

CATEGORIZING BENEFITS AND ANALYZING SUCCESS FACTORS IN  
INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC FUNDRAISING: AN FBS SCHOOL STUDY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Luke Rapisarda: Categorizing Benefits and Analyzing Success Factors in Intercollegiate Athletic Fundraising: An FBS School Study  
(Under the Direction of Nels Popp)

Intercollegiate development leaders are facing increasing challenges to raising money. As a result, it becomes increasingly important for fundraisers to overcome those challenges to continue to provide scholarship support for the university. No prior research exists on how experiential benefits have a relationship with revenue. The present study examines how benefits on the annual fund benefits charts could be leveraged to increase fundraising by first collecting all the experiential benefits and having them rated as experiential as not by experts. Schools were categorized into overperforming and underperforming based on a predictive model. A group comparison examined these two categories and their number of experiential benefits. The results of the study suggest that schools that overperformed against the predictive model average 4.57 experiential benefits on their benefits chart, while those that underperformed average 3.81. The results of this study warrant future research.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Fundraising in intercollegiate athletic programs has been a widely researched topic among scholars for the last several decades (Park et al., 2016). The origins of athletic fundraising begin much further back than that, however. Athletics specific giving first originated in the early 1900s (Batt, 2005). Recognizing how lucrative fundraising for sports could be, the landscape of athletics giving was changed in 1934 by Dr. Rupert Fike. An athletic booster club was formed at Clemson University under the stipulation that members were required to donate \$10 per year to support the department of athletics. A recent NCAA report showed that 17% of all athletics departments revenues come from donations (Popp et al., 2022), which is the third highest revenue source behind institutional support and media rights and notable ahead of both ticket revenue and licensing. In addition, according to Hobson and Rich's (2015) findings, athletic booster organizations raise millions of dollars annually to provide student-athlete scholarships, support athletic facilities, pay coaching salaries, and cover operating expenses.

The expenditures of intercollegiate athletics have only continued to grow, placing additional stress on the athletic booster clubs to generate more revenue for several reasons. First, because of excessive commercialization and a keen focus on winning, an arms race has been incited in college athletics as these issues are under the public spotlight and highly scrutinized. The arms race is accentuated by previous research by Caro and Elder (2017) suggesting when one university chooses to spend some of their budget outside of the norm that is perceived as



beneficial, other universities choose to do the same. This could be new upgrades o a facility or any other action that is perceived as a recruiting advantage. This leads to many new expenses on upgrades to keep up with other universities. Other expenditures increasing also include the cost of attendance for universities, driving up the cost of scholarships as well (Sauter, 2019). The focus on winning can be seen by the amount of spending on the salary of coaches. Division I FBS football and basketball coaches comprise 80% of respective state payrolls' highest paid employees (Gibson, 2019). Additionally, from 2005 to 2020, coaching salaries for female head coaches increased by about 136 percent, and assistant male coaches rose by 172 percent (Mueller, 2023). The public perception is that a good coach can lead to more winning, and, as a result, athletic departments are willing to spend more on coaches than ever, including large buyouts and severance packages.

Another large driver of the rise in the cost of college athletics is the introduction of NIL collectives. There has been longstanding scrutiny of the NCAA's amateurism model as college sport has become a multi-billion-dollar business, and student-athletes are being exploited by not getting a cut. Action upon this anti-trust scrutiny begins with the unanimous Supreme Court ruling in *NCAA v. Alston* (2021). *NCAA v. Alston* appears to have changed the entire landscape of intercollegiate athletics. On July 1, 2021, the NCAA adopted a new policy that opened the floodgates for student-athletes to receive unlimited educational benefits as defined by each institution. As a result, student-athletes were allowed to receive payment for their name, image, and likeness. Within these boundaries lies the future of NIL: collectives. In the now over-the-table landscape of NIL, third-party "collectives" made of fans and boosters now pool their money to pay players. These collectives offer diverse benefits in exchange for athlete payments, with the prevalent model being subscription-based, granting fans access to athlete-generated

content (Holden et al., 2023). These collectives negotiated agreements pay incoming athletes in exchange for the use of their NIL in the form of a social media post, appearing at a charitable event, or even signing an autograph.

Although the floodgates of NIL being opened proved lucrative for student-athletes, it could negatively affect the long-standing booster clubs for NCAA schools. If donors choose to donate less to the booster clubs, and more or all their money to the collective, there will be less money for items that the booster clubs typically fund like scholarships, athletic facilities, coaching salaries, and others.

Additional challenges have exacerbated the need for more revenue as well, including tax cuts and the COVID-19 Pandemic. In 2017, the Tax Cut and Job Act (TCJA) was signed. This new policy eliminated the tax-related benefits for season ticket purchases and saved the government \$200 million, but cost booster clubs deeply. The new policy eliminates the incentive of donors to give for tax-related benefits and led to a 49% decrease in donations from 2017 (Pre-TCJA) to 2020 (Post-TCJA) (Brown, 2020). The year 2020 also posed a unique challenge, as the global pandemic caused the main source of NCAA revenue, the March Madness tournament, to be cancelled. The Indianapolis Business Journal reported that the cancellation of March Madness disallowed the payment of \$375 million to NCAA institutions, placing additional strain on booster clubs to raise money.

