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MORE THAN "THE STATS GUY?" SPORTS INFORMATION DIRECTORS AND LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

BY

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Abstract

The College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) was formed to elevate the professional standing of sports information directors (SIDs) from technician roles to the management level through strategic communication. This reflects a general trend in public relations, where practitioners often struggle to assume leadership roles. Excellence theory and research on public relations roles assert organizations succeed most when public relations practitioners are management-level employees. This study explores the roles SIDs play in Division III, with a focus on leadership, through interviews with current SIDs and athletic directors in one upper-Midwest conference. Their comments suggest that many SIDs operate exclusively in technical, production-oriented roles and participants were divided on how appropriate and practical it is for SIDs to assume leadership roles. These results indicate SIDs are generally not currently occupying the roles that CoSIDA desires and highlight the challenges the organization faces in attempting to elevate the profession. The results have practical implications for SIDs, who desire a more prominent role, as well as the respect, higher job satisfaction and salaries that typically accompany a managerial role, and suggest that CoSIDA has work to do to achieve its goal. Theoretically, the results bring the practicality of the claims of excellence theory into question by expressing concern over how realistic it is for SIDs to serve at the management level.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Sports information directors lead the public relations efforts of intercollegiate athletic departments at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I, II and III and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) levels. Although most commonly referred to as SIDs, these public relations professionals often have titles such as “director of media relations” or “director of athletic communications.” Regardless of their titles, their main function is to disseminate information to a variety of external publics, including alumni, staff, boosters, fans, community members, media members, prospective student-athletes and parents, as well as internal publics, such as student-athletes, coaches and administrators. Typically, their main responsibilities include writing press releases (i.e. game previews and recaps), maintaining the athletics website, recording statistics, running social media accounts and producing publications (i.e. record books, game notes, programs, media guides) for athletic departments that typically have 10-20 teams.

Despite their importance to an athletic department in performing these responsibilities, SIDs often feel disrespected, underutilized and underpaid, as they typically operate more as technicians than managers (Hardin & McClung, 2002; McClenaghan, 1995; Moore, 2011; Stoldt, 2000; Stoldt & Narasimhan, 2005). In fact, one of the main reasons CoSIDA was formed was due to the low morale of the profession. According to CoSIDA founder John Humenik, two of the primary objectives of the organization were to “elevate and enhance the organization’s and profession’s overall standing and image in the college athletics community” and to “improve the self-image of the profession, its professionals, and the organization” (Stoldt, 2008, p. 459-60). With these goals in mind, Humenik called for SIDs to assume a more managerial role:
We have to understand that we not only have to change the way we see ourselves – changing from information directors to communication directors to strategic communications directors – but also have to teach senior leadership; that is how they have to see us and our role within their organizations (Stoldt, 2008, p. 461).

The issues Humenik described are of wider importance, as SIDs are part of a variety of public relations practitioners. Excellence theory states that excellent public relations work occurs when practitioners are involved at the management level, rather than operating as technicians. Research on public relations roles shows the roles practitioners play impact the organization’s public relations efforts as well as individual practitioners in terms of higher salaries and job satisfaction (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995). Together, excellence theory and research on public relations roles suggest that practitioners are best utilized at the management level, although several studies of SIDs show that such utilization is not typically the case (Hardin & McClung, 2002; McCleneghan, 1995; Moore, 2011; Stoldt, 2000; Stoldt & Narasimhan, 2005).

This study examines the issue of leadership in sports information through interviews with current Division III SIDs and ADs. In doing so, it investigates the roles SIDs play in their departments and analyzes how they feel about those roles. While the SIDs provide the primary perspective on these issues, athletic directors are also included to address how the SID role fits into the entire athletic department. Given the emphasis on leadership, this study describes barriers that often prevent SIDs from transitioning into leadership roles, provides suggestions on how to overcome those barriers in pursuit of a managerial role and assesses the practicality of SIDs occupying leadership positions.

This study uses the claims of excellence theory and research on the roles public relations practitioners play as a theoretical basis for examining SID roles in light of Humenik’s comments.
about the future of the profession. The findings show that SIDs are involved in leadership roles to varying degrees in their departments, while a majority of SIDs desired to be more involved than they were at present. At the same time, SIDs and ADs both expressed concerns over the feasibility of having SIDs assume leadership roles, due primarily to personnel and financial restraints. These results have implications for individual SIDs, who are currently frustrated with their roles, the departments and institutions they serve, as well as the SID profession as a whole as it tries to pursue a management-level standing.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review summarizes scholarship on the evolution of sports communication in order to provide a general context for the present study. Next, it describes excellence theory as one of the main theoretical frameworks for understanding the roles SIDs play. Given the importance of leadership to excellence theory, it also reviews literature on leadership in public relations and studies that investigate the roles public relations practitioners play. Finally, research on SIDs is presented, including studies that built a profile of the profession and began to explore the roles SIDs play in their departments.

Sport Communication

Sport communication is a broad, diverse field that has grown in recent decades as sport has grown in popularity. After providing a definition of sport communication, this section investigates the topics, theories and methodologies that make up the field, and highlights the Strategic Sport Communication Model as a unifying theory for sport communication.

Sport is pervasive in today’s culture and communication plays a major role in the popularity of sport (Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). According to Pedersen et al. (2007), sport communication encompasses everything from interpersonal relationships, public relations and advertising to theory, research, and print and electronic media. The same study provided one of the more complex, detailed and expansive definitions of sport communication, calling it “a process by which people in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor share symbols as they create meaning through interaction” (p. 76). Following this definition, sport communication scholars can study everything from water cooler talk at work to national television broadcasts, making sport communication a wide-ranging area of research. As a result of this diversity, scholars have typically adopted a broad perspective in studying sport communication, although
researchers have also noted the need for segmentation through modeling in order to create a theoretical framework for the field (Pedersen et al., 2007).

The study of sport communication dates back to the early 1930s, but it took until the early 21st century for scholars to take a high level of interest in the field; one of the first sport communication articles is Riding’s 1934 work “The Use of Slang in Newspaper Sports Writing” in Journalism Quarterly (Pedersen, 2013). In the 1970s, the field began to emerge as scholarship became more frequent, with the Journal of Communication devoting an entire issue to sport in 1977. In what Abeza, O’Reilly, & Nadeau (2014) call the “pivotal stage” of the 1980s, sport communication began to distinguish itself as its own unique field of study, although scholarship in the area was infrequent (Boyle, 2013). Beginning in the 1990s, scholars started to examine the overlap between communication and sport (Pedersen et al., 2007) and became serious about studying sport communication as its own distinct field of research (Trujillo, 2003). More recently, the development of sport communication has accelerated, as three academic journals are now devoted to the field, academic conferences have been held on the topic and many universities offer related academic programs, helping sport communication establish itself as a more formalized field (Billings, Butterworth, & Turman, 2012).

As an academic field, sport communication spans many subjects, theories and methodologies. The work of Abeza et al. (2014) traced the development of the field by identifying academic infrastructures, discussing its body of knowledge, assessing how the developments have affected scholarly advancements, identifying areas of “disciplinary pain,” and providing suggestions for further research. After a thorough examination of academic associations, conferences, journals and textbooks, the authors noted that each of these infrastructures has contributed to the growth and continuing development of sport
communication. The study also highlighted three main research areas in sport communication: personal and organizational communication in sport, ancillary sport communication and sport mass media. Personal and organizational communication in sport has received minimal attention from scholars, as only about 7% of reviewed articles in the *International Journal of Sport Communication (IJSC)* addressed the topic. Ancillary sport communication includes crisis communication, advertising and public relations and accounts for over 20% of *IJSC* articles. Sport mass media incorporates traditional media outlets, such as newspapers, radio and television, and online and social media while accounting for 49% of *IJSC*’s publication. While not all sports research fits neatly into them, the previous three categorizations summarize most of the research in sport communication.

Regardless of this three-part division, scholars have used many different approaches to study the field theoretically. Yoo, Smith, & Kim (2013) found that media-effects theories were the most popular theoretical groundings used in the field, while Abeza et al. (2014) showed that the most commonly used theories in sport communication include agenda setting, framing, uses and gratification, disposition, cultivation of social identity, self-categorization and excellence theories (Abeza et al., 2014). This finding shows that sport communication relies on general communication theories and theories from other disciplines, such as marketing, due to a lack of theories specific to sport communication. Pedersen, Laucella, Miloch, & Fielding (2007) argued that, in order to be a distinctive field, sport communication needs theories that can explain sport-specific phenomena since sporting events have become some of the biggest events worldwide and contain political, sociological, cultural and economical aspects. In the *IJSC* review, content analysis and surveys were the most popular methodologies, as 51% of the articles were quantitative, 45% were qualitative and 4% used mixed methods. Sport communication, then, is a
subdiscipline in which scholars have studied a wide range of topics, using a variety of theories and methodologies, although researchers have not been able to develop theories unique to the field.

Scholarly research on sport spans a wide variety of topics, disciplines, methodologies and theories. Strategic communication and management are particularly important to sport since the organization, facilitation, administration, and promotion of sport would be impossible without them (Pedersen, 2012). Regardless of one’s perspective on strategic communication, it is a fundamental element of the sporting industry, as sport and communication “work together to form an influential and pervasive relationship…sport cannot exist without communication” (Pedersen, 2012, p. 57). An individualistic view of strategic communication in sport looks at how written, oral, technological and other personal skills contribute to more effective and strategic communication (O’Hair, Friedrich, & Dixon, 2011). An organizational view involves the communication strategies sport organizations use and individual approaches to strategic communication (Conrad & Poole, 2012). A sport-specific view suggests public relations is a marketing and management tool to be integrated throughout the operations of a sport organization (Stoldt, Dittmore, & Branvold, 2012). Finally, a broader perspective comes from Pedersen’s (2012) Strategic Sport Communication Model (SSCM).

As one of many ways to conceptualize sport communication, the SSCM illustrates how sport communication can be categorized and operationalized from a strategic management perspective. The SSCM, which is built on numerous theories and models of communication, explains the relationships among key variables in the discipline by combining the process of sport communication and the major elements of the field (Pedersen et al., 2007). The model consists primarily of three strategic components: personal and organizational communication in
sport, sport mass media and new/social media, and ancillary sport communication. These three components are interrelated, rather than mutually exclusive (Pedersen, 2012). Personal and organizational communication in sport includes interpersonal and intrapersonal communication at both the individual and organizational levels, although the latter level has traditionally been the focus (Pedersen, 2012). Ancillary sport communication includes sport public relations, advertising, media relations, community relations, and crisis communication. Research on ancillary sport communication has focused on strategic communication, media relations, public relations and marketing (Judson, Neeley, & Aurand, 2011; McKelvey & Grady, 2008; Stoldt, Ratzlaff, & Remolet, 2009). Sport mass media is a broad component that involves traditional (e.g., newspapers, radio, television) and emerging media (e.g., new media, social media). Sport mass media has been the most-studied component of the SSCM and traditional print and broadcast media have received the most attention (Fortunato, 2004; Lynn, Hardin & Walsdorf, 2004; Wenner, 2004), although research on new and social media have grown significantly in recent years.

**Excellence in Public Relations**

Excellence theory describes the conditions that lead to effective public relations practice, as well as the principles for how the public relations function should be organized in order to provide maximum value to the organization.

Excellence theory is a commonly used theory in the field of sport communication and is most useful when studying ancillary sport communication, given its strong connection to public relations. In the wide array of public relations literature, one of the most comprehensive efforts was the study of excellence in public relations (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992). The study was a 15-year examination of public relations practitioners and practices in over 300
organizations in three different countries. The main goals of the study were to identify the characteristics of organizations with excellent communication practices, to describe how those characteristics impacted the effectiveness of the organization as a whole, and to determine the financial value of excellent public relations. The study highlighted three main factors that contribute to excellent communication practice: the knowledge base of the communication staff, the expectations of senior-level management about communication practices and the culture of the organization (Dozier et al., 1995).

