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**Athletic Success and Donation Intentions: Does Sense of  
Community Mediate?**

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As Division I FBS expenditures continue to increase at a rate that outpaces revenues, universities, as well as their respective athletic departments, are facing more pressure to justify these spending patterns. Two popular arguments in favor of athletic spending and subsidization are the football team's ability to unite students through a stronger campus sense of community, as well as athletic success leading to increased levels of institutional giving. However, no study has unpacked how these three items (athletic success, sense of community, and donation intentions) operate cumulatively. Accordingly, this study surveyed 253 FBS students on the impact of football success on their intentions to donate to both their institution's athletic department and their annual fund, with the mediating role of sense of community. The results indicated a partial mediated effect between these three variables, as well as a significant relationship between team identification and sense of community. The findings provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the sport management field. Specifically, this study supplies both justifications and rebuttals for the increased spending patterns on the FBS landscape.

With each passing year, colleges and universities are spending more money to establish and maintain successful athletic programs (Huml et al., 2019). Between 2004 and 2016, median total expenditures for athletic programs competing in the NCAA's highest level of football competition, the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision or FBS, jumped from \$29 million to \$71.7 million, an average annual increase of 7.8% (Jewell, 2020). Because of these enlarged budgets, the majority of FBS athletic departments operate at a deficit and must rely on institutional subsidies to support their programs (Lipford & Slice, 2018; Osborne et al., 2020). One example of these allocated funds are student fees, or "mandatory fees assessed primarily (but not exclusively) to full-time undergraduate students that universities use to support intercollegiate athletics" (Jones & Rudolph, 2020). Student fees are becoming a progressively larger component of athletic department funding. In 2016, approximately 82% of public, Division I institutions collected athletic fees from their students. Further, between 2004 and 2015, the average yearly amount of student fees collected by Division I institutions increased by roughly \$1 million (Jones et al., 2018).

University subsidization of athletics is understandably met with controversy, mainly from students, who question what academic-related endeavors could benefit from a similar investment (Enright et al., 2020). However, this spending is commonly justified by the belief that successful athletics can provide enhanced

visibility and marketing to the school, a phenomenon dubbed the "front porch" effect (Bass et al., 2015, p. 5). The symbiosis between academics and athletics is a popular topic in sport management literature. As Bremmer and Kesselring (1993) note, universities' "primary form of media exposure (and advertising) derives from a distinctly nonacademic enterprise – intercollegiate athletics" (p. 409).

Previous literature has correlated athletic success to several benefits, including increased student applications (Chressanthis & Grimes, 1993; McEvoy, 2005; Murphy & Trandel, 1994; Toma & Cross, 1998), higher applicant quality (McCormick & Tinsley, 1987; Pope & Pope, 2009), and higher student retention rates (Hickman & Meyer, 2017; Tucker, 2004). Another popular justification for hefty athletic spending is that athletic success will increase donations to the university. Several researchers have correlated athletic success to higher levels of giving to both the athletic department (Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Sigelman & Bookheimer, 1983; Stinson & Howard, 2007) and the university annual fund (Daughtrey & Stolar, 2000; Grimes & Chressanthis, 1994; Rhoads & Gerking, 2000; Stinson & Howard, 2008).

In addition to increased donor behavior, another common justification for increased spending levels is collegiate athletics' impact on current students. This is primarily due to sport's social elements, as identifying with a team can give students a sense of belonging by watching and attending games together (Clopton, 2007). One particular social benefit of in-

tercollegiate athletics is the ability to improve campus climate through fostering a sense of community (SOC; Warner et al., 2011). The presence of intercollegiate athletics has proven to be a viable channel for fostering SOC (Clopton, 2007; Stensland et al., 2019), with SOC having also been linked to increased donation intentions (Warner et al., 2011).

Despite these findings, several limitations exist. While athletic success and sense of community have been correlated with donations, and athletics has been shown to influence sense of community, no research to date has looked at the role of successful athletics on sense of community, and how this goes on to impact donation intentions. This is an important gap in the literature, since enriching school spirit has proven to be motivation for institutional subsidization of athletic programs (Feezell, 2009), and the ultimate goal of this increased spending is to win more games. If schools wish to continue using SOC and donation behavior as justifications for increased athletic spending and institutional subsidization, it is important to explore how athletic performance, not just the presence of athletes, impacts campus SOC amongst students, and how SOC subsequently goes on to influence donation intentions.

Further, previous research has failed to produce consistent results regarding the impact of athletic success on donations. For instance, Baade and Sundberg (1996) found a positive relationship between basketball success and donations, while Brooker and Klastorin (1981) found a negative relationship. Given

SOC's correlation to donation intentions, it is possible that incorporating SOC into future research can shed greater insight on the topic. The goal of this study is to examine the impact of athletic success on donation intentions, with the mediating effect of sense of community, while also uncovering the most important factors to fans' subjective view of success.