With the increase expenditures due to the rising cost of intercollegiate athletics, the introduction of NIL collectives, and changes in tax policy, athletic departments are turning to their fundraising to continue to raise more money to remain financially sound (Atwater et. Al, 2022). This insatiable pursuit of additional revenue can be seen in the growth of fundraising in intercollegiate athletics. The total amount of donor contributions and endowments for DI FBS

autonomy institutions has risen from \$1,259,000,000 to \$1,981,000 in 2020 (NCAA, 2023), prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the many ways development departments attempt to raise the amount of donations given is using tiered rewards systems in their Annual Fund. These tiered reward systems are explained through a benefit chart, which often delineates the least amount of money required to obtain that benefit at the sought-after level. Prior research has been done to understand the current structure of these rewards in how many tiered levels work best, the most effective amount at the highest level, and to understand that the greater the exclusivity of the reward, the more money it is worth as seen within the airline and hotel industry (Kipkorir and Macário, 2022). The most exclusive of these rewards are often based in experiential assets. This can be seen with benefits like Clemson’s “golf outing with coaches” reward or Virginia Tech’s “memorable experiences” including an invitation to a “behind the scenes” experience at an Olympic sport, invitation to a pre-game experience, invitation to the Enter Sandman and tunnel experience, exclusive Virginia Tech Travel Opportunities, and an exclusive Hokie Ambassador experience. This is remarkable, as these experiences cost the development department very little or no money to include donors in but yield the highest desire as they are such experiences. There is currently no research that explains the value of these experiences within intercollegiate athletics, and therefore it is unknown as to whether including unique experiential assets on benefits charts leads to greater financial performance by the fundraising arms.

It is important for athletic departments to understand the importance of including unique experiences in their benefits charts. Despite the need to understand what other departments are doing, there is no published research that compiles amount experiences each university offers. The current study is exploratory in nature and designed to help mend the gap in fundraising

literature within the field of intercollegiate athletic by categorizing benefits into standard and unique benefits and understanding their relationship on each athletic department's financial success. The purpose of the study is to investigate and analyze the experiential benefits, explanatory variables, and predictive models associated with fundraising efforts in FBS schools' athletics development departments.

### **Research Questions**

- RQ1: What are the key benefits and incentives offered by FBS schools' athletics development departments, and how do they categorize into standard or experiential benefits?
- RQ2: Which universities overperformed in 2022 based on a predictive model using 2021 data and multiple explanatory variables?
- RQ3: What is the group comparison between universities that outperformed their expected donations and offering benefits categorized as experiences?

### **Definition of Terms**

1. **Athletic Booster Club:** An organization that raises private funding for college athletics
2. **Donor:** Any person who has donated money to a university or college's athletic booster club
3. **Donor Motivation:** Contributing factors that affect an individual's decision to give
4. **NIL:** Name, Image, and likeness

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Donor Motivation

Because of the ever-increasing importance of donations to the success of athletics departments, understanding why college athletics donors give in the first place is of foundational importance, especially within the context of the present study. There is robust literature on the factors that influence donor motivation (Gladden et al., 2005; Mahony et al., 2003; Park et al., 2016; Staurowsky et al., 1996; Stinson & Howard, 2004; Tsotsou, 1998). Ko et al. (2014) narrowed donor motivation into the following categories:

(a) philanthropy (e.g., feel good and support the department), (b) vicarious achievement (e.g., intrinsic rewards, achievement, and basking in reflected glory), (c) commitment (e.g., love for the school and athletes), (d) affiliation (e.g., sense of belongingness), (e) socialization (e.g., associate with other donors), (f) public recognition (e.g., ego enhancement), (g) tangible benefits (e.g., better seats, parking, and suites), and (h) power (e.g., involvement in programmatic decisions). (p. 527)

The present study mainly focuses on tangible benefits. Additional prior literature has further broken down donor motivation showing donors give for reasons falling into two categories: altruistic reasons or transactional reasons (Comstock 1989; Hammersmith 1985; Mann, 2007; Sojka, 1986). Donors who give solely to receive tangible benefits are categorized as

transaction-motivated, with their motivations often centering around benefits like priority seating and parking privileges (Isherwood, 1986). Mahoney et al.'s 2003 study also showed that ticket-related benefits are the top motivator among these athletic donors. However, donors who are motivated to give for intangible reasons or primarily for the benefit of recipients are considered altruistically motivated (Popp, Barrett & Weight, 2016). Research suggests donors with altruistic motivations are influenced by factors like special recognition (Isherwood, 1986), supporting the image of their state and university (Hammersmith, 1985), the desire to support student-athletes' academic achievement and athletic performances (Mahoney et al., 2003), and enhancing the quality and image of their respective athletic programs (Comstock, 1988; Hammersmith, 1985).

The present study focuses on the transactional reasons why athletic donors give money to the athletic department. The primary focus is on which special experiences can be curated for donors that would add value to the point where donors feel inclined to donate to the next benefit level to receive the exclusive experience. Therefore, fundraising organizations should make a conscious effort to ensure that these experiential benefits are maintained at a level that donors perceive as acceptable,

### **Tiered Rewards Systems**

Tiered Rewards Systems are effectively used to activate consumption and stimulate revenue in both the hotel industry (Yu et Al., 2022), and the airline industry (Kipkorir et al., 2022). The desired outcomes of these rewards systems are to incentivize the consumer to continually give the hotel chain or airline their business in exchange for a benefit. These programs were defined as supplier's structural effort that provides customers with loyalty incentives such as points redeemable for prizes or discounts to increase customers' attitudinal and behavioral commitment to the supplier's market offering (Sharp and Sharp, 1997). There

must be an increase from level to level in perceived value to achieve the desired outcome of incentivizing further and continued membership (Dowling & Uncles, 1997). Additionally, these programs intend to enhance each member's feeling of belonging, in addition to providing them with a benefit (Hu et al., 2010). For these programs to be especially effective, they often need to have the largest, most valuable rewards as the hardest award to achieve (Chen, 2016).