Excellence theory asserts that for an organization to practice excellent public relations, it must have a knowledgeable communication staff. The expertise of a communication staff can be divided into two forms: technical and managerial (Dozier et al., 1995). Technical expertise is the writing and distributing of messages, while managerial expertise consists of contributing to management, performing research, negotiating and persuading publics (Stoldt & Narasimhan, 2005). This distinction between managerial and technical expertise is in accordance with previous research that looked at the roles of public relations practitioners (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1992; Reagan, Anderson, Sumner, & Hill, 1990). While technical skills are important in order for an organization to communicate effectively, management skills are the most important factor behind excellent public relations practice (Dozier et al., 1995). Communication effectiveness, then, begins with a knowledgeable public relations staff but the most effective public relations practices would be those in which practitioners function as managers as well.

When public relations practitioners are not able to function as managers, the expectations of senior management regarding communication practices become the second important factor for excellent public relations. In order to achieve excellence, senior management must embrace progressive communication practices (Stoldt & Narasimhan, 2005). Even if an organization has
public relations professionals with high levels of technical and managerial expertise, their knowledge and capabilities will not be utilized most effectively unless senior management calls on the staff to use their skills.

The relationship between public relations practitioners and senior management is also important in forming an organization’s culture, which is the third factor in excellent communications practice. Organizations with participative cultures are more conducive to communication excellence than those with authoritarian cultures (Dozier et al., 1995). Similarly, organizations that embrace diversity are more inclined to achieve excellence in public relations than those that do not.

In addition to laying out the conditions that create excellent public relations, the excellence study described four principles of how the public relations function should be organized to maximize its value. First, and most importantly, the study showed involvement in strategic management was the most critical characteristic of excellent public relations, meaning public relations executives must play a strategic managerial role as well as an administrative manager role (Grunig, 2008). In that role, practitioners are empowered as part of the decision-making process, allowing them to engage in two-way communication with their audiences rather than one-sided messaging (Grunig, 2008). Second, the study showed that public relations loses its role in strategic management if it is subjugated to other management functions, such as marketing, because practitioners were more likely to engage in asymmetrical communication, rather than the symmetrical style of excellent public relations (Pedersen, 2013). Third, excellent public relations practice is strategic both in its design and in practice. Excellent public relations departments use communication outlets only to meet a specific need, are deliberate in the actions they take and are guided by research based on current conditions (Pedersen, 2013). Fourth,
organizations with participative cultures were more likely to have proactive, excellent public relations than those with authoritarian cultures. Organizations that practice excellent public relations allow practitioners to act freely, rather than carry out decisions made by management (Pedersen, 2013).

**Excellent Leadership in Public Relations**

Excellence theory also addresses the issue of leadership as it pertains to the field of public relations at both the individual and organizational levels.

Although excellence theory states public relations practitioners should be part of the leadership team of their organizations, that is generally not the case for two main reasons. Investigations of empowerment in the profession found most public relations professionals failed to gain influence not only due to the devaluation by organizational executives, but also because of their own lack of individual empowerment. A lack of professional expertise, leadership skills, organizational knowledge and experience with organizational politics and power relations impeded the empowerment process for public relations professionals (Berger, 2005; Berger & Reber, 2006; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). For example, Berger & Reber’s power-relations theory (2006) describes how power can be used to make public relations units more active, effective and ethical in organizational decision-making. The same study identified five types of influence - resources and tactics, individual, structural, relational, informational and systemic - that help public relations professionals become more influential. Similarly, Berger, Reber & Heyman (2007) explored the factors that influence public relations executives to achieve success and maintain leadership positions. The study showed relationships and networking, communication skills, a proactive nature, and interpersonal skills all contribute to success in the field. Finally, Choi & Choi (2007) identified six public relations leadership behaviors - providing
organization members with a clear vision of the organization’s policies and strategies, exerting upward influence, acting as an agent of change and creating alliances inside and outside the organization - that all proved to be effective in achieving public relations leadership.

Public Relations Roles

A number of scholars have explored differences in the manager and technician roles in public relations. Given the emphasis on leadership to organizations, especially in public relations, researchers have analyzed the roles public relations practitioners play in order to assess their involvement in leadership capacities. Dozier (1992) defines roles as “abstractions of behavior patterns of individuals in organizations,” which “define the everyday activities of public relations practitioners” (p. 327). Roles influence actions, which produce predictable outcomes over time (Dozier 1992). Several studies discuss four main roles that describe the activity patterns of public relations professionals (Broom & Smith, 1979; Ekachai, 1995; Hogg & Doolan, 1999).

Among these studies to examine the categories of roles public relations practitioners play, Hogg & Doolan (1999) provided concrete definitions of the four main roles. A practitioner in the “expert prescriber” role studies and defines the problem, develops the program and takes responsibility for its implementation. A “communication facilitator” is primarily concerned with the quality and quantity of information that flows between management and the organization’s publics, making them more concerned with the specific communication process, rather than wider policy and operational issues. As its name suggests, the “problem-solving process facilitator” is involved with planning and coordinating public relations activities with senior management. Finally, a “communication technician” implements public relations programs using skills such as writing and editing, but depends on management for guidance. Practitioners
assume all four roles to varying degrees but most operate in one dominant role more than the others (Dozier, 1981; Dozier & Gottesman, 1982) due to personal preference (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Broom & Smith, 1979). The four-role model is a popular way to conceptualize public relations roles that has led to a large body of research on roles.

Although researchers have noted the four-role model makes sense conceptually, the main distinction scholars make is between managers and technicians. In fact, high correlations among the expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem-solving process facilitator have led scholars to reduce the typology to the two disparate roles of manager and technician (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1992; Reagan et al., 1990). The key activities scholars have identified with the public relations manager’s role include planning public relations programs, making communications policy decisions, counseling management, supervising the work of others and diagnosing public relations problems (Broom & Dozier, 1986, 1995; Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998). The technician’s role is more specific and straightforward, as technicians create and disseminate the communication messages of an organization (Moss & Green, 2001).

Research has shown the manager-technician dichotomy broadly reflects how senior management perceives the public relations function’s roles (Dozier, 1992). Many factors contribute to whether a practitioner plays the manager or technician role, including the work environment, gender, professional experience, tenure with an employer, education level and size of the public relations function (Acharya, 1983; Dozier & Broom, 1995).

While many factors influence the roles public relations practitioners play, studies also show roles impact many other variables at the personal and organizational levels. Public relations professionals who have management roles tend to have higher salaries and are more frequently involved in management decision-making than technicians, with men playing management roles
more often than women (Broom & Dozier, 1986). The roles that public relations practitioners occupy impact the level of excellence of an organization’s public relations work, as organizations whose communicators play the technician role typically fail to maximize their public relations efforts (Dozier et al., 1995). The same study found public relations work is maximized when practitioners have the knowledge to play the managerial role, contribute to the decision-making process and execute two-way communication programs. Finally, the researchers showed practitioners who enact the manager role engage more frequently in management decision-making, earn higher salaries and have higher levels of job satisfaction. Each of these findings support the idea that public relations practitioners best serve their organizations when they assume a managerial role, rather than a technical one.

Contingency theory has also been used as a way to examine the role public relations leaders play in achieving excellence in communication management. Contingency theory addresses the relationships between organizations and their publics, focusing on how public relations leaders help lead to the strategic management of relationships. As such, it proposes the relationships between an organization and a public exist on a continuum from pure advocacy to pure accommodation, as supported by researchers (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001; Reber & Cameron, 2003). Since evidence has shown the organization-public relationship changes over time, public relations leaders play a key role within their organizations by choosing the right position along the continuum at the right moment (Meng, Berger, & Gower, 2009). Literature on leadership and public relations highlights why leadership is critical in increasing the value of public relations and in achieving effectiveness in public relations.
Sports Information Directors

Scholars have developed a profile of SIDs, examined the roles they play and described how they feel in those roles. While there is a sizeable amount of research on public relations roles, three main studies have begun to examine SIDs. The work of McCleneghan (1995), Hardin & McClung (2002) and Moore (2011) built a profile of the profession across NCAA Division I, II III and NAIA levels, although Hardin & McClung (2002) looked exclusively at Division I. All three studies showed the field is predominantly occupied by middle-aged males, as 83% of SID participants were men (Moore, 2011) and the majority of SIDs were between 30 and 50 years old in each study. Almost all SIDs hold a bachelor’s degree, most commonly in journalism or communication (Hardin & McClung, 2002; McCleneghan, 1995; Moore, 2011). Initially, research showed that SIDs did not typically hold an advanced degree (McCleneghan, 1995), although Hardin & McClung (2002) showed that over 19% earned a master’s degree and Moore (2011) found that number to be over 50%. SIDs hold an average of 15 years of experience in the field and have been in their current position for an average of 10 years (Hardin & McClung, 2002; McCleneghan, 1995; Moore, 2011). These studies also showed that salaries rose from $38,500 (McCleneghan, 1995) to an average of between $45,000 and $55,000, with most SIDs making between $35,000 and $45,000 (Moore, 2011).

Following the profile built by the previous three studies, several scholars focused on the topics of gender and gender roles in the SID profession. One of the first studies to address this topic was Neupauer (1998), who interviewed female SIDs to gain their perspective on the role of the female SID, given the male-dominated makeup of the profession. Female SIDs discussed the difficulty of finding a balance professionally and personally given the demands of sports information work, traditional gender roles and the bias of male athletic directors toward male
SIDs (Hardin & Whiteside, 2012; Neupauer, 1998). Although female SIDs faced obstacles in breaking into the profession, they reported being treated fairly once they got a job (Neupauer, 1998). A more recent study showed that while female SIDs felt they had an advantage over men by being more empathetic and effective communicators, this advantage failed to provide them with opportunities for promotion, as they expressed anxiety about being judged as inferior to men and faced stereotypes about women being less capable of working in the field (Hardin & Whiteside, 2012). Furthermore, the same study explored the work experiences of women in sports information and found although women perceive barriers to advancement in the field, they are hesitant to admit they exist. Female SIDs also began to internalize some of the value systems of the male-dominated SID profession and found it difficult to stay in the profession once they had children (Hardin & Whiteside, 2012). Collectively, these two studies began to build a more comprehensive, nuanced understanding of the SID profession by examining how a subgroup of SIDs felt about their roles.

Scholars built off the work of Hardin & Whiteside (2012) by looking more widely at how SIDs feel in their roles, an important endeavor since the way communicators perceive their roles impacts the overall effectiveness of their communication programs (Dozier, 1992). One study found a lack of respect was the most common answer SIDs gave to a question asking them to describe their current employment situation (McCluneghan, 1995). This can be partially attributed to sports information offices being under-funded and under-staffed, causing many departments to employ undergraduates, interns and graduate assistants, known as GAs (Hardin & McClung, 2002). One study showed the majority of SIDs had between one and three graduate assistants but over 40% of sports information offices consisted of just one full-time SID (Moore, 2011). While more than half of Division I SIDs had one to three full-time assistants and two-
thirds had one to three graduate assistants, two-thirds of non-Division I SIDs had no full-time assistants and less than half had graduate assistants (Moore, 2011). At the time, the lack of a legitimate accredited professional organization was another factor in the perceived lack of respect, although the emergence of CoSIDA has begun to change that (Hardin & McClung, 2002).

**Athletic Directors and SIDs**

As the leader of athletic departments, athletic directors are positioned to influence the work of SIDs and several studies have investigated the relationship between the two positions. First, studies have shown athletic directors generally feel that public relations has value to their departments and view SIDs as the top public relations professionals in their departments. As a result, scholars have examined the degree to which athletic directors and SIDs work together, finding limited interaction between the two positions despite athletic directors’ belief in the value of public relations.