## **Literature Review**

### **Athletic Success and Donations**

The impact of athletic success on institutional giving has been a popular topic within the sport management literature (Martinez et al., 2010). While there are many variables that influence this relationship (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007), one of the most salient is the destination of the gift; specifically, whether the donation is being made to the school's annual fund or is earmarked toward the athletic department. Looking at athletic giving, previous research has consistently found a positive relationship between athletic success and donations to the athletic department. In one of the first studies on the topic, Sigelman and Bookheimer (1983) examined football and basketball winning percentages for 57 schools between 1977 and 1981. Sigelman and Bookheimer (1983) concluded that football success is the strongest indicator of donations to the school's athletic department, beating out donor income, donor education, and the presence of professional sports competition. Sigelman and Bookheimer's (1983) findings have since been replicated by sev-

eral other studies (Coughlin & Erekson, 1984; Stinson & Howard, 2007, 2008). In addition to higher overall levels of giving to the athletic department, athletic success has correlated to an increase in the average dollar amount of gifts, as well as the total number of donors (Stinson & Howard, 2008).

Despite the consensus on athletic department donations, research regarding the impact of athletic success on institutional donations has yielded mixed results. Baade and Sundberg (1996) gathered institutional giving statistics for 48 private, 94 public, and 167 liberal arts colleges across all three NCAA levels between the years of 1973 and 1990. Baade and Sundberg (1996) found that football bowl game appearances significantly increased institutional giving. Since Baade and Sundberg's (1996) study, multiple authors have yielded similar results on this relationship (Daughtrey & Stolar, 2000; Rhoads & Gerking, 2000; Stinson & Howard, 2008; Tucker, 2004).

Conversely, several studies have failed to find evidence of athletic success positively influencing institutional giving. Sigelman and Carter (1979) explored the relationship between athletic success and donations to the university's annual fund. The percentage change in total alumni giving for 138 Division I schools were obtained and correlated with three (3) success measurements: winning percentage in both basketball and football and football bowl game appearances. Sigelman and Carter (1979) failed to find a significant change in alumni giving across any of the three athletic success

variables. Additional studies have also produced similar results (Sigelman & Bookheimer, 1983; Stinson & Howard, 2007). These findings suggest that the impact of athletic success on donations may be largely contingent on whether or not the gift is earmarked for the athletic department. Thus, while the beneficiary of the donation (i.e. athletic department or institution) is arguably the most salient factor in this relationship (Martinez et al., 2010), others may influence it as well.

The issue of donation target is also compounded by previous literature's findings regarding motivations for institutional giving. For example, Sattler et al. (2019) found that Division I giving campaigns when donors could see where exactly their gift was going, as opposed to the university deciding where the money is best spent. This finding has important implications for the current study, as students may be more likely to donate to athletics, since they know exactly where their gift is being utilized. Conversely, will students be *less* likely to give specifically to athletics, as they would rather see their donation benefit the institution as a whole? Thus, separating donation intentions into institutional fund and athletic department sub-categories will be important for this study.

Beyond the donation's target, research has suggested that donors' alumni status adds another layer to this relationship. While alumni donors have been found to be more sensitive to athletic success than non-alumni donors (Martinez et al., 2010; Rhoads & Gerking, 2000), studies have produced mixed findings regarding



the impact of alumni status on the type of donation made. Stinson and Howard (2004) analyzed donor behavior by both alumni and non-alumni at the University of Oregon between 1994-2002. While not directly factoring team performance into their study, Stinson and Howard (2004) explored the “crowding out” effect, wherein athletic success primarily benefits the athletic department and takes donations away from the university’s institutional fund. Stinson and Howard (2004) found that, in all but two years of the dataset, alumni out-donated non-alumni in terms of academic donations, measured by the total portion of their gift given to academics. Meanwhile, non-alumni were not as influenced by academic factors, suggesting that athletic success will lead to alumni donating primarily to academics and non-alumni donating primarily to athletics. Conversely, Rhoads and Gerking (2000) found that non-alumni donors placed more emphasis on athletic success, while non-alumni were more interested in research and faculty quality. In turn, non-alumni donations tend to go primarily to the university’s annual fund, with alumni donations going to the athletic department.

Institution type has also shown to be an important factor in this relationship. In Baade and Sundberg’s (1996) study, the authors found that appearances in the NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball Tournament resulted in higher gifts for public schools, but not for private schools. Moreover, Humphreys and Mondello (2007) found that both football bowl game and NCAA Tournament appearances were positively, significant-

ly related to restricted giving for public schools, while for private institutions, only NCAA Tournament basketball appearances were significantly associated with restricted giving. Additionally, Brooker and Klastorin (1981) reported a negative relationship between basketball success and donations amongst Pac-8 schools when including private and public schools in the same sample. However, when the authors classified institutions as either public or private, the relationship was significant and positive for the public Pac-8 schools. Brooker and Klastorin (1981) subsequently advised future studies on the topic to consider the type of institution when evaluating this relationship.

