

Always in a fight: the institutional work of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

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### **Abstract**

Recent efforts have highlighted the work that organizations perform to create or maintain their institution. Under the broad term of institutional work, scholars have examined efforts by individuals and organizations to create institutions, maintain institutions, and defend institutions from attacks. This work however, has tended to compartmentalize the work of creation from the work of maintenance. In this paper, we examine the life course of an organization to view how they move from creation to maintenance. Our historical study of the National Collegiate Athletic Association demonstrates that organizations once founded and institutionalized constantly face challenges. Sometimes organizations respond by ignoring these challenges, sometimes they defend by doing maintenance work, but sometimes they also respond by making major changes to their own institutions. This suggests that instead of thinking of institutional creation work as separately from maintenance work, the scholars would benefit by “following the conflict” and problematizing how organizations resolve conflicts. Our work also is a call for more studies that examine the entire life-course of an institution as opposed to focusing only small time windows.

## **Introduction**

The role of agency within institutional strategy continues to garner considerable interest within institutional and organizational analyses. The reintroduction of overt action into institutional frameworks is largely credited to the works of Eisenstadt (1980) and DiMaggio (1988) that brought about discussion of institutional entrepreneurship (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Typically thought of in terms of change, institutional entrepreneurship entails those actions wherein change agents (i.e. institutional entrepreneurs) break the engrained molds and mobilize resources to modify existing social arrangements or create entirely new institutions (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; DiMaggio, 1988; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004). Scholars have also begun to recognize that institutional maintenance likely necessitates institutional entrepreneurship (Fligstein, 2001; Rao, Monin, & Duran, 2003), yet this type of institutional entrepreneurship has been relatively understudied (Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Regardless of their intentions (i.e. change or maintenance), institutional entrepreneurs represent important pieces in the institutional picture because of their powerful positioning and their abilities to recruit and mobilize multiple types of resources (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008).

The actions of institutional entrepreneurs, including both change and maintenance endeavors, was brought under the broad umbrella of ‘institutional work’ by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). As understandings of institutional work continue to evolve, the tendency has been to relegate agency as an “either/or” proposition (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). That is, scholars tend to treat actors as either change agents who restructure or create institutions (see Battilana et al., 2009) or as maintenance agents who work to maintain institutional norms in response to challenges (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lok & de Rond, 2013; Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Quinn Trank & Washington, 2009). Few have examined those instances where agents engage in institutional entrepreneurship to both change and maintain institutions (see Currie et al., 2012 for a notable exception). Further, scholars have yet to detail the journey of institutional entrepreneurs who worked to change and create new institutional arrangements but then worked to maintain the newly created institution. Certainly, the question of what happens to institutional entrepreneurs once a new institution has been rooted is important to answer.

The purpose of this study was to examine an organization's institutional work as it progressed from institutional creator to institutional defender. This research extends previous studies that have shown congruence between different forms of institutional work in both maintaining and altering institutional boundaries and practices (see Currie et al., 2012; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Here, we detailed the processes whereby the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) seized control of a fragmented field and established itself as the dominant governor of not only intercollegiate athletics but also of amateur athletics in the United States. Through calculated action, the NCAA worked to establish its dominance and the legitimacy of the field, growing its membership from 300 by the 1940s (Stagg, 1946) to now more than 1200 colleges and universities (see [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org)). Upon establishing its dominance in the field, the NCAA was tasked with defending the institution of intercollegiate athletics and its position of power from various contestations. We contribute to the institutional work framework in multiple ways. First, we provide insight into the life cycle of institutional entrepreneurs. We show institutional entrepreneurs actively create and then defend their creations through strategic action. Secondly, we model the process whereby agents avoid extensive institutional change by engaging in various forms of maintenance work.

In the following sections, we provide an overview of US collegiate athletics, then an overview of the literature on institutional work, focusing primarily on institutional entrepreneurship as it pertains to institutional change and maintenance. We provide a historical analysis of the formation of college athletics, highlighting the key institutional entrepreneurs and their work to alter and solidify the institution of college athletics. We find that the NCAA was able to maintain their dominant position in collegiate athletics by determining which challenges they could ignore, which challenges required defending of legitimacy of institutional arrangements, and which challenges required altering boundaries and practices. Finally, we outline the theoretical contributions of this research.

### **History of the NCAA and U. S. College Sports**

This research consisted of a historical case study of key episodes in governance struggles that shaped the fields of intercollegiate and amateur athletics in the United States. This inquiry centers

primarily on the roles, relations, and transformation of the NCAA as it rose to power and sought to maintain not only its legitimacy but also the legitimacy of the field. The field of intercollegiate athletics serves as an appropriate setting for organizational studies as it is not only a highly institutionalized field in United States folklore, it also offers rich historical data for tracking the field's evolution (see also Stern, 1979, 1981; Washington, 2004; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). The actions of the NCAA are of particular interest as the organization emerged during a highly tenuous era for intercollegiate and amateur sport where the entire field was on the verge of collapse. Through strategic efforts, the NCAA worked to establish its power and legitimize its standing while legitimizing the field. The NCAA quickly became the dominant institution for collegiate and amateur athletics in the United States. "It would be too sweeping to say the association (referring to the NCAA) has dominated athletics in American Colleges, but it is entirely just to say that the changes that have taken place in college sports had their counter parts in the proceedings of the association" (Savage, 1929:29).

As a field, intercollegiate athletics was birthed from amateur sport. The National Athletic Association (NAA) was the first organization that tried to structure amateur athletics in the United States in the mid-1800s. The NAA constructed the root definition for amateurism that formed the basis of most definitions of amateurism in the field; that is, the tying of amateurism to non-pecuniary gains (Flath, 1963). While other actors, especially the Athletic Clubs, adopted the NAA definition of amateur athletic, they spurned its attempts to control the field. They contended that NAA was made up of non-athletes elites trying to impose on legitimate athletes. The disagreement with NAA led the Athletic Clubs in New York and its environs to form National Association of Amateur Athletes of America (NAAAA). The romance between the NAAAA and New York Athletic Club was short-lived as the latter withdrew its support from the association following numerous disagreements. Other athletic clubs resigned their memberships from NAAAA not long after the withdrawal of the New York Athletic clubs. The New York Athletic Club allied with like-minded athletic clubs to form the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) in 1888 in direct challenge to the NAAAA; a rivalry the AAU ultimately won.

