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The Graduate School

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PRIORITY SEATING PROGRAM AT AN NCAA DIVISION I SCHOOL

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Joseph R. Delich

College of Health and Human Sciences
School of Sport and Exercise Science

August 2004

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I would be remiss if I did not mention my parents [redacted] as they have supported me for the last 38 years in every way imaginable. Fifty one years ago, my father earned his masters degree from UNC…I am proud to follow his lead. Thanks for always being there and believing in me!

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THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS ARTICLE ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR AND DO NOT REFLECT THE OFFICIAL POLICY OR POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, OR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT.

ABSTRACT

Delich, Joseph R. *A Qualitative Case Study on the Implementation of A Priority Seating Program at an NCAA Division I School*. Published Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2004.

The purpose of this study was to examine the development and implementation of a priority seating program at a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I member institution. The unit of analysis (sample) for this study was the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) athletic department's priority seating program.

A qualitative case study was the chosen methodology and the use of personal interviews and documents were the primary sources of evidence for data collection. A case study protocol was developed and used in this study. Six days were spent at UW conducting interviews and gathering materials relevant to the study. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed and qualitative content analysis was utilized to examine documents collected for the study. A process of triangulation was used to validate, corroborate, and refute emerging findings. Additionally, peer reviews, member checks, and a researcher journal/log were used to help increase the study's validity and reliability.

Results of this study indicate the priority seating program at UW was developed to generate additional revenues by exploiting an "untapped" resource identified in the annual giving program. UW included a priority points program largely in response to their inability to distribute benefits equitably. UW conducted research on 13 "similar" institutions that administered priority seating programs, held focus groups with current UW athletic supporters, and assembled a diverse group of interests to assimilate all of this information and formulate a program. The keys to "selling" the program included,

starting the process well in advance, providing logical and factual rationale for the program, and always communicating in an open and honest fashion.

This studies key findings include: a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis is vital to designing a program; fostering a partnership type relationship with donors increases their level of "buy-in"; a donor's range of emotions from program announcement to implementation will often vary and must be accounted for; priority seating may be an effective market penetration strategy relative to fund raising; the market exchange theory and the principle of scarcity are both foundational, underlying themes of priority seating/priority points programs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is a widely acknowledged reality that big-time Division I athletics have become big-time businesses as the cost of conducting intercollegiate athletic programs continues to increase substantially (Dittman, 1997). As athletic costs continue to rise with the advent of tuition hikes, increased salaries and budgets, Title IX requirements, and a host of other related factors, the pressure on athletic directors to increase revenues for their departments is enormous and many athletic administrators across the country are being hired on the basis of their demonstrated ability to raise funds (Sabock & Bortner, 1986). According to Stier (1992), sport programs are constantly in need of additional resources and financial backing. For the elite schools, raising revenues is paramount in order to keep pace with the escalating costs of big-time college athletics and the lofty aspirations set at many institutions. The University of Miami's athletic department has grown from $15 million in 1993 to $35 million in 2002, yet the athletic department administration contends that this sum will have to grow in the years ahead for the program to remain competitive and to compete for national Championships in all sports. At Kansas University, the athletic director contends that the school must boost its $27 million athletic budget in order to keep pace with other schools (Anderson, 2003). While the athletic costs continue to proliferate between the elite schools vying for National Championships year in and year out, many universities are simply trying to grow revenue in an effort to stave off the elimination of existing men's and women's programs.

It has been widely chronicled that public sector resources have been on the decline for a number of years and in some states completely unavailable to athletic

programs (Howard & Crompton, 2004; Craig & Weisman, 1994). According to Baggot (2002a), the University of Wisconsin (UW) Athletic Department received 6.1 percent of its $13.4 million in revenues from state assistance in 1985; conversely, in 2002 the athletic department's $51.3 million revenue stream received zero assistance from state sources. In an effort to supplement existing operating budgets and to increase opportunities for women, without eliminating men's programs, athletic administrators have turned to alternative forms of revenue generation (Howard & Crompton, 2004; Agthe & Billings, 2000; Craig & Weisman, 1994). Perhaps the most common form of alternative revenue generation in today's collegiate athletic environment falls under the "broad" umbrella of fund raising.

The contributions from the practice of fund raising have left an indelible mark on the landscape of today's collegiate athletic environment. According to Fulks (2001), monies generated through fund raising activities are the second largest source of revenue generation and account for 18 percent of all revenues across Division I-A athletics. At the University of Wisconsin, the practice of fund raising has risen from 4.6 percent of generated revenues in 1985 to representing 11 percent of all revenues in 2002. This is the third largest revenue source at UW behind ticket sales and revenues from the Big Ten Conference (Baggot, 2002b). Despite its significance, collegiate fund raising has long been a topic largely ignored by those in the academic community. A review of the existing literature indicated that prior to 2001, Isherwood (1986) was the last to conduct a thorough descriptive study of Division I-A athletic department's fund raising programs (Wells, 2001).

In his study on intercollegiate fund raising, Wells (2001) noted that the inclusion of priority seating as an alternative form of revenue generation is a practice that is being looked upon by athletic administrators as a potentially significant contributor to an athletic department's overall revenue stream. In fact, Wells (2001) noted that the athletic fund raising practice of tying ticket sales and seating priority with donations over and above the season ticket price is redefining the true meaning of fund raising. To strengthen this assertion, a separate study by Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, (2003) examined athletic donor motivations at NCAA Division I institutions and found that along with success-related factors and psychological commitment, the practice of priority seating was one of the most significant factors considered by donors.

The potential revenue-generating capability of a priority seating program is very attractive to athletic departments who are constantly searching for revenue streams from any and all sources. Brewer (2002) reported that the University of Tennessee raised $12 million in 2001 through its priority seating program. Louisiana State University (LSU) expected to generate an additional $7.5 million in annual athletic department revenue by implementing priority seating, while at the University of Wisconsin, the "Badger Fund" received donations totaling more than $3.6 million from its priority seating program (Baggot, 2002b). At Kansas University, athletic department officials anticipate the generation of at least $3 million through its implementation of a priority seating program (Anderson, 2003). The importance of priority seating cannot be understated as schools continually look for ways to maximize revenue streams. Yet, as compelling as the potential revenue generating capacity of priority seating is, there is an equally compelling potential for backlash when implementing a new program or even revamping an old one.

Athletic administrators considering implementing or significantly revamping an existing priority seating program must fully understand the dynamics involved and the very real potential for negative consequences.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the development and implementation of a priority seating program at a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I member institution. This study attempted to illuminate a process that resulted in a decision or sets of decisions, why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what results (Schramm, 1971), as they related to the implementation of priority seating at the University of Wisonsin-Madison.

Research Questions

The study's propositions directed attention to elements for examination during the scope of the study (Yin, 2003). There were two fundamental propositions that guided the search for relevant evidence in this study. First, the lack of any substantive literature on the topic of priority seating brings into question the underlying principles that govern the development and implementation of priority seating programs. It is this study's contention that schools must undergo some degree of either a formal or informal process to develop a program, its strategies, and subsequently its implementation. The existence of such a process allows for a systematic analysis and evaluation of the underlying principles relative to this process. The second key proposition was the thought that priority seating, while traditionally thought of as a fund raising tactic, may in fact be more suitably categorized as a pseudo sponsorship-like arrangement whereby each party is governed not by traditional fund raising edicts but rather by a more market-like

exchange where both parties are mutually satisfied. These two propositions were critical for as Yin (2003) pointed out, only when you are forced to state your propositions can you move in the right direction of what it is you should study.

The following research questions were developed with these propositions in mind and were intended to aid in the data collection by clearly stating the issues to be addressed.

Q1 Why was a priority seating program established at the University of Wisconsin-Madison?

Q2 What factors played a role in the development and implementation of the program?

Q3 How were the key factors in the priority seating and priority points system determined?

Q4 Why were priority points criteria weighted against one another as they were?

Q5 What was the overall strategy involved with "marketing" the new program to donors?

Need for Study

As previously stated, operating expenses for Division I-A athletic programs continue to rise due to greater staffing requirements, escalating salaries, increased scholarship (tuition) costs, Title IX compliance, and a host of other related factors. With state and federal funding on the decline, it's imperative that athletic departments become more self-reliant financially. In lieu of escalating costs, administrators must turn their attention to the opposite side of the balance sheet in an effort to maximize potential revenue streams. Fund raising is one of the critical components of any Division I-A athletic program's revenue generation schema and as reported by Wells (2001), the magnitude of season ticket sales relative to annual fund raising is very high and provides

several more recommendations for future research. Wells (2001) also points out that priority seating appears to be the direct link between season ticket sales and athletic fund raising. Substantiating this is Mahony, Gladden, & Funk (2003) who identified the need for future research to be directed not at the macro-level, but rather that an effort is made to analyze annual athletic fund raising programs at the micro-level with such programs as priority seating.

Kelly (1991) argued that linking donations (i.e. philanthropy) with the practice of priority seating (i.e. value in kind) is a type of relationship that should not be fostered in a fund raising program, advocating rather that universities continue to follow the more traditional philanthropical donating edicts. The practice of priority seating, which elicits donations in exchange for preferential seating, appears to emulate a sponsorship-like arrangement between the University and its core fan base. The essence of sport sponsorship is based on the mutual exchange between a sport entity and a corporation whereby the reliance on the exchange theory suggests that both parties can simultaneously provide and receive benefits, thus creating a symbiotic relationship (Copeland, Frisby, & McCarville, 1996; McCarville & Copeland, 1994).

A key tenet of social exchange theory is that human behavior is in essence an exchange, particularly of rewards or resources of primarily material character (wealth) (Cook, 2000; Stolte, Fine, & Cook, 2001). According to Coleman (1990), presumably such exchange transactions permeate all social phenomena including group processes and inter-group relations, which are conceived as sets or joint outcomes of voluntary individual actions induced by rewards. Arguably, social action is an exchange of (tangible or intangible) activities and rewards/costs between individuals on the grounds

that people have always explained their conduct by means of its benefits and costs to them (Homans, 1961). According to Coleman (1990), exchange represents the basis of human behavior and is pervasive throughout social life.

Another feature of exchange theory is the principle of reciprocity that Cialdini (2001) simply describes as a rule that says we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us. Assuming that exchange transactions are reciprocal, if reciprocity is not observed such transactions will tend to eventually discontinue (Zafirovski, 2003). Within the attribute of reciprocal reinforcement, the concept of an exchange relation contains an "exchange ratio" [balance-imbalance] and this variable sets the stage for introducing dependence, power, and cohesion (Emerson, 1969).

This type of market-like exchange between the university and its season ticket holders is wholly different from the traditional notion of "making a donation" which customarily did not require the University to provide anything of real value in return. Most universities appear to treat priority seating as a component of their fundraising arm, governing its implementation with the same tactics used to solicit the "traditional" donation. It would seem intuitive that perhaps this viewpoint may be somewhat antiquated and as such would require athletic department's to rethink their fundamental approach to priority seating, away from the "traditional" donating edicts and more towards principles appropriate with the exchange theory and the market like exchange of goods and services.

Additionally, as compelling as the potential revenue generating capacity of priority seating is, there is an equally compelling potential for backlash when implementing a new program or even revamping an old one. Athletic administrators at

Louisiana State University (LSU) spent the better part of two years to garner support and "sell" its new program to its season ticket base in anticipation of the need for damage control. Donors at Kansas University have filed suit against the school claiming that their rights have been violated by the University's demand for additional donations over and above the season ticket price (Anderson, 2003). It is imperative that athletic administrators who are considering implementing or significantly revamping a priority seating program must fully understand the dynamics involved as well as the very real potential for negative ramifications.