Athletic directors are the most common supervisor for SIDs and task them with the public relations work of their departments (Moore, 2011). In fact, athletic directors saw SIDs as the top public relations officers within intercollegiate athletic departments (Stoldt, Miller, & Comfort, 2001). Athletic directors rely on SIDs for public relations expertise because athletic directors have difficulty differentiating public relations from other communication fields such as advertising and marketing (Pratt, 2013). At the same time, ADs often equate sports information with public relations despite sports information being only one part of the larger public relations process (Stoldt et al., 2001). Athletic directors also acknowledge the importance of public relations, as they believe that athletic departments have much to gain from public relations, including media coverage, event attendance and ticket sales (Pratt, 2013). As a result, 63% of
athletic directors have someone on their staff solely devoted to public relations, although some of
the titles include identifiers such as media relations (31%), communication (25%), sports
information (10%), public relations (10%), external affairs (8%) or marketing (7%) (Ruihley &
Fall, 2009). These studies collectively show that public relations work is of value to
intercollegiate athletic departments and highlight the importance of the SID in performing public
relations tasks.

Despite athletic directors’ beliefs in the value of public relations and that SIDs are often
the top public relations official in their departments, research shows athletic directors do not
always work closely with their SIDs. In fact, nearly 30% of SIDs communicate with their athletic
director once a week or less and nearly 14% were never included in senior staff meetings, which
typically consist of ADs, assistant ADs, other administrators and coaches (Stoldt et al., 2001).
This finding was replicated by Moore (2011), who found most SIDs only have intermittent
contact with their athletic director, as 39% visit once a week and 11% reported never having
direct contact. While athletic directors do not have a high degree of contact with their SIDs, they
reported being highly engaged with their top public relations professionals, as 90% of athletic
directors talked with their top public relations officers at least once a week with 57% talking at
least daily (Ruihley & Fall, 2009). These top public relations professionals included titles in
media relations, communication, sports information, external affairs, marketing, public relations
and community relations.

Athletic directors perceive their top public relations officers to be more proficient at
technical tasks, such as working with coaches and athletes and producing public relations
material, than they do at managerial tasks, such as setting public relations goals and developing
and managing a budget (Ruihley & Fall, 2009). Furthermore, only 32% of SIDs believed their
athletic director would recommend them for a promotion to athletic director, indicating a disconnect between the two positions (Swalls, 2004). These findings are important in light of research that shows the perceptions of senior managers are important indicators of the status of public relations activities in their organizations (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995). Collectively, these studies indicate that, although athletic directors value public relations work, they do not interact frequently with their SIDs, creating a lack of connection between the two positions.

**SID Roles**

Five main studies have analyzed the roles SIDs play in their athletic departments. Collectively, these studies showed SIDs typically play technical, rather than managerial, roles and have a moderate, yet rising, level of influence in their departments. In addition to documenting the roles SIDs play, these studies also addressed SIDs’ attitudes towards the roles, showing they generally desire a management-level position and more influence. Finally, studies have stated that the SID position is not of a high enough profile to project SIDs into leadership roles.

Despite athletic directors acknowledging the public relations expertise of SIDs and the value of public relations to their departments, studies have shown that SIDs are not being used accordingly. Several scholars have investigated the roles SIDs play in athletic departments, using the manager-technician dichotomy as well as other models. Using a survey that linked specific tasks to each of Broom & Smith’s (1979) roles, Stoldt (2000) found that less than 8% of SIDs operated as managers, while over 92% were technicians. Five years later, over 84% of SIDs self-reported that they operated primarily as technicians while only 16% identified themselves as managers (Stoldt & Narasimhan, 2005). A more recent study used a different set of role categories and showed that SIDs identify most closely with a media relations role, compared to
publicity material producer or manager roles, while Division I SIDs performed managerial activities more frequently than their non-Division I counterparts (Moore, 2011). In the same study, SIDs also reported spending 48% of their time as publicity producers, 22% as managers, 19% as media relations professionals while devoting 10% of their time to other tasks. At the same time, SIDs rated their expertise on technical tasks to be significantly higher than their expertise on management tasks and indicated that technical tasks, such as maintaining a website, writing news releases and producing publications, are more important to their organization’s well being than managerial tasks, such as developing goals and objectives for a department (Stoldt & Narasimhan, 2005). These studies showed that SIDs typically play technical roles, rather than operating as managers as suggested by excellence theory.

The work of Moore (2011) is one of the only studies to specifically address the level of influence SIDs feel in their current roles. In the study, 65% of SIDs reported moderate influence, 26% had little influence and only 9% perceived a high level of influence with Division I SIDs having more influence than non-Division I SIDs (Moore, 2011). The study also showed that despite only having a moderate amount of influence, SIDs were second to compliance directors in terms of influence among athletic department administrators, ahead of business operations, development and fundraising, marketing and facilities. Additionally, the study showed the amount of influence held by SIDs was on the rise, as over 75% of SIDs reported an increase in influence, while less than 8% noted a decrease. The study also found participants attributed an increase in influence to themselves (i.e. gaining more experience or proving themselves) and decreases to external reasons (i.e. the administration not valuing their work).

While there is strong evidence that SIDs operate primarily as technicians rather than managers, previous research is inconclusive on whether that is the ideal role for SIDs, as one
study showed that less than 20% of SIDs said they desired operating in a management role (Stoldt, 2000). However, none of the SIDs that did serve in management roles said they would prefer to operate as a technician (Stoldt, 2000). In a separate study, over 38% of respondents felt they held a senior management position (Swalls, 2004). However, more than twice that number felt that they perform senior management duties, such as contributing to a strategic plan, providing input on management decisions and managing people (Swalls, 2004). Of Moore’s (2011) respondents, 41% were pleased with their level of influence, 24% were somewhat satisfied and 35% were dissatisfied. Those SIDs with more influence tended to be more satisfied with their level of influence, while those that were dissatisfied with their level of influence perceived they had less influence, indicating a general desire to be more influential (Moore, 2011). Furthermore, that same study suggested that SIDs who want to be more influential need to find a way to occupy a managerial role, as serving in a managerial role was the strongest predictor of strategic influence.

Despite the uncertainty regarding what the ideal role for an SID is, SIDs may seem locked into the roles they currently serve. Although 84% of SIDs believed that veterans in the field are qualified to become athletic directors, only 49% felt they possessed the necessary skills to be an athletic director, indicating a lack of individual confidence in their potential in a leadership role. Furthermore, less than 5% of SIDs had interviewed for an AD job and 72% of athletic directors said an SID was not a finalist when they interviewed for their position (Swalls, 2004). The discrepancy between the 49% of SIDs who think they have the necessary skills and the 5% who interviewed for an athletic director position demonstrates a significant lack of interest on the part of SIDs in becoming an athletic director. In fact, 65% of SIDs had no interest in pursuing an athletic director job in the future, suggesting they either enjoy their current field
or are content with their role as a technician (Swalls, 2004). That study concluded the SID position is not of a high enough profile to project SIDs into management or leadership roles, which would ultimately lead to consideration for athletic director positions. Although SIDs often crave the responsibility, pay and profile of management-level positions, they seem to desire those benefits in the SID role, rather than moving into a higher-profile position, although SID positions are typically not of that higher profile.

While many scholars have studied the roles SIDs serve in their athletic departments, Battenfield & Kent (2007) examined the way that Division I SIDs went about their job, which also has important ramifications for the profession. Through an ethnographic study of the culture of communication used in a Division I sports information office, the study noted that SIDs preferred to isolate themselves, especially from their supervisors, and that culture of separation led to staff morale issues and a poor communication climate. The communication that did occur, both internally and externally, was sporadic and rushed, as “drive-by meetings” were commonplace. Furthermore, the communication happened primarily electronically, which marked a conflict between “old school” and “new school” SIDs. Veteran SIDs worked in an atmosphere where good public relations required personal contact, while younger SIDs preferred a culture centered around the computer as a way to send messages. Non-verbal communication also played a major role in the office, as the staff frequently sent negative non-verbal body messages to avoid interpersonal communication. Most importantly, however, the study showed that SIDs “no longer operate as communicators, but are now mere producers of information” (p. 248). Instead of serving as a disseminator of information, SIDs were in charge of producing information without receiving recognition in a “culture of anonymity.” As a result, the study concluded that a basic lack of respect for the efforts of SIDs is pervasive in sports information.
culture, where “very little actual ‘communication’ of worthwhile public relations value was actually taking place” (p. 249-250). Instead of spending time building relationships with news media or other external publics, SIDs were producing media guides, game notes and other items that, according to the authors, were not as valuable. This final finding indicates that SIDs are not operating in managerial-type roles, as indicated by previous research, signaling the profession is still struggling to prove its worth, even at the Division I level.

**Unexplored Areas**

Scholars have studied a wide variety of topics using different theories and methodologies in the area of sport communication. The SSCM is one of many approaches to understanding sport communication and is a general model that breaks the field down into three main areas: personal and organizational communication, ancillary sport communication and sport media. Sport public relations fits into the general body of research on public relations, in which scholars have focused on the role public relations plays in an organization and the roles public relations professionals play.

Since SIDs are the primary public relations professionals in intercollegiate athletic departments, researchers have developed a profile of the profession and have explored the role(s) they play. One of the prevailing themes of this research is that those in the profession feel underutilized in terms of the amount of leadership they are afforded. However, this issue has not been explored through in-depth interviews, as previous scholars have used quantitative methods to demonstrate the issue, rather than examining it qualitatively. Furthermore, scholars have focused on SIDs as one homogeneous group, rather than looking at a specific level (i.e. Division III). It is important to consider each level on its own since Division III SIDs face different problems than those in Division I in terms of staffing, budget and media coverage. A more recent
examination is also in order as it is increasingly common for SIDs to have titles such as “assistant athletic director for media relations,” which may have resulted in a change in role. A more up-to-date investigation will help evaluate the status of SIDs to show whether or not the profession is developing both as CoSIDA hopes and as indicated by previous research. The perspective of ADs is also an important element of this study, as they are in a position to dictate the roles played by SIDs. Through in-depth interviews with current Division III SIDs and ADs, this study updates previous research on SID roles while also expanding on the existing research by building a more comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the profession.

**Research Questions**

The above literature review connects research on excellence theory, public relations roles and SIDs in order to provide background for the present study. Excellence theory suggests that public relations work is most effective when practitioners are part of the management team and this empowerment also benefits the individual practitioners. Despite this claim, research on public relations shows practitioners generally struggle to attain managerial roles and instead operate primarily as technicians, carrying out public relations plans handed down by management. This research relates to SIDs, who themselves are the primary public relations practitioners within intercollegiate athletic departments. This study seeks to examine the roles Division III SIDs play with regards to leadership through interviews with SIDs and ADs.

RQ 1: Are Division III SIDs involved in leadership roles in their athletic departments, as excellence theory suggests they could, or do they operate as technicians like most public relations practitioners?

RQ 2: What are the consequences of the roles Division III SIDs play for the profession and their athletic departments?
Chapter Three: Method

The research questions were addressed through interviews with SIDs and ADs at institutions in a Midwest Division III conference. The researcher sent emails to the athletic director and top sports information staff member at each institution. One of the institutions had two co-SIDs, so emails were sent to both. Of the nine sports information personnel, four had the title “sports information director,” three were “assistant athletic director for media relations,” one was “sports information coordinator” and one was “director of athletic communications.” The head athletic directors at each of the eight institutions were also contacted. Three of the sports information professionals and two of the athletic directors were women. Although this gender imbalance may be seen as a weakness of this study, it is generally reflective of the demographics of the field. In fact, the inclusion of five women is a strength of this study, as it provides an often under-represented perspective to the current topic, although a comparison between males and females was not the focus of this study.