Tiered reward systems are used in many fundraising sectors as well, including intercollegiate athletics (Mahoney et al., 2003). The use of tiered rewards systems is most seen in athletic booster clubs in Annual Funds. These tiered reward systems are explained through a benefit chart, which often delineates the least amount of money required to obtain that benefit at each level. Similar to the airline and hotel industry, the most exclusive rewards are at the top of the benefit charts. Prior research suggests that most people donating only give to the lowest amount required to receive the benefit, and that if a donor is near the next level, they will typically give more to achieve that level (McCall & Voorhees, 2010). Park et al (2016) discovered that donors are highly motivated by benefits, suggesting that these benefit charts do facilitate the increase of revenue in athletic departments. In the much-needed attempt to boost donor giving, cultivate lasting donor loyalty, and optimize yearly contribution revenue, tiered reward systems have emerged as a key strategy. Leaders in athletic fundraising must adjust their most exclusive benefits to incentivize them to continue donating to the highest level. This could include exclusive experiences that only the highest tier receives, such as an away game trip with the football team. As these are key strategies, it is critical to evaluate which incentives are the most valuable and unique to donors.

## **Experientialism and its Influence on Donor Behavior**

Experientialism, as proposed by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003), asserts that individuals derive greater satisfaction and happiness from experiential purchases compared to material possessions. This theory posits that unique experiences contribute significantly to an individual's well-being and sense of fulfillment. The distinction between material and experiential purchases defines the former as “spending money with the primary intention of acquiring a material possession – a tangible object that you obtain and keep in your possession” and the latter as “spending money with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience—an event or series of events that you personally encounter or live through,” (p. 1194). In another study by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003), a diverse group of Americans were tasked with recalling both a material purchase and an experiential one, then gauging which brought them greater happiness. Across various demographic parameters such as age, race, gender, income, marital status, and region, a noteworthy majority expressed that their experiential purchase brought them more joy, which would be categorized as an “experience” in the present study.

Intuitively, it makes sense that the most valuable items on benefits charts are experiences. For example, the Enter Sandman experience at Virginia Tech is only offered to donors in the benefit zone third highest from the top, with the only other more exclusive experiences being experiential based as well. Of note, the most exclusive of these experiences, like the Enter Sandman Experience, come with very little cost to the athletic department. Therefore, the strategic ideation of unique experiences and correct placement on a benefit chart is crucial to successful benefit chart.

Based on the literature review, the present research takes factors that have been identified and uses them to categorize experiences offered as benefits by fundraising departments. The



relationship potentially supports the idea that to best take advantage of the positive effects of offering unique experiences and to positively move them to donate into the next level, athletics fundraising organizations should look to improve and expand upon the most important unique experiences on their benefits charts. The present study aims to investigate if emphasizing unique experiential benefits in fundraising benefit charts could be a potential driver for increased donor contributions. Crafting benefit chart incentives that offer distinctive, memorable experiences may not only attract but also retain donors by tapping into their intrinsic motivation for experiential fulfillment.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To address RQ1, the benefits charts were collected from the development arm of every FBS athletics department ( $n=103$ ). The benefits and associated price ranges were recorded through examining each institution's athletic department's website. Baylor, Boston College, BYU, Duke, Liberty, Miami (FL), Navy, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Rice, SMU, Stanford, Syracuse, TCU, Temple, Tulane, Tulsa, USC, Vanderbilt, and Wake Forest were excluded as they are private institutions with no data available about the dependent variable: donation contributions to the athletics department. Alabama, Auburn, Eastern Michigan, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio State, and Oregon were also excluded as they only use priority points for parking and ticketing, with no benefits chart in an annual fund. Army, Jacksonville State, and South Alabama had no data available, as the fundraising at these universities is done directly through university advancement, meaning there is no athletics annual fund.

After every benefit from these charts was collected, the list was sent to two experts in the athletics development field to be rated as experiential or a standard benefit. The kappa ( $k$ , Cohen, 1960) was then computed and utilized. Kappa provides credit to which the agreement between the two raters exceeds what would normally be achieved by chance (Acock, 2012). The two judges agreed in 94.4% of the cases, which resulted in a coefficient of agreement of .96 ( $z = .008$ ,  $p < .001$ ), deemed by Landis and Koch (1977) to be good reliability (.80 is considered very good). The disputed categories were discussed and resolved after further discussion. Once the experiential benefits were identified, they were counted, coded, and themed into the following

categories: (a) exclusive access to teams (b) travel opportunities (c) hospitality (d) donor event invites (e) recognition and appreciation (f) special game day experiences (g) access to coaches/AD's and (h) other benefits. They were then broken into low value benefits (\$5,000 or less), medium value benefits (\$5,001 to \$24,999) and high value benefits (\$25,000 or more). Once all the data were collected, SPSS, a statistical software, was used to analyze the experiential benefits.