While AAU emerged from these internecine wars, the NCAA was a product of public opprobrium about the brutality of college football; that is, the crisis was problematized from outside the emerging field. This disenchantment with football peaked in 1905 with the deaths of many college football players. In 1905, President Roosevelt had called a meeting with Yale, Harvard, and Princeton to discuss rules that the schools could undertake that would curtail the violence in football (Smith, 1988). President Roosevelt felt that these schools, which were not only academic leaders but athletic leaders as well, could lead other schools to change their rules. Roosevelt also wanted to warn these schools against their own brutal play. In 1905, most of Harvard's games resulted in some player receiving a severe injury (Smith, 1988). None of President Roosevelt's suggestions was followed and by the end of that year, Harold Moore of Union College had died in a game against New York University, and there were serious injuries to players in a Harvard vs. Columbia game (Flath, 1963). It was these injuries that led to a meeting between 62 colleges and universities to discuss brutality in football. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss three things: "should football be abandoned, if not what reforms are necessary to eliminate its objectionable features, if so, what substitute would you suggest to take its place (Quoted from NY Times 12/8/1905 p. 9)?" While some schools decided to abandoned football, or switch to the less dangerous rugby style of play, the meeting ultimately led to the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association which, in 1910, changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Stagg, 1946).

Since establishing its authority, the NCAA has defended both its governance and the legitimacy of the intercollegiate model from various challengers on multiple fronts. The earliest contestations to its authority emerged from a rival organization, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). The AAU and the NCAA battled for control over high-profile amateur sporting events (i.e. men's college basketball) and Olympic endorsement (Flath, 1963). Other organizations, namely the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), competed with the NCAA for membership from universities. Further, technological advances endangered the revenue streams of NCAA members, thereby endangering the viability of the field. Lastly, internal divergences have threatened to tear apart the organization. Despite

these numerous contestations from different challengers, the NCAA has maintained its position of power through strategic actions. The organization has been adept at combatting threats to institutional arrangements (Washington, 1999). As such, we examined the history of intercollegiate athletics and the NCAA as a means for understanding transformations of institutional entrepreneurship and institutional defense. Thus, our research question is, what is the process by which the NCAA created the institution of college sport and in the face of challenges has been able to maintain its dominant position? To answer this question, we draw upon the literature on institutional work.

### **Institutional Work**

Institutional work represents a broad encompassment of the various actions of institutional agents to build, change, or maintain institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The foundations of institutional work have been widely attributed to the DiMaggio's (1988) essay that re-introduced agency back into institutional theory by drawing attention to the problematic trend of focusing primarily on social structures and ignoring concerted action within institutional theory. Notably, focusing primarily upon embedded structure may not sufficiently account for institutional change, nor does it account for those instances when institutions may not be characterized as self-reproducing and are in need of maintenance (Hwang & Colyvas, 2011). Given the purpose of this study, we expand upon the institutional work framework, specifically examining institutional entrepreneurship, by examining it both from a change and maintenance perspective.

### **Institutional Entrepreneurship**

**Institutional Change.** Most references to overt action and institutional change have drawn upon the concept of institutional entrepreneurship. First introduced by DiMaggio (1988), institutional entrepreneurs have been widely considered to be those actors who leverage resources to either alter existing institutional arrangements or create entirely new institutions (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). These actors may be individuals or factions within an institution (Fligstein, 2001; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004), or they may be entire organizations that work to implement significant changes to institutional scripts (Dejean, Gond,

& Leca, 2004; Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007; Garud, Jain, & Kumaraswamy, 2002; Hensman, 2003). The re-inclusion of agency into the institutionalization picture required scholars to address the issues of the embeddedness of institutional actors (Seo & Creed, 2002). That is, actors who have been institutionalized should not be able to conceive of alternative realities beyond their institutional scripts (Maguire, 2007). Scholars have accounted for this by theorizing that contradictions among the logics within institutions destabilize organizations and change agents naturally emanate from this instability (Seo & Creed, 2002; Sewell, 1992). This inherent volatility likely results in institutional sensitivity to various field-level occurrences that may provide challenges to institutional norms (Battilana et al., 2009; Fligstein, 2001; Holm, 1995; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2000). As such, institutional entrepreneurs are those who leverage this instability to initiate divergent changes to restructure institutional arrangements (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002; Maguire et al., 2004; Seo & Creed, 2002).

Institutional entrepreneurship is largely dependent on one's position within an institution (Battilana et al., 2009). Some research has suggested that those who are not centralized figures and who may be disadvantaged by institutions are those most likely to become institutional entrepreneurs as they hope to create more advantageous institutional arrangements (Garud et al., 2002; Haveman & Rao, 1997; Hensman, 2003; Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991). However, others have found that institutional entrepreneurship often originates from high-status centralized figures or organizations, as they are more apt to mobilize resources and possess sufficient social legitimacy to implement changes (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Hardy & Maguire, 2007; Sherer & Lee, 2002). The difference in these perspectives may stem from both the characteristics of the actors' fields and the types of changes that are being implemented (Battilana et al., 2009). For instance, those embedded in organizations that span many institutional fields may be more apt to engage in institutional entrepreneurship as they are routinely exposed to alternative practices (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2002; Hardy & Maguire, 2007; Sewell, 1992). Regardless of position, institutional entrepreneurs must demonstrate the legitimacy of the changes that they are implementing to ensure the institutionalization of the new norms (Dacin et al., 2002).



The actions of institutional entrepreneurs for initiating institutional change have been well documented. Generally, these actions fall into three categories (labeled differently by different authors) that consist of envisioning and rationalizing change, creating alliances, and finally, mobilizing allies and resources to initiate the change (Battilana et al., 2009; David, Sine, & Haveman, 2013; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). First, institutional entrepreneurs must be able to recognize problems (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) and create a vision for initiating those changes in manners that will rally supporters (Battilana et al., 2009; David et al., 2013). In creating this vision, institutional entrepreneurs must position and rationalize the change to possible actors so that it breaks through the entrenched mentalities that gravitate toward the institutionalized norms of thought and action (Boxenbaum, 2006; Fligstein, 2001; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Once the vision for change has been created and rationalized, institutional entrepreneurs are tasked with affiliating with others who are willing to challenge institutional norms and may also legitimate the changes (David et al., 2013; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). Indeed, institutional entrepreneurship tends to be a collective endeavor as power and legitimacy are achieved more effectively with numerous actors aspiring to change (Fligstein, 2001). As such, research has shown that political and social skills are important traits of institutional entrepreneurs (Fligstein, 2001; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Perkmann & Spicer, 2007). Creating strategic alliances is also important as powerful actors who may be better positioned to initiate changes often control necessary resources (Dorado, 2005). Finally, institutional entrepreneurs mobilize their recruited allies and resources to initiate change and institutionalize their newly created logics (DiMaggio, 1988). Resources may include both human capitals along with financial assets, as both are necessary for divergent changes that break from institutional scripts (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). Ultimately these actions are the indicators of institutional entrepreneurs.