Participants were recruited via email by obtaining email addresses from their institution’s online staff directories. Once informed consent was obtained, interviews were performed over the phone due to the geographical spread of the participants and time constraints. The interview protocol included questions about the role of an SID in a Division III intercollegiate athletic department (see Appendix A). Both SIDs and ADs were asked the same questions in order to allow an accurate comparison between the two perspectives. Questions were kept as simple and open-ended as possible to allow the participants the freedom to respond as they see fit without the researcher guiding the responses. Given the general, open-ended nature of the questions, the researcher asked for clarification when appropriate. Participants were promised anonymity and the interviews lasted 15-30 minutes.
Interviews were transcribed verbatim with identifiers that allowed participants to retain anonymity. The transcriptions and audio files were not made available to anyone except the researcher and the chair of his thesis committee. Transcripts were imported to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software used by scholars to analyze and code interviews and other artifacts. This software allowed the researcher to analyze the recurring themes in the data using a grounded theory approach, which allowed the themes to emerge from the data. Similar to rhetorical analysis, this process relies on the judgment of the researcher, whose job it is to understand and evaluate the data (Black, 1978). The number of occurrences of a theme in the data was a primary indicator of its importance, although factors such as context and word choice, among others, were also important.

The researcher performed an initial pass through the data to identify and code a range of themes. After that, a second pass allowed the researcher to recode and recategorize the themes as necessary, since themes arose late in the first pass that applied to the already-coded transcripts. If appropriate, passages were coded into more than one theme. Once a final list of themes was compiled, coded references were rearranged hierarchically to identify relationships among them, a process similar to that of Bazely (2007). This process was also similar to Lindlof’s (1995) technique of constant comparison of themes throughout the data analysis process until the point of theoretical saturation. Finally, the themes were analyzed using the type of close analysis described by Strauss & Corbin (1998). The themes that emerged from the SID transcripts and athletic director transcripts were analyzed separately to gain two different perspectives on the research questions, while combining the two perspectives created a broader picture of the profession.
This study has both practical and theoretical implications. The results of this study primarily have practical use for individual SIDs in helping them understand the current landscape of their profession. More importantly, however, this study addresses the direction the profession is currently headed in comparison to CoSIDA’s goals of attaining a management-level position geared towards strategic communication. Investigations of this nature also impact the athletic departments and institutions that SIDs serve, as any changes in roles for an SID have an impact on those levels as well.

In terms of theory, this study examines the SID profession in order to evaluate where it stands regarding leadership, given the claims of excellence theory and research on public relations roles. Excellence theory and literature on public relations roles suggest that public relations practitioners and their organizations are best served when practitioners are management-level employees, rather than assuming technical roles. This study seeks to provide evidence regarding whether public relations practitioners (i.e. SIDs) are currently able to, or do not desire to, take on leadership roles in their departments, as well as developing questions about the practical application of excellence theory and research on the roles public relations practitioners play.
Chapter Four: Results

Respondent comments were divided into six themes, which have been further broken down into subthemes in order to develop a hierarchical understanding of related topics within each theme. First, participants described their responsibilities, which consisted primarily of technical tasks aimed at promoting the institution’s teams, creating a heavy workload for SIDs. Second, participants discussed the issue of staffing, indicating that current models in Division III are not ideal for SIDs. Third, participants addressed the amount of interaction SIDs have with other administrators, showing varying degrees of informal and formal contact. Fourth, participants described the varying levels of leadership held by SIDs with SIDs reporting a desire for more leadership. Fifth, participants outlined the value of SIDs in the form of forming the perception of athletics, which was understood within athletic departments but not outside them. Finally, participants indicated the profession was changing towards strategic communication, as evidenced by changes in titles.

Responsibilities

All participants were asked to explain the responsibilities of the SID at their institution to compare to the profile established in prior research and to develop an understanding of the roles SIDs play. The participants described a wide range of responsibilities, although both groups of participants described primarily technical tasks that had a common focus on promotion and publicization of the department’s teams. Furthermore, participants discussed a heavy workload that prevented SIDs from doing as much as they wanted in their promotional role.

**Technical tasks.** The comments of both groups of participants indicated these SID professionals spend most of their time on technical tasks. The most commonly-mentioned tasks included managing the website, recording statistics, writing a variety of types of releases (recaps,
previews, press releases, feature stories, etc.), designing materials (programs, media guides, flyers, etc.), running social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, etc.) and game management responsibilities, such as overseeing scorer’s table staff, being the public address announcer and event set-up. Other responsibilities mentioned were soliciting corporate sponsorships, overseeing marketing, submitting athletic and academic nominations (conference-wide, regional and national), photography, producing live video streams and serving on a variety of committees (i.e. Hall of Fame). The participants suggested managing the website was the most important responsibility of SIDs, given the website served as the primary way to disseminate information for the department.

Promote teams. Although SIDs had numerous responsibilities, most of them centered around one main goal: promoting their athletic department’s teams and student-athletes. One SID said the position was centered around distributing information to the media and that continues to typify the role:

It’s making sure we get that information out there because if you play a game and you win and nobody knows about it, did it really happen? Now a big thing is making sure that information is disseminated on different platforms.” (SID 7)

One AD referred to the SID as “the gatekeeper” saying the SID is “the first line through which people see our results, our stories.” Similarly, a second AD said,

for the most part, they’re responsible for public relations, disseminating information about the teams and the sports. It’s a crucial role for an athletic department because for a lot of the media, the SID can often be the face of athletics. (AD 4)

One SID mentioned reaching up to 15,000 people a week through the website and social media which is “a huge image deal…if that looks bad, then your whole perception of your athletic
department and programs is bad.” Another SID highlighted the importance of maximizing the 
exposure of the department’s teams and accomplishments as especially important given the 
recent level of success at the institution, noting a role as a “storyteller” who tells the stories about 
how and why student-athletes achieved success. Finally, one SID summed up the role saying, 
we work to promote the department and its teams. I tell our coaches that it’s my job to 
tell your story, get you guys out there. We pass stories to media outlets…just trying 
different ways to drive people to our website, to our Facebook, to our Twitter. (SID 8) 

**Workload.** Although publicizing the department’s teams was the main responsibility for 
SIDs, it was one part of a heavy workload the participants described. Several participants 
mentioned the long hours that characterize the profession, including nights and weekends when 
most games occur. According to one SID, the workload at the Division III level is especially 
high because “you are the SID for everything…you have your hand in every single sport.” 
Another SID stated, “SIDs must love what they do because it’s a ton of work. It’s a lot of hours, 
it’s not an easy schedule and to continue to do it, you have to enjoy parts of it.” 

SIDs were involved in numerous other capacities, including planning and designing 
signage, seeking corporate sponsorships, fundraising for the department, overseeing game 
management and serving on various committees (Hall of Fame, Division III Baseball 
Championship, etc.). The SIDs felt these responsibilities were not part of their job, which led to a 
feeling of frustration. One SID said he knew of SIDs involved with compliance and scheduling 
as well. Two of the SIDs described how game management responsibilities, such as staffing and 
promotions, prevent them from being able to provide more coverage or do more creative things 
with their sports information tasks. One SID said, “There are times where I feel like, oh, I wish I 
could have more time to do more things for this sport but I just don’t because there are other
things I have to get done.” Similarly, another SID felt meetings often get in the way of accomplishing other responsibilities:

I just think it’s the nature of the work. It’s just such a heavy workload. I mean even me, I get frustrated sometimes by meetings…sometimes I’m like, man, I could be working on my football game notes right now instead of sitting in an hour-long communications meeting on campus. (SID 5)

On the other hand, three SIDs said game management responsibilities have been taken away and given to other staff members and described that as a positive change:

I used to be in that position where I was having to do game management. I was having to do basically every operation at the press box on top of the sports information stuff. I think people in our profession want to be more strategic. I just don’t think they have time to do that, given not only the volume of sports at their institution but also the fact that they have those game management responsibilities, stat responsibilities, scheduling responsibilities. I think a lot of them would prefer not to have that day-to-day grinding stuff and would rather be more strategic in their communications. (SID 5)

All five ADs acknowledged the workload taken on by their SIDs. Two discussed how they made efforts to find additional help for their SIDs. One described how he has made department-wide changes to strip away additional responsibilities from administrators so they can focus on fewer, more specific tasks:

I can believe that [they are frustrated]. It is the sports information directors who do other duties, right? So that kind of muddies the water. It comes back to the question: if you’re responsible for 10 things…are you going to be able to give as good an effort to all 10 as
if you take the same amount of effort or time and spend it on five instead of spreading yourself thin over 10 duties? (AD 1)

The second AD commented on an attempt to provide more part-time help to lighten the SID’s workload:

That’s why we continually try to get him as much help as we can. We’ve tried to give him a 20% position here to help lessen the load but he’s never said he’s overloaded. He’s just that type of person that would never do that. He likes being at everything. (AD 5)

After acknowledging the workload on the SID, one AD suggested that the high workload and resulting frustration is part of working in athletics, not just sports information:

I think that is how [the SID] feels. I don’t think he has anymore on his plate than I do or than anybody else in our department. We all work very hard. We all have a lot of things to deal with. That’s the nature of athletics. I don’t think that’s just the nature of sports information. (AD 3)

**Staffing**

One issue that arose throughout the interviews was staffing. When discussing staffing, participants described how sports information offices often consist of one full-time staff member who relies on student workers and help from part-time staff and graduate assistants. The general consensus of the interviews was that these staffing models allow SIDs to cover everything they need to but that more staffing would allow SIDs to expand their coverage and reduce the load on the full-time SID.

**One-man shop.** In describing current staffing models, participants described how the sports information staff generally included one full-time staff member. Of the eight institutions, six had one full-time staff member in charge of sports information. Of the other two institutions,
one had a “sports information coordinator” who was also a head coach and the other had two “co-SIDs” who shared the SID responsibilities and also served as coaches. The two co-SIDs described how their coaching duties meant the two of them combine to do the work of one full-time SID, rather than allowing the two of them to do more than so-called “one-man shops.” One of the institutions had recently employed two full-time staff members in sports information but lost one of the positions due to state-wide budget cuts.

Reliance on student workers. Given the limited amount of full-time sports information staff, student workers were involved in the sports information departments of the eight institutions. The students were most commonly used for statistics, game management and web streaming, but were also used for set up, writing and even being responsible for covering certain sports. Two SIDs said they rely on student help out of necessity due to a lack of other options at the Division III level. According to one SID,

the thing I’ve found is in Division III, you really work your tail off because you don’t really have the help. You rely so much on student help to do the job. I’ve gone to classes and tried to solicit help and sometimes it works, but you’ve got to find the right people. That’s the hard part. (SID 3)

Participants indicated that students were used for technical tasks, primarily statistics, which can be learned fairly quickly. One AD to comment on the use of students said,

we invest more into student employment to take some of the petty work that a sports information director has, like setting up…When a student could be doing that and the SID can be focusing on prep for the game, as well as postgame when you want to get interviews done. (AD 1)
Similarly, an SID said allowing students to do tasks like statistics can allow the SID to do more in other areas:

I think sitting at a game and taking stats is something I enjoy doing but as I’m sitting there, I start to think to myself at this point in my career, is this really helping our department move forward? (SID 5)

Two SIDs described how the reliance on student workers can benefit both the SID and the student workers. According to SID 8,

it gives them some experience and it takes a little off my plate. I’m just tweaking recaps, rather than writing them all myself…I like doing some of the other things and a student can learn how to write a recap and that also helps build their experience. It gives them something to put on their resume. (SID 8)

While the SIDs generally described appreciation for the work their students do, two discussed how difficult it is to find good student help:

Some of us are luckier to have a good staff and it depends on how your school’s scope is if you have a lot of student workers. We’re lucky to have a decent amount of student workers but those capabilities but that can change at any moment for us. (SID 4)

On the same subject, another SID described the difficulty of finding the right kind of students for the job:

Even on campus, I go to the student newspaper and these guys on campus, they don’t even know what I do. I try to explain it and say “this is great experience for how to write stories” and they’re not really interested…I’ve gone to classes and tried to solicit help and sometimes it works but you’ve got to find the right people. That’s the hard part. (SID 3)
Part-time staff and graduate assistants. In addition to student help, SIDs received assistance from part-time sports information staff and graduate assistants (GAs). In this study, three SIDs had part-time assistance and two had one GA on staff. Two of the part-time sports information staff members were full-time staff who also served as coaches, while one was exclusively a part-time sports information employee. One AD described having a better staffing model than most Division III departments but that was still not enough to do the job most effectively:

You certainly would need additional staff and that’s what we continue to try and work towards as well. I mean, right now we have [our SID], a GA and we have a part-time person on staff that also coaches and teaches and it’s still not enough, but it’s still more than what some other institutions have. (AD 2)

Three SIDs and one AD said the lack of staffing is an especially prominent commonality at the Division III level due to lack of funding. One SID said,

I think for the most part, it’s pretty similar. I think there are special circumstances where there’s a bigger athletic budget that allows for more people to be on staff, but I think for the most part, Division III wise, you’re looking at a smaller staff covering a lot of different things. (SID 4)

Similarly, SID 5 noted that the staffing model was not ideal, despite having a GA and a part-time staff member, and that “99% of Division III institutions don’t have an ideal staffing model” due to the demands of the position.