To address RQ2, data were collected regarding each of the explanatory variables from a stratified sample of NCAA FBS Institutions ( $n = 103$ ). Several independent variables were collected to be used in the analysis: (a) enrollment, (b) men's basketball winning percentage, (c) population of the nearest metropolitan statistical area nearest to the institution (d) conference affiliation and (e) football all-time winning percentage. These variables were suggested by prior research as statistically significant explanatory variables of annual athletic contribution revenues (McEvoy, Morse & Shapiro, 2013). Enrollment was collected via the U.S News & World Report at [usnews.com](http://usnews.com). Men's basketball and football winning percentages were collected from the NCAA at [stats.ncaa.com](http://stats.ncaa.com). The population of the nearest metropolitan statistical area nearest to the institution was collected via data from the U.S Census. Once all the data were collected in Excel, it was imported into an SPSS electronic file to be used for analysis. SPSS was then used to perform a multiple regression analysis. The model was trained using data from 2021 to create the constant, coefficients, and the predictive model. The data from 2022 was then entered into the model to create a predicted amount the dependent variable of the model, athletic department fundraising revenue. The dependent variable for the analysis was donor contribution revenue. With a sample of  $n = 103$ , a maximum of five independent variables should be used. Regression analysis literature suggests a rule of thumb for sample size that only one independent variable

should be tested for every 20 dependent variable observations (Harrell, 2020). Factors were reduced by analyzing the correlation coefficients in a correlation matrix as to choose five factors that were not highly correlated with each other. Then, schools were ranked from the most overperforming (dollars above the predicted amount), to the most underperforming (dollars below the predicted amount) and were then segmented into quartiles for further analysis

To address RQ3, the relationship between the most overperforming and underperforming was evaluated through creating box plots displaying data points using the descriptive statistics collected from RQ1. The results were then analyzed and discussed.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

To answer RQ1, descriptive statistics were analyzed using SPSS software. Of the total benefits on the benefit chart ( $n=1550$ ), 441 were rated as experiential (28.4%). Of the 441 benefits, 77 were identified as low value benefits (\$5,000 or less), 188 were identified as medium value benefits (\$5,001 to \$24,999), and 176 were identified as high value benefits (\$25,000 or more). Of the high rated benefits, 62 schools ( $n=103$ ) had an experiential benefit at their highest tier. Themes were identified as (a) exclusive access to teams, (b) travel opportunities, (c) hospitality, (d) donor event invites, (e) recognition and appreciation, (f) special game day experiences, (g) access to coaches/AD's, and (h) all other benefits (see Table 1).

Table 1.  
*Descriptive Statistics for Experiential Benefits*

<u>Category of Benefit</u>	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Donor Event Invites	139	31.5%
Hospitality	112	25.4%
Special Game Day Experiences	65	14.7%
Travel Opportunities	49	11.1%
Access to Coaches/AD	37	8.4%
Access to Teams	21	4.8%
Other	10	2.4%
Recognition/appreciation	8	1.7%
Total	441	100%

## Regression Analysis

To answer RQ2, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS to determine if any of the chosen factors had a statistically significant relationship with the revenue from donations. A maximum of five factors were to be included in the regression. All independent variables were analyzed in order to determine which factors were the most highly correlated. To avoid multicollinearity, variables were selected for the regression based on the statistical significance of their correlations. The following factors were selected to be included in the preliminary regression: enrollment, men's basketball winning percentage, population of the nearest metropolitan statistical area nearest to the institution, conference affiliation, and football all-time winning percentage. Regression analysis literature suggests a rule of thumb for sample size that only one independent variable should be tested for every 20 dependent variable observations (Harrell, 2020). Descriptive statistics for the factors used in the regression are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*Descriptive Statistics for Linear Regression Model*

Variable	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation
Revenue Generated	103	14608589.50	15137493.30
Enrollment	103	19718.76	7446.47
Football All-Time WPCT	103	.54	.08
MBB All-Time WPCT	103	.55	.07
MSAPOP	103	1073129	1930132.79
Conference Affiliation	103	.44	.50

Tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Conference Code,  $VIF = 1.632$ ; MBB Winning %,  $VIF = 1.246$ ; Enrollment,  $VIF = 1.459$ ; MSA population,  $VIF = 1.140$ ; Football Winning %,  $VIF = 1.119$ ). Results of the preliminary multiple regression revealed that three of the factors were statistically significant at

an alpha level of .05. The final regression included men’s basketball winning percentage, football winning percentage, enrollment, conference affiliation, and MSA population. Results of the final regression are reflected in Table 3 and indicate these four of these independent variables are statistically significant in explaining 56% of the variance in the donation amount ( $F(5,96) = 24.466, p < .001, R^2 = .56$ ). These variables included men’s basketball winning percentage ( $t = 1.428, p = .157$ ), football winning percentage ( $t = 3.124, p = .002$ ), enrollment ( $t = 2.020, p = .046$ ), MSA population ( $t = -1.814, p = .073$ ), and conference affiliation ( $t = 5.977, p < .001$ ).

Table 3.  
*Final Predictive Model*

Variable	Coefficient	Coefficient <i>t</i> -statistics	Significance	VIF
(Constant)	-32185177.5	-2.801	.006 <sup>a</sup>	
ENROLL	342.0	2.020	.046 <sup>a</sup>	1.459
MBBWPCT	22094869.6	1.428	.157	1.246
MSAPOP	-1.025	-1.814	.073	1.140
CONFERENCE	15475593.4	5.977	.000 <sup>a</sup>	1.634
FBWPCT	40570959	3.124	.002 <sup>a</sup>	1.119
		<i>F</i> -statistic	24.466	
		Significance	.000 <sup>a</sup>	
		<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.560	
		Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.537	

<sup>a</sup>Significant at the .05 level

According to the results of the multiple regression, this model suggests that if a university’s men’s basketball program went from 0 wins, to winning every game, revenue increases by approximately \$22,094,869 ( $\beta = 22094869.6, t(103) = 1.428, p = .157$ ) when all other factors are equal. For each additional student enrolled at the university, the model suggests that revenue would increase by \$342 ( $\beta = 342.025, t(103) = 2.020, p = .046$ ) when all other factors are equal. For each additional person in the nearest MSA, the model suggests that the revenue should decrease by \$1.03 when all other factors are equal ( $\beta = -1.025, t(103) = -1.814, p = .073$ ). If the school is in a Power 5 conference, the model suggests revenue should increase by

\$15,710,606 ( $\beta = 15710606.7$ ,  $t(103) = 5.977$ ,  $p < .001$ ) if all factors are equal. The model suggests if a university's football program went from 0 wins, to winning every game, revenue increases by approximately \$40,570,959, ( $\beta = 40570959$ ,  $t(103) = 3.124$ ,  $p = .002$ ) when all other factors are equal.