Most theorizations of institutional entrepreneurship have focused primarily on institutional change. However, institutional entrepreneurship may also be seen in efforts to maintain institutional arrangements in the face of challenges (Currie et al., 2012; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003). In the following section, we discuss the role of actors in

institutional maintenance work, highlighting the institutional entrepreneurship of maintaining institutional arrangements.

**Institutional Maintenance.** A key indicator of institutionalization has been the unregulated conformity to self-reproducing to normative social orders (Greenwood et al., 2008; Jepperson, 1991). However, scholars adopting the institutional work framework have suggested that “maintenance is not a stable property of the institutional order and various forms of work may be necessary to ensure institutional continuity and stability” (Micelotta & Washington, 2013, p. 1138). Indeed, institutions may not be self-reproducing absent of concerted efforts put forth by agents seeking to preserve the dominant social orders (Hwang & Colyvas, 2011). Purposive action, similar to that needed for initiating change, is likely necessary for maintaining institutions, especially when norms are contested (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Institutional maintenance work is often triggered to neutralize threats that may exploit weaknesses within institutional orders and ultimately maintain or re-establish the power and legitimacy of the institutionalized social constructions (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010; Lok & de Rond, 2013). As such, agents engage in actions that are aimed at either maintaining the adherence to institutional rules or replicating the existing institutional typologies (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Comparatively, institutional maintenance had been understudied as most research of institutional work generally examined agency and change (Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Yet, scholars have recently afforded attention to the role of concerted action to maintain institutions. Broadly speaking, scholars have shown that institutional maintenance work generally entails “supporting, repairing or recreating social mechanisms that ensure compliance” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 230). Notably, actors work to bolster the foundations of the dominant institution despite others’ efforts to change (Lawrence, 1999; Quinn Trank & Washington, 2009; Zilber, 2009). Dacin and her colleagues (2010) noticed that reproducing macro-level practices throughout micro-level interactions served to preserve institutional order. Others have found that various actions, such as expanding institutional boundaries to incorporate fringe actors into the institutional script, have been useful for counteracting and undermining contestations (Currie et al., 2012; Lok & de Rond, 2013; Washington, 2004). Further,

maintenance work may also necessitate repairing or reversing institutional fractures. Micelotta and Washington (2013) found that actors may engage in practices such as re-asserting institutional norms, re-establishing power balances, regaining leadership, and ultimately, reinstitutionalizing norms to repair damages that may have resulted from breakdowns or change efforts caused by institutional instability.

Traditionally relegated to the context of change, the tenets of institutional entrepreneurship may also be activated as actors work to maintain institutions against threats to stability. Particularly within well-established fields, institutional entrepreneurs vociferously defend their institutions to maintain the norms of social interactions to maintain power balances and legitimacy (Rao et al., 2003). Indeed, institutional maintenance entrepreneurship likely consists of similar tenets seen with institutional entrepreneurship and change (Currie et al., 2012). That is, institutional entrepreneurs must be able to envision threats to the institution and develop a rationalized plan for combatting those challenges. Currie and his colleagues (2012) demonstrated how those within the medical professions theorized issues of risk and positioned themselves as “arbiters of risk” (p. 956). Further, maintenance work may be contingent on institutional entrepreneurs forging or reactivating alliances. Research has shown that institutions are readily maintained when elites not only unite but also enhance their positions within institutional arrangements (Battilana, 2011; Currie et al., 2012). Ultimately, institutional entrepreneurs must direct their substantial power and resources towards motivating those within a given institution to maintain the status quo.

While conceptions of institutional work continue to expand, the evolving nature of institutional entrepreneurship has received limited attention. Particularly, research has yet to provide insight into the lifecycle of institutional entrepreneurs. Research of institutional change and maintenance has remained relegated to conceptual siloes with scholars rarely examining actors as both change and maintenance agents. This is a significant limitation as institutional actors often assume multiple inter- and intra-institutional roles (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Meaning, actors are rarely static in their positioning within a field. Thus, it is important to understand what happens next for change agents that have created an institution. As such, we sought to answer two primary questions with this

inquiry. First, under what conditions and through what processes does an organization rise to dominance in an institutional field? Secondly, once an organization has institutionalized its dominance, how does it maintain its power and the legitimacy of the field?

## **Method**

**Data Sources and Analysis.** The primary data of this historical case study consisted of documents collected from various sources, including: the archives of the NCAA, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and numerous secondary documents such as the dissertations of Flath (1963), Hoover (1958), Wu (1997), and Land (1977). These multiple data sources provided detailed, triangulated documentation of the various struggles in the field of intercollegiate athletics. A primary weakness of historical research is the reinterpretation of history through secondary sources (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001). To mitigate this issue, we were careful to include numerous perspectives of the historical events of intercollegiate athletics in order to account for author biases and interpretations. In sum, we relied on data spanning nearly seven decades of intercollegiate athletics to understand the evolution of the NCAA's role in the formation and governance of intercollegiate athletics and amateur sport.

Data were analyzed using the inductive grounded theory approach (Goia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). In order to gain in-depth understanding of this historical case, we read through all our data documents without coding. We conducted this first read-through to minimize our propensity to impose our theoretical bias on the historical events as well as to acquire an adequate picture of the events that transpired in the case. This is important because the duration of our case study forecloses availability of other sources of data aside document; therefore, we attempted to gain a global picture of the case before theorizing about the events that transpired. Secondly, reading through the documents allowed us to narrow down portions of the plethora of documents on amateur athletics relevant to our case.

Upon extensive review of our compiled documents, we commenced open coding. We looked for recurring themes, events, connections, patterns of relationships in the emerging field. We constantly compared these recurring themes across all our data sources. Examples of recurring events and themes are

adversarial relationships between key actors in the field, followed by some type of truce, which are mostly brokered by some governmental arrangements, towards the years of the Olympic Games, and resumption of hostilities after the Olympics. We attempted to uncover these recurring patterns, underlining logics presented in the data, and the arguments of the different protagonists in the events. We continuously looked across different sources of data and combine them with our theoretical understanding to gain insights into the emerging codes. In addition, we focused on the actions of different stakeholders in the emerging field of amateur athletics. Throughout this process, our research team routinely compared notes and discussed our understanding of the emerging patterns. Following the identification of different first order codes, we sought to understand the relationships between the concepts by moving back and forth between data and theory. As such, we considered the emerging themes, created multiple tentative groups, and examined relationships between codes spatially and sequentially. Finally, we aggregated the different themes into higher-level theoretical constructs. In an effort to create broader theoretical framework that plug into ongoing organization debate, we compared our different themes with themes from the literature. Through this process, we were able to provide detailed answers to the driving research questions of this study.

Figure 1 shows our data structure. It consists of three levels of coding described in the preceding paragraphs: open coding, second-order codes, and theoretical categories. There are 3 theoretical dimensions that emerged from our data analysis: 1) Contention 2) rule creations and 3) legitimacy claims. Suffice to say that Figure 1 is the product of our data representation, i.e., not a dynamic or causal model.