One SID expressed a desire for one or two full-time assistants to do the job well but said that is unrealistic due to the budget cuts on top of restricted budgets at the Division III level:
I think the biggest thing it comes down to is the people above. If the administration feels that sports information is warranted to have two or three people help spread the goodwill of the athletic program. Again, it comes down to money and I totally get it. When coaches don’t have assistant coaches and they need them…I just don’t know where we fit in. (SID 3)

In addition to the budget issue, AD 5 noted the difficulty of finding help within the department because coaches lack the skill set necessary to do many SID tasks. One SID said the lack of staffing in his office prevented doing more types of feature stories, video work and other projects. On the other hand, another SID was able to be more involved as an administrator as a result of having part-time assistance.

One AD and one SID discussed how even providing help to an SID is not always as effective as it could be because SIDs often have a hard time delegating. One AD noted that adding a part-time assistant has not expanded the offerings of the department due the SID’s reluctance to hand over duties and expected more from the sports information staff. On the same topic, SID 5 described how he, like many SIDs, does not like to delegate to ensure tasks are done properly.

Desire for more staff. A common theme for SIDs was a desire for staffing in their department to help them do the job more efficiently and effectively and this was also mentioned by two ADs. One SID summarized the issue, acknowledging having enough help to do the job but not enough to do it as effectively as he would like:

I have some help, not as much as I wish I could have, but it’s enough to make it work and we do the best we can…I wish we could have one or two full-time assistants to make this
thing really work well but it’s just not going to happen, especially with the budget cuts and stuff like that. (SID 3)

Another felt having a graduate assistant devoted to statistics, records and archives would free up the SID for other responsibilities. According to one SID, this problem is widespread in the profession at the Division III level:

I think for the most part it’s pretty similar. I think there are special circumstances where there’s a bigger athletic budget that allows for more people to be on staff but I think for the most part, Division III wise, you’re looking at a smaller staff covering lot of different things. (SID 4)

Other SIDs expressed an understanding of the difficult decisions faced by upper-level Division III administrators when it comes to staffing. SID 3 summarized the issue:

Do I need an assistant more than a coach? Being selfish, I would say yes but reality is that it doesn’t work that way and coaches need assistant coaches to recruit and bring people in to campus and that’s what they’re trying to do. So I think it’s really tough to have the ideal situation. I’d love to have one or two full-time assistants but at the end of the day, it’s probably not reality. (SID 3)

When asked why it probably is not reality, SID 3 said,

I think the biggest thing is it comes down to the people above. If the administration feels that sports information is warranted to have two or three people help spread the good will of the athletic program. Again, it comes down to money and I totally get it. When coaches don’t have assistant coaches and they need them, I just don’t know where we fit in. (SID 3)

One AD agreed that additional staffing would help SIDs to expand their offerings:
You certainly would need additional staff and that’s what we continue to try and work towards as well. I mean right now, we have [our SID] and a GA and we have a part-time person on staff that also coaches and teaches. It’s still not enough but it’s still more than what some other institutions have. (AD 2)

Finally, another SID provided examples of what more staffing would allow the sports information staff to produce:

We would like to do more feature stories and stuff too but that doesn’t always happen. And with the video, I’d like to do more of the feature thing, feature videos, but that doesn’t always happen. It just depends on what type of staff you get in terms of students.

(SID 6)

Interaction with Administrators

All ADs and SIDs were asked about the amount of interaction SIDs have with other administrators both inside and outside athletics as a way to investigate their leadership. The only administrators mentioned were ADs and assistant ADs, although several SIDs interacted with their campus communication staffs. Comments showed that SIDs have varying degrees of interaction with their ADs and assistant ADs ranging from daily communication to going days without communicating. The nature of the interactions ranged from informal discussions to weekly administrative team meetings. Four participants also discussed a “hands-off” approach on the part of ADs with their SIDs.

Who they interact with. When asked about their interactions with other administrators, the only administrators SIDs reported working with were their ADs and assistant/associate ADs. None of the participants reported working with chancellors, vice chancellors, presidents, or any other upper-level administrators, although one SID had limited interaction with administrators in
student life of which athletics was a part. Five participants said SIDs work with their institutions’ communications staff from time to time, primarily regarding special events, including two who attended weekly communications staff meetings.

**Frequency.** The participants said interactions between SIDs and other administrators occurred at varying frequencies. Just one AD and one SID mentioned infrequent interaction with the other position. Two ADs reported minimal task-related interaction with their SIDs, one due to the length of tenure of the SID and one due to a personal management philosophy. When asked about the frequency of interaction with his SID, one AD said,

rarely. He’s experienced and has been here. He reports to me but the only thing I’ll mention to him is maybe ideas for articles or stories. He pretty much runs it all with little supervision. I don’t know if that’s true everywhere but he’s been here for a long time.

(AD 5)

The other AD noted,

I don’t have a lot of say in what they do. My philosophy has always been to hire good people and then get out of their way and let them work and support them as much as you can. Your SID knows a heck of a lot more about what needs to be done in that office than an athletic director does. (AD 4)

However, AD 4 did report frequent interaction with their SID due to the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with the SID.

Three SIDs described how they have autonomy to do their job, including the two SIDs who said they have minimal contact with their ADs. The third SID reported constant interaction with their AD but also had autonomy to do the job, while consulting with the AD when
necessary. The other two SIDs indicated their AD let them do their job with little interaction or input. According to one SID,

the contact I have with them is really kind of, not limited, but they really let me do my thing...I go a couple days without having contact with the AD or assistant AD. It’s just they know what I’m doing and they just trust me, so I think that is something that has been built up over the years and for that part, it’s been a great relationship (SID 3)

The other SID said the administration trusted that the work would get done and interacted primarily with an assistant AD, while noting an open-door policy should circumstances arise that required communication with the AD or other administrators.

Of the 12 participants to have frequent interaction, the interaction ranged from hourly to daily to weekly. One AD said hourly interaction with the SID was necessary because the SID was the second most important person in the office to the business manager, while another noted already having been in the SIDs office three times that morning.

Nature of interaction. The nature of the interactions between SIDs and their ADs and assistant ADs were both formal and informal. Four participants mentioned formal meetings, three weekly and one bi-weekly. Two had weekly one-on-one meetings with the other position, the third weekly meeting involved the entire administrative team and the bi-weekly meeting was for the whole department. Five participants discussed informal interactions, including running into each other due to the proximity of their offices and an open-door policy, as the main way SIDs and ADs work together. One AD re-emphasized the importance of strong relationships between the two positions, indicating interaction should not be limited to work-related topics. Alternatively, one SID said he mainly hears from his AD when something is wrong or the AD doesn’t like something and expressed never receiving positive feedback.
Seven SIDs mentioned frequent interaction with their ADs. Two noted daily communication, two said they work closely and another reported receiving lots of feedback, although most of the feedback was negative:

As far as the athletic director, he gives us a lot of feedback. If there’s something he wants, he’ll tell us. Other than that, he kind of lets us go. It’s kind of one of those where if something’s wrong or he doesn’t like something, then he’ll let us know but there’s never a “hey, that was a really good story on this” or “everything is fine” or “looks good.” (SID 1)

Two of the SIDs said they have weekly meetings with their ADs and two specifically mentioned not having standing meetings. One of the ADs to have a weekly meeting described the purpose of the meeting along with the nature of the relationship between the two:

I go into (the AD’s) office once a week for a half hour and we chat about things and discuss some of the issues with the things going on in the department. We have a pretty informal relationship but it’s a positive relationship. (The AD) is extremely supportive of the things I’m doing and how the things we’re doing fit into the greater department. (SID 5)

One of the SIDs discussed how a personal interest in the administrative side changed the role he played at his institution, leading to working with the AD as part of the senior leadership team:

I’ve been getting more involved in the administrative side of the athletic department the last few years…My current role is getting more involved in the administrative side of things with daily decision stuff for the whole department that doesn’t even necessarily affect sports information. It’s kind of an evolving role. (SID 7)
In response to a follow-up question, SID 7 said this change was due to a personal interest in the administrative side and that his more administrative role is unique among Division III SIDs.

**Leadership**

Another important theme to emerge from the interviews was the issue of leadership. This theme was most commonly addressed by SIDs and ADs through the involvement of SIDs on the administrative teams of their departments. However, SIDs also discussed this topic through comments on the behind-the-scenes nature of their work and expressed frustration with regards to the amount of leadership they were afforded.

**Administrative team.** Four ADs described the importance of having their SID as part of their department’s administrative team. Two ADs addressed this topic specific to the situation at their current institution. In addition to the AD who felt the SID is the second most important person in their department, one AD pointed to the assistant athletic director title as indication that the SID served an administrative role, while mentioning the SID served as a chair on a recent search committee. Two ADs commented more generally on the value SIDs bring to their departments and institutions when they are part of the administrative team. According to AD 2, “They’re a director, so they are in charge of all aspects of that division…they certainly need to be part of leadership teams because they are in touch with so many different aspects of the bigger picture of the institution.” Furthermore, AD 2 said, “But the important part is that they’re part of the administrative team. They’re sitting at the table helping make decisions and they are essentially prioritizing what our goals are for the year.” Another AD described how the entire department benefits from having SIDs as integrated as possible because the SID is another resource for departments that often have small administrative staffs.
Six SIDs also made comments related to this theme, with five agreeing that it is beneficial to have SIDs involved with the leadership teams of their athletic departments due to the SID’s role in publicizing the department. While not currently serving as an administrator by title and responsibilities, SID 4 said, “I’d like to pick a situation to have more of a role. I think that’s a good route to go with, having them kind of on the athletic director’s cabinet, as you would call it.” As “an administrator and ambassador for our department,” SID 5 was involved with building the strategic plan of his institution and, although he has a so-called “seat at the table,” still wished for more administrative responsibilities and decision-making privileges. Similarly, another SID argued that SIDs need to be more involved both on campus and in their community. SID 5 noted the issue of having too many “cooks in the kitchen” and felt the more SIDs can handle their daily responsibilities, the more responsibilities they will be afforded. The SID who was highly involved administratively said that allowed him to stay in the loop of what is going on around the department and keep others informed. Two SIDs discussed how limited staffing plays a major role in determining how involved a SID can be since they are often too busy to take on more responsibility. Another noted a potential trend of less experienced ADs seeing their SIDs as having “a more viable role in athletics” as an administrator, while longer-serving ADs are more likely to hold the “stats-guy” mentality. Finally, one SID felt that, although many SIDs may be qualified and want to be involved in a leadership capacity, there are other leaders in the department and SIDs having more of a voice may lead to too many conflicting voices.

While many participants felt it was beneficial for SIDs to assume leadership roles in their departments, three SIDs described the difficulty of those in the position gaining a more prominent role in their departments due to the nature of their work. One said that SIDs need to
have a strong voice in order to be more involved but that many SIDs do not have one as a result of being isolated working in their offices. According to SID 7, SID often operate “behind the scenes…making our student-athletes and coaches look good…that’s kind of the nature of what we do,” while another used the word “forgotten” when referring to SIDs.