To answer which schools overperformed and underperformed their predicted value in 2022, the following equation was utilized:

$$y = 22094869.6(X1) + 342.025(X2) - 1.025(X3) + 15710606.7(X4) + 40570959.5(X5) - 32185177.5$$

See table 4 to find the rankings of the overperformers and see table 5 to see the rankings of the underperformers.



Table 4.  
*Overperformers Based on Predictive Model from 2021 Data*

Institution	Revenue Overperformed	Institution	Revenue Overperformed
Georgia	57783223	FAU	3782339
LSU	43541798	Cincinnati	3497618
Texas	40080707	La Monroe	3426208
Clemson	33026217	Missouri	3141171
Florida	28405789	Tennessee	2718665
Michigan State	19984450	New Mexico	2070441
Illinois	15409583	Kansas	2060252
Texas A&M	15044764	Marshall	1867324
Ole Miss	11704904	N. M. State	1631040
Oklahoma	9672007	Penn State	1437536
South Carolina	9381680	Virginia	1371647
Charlotte	9176513	Iowa State	1189096
San Diego State	8826164	UTEP	1053566
Kansas State	7932043	UAB	770676
Wyoming	7893126	Miss. State	746164
Florida State	7595231	Louisiana	700411
Georgia State	7562266	FIU	668668
Louisville	7024951	Southern Miss.	129363
Iowa	6622217		
East Carolina	6541059		
UConn	6372947		
Air Force	5025208		
Arkansas State	4717703		
Old Dominion	4699488		
Colorado State	4395984		
UNLV	3866568		

Table 5.  
*Underperformers Based on Predictive Model from 2021 Data*

Institution	Revenue Underperformed	Institution	Revenue Underperformed
Arizona	-23065760	Ohio	-5238552
Utah	-17662887	Oklahoma State	-5209774
Maryland	-17618407	Middle Tenn. St.	-5072725
Rutgers	-17367368	UCF	-5014311
Arizona State	-16728562	Minnesota	-4732986
Colorado	-15306897	Virginia Tech	-4397212
Oregon State	-15206791	Bowling Green	-4350137
Kennesaw St.	-15142103	UMass	-4241351
JMU	-14580239	Wisconsin	-3839267
California	-13448556	Troy	-3785435
West Virginia	-12932047	UTSA	-3749321
Washington St.	-12512009	Ball State	-3746422
NC State	-10782079	Fresno State	-3359502
Arkansas	-9335362	Utah State	-3326876
Georgia So.	-8544209	Toledo	-3187467
Texas State	-8538339	San Jose State	-2721582
North Carolina	-8152356	Washington	-2573089
W. Kentucky	-8023351	W. Michigan	-2571620
Purdue	-8018444	La Tech	-2413317
Coast. Carolina	-7677233	C. Michigan	-2268901
North Texas	-7149156	Houston	-2162564
Boise State	-7071680	Nevada	-2160737
Sam Houston	-6720727	South Florida	-1956634
Miami (OH)	-6576031	Akron	-1633167
Nebraska	-5851218	Memphis	-1443869
App. State	-5601166	Buffalo	-1126496
Georgia Tech	-5370263	UCLA	-1110721
		Hawaii	-963469
		Kent State	-736397
		NIU	-610749
		Texas Tech	-303174
		Kentucky	-8762

To answer RQ3 and explore the relationship between the schools categorized as “overperformers” and “underperformers, descriptive statistics were analyzed with their relationship to number of benefits. The results were then placed in a box plot (see figures 1 and 2).