### **Findings**

The history of intercollegiate athletics and the NCAA suggested that institutional entrepreneurship evolved from and was shaped by contestations within the field. We observed three notable dimensions of entrepreneurship wherein the NCAA established itself as the primary governor and defender of amateur athletics. The first dimension, labeled Contention, details the numerous tensions and contestations both within the field of amateur athletics and the within intercollegiate athletics once the NCAA had established its authority. The second dimension, Rule Creation, outlines the NCAA's primary

strategies for addressing contestations in the field. The final dimension, termed Legitimacy, outlines the legitimacy challenges the NCAA faced while trying to establish and maintain its control of intercollegiate athletics. We present these as distinct moments, yet an in-depth read into our data suggests that the themes were intertwined. For instance, the NCAA's efforts to centralize and legitimize its standing was often concurrent with its rise to power. As such, it is important to keep in mind the iterative relationships between the themes of this study.

**Contention.** The NCAA's rise to power was characterized by tempestuous developments both within the realm of intercollegiate athletics and within amateur sport in the United States. The roots of intercollegiate athletic competition can be traced to the 1850s, with numerous intercollegiate leagues being in place for various sports by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fleischer, 1958; Stagg, 1946). University officials had begun to recognize the enhanced visibility, popularity, and prestige that accompanied involvement in athletics, particularly football. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, university presidents, such as those at Swarthmore, University of Chicago, and Duke University, had developed strategic plans that included substantial investments in football (Lawson & Ingham, 19080; Lewis, 1972b; Summer, 1990). Although reactions to this couple of athletics and academics ranged from praise (Adams, 1890) to criticism (Deming, 1905; Godkin, 1894), universities had already begun to realize the financial rewards of football. An 1889 football game of Princeton vs. Yale generated \$25,000 (Hart, 1890), while Harvard grossed \$42,000 from its games against Yale and Pennsylvania in 1894.

The financial gains from football and the behaviors that ensued introduced key sources of tension that still shape governance in intercollegiate athletics. Schools invoked various strategies for enhancing and profiting from increased visibility and prestige. Schools developed school colors, nicknames, and mascots (Rudolph, 1962). They began to hire high-profile football coaches, even paying them more than professors (Smith, 1988). Some even doled out money to the players in hopes of winning more games (Smith, 1988). While school officials recognized and welcomed the benefits of increased visibility and popularity, presidents remained leery of athletics dwarfing the educational identities of their schools (Lewis, 1972a). As one historian noted,

College athletics had come under severe criticism, especially during the first few years of the twentieth century. Newspapers and magazines [were] filled with articles attacking not only the method of play but the amateur status of many college athletes as well (Flath, 1963: pg. 44).

Even in its formative years, intercollegiate athletics was characterized by contradictory logics (Barley and Kunda, 1992).

As athletics continued to grow, numerous entities, including conferences, councils, and individual universities, attempted to organize competitions. Yet, tension remained over the playing rules for football. Due to prior success, the Intercollegiate Football Association (IFA) adopted Harvard's rules for football (Stagg, 1946). Some schools resisted, notably Yale, and eventually left the IFA (Falla, 1981). Ultimately, different universities were operating with different rule sets. In efforts to consolidate, Cornell, Harvard, Navy, Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Yale formed the American Football Rules Committee. However, this was met with resistance, as schools in the West did not like the rules from this committee. This led to seven schools forming what is now the Big Ten Conference (Stagg, 1946). The primary concern with the rules was the violent nature of early football, with some seasons had as many as 44 deaths (Leifer, 1995). The early attempts at quelling the violence resulted in less entertaining football for the fans (Stagg, 1946). Ultimately, schools reverted back to more entertaining styles of football despite the occurrence of more player deaths.

Public outcry and pressings from president Theodore Roosevelt resulted in the meeting of 62 colleges and universities to discuss the brutality of college football. The purpose was to discuss the possible abandonment and/or reform of football to eliminate its objectionable features. In addressing the attendees, President Roosevelt stated,

[H]e liked the game (football), but felt that something should be done to reform the rules, especially in the interest of fair play and discouragement of rough play, and asked them to undertake to start a movement to that end (front page New York Times October 10, 1905).

While some opted for abandonment, the meeting led to the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association, which in 1910 changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Stagg,

1946). The NCAA was tasked with reducing violence in football and structuring the field of intercollegiate athletics. Initially founded with only 38 member schools, by 1942 its membership had grown to 314 schools and included “nearly every college or university of importance in the country” (Stagg, 1946: 81). Indeed, the NCAA had become the dominant purveyor of collegiate and amateur athletics in the United States (Stern, 1979).

While trying to organize, unite, and expand its membership, the NCAA also faced ardent competition from entities both outside of the realm of intercollegiate athletics and from within the field. Entities outside of intercollegiate athletics, such as the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), were trying to gain footholds in the governance of amateur sport. The AAU, whose stated aim was control of all amateur athletics (Flath, 1963), governed lacrosse, track and field, and basketball (Stagg, 1946). Affiliated with international amateur athletics and the Olympic movement, AAU attempted to invoke rules regulating amateur eligibility by mandating the teams or schools with which its members could compete. Although their initial eligibility rules were aimed to quell amateurs from competing against professionals, these rules became tools in the organization’s fight against the NCAA. Garnering an endorsement from the International Olympic Committee recognizing it as the United States representative, AAU was a source of significant tension as they worked to undermine amateurism within intercollegiate athletics.

The contests between NCAA and AAU were thematic of the early days of intercollegiate athletics. While stakeholders in intercollegiate athletics differed on many fronts, there seemed to be an implicit consensus that college sports should be played by amateurs (using amateur definitions similar to those of AAU). However, AAU was the foremost amateur athletic organization in the country. Ordinarily, the subscription to amateur rules by stakeholders in intercollegiate athletic should have meant NCAA and college athletics should be subject to AAU rules. However, NCAA and its members contested this position. The disagreement set up many confrontations between the two organizations and the outcome often constitute the basis of supremacy claims by the two organizations. These early days battle often played out close to the global Olympics games. While AAU and its affiliates often controlled the US Olympic organization, NCAA had the highest numbers of amateur athletes in the US Olympics teams. In



addition, NCAA athletes, more than athletes from AAU or any other organization, won more Olympic medals in those early days. These feats by NCAA athletes emboldened NCAA in its supremacy battle with AAU.