**Frustration.** Three SIDs talked about lack of leadership roles as a source of frustration, as did one AD. One SID discussed the issue of SIDs feeling frustrated with their lack of involvement in decision-making or leadership roles in their departments specifically in his experience and from interactions with his peers at other institutions. With regards to his current position, he acknowledged having a “spot at the table” in his department but still desires more administrative responsibilities and decision-making privileges. He also noted the importance of handling his daily sports information responsibilities in order to gain respect from other administrators and earn further responsibilities. More generally, he noted that his degree of involvement in a leadership capacity in his department is not common at the Division III level:

> I know a lot of sports information directors and I talk to them at conventions. I talk to them through email, on the phone, when I’m at other sites and they are frustrated…I think it is atypical, the fact that I am able to be strategic and to sort of think beyond the day-to-day grind and responsibilities. (SID 5)

When asked to clarify what being strategic entailed, SID 5 mentioned being involved in forming the strategic plan of the department and finding new ways to share content both internally and with the media. On the same topic, SID 3 agreed that SIDs often feel frustrated with regards to leadership but expressed doubt over how appropriate it is for SIDs to have a prominent voice in athletic departments:

> Despite my years of service, I think that there’s a leader of the department and he or she
is in that role for a reason and they need to be the voice. If you have five, six…10 people providing input, they you have different voices, different leaders and I think it leads to problems, perhaps…There needs to be a common message and really need to all be on the same page. So, as much as sports information directors want to have as much say as possible and they may be qualified to do that, I just don’t know if it’s the right thing to do. (SID 3)

Similarly, another SID noted the lengthy tenures of many SIDs in the league and felt the years of service may indicate SIDs are content in their roles. From the AD perspective, one AD – after acknowledging frustration with limited management roles – advocated on behalf of the SIDs for more involvement in their departments:

In my earlier career as an assistant athletic director, I even had a really hard time conceptualizing the role of a sports information director. In my mind, they’re a director, so they’re in charge of all aspects of that division. But now I see as sports information continues to evolve and the demands that are required by staff in those positions, they certainly need to be part of leadership teams because they are in touch with so many different aspects of, again, the bigger picture of the institution because we’re the front door to an institution. (AD 2)

Value of SID

Another major theme that came up during the interviews with both ADs and SIDs was the value of SIDs. There were three main areas discussed under this theme. First, participants talked about a general lack of understanding of the value of SIDs to their departments on the part of the general public and administrators outside of athletics, which led to frustration on the part of SIDs. Second, ADs and SIDs both described how people within the athletic departments did understand the value of the SID and this value comes from SIDs serving as the face of the
department and in recruiting and retention. Third, participants said the value of an SID comes from their role in promoting the department’s teams and their value in affecting recruitment and retention.

**Lack of understanding outside athletics.** The first subtheme under the theme of the value of SIDs is the lack of understanding of this value on the part of the general public and campus administrators outside of athletics. One AD and three SIDs elaborated on how those people not involved closely with the work of SIDs do not see all that goes into the role. One AD discussed how the general public only sees SIDs working at games, which is only a fraction of what SIDs do, and do not realize the amount of work SIDs do outside events:

The games are just one part of that and since our student-athletes are in school during the day and compete at night and on weekends, we work traditional days and then we work nights and weekends. The rank-and-file person or fan doesn’t see that. They just see them at games and think they have the best job in the world because they get paid to watch sports. They don’t have an understanding of the day-to-day things that an SID does. (AD 4)

SID 1 likened the work SIDs do to the work an offensive line does in football, saying “It’s not even close” when asked if people understand the role, and went on to add that “Nobody talks about it [the work SIDs do] until something goes wrong.” SID 3 agreed with SID 1 and related the lack of understanding to the reputation of SIDs as the “stats guy” rather than “a professional…a communications leader.” SID 7 felt that the average fan sees the work of SIDs through scores in the newspaper, notes on a broadcast or stats on the website but does not understand how they got there or who was responsible for them.
In addition to the general public not understanding the value of the SID, three SIDs commented on how high-ranking administrators at their institutions also fail to comprehend what SIDs bring to their departments. Two of the three participants assumed the SID role, in addition to a coaching position, with little experience in the field after their university decided not to hire a full-time SID. SID 9 mentioned presidents and chancellors as high-ranking administrators that frequently do not understand the value of SIDs to their institutions. One SID described the circumstances that led to her situation and how they reflect the administrations’ view of the role, saying,

I think it is kind of sad the way the university community views the role. I don’t think they see the importance of it, but, when you are faced with tough situations like budget cuts, their main priority was to not cut a program, so that’s what they were left at. (SID 2)

Similarly, another SID felt sports information is not always deemed a profession by administrations:

I think as a general rule for sports information people, those people are professional people. That is a professional job. It’s something that takes specialized training to do and I don’t think system-wide and I know here, they don’t always look at it that way. (SID 1)

SID 1 went on to describe how the administration at his institution had an “anyone can do it” mentality, which led to him to being asked to take on the SID role with little preparation.

New SIDs

Three SIDs who were thrust into the role when their institutions decided not to replace a full-time SID explained how their situations were indicative of this problem. Two of the three SIDs worked at the same institution as co-SIDs, while the other split the duties with other full-time employees in the department. Of the two co-SIDs, one coached a fall sport and the other
coached a spring sport, so they took turns doing the bulk of the work in the offseason of their particular sport. These three SIDs all had minimal experience in the profession. One had a communications degree but had no experience in the field prior to one month with the previous SID to get up to date. The other two had worked as assistant SIDs while coaching at previous institutions. One of the co-SIDs and the other SID said the statewide budget cuts played a role in them becoming SIDs. One got involved in sports information after losing a 50% teaching appointment in another department. The other SID said the institution’s main goal when faced with the cuts was to not cut a program, which led to the university not hiring a full-time SID. Another SID reflected on the issue of institutions making these choices, saying,

I worry as people get into budget situations that they feel that sometimes the sports information people, they don’t value it or don’t see that it’s a specialized job. Then that’s one of the first things they can say, “Well, we can have someone else do that as part of their job.” That is definitely not something I would recommend trying to do…It really bothers me that it’s not viewed as a profession. You can’t just walk into it. (SID 1)

**Understanding within athletics.** While participants expressed doubt about whether people outside of athletic departments understand the value of SIDs, they generally felt that people inside athletic departments do see that value. Four ADs and six SIDs discussed this theme. The four ADs were clear in stating the value they see in their SIDs. AD 2 referred to sports information as a “critical function,” AD 4 said they are “critical to what we do,” while AD 5 said the SID is “probably the key to our whole athletic department.” Furthermore, two ADs said the value of SIDs comes from statistics and gameday responsibilities, with AD 3 noting “If you take him out of the equation, there aren’t other people who can step in and do that.” On the same note, AD 3 mentioned that people inside the department (i.e. coaches) often want more
from the SID but that they “absolutely understand the importance of him to our operation.” AD 4 felt that ADs and SIDs typically have strong relationships both generally and in his personal experience.

Six SIDs joined the four ADs in agreeing that athletic department employees understand the value SIDs hold for their departments. SID 1 said that people who work in athletics see the value of SIDs because they see the variety of responsibilities SIDs have, while SID 3 said SIDs sometimes are “running the whole department.” Speaking generally, SID 2 felt SIDs at the Division III level are viewed as “a crucial role in the athletic department” due to their role in marketing the programs and making sure everything runs smoothly at games. SID 5 spoke specifically about how ADs value their SIDs:

I think athletic directors are seeing the value of our position. They’re seeing our status as an insider, as a storyteller, as an ambassador of our department. I had an athletic director that I worked for in the past say to me, “I’ve got my assistant and my senior women’s administrator in my right had and I’ve got my SID in my left hand,” so I think that’s the position a lot of athletic directors have. (SID 5)

SID 9 also specifically mentioned how the AD realized how important sports information is to the entire department. Two other SIDs (SID 6 and SID 9) noted the amount of time in their current position and a move to an assistant athletic director title as evidence that people in their departments valued their work.

**Forming perception of athletics.** The most common way participants described the value of SIDs to their departments was their role in creating the public’s perception of the athletic department through their work with the media, the website, social media and marketing. In total, one AD and one SID mentioned the SID’s role in dealing with the media, one AD and
four SIDs pinpointed the website, two SIDs discussed the SID’s role as a marketer, and one SID identified social media as key elements behind the value of an SID. AD 1 described the SID as the “gatekeeper…the first line of which people will see our results and our stories.” AD 4 used the phrase “the face of athletics” twice in talking about the role of the SID, while AD 5 said “he is our communication” when referring to the SID. Three of the four SIDs to mention the website said that aspect of their job is important because it is the go-to source for information about their teams and, therefore, serves as a vital reflection on the programs. According to SID 1, “We are reaching 5, 10, 15 thousand people a week with what you’re putting on your website…You really do have a lot of power and influence over the athletic department and what people are seeing about it.” SID 2 described SIDs as “the hub of the athletic department” and discussed the role they play in marketing the programs as especially important at the Division III level where the media is not as prominent. Similarly, SID 5 mentioned how the SID serves as a storyteller by “promoting and highlighting our student-athletes’ accomplishments and telling their stories” and SID 8 said she tells coaches “it’s my job to tell your story, to get you guys out there.” SID 6 referred to the sports information office as a “public relations arm of the university” and SID 7 identified disseminating information as the most important part of the job.

**Recruiting and retention.** A second way that participants described the value of SIDs to their departments was through recruitment and retention, a theme mentioned by two ADs and two SIDs. In building off the previous theme, AD 1 said, “The website is the first line of recruiting. A recruit comes to our website and it’s the first thing they come to instead of talking to a person, so it’s got to be up-to-date.” On the same topic, SID 1 said the website serves as an important tool in both recruiting and retention by helping form the perception of the athletic department. SID 7 mentioned that creating recruiting materials often is the responsibility of the
SID and specifically mentioned recruiting student-athletes as part of what they bring to the table for their departments. According to AD 2, “Athletic communications is something we can’t just ignore because of how we can help enrollment at an institution based on the stories we provide…especially in Division III with the philosophy we have, we have to be able to explain why people should choose the institution you’re at.”

**Frustration.** Finally, SIDs generally felt frustrated due to feeling underappreciated by upper-level administrators and the general public. This was especially evident at the institutions of three participants who, despite limited experience in sports information, assumed SID responsibilities out of necessity after their institutions opted not to hire full-time SIDs. All three of these SIDs, two of who split the SID duties at one institution were either a head coach or assistant coach in addition to their sports information roles. One of these described how a coach’s involvement in sports information reflects this lack of understanding from administrators outside of athletics, such as chancellors and vice chancellors, a view that was held by one of the longer-tenured SIDs as well:

…they do not see the value in it nearly as much as I do or as a coach or as I think the rest of our athletic department does, unfortunately. So, I think it’s kind of sad the way the university community views the role. (SID 2)

Another participant, SID 4, commented that even people within the athletic department do not always grasp what goes into the role, saying, “I don’t think they understand what all goes into a day of prepping for a game…Coaches and administrators are always thinking about themselves specifically. They don’t think about everyone else around them.” Despite these comments, four SIDs said they think their co-workers in athletics understand their role and what they contribute to the department, while SID 2 felt that SIDs are generally well-valued, although not at her
current institution. Similarly, all five of the ADs that were interviewed stated that SIDs are a valuable part of their departments in their opinion. AD 3 noted SIDs’ importance in terms of gameday responsibilities, such as video and stats, saying, “We have to have those kinds of things and he’s the most knowledgeable about those things, so if you take him out of the equation, there aren’t other people who can step in and to those things.” Furthermore, AD 5 referred to the institution’s SID as “the key to our whole athletic department.” In addition, two ADs specifically stated they think others around their department see the value of SIDs as well. Results also showed that the general public does not understand what SIDs contribute to their department, as three SIDs and one AD commented on misperceptions from people outside the university. When asked if administrators and the general public see the value in sports information or not, SID 1 responded with,

It’s definitely the second one and it’s not even close. People never talk about the offensive line and I think it’s the same kind of thing with sports information people. They are doing a ton of work and have a lot of stuff on their plate and nobody talks about it until something goes wrong…I think as a general rule, those are professional people…It’s something that takes specialized training to do and I think system-wide and I know here, they don’t look at it that way. It’s like ‘well anyone can pick it up and start writing stories and managing the website or doing stats.’ (SID 1)

On the same note, SID 3 and SID 7 discussed how the general public only sees SIDs doing stats at the games, leading to the aforementioned “stats guy” mentality, rather than everything else they do over the course of a week, and how people take what the SID does (stats, recaps, photo galleries, etc.) for granted. These feelings were shared by AD 4, who shared how people think
SIDs and ADs get paid to watch sports without truly understanding all the work that goes into their jobs.

