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The Reason(s) Small, Private Schools Start Football Programs

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ABSTRACT

The number of college football programs in the United States currently totals 774, which is an all-time high. It's clear there is a demand for football as there are 128 schools in 10 conferences at the highest level FBS and 125 schools participating at the second highest level, FCS. Both of these subdivisions are required to provide scholarships for players, making these two levels the most expensive for universities to offer (NCAA.com, ND).

There are a number of reasons that schools establish and fund football programs. At the highest level, there is a lot of money through media rights and merchandising. Many of these larger programs also have high attendance at their games, which is another source of revenue. Football, at most levels, means exposure for the schools. And football, for many, is part of a culture and just plain fun. All of these reasons seem important functions of a university, especially at the highest levels. But what's in it for smaller universities and colleges that won't see a windfall from media rights, merchandising and attendance?

This paper examines the reasons students and alumni gave to why they wanted to see football established at Mercer University.

The findings of this study are beneficial to any small university that is considering founding a football program on its campus. First, students clearly expect a level of enjoyment out of going to the game. While the negative relationship between expected enjoyment and donation may seem surprising, the finding can be easily supported by literature. It is clear that individuals would find going to the game enjoyable but only those who truly consider potential development of a football program to be important to the university as a whole would actually go beyond the consumption by donating money to the program and the school. Only small effect of football fan identity on consumption is surprising from theoretical perspective.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ania Izabela Rynarzewska earned her Ph.D. at Florida State University. She is now an Assistant Professor at Mercer University. She was a founding director of Masters of Science in Business Analytics at Mercer University and has led the program to its highest enrollment to date.

Steven R. McClung received his Ph.D. at University of Tennessee. Currently, at Mercer University he is holding an Associate Dean position of Macon Campus and VP of Operations at Mercer Innovation Center.