Merriam (1998) notes that case studies are interested in the process rather than the outcomes, in the context rather than a specific variable, and in discovery rather than confirmation. The literature, or lack thereof, clearly identifies a void in the area of research specifically related to the topic of priority seating. A qualitative case study was chosen because its strength lies in its ability to provide a contextual, in-depth, and holistic view of a recently implemented priority seating program. The results of this study illuminate the strategies, methodologies, and theoretical underpinnings by which a school may be best served to implement such a program. Additionally, it is possible this study will uncover new ideas or hypotheses relative to the practice of priority seating. I believe this effort was the first rigorous academic endeavor conducted specifically on the topic of priority seating.

Delimitations

There were two distinct factors serving as the basis for the delimitation of this study. These two factors were:

a. Criterion-Based Sampling: In most case studies, the practice of random sampling is not utilized because the overarching objective is not to estimate some population value but rather to select a case or cases which offer the greatest learning potential (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). Goetz & LeCompte (1984) refer to this concept as criterion-based sampling whereby the researcher establishes certain criteria for the study and subsequently searches for a sample that fits that criterion. I developed specific criteria for this particular study and have enumerated these in the methodology section.

b. Unit of Analysis: According to Yin (2003), a critical component of research design is related to the fundamental problem of defining what the "case" is. The "case", or unit of analysis, is the object of the researchers study and may be a single individual, a group, a program, or an implementation process (Yin, 2003). It is Yin's (2003) contention that the selection of the appropriate unit of analysis will occur when the primary research questions have been accurately identified; however as with other facets of the research design, the unit of analysis may need to be revisited because of discoveries made during the data collection phase of the study.

The two factors listed above provided the "boundaries" for this study and as such formed the basis for the following delimitation:

1. This study's primary focus was on examining the athletic department's implementation of a priority seating program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW). This study did not assess priority seating programs at any other universities with the following caveats. I have discussed priority seating programs within the review of literature and used information from other university programs to aid in the development of appropriate research and interview questions for the data collection phase of the study.

Additionally, a pilot study of priority seating at Gonzaga University was conducted to further reinforce validity and reliability (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996; Broom & Dozier, 1990).

Limitations

This study was limited by the following constraint:

1. Use of single-case v. multiple-case design: While the researcher concluded that the rationale for use of a single-case design was appropriate given the descriptive nature of this study (see chapter III), it is recognized that there may be distinct advantages associated with the use of multiple-case designs. The evidence from multiple cases is often considered to be more compelling and thus the overall study is regarded as being more robust (Herriot & Firestone, 1983). Multiple-case designs may be preferred over single-case when the researcher has the choice and the available resources. Single-case designs are vulnerable if only because you will have put "all your eggs in one basket" (Yin, 2003).

Definition of Terms

As Crotty (1998) points out, the terminology in research literature and social science texts is far from consistent; even to the point where some terms are actually used in contradictory ways. The following terms, both research based and topic specific, were used throughout this study and are defined here to avoid the potential for multiple interpretations.

Athletic Support Groups (Booster Clubs): Athletic support groups or booster clubs are the principal mechanism through which nearly all athletic departments solicit

annual contributions, whereby revenues are typically generated through the club's membership dues (Howard & Crompton, 2004).

Methods: The techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis (Crotty, 1998).

Methodology: The strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes (Crotty, 1998).

Personal Seat License (PSL): PSL's are rights purchased by a fan that allow him or her to buy permanent season tickets for a particular seat or set of seats, in an arena or stadium. The seat license guarantees the fan a particular seat for the duration of time he or she holds the license as well as guaranteeing the right to purchase season tickets to events taking place in the stadia (McCarthy & Irwin, 1998).

Priority Points System: A system utilized by collegiate athletic departments to systematically assign season tickets (typically for men's football and basketball) to donors. The more points accumulated by the donor, the more preferred the seating location (Howard & Crompton, 2004).

Priority Seating: The concept of tying preferred seating locations to additional donations to the athletic program. In order for fans to purchase the best seats in the stadium or arena, they must make an extra contribution to the athletic department for the "right" to buy those seats (Howard & Crompton, 2004).

Qualitative Case Study: An intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 1988). A phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context (Miles and Huberman, 1994). An empirical inquiry that

investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative Content Analysis: A research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text (Weber, 1990), content analysis is an appropriate methodology when the documentary evidence such as historical records, novels, and existing advertisements are the primary sources of data and the message itself is the object of investigation (Kassarjian, 1977). A research technique intended to uncover new insights, explore the facts, and provide an action guide (Krippendorf, 1980).

Qualitative Research: An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998).

Triangulation: A procedure used to check the integrity of the inferences one draws and can involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple methods, or all of these (Schwandt, 2001).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The first section in this review of literature provided an overview of priority seating while the second section focused on a review of the material specifically related to the guidelines, factors, and procedures that comprise priority seating programs at Division I-A institutions.

Priority Seating in Today's College Athletics

During the review of literature on the topic of priority seating, it became readily apparent that little, if any, formative research has been conducted on this specific subject matter. In collegiate athletics, priority seating is the practice of tying preferred seating locations to additional donations to the athletic program. In order for fans to purchase the best seats in the stadium or arena, they must make an extra contribution to the athletic department for the "right" to buy those seats (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Over time this definition has evolved to include not only seating location, but also as a means for allocating tickets. Allocation may include such items as the number of tickets allowed per donor, priority for purchasing special event tickets, and priority for purchasing both away game and post-season competition tickets.

Based on my review of existing collegiate priority seating programs, it was concluded that there are generally two different approaches schools use to establish priority. The first approach is to simply establish priority based solely on the amount of the annual donation made to the athletic department over and above the cost of any

season tickets. The second and more prevalent method involves a prioritization scheme whereby a "priority points" system is utilized to define and weight various criteria necessary to establish priority for donors. I reached these conclusions after conducting a qualitative content analysis of multiple NCAA Division I athletic department websites regarding priority seating. Kassarjian (1977) described content analysis as an appropriate methodology when the documentary evidence is the primary source of data and the message itself is the object of investigation. The schools that I used to ascertain the various criteria for priority seating programs along with the actual criteria are presented in Table 1 (Appendix A). These schools were not selected for any reason other than the following: each school has at least one program that competes at the NCAA Division I-A level and each school has a priority seating program in some capacity.

Initiated in the early eighties, the practice of priority seating continues to evolve in terms of its proper place within the prototypical athletic department. According to Case (1987), the priority seating program at Indiana University was simply an "advanced" fund raising technique within the development office. At Idaho State University, the director of athletics referred to priority seating as an "essential part of the athletics booster club" (Gauthier, 2002). The director of athletics at the University of Alaska-Anchorage lumped priority seating and VIP treatment as a part of its sponsorship program (Petro, 1986). A survey conducted by Penn State University highlighted the granting of benefits to those who make financial contributions to the athletic program as a key fund raising strategy (Sabock & Bortner, 1986). This study also went on to identify ticket purchasing/seating priority as the most highly sought after benefit by donors with preferred parking and invitations to special events representing the second and third most

sought after benefits respectively. Other like studies, (Klages, 1989; Webb, 1989; Comstock, 1988; Isherwood, 1986; Coughlin & Erekson, 1985; Hammersmith, 1985;; Ostlund & Brown, 1985; Sigelman & Brookheimer, 1983; Sinatra-Ostlund, 1984; Brooker & Klastorin, 1981), conducted on the subject of why donors give to athletic programs resulted in highly congruent results with the Penn State study, listing ticket/seating priority, parking priority, special recognition, and social opportunities as the most highly sought after benefits by donors. The aforementioned research was conducted specifically under the broad umbrella of fund raising and consistently identified priority seating as one of the most highly sought after benefits for athletics donors. Yet, Mahony, Gladden, & Funk (2003) identified the need for future research to be directed not at the macro-level, but rather that an effort is made to analyze annual athletic fund raising programs at the micro-level in such programs as priority seating.

The essence of fund raising is simply "the raising of assets and resources from various sources for the support of an organization or a specific project" (Ciconte & Jacobs, 1997). In an effort to categorize the various types of fund raising initiatives on a typical collegiate campus, Greenfield (1991) identified the "giving pyramid". This pyramid contains three levels including, from top to bottom, estate or planned giving, major giving programs, and annual giving programs. Instruments such as charitable remainder trusts and bequests characterize estate or planned giving. Major giving programs are mostly rooted in capital campaigns and endowments, while the annual giving programs are highly geared toward the individual donor and include annual campaigns, special events, and various renewal programs. Priority seating programs generally fall under purview of the annual giving programs; more specifically priority

seating is often found within the framework of established giving levels which are unique to the annual fund raising program since their "membership" dues serve as the annual donation. Although the typical priority seating program is foundationally based within the annual giving programs, most priority seating programs account for and reward the larger gifts of endowments and bequests, thus demonstrating their flexibility across the entire "giving pyramid".

A relevant contribution from Eilefson (1977) is the belief that the market (i.e. season ticket holders and potential donors) is a segmented group; that donors are at different stages in the giving continuum; and that a differentiated product line or program is necessary to appeal to this diverse population. As a result of this segmentation, Eilefson (1977), contends that it is extremely important to integrate a sound marketing approach to fundraising by identifying individual donor needs and matching those to organizational objectives. A review of several schools' donor programs shows a wide range of established giving levels from university to university. From Clemson's "IPTAY" (I Pay Ten A Year) program to the University of Wyoming's "Scholarship Club" membership ($10,000), the wide array of established giving levels appear to cater to every demographic and psychographic representation in a respective University's donor pool.

Eilefson (1977) promoted the notion that a key motivator for supporting athletic fund raising was through the advocacy of the leadership merits of athletics coupled with the social issues surrounding scholarship money. This rationale that purports donors will give to athletics, as a form of philanthropy is not reflective of the landscape that exists today. According to Howard & Compton (2004), the practice of fund raising fits into the

contextual framework of a sponsorship relationship. At its core, sponsorship is based on the mutual exchange between a sport entity and a corporation whereby the reliance on the exchange theory suggests that both parties can simultaneously provide and receive benefits, thus creating a symbiotic relationship (Copeland, Frisby, & McCarville, 1996; McCarville & Copeland, 1994). Substituting the term "corporation" with the term "season ticket holder" appears to define the relationship present in a priority seating program. Kelly (1991) would argue that linking donations (i.e. philanthropy) with the practice of priority seating (i.e. value in kind) is not a relationship that one wants to foster in a fund raising program, partially because donations become too intrinsically linked with winning and losing. Conversely, Cialdini (2001) forwards the concept of reciprocity as one of the most powerful weapons of influence that is available to those who are in the business of "selling". Fund raising practices such as priority seating clearly seem to align themselves with Cialdini's principle of reciprocity, providing further support for the notion that the practice of fund raising has digressed from purely philanthropic principles, moving it ever closer to the idea that it is nothing more than a market like exchange of goods or services whereby both parties are mutually satisfied.