**Changing Profession**

Another theme to emerge from the interviews was the evolving nature of the sports information profession, which was evident in several ways. First, it is becoming more commonplace for SIDs to have titles such as “assistant athletic director for athletic communication” or “assistant athletic director for media relations.” In relation to the shift in titles, the interviews indicated that the profession is moving away from an emphasis on statistics and towards a role as a strategic communicator. Finally, the rising presence of social media has changed the SID profession by adding another element to the job.

**Shift in titles.** Eight participants (three ADs and five SIDs) noted the trend in the profession of moving away from the typical “sports information director” title and towards “assistant athletic director for athletic communication” or “assistant athletic director for media relations.” Four of the SIDs interviewed had assistant athletic director titles, with three having their title changed recently from SID. Four of the participants held the title of “sports information director” (or “co-sports information director”), while one was “sports information coordinator.”

One athletic director noted,

you’re seeing more and more people in Division III doing that, but even in upper Divisions II and I, they’re certainly transforming those titles because it has become so much more involved outside that traditional statistician. (AD 2)

From the SID perspective, two participants commented on how assistant athletic director titles carry more respect and bring more visibility to the job:
I think that kind of tells people that this is an important job...I think it’s a good move for the profession to get more people like that because you are putting the spotlight on how important the position is. (SID 1)

Three SIDs described how this trend fits the changing nature of the SID position itself. According to one SID,

the reason for that I think is a little bit of a change in the responsibilities and sort of the shift of our profession to more of that athletic communications instead of information submitting, collecting, all that kind of stuff. (SID 5)

One SID and one AD felt that the change in titles have not impacted the profession, while one SID to have a title change said the change did not come with any change in responsibilities or financial advantages:

It was strictly just a title change. [Our AD] wanted to do that because he thought we deserved a change to make us a little more visible and to show people that we are important in the realm of the athletic department. No responsibilities changed. (SID 9)

**Move from statistics to strategic communication.** Two ADs and five SIDs described how the SID profession is moving away from its original emphasis on statistics. One AD noted how the profession has grown recently to being about more than just statistics, although statistics remain an important part of the job:

That profession has certainly grown over I would say even the most recent five years to where it’s not that typical statistician’s type of response. Now it’s more of an athletic communications piece with not only the statistics, which are important for every sport, but most importantly telling the story of the institution. (AD 2)
The other AD traced the growth back two decades and highlighted the additional responsibilities of current SIDs:

SID 20 years ago, they kept stats. That has progressed into...they release articles, now they have the webpage to take care of, they have the webstreams to take care of, they have the social media...and all that other stuff. I think that their job descriptions have just continually added stuff over the years with the increase in media. (AD 5)

According to SID 7, “The job was originally centered around statistics and making sure that results get reported to local news media, the conference and the NCAA…When I first started doing this as a student, that is really all we had to do. We didn’t really have much of a website.” Another SID described how SIDs are seen as the “stats guy” since that is the part of the job people see them doing at events, while another commented on how many in the profession are “stats junkies.”

Three SIDs discussed how important communication skills are to their jobs given the public relations elements of their positions and one other noted how it is fairly common for SIDs to come from or move into other communications positions, including the main communications positions at a university. One SID expanded on how the profession is transitioning to a focus on being a communicator, rather than simply a statistician:

It’s really not about the statistics and the record side so much anymore. That is still part of the job but I think the most important job is to communicate strategically with those different audiences, directly with the media, more indirectly with out website to the fans, our alumni, our campus community. (SID 5)

One AD also explained this change in depth, saying that it has benefitted the SID profession while acknowledging that the profession will have to continue to adapt in the future:
I hate to say it that way but when you think back from where that position was to where it is today, it certainly has evolved and to the benefit of athletic communication. So it will continue to evolve that way and it took CoSIDA a little bit to start recognizing that with their leadership and continuing to allow and educate folks on what that evolution is. It will be important as athletics continues into the new technologies. (AD 2)

**Social media.** The interviews also indicated that the rise of social media has altered the role of the SID by adding another dimension to the job. In total, four ADs and five SIDs discussed social media at some point during their interview. Two of the four ADs to mention social media did so in passing by mentioning it as part of the job. Another said coaches often want more from their SID on the social media side of the job. When asked about how the SID profession has changed, AD 5 responded by discussing how social media has added another responsibility for the SID:

> It’s become more and more with all the increases in social media. …SIDs 20 years ago, they kept stats and that progressed into they have website stuff, they released articles. Now they have the webpage to take care of, they have the web streams to take care of, they have social media…. I think that their job descriptions have just continually added stuff over the years with the increase in media. (AD 5)

Three SIDs also commented briefly on how social media is part of the job. However, two SIDs elaborated on how important social media is to their job. According to SID 8, “We’ve increased our presence on social media tremendously since I started. I’ve pushed teams saying, ‘Hey, you need to be on Facebook, you need to be on Twitter,’ and really helping them do that and making posts for them.” Another SID discussed how social media has changed the SID profession, saying:
With social media and getting the message out, I think SIDs are becoming more public relations savvy and I think people, especially in the state, don’t have a marketing person, so they have to go to the SID to help with that. So I think SIDs’ roles have changed in terms of you get more responsibilities because of the way technology has changed. (SID 9)
Chapter Five: Discussion

This section explores the importance of this study’s findings in relation to previous research. It considers why SIDs may currently be serving in technical roles, rather than managerial ones; it also begins to clarify what a more strategic role would entail and what a move to such a role would require. Finally, it addresses this study’s limitations, which primarily relate to the methodology used, as well as its benefits and implications, while providing suggestions for future research.

The interviews indicated that SIDs have not moved beyond the technician role because the technical aspects of the job are still important and their departments have not implemented staffing models to allow SIDs to move beyond the technical role. Participants’ comments indicated that many SIDs spend their time consumed with technical tasks, such as managing school websites, writing releases, recording statistics, producing social media content and designing publications and promotional materials. This result supports previous studies that showed SIDs operate primarily as technicians (Moore, 2011; Stoldt, 2000; Stoldt & Narasimhan, 2005) in a role similar to the communication technician role of Hogg & Doolan (1999). In such a role, the SIDs were operating as many public relations technicians do by disseminating communication messages (Moss & Green, 2001).

The primary reason why SIDs function substantially as technicians was that ADs and SIDs in this study felt those tasks were most important to the department. The majority of participants described the value of the SID through technical tasks, primarily managing the website and statistics, a finding supporting those of Ruihley & Fall (2009) and Swalls (2004). The technical expertise of SIDs was highly valued within their athletic departments, a result also similar to Ruihley & Fall (2009) and Swalls (2004), who found ADs and SIDs both perceived
SIDs to be more proficient at technical tasks. Furthermore, participants described how SIDs’ proficiency at technical tasks has led the SID to be seen as a workhorse and as the “stats guy” by the general public and upper-level administrators. Similarly, the emphasis on technical tasks was further evidence supporting Battenfield & Kent’s assertion (2007) that the sports information profession is characterized by an emphasis on production, rather than effective communication. Finally, participants noted a tension within the profession between technical and managerial tasks, as becoming more involved with managerial tasks would get in the way of accomplishing their many technical responsibilities.

The staffing models in sports information offices were a second factor that led SIDs to occupy technical, rather than managerial, roles. Given the “one-man shop” nature of most sports information staffs as seen in this study and Moore (2011), SIDs simply could not find time for tasks outside of the technical responsibilities, especially given the SIDs also held responsibilities such as corporate sponsorships, marketing and game management. The lack of full or part-time help devoted specifically to sports information led offices to rely on student workers, graduate assistants and, in some instances, coaches and other staff members. According to the interviews, these staffing models allowed SIDs to perform their primary duties but SIDs expressed a desire for increased staffing, which would ease their workload and help them expand their coverage. Given the difficulty of finding reliable students with relevant skill sets and interests, SIDs desired staffing devoted exclusively to sports information and felt that would allow them to take on additional projects aimed at promoting their teams and student-athletes, such as feature stories/videos, that they are unable provide under current models. While producing these products is a technical task, if approached strategically, they could help tell the story of the institution in more effective ways that many SIDs presently use. However, ADs and SIDs both
acknowledged the difficulty of providing more staffing to sports information, given the financial restraints at the Division III level, while SIDs also noted an “anyone can do it” mentality held by upper-level administrators with regards to their work that prevented devoting further resources to sports information.

This study showed that as a result of being consumed by technical tasks, SIDs are not practicing strategic communication as desired by CoSIDA. The interviews found SIDs generally were not providing strategic content, had not advocated for a managerial role, and may not be prepared for one. Some participants even questioned the feasibility of SIDs transitioning to such a role. Most notably, however, SIDs and ADs both failed to articulate a vision and plan for SIDs to adopt a more managerial, strategic role.

This study found that SIDs were not currently producing strategic content, as they were primarily concerned with producing routine content, rather than thinking about how the content fits into a wider communication plan. This supports Battenfield & Kent’s finding (2007) that SIDs are producers, rather than communicators, which results in little value coming out of the sports information area and suggests that SIDs are not being strategic as advocated for by Pedersen (2013). Additionally, this result provided further evidence that SIDs were fulfilling the technical role in communicating messages, without being concerned with how what they produce fits into a specific, strategic plan (Moss & Green, 2001), rather than the managerial role of planning public relations programs, making communication policy decisions, counseling management, supervising others and diagnosing problems (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier & Broom, 1995; Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998).

While this study produced only vague comments about what a more strategic role would look like for SIDs, the two participants to discuss this topic did begin to articulate ideas for the
type of content that would allow the SID to produce. The two participants described the
importance of having the SID serve as an institutional storyteller or ambassador. In such a role,
the SID is integrated into the entire institution by promoting how athletics fits into the mission of
the institution. Accordingly, the SID documents the entire student-athlete experience, including
academics and community service, rather than simply reporting on wins and losses. Specifically,
SIDs in this role would design content about why student-athletes chose their current institution,
what their experience has been like and what they have learned. In doing so, SIDs would have an
impact on recruiting and retention of student-athletes, which serves as a benefit to the institution
as well as the athletic department.

This role would lead SIDs to be more involved with administrators than they currently
were according to these interviews and previous research. This study showed that SIDs do not
presently interact with administrators outside athletics (i.e. presidents/chancellors, vice
presidents/chancellors, alumni relations or admissions) other than a small amount of contact with
the campus communication staff. In the more strategic role, the two participants envisioned SIDs
working with these other groups because athletics often serves as the “front door” to the
institution and is a primary way that alumni stay connected to their alma mater. By being
involved in this manner, SIDs, who already help form the public perception of the athletic
department, would also have an impact on attracting donors. In this role, SIDs would be tasked
with developing and implementing a strategic communication plan that showcases how athletics
supports the mission of the institution and communicating how student-athletes are having a
positive experience with an emphasis on academics and community service in addition to
athletics. This could lead SIDs to expand the amount and type of coverage they provide through
feature stories on current student-athletes and alumni, highlighting their experiences at the
institution and how those experiences are beneficial, which media outlets may be more apt to pick up. While the present study and Stoldt (2000) suggested that many SIDs desire a more managerial role in order to overcome the lack of respect they often feel (McCleneghan, 1995), it is unclear if SIDs are generally qualified and eager to take on the role that the two participants began to articulate. In addition, participants in this study and the work of Swalls (2004) expressed doubt over SIDs’ qualifications for increased leadership roles.