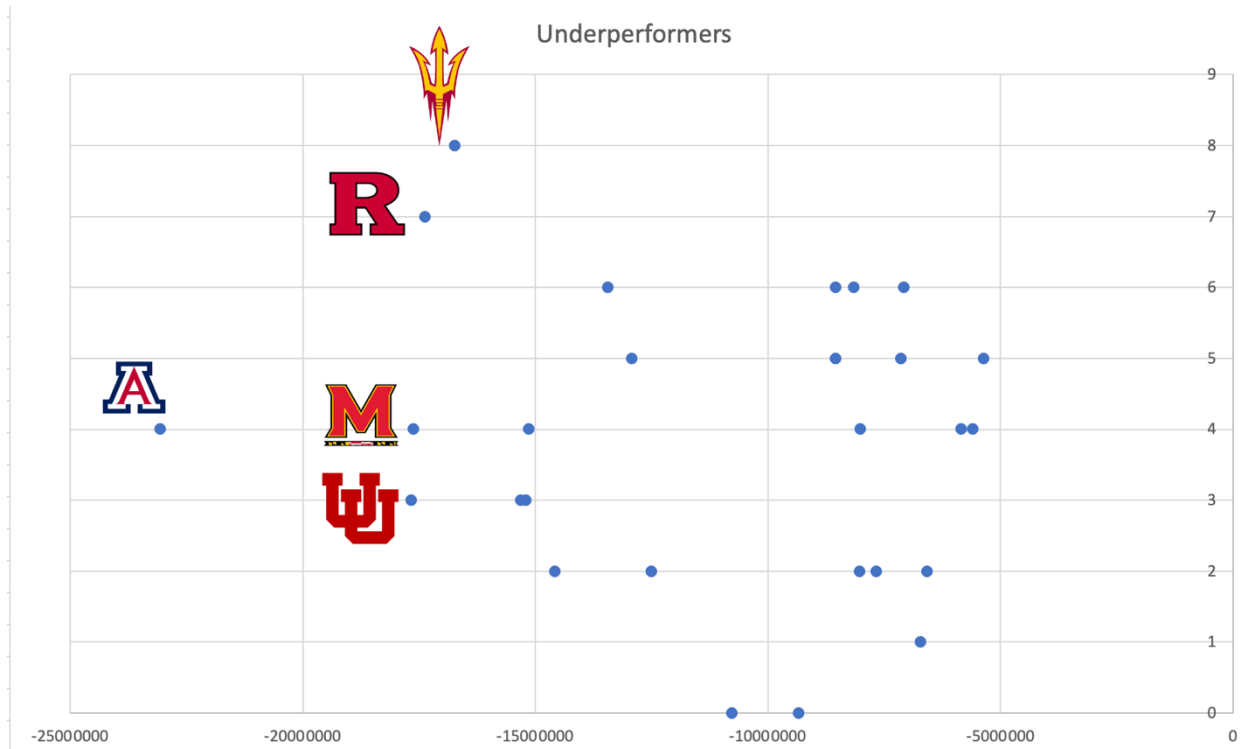


Figure 1

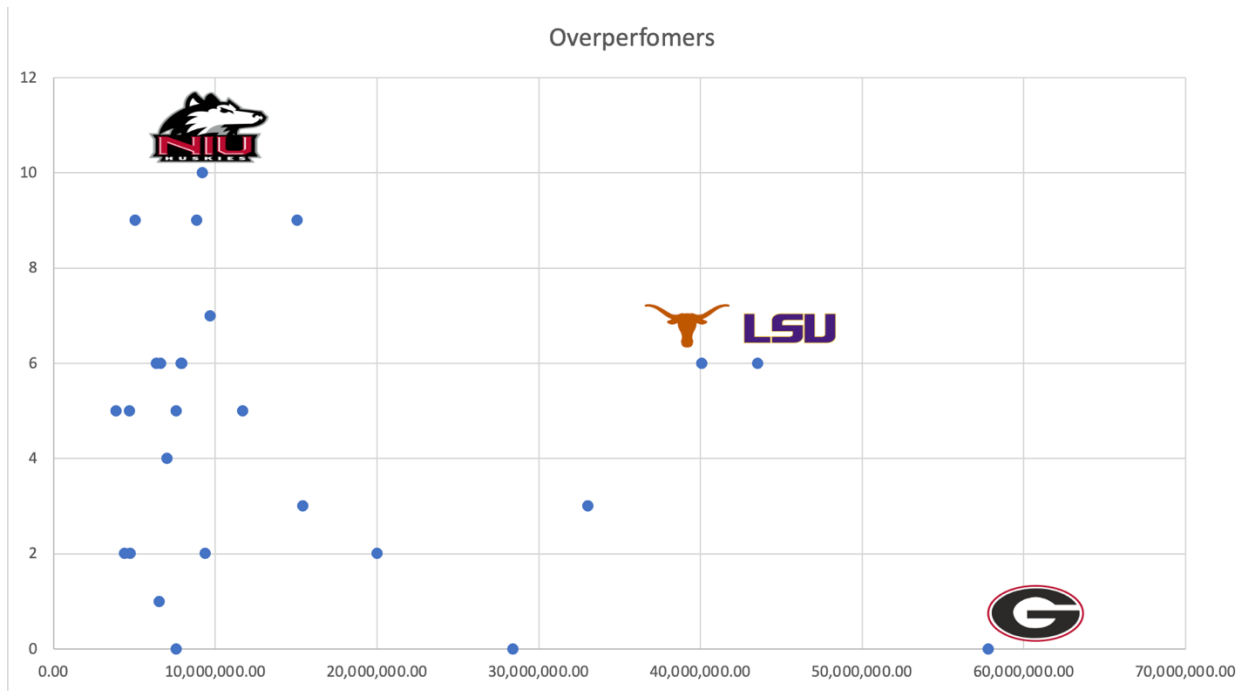


Figure 2

Averages were calculated for each of the categories. Underperformers averaged 3.81 experiential benefits, while overperformers averaged 4.57 experiential benefits. In the category that moves the needle the most, the benefits that are valued at \$25,000 or more, underperformers averaged 1.7 experiential benefits, while overperformers averaged 2 experiential benefits (see Table 6).

Table 6.

*Final Average Number of Experiential Benefits*

Variable	Overperformers	Underperformers
Experiential Benefits	4.57	3.81
Experiential Benefits Over \$25,000	2.0	1.7

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Summary and Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between schools that overperform or underperform in donations received and the experiential benefits they have on their benefits charts. Prior to this study, no research existed analyzing the relationship between these exclusive experiential benefits and the revenue that each of these requires which suggests that rather than schools making a decision guided by research, decisions are likely based on mimetic isomorphism (Lipsey, 2019). As there is an increasing need for additional streams of revenue for college athletics departments due to the increase expenditures due to the rising cost of intercollegiate athletics, the introduction of NIL collectives, and changes in tax policy, fundraising organizations must raise more money to continue to meet the needs of these increasing demands. To achieve this goal, these organizations should routinely assess whether their benefits charts incentivize donors to give more. As such, attention should be given to determining these experiences and their placement on a benefit chart to continually increase giving.