This market-like exchange between university and donor is not void of its potential pitfalls. Sabock & Bortner (1986) reported that 30 percent of survey respondents identified donors as demanding more benefits in return for their contributions. Additionally, another 21 percent of respondents reported donors as becoming excessive in their expectations to have a voice in the athletic decision making process. Perhaps the most contentious aspect of a priority seating program is actually implementing a program where one had not existed before. Louisiana State University

(LSU) took all of two years to lay the groundwork for implementing a priority seating program for football because of its concerns over the potential adverse reactions of its long-time season ticket holders to what may be perceived as an extra "levy". The LSU athletic department swapped thousands of e-mails with LSU fans, made hundreds of phone calls, carried out face-to-face meetings with 81 different state legislators, conducted dozens of cyber-side chats, and held numerous focus groups prior to making its report to the LSU Board of Supervisor's. This mammoth effort was primarily designed to be a preemptive strike in anticipation of the need for damage control upon the implementation of priority seating. Donors at Kansas University catapulted their displeasure with the proposed implementation of priority seating into the legal system. Anderson (2003) reports that some donors have filed suit against the athletic department contending that the school is violating the Kansas Consumer Protection Act as well as the season ticket holders' Constitutional right to due process by requiring donations to retain prime seat locations. Finally, as reported by McCarthy & Irwin (1998), a major pitfall of priority seating is that while long-term donors can reasonably expect to sit in the same seats annually, changes in donation patterns may occur that result in a reallocation of seats, not always popular with donors. Despite the many challenges and potential pitfalls, priority seating has become a necessity in the fund raising landscape (Howard & Crompton, 2004).

Factors Relating to Priority Seating

The focus of the literature review in this section was to research what had been written about the criteria, or key factors that are utilized by an athletic department to establish a hierarchical structure for their priority seating programs. As noted by

Gauthier (2002), there are many different ways to prioritize seats ranging from elaborate point systems to a straight donation system. During an extensive review of the literature, however, I found no evidence of work that had been done to identify the various factors used in the "prototypical" priority seating program. On the contrary, individual schools looking to implement priority seating typically did so in a fashion that involved significant investigation into and interaction with donors for the purpose of defining appropriate criteria as evidenced by the mammoth effort at LSU. One important observation to note is that without a demand for season tickets, it is very difficult if not impossible to implement a priority system. During my analysis of existing priority seating programs, I found that these programs existed almost exclusively within the "revenue" sports (i.e. football, basketball) and not within the "non-revenue" sports (i.e. Olympic sports – track & field, swimming).

Administrators of programs who choose to implement priority seating on a straight donation basis, such as Idaho State, have a very simple process. The booster giving the largest donation to the athletic department in that current "giving cycle" is afforded the first pick of seats. It's a simple system that is both easy to administer and requires little in the way of "educating" the season ticket holders. But a system so simplistic can also serve to "punish" season ticket holders by not considering and rewarding such factors as longevity and loyalty as a season ticket holder and donor. As such, many schools favor a more elaborate points system to establish the hierarchy of its season ticket holders. Case (1987) alluded to the points system at Indiana University whereby a specified number of points would be awarded for various types of donor contributions. A donor's accumulation of these points would affect their opportunity to

purchase tickets to certain sporting events that may be sold out from year to year as well as determine the location of where these seats are located at the event. It's important to note that many programs have both "accumulative" and "non-accumulative" points. According to Case (1987), accumulative points can be carried over from year to year and are awarded for such things as continuous years of giving as a season ticket holder and continuous years of giving at a pre-established donor level. Non-accumulative points do not carry over from year to year and are generally awarded annually based on the dollar amount donated for that year.

While no substantive research could be found to suggest that one method (straight donations or a points system) is more effective than another, a case may be made for the points system based solely on a preponderance of schools which employ this method over the straight donation system. In a pilot survey conducted by myself, 15 NCAA Division I institutions with priority seating were polled regarding their priority seating programs. The results indicated that 85 percent of the schools surveyed used some type of points system over a straight donation method. Because the straight donation method of prioritizing is simple and highly intuitive, the remaining focus of the literature review is geared towards priority points systems.

Due to the lack of formative research on this topic, the key factors for establishing a priority points system were collected from multiple NCAA Division I athletic department websites. As mentioned previously, Kassarjian (1977) described content analysis as an appropriate methodology when the documentary evidence is the primary source of data and the message itself is the object of investigation. Miles & Huberman (1994) noted that qualitative studies are not designed to be representative in terms of

statistical generalizability, and they may gain little from an expanded sample size except a more cumbersome dataset; considerations for sample size should be governed by the research question and analytical requirements, such as data saturation where the same criteria or themes emerge over and over again. Based on this notion, I looked at 32 schools at which point it was determined that there was sufficient evidence to indicate the data had begun to repeat itself with recurring criteria.

The following key factors for a priority points system are summarized here and were accumulated based on the information gathered from Table 1 (Appendix A). The percentage provided next to each criterion is the incidence rate for that criterion amongst the 32 schools researched.

1. Current year giving to athletics (100%)
2. Consecutive years of season ticket purchases (72%)
3. Cumulative giving to athletics (25%)
4. Consecutive years of giving to athletics (47%)
5. Varsity letter winner at University (16%)
6. Graduate of University (13%)
7. Full-time current or retired University employee (10%)
8. "Unrestricted" donations versus sport specific (13%)
9. Other (i.e. volunteering, donations to other school entities, gifts-in-kind, etc.) (22%)

These factors have not been presented in any particular order nor is the order intended to imply the relative importance of any one factor versus another. Additionally, the data collected for these 32 institutions did not reveal any patterns of the relative importance

(i.e. weighted criteria) of one factor over another with one caveat. In all priority points programs surveyed, the number of points awarded for "current year giving to athletics" was the highest weighted factor.

SUMMARY

The type of market exchange that takes place in priority seating between the university and supporter is completely different from the traditional notion of "making a donation" which customarily did not require the university to provide anything of real value in return. Most universities continue to treat priority seating as a component of their development office or fund raising arm. Yet to administer priority seating with the same tactics used to solicit the "traditional" philanthropic donation may be ill advised based on the information uncovered through the literature review. Athletic departments may need to rethink their fundamental approach to priority seating, away from the "traditional" donating edicts, and more towards principles appropriate with the market like exchange of goods and services.

The absence of any formal academic research specifically on the topic of priority seating brings into question the strategies, methodologies, and theoretical underpinnings by which one would be best served to implement such a program. The utilization of a qualitative case study will provide a contextual, in-depth, and holistic view of a recently implemented program with the intent that the results of such a study may either uncover new ideas or hypotheses. Based on my review of the existing literature, I believe this effort is the first rigorous academic endeavor conducted specifically on the topic of priority seating. While priority seating has appeared "superficially" within the fund raising literature, it has yet to be treated as the primary focus of the research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to assess the implementation process associated with priority seating at a major NCAA Division I school. In order to accomplish this task I determined that qualitative research methods would be most appropriate and preferred over quantitative methods. This chapter begins with a discussion of case study methodology as the chosen research approach. The topics of research design, sampling procedures, sources of evidence, validity and reliability, and case study protocol round out the methodology section.

Case Study Methodology

Yin (2003) defined the case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Merriam (1998) defines the case study as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit. Merriam (1998) also notes that case studies are interested in the process rather than the outcomes, in the context rather than a specific variable, and in discovery rather than confirmation. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe case studies as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. Smith (cited in Merriam, 1998) differentiates case studies from other types of qualitative research as intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community. The principal themes that resonate from these various definitions may be summarized as the analysis of a single bounded

system, a holistic description, a process orientation, examination of a phenomenon, and a contextual analysis.

The methodology for this study was highly congruent with qualitative case study attributes. According to Yin (2003), case studies are likely to be favored when the research question being asked begins with "how" or "why", when the researcher cannot manipulate relevant behaviors, and when the context of the study involves examining contemporary events. This study closely mirrored Yin's assertion as the majority of the research questions in this study began with "how" or "why"; I could not manipulate participant behaviors (nor did I desire to); and the context of this study is a contemporary phenomenon; hence this research lends itself well to the case study methodology. Additionally, as Merriam (1998) points out, the case study is a particularly suitable design when one is interested in process. Sanders (1981) contends that case studies help to understand the processes of events, projects, programs and in discovering context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object. These are particularly relevant to this study as a key component of this study is the examination of the implementation process associated with a priority seating program.

Merriam (1998) highlights a distinct advantage of the qualitative case study as being its ability to discover new relationships, concepts, and understanding, rather than verification of predetermined hypotheses. Thomas & Nelson (2001) note an inherent strength of the case study approach is its ability to provide a more in-depth, holistic approach to the problem than may be possible with survey studies alone. Schramm (1971) notes that case studies typically illuminate a decision or set of decisions, why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result. Another principal

advantage of the case study method, as forwarded by Thomas & Nelson (2001), is its usefulness in formulating new ideas and hypotheses about problem areas, particularly where there is no definitive structure or model. A case study's heuristic qualities, or its ability to enlighten the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study, are illuminated by Merriam (1998), noting that case studies can:

1. Explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened and why.
2. Explain why an innovation worked or failed to work.
3. Discuss and evaluate alternatives not chosen.
4. Evaluate, summarize, and conclude thus increasing its potential applicability.

Stake (1981) asserts that the knowledge gained in a case study is different from other research knowledge in four important ways: case study knowledge is more concrete as it is rooted in the sensory and not the abstract; it is more contextual as our experiences are in fact rooted in context; it is more developed by reader interpretation as the reader contributes their own experiences and understanding; and finally unlike traditional research, the reader participates in extending generalizations to the reference populations.

Research Design

A research design provides the glue that holds a research project together; it structures the research to show how all of the major parts work together to address the central research questions (Trochim, 2000). In many ways, to design a qualitative research study is to follow a traditional research approach. A problem is presented, a question is asked, data is collected, an analysis of the data is made, and the question is subsequently answered (Creswell, 1998). One distinctive feature of the qualitative

approach, as noted by Creswell (1998), is the researcher typically plans a general approach to the overall study since a detailed plan would be inappropriate given the emerging issues that often develop during a field study. Yin (2003) identifies the research design as the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions, and ultimately, to its conclusions; colloquially it's the logical plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered and there being some set of conclusions. Yin (2003) identifies five components that are essential to case study research designs:

1. the study's questions;
2. its propositions, if any;
3. its unit(s) of analysis;
4. the logic of linking the data to the propositions; and
5. the criteria for interpreting the findings.

I utilized Yin's framework as the basis for the development of an appropriate research design for this particular study.

The Study's Questions

Merriam (1998) likens research questions that guide a qualitative inquiry to hypotheses developed in quantitative research. The study's questions are based upon a problem, a research issue to which we would like an answer (Creswell, 1998). Yin (2003) notes that the form of the question, in terms of "who", "what", "where", "when", and "why", may provide insight into the type of research strategy to be employed. As stated previously by Yin (2003), case studies are likely to be favored when the research question being asked begins with "how" or "why" as is the case with the majority of this

study's research questions. One caveat of note is Stake's (1995) assertion that the best research questions actually evolve during the study. Creswell (1998) reinforces this notion asserting that the research questions will change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem. Yin (2003) also submits to this line of thinking noting that the skilled researcher must be willing to adapt and make changes as unanticipated events or information occurs.

Study's Propositions

The study's propositions directed attention to elements that were examined during the scope of the study (Yin, 2003). There are two fundamental propositions that guided the search for relevant evidence in this study. First, the lack of any substantive literature on the topic of priority seating led me to question the underlying principles that govern the development and implementation of priority seating programs. It is my contention that schools must undergo some degree of either a formal or informal process to develop a program, its strategies, and subsequently its implementation. The second key proposition is the thought that priority seating, while traditionally thought of as a fund raising tactic, may in fact be more suitably categorized as a pseudo sponsorship-like arrangement whereby each party is governed not by traditional fund raising edicts but rather by a more market like exchange where both parties are mutually satisfied. These two propositions are critical for as Yin (2003) points out, only when you are forced to state your propositions can you move in the right direction of what it is you should study.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is related to the fundamental problem of defining what the case is about. Merriam (1998) refers to the unit of analysis as the sample. Yin (2003)

states the case may be a study of one individual, or as Feagin (1991) notes, the case may be centered upon such phenomena as decisions, programs, the implementation process, or organizational changes. The selection of the appropriate unit of analysis will occur when the researcher accurately specifies the primary research questions and delineates time boundaries marking the beginning and end of the case (Yin, 2003). Selection of the appropriate unit of analysis coupled with a clear delineation of time boundaries, determines the limits of data collection and analysis. For this particular study, I chose the primary unit of analysis as the University of Wisconsin-Madison priority seating program. It should be noted that the unit of analysis, along with other facets of the research design, may be revisited as a result of discoveries that arise during the data collection phase (Yin, 2003). During the course of this study, no discoveries were made that warranted any changes in the unit of analysis.