If SIDs are to achieve CoSIDA’s vision of occupying leadership roles, a more likely scenario would be for SIDs to work more closely with their ADs, who are likely already engaged in the sorts of discussions mentioned above. This study and previous research (Moore, 2011; Stoldt, Miller, & Comfort, 2001) indicated that SIDs often do not work closely with their ADs, as ADs often employ a “hands-off” approach to their SIDs. However, previous studies have shown that ADs view their SIDs as their top public relations officer (Stoldt, Miller, & Comfort, 2001) and feel their departments gain from public relations (Pratt, 2013), indicating the two should more together more closely than indicated. If it is unlikely for SIDs to be involved directly in discussions with upper-level administrators about the institution’s communication plan, their ADs can still inform them of how SIDs fit into those plans, given the role SIDs play in disseminating information about the athletics department. This more indirect form of involvement could limit the amount of say SIDs have but being involved in those discussions would help raise the standing of the profession in the eyes of upper-level administrators and allow SIDs to move beyond the predominantly technical roles they currently serve.

Another possibility for what the strategic mindset would mean for an SID is that it is more about placement of content, rather than generation of content. Given the emphasis on production in the profession, SIDs are typically asked to produce as much content as possible
without thinking about how and where to share that content. For example, given the numerous social media platforms that are relevant in the collegiate athletics landscape (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.), SIDs have a variety of options for where to place their content. However, SIDs often lack time or personnel to produce content for their websites and other platforms and are left posting game previews and recaps and sending them to local media, who typically provide minimal, if any, coverage to Division III athletics. However, improved staffing models would allow SIDs to think more intentionally about the type of content they produce and produce higher-quality work. Since SIDs are tasked with telling the story of the athletic department given the general lack of coverage at the Division III level, print or video feature stories aimed at chronicling the student-athlete experience seem the most relevant and beneficial way for SIDs to expand their coverage and promote their institution.

Implications

This study’s practical implications for the SID profession, individual SIDs, their athletic departments and institutions are that two main changes may need to occur in order for SIDs to follow in CoSIDA’s vision. The first change is that institutions would need to use existing resources more effectively in order to free up time for their SID. Secondly, SIDs would need to become informed on what the strategic role entails and what its benefits would be. The study also has theoretical implications for scholarship on the roles public relations practitioners play and excellence theory in particular, as it questions the practicality of some SIDs taking on managerial roles, as excellence theory asserts public relations practitioners should do; these are discussed in the recommendations for future research section.

First, institutions will need to leverage existing resources more effectively if SIDs are to adopt a more managerial role. Under the more strategic model, SIDs would delegate tasks, such
as statistics and promotional materials, to student workers, graduate assistants or other staff with oversight from the SID. Additionally, athletic departments would likely need to assign game management responsibilities to another area, in order to allow SIDs to focus on overseeing their sports information area. According to participants, this could include training student workers, creating a part-time position devoted to game management, or using coaches in this role. SIDs would also need to find student workers with relevant skills and interests to fulfill the technical roles, which is difficult according to the interviews. For instance, departments could recruit students from public relations and communications classes and offer incentives in the form of academic internships or credit to try and attract better student help, who would gain valuable experience at the same time. Such changes could allow SIDs to operate managerially without creating additional positions, although some departments may find it necessary to form other positions. If so, the comments of participants indicate that graduate assistant or part-time positions would provide enough help from people interested in the profession without the financial impact of full-time positions. This would help alleviate the tension SIDs felt between technical and managerial responsibilities by making sure the technical tasks were accomplished by others while the SID would be free to focus on communicating strategically.

Second, SIDs will need to be informed on what a more strategic role would look like and how it would benefit their institution. Along these lines, this study provides evidence that SIDs are becoming more involved in managerial roles, most notably through comments from ADs noting the importance of that shift, while SIDs noted a move away from an emphasis on statistics to an emphasis on communication. However, this study also showed that work remains to be done in this area and, since CoSIDA was formed to move the profession in this direction, the emphasis is on the organization to educate its members with specifics on the role they envision,
including their responsibilities. If CoSIDA can clarify the role they see SIDs serving as strategic communicators to SIDs, individual SIDs can decide if that is a role they are interested in. If so, those SIDs can begin to articulate how that role would look to their ADs, who could take the vision farther up the institutional hierarchy. It seems that decisions about the roles SIDs play need to be made on an institution-by-institution basis, given the diversity of institutions in terms of size, level of success, funding and staffing. Smaller institutions or those with limited funding and staffing may not be able to go the managerial route, while larger institutions and those with more financial and staffing resources, whose SIDs may already play more managerial roles, may decide that a managerial role could benefit the institution. If an institution decides to go the managerial route, SIDs may need to work with their ADs to form a professional development plan to acquire the skills necessary for a managerial role. CoSIDA could also help in that area by providing professional development opportunities or programs.
Chapter Six: Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Like all research projects, this thesis is not without limitations and sets the stage for future research. This section discusses the limitations of the present study and suggests related areas for future studies to explore.

Limitations

Like all research projects, this thesis is not without limitations. The limitations relate primarily to the qualitative methodology the researcher employed.

First and foremost, the sample used in this study raises the issue of generalizability. As a single study including 14 participants at the Division III level from a single conference, the results of this study do not necessarily apply outside of this sample. Furthermore, the conference participants in this study came from consists of institutions of similar demographics (size, price, academic reputation, etc.), meaning the results may not translate to institutions of different types. The comments also may not apply outside of Division III since Divisions I and II generally have athletic departments with improved staffing models and higher budgets, which alleviates many of the difficulties mentioned by participants in this study. The sample this study used was a convenience sample, as the researcher had worked with many of the participants. The sample also did not include all ADs and SIDs in the conference, although all of the conference’s institutions were represented by at least one participant. However, the familiarity between the researcher and the participants, in many cases, may have made the participants more willing to participate in the study and more comfortable during the interviews.

Secondly, the interpretations of the data from the qualitative interviews are those of the primary researcher and the method used relied on only the primary researcher’s interpretations of the data. However, the researcher in this study was familiar with the SID profession as a result of
nearly seven years of work in the field as an undergraduate student, graduate assistant and full-time employee. The researcher’s experience with the profession and the respondent’s institutions equipped him to understand the context around the data and to identify themes. While there was not a substantial amount of literature about SIDs and issues of leadership, the researcher’s time in the profession helped him both develop interview questions and assess the comments made by participants. For example, while the feelings of frustration SIDs felt about their roles was mentioned in the literature, the researcher’s first-hand experience with that feeling and seeing others feeling that way further enhanced its importance to the study. Although the researcher’s experience helped inform the interpretation, it could lead to the introduction of interpretive bias into the findings. To overcome this, the researcher relied on the comments of the participants, rather than his own thoughts and opinions, in presenting the evidence both for and against SIDs being involved in leadership roles.

Despite any perceived limitations, this study has scholarly and practical benefits. The findings of this study help advance scholarship both in public relations and the SID profession. This study adds to the significant body of research on public relations role theory by investigating the issue of leadership of one public relations position in light of the claims of excellence theory. At the same time, this study contributes to a limited amount of research examining the roles SIDs play and how they feel about those roles. As discussed above, the conclusions drawn from this study have important implications for the SID profession, as SIDs need to demonstrate their value as strategic communicators rather than technicians and their ability to perform a managerial role if they are to perform the roles CoSIDA envisions.
Recommendations for Future Research

The goal of this study was to develop a more in-depth understanding of the roles that Division III SIDs play in their departments, especially with regards to leadership. While this study was successful in providing qualitative evidence for already noted themes and uncovering new ones, work in this area is not complete.

The most evident direction for future research is to extend this study to a wider sample. Since this study only consisted of 14 participants from one conference, future studies should investigate if these results apply to a larger, more diverse sample. Using a similar methodology, researchers should study SIDs at other institutions to see if the results were unique to the conference in this study or if they apply more generally. This approach could also uncover different themes that would further enhance the understanding of this subject. For example, SIDs at institutions with other sizes, staffing models, financial standing or locations may play different roles than those in this study. Given the small sample size of this study, researchers could also use quantitative measures, such as surveys, to analyze a more diverse group and develop a more thorough view on the state of the SID profession. For instance, researchers could study the roles SIDs play at Division I and II institutions and compare them to the data from this study to evaluate if the issues raised here apply at other levels.

Further research is also needed on the AD perspective of this study, given only five were included among the participants. If, as suggested by previous research and this study, athletic directors play important roles in influencing the roles sports information directors play, future research needs to build a better understanding of how they see the profession. Specifically, future studies should directly address the possibility of a more strategic role for SIDs to see if ADs see
that role as viable or not. Such a study would be an important step in evaluating how practical CoSIDA’s vision for the profession is moving forward.

A deeper investigation of the SID profession’s desired shift towards strategic communication is also in order since participants in this study were not specifically asked about the topic. As a result, this study yielded limited insight into this potential transition. If, as Humenik’s comments suggest, this is the way CoSIDA wants the profession to go, a further look into this shift would establish how many SIDs are operating as strategic communicators, what that means or looks like, and if they feel that role is how an SID best serves their department. Answers to these questions would provide guidance in determining the future of the profession. Future research also needs to further investigate the nature of AD-SID relationships by examining how the two work together, as a closer partnership between the two positions is important moving forward. This study and previous research have shown that ADs and SIDs often do not work together closely, but this study suggests a deeper understanding of how the two collaborate is important for the SID profession. As a result, future studies could explore what ADs and SIDs collaborate on, how SIDs would fit into the department in a more managerial role and what, if any, value that would add to the department and institution, compared to the current model. Answers to questions like these would yield insight into how practically viable CoSIDA’s desire for a more managerial standing is and would help clarify exactly what that move would mean for the profession.

This study also has implications for future research on roles in public relations and excellence theory in particular. The mixed opinions found in this study about the practicality and appropriateness of SIDs assuming managerial leadership roles in their departments raises the same questions about other public relations practitioners taking on those roles. Excellence theory
suggests individual practitioners and organizations benefit when practitioners hold managerial roles, but this study suggests that some individuals find it difficult to take on such roles. As a result, future research must examine the roles played by public relations practitioners in other domains in order to evaluate if that is currently the case. Furthermore, a comparison of the thoughts of both public relations practitioners and organizational leaders could yield insight into the general value of public relations and, specifically, if it holds value at the management level. This study indicated that leaders (ADs) valued their public relations practitioners (SIDs) but often did not include them as part of the management team, calling into question excellence theory’s claim that public relations is a management-level function. Such studies would either substantiate excellence theory’s claim or raise more questions about its stance on the position of public relations practitioners in contemporary organizations.
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Appendix A - Interview Questions

**SIDs**
1. What are your responsibilities in your current position?

2. Which of those responsibilities do you see as the most important to your job and your department as a whole?

3. How would you describe your role within your athletic department? Are you solely involved with sports information or are there other responsibilities?

4. How does your work contribute to your athletic department? Are you involved in the decision making process of your athletic department, especially for decisions that affect your job?

5. Are you content in that role? Are there things you wish you could be more involved with or things you wish you did not have to do?

6. Speaking more generally rather than about your specific position, what role do SIDs play in Division III athletic departments?

7. What is the ideal role for a Division III SID? How do they best serve their department?

8. What are the main factors keeping Division III SIDs from attaining that ideal role?

**Athletic Directors**
1. What are the responsibilities of your SID?

2. Which of those responsibilities do you see as the most important to your department?

3. What role does your SID play in your department? Are they involved in tasks outside of traditional sports information?

4. What does your SID contribute to your entire department? Are they involved in the decision making process of your department, especially for decisions that affect their job?

5. Do you think your SID is content in that role?

6. Speaking more generally rather than about your department, what role do SIDs play in Division III athletic departments?

7. What is the ideal role for a Division III SID? How do they best serve their department?

8. What are the main factors keeping Division III SIDs from attaining that ideal role?