Overall, research on the relationship between athletic success and donations appears to be a complicated one, with several factors (i.e. target of donation, alumni status, and type of institution) also wielding influence. In the wake of increased athletic department spending (Huml et al., 2019), in order to uncover whether schools are seeing the desired benefits from their increased spending, it is important for researchers to examine this issue further.

### **Sense of Community**

While there are numerous factors that may determine the impact of athletic success on donation intentions, SOC may be an instrumental variable in this relationship. Due to the inconsistent results of previous research concerning the impact of athletic success on donations, as well as SOC influencing donation intentions (Warner et al., 2011), measuring

all three variables collectively may clarify this relationship.

The term “sense of community” originally appeared in Sarason (1974), who defined it as an “environmental or community characteristic that leads to individuals feeling a sense of belonging and social support at the group-level” (cited in Warner et al., 2013, p.349). Since Sarason’s (1974) study, SOC has been linked to several desirable outcomes within academic settings, including fewer delinquent behaviors (Battistich & Hom, 1997), decreased student loneliness (Pretty, Andrew, & Collet, 1994), and higher retention rates, academic performance, and student subjective well-being (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; McCarthy, Pretty, & Catano, 1990; Warner & Dixon, 2013). Because of these positive academic outcomes, college and university officials need to strive to maintain a strong sense of community on campus (Boyer, 1990).

While sense of community has been most popular in the higher education and community psychology research (Warner & Dixon, 2013), it has also appeared in sport management studies. This is primarily due to sport’s social nature, and how sport represents a “near universal and nonthreatening conversation topic” (Wenner & Gantz, 1989, p. 242), which allows individuals to bond and form friendships with people who share a similar passion for sports (Phua, 2010). Specifically, sport’s ability to create a stronger sense of community on college campuses has been the topic of several sport management studies (Clopton, 2007; Roy et al., 2008; Toma, 2003; War-

ner et al., 2011). For example, Stensland et al., (2019) found that the presence of Division I athletics can serve as a social anchor for the institution, providing students with a sense of belonging and community.

However, no studies to date have explored how sense of community fluctuates with team performance. For example, Warner et al. (2011) examined SOC levels of students at Old Dominion University before and after the football team’s jump to Division I. The authors included attendance figures when measuring SOC levels, but did not evaluate how team performance impacts this relationship. This is a problematic limitation, as schools are increasing their athletic department budgets in the hopes of winning more games. Since schools are also relying more on student fees to subsidize athletic programs, it is important for future research to examine how athletic success impacts students’ perceived sense of community on campus.

Additionally, sense of community can also influence donation intentions. For instance, while Warner et al. (2011) found no significant differences in SOC before and after the season, SOC was found to have a positive influence on future support for athletics, measured by respondents’ intentions to donate to Old Dominion’s athletic department. Further, Brunette et al. (2017) surveyed 266 college students and found that students were more likely to donate when they felt a sense of place at their current university. Thus, it may not be sufficient for future research to examine the direct

impact of athletic success on donation intentions. Because of how athletic success may impact sense of community, which will then go on to impact donation intentions, future studies may need to operationalize sense of community as a mediating variable. This leads us to the formulation of our first research question:

- RQ1: Does SOC mediate the relationship between perceptions of football success and donation intentions?

### **Team Identification/Success Subjectivity**

Another important variable to consider in this relationship is that of team identification, as schools need to know if the institution-wide benefits they are receiving from successful athletics is predicated upon a certain level of team identification. If only highly identified fans are perceiving a strong sense of community on campus, administrators may need to re-evaluate their marketing techniques. Team identification, as defined by Wakefield and Wann (2006) is “the degree that the fan views the team as an extension of self-identity.... the extent to which the fan feels a psychological connection to the team” (p. 168). Since team identification is largely based on Tajfel’s (1978) Social Identity Theory (Fink et al., 2002), it is understandable that social motives are primary drivers of team identification. For instance, Trail et al. (2000) found nine motives for team identification, one being the need for social interaction and belonging. Building off this study, Fink et al. (2002) attempted to uncover which

of these motivations were most important to team identification’s existence. The authors found that social interaction was one of the four motive subscales significantly related to team identification, with the construct explaining a significant amount of variance in team identification amongst males in the sample. Thus, team identification levels may play an important role in campus SOC perceptions, as the social benefits of intercollegiate athletics could be restricted to students who are already highly identified fans.

In addition to team identification’s influence on social interactions, previous research has shown that team identification levels play an important role in fans’ reactions to changes in team performance. For instance, Wann and Branscombe (1990) found that highly identified fans were more likely to Bask in Reflected Glory (BIRG) following successful performances, and less likely to Cut off Reflected Failure (CORF) following unsuccessful ones. Conversely, medium and lowly identified fans were less likely to BIRG and more likely to CORF. Thus, while team identification may influence responses to successful athletic performances, no research to date has explored how team identification impacts what individuals constitute as successful. This also presents a limitation of previous literature, as failing to understand how highly and lowly identified fans define success makes it difficult to provide a holistic view of team identification’s role on sport fans’ behavior.