While the AAU pursued control of all amateur athletics, NAIA competed for dominance in intercollegiate athletics. The NAIA became the organization for the small-sized colleges and universities that had been excluded from competing in NCAA and AAU tournaments, particularly basketball (Hoover, 1958; Land, 1977). The NAIA allowed marginalized universities, such as liberal arts schools, teachers colleges, and historically black colleges, to compete in post season tournaments and gave voice to those who had been traditionally ignored by the NCAA (Hoover, 1958). As NAIA affiliates began to garner significant media attention and demonstrate success in athletic competition, the NCAA expanded its boundaries to include the college division that would accommodate the needs of the smaller schools and universities (Land, 1977). By the 1960s the historically black colleges were allowed to compete in NCAA sponsored events and were given membership (Land 1977). In 1973, the NCAA restructured again, changing from two divisions, university and college, into three divisions, Division I, II, and III. It was at this time that the NCAA also forced colleges to choose which organization they would support. Prior to 1974, colleges that were members of the NCAA and NAIA could compete in either the NCAA or NAIA post-season tournaments (Land 1977). This decision hurt the NAIA, as the NAIA needed their best teams to compete in their tournaments in order to generate revenue. The NCAA received most of its revenue from the university division and was relatively unfazed by financial losses from the college division (Falla 1981). In 1974, the NAIA, hoping to reduce the uncertainty in its post-season tournaments, required its members to declare at the beginning of the season if they were going to participate in the NCAA's or the NAIA's post season tournaments. This rule change inspired many NAIA schools to leave the NAIA and join the NCAA.

Beyond internal conflicts and tensions with externalities, the NCAA faced significant legislative issues from the United States federal government. Federal statutes and rulings in civil lawsuits posed serious threats to the NCAA and the institution of intercollegiate athletics. While we have previously

discussed the internal strife and maintenance strategies for the civil lawsuits, Title IX represented a substantial threat to the status quo. Passed in 1972, Title IX of the Educational Amendments decreed that educational entities receiving federal funding were prohibited from discriminating on the basis of sex. This had profound effects in athletics as essentially all levels of schools, including colleges and universities, were legally mandated to provide women and girls with opportunities comparable to their male counterparts to participate in athletics (Staurowsky, 2003). As reflected in the numerous roundtables of the mid-1970s NCAA conventions, NCAA member representatives expressed consternation regarding the implementation of the new legislation. The fear was that the inclusion of women's sports would financially cripple many schools, requiring them to abandon intercollegiate athletic competition altogether (Staurowsky, 2003). Indeed, consider the following excerpt from the General Roundtable at the 1979 NCAA convention,

Title IX is not a bad dream that will go away somehow...The message is getting through that Title IX is for real, that it will involve massive sums of money at a time of fiscal exigencies in higher education and that the financial base of a major collegiate activity may be in jeopardy. For some institutions it may well mean eliminating football. For others it will mean drastic cutbacks in men's programs other than football and basketball. Few schools will have the resources to maintain the men's programs at their current level and still provide the guideline of compliance.

The NCAA's customary response to legal challenges was again invoked. The NCAA would ardently defend its control of intercollegiate athletics and would rebuke efforts from externalities. Specifically, the NCAA passed resolution No. 133 that included the following wording, "[the NCAA] shall oppose any HEW standard or administrative enforcement method which would require HEW to monitor and dictate in detail the financial operations of the nation's colleges and universities with respect to athletics." Secondly, the NCAA would lobby for support from powerful allies. Notably, former NCAA president John Fuzak, solicited the support of President Gerald Ford in opposition to Title IX. In his letter, he claimed that the Title IX could potentially destroy big-time men's intercollegiate athletics

(Staurowsky, 2003). However, through a series of lawsuits, the U.S. Supreme Court forced the NCAA and its membership into Title IX compliance.

In addition to Title IX, the NCAA was forced to defend its dominating position in amateur sport when the United States Senate Commerce Committee drafted a proposed bill in 1973 that would have put the federal government in control of at least 30 amateur sports. This reactionary bill was introduced in response to Congress's increased frustrations of U.S. Olympic performances and the wrangling between the NCAA and AAU. Further, the NCAA had formally withdrawn from the United States Olympic Committee amidst concerns of the organization's structural issues (Nafziger, 1983). While the bill eventually passed as The Amateur Sports Act of 1978, substantial opposition from the NCAA resulted in the NCAA maintaining control over intercollegiate sport. The NCAA's influence and legitimacy was bolstered through this process as its defense of its power resulted in a victory over a federal agency. Ultimately the NCAA rejoined the USOC in 1978.

**Rule Creation.** Of its initial charges, perhaps the most difficult task for the NCAA was building an association that could accommodate various constituencies. Prior to the NCAA, intercollegiate athletics had gone from periods of student organizing to tenuous partnerships between schools to disjointed conferences, each with its own sets of rules. As the association sought to expand its membership, the NCAA began to codify rules that governed all aspects of intercollegiate athletic competition. The first sets of rules governed game amateurism in college sports were implemented by individual colleges or small groups of colleges. In 1896, Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania instituted rules that would ban professionals from competing in intercollegiate contests, with Princeton and Yale implementing similar rules four years later (Flath, 1963). These included rules about playing methods and rules about who can play in the game. As more colleges and universities were added to the membership, rules concerning structuration of governance were created. With the influx of money into the organization, rules of eligibility and recruitment were instituted. Technological advancements resulted in created or amended rules. The NCAA produced more rules than any other sport organization in United

States history as means for governing intercollegiate athletics. The different rules in the emergent field precipitated a semblance of order and provided ammunitions for further contentions in the field.

To solidify control of intercollegiate athletics under the umbrella of its governance, the NCAA's primary strategies were the creation of rules, restructuring, and expanding its boundaries. While, like other national organizations laying claim to leadership of amateur athletics in United States, NCAA was organized based on regional conferences, the organizational structure included additional layer of rules committees at individual sport levels; in essence, football had rules committee, so did basketball, swimming, athletic, etc. The NCAA produced more rules than any other sport organization in the United States history. The rules committees made rules on different aspects of amateur sports played at the college levels. The first sets of rules were about the games, i.e., rules on method of playing different games, rules on who can play in a game, among others. Rules about playing methods resonated with NCAA roots and the football crisis of the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century because football rules were particularly maligned by the public during the crisis that led to the formation of NCAA. Earlier games were played under different rules. For instance, in a game between Harvard and McGill in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first two quarters were played with American football rules, while the last two quarters were played with Canadian football rules. This disparity in rules limited the pool of potential opponents. Aside the differences in playing rules, there were also rules, which even though consistent were deemed dangerous and/or unfair to the wellbeing of athletes.

Upon vanquishing multiple competing organizations and expanding its membership, the primary challenge for the NCAA became easing tensions among association members. These internal conflicts generally stemmed from the disparate situations and needs of the NCAA's membership. As the NCAA had expanded its boundaries to included smaller, marginalized colleges and universities, significant divides became evident. The elites, which had shifted from the elite academic institutions of the northeast to major football universities, believed their revenue earning potentials were being stifled by certain rules, namely the limitations placed upon television broadcasts. The non-elites were concerned primarily about the financial strains of trying to compete. These potential fractures required addressing from the NCAA.