Linking Data to the Propositions

The linking of data to the propositions is a precursor to the data analysis steps in case study research. This concept involves the process of associating the information gathered through the various data collection methods back to the study's initial propositions, also referred to as pattern matching (Campbell, 1975). Data that was collected for this study was associated with the initial propositions in order to conduct a compare and contrast analysis.

Criteria for Interpreting the Study's Findings

The final element of the research design involves the criteria for interpreting the study's findings. As acknowledged by Yin (2003), this final element is perhaps the least well-developed component of case study design. Unlike some other qualitative

methodologies, there is currently no precise way of setting the criteria for interpreting case study findings; as such, I attempted through a compare and contrast analysis to identify patterns that were sufficiently contrasting so that the findings could be interpreted (Yin, 2003).

Sampling Procedure

Unlike sampling procedures in quantitative analysis, random sampling methods are not utilized with qualitative techniques since the random sampling methods are employed for the purpose of choosing a sample that represents the larger population such that the findings in the sample may be inferred back to the larger population (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). Stake (1995) echoes this notion stating that case study research is not sampling research since the primary objective is to understand the one case and not necessarily to understand other cases. According to Thomas & Nelson (2001), the selection of participants in a case study depends upon the problem being studied and the focus of this study may be a person, a program, an institution, a concept, or as Merriam (1998) adds a process. Burgess (1982) notes that sampling in field research involves the selection of a research site, time, people, and events while Merriam (1998) highlights the need for the researcher to consider where to observe, when to observe, whom to observe, and what to observe.

As Merriam (1998) points out, generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research and therefore nonprobability sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research. The most common form of nonprobabilistic sampling in qualitative research is purposive (Chein, 1981). Patton (1990) refers to this as purposeful

sampling whereby the logic and power lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Schwandt (2001) refers to the purposive or purposeful strategy as:

> The logic of sampling where the units are chosen not for their representativeness but for their relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research. Relevance may be a matter of choosing a unit(s) because there may be good reason to believe that "what goes on there" is critical to understanding some process or concept or to testing or elaborating some established theory. (p. 232)

The concept of purposive sampling has also been referred to as criterion-based sampling. According to Goetz & LeCompte (1984), in criterion-based sampling the researcher establishes criteria necessary to include in the study and then finds a sample that meets this criteria. In the development of this study, the purposeful or criterion-based sampling method was utilized to select an appropriate sample.

In order to establish appropriate criteria, I first made a choice of whether I wanted the sample to be unique or typical, relative to other priority seating programs. The unique sample is rooted in the atypical, or the phenomenon in which the attributes or occurrences are rare; the researcher is drawn to the sample because it is unique (Merriam, 1998). Conversely, the typical sample reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest; the sample is selected specifically because it is not atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual (Patton, 1990). I chose to use a typical sample, as it was my aim to increase the likelihood that others may be able to generalize or transfer the results to their like situations (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). The concept of

generalizability or transferability is discussed further in the validity and reliability section.

Based on the decision to utilize criterion-based sampling and a typical sample, I developed the following criteria for the purpose of selecting an appropriate sample.

1. Must be an NCAA Division I member institution.
2. Must have either (or both) a men's Division I-A football or men's Division I basketball program.
3. Must have implemented for the first time, or significantly altered a previous, priority seating program for at least one of the aforementioned programs.
4. Must have developed and included a priority points system as a component of the overall priority seating program.
5. The program must have been implemented within the past five years.
6. A preponderance of the "key players" who were involved in the process of developing and implementing the program are available to the researcher.
7. The school's process that was undertaken should have been rigorous and substantial such that the study may provide a rich, detailed description.
8. It is preferable if the school has already implemented the program at the time of the study, so that the program's results could be incorporated into the study's discussion section.
9. Must have approval from school to conduct the study and access to appropriate personnel and relevant documentation as deemed necessary for the conduct of this study. (Note: According to Thomas & Nelson (2001), you

must have access to the data and although seemingly trivial, there is nothing more important than site entry).

10. The selected site must be economically and logistically feasible to the researcher for the purpose of conducting this study.

Utilizing on-line resources to uncover schools that utilize priority seating, I first developed a list of around 30 potential candidates. Schools that did not meet a majority of the criteria as set forth were immediately eliminated from consideration for this study. In the end, there were two schools who were strong candidates for this study based on their meeting of a preponderance of the established criteria: Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge (LSU) and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Ultimately I chose the University of Wisconsin-Madison as representing the "best fit" for this study. While UW meets all of the aforementioned factors, I determined that criterion #8 and #10 were the two factors in particular that separated UW from LSU.

Merriam (1998) acknowledges that there is more to sampling than simply selecting the case or unit of analysis:

> First, you must select "the case" to be studied. Then, unless you plan to interview, observe, or analyze all the people, activities, or documents within the case, you will need to do some sampling within the case…thus a second set of criteria is usually needed to purposefully select whom to interview, what to observe, and which documents to analyze. (p. 65-66)

In order to develop an initial list of interviewees and potential sources for document retrieval, the following steps were taken to aid in data retrieval process:

1. A thorough review of the literature was conducted to provide insight into the most appropriate potential sources of information (i.e. athletic department development offices, senior athletics administrators, athletics advisory boards, booster club officials, coaches, athletic donors, etc.)
2. Article searches were conducted utilizing such on-line sources as Lexis-Nexis Academic and InfoTrac to identify relevant articles that would provide "by name" information on key personnel involved with priority seating at a given school. These articles were also utilized to assess the breadth and depth of the overall process involved with the development and implementation of priority seating. This was critical because of the requirement to study a rigorous process.
3. Analysis of UW's officially sanctioned website to determine potential interviewees and sources for document retrieval. The website identified the offices of primary responsibility for priority seating and listed names of those individuals in charge.
4. Analysis of priority seating materials (i.e. letters, brochures, etc.) that are published by UW. The information that was retrieved here provided the "basic" structure of UW's priority seating/points program.
5. Initial contact with key UW personnel involved with the administration of the priority seating program, provided an opportunity to inquire about supplementary sources of information such as additional interviews to conduct and documents not available to the general public.

It is acknowledged that the assistance of those individuals who are closest to the priority seating program at UW was extremely valuable in terms of directing me to individuals and documentation which could not otherwise have been accessed by the lay person. This reality illuminates Thomas & Nelson's (2001) earlier contention that there is nothing more important than the participant's willingness to provide site entry and access to information.

Sources of Evidence

While it may be common for qualitative studies in education to employ only one, and at best two, techniques for data collection, the hallmark of the case study is the ability to understand the case in its totality and to provide a holistic description and analysis that can only be accomplished by data collection methods characterized as having breadth and depth (Merriam, 1998). It was also noted by Patton (1990) that:

> Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective...By using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings. (p. 244)

According to Yin (2003), the six sources of evidence that are typically associated with the case study are documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. Merriam (1998) consolidates this list into three general sources of information to include interviews, document analysis, and observations. Because of the historical context of this study, the use of observations as a source of evidence was not applicable and therefore was not used. Prior to elaborating on

interviewing and document analysis, a brief discussion on the research instrument and a statement of the researcher's bias is presented.

Research Instrument

Thomas & Nelson (2001) point out that in qualitative research the investigator (researcher) is the instrument for collecting and analyzing data and that developing a rapport with study participants is vital because participants must feel that they can trust the researcher or else they will not be inclined to give the information needed. Locke (1989) points out that this familiarity between researcher and study participants tends to promote an almost irresistible flood of personal judgments that if left unchecked could seriously threaten the integrity of the data. Scwhandt (2001) echoes these sentiments by noting that fieldwork requires the active, sustained, and long-term involvement of the inquirer (researcher) with the respondents and the cultivation of empathy with and attachment to the people being studied. As such, the tendency of the researcher to be unaware of how their interactions in a field study threaten, disrupt, create, or sustain patterns of social interaction might result in a prejudicial account of the facts. A sound inquiry practice demands critical self-reflection of the researcher's own actions and predispositions and awareness of the potential to be both deceived by others as well as by one's own self (Schwandt, 2001). One technique that I utilized to mitigate this potential pitfall was a researcher's log where I routinely and actively participated in self-reflection regarding the study. Additionally, my only contact with study participants was arranged in a "work" setting and not a social setting so as to avoid the potential prejudices associated with becoming too emotionally attached.

Researcher Bias

Merriam (1998) notes that one strategy for enhancing the internal validity of a study is for the researcher to clarify their biases prior to the conduct of the study. It is with this in mind that the following information is presented regarding my disposition relative to this study: I have worked in college athletics primarily as an intercollegiate coach in men's Division I ice hockey. Additionally, I have worked as a physical education instructor for undergraduate students at a major institution of higher learning. At no point in time have I had any involvement with or responsibility for a priority seating program either as a staff member or as an affected season ticket holder. I did not enter into this study with a predisposition either for or against the practice and had no preconceived notions or hidden agendas for furthering a particular finding. Regarding the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I had no ties whatsoever to this school either formally or informally. The selection of this institution for this study was based solely on the criteria laid out in the sampling procedure section of Chapter III. Prior to this study, I did not know on a personal or professional level, any of the key players involved with the priority seating program at UW. I do not intend to solicit employment from UW now or any time in the near future. Finally, UW has not commissioned this study and I was not compensated in any way shape or form from the university.

Interviews

It is the rare case when all or a majority of the various sources of evidence are used equally within a given study; rather it is typically one or two methods of data collection which predominate while the other(s) play a supporting role in gaining an in-depth understanding of the case (Merriam, 1998). Yin (2003) asserts that one of the most important sources of information for a case study is the interview. This particular study

is no exception as the primary means of data collection was focused on the use of interviewing techniques.

Interviewing can be viewed as a set of techniques for generating and analyzing data from structured, group, and semi-and unstructured interviews with participants (Schwandt, 2001). Patton (1990) describes the process of interviewing in the following manner:

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...we cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing then is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 196)

According to Rubin & Rubin (1995), while the researcher may pursue a consistent line of inquiry, the actual stream of questions in a case study interview is more likely to be fluid rather than rigid. Yin (2003) echoes this thought noting that the researcher has two important jobs: first, is the duty to pursue the line of inquiry and second is the responsibility to ask the actual conversational questions in an unbiased manner that will also serve the needs of the line of inquiry. This open-ended interviewing technique is the most common for case studies as it allows for the discovery of the facts of the matter as well as simultaneously putting forth "friendly" and "nonthreatening" questions where respondents may provide their opinions about events (Yin, 2003). A second interviewing

technique is the focused technique (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990) in which the interview may still be open-ended and assume a conversational manner, however this method distinguishes itself as the researcher is more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol (Yin, 2003). Similarly, Merriam (1998) identifies the semi-structured interview approach, in which all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions, and the overall investigation is characterized by an open-ended approach. I used a focused interview technique, with an open-ended approach, during interviews with participants.