Further, prior literature on the relationship between athletic success and donations further supports the need



to measure success subjectively. For instance, authors have conceptualized “success” a variety of ways, including team winning percentage (Brooker & Klastorin; Coughlin & Ereckson, 1984; Holmes et al., 2008; Sigelman & Carter, 1979), bowl game appearances (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007), NCAA Tournament appearances (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Grimes & Chressanthis, 1994) and number of rounds advanced in the NCAA Tournament (Tucker, 2004). The use of objective success measurements means the relationship between success and donation intentions may fluctuate depending on which success measurement is utilized. For these reasons, future studies on the topic should attempt to uncover how individuals define success, and how team identification effects this relationship.

This leads us to our second and third research questions:

- RQ2: What is the relationship between team identification levels and sense of community?
- RQ3: How do team identification levels influence what factors are most important to students’ athletic success perceptions?

## Method

### Sample

The study sample consisted of students at four Division I FBS institutions: two at the Group of Five (includes the American Athletic, Conference USA Mid-American, Mountain West, Sun Belt conferences) level and two at the Power

Five (includes the Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big XII, Pacific-12, and Southeastern conferences) level. This decision was made to facilitate the success subjectivity research question, as including schools on both levels of competition will help ensure the study’s generalizability. The choice to utilize a student-only sample was based off of the study’s SOC aspect. While alumni and non-student fans of the school’s football team may be able to perceive a SOC on campus, students were believed to have the most accurate views on the subject.

While previous research has chosen to measure the impact of football and basketball success on donation intentions simultaneously, the current study only assessed football success perceptions. This decision was made for two reasons. First, football tends to be the most commercialized sport on college campuses (Whiteside et al., 2011), providing the most opportunities for social interaction. Further, Mixon and Trevino (2005) discussed football’s “chicken soup” effect (p. 9), where the most effective way for students to acclimate to college and ward off bouts of homesickness is by developing friendships revolving around supporting the football team. Thus, football success was deemed to be the most appropriate sport for examining SOC perceptions on campus. Further, the decision to exclude basketball success was primarily due to the timing of data collection, as the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the cancellation of the 2020 NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament. Since previous research

has shown NCAA Tournament appearances (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007) and rounds advanced in the tournament (Tucker, 2004) to be key determinants of donation intentions, the authors did not believe that they could accurately assess basketball success perceptions and subsequent donation intentions in the absence of the NCAA Tournament.

### **Instrument**

The survey consisted of seven sections: (1) football team quality, performance, and success, (2) sense of community, (3) athletic department donation intentions, (4) annual fund donation intentions, (5) factors influencing success, (6) team identification, and (7) demographics.

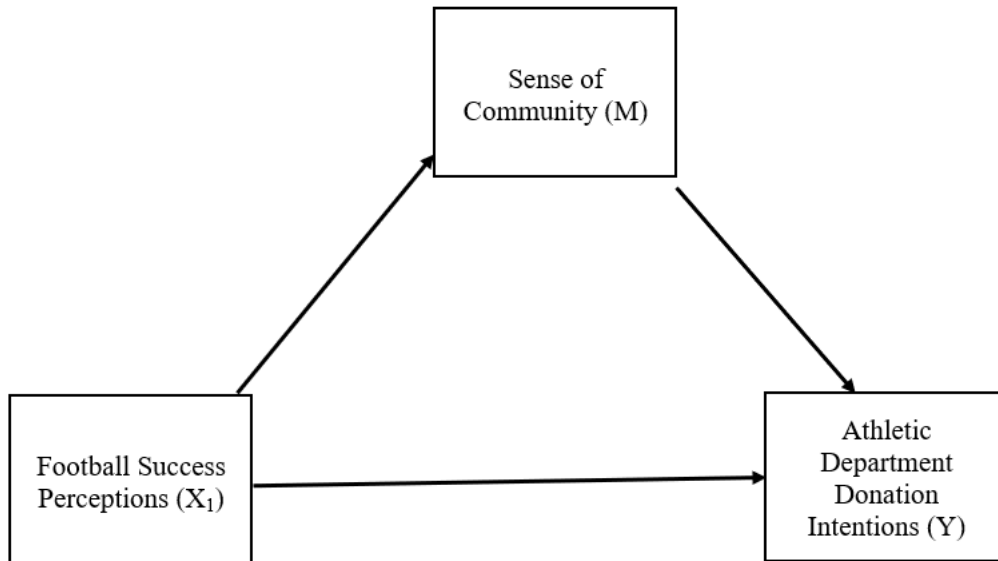
To measure football team success, the current study utilized the team quality, performance, and success section of Ross et al.'s (2006) Team Brand Association Scale (TBAS). The full 41-item instrument consists of 11 team brand associations, one of which includes a five-item section on team, quality, performance, and success. The TBAS has been used and proven reliable and valid in previous sport management studies (Arai et al., 2013; Biscaia et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2007; Walsh & Ross, 2010). Sense of community was measured using the College Sense of Community Scale (CSCS), a modified version of Lounsbury and DeNeui's (1995, 1996) Campus Atmosphere Scale. The CSCS has shown adequate reliability and validity in previous research (Clopton, 2007, 2008; Warner et al., 2011). All items in these two sections