Descriptive statistics reveal that 28.4% of benefits across the 103 institutions in the study are “experiential” in nature. Eight institutions offered no experiential benefits, while one school offered 12 benefits (UCLA), and two schools (Houston and Bowling Green) were close behind with 11. The types of experiential benefits varied widely, with common offerings including exclusive access to teams, such as invites to practices and special events like team banquets.

Additionally, travel opportunities, particularly attending away games, predominantly in football, were prevalent, with select schools extending the privilege to any sports team of choice. Hospitality benefits, encompassing pre-game tailgates and access to suites, were another large contributor. Donor event invites, tailored specifically for members of the annual fund, were a common practice, ranging from scholarship dinners to student-athlete award shows. Special gameday experiences, such as sideline passes at football games, were another common theme. Furthermore, benefits facilitating direct interaction with coaches and athletic directors, including golf outings and personalized calls, were offered as well. Several benefits were categorized into an “other” other category due to their uniqueness, ranging from painting the checkerboard on the football field at Tennessee to invitations to exclusive events like Riverboat Cruises and movie nights at the football stadium. These findings show the diverse array of benefits employed by institutions to engage donors and enhance their philanthropic endeavors.

Beyond their novelty and appeal, these benefits often come at a low cost to the institution, suggesting a strategic opportunity to enhance fundraising efforts. By incorporating such unique and experiential benefits into their fundraising strategies, institutions stand to not only enrich donor experiences but also potentially augment their fundraising outcomes. This highlights the importance of strategic thinking and creativity in designing donor engagement initiatives, as institutions seek to cultivate lasting relationships and secure vital financial support.

Assessing the descriptive statistics per conference shows that overall, schools in the Power 5 and schools in the Group of 5 averaged almost the same number of experiential benefits at 4.2 and 4.3 respectively. However, schools in the Group of 5 averaged one experiential benefit at the \$25,000 or more level, where schools in the Power 5 averaged three experiential benefits at this level. At both small and large institutions alike, there is an opportunity to make these

experiential benefits for fans. Some might say that these privileges hold greater significance at Power 5 institutions due to their restricted accessibility; ordinarily, fans lack the chance to engage with coaches or spectate from the sidelines during football matches. However, this is not about exclusivity, but moreover about the willingness to market and operate it by both event management staff and development departments. Additionally, the average highest benefit level at a Power 5 institution significantly exceeds that of a Group of 5 institution (Lipsey et al., 2019), potentially contributing to the disparity in these averages.

Results of the multiple linear regression reveal 56% of the variance in donor contributions can be explained by five of the factors used in the analysis: men's basketball winning percentage, football winning percentage, enrollment, conference affiliation, and MSA population. The results suggest a positive effect between all five factors and donor contributions. This supports the previous literature that suggest the relationships between athletics revenue and these factors (McEvoy, Morse & Shapiro, 2013).

Football and men's basketball success have been shown to significantly impact donation contributions and revenue (Chung, 2015). Specifically, this research reveals that for established schools, regular season wins in football predominantly drive revenue growth, whereas less-established schools benefit significantly from invitations to prestigious bowl games. Similarly, in men's basketball, there exists a linear correlation between revenue and success, particularly for historically successful programs, which often offer basketball ticket purchasing options alongside top tier giving levels. Donors to college athletics are primarily motivated by transactional motives, expecting valuable benefits in return for their contributions (Mahoney et al., 2003). Moreover, factors such as enrollment, conference affiliation, and metropolitan statistical area (MSA) population have been identified as predictors of donor contributions. Of

interest in the present study, men's basketball winning percentage was moderately significant, while football winning percentage was very significant, therefore suggesting that the football team winning affects donations more than the men's basketball team winning. Schools with higher enrollment and those within the Power 5 conferences tend to attract more donors and generate higher revenues, likely due to larger fan bases and historical success. Additionally, areas with larger populations show increased contributions, indicating a positive relationship between local population size and spending on entertainment like college sporting events. Of note is well is that enrollment's statistical significance is much more impactful than that of the population, which could be true as there could be a big school with high enrollment in a smaller town.

In the present study, the model creation process utilized data from 2021 to establish the expected outcomes for 2022. The resulting list was categorized based on the degree of overperformance and underperformance, segmented into four groups. Underperforming schools exhibited an average of 3.81 experiential benefits, while overperformers averaging 4.57 experiential benefits. Within the category demonstrating the most significant impact, where benefits valued at \$25,000 or more were analyzed, underperforming schools averaged 1.7 experiential benefits, while overperformers averaged 2. Top overperformers often have successful football programs, like institutions such as Georgia, LSU, Texas, Clemson, and Florida. However, schools experiencing notable underperformance often exhibit poor football reputations such as Rutgers, Maryland, Colorado, Cal, and ASU. These observations suggest a potential relationship between athletic success and donation performance, warranting further investigation.



This group comparison between the benefits suggests there may be a positive relationship between having more experiential benefits and overperforming the expected benchmark for each respective university. The findings of this study align with the principles of experientialism as proposed by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003), highlighting the significant impact of experiential purchases on individual satisfaction and well-being. Specifically, the results demonstrate that universities that overperformed in terms of money raised averaged 4.57 experiential benefits in the present study, while those who were categorized as underperformers averaged 3.81. This disparity in this group comparison could underscore the importance of unique experiences in driving donor engagement and contributions within athletic fundraising contexts. Experiential benefits, shown to bring significant joy across various demographic parameters (Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003), are particularly compelling for athletics fundraisers. Further research into the effect of experiences on donor giving is warranted as a result.