Based on my initial research, I identified two potential "gatekeepers" or "informants" within UW's athletic department. I made initial contact with both individuals via telephone and scheduled subsequent face-to-face meetings in Madison, WI. The two individuals identified were the Senior Associate Athletic Director for Intercollegiate Athletics and the Executive Director of the UW Badger Fund. I selected these individuals because of their specific knowledge, involvement, and responsibility for and with the UW priority seating program, as well as their ability to identify and arrange for additional interviewees. During my face-to-face meetings, I provided each with a synopsis of my proposed study and requested their assistance and support in gaining access to participants to interview. Their verbal support was then followed up an official consent form that provided a synopsis of the study and allowed me access to UW personnel and documents. The Senior Associate Athletic Director signed this consent form.

Interviewing with the open-ended technique often leads to respondents becoming more of an informant rather than a respondent and according to Yin (2003), these key

informants are often critical to a case study's success as they can provide the investigator with valuable insights into a matter, suggest sources of corroboratory or contrary evidence, identify other persons to interview, and also initiate the access with these additional sources of information. This is highly relevant for this study, as the two identified individuals were utilized to identify and provide access to a preponderance of the information sources for this study. It is recognized that in fostering this type of relationship it is possible to become "overly dependant" on the informants with the potential for the informant to exercise, albeit subtle, interpersonal influence over the researcher. Yin (2003) counters this potential pitfall by emphasizing the need for the researcher to actively search for corroboratory evidence to confirm an informant's insight and to search for contrary evidence as diligently as possible.

There were a total of seven individuals who were interviewed for this study. The individuals are as follows: the Executive Director and the Assistant Director of the UW Badger Fund office; the UW Senior Associate Athletic Director; the UW Men's Head Hockey Coach (at the time of the program's implementation); the UW Director of Ticketing; a member of the UW Athletics Advisory Board; and a member of the local Madison media who was responsible for covering UW's priority seating program during its implementation. I chose these individuals both for the specific knowledge they possess as well as for the varied perspectives they provided.

The ability to pose and ask good questions is a prerequisite for case study investigators and according to Yin (2003), the following factors are vital characteristics of a "good" investigator: the investigator must be a good listener capable of processing large amounts of new information without bias; must be adaptive and flexible as new

information comes to light, always keeping in mind the need to balance this adaptiveness with rigor; must have a solid grasp of the issues being studied which allows for interpretation of data as it is collected; and finally the investigator must be unbiased entering the study without preconceived notions of the outcome. Merriam (1998) notes that asking good questions is essential in stimulating desired responses that will provide information useful to the study's focus. Three types of questions that I attempted to avoid were leading questions that may reveal a bias or assumption that is not be shared by the interviewee; multiple questions that did not allow the interviewee to answer one by one; and yes-or-no questions that provide no information when answered just that way (Merriam, 1998).

My interviewing skill set for this study was developed through previous academic work in the qualitative research field as well as through an extensive review of the literature on both the topical material as well as in the area of qualitative research methods. Prior to conducting interviews at UW, I conducted a pilot study on priority seating at Gonzaga University in order that I might sharpen my interviewing skills and techniques. The Information gleaned from the conduct of this pilot study was also used to validate and refine the interview questions for the UW study.

The Executive Director of the Badger Fund at UW was a valuable resource in terms of assisting with the task of identifying personnel and the subsequent scheduling of these individuals for interviews. Upon approval of the University of Northern Colorado's Institutional Review Board, interviews were conducted in Madison. Informed consent letters were presented to participants prior to the start of all interviews. Two of the seven interviews could not be conducted during my visit to Madison due to prior commitments

of the participants. These interviews were subsequently conducted via telephone (speakerphone) and with the use of a tape recorder.

Interviews were semi-structured (Merriam, 1998) whereby pre-determined questions (see Appendix B) were used to guide the interview but further probing questions were asked to explore emerging information as it became available. I also reevaluated pre-determined questions after each interview so that I might refine or alter prior to the next interview. Upon transcription, I provided each interview participant a copy of their transcribed interview for their review (member check) so they could corroborate the essential facts and evidence presented in the case report (Yin, 2003; Shatzman & Strauss, 1973). Three of the seven interviews were returned with corrections/clarifications. All interviews were tape recorded as respondents provided their permission on the appropriate consent form. Thomas & Nelson (2001) note the tape recorder is clearly the most common method of recording interview data because of the obvious advantage of preserving the entire dialogue for later analysis.

Document Analysis

Merriam (1998) uses the term document as an umbrella term to refer to a wide array of written, visual, and physical material that is relevant to a given study. Schwandt (2001) refers to document analysis as various procedures involved in analyzing and interpreting data generated from the examination of documents and records relevant to a study. According to Yin (2003), documentary information is likely to be relevant to almost every case study topic, can take many different forms, and should be the object of explicit data collection plans. Nearly every study will have some need for examining

newspapers, books, magazines, websites, memos, annual reports, correspondence, meeting minutes, annual reports and the like (Trochim, 2000; Stake, 1995).

According to Trochim (2000), most written documents are analyzed with some form of content analysis. Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text (Weber, 1990). The purpose of this research technique is to uncover new insights, explore the facts, and provide an action guide such that relevant facts may be revealed to the investigator in order to assist in achieving the study's objectives (Krippendorf, 1980). Altheide (1987) identifies the following attributes regarding content analysis:

> Most research designs using conventional content analysis are sequential in nature moving from category construction to sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation...qualitative content analysis, on the other hand, is used to document and understand the communication of meaning as well as to verify theoretical relationships. Its distinctive characteristic is the reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection and analysis...The aim is to be systematic and analytic, but not rigid. (p. 68)

I utilized qualitative content analysis to assess the data contained in the myriad of documentation collected. Rather than employing a rigid counting scheme as is often found in quantitative content analysis, I followed the "spirit" of the qualitative approach in terms of applying a systematic and analytic process to identify recurring themes and underlying principles.

Yin (2003) recognizes the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources, noting that documentary evidence may be helpful

in verifying the correct spellings and titles or names of organizations mentioned in a previous interview; may provide specific details to corroborate or refute information from other sources; and finally the researcher may make inferences from the documents. Burgess (1982) cautioned that documents must not be used in isolation and it is the researcher's responsibility to determine as much as possible about the document, its origins and reasons for being written, its author, and the context in which it was written. In order to ascertain the authenticity of particular document, Guba & Lincoln (1981) recommend asking the following questions:

1. What is the history of the document?
2. What guarantee is there that it is what it pretends to be?
3. Has it been tampered with or edited?
4. If genuine, under what circumstances and for what purposes was it produced?
5. Who was/is the author?
6. What was the author trying to accomplish? For whom was the document intended?
7. What were the author's sources of information? Does the document represent an eyewitness account, a secondhand account, a reconstruction of an event long prior to the writing, or an interpretation?
8. What was/is the author's bias?
9. To what extent was the author likely to want to tell the truth?
10. Do other documents exist that might shed additional light on the same story, event, project, program, context? If so, are they available, accessible and who holds them? (pp. 238-239)

I made a conscious effort to ascertain the authenticity of key documents through an analysis of the documents themselves and by asking questions of the study's participants aimed at clarifying particular documents.

Data collection was divided into four general areas that included internal documents, external documents, official program materials, and media documents. Internal documents included athletic department memos, briefings, research reports, and any other forms of correspondence specifically intended for internal departmental use. These internal documents were integral in helping to illuminate the process and key decision points associated with the rationale behind, and the development of, the program. External documents consisted of those materials that were developed by the athletic department for the purpose of dissemination to the public (i.e. letters to boosters, e-mails, press releases). Official program materials (i.e. brochures, tri-folds) are materials developed for the purpose of detailing the specifics of priority seating and the priority points system. The external documents and official program materials that were collected during the study provided valuable information about how UW chose to educate and market priority seating to its fans as well as the types of public relations strategies that were employed to quell potential displeasure with the new program. Media documents consisted almost exclusively of newspaper articles and were extremely useful in corroborating dates, timelines, and the public perception/reaction to the proposed programs.

I relied heavily on key "informants" and the "gatekeepers" to assist in identifying and gaining access to documents that would otherwise be non-accessible to the layperson. During my initial meeting with the "gatekeepers" I was given assurances that one,

documentation did in fact exist, and two that I would be afforded "unrestricted" access to it. Prior to the data collection at UW, I provided the "gatekeeper" with a list of the types of documents I was looking for from the athletic department. This initial list allowed the "gatekeeper" to compile various documents that I was able to produce copies of during my data collection trip to Madison. Additionally, at the end of each interview session, I asked participants if they possessed or knew of any relevant documentation that I may be able to reproduce for the purpose of additional data collection. The bulk of the documents collected during this study were acquired by asking participants to share any relevant materials regarding the subject matter.

Validity and Reliability

Yin (2003) notes that because a research design is intended to represent a logical set of statements, then one must be able to judge the quality of a given design according to certain logical tests. Merriam (1998) makes the following assertion:

> All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner…but how can consumers of research know when research results are trustworthy? They are trustworthy to the extent that there has been some accounting for their validity and reliability, and the nature of qualitative research means that this accounting takes different forms than in more positivist, quantitative research. (pg. 198)

Along this same line of thought, Stake (1995) notes:

> All the way through our case study work, we wonder, "Do we have it right?" Not only are we generating a comprehensive and accurate description of the case, but are we developing the interpretations that we want…In our search for accuracy

> and alternative explanations, we need discipline; we need protocols which do not depend on mere intuition and good intention to get it right. (pg. 107)

According to Yin (2003) there are four fundamental tests that are widely used and accepted to establish the quality of any empirical social research, such as case studies. These four tests include: construct validity; internal validity; external validity, and reliability.

Construct Validity

Trochim (2000) describes construct validity as the degree to which inferences can legitimately be made from the operationalizations in your study to the theoretical constructs on which those operationalizations were based. Put another way, to claim construct validity is to claim that the observed pattern, or how things operate in reality, actually corresponds with the theoretical pattern, or how we think the world works. Trochim (2000) refers to this concept as pattern matching. Yin (2003) identifies three tactics available to increase the construct validity of a given case study: multiple sources of evidence; chain of evidence; and review by key informants.

Multiple sources of evidence allow a researcher to address a very broad range of issues, but most importantly allows for the development of converging lines of inquiry or a process of triangulation (Yin, 2003). Triangulation is a procedure used to check the integrity of the inferences one draws and can involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple methods, or all of these (Scwhandt, 2001). Multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon and therefore help to address the potential problems of construct

validity (Yin, 2003). In this study I utilized individual interview transcripts and documents relevant to priority seating at UW as my sources of evidence for triangulation.

Yin (2003) describes the chain of evidence principle as simply allowing an external observer, in this case the reader, the ability to follow the derivations of any evidence, ranging from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions. Yin (2003) identifies several key features regarding the chain of evidence principle:

> First, the report itself should have made sufficient citation to the relevant portions of the case study database; second, the database, upon inspection, should reveal the actual evidence and also indicate the circumstances under which the evidence was collected; third, these circumstances should be consistent with the specific procedures and questions contained in the case study protocol, to show that the data collection followed the procedures stipulated by the protocol; and finally, the protocol should indicate the link between the content of the protocol and the initial study questions. (p. 105)

According to Yin (2003), achieving these key objectives will significantly contribute to the methodological problem of determining construct validity. I utilized the case study protocol that was developed as a part of this methodology section so that I would ensure the chain of evidence principle was followed during data analysis.

The third tactic forwarded by Yin (2003) is the procedure to allow participants and informants to review a draft report of the study as more than a matter of professional courtesy. This type of review is ideal for corroborating the essential facts and evidence presented in the case report (Shatzman & Strauss, 1973). While I was not looking for agreement from participants relative to the interpretations and conclusions, I was looking

for the participants to agree with the actual facts of the case (Yin, 2003). I provided (via electronic mail) a copy of each individual transcribed interview to participants so they could acknowledge, take issue with, or add additional information or clarification as deemed appropriate. No significant discrepancies occurred and therefore, no additional information sought.

