEs do on creating the best experience for their student-athletes, this includes hotels, transportation, and meals. When it comes to transportation, this investigation expanded on the study from Robbins, et al. (2015), who suggested HBCUs require student-athletes to travel on long bus rides to avoid hotel costs and are playing back-to-back road games to ensure they are getting the most out of one trip. Additionally, the results from this study provide qualitative support for the lack of funding for athletic program expenses reported between HBCUs and HWIHEs (Elliott & Kellison, 2019). With the concerns highlighted in this study addressing student-athlete experiences during travel and on game-day, it appears institutional isomorphism is not supported in the current climate at HBCU athletic departments as HBCUs do not reportedly allocate funds in a similar fashion compared to HWIHEs. Although similar spending habits were reported between revenue and nonrevenue sport programs, the level of spending priorities for budget allocation appear to be different as it does not appear HBCUs are prioritizing spending on line items that are beyond the basics, those items that might increase the student-athlete experience. This issue could lead to prospective student-athletes and coaches comparing opportunities between an HBCU and a HWIHE and not finding the experience at the HBCU as attractive, possibly leading to the continued cycle of more skilled prospective coaches and student-athletes taking opportunities at HWIHEs.

Previous research indicates HBCU athletic departments are not participating in strategic planning and it was recommended HBCU athletic

departments look into best practices that can be implemented to counter fiscal challenges (Elliott & Kellison, 2021). Strategic planning was a highlighted theme in this study. According to Cheladurai, (2014), the first step in the strategic planning process is strategic intent, which captures the general identity, direction, and level of aspirations of the organization. It becomes apparent that it might be necessary for HBCUs to revisit their mission statement to determine if budget allocation aligns with goals and objectives of the organization. With the lack of funding, it appears important to evaluate necessary expenses and find the best investment when it comes to allocating resources to athletic programs, travel, coach salaries, and overall student-athlete experience. Although the results of this study indicate HBCUs face budget challenges that HWIHEs might not face, the study offered solutions that HBCU administrators could put into place to better structure their athletic department for success. Creating budgets on the front end of the academic year and planning out the cost of travel and game day operations could help HBCUs budget and allocate funds throughout the academic year. The practice of planning out the budget for the academic year could help HBCU campuses better understand where they are allocating funds most effectively and where funds could be cut.

When it comes to planning, it is important for the institution to prioritize budget allocations across sport programs. As this study indicated, HBCUs are investing more in revenue-generating sports in comparison to their non-revenue generating sports. Although participants believed this to be a common practice at both HBCUs and

HWIHEs, they believed there was a far greater disparity in the allocation of funds between the two types of sports at an HBCU. It could be imperative for HBCUs to reassess their current budget allocation practices and look for ways to possibly cut spending toward revenue generating sports in the hopes of providing a better student-athlete experience for non-revenue generating sport programs. This assessment might mean revenue generating sports are not able to stay at the best hotels or eat at the best restaurants but that the budget can be allocated so that there is a happy medium reached and all sport programs can stay at quality hotels and have reasonable meals while on the road for competition.

6. Application for Future Study

The results of this study expand previous studies indicating HBCU athletic administrators are spread thin and already have multiple responsibilities on campus (Elliott & Kellison, 2021). Continued analysis in this area can help athletic administrators at lower resourced institutions make better decisions in regard to budget allocations amongst sport programs in their athletic department. Future studies can use a more detail budget analysis to determine specific areas of spending. Specifically, a budget analysis could look at various aspects of the operating budget to include spending on scholarships, coaches, athletic staff, travel, and student-athlete experience. Additionally, future studies can seek multiple perspectives, to include a student-athlete perspective on the current budget allocation practices for HBCU athletic departments. Finally, it may also be important for future research to focus on helping

practitioners working at or with HBCUs generate revenue that can be used to increase operating funds that could be earmarked toward ensuring an optimal student-athlete experience for those student-athletes competing at HBCUs.

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