Regarding the types of experiential benefits offered by institutions, several observations emerge, particularly in relation to successful fundraising outcomes. Institutions that excel in fundraising often provide a diverse range of experiential benefits tailored to the preferences and interests of their donor base. These benefits may include exclusive access to athletic events, behind-the-scenes experiences with coaches and athletes, and VIP treatment at game-day festivities. Successful fundraising institutions appear to successfully leverage experiential benefits strategically to cultivate meaningful connections and foster donor loyalty. Institutions that prioritize unique and memorable experiences tend to garner greater donor engagement and support, as evidenced by their fundraising success.

Additionally, top-performing schools often exhibit a combination of factors contributing to their success, including athletic excellence, strong alumni engagement, and effective

fundraising strategies. These institutions leverage their athletic achievements and storied traditions to cultivate a sense of pride and loyalty among alumni and donors, driving increased philanthropic support. Underperforming schools may face challenges such as limited resources, lack of success or lack of visibility. Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for underperforming schools to enhance their fundraising efforts by prioritizing donor engagement, diversifying their revenue streams, and leveraging their unique strengths and assets. Although donations are often reliant on team success, these types of experiences that are not reliant on a successful team could help move the needle for development teams. For example, a donor may not be willing to pay more for an additional benefit of watching a practice for a team that does not perform well on the field. However, a donor may pay more for a tailgating experience or an opportunity to speak with the athletic director may be more appealing, since they are not as tied to success. These strategies could be useful for fundraising regardless of the size, history, or success of the teams. By identifying areas for improvement like these and implementing targeted strategies, underperforming schools can position themselves for greater fundraising success in the future. A deeper understanding of the factors contributing to fundraising success can empower institutions to identify areas for improvement and implement targeted interventions to enhance their fundraising effectiveness. The strategic placement of such experiences on benefit charts could emerge as a critical factor in maximizing their effectiveness. Exclusive experiential offerings emerge as particularly valuable assets for fundraising organizations, despite their relatively low cost. The present research shows the potential need for fundraising departments to prioritize the enhancement and expansion of unique experiential benefits in their fundraising strategies. By capitalizing on donors' intrinsic motivation for experiential fulfillment,

organizations can not only attract but also retain donors more effectively, ultimately fostering increased donor contributions and support.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study produced noteworthy findings, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the research. First, the final regression model did not explain the total variance donation amount, as the R<sup>2</sup> value was 56% of the variance in the donation amount, meaning that about 44% percent of the variance was not explained by the model. This leaves a significant amount of room for other factors to play a role in the variance that predicted overperformers and underperformers. This study was limited to five variables in the final model due to the size of the sample ( $n = 103$ ). A suggestion to better define the data would be to increase the sample size to include more factors, data could be collected for multiple years. Additionally, there is a possibility that different variables could be used to determine more of the variance and might create a better model. There are many additional factors that could be included in future research, such as: size of the athletic department, bowl game appearances, football attendance, and size of the booster club.

Furthermore, the study excluded 31 schools within the FBS due to limited access to giving level information. These schools were either found to lack benefit charts or giving levels on their websites, or they did not employ tiered rewards systems. Additionally, some schools' revenue data was unavailable, particularly those categorized as private institutions.

One other significant limitation was the relationship between the experiential benefits and the schools they were associated with in terms of overperforming and underperforming was assessed through a comparison, rather than a correlation or regression, leaving room for the factors unaccounted for by explanatory variables.

One suggestion for future research would be to evaluate the relationship with over performing and underperforming as a part of a linear regression model, to see the exact value of each experiential benefit and its significance, if any. Additionally, exploring alternative approaches, such as analyzing the average dollar amount of experiences and comparing it to revenue, could prove beneficial. Also, a future study could look at the different themes within benefits charts and their relationship with revenue as well, like parking or priority ticket priority. Another form of research that could also be helpful would be to take a broader look at benefits charts and everything on them to gather all the information about what other universities are doing all in one place. In addition to that, a qualitative study interviewing development staff to discover the strategies and objectives they use in creating their benefits structure would help mend the gap in understanding how these decisions are made, what are the biggest barriers to achieving the desired benefits, and if these decisions are data-driven by prior research.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the relationship between schools' donation performance and the presence of experiential benefits on their fundraising charts, addressing a gap in existing research. The findings shed light on the group comparison between these two variables and donor engagement within athletic fundraising contexts. Institutions that overperformed in terms of experiential benefits exhibited higher levels of money raised, averaging 4.57 on our scale, compared to underperforming institutions, which averaged 3.81. This discrepancy could potentially show the importance of strategically incorporating exclusive experiential offerings into fundraising strategies. The study emphasized the need for fundraising departments to continually assess and enhance their benefits charts, with a focus on maximizing the appeal of unique experiential benefits. Descriptive statistics revealed a considerable portion of benefits

across institutions were categorized as experiential, with varying values and themes. Furthermore, the regression analysis highlighted the predictive power of factors such as athletic success, enrollment, conference affiliation, and MSA population on donor contributions, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of fundraising dynamics. Overall, the results support the notion that investing in unique experiential benefits can be a potential driver for increased donor contributions, crucial for meeting the growing financial demands of college athletics departments. As institutions navigate challenges such as rising expenditures and changes in tax policy, leveraging experiential benefits strategically offers a promising avenue for sustaining financial health and supporting student athletes through scholarships. By aligning fundraising strategies with donors' intrinsic motivations for experiential fulfillment, organizations can not only attract but also retain donors effectively, ultimately bolstering their capacity to meet the evolving needs of college athletics.

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