Because of their familiarity with the priority seating program, two key participants were afforded the opportunity to review the draft report prior to its submission to the doctoral committee. These two individuals are the Senior Associate Athletic Director and the Executive Director of the Badger Fund, which oversees the priority seating program. The Executive Director of the Badger Fund and the Assistant Director of the Badger Fund both read the draft report; the collective comment from these two was simply, "The substance looks good." The Senior Associate Athletic Director was unable to review the draft report.

Internal Validity

Kirk & Miller (1986) described the concept of validity in qualitative research in the following manner:

> The issue of validity is not a matter of methodological hair splitting about the fifth decimal point, but a question of whether the researcher sees what he or she thinks he or she sees. (p. 21)

In case study research, Yin (2003) identifies his concern over internal validity as it relates to the broader problem of making inferences:

> In a case study, an inference is made every time an event cannot be directly observed. An investigator will "infer" that a particular event resulted from some

> earlier occurrence, based on interview and documentary evidence collected as part of the case study. Is the inference correct? Have all rival explanations and possibilities been considered? Is the evidence convergent? Does it appear airtight? (p. 36)

A research design that has taken into account these particular questions has begun to address the overall problem of making inferences and therefore the specific problem of internal validity (Yin, 2003).

Merriam (1998) suggests several strategies for enhancing internal validity such as the previously discussed practice of triangulation. Triangulation is a procedure used to check the integrity of the inferences one draws and can involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple methods, or all of these (Scwhandt, 2001). One caution regarding triangulation comes from Mathison (1988) who points out that triangulation may produce data that are either inconsistent or contradictory and as such suggests that a paradigm shift occur; one that moves away from the traditional notion of a technological solution for validity and instead relying on a more holistic understanding of the construct in order to build plausible explanations about the phenomena under study. It is with Mathison's recommendation in mind that I approached the practice of triangulation during the data analysis phase. Another technique I utilized to increase internal validity is the practice of peer (colleague) examination of findings as they emerged. In addition to my research advisor and faculty representative, I consulted with two Ph.D.'s in the area of Sport and Exercise Science and pre-arranged for them to review my initial findings. Finally, I clarified my biases in the methodology section as another means of increasing internal validity.

External Validity

According to Pelham & Blanton (2003), external validity refers to the degree in which a research finding provides an accurate description of what typically happens in the real world, or as Merriam (1998) notes, it is the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. It is important to note that in qualitative research, a single case or non-random sample is selected precisely because the researcher hopes to understand the particular in depth, and not necessarily to discover what is true of the many (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) offers this perspective on a practical view of generalization, arguing that:

> ...qualitative research should provide perspective rather than truth, empirical assessment of local decision makers' theories of action rather than generation and verification of universal theories, and context-bound extrapolations rather than generalizations. (p. 491)

Thomas & Nelson (2001) claim that one of the strongest intuitive arguments for external validity in qualitative research is the concept of user generalizability whereby the user (reader) evaluates the findings and actively applies those things that are applicable to their own situation. Peshkin (1993) noted that the consumer of the research, not the author, has the responsibility for generalizing. Goetz & LeCompte (1984) referred to this as transferability, or the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. Locke (1989) stated that given the rich conceptual description, most readers can easily recognize which situations apply to their own and that the strong recognition of application by the readers is in no way an inferior measure of external validity.

In order to enhance the possibility that the results of a qualitative study can be generalized in some sense, I followed the strategies put forth by Merriam (1998): first, through my writing, I provided a rich, thick description of the case whereby the reader was able to ascertain how closely their situations match the research situations, and hence, whether the findings can be transferred; secondly, by previously identifying sampling criteria that led to a "typical" sample, I presented UW and its priority seating program as a typical or modal category school, such that users could make comparisons with their own situations.

Reliability

Merriam (1998) describes reliability as the extent to which research findings can be replicated. Yin (2003) identifies the goal of reliability within a case study is to minimize the errors and biases and to conduct the research such that an auditor could repeat the procedures and arrive at the same results. Guba & Lincoln (1981) argued that reliability in qualitative studies requires a different conceptualization, suggesting the term dependability in lieu of reliability. The idea of dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for ever-changing context within which the research occurs, thus the researcher is responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study. I maintained a researcher log/journal throughout the duration of this study so that through introspection I could account for changing context and subsequently act upon it as deemed appropriate. This log was updated weekly and if necessary, on a daily basis. Guba & Lincoln (1981) also argued that:

> ...if the study has internal validity, then reliability is also assured and thus the argument is made that a demonstration of internal validity amounts to a simultaneous demonstration of reliability since it's impossible to have internal validity without reliability. Hence, if the researcher places emphasis on shoring up validity, reliability will follow. (p. 120)

The procedures I have previously outlined regarding internal validity also served to increase this study's reliability per Guba & Lincoln's assertion.

Yin (2003) recommends approaching the reliability problem by operationalizing as many steps as possible and by conducting the research in a manner as if someone was always looking over your shoulder as if to be audited. In order to accomplish this daunting task, Yin (2003) recommends the use of a case study protocol and a case study database to deal with the documentation problem and thus the reliability issue. I have developed both a case study protocol and a case study database as a part of this study. The case study protocol is included as a part of this methodology. The case study database will include the following key pieces of information: my weekly research log/journal; all key participants (to include contact information); all documentation collected as a part of this study; all individual interview transcripts; all relevant documentation utilized in the development of this study's literature review; and finally any extraneous information that I may see fit to include as noteworthy.

In the final analysis, the value of a case study may be assessed by the following questions (Sage personal communication, July 9, 1991, cited in Reed, 1995):

> Does it have logical validity? In other words, does it make sense? Does everything flow sequentially? Does the methodology lead to results answering

the question posed? Does it contribute to the field? Ultimately, the key to any piece of research is the indefinable concept of "quality". (p. 27)

A number of tactics and techniques have been detailed in this section aimed at addressing critical issues of validity and reliability and to ensure as Sage put, a "quality" product. In order to clearly address the issues of validity and reliability I constructed a table in Appendix C that summarizes the techniques that were utilized to tackle these concerns.

Case Study Protocol

Yin (2003) notes that the protocol is a major way of increasing the reliability of case study research and is intended to serve as a guide for the researcher carrying out the data collection in a single case study. In addition to keeping the researcher targeted on the subject of the case study, preparation of the protocol forces the researcher to anticipate several potential problems; such forethought may potentially avoid disastrous outcomes in the long run (Yin, 2003). A case study protocol generally has the following four sections:

1. An overview of the case study project
2. Listing of the Field Procedures
3. Case study questions
4. Guide for the case study report

In accordance with Yin's recommendations, a case study protocol was developed to serve as a guide in the conduct of this study. This protocol is included below:

Case Study Protocol

Overview of Project:

(See Abstract)

Field Procedures:

1. Gaining access to key interviewees and documents

   I utilized "key informants" within the UW athletic department to assist in gaining access to both appropriate interviewees as well as relevant program documentation that would be otherwise inaccessible to the general public.

2. Sufficient resources while in the field

   I was based out of a hotel in Madison, WI during the course of the weeklong data collection phase. I had a laptop computer, Internet access, printer and copier service, and was in a quiet environment for note taking. Notes were entered as quickly as feasible after each interview and document review.

3. Clear schedule of data collection activities

   I worked closely with key informants to prearrange interviews and timeframes for document retrieval. Schedules were set to accommodate long-running interviews, document collection, and missed appointments. Appointments were 90 minutes each, however most interviews were concluded between 45 minutes to an hour. A total of seven interviews were conducted during this study.

4. Providing for unanticipated events

I dedicated one week to data collection activities in order to allow sufficient lag time for unanticipated problems. Additionally, I secured necessary resources for an additional trip to be taken outside of the primary data collection phase, however this was not needed.

Case Study Questions:

(See Appendix B)

Guide for the Case Study Report:

1. Analysis of Data
    a. Program Background / History
    b. Description of Current Program
    c. Analysis of individual research questions
    d. Analysis of program results / outcomes (To Date)
2. Interpretation
    a. Use of qualitative content analysis to develop common themes and key decision points
    b. Analysis of theoretical underpinnings
3. Conclusion
    a. Implications of findings to sport management and administration
    b. Recommendations for future research

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. Merriam (1998) describes it in the following manner:

> Making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read...it is the process of making meaning...these meanings or understandings or insights constitute the findings of a study. (p. 178)

A key tenet of data analysis in qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection. Waiting until all data has been collected to begin the analysis will only undermine the entire project (Merriam, 1998). During the course of data collection in this study, I utilized a researcher's log/journal to capture observations, thoughts, and ideas as they became available. The "real-time" information included in my researcher journal was used to constantly assess emerging information and themes and to direct additional data collection as deemed appropriate. The last two interviews conducted and the line of questioning involved were a direct result of this process of continual analysis of emerging information.

In order to manage the multitude of information collected, I utilized three-ring binders to organize all documentation collected and interview transcripts. Additionally, separate folders were maintained to house items that were not conducive to being stored in a binder; these items included pamphlets, brochures, and various bound materials. Together with my researcher's log/journal, this information constituted my case study database. All information in this database was categorized according to the "document" source. As such, all interview transcripts were in one section, internal memos and documents in a separate section, newspaper articles in another, and so on. Material was organized in this manner to facilitate the process of triangulating the data from multiple sources and multiple perspectives.

In an effort to make sense of the data, I utilized thematic or category construction techniques. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) noted that:

> ...to construct categories or themes is to capture some recurring pattern that cuts across a preponderance of the data. These categories or themes are concepts indicated by the data (and not the data itself)....In short, conceptual categories and properties have a life apart from the evidence that gave rise to them. (p. 36)

Pragmatically, I began by reviewing all of the data collected and making notes in the margins. Additionally, multiple colored highlighters were used to identify "significant" data points relevant to one of the five overarching research questions. The log/journal contained five sections corresponding to each of the study's questions. A second review of the data allowed me to place individual entries into the log/journal relative to the study's fundamental questions. This process of triangulation allowed me to consolidate, verify, and corroborate common occurrences within the data and subsequently to begin to develop the study's key themes or categories. As Merriam (1998) noted:

> ...at the heart of this method is the continuous comparison of incidents, respondents' remarks, and so on, with each other. Units of data—bits of information—are literally sorted into groupings that have something in common.

According to Merriam (1998), a higher level of analysis involves "...making inferences, developing models, or generating theory." Miles and Huberman (1994) note:

> ...[generating theory] is a process of "moving up from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape. We're no longer just dealing with observables, but also with unobservables, and are connecting the two with successive layers of inferential glue." (p. 261)

In order to connect the data back to theory, I consistently compared emerging findings and themes with the theoretical foundations rooted in the study's literature review. Additionally, as I began to develop theoretical propositions, I undertook a process of peer review to help substantiate, corroborate, or refute these conclusions. By coordinating these results with multiple individuals from the sport and exercise science "world" as well as outside this discipline, I was able to gain multiple theoretical perspectives looking at the same phenomenon and thus contributing to the overall validity of the study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

It is a glorious Saturday in the fall of 2003 and the ESPN television crew has descended upon the University of Wisconsin to broadcast its highly popular national television show, "College Game Day." Today's match-up is a classic Big Ten football rivalry between the University of Wisconsin Badgers and the The Ohio State Buckeyes. With the aid of a 50" High Definition Widescreen Television, I feel as if I have been transported into an awe-inspiring sea of red and white, artificially emblazoned on a canvas of autumn gold bathing in the sunlight of a magnificent fall day. As thousands of loyal Badger supporters swallow up my television screen in anticipation of the day's game, I can't help but feel a slight bit of remorse that I too am not a part of this raucous celebration in the heart of Madison…in the heart of "Badger Country".