As with most conflicts within the institution, early attempts to suppress internal challenges involved extensive rulemaking. The most notable example was the NCAA's response to the emergence of television technology. The discussion of how to manage television was a primary topic of concern at the NCAA conventions in the 1950s. Although modern television contracts have provided substantial revenues to universities, the early years of television broadcasts posed significant threats to the NCAA membership. This concern was noted in the 1951 NCAA yearbook:

The concern of the colleges of the country with the effects of television upon football attendance and thus upon the future of intercollegiate and intramural athletic and physical training programs became more and more evident as sets began to saturate important collegiate areas...One important conference, the Big Ten, went so far as to ban live television during the 1950 season and other conferences have followed suit.

In response to the emergence of television, the NCAA commissioned a television committee to develop a plan for managing televised broadcasts of college football games (NCAA members did not believe televised basketball games posed a threat). This committee, working in conjunction with data from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), developed an encompassing plan of rules that were designed to limit the adverse effects of television. By 1960, the NCAA membership has settled on a plan ultimately included the NCAA's controlling of all television contracts (i.e. individual schools not allowed to negotiate their own contracts), instituting the "black out" rule (i.e. local broadcasts not airing local games), and limiting the number of broadcasts of each school's football games.

The NCAA's primary response to issues was to always institute encompassing rules for its membership. However, this created significant strife among members, as the larger schools continued to seek more autonomy while the smaller schools were cognizant of their own limitations. In those instances when their extensive rules would be challenged, the organization would ardently defend its rules in hopes of quelling dissention among its members. Notice the following excerpt from the 1973 Convention report of the Television Committee:

We think all of the points fail in significance in relation to the most important of all aspects of the NCAA television plan—control by television of college football. You take away the NCAA controls; and nearly every football-playing member would face competition from the telecasts of the local major conference, any nearby major or independent or any nationally packaged program, whether organized by the NCAA or not.

Noticeably, in its attempts to defend and maintain centralized control of all aspects of intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA would frame its control as a protective measure. While extensive internal regulation may limit the potential of the elites, the fragile non-elites would be safeguarded from any potential threats. However, this maintenance strategy ultimately created greater dissention and often left the institution on shaky ground.

As the divide between the larger elite universities and the smaller non-elites grew, the NCAA responded by changing the structure of its organization to make it more responsive to the needs of its various constituents. After considerations for reorganizing in proceeding years, the NCAA called its 1<sup>st</sup> Special Convention in 1973 wherein the NCAA restructured into three separate divisions under the NCAA umbrella of control. Under this new structuration, members of each division were allowed to establish criteria for membership and bylaws of governance. Ultimately, this measure significantly reduced internal conflicts among the membership of the association as small school interests were still protected (e.g. Division III, which consisted of mostly small liberal arts colleges and universities, no longer offered scholarships to athletes), while the larger elite universities were unburdened and allowed to pursue their own interests.

As the internal membership squabbles were being addressed through restructuration, new conflicts emerged with larger elite universities vying for further loosening of restrictions put in place prior to the 1973 split. Primarily, universities were seeking the flexibility to negotiate individualized television broadcast contracts. The late 1970s and early 1980s found the NCAA mired in litigation with the University of Oklahoma and the University of Georgia concerning negotiations of television contracts wherein the NCAA adamantly defended its policy of centralized negotiations (*NCAA v. Board of*

*Regents*). In these types of internal conflicts with its members, the association would put forth strong defense of its policies and its authority. Only in those instances when the courts ruled against the NCAA's policies would the association alter its rules. To maintain the legitimacy of its control, the NCAA would then restructure its rules in compliance with legislation but would attempt to re-establish its legitimacy by negotiating rules that would still allow for moderate controls from NCAA policies.

**Legitimacy.** As the NCAA rose to power, the organization along with the fields of intercollegiate and amateur athletics were wrought with significant legitimacy crises. Athletic clubs were being accused of violating rules of amateurism. College and university officials were conflicted by the contradictory logics of commercial appeal and educational identity with intercollegiate athletics. Consider the following excerpt from the New York Times,

Avery Brundage, head of the United States Olympic Association...who had been associated with amateur sports for practically a life time, expressed belief yesterday that college athletes who receive scholarships because of their ability in sports become, in fact, professionals (New York Times, Dec 12, 1949).

Further, the general public and the United States government were questioning the existence of college football following numerous player deaths. The authority of the NCAA was even brought into question from various entities that were initially resistant to joining the association. External organizations like the AAU, which was intent on controlling all aspects of amateur athletics, sought to delegitimize its competitors. Indeed, the NCAA was essentially fighting simultaneous battles throughout its formative years. It was tasked with legitimizing the field while it was working to cement its legitimacy as the dominant actor. Even as the NCAA had solidified its control, it routinely has faced issues of legitimacy.

Like actors in most incipient fields, stakeholders in intercollegiate athletics labored to legitimize their domain of activity. The strife for legitimacy was complicated by the continuous strife between NCAA and AAU. This is because the fights were often public and sometimes became issues that congress and other arms of government had to intervene. These highly visible fights contributed to the visibility, and hence cognitive legitimacy, of intercollegiate athletics in particular and amateur sports in general. In

essence, while the public might have craved more harmonious relations in amateur athletic field, its acknowledgement of the fight suggested that there was something worthy of the fight; that is, a legitimate set of activities over which the different gladiators were contesting. Conversely, these contentions often threatened the cohesion of the incipient field. Lack of cohesion can undermine the legitimacy of emerging field (Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011). In addition, through the activities of various rule committees, NCAA imposed a semblance of order in intercollegiate athletics and stabilized expectations for both internal and external stakeholders. In essence, the organization created coherence in an otherwise chaotic assemblage of disparate activities. In the rules committees, NCAA had established legislative and judicial entities for managing member grievances. This arrangement fostered a stability that was foreign to amateur athletics before the emergence of NCAA. This coherence and stability cemented the place of collegiate athletics at the heart of pastime activities of the nation.

Periodically, the NCAA and intercollegiate athletics were challenged by externalities trying to invoke changes in the field. Various foundations, commissions, organizations, and individuals positioned themselves as authoritarians within the field of intercollegiate sport. Yet, these challengers actually had minimal, if any, effect on the institutional workings. In response to these, the NCAA and its membership have adopted the strategy of ignoring and/or dismissing these challenges. The earliest such instance was the report from the Carnegie Foundation in 1929. At this time, there was concern over the payment to college athletes and the undermining of academics by athletics. The Carnegie Foundation offered a scathing report condemning these controversies. However, this report gained minimal traction as it was simply ignored by the NCAA and its membership. Oriard (2012) described the reaction as follows,

The Carnegie Foundation's indictment of schools that subsidized athletes received front-page attention wherever big-time football was played, but it appeared on a Thursday (October 24), followed by the local university's denial or a shrug of indifference, after which the newspapers refocused their attention on what really mattered—how the local home team would fare in Saturday's game.