were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

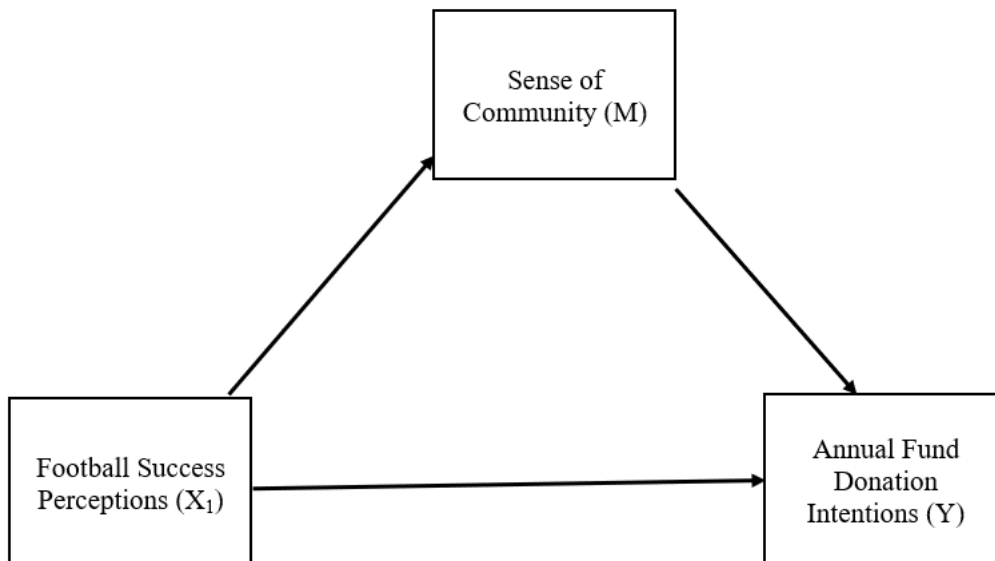
Due to previous research's findings on how the gift's target influences the relationship between athletic success and donations, the researchers decided to measure both athletic department and annual fund donation intentions. Both donation intention sections used three items adopted from Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior. The three items for both sections were the same, but the wording was slightly modified to clarify that one section was measuring athletic department donation intentions, while the other was measuring annual fund donation intentions. The items in these respective sections were all measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). The mediation models for this RQ can be found below.

To measure athletic success subjectivity, participants were asked to rate the importance of nine off-field and on-field criteria on their personal definition of success. Four of these items (student-athlete graduation rate, complying with NCAA rules and regulations, fan turnout at games, and team financial surplus/deficit) were taken from Putler and Wolfe's (1999) Intercollegiate Athletics "Success" Survey. The remaining five items were taken from previous studies' objective measurement of football success. Only football success measurements that have been operationalized in previous research were included in this section. For example, students were asked

**Figure 1**  
*RQ1 Mediation Model 1*



**Figure 2**  
*RQ1 Mediation Model 2*



to rate the importance of year-over-year improvement in their personal definitions of success, based on McEvoy's (2005) study, which measured success as an improvement in conference winning percentage of at least 0.250 from the previous season. The five measurements that were converted to items included: team overall winning percentage (Smith, 2008), team conference winning percentage (McCormick & Tinsley, 1987; Murphy & Trandel, 1994), team national championship victories (Toma & Cross, 1998), improvement from previous year (McEvoy, 2005), and placement in Associated Press' (AP) poll (Pope & Pope, 2009). Each of these nine items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (extremely unimportant) to 7 (extremely important). Team identification was measured using Trail and James' (2001) three-item Team Identification Index (TII). The TII has shown sufficient psychometric properties in previous research (Kwon et al., 2008; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Trail et al., 2003, 2005). These three items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Lastly, the demographic variables included in the analysis were: (a) gender, (b) ethnicity, and (c) class.

### **Procedures**

Prior to data collection, the researchers obtained approval from their university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researchers then contacted professors of general education and activity classes at Group of Five and Power Five

universities and asked if they would be willing to send the Qualtrics survey link to their students. The decision to target these types of classes was to ensure the sample was comprised of students from all majors, as opposed to the majority of students being sport management/administration majors. The researchers explained the purpose of the survey to the professors, who then relayed this information to their students. The researchers also reiterated the survey preamble information that students' participation in the study was completely voluntary.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

A total of 920 students were given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire, with 282 students responding, a response rate of 30.7%. After eliminating blank or incomplete surveys, this left a sample of 253 usable responses. Of the respondents, 132 (52.2%) were male, 113 (44.7%) were female, and 8 (3.2%) chose not to respond. Responses indicated that 181 (71.5%) of the participants were white, 54 (21.3%) were Black/African-American, 12 (4.7%) were Asian, 5 (2.0%) were Hispanic/Latino, and 1 (0.4%) was American Indian/Alaska Native. For class, 105 (41.5%) of the participants were seniors, 82 (32.4%) were juniors, 43 (17.0%) were sophomores, 19 (7.5%) were freshmen, and 4 (1.6%) were graduate students. Table 1 summarizes participants' demographic information. Participants also attended a mean of 2.58 football games the previous season.