Figure 1: Game Day at Camp Randall Stadium – University of Wisconsin

In 2003, Sports Illustrated (SI) magazine named Madison the number one "Best College Sports Town" in America. SI did an admirable job of capturing the essence of Madison and its love affair with the Badgers in the following piece:

> A former Wisconsin governor once described Madison as 89.4 square miles "surrounded by reality"...what lies within that space, specifically the 933 acres of the University of Wisconsin campus, is indeed surreal; a little universe in which red and white seem the only allowable colors and the TV ticker on the afternoon of September 11th read airport closed...state capitol closed...no word yet on Badgers game...Madison is about eating thick, red bratwursts and watching games on the twin 10-foot TV's at State Street Brats. It's doing the slow-motion wave, jumping around to House of Pain and taunting the underclassmen in Section O at Camp Randall, the giant horseshoe of a football stadium that holds 76,634 fans and rarely a soul less...It's sitting in a sunburst chair outside the Memorial Union, gazing across the expanse of Lake Mendota, listening to live music, drinking your favorite beverage and seeing the beautiful girl in front of you proudly sporting a red-and-white Bucky Badger tattoo on her shoulder. It's trading elbows with an offensive lineman in pickup hoops games at the enormous campus gym...It's walking over to the venerable Kollege Klub on a Saturday night to see the football players arrive in a flourish and then disappear into a bar as unpretentious any you'll find on this good green earth...It's Badger hockey fans who research the name of the mother of an opposing team's goalie so as to better inform their heckling...It's the crimson-and-white tie-dyed masses of the Grateful Red at the Kohl Center summoning un-Dead-like displays of roof-raising

> fervor during basketball games…It's over half the crowd staying after football games to engage in the "Fifth Quarter", a choreographed sing-and-dance-along which students flail about as the band plays everything from polkas to fight songs…but most of all, Madison is a town where everyone you meet is your friend as long as you know those nine magic words: How ya think the Badgers will do this year? (Ballard, 2003)

It is with Ballard's depiction in mind that I make my first visit to Madison and the University of Wisconsin in January of 2004. Harkening back to this past fall, there is a stark contrast today; it is a gray, cold afternoon and the golden leaves have long since fallen; now sparsely strewn across the campus, interlaced by patches of snow and ice. There are no cheering crowds, no bands playing, no singing and dancing students, and State Street is relatively quiet as people dart in and out of the eclectic mix of shops, restaurants, and bars carrying on with their daily routines. The UW campus is a massive expanse that leaves one wondering where the campus begins and the city ends…it is as if these two souls are one in the same and any differences are merely indistinguishable. At the time, little did I realize the truth in that statement.

As I make my way towards Camp Randall Stadium and the offices of UW's Athletic Administration the raucous game-day crowds have been replaced by the drone of construction workers laboring methodically on the myriad of stadium improvements. The office I am looking for is tucked away, deep within the bowels of Camp Randall's massive infrastructure. As I navigate my way through the stadium's tunnels it is hard to picture this massive, double-deck, 76,129 seat stadium as a once cozy, single level 10,000 seat gem that welcomed rival University of Minnesota for its inaugural game in 1917. As

much as I am awed by the history of Camp Randall, I am equally cognizant of the great challenges that must face the university as it attempts to overhaul the stadium's infrastructure while simultaneously laboring to preserve its spirit.

One thing that I am certain of is that this extensive makeover comes with a heavy price tag that must ultimately be accounted for by someone. It is with this in mind that my memory is quickly jostled back to the purpose of my visit. The topics cascade through my mind like the steps ahead of me…revenue generation, fund raising, annual giving and finally, like the last step before the Athletic Director's office, the topic of priority seating. While priority seating may not be nearly as alluring as a game-day Saturday, it is nonetheless a subject for which I have great interest today. It is also a topic of great importance to those who have been charged with maintaining the current and future health and well being of Wisconsin athletics.

BACKGROUND

As discussed in the methodology section, the chosen unit of analysis for this study was the University of Wisconsin-Madison's priority seating program. Yin (2003) purports that a hallmark of the case study method is its ability to deliberately address contextual conditions, believing that they may be highly pertinent to the study and provide a greater understanding of the chosen unit of analysis. Priority seating may have been developed and implemented solely by the UW athletic department, however it does not operate within a vacuum; on the contrary it is a program that touches a number of groups both in and out of the university system. In order to better develop the frame of reference and the context in which UW's priority seating program operates, I begin here

with a discussion on the city of Madison, the University of Wisconsin, the UW athletic department, and the Big Ten Conference.

Madison, WI

Located in the southwestern corner of Wisconsin, Madison is a thriving community of 208,054 people and is by far the largest metropolitan city in Dane County that boasts an overall population of 426,526 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Madison has been described as a quaint city with small-town values that offers much to its residents. It has great natural beauty with its twin lakes, a huge vibrant university, first-rate public schools, a low cost of living, a low unemployment rate, an above average median household income, and great culture coupled with a strong sense of community (Fine Living, 2003). In recent years, the city of Madison has received a number of accolades as one of this country's great places to live, work, and play. The following is just a handful of the honors that have been recently bestowed upon the city according to the website visitmadison.com:

- #2 Among America's Best Places to Live and Work
  Employment Review Magazine, June, 2003
- #5 Best Places for Business and Careers
  Forbes Magazine, May, 2003
- #2 Best Places to Live
  Homeadvisor.msn.com, July, 2002
- #2 among "America's Best Places to Live and Work"
  Employment Review Magazine, June, 2002
- #2 Best Place to Live and Work in America
  BestJobsUSA.com, May, 2002
- #1 Best (small) Cities for Women
  Ladies Home Journal, March, 2002
- #6 Best City for Families
  Child magazine, March, 2001
- #1 Best Places to Live in America
  Money magazine, July, 1998
- #3 Hottest City for Growth
  U.S. News & World Report, April, 1995

The pillars of the Greater Madison economy are a diverse and stable balance of governmental, industrial, and service sectors. Madison is the epicenter for both state and county government activity as it is home to the Wisconsin State Capitol and the multitude of Dane County governmental agencies. Roughly 43,000 or one-fifth of the Greater Madison workforce is employed in local, state, and federal government jobs. That number spikes to 73,000, or roughly one-third of the workforce when the University of Wisconsin and its employees are factored into the mix (www.madisonchamber.com). Another 30,000 people are employed in the industrial sector working in such long-standing industries as meat packing and agricultural equipment. Medical research has become an extremely important industry in Madison, along with additional research in the fields of genetic engineering, robotics, highway engineering, agriculture, aviation and aeronautics, and zoology (www.bestjobsusa.com). Within the financial, professional, and technical service sectors, Madison is the world headquarters for such large corporations as Rayovac and Oscar Mayer Foods and is the home base for such leading insurance companies as American Family, CUNA Mutual, and General Casualty Insurance. Diversified farming plays a stabilizing role for the city of Madison as Dane County is ranked among the top 10 counties in the nation for the value of its farm products (www.madisonchamber.com). The diversity and balance of the Greater Madison area economy positions the community to provide a degree of stability through economic downturns, as well as affording it unique opportunities during economic upswings.

Culture and the arts flourish in the Greater Madison area with a vast array of museums, theaters, playhouses, art galleries, and the Madison Symphony Orchestra. An impressive library system contains more than six million volumes, pamphlets and

manuscripts for study, research and enjoyment (www.madisonchamber.com). In addition to the nationally acclaimed University of Wisconsin, Madison boasts six additional colleges and universities ranging from small fully accredited liberal arts colleges to technical schools specializing in Associate degrees and vocational diplomas. Across Dane County, there are 16 public school districts and 22 private and parochial schools including two alternative high schools, Montessori preschools, and an array of educational services for those with special needs. Madison's healthcare system is robust with the University Medical School, five general hospitals, over 20 major medical clinics, and more than 100 research and testing labs, all combining to make the area a world-class medical center with a reputation for excellence (www.bestjobsusa.com). Finally, there is no shortage of recreational opportunities with over 21,000 acres of county lakes, hundreds of miles of trails and over 150 parks and play areas that contribute to the wide array of seasonal activities offered in the Greater Madison area (www.visitmadison.com).

The Greater Madison area does not play host to any professional sports teams. The closest professional sports team is the National Basketball League's Milwaukee Bucks and Major League Baseball's Milwaukee Brewers roughly 70 miles away. The state of Wisconsin is nothing short of "crazy" about its National Football League team, as was pointed out to me very proudly during one interview.

> You should be aware that the University of Wisconsin is one of two spectacular football teams in the state, the other one being the Green Bay Packers. The Green Bay Packers season ticket base is well represented across the entire state of Wisconsin and certainly in the Madison area…we're only two hours away.

The following table was constructed to highlight select economic and demographical information from Madison and Dane County. All figures provided represent source data for the year 2000 unless otherwise indicated. Relative to the nationwide statistics, the city of Madison and Dane County rank favorably in nearly every economic category with the exception of cost of living index.

Table 1: Madison and Dane County Demographics

Madison and Dane County, Wisconsin			
	Madison	**Dane County**	**U.S.**
ECONOMIC			
Per Capita Income	$23,498	$24,985	$21,587
Median Household Income	$41,941	$49,223	$41,994
Unemployment Rate (2003)	2.4%	2.1%	6.0%
Projected Job Growth Rate (Thru 2008)	15.0%	----	----
Cost of Living Index (2003)	110.7	99.0	100.0
DEMOGRAPHIC			
Median Age	30.6	33.2	35.3
Sex Ratio (Total % of population)			
Male	49.1%	49.5%	49.3%
Female	50.9%	50.5%	50.7%
Race			
White, Non-Hispanic	82.0%	87.3%	69.1%
Black or African American	5.8%	3.9%	12.1%
Asian & Pacific Islander	5.8%	3.5%	3.7%
Hispanic or Latino	4.1%	3.4%	12.5%
All others	2.3%	1.9%	2.6%
Population			
2000 (Census)	208,054	426,526	----
2001 (Estimate)	210,377	431,815	----
2002 (Estimate)	213,679	438,881	----
2010 (Estimate)	227,000	480,573	----
2020 (Estimate)	243,500	523,828	----
Sources:			
U.S. Bureau of the Census			
U.S. Department of Labor			

University of Wisconsin

From little acorns grow mighty Oaks...
Eugene O'Mahoney

And as the little acorn grew into the mighty Oak, so too has the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In 1848, Nelson Dewey, Wisconsin's first governor, signed the act that formally created the University; its first class of 17 students met in a Madison school building on February 5, 1849. It is from these humble beginnings the University has grown into a large, diverse community with just over 40,000 students representing every state in the nation and a host of countries around the globe.

UW-Madison is the oldest and largest campus in the University of Wisconsin system, a statewide network of 13 comprehensive universities, 13 freshman-sophomore transfer colleges, and an extension service. Madison is one of only two doctorate-granting universities in the system (www.uc.wisc.edu/profile/history/html). In 2002-2003, the University reported that it had 28,583 undergraduate students, 8,924 graduate students, 2,430 professional students, a faculty of 2,050, and living alumni of nearly 350,000.

UW-Madison offers instruction in more than 100 fields, with more than 4,200 course listings. The U.S. News and World Report lists 22 UW-Madison programs among the top ten university departments in their fields, and a once-a-decade survey of academic departments, conducted in 1995 by the National Research Council, named 16 UW departments among top-10 lists. The UW-Madison campus also boasts roughly 600 clubs and organizations to cater to its students varied backgrounds and interests.