Modern contemporaries of the Carnegie Foundation range from reports from the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and actions of players' rights advocates such as the National College Players Association to media pundits and academic scholars advocating for changes to the NCAA's governance. While these challengers have engaged in significant public relations campaigns calling for substantial changes to intercollegiate athletics, they lack the cache to institute significant alterations.

Generally speaking, the NCAA has turned a deaf ear to these "illegitimate" challengers. This is evidenced by the lack of attention or simple dismissal of these watchdogs of the field. Notably, organizations such as the Knight Commission and the Drake Group have issued several reports and op-eds criticizing the NCAA and calling for reform in intercollegiate athletics. However, these calls have been met with minimal response. Consider the following excerpt from an open letter penned by the Director of Athletics at Virginia Commonwealth University where he dismisses the significance of findings in a recent Knight Commission report that criticized excessive spending,

The article, which ran initially without any input from VCU athletics, focused on an increase in Athletics spending from 2005-2011...From the beginning of my tenure last year we developed and implemented a strategic plan that in part focused on fiscal responsibility and improving the experience of our student-athletes. It is my belief that the facts show that this focus has paid dividend...VCU Athletics is winning while spending efficiently. (see

<http://forums.vcuramnation.com/threads/response-to-the-knight-commission-report.12559/>)

As noticed in this excerpt, the strategy of dismissing consisted of de-legitimizing the challenger while also providing a moderate rebuttal to findings from reports. The strategy of ignoring these types of reports can also be noticed by unchanging actions from universities and colleges. For example, the Knight Commission has routinely called for a curtailing of spending on college athletics. However, various reports from the NCAA continue to show that spending continues to increase (Fulks, 2014; Hoffer, Humphreys, Lacombe, & Ruseski, 2015). As such, the NCAA and its members tend to ignore illegitimate challengers, as these challengers do not pose serious threats to the institution.

While much of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the NCAA was dedicated to solidifying legitimacy and establishing its dominance as the primary governor of intercollegiate and amateur athletics in the United States. The latter portion of the century presented new challenges to the institution that required entrepreneurship from the NCAA to maintain its dominance and the legitimacy of its authority. The NCAA would address legitimacy challenges by making more rules or by ardently defending the rules that had already been instituted. In other instances the NCAA modified its structure (as previously discussed) or it would even ignore the challenges. Broadly, legitimate challenges, meaning those originating from power internal and external entities that posed significant threats to the institution, were actively addressed. Conversely, illegitimate challenges were typically ignored or minimally acknowledged, as the potential for institutional damage was minimal.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this paper was to understand the progression of an organization's institutional work. While previous research has focused primarily on instances of institutional change and maintenance as independent occurrences, our research suggests that creation, maintenance, and change are continuous processes undertaken by institutional agents seeking to maintain legitimacy and power within the institution. Whereas previous research has theorized that contradictions and contentious episodes produce change agents (Seo & Creed, 2002), our research suggests that institutional elites work to strategically combat instability to avoid wholesale changes. Figure 2 summarizes this process. While we describe the processes in Figure 2 as sequential moments, it is important to note that these actions often occur in conjunction.

[insert Figure 2 approximately here]

Initially, our model proposes that institutional creation is a result of contention within a field. As we discussed previously, organized intercollegiate athletics was born from various conflicts among disparate universities, amateur sport organizations, and society at large. Many of the early issues originated from tensions in college football such as inconsistent playing rules, management of revenues in amateur sport, and player safety concerns. As these issues created legitimacy crises that left the endeavor

of intercollegiate athletic competition on unsteady footing, the NCAA emerged to organize intercollegiate football and address the various crises. The scope of the organization's control grew to include all intercollegiate athletic endeavors. As an institutional entrepreneur, the NCAA exploited weaknesses in the field and the relative power vacuum to create institutional arrangements that began to favor their interests (see also Battilana et al., 2009; David et al., 2013; Seo & Creed, 2002).

In those early stages, the process of institutional creation involved extensive boundary and practice work, which often occur simultaneously (Gieryn, 1983; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Our research suggested that this entailed extensive rule creation. As it began organizing intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA created countless rules that governed every aspect of the institution from membership criteria and game play to organizational structure. These rules denoted the boundaries of the NCAA's amateurism model and the practices that kept all aspects of the association functioning in an organized manner. While embedding its rules, the NCAA was still forced to address various legitimacy challenges. The earliest concerns revolved around the conflicting logics of commercialism in intercollegiate sport and amateurism (Barley & Kunda, 1992). The financial benefits universities were reaping from football were leading to questionable athlete recruitment practices, which were threatening to undermine the amateur ascriptions of the NCAA (Washington & Ventresca, 2004). The NCAA responded to those legitimacy challenges by creating more rules to bolster the boundaries of the institution and outline accepted practices.

Further, as outlined in Figure 2, our findings indicated that the extensive boundary and practice work resulted in further contentions both internally and from externalities. While others have considered these challenges as the sources of change agents (see Battilana et al., 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002), our research suggests that these challenges also prompted various forms of concerted maintenance work to prevent extensive changes. As the NCAA had created its boundary and practice delineations, those disadvantaged by the regulations created tensions that the NCAA was forced to address. First, external organizations and colleges that were disadvantaged by NCAA rules vied for more favorable institutional arrangements by challenging the NCAA's authority in the field or by creating competing intercollegiate

sport associations. To avoid institutional upheaval that could result from powerful rival organizations, the NCAA took specific steps to undermine its challengers. In the case of the NAIA, the NCAA's maintenance work included expanding its boundaries and modifying rules of practice to attract the smaller colleges and universities comprising the NAIA's membership. Specifically, the NCAA created a division that catered more toward the needs of smaller colleges. Now afforded access to NCAA resources and presented with protective rules, small colleges and universities began to seek NCAA membership. With its membership depleted, any further issues from the NAIA were simply ignored, as it was no longer a viable threat.

The NCAA faced similar threats from other externalities that challenged its dominance of amateur sport in the U.S. In 1921, the NCAA voted to leave the American Olympic Committee (AOC) because it felt that the AAU had too much control. Whereas the NCAA had 16 votes, the AAU had 33 votes on the AOC (Stagg 1946). The AOC responded by re-organizing and giving the AAU and the NCAA 3 votes a piece. Further, the NCAA responded to the proposed Amateur Sports Act by vigorously defending the legitimacy of its rules. These strategies ultimately reduced the contentions from these externalities to the point where the NCAA could again ignore any further challenges.