## Inferential Test Results

To analyze RQ1, which was concerned with whether sense of community mediates the relationship between athletic success and donation intentions, the SPSS PROCESS macro tool was used. Two separate mediation analyses were conducted, one with athletic department donation intentions as the dependent variable, and another with annual fund donations as the dependent variable. In the first mediation, success perceptions had a positive, significant influence on sense of community ( $\beta = 0.49, p < .01$ ), while a significant path from sense of community to athletic department donation intentions was also found ( $\beta = 0.38, p < .01$ ). A significant direct effect was also observed between athletic success perceptions and athletic department donation intentions ( $\beta = 0.50, p < .01$ ). However, as Hayes (2012) pointed out, researchers should not determine the indirect effect of a mediating variable based on the individual paths, but rather on an “explicit quantification of the indirect effect itself” (p.13). Thus, to assess the indirect effect of SOC, the bootstrap test was employed. The bootstrap test consists of using 5000 random bootstrap samples to determine a 95% confidence interval of the path coefficients. If the confidence interval range does not include zero, this is evidence of a significant indirect effect. (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017). Based on this criterion, the indirect-only mediation through sense of community was significant, as evidenced by the bootstrap test ( $\beta = 0.19, 95\% \text{ C.I.} = .087, 0.29$ ). Since both the di-

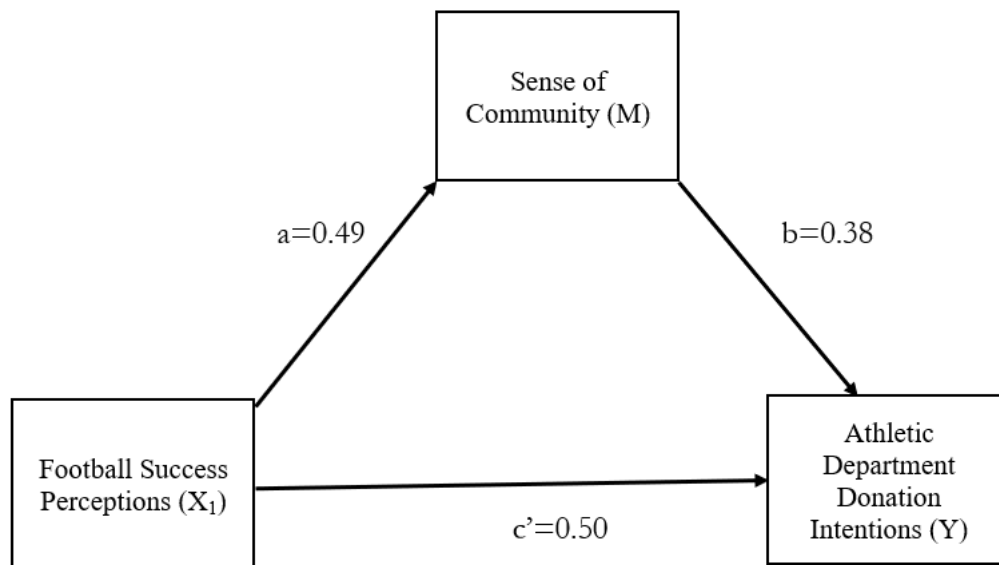
rect and indirect effects were significant, it was concluded that partial mediation has occurred (Zhao et al., 2010).

In the second mediation analysis, success perceptions had a positive, significant influence on sense of community ( $\beta = 0.49, p < .01$ ), with the path from sense of community and annual fund donation intentions also being positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.37, p < .01$ ). Once again, a significant direct effect was observed between athletic success perceptions and annual fund donation intentions ( $\beta = 0.35, p < .01$ ). Similarly, the indirect effect of sense of community was also significant ( $\beta = 0.18, 95\% \text{ CI} = 0.81, 0.29$ ), providing evidence of partial mediation. These results are depicted in figures 3 and 4 below.

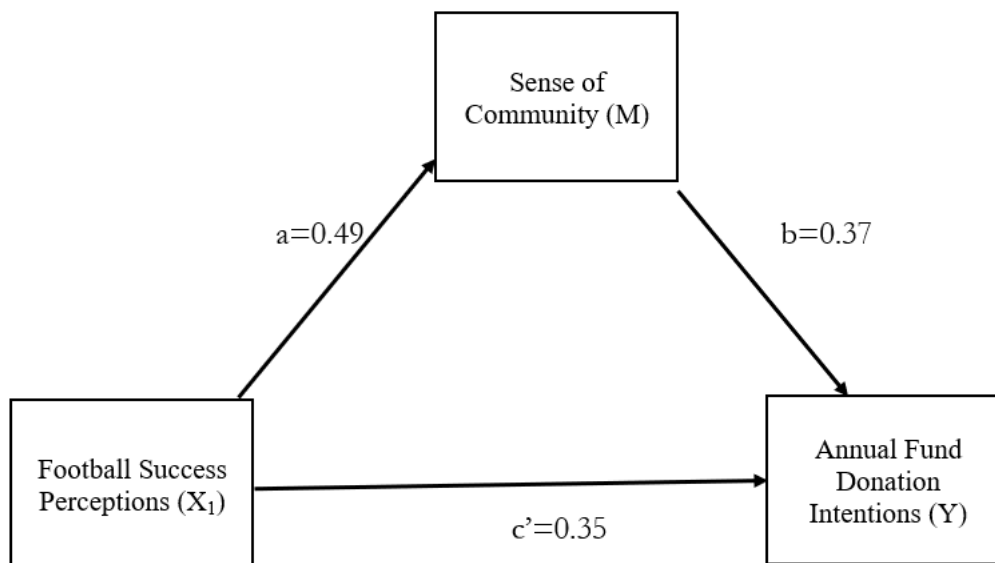
For the second research question, an independent samples t-test was conducted with sense of community as the dependent variable and team identification as the independent variable. To categorize team identification, respondents were placed into one of two groups: low team identification and high team identification. The former group was defined as mean scores on the TBAS being below 3.50, with the latter being mean scores greater than or equal to 3.50. Before proceeding to the t-test, the homogeneity of variance was addressed, a key assumption of independent group t-tests (Nordstokke & Zumbo, 2007, 2010) by utilizing a Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances (Nordstokke et al., 2011). The Levene’s test was not statistically significant ( $F = .874, p > .05$ ), indicating equal group variances and thus satisfying the



**Figure 3**  
*Results of Mediation Analysis #1*



**Figure 4**  
*Results of Mediation Analysis #2*



**Table 1**  
*Participant Demographics*

	Frequency	Frequency Percentage
Gender		
Male	113	44.7%
Female	132	52.2%
Other/Prefer not to Respond	8	3.1%
Race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.4%
Asian	12	4.7%
Black or African American	54	21.3%
Hispanic or Latino	5	2.0%
White	181	71.6%
Class		
Freshman	19	7.5%
Sophomore	43	17.0%
Junior	82	32.4%
Senior	105	41.5%
Graduate Student	4	1.6%

homogeneity of variance assumption. The independent samples t-test indicated a significant group mean difference between low team identification ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $S.D. = 1.10$ ) and high team identification ( $M = 5.62$ ,  $S.D. = 1.03$ ) in regard to sense of community perceptions;  $t(251) = -5.77$ ,  $p < .05$ . These significant differences suggested that highly identified fans of their schools' football team perceived greater sense of community levels on campus.

For the third research question, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test was conducted, with team identification groups (defined the same way as in RQ2) serving as the grouping variable and mean scores on each of the nine (9) success items serving as dependent variables. Since homogeneity of variance is also an assumption for a MANOVA, a Levene's test was again utilized (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2011). The

Levene's test resulted in all nine items being significant at the .05 level, indicating violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption. Because of this finding, the researchers did not proceed with data analysis for RQ3.

### Discussion

The results yielded by the study offer a variety of strategic implications for NCAA Division I FBS athletic administrators as well as university administrators at these institutions. More specifically, this study provides practical insight for professionals specializing in college fund raising and development, either within athletics or servicing the larger campus community. Students' perceptions of athletic success had a significant, positive impact on their intentions to donate to their respective athletic departments' and institutions' annual funds in the future.

While it is important to note that intention does not always predict actual behavior, this is still very useful information for institutional and athletic department officials. Administrators can emphasize success in football, such as conference championship game appearances or bowl game appearances, to foster donation intentions. For example, fundraising campaigns can encourage students to commemorate the football team's success the previous season with a donation. Of course, greater levels of success, such as conference championships, appearances in the College Football Playoff (CFP) and national championships, offer even greater opportunities to promote donations. Thus, the more successful the football team performed the previous year, the harder institutional officials should push these fundraising campaigns. Nevertheless, even institutions that have experienced multiple losing seasons prior to a winning record and post-season participation, should leverage fundraising opportunities by emphasizing the trending positive direction and promote optimism toward further success.

Additionally, results indicated that success perceptions have a significant, positive impact on students' sense of community. Considering that the results also indicated that sense of community had a significant and positive impact on donation intentions, marketing campaigns should highlight these benefits and outcomes cumulatively. For instance, athletic departments should develop campaigns that emphasize the social benefits of successful athletics to the

campus community. Further, these campaigns should stress to students that they should consider donating if they wish to continue seeing athletic success serve as a valuable channel to foster a sociable campus atmosphere. Undoubtedly, financial constraints will limit the donation ability of current students. Yet, by displaying and promoting profiles of alums engaged in giving, this may well foster future giving once the student graduates and experiences career success.