Maintenance work was also necessary for managing internal dissention. While the enabling conditions and locations of change agents in regards to power centrality are diverse, institutional change often originates from within the institution (Battilana et al., 2009). The NCAA's most consistent contestations arose from member colleges and universities being discontent with the governance of the institution. As an organization that has periodically expanded to incorporate diverse members, the NCAA has worked to maintain not only peace among its members but also its favorable position of power. Internal tensions in this case were often the result of NCAA responses to external challenges. For instance, as the NCAA expanded its boundaries to include smaller schools, internal strife resulted in the institution. Earlier institutional arrangements advantaged the powerful larger universities with ample resources, thereby alienating smaller schools to lesser positions. To mitigate this tension, the NCAA responded by creating new boundaries and practices under the broad umbrella of NCAA governance.

Technological advances, namely the advent of broadcast television, also created tensions among NCAA members. While the NCAA was initially fearful that television would harm intercollegiate sports, it soon began to exploit television broadcasts as new forms of revenue. Initially, rules were instituted that provided the NCAA with control over television contracts. When this created contention among members, the NCAA responded by defending the legitimacy of its rules. Ultimately, this maintenance strategy was forced to change when the NCAA's control was challenged in federal court. The NCAA adjusted its maintenance strategy and reconfigured its rules concerning television contract negotiations. In doing so, the NCAA maintained its position of power (though less powerful than before) and avoided wholesale changes that could have supplanted the organization from its governing position. It simply institutionalized the changed script into the fold of its boundaries.

Finally, some challenges and challengers to the institution and to the NCAA were ignored. The NCAA has generally not addressed challenges originating from non-powerful sources. For instance, among the pages of data from the NCAA archives, minimal attention was paid to watchdog organization reports or beseeched changes to rules from athlete advocate groups. These types of organizations have attempted to exploit contentions within the intercollegiate athletics yet have not held regulatory power within the field. Ultimately, the NCAA has generally not addressed these types of contestations, as they have not posed legitimate threats to the NCAA's dominance. As previously discussed, our findings also suggested that the NCAA would ignore challengers once it had diminished the capabilities of rivals. Indeed, the NCAA no longer addresses contestations from the NAIA or AAU. While both organizations were significant rivals at some point, the NCAA's boundary and practice maintenance work had depleted the power of its rivals so that they could be ignored.

### **Conclusions**

This research makes numerous contributions to previous understandings of institutional work. By examining approximately 100 years of organizational action within a contested field, our research detailed diverse contestations to the NCAA's governance of college athletics that required various forms of institutional work. This extensive historical examination of an organization and the field afforded insights

that extend beyond current conceptions. Initially, our research sought to detail the process whereby an organization evolved from change agent to maintenance agent within a contested field. This addresses a primary shortcoming in the institutional work literature wherein previous studies have, perhaps inadvertently, positioned institutional agents as either change agents or as maintenance agents (Battilana et al., 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Yet, here we show that change, creation, and maintenance work may be undertaken by the same entity that is seeking to leverage instability within the field to its advantage. This suggests that traditional relegations of institutional agency to a specific type of work may be more of a conceptual convenience rather than an accurate depiction. That is, our research indicates that institutional agents engage in work to address conflicts and leverage contentious episodes to achieve advantageous positions within the field.

As our research has challenged the distinctions of institutional actors, we also question previous categorizations of institutional work. In this regard, scholars have distinguished between institutional creation, change, and maintenance work (see Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), treating each form as unique from the next (e.g. Battilana et al., 2009; Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Recent studies have begun to recognize that these delineations among the preconceived categories may be indistinct with conceptual overlap among the forms (Currie et al., 2012; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2011). Our research furthers this trend, implying that institutional work may simply involve agents addressing contentions to further their interests. We found that the organization adapted its strategies to resolve various conflicts that threatened both the fabric of the institution but also the organization's position within the institution. To that end, the type of work was de-emphasized, suggesting that previous classifications may be convoluted. Work aimed at institutional change had become a maintenance strategy. Some maintenance efforts ultimately ended with changes to institutional arrangements. In other instances, challenges were not addressed because the perceived threat was minimal. Thus, perhaps institutional work should not be categorized and reconceptualized as agents seeking advantageous institutional arrangements.

Further, our research offers an extensive longitudinal view of institutional work beyond previous studies that were fairly myopic examinations of responses to singular events or threats (*sources?*). Our

investigation provided insight into the consequences and repercussions of organizational actions, demonstrating the continuous nature of institutional work. That is, we support previous conceptions that institutional instability is the norm (Seo & Creed, 2002) with institutional work being a recurring process of addressing contestations. Our study demonstrated that institutional work is ongoing and often simultaneous. Meaning, responses to previous challenges create subsequent conflicts requiring new forms of action. In this sense, institutional agents remain rather entrepreneurial by remaining reflexive to new challenges (see also Currie et al., 2012). Whereas previous research have discussed institutional equilibrium (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Levy & Scully, 2007; Reay & Hinings, 2005; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2011) we provide insight into what happens once an organization addresses substantial contestations by showing that institutions may never truly reach a state of equilibrium.

While there has been attention focused on institutional work, most of these projects have examined either how institutions evolve or how they persists. Our work argues that this dichotomy between creation and maintenance is a false one. As we have shown, institutions once created, are always in a battle. While in our study, we see evidence of actions where the NCAA ignores conflicts, defends its claims against some conflicts (maintenance work) and succumbs to other conflicts by creating new practices or routines (entrepreneurship), future work could examine cases where institutions might only use one response over others. This work also calls for more work that bring history in. Maybe the reason for the dichotomy on creation or maintenance has less to do with theoretical differences and more to do with the actual window of study. As such, we think our work speaks to a call made by Dick Scott in his class book on organizations and institutions: “We need better information about the life course of institutions? (Scott, 1995: 146)”

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## Appendix A List of data sources

S/No	Name	No of page
1	Flath, A. W. 1963. <i>A history of relations between the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the Amateur Athletic Union Of The United States</i> . Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University Of Michigan.	276
2	Betts, John R. 1951. "Organized Sports In Industrial America." Dissertation in <i>Physical Education</i> : Columbia University.	22
3	Roy, Ilowit. 1956. "A History of Intercollegiate Lacrosse in the United States" Columbia University	11
4	Hoover, Francis Lentz. 1958. "A History Of The National Association Of Intercollegiate Athletics." Master's thesis In <i>Physical Education</i> : Indiana University.	42
5	Land, C. B. 1977. <i>A History of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics</i> . Unpublished Ph.D., University of Southern California	70
5	Moriarty, Richard James. 1971. "The organizational history of the Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union Central" Ohio State University	120

Figure 1 – Data Structure