The results from the present study suggest that highly identified fans of their schools' football team perceived greater sense of community levels on campus. Sport marketers within NCAA Division I FBS athletic departments should develop campaigns aimed at increasing identification. By nurturing the students' perceptions that the team represents them and their support of the team in turn contributes to the team's successful performance, this may foster higher levels of identification. The significant group mean differences between lowly and highly identified fans in regard to sense of community suggest that, it is not sufficient for schools to rely on the overall presence of athletics to foster campus sense of community. Rather, if schools want this benefit, they should concentrate their efforts on getting their students to become highly identified with the football team. Once this occurs, students may perceive a strong campus sense of community by virtue of their identification. In other words, the aforementioned benefits may depend on high pre-existing levels of team identification.

Emphasizing campus traditions, celebrations, chants, slogans, athletes inducted into the institution's Hall of Fame, sport facilities, and other unique attributes of the athletic program could nurture higher identification levels.

The results also provide a strong justification for FBS schools' spending behaviors. Previous research has found that football success may increase donations, but only if they are earmarked toward the athletic department. However, football success perceptions significantly influencing both athletic department and annual fund donation intentions demonstrates that athletic success may create benefits for the institution as a whole. Specifically, football success can bolster university image (i.e. the Front Porch Effect) and encourage donations to the annual fund as well as the athletic department.

Conversely, these findings challenge the notion that increased donations alone are sufficient justification for increased spending and subsidization behaviors. While both models produced a significant direct path between football success and donation intentions, the partially mediated effect of SOC provides valuable insight for university administrators and athletic directors. For instance, since SOC is likely to benefit current students the most, institutional officials may wish to stress the impact of athletic success on campus climate and culture when attempting to increase donations amongst current students. Conversely, using football success to directly increase donation levels may be more appropriate for

non-student donors who are less likely to be effected by increased SOC levels on campus.

Further, these findings also provide valuable insight for smaller Division I FBS programs. For example, given the high-profile nature of their programs, institutions such as the University of Alabama or Ohio State University may be more likely to receive additional donations as a direct result of their football team's success. However, smaller Division I programs may need to rely on a more indirect way to use football success to foster donations. For example, smaller institutions can stress that a successful football team is the best way to bring their student body together. The shared pursuit of seeing the team win by watching or attending games together is a sure-fire way to increase campus community. Further, this may be an easier campaign at smaller institutions, since it involves a smaller student body. Subsequently, this will make students more likely to donate. For this reason, smaller, less decorated Division I FBS football programs may find these findings particularly useful.

Lastly, findings also strengthen the body of literature surrounding Social Identity Theory, specifically the concept of BIRGing and CORFing. For example, in both models, there was a significant pathway between football success and sense of community. This indicated that when students believed their school's football team was performing successfully, they felt a stronger, more sociable atmosphere on campus. Students may wish for these successful performances to

reflect positively on both themselves and the entire student body. Thus, when the football team is winning, students may feel as if “we” won. Conversely, when the football team loses, students may feel like “they” lost.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

One limitation of the present study was the inability to proceed with the analysis aimed at determining which factors had the most significant impact on students’ perception of athletic success. Future studies should attempt to obtain a more representative sample of the students attending NCAA Division I FBS institutions in order to determine which factors are most salient in this relationship. Additionally, future research studies should incorporate strategies for reducing the impacts of non-response bias. It is not always accurate to assume that individuals who did not respond to participate in a survey have similar perceptions and intentions as those individuals who did elect to complete the survey. By following up with those who were initially given access to the survey, but did not participate, researchers can perhaps convince them to participate via a second or third attempt. Not only would this increase the response rate, but this approach should also yield a more representative sample. It is also important to underscore that donation behavior was not assessed in the present study. It is possible that respondents indicated that they have the intention to donate to the athletic department in the future, yet their future behavior may not support

this assertion.

Another limitation is that the study sample only consisted of four FBS institutions. Since there are 130 schools that compete on the FBS level, this study’s findings may not be generalizable to the entire FBS population, and certainly not to NCAA Division I FCS, Division II, or Division III institutions.

Lastly, while not a limitation per say, the sample’s class composition was an interesting finding. Specifically, 187 of the 253 students in the sample were juniors and seniors (73.9%). Given that activity and general education courses were the means for administering the survey to students, one might expect to see the inverse of this demographic make-up. For example, conventional wisdom would suggest that juniors and seniors would primarily be enrolled in classes for their major, while general education and activity would be comprised mostly of freshmen and sophomores. Future research on the topic may wish to further explore the class composition of their sample and how this informs the results.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the impact of football success on both institutional and athletic department donation intentions, with the mediating effect of sense of community. While athletic success, sense of community, and donation intentions have all been popular topics in collegiate athletics research, this study attempted to provide a more holistic view at how these three variables operate collectively. The results indicated that sense of com-



munity partially mediated the pathway between both donation variables, findings that contribute to both theory and practice. Given the constantly increasing expenditures facing FBS programs, future research should continue exploring the impact of football success, as well as other variables that may influence donor behavior.

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