UW-Madison Intercollegiate Athletics

According to the athletic department's published 2002-2003 Annual Report, the UW-Madison intercollegiate athletics program boasts 25 varsity sports (12 men's and 13 women's) and over 750 student-athletes. Their successes both on-and-off the field have been impressive by any standard. In 2002-2003, the UW-Madison finished in the nation's Top 25 of the National Association of College Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Director's Cup, which ranks schools for on-field achievement. This is the eighth time in the award's ten-year history that UW has landed in the Top 25. Also in 2002-2003, the school's student athlete graduation rate released by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was 88 percent. This graduation rate was the highest in school history and was tied for the third-best rate nationally amongst all NCAA Division I-A schools. Wisconsin has also established itself as a top finisher in the overall Big Ten competitive standings over the last decade. Three Rose Bowl appearances for the football team and a recent trip to the men's basketball Final Four have helped to secure a place for Wisconsin athletics as a premier NCAA Division I-A institution.

Big Ten Conference

The Big Ten Conference was established in 1869, at which time the University of Wisconsin was one of seven fledgling members. As of 1950, the conference had expanded to ten conference members including UW, University of Michigan, Michigan State, University of Minnesota, University of Iowa, Indiana University, Purdue University, University of Illinois, The Ohio State University, and Northwestern University. The conference remained unchanged until 1990 with the addition of its eleventh member Penn State University. Today the Big Ten sponsors 25 championships,

12 for men and 13 for women; provides over $63 million in athletic aid to 7,500 student athletes; and comprises over 250 sport programs total (www.bigten.org).

The Big Ten Conference is considered one of the NCAA's "major" conferences along with the likes of the Southeastern Conference (SEC), the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), the Big East, the Pacific Coast Conference (PAC-10), and the Big Twelve. According to tax statements filed in 2000 for tax-exempt organizations, the Big Ten had total revenues of $85,168,021 (second only to the SEC); the largest majority of this ($42,316,733) coming from television broadcast royalties. Nearly 93% of these revenues, or $78,886,082, are distributed back to its member institutions. The University of Wisconsin's share of these revenues was $7,261,836 in the year 2000. According to the document "Keeping Big Red in the Black", Big Ten distributions constituted the second largest revenue source for UW athletics behind ticket sales. No other conference paid more to its members in 2000 than the Big Ten.

PRIORITY SEATING CHRONOLOGY

Preferential Seating (1982)

The history of priority seating at the University of Wisconsin can be traced back to the year 1982, at which time it surfaced under the title of preferential seating. The preferential seating plan established a basic surcharge, over and above the price of a ticket, on specific "zones" within Camp Randall Stadium. According to the Associate Director of the Badger Fund, this program was established exclusively for football and the preferential seating program was managed by athletic supporters in the Mendota Gridiron football booster club for years until its ultimate transition to the athletic department run Badger Fund in 2001. A review of athletic department documents

uncovered the following departmental mission statement regarding preferential seating (circa 1981-1982):

> Construct and implement a preferential seating plan for Camp Randall Stadium that will generate sufficient revenue to sustain the sports programs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison at a highly competitive level while continuing to maintain positive relationships with our many loyal fans, boosters, UW faculty & staff, alumni and residents of Wisconsin.

There are two distinct goals evident in this mission statement. First, preferential seating was an attempt to generate additional revenues for the athletic department and second, the department hoped to balance this revenue generation scheme with the need to maintain positive relationships with a variety of different groups ranging from boosters to UW employees. Upon further review of the documentation it became clear that the athletic department's intent was to reward fan loyalty (longevity) first and to spur annual giving as its secondary objective. A rudimentary point schema was established to help allocate seat selection and parking priority. The system awarded two points for every year of purchase and one point for every $1,000 contributed, clearly sending the message that loyalty was going to be rewarded first (A theme that is not necessarily shared in the 2001 version of priority seating). The athletic department also demonstrated its loyalty to its employees by providing a provision for staff members who had been with the department for 10 or more years. Upon their retirement from the UW athletic department, these staff members were given the opportunity to purchase their previously complimentary tickets and maintain their seats as well as being provided with points for "years of purchase"

equivalent to their years of service with the department (Another theme that would not reappear in the 2001 version of priority seating).

I did not find any documentation that discussed the rationale and development behind this precursor program to the current priority seating initiatives. While a number of this study's participants were familiar with the 1982 program, none of the study participants had any "history" behind its development and implementation. There was, however, consensus among the participants that the original program was plagued by problems from the outset. The Executive Director of the Badger Fund summed up the prior preferential seating program in the following manner:

> In 1982 they developed a program where there were different zones and patrons had to give a minimal donation on an annual basis.... We had this nice little seating chart that said people in these sections need to give this amount, but it was truly hit or miss on who was contributing.... The program was absolutely not enforced uniformly across all season ticket holders.... The theory was that new people coming in had to participate in the preferential seating program. We had staff doing their best to see that it happened, but we had no real system to check it and make sure that it was happening. So over a 20 year period it ended up being a hodgepodge...the real challenge was that the program came out in 1982 and while we had some success, we were just a mediocre (football) team through the 80's. Then we had a stretch where we not a very good team. It was hard to enforce a preferred seating program when the team was not winning and we were just trying to get people in the stands. So to say "Hey, you need to buy tickets and make a gift" really did not work.

The Senior Associate Athletic Director echoed these sentiments with the following observations about this now defunct program.

> ...we had a priority seating program in place since 1982 and what happened was that the fortunes of the football program went downhill and this department was in no position to withhold tickets from somebody because they did not make a required donation. It was really a program that had been pretty much un-enforced due to the lack of success particularly in the late 80's. Once the success of the football program sort of re-arrived, the seats became more and more difficult to get...then we were in more of a leveraging position.

UW's Ticket Director referred to the 1982 preferential seating plan as "...a very minimal priority plan...it was extremely sporadic in its application. We did not really demand people to participate..." In fact, the Assistant Director of the Badger Fund noted that, "The missing piece was the football...we had about $600,000 annually in football donations, however if we fully implemented priority seating for all of our (football) season ticket holders we may have done $5 million...."

While none of the participants I spoke with deemed the 1982 preferential seating plan a rousing success and most agreed that the system was inefficient and clearly "left money on the table"; the prevailing sentiment was that it did prove itself useful as a "strawman" for the development of a premium seating plan in the new Kohl Center. As the Badger Fund Executive Director noted, "when we moved over to the Kohl Center we were able to bring pieces of that (1982) program and implement them into our men's and women's basketball and men's ice hockey programs".

The Kohl Center

The opening of the $72 million Kohl Center in January 1998 provided UW with a unique opportunity to migrate pieces of the 1982 priority seating plan from football to its other primary revenue generating sports, basketball, and ice hockey. A document dated April 19, 1996 and titled "The Kohl Center: Basketball Ticket Plan" was an informational text created by the athletic department. It was the first formal document that was mailed to UW season ticket holders and was done so roughly 21 months prior to the opening of the Kohl Center. Athletic Director, Pat Richter, had this to say to all Badger supporters:

> To ensure completion of the $72 million Kohl Center, we have had to tackle an ambitious fundraising campaign. As a means of reaching our fundraising goals, the UW-Madison will be instituting a premium seat plan for the new building. We feel that this plan is fair as it balances customer loyalty with the incentive to give money to the Kohl Center campaign…Please consider this pamphlet a resource for your questions about the premium seat plan as well as other ticketing issues for the Kohl Center.

The pamphlet referred to by Richter contained a wealth of information regarding the pricing, allocation, and other specifics of the new ticketing plan. This initial plan for the Kohl Center was targeted specifically to men's and women's basketball patrons. The men's ice hockey team did not immediately move into the Kohl Center as they continued to play in Dane County Coliseum until the 1999-2000 season. The following is a short synopsis of the priority seating plan that was developed for the new Kohl Center and is information pulled directly from the aforementioned document "The Kohl Center: Basketball Ticket Plan."

The athletic department began by identifying "premium seats" as seats located between the end lines at courtside level. It was estimated from anticipated demand that roughly 2,000 seats would be designated as premium seats for men's basketball and only 500 for women's basketball. All premium seats would require a one-time minimum construction contribution of $2,500 per seat paid directly to the Kohl Center Campaign (I had discovered in my earlier pilot study of Gonzaga University, this type of charge is not unusual; Gonzaga also required an "Arena Building Fund" donation for purchasing select seats in their new building). In making this one-time donation, UW donors were afforded the opportunity to purchase season tickets for all three sports (men's and women's basketball and men's ice hockey) without having to make an additional $2,500 per ticket donation for each sport. Additionally, these donors would continue to have "rights" to these seats so long as they made their annual per seat contributions. Although never referred to in any of the documents I reviewed, by definition, this pact closely resembles a personal seat license arrangement found almost exclusively in professional sports and not college athletics. In fact during my interview with a reporter from the Wisconsin State Journal, he referred to the Premium seat arrangement in new Kohl Center as a "form of seat license."

In addition to the one-time Kohl Center Campaign gift, individuals sitting in the premium seats for men's basketball were also required to make an annual per seat contribution ($150/men's basketball and $25/women's basketball). Seats that were not identified as "premium seating" were designated as "general seating." General seating areas did not require the one-time Kohl Center Campaign gift, however many of the areas did require the annual per seat contribution. Ultimately 3,000 seats required an annual

donation of $150 per seat; 2,250 seats required an annual $100 donation; and another 950 seats required a donation of $50. Approximately 10,000 seats in the Kohl Center did not require any type of contribution over and above the price of the ticket.

Once the athletic department had identified its premium and general seating areas and categorized seats by required annual donation levels, they introduced a four-phased approach to guide seating in the new building. Each phase of the Kohl Center seating plan utilized various criteria to serve as "tie-breakers" within that particular phase and for the purpose of developing a donor rank order for choosing seats (Note: At this juncture, the athletic department did not have a priority points schema to employ evenly across the donor continuum). The following is a synopsis of the four-phased approach that was utilized to establish seating priority in the new Kohl Center.

- Phase I: Serving current season ticket holders who make the $2,500 per ticket Premium seat construction contribution…Seating priority is based on years of continuous purchase in the sport in which tickets are desired
- Phase II: Serving non-season ticket holders who make the $2,500 per ticket Premium Seat construction contribution…Seating priority is based on the per-ticket contribution. Contributions in excess of the $2,500 will improve priority seat selection ranking. If this priority allocation results in a tie, a history of giving to UW Athletics and/or UW-Madison will be the tie-breaker
- Phase III: Serving current season ticket holders who choose not to make Premium seat construction contributions…Seating priority in this phase is based on years of continuous purchase in the sport in which tickets are desired

- Phase IV: Serving Badger fans who are not season ticket holders and who choose not to make Premium seat construction contributions…Seating priority in this phase will be based on the amount of a gift, if any, to the Kohl Center Campaign and/or rank on the waiting list for the sport in which tickets are being requested.

In all selection phases, UW reserved the right to establish additional tie-breaking procedures to establish priority as necessary. The athletic department was forced to make these decisions as the situation warranted because they did not have a comprehensive priority point's schema that they could defer to.

Only days after mailing "The Kohl Center: Basketball Ticket Plan" to UW season ticket holders, UW released their Kohl Center Ticket Plan to Madison's two major newspapers, The Wisconsin State Journal and The Madison Capital Times. Coupled with pledge forms, the ticket plan was unveiled to the general public as a supplement in each newspaper. In addition to their direct mailings, the athletic department employed the use of "old-fashioned" town-hall meetings to convey the information about the plan and to field questions and concerns from supporters. Given the potential volatility, these meetings were appropriately conducted by the Athletic Director and other senior members of the UW Athletic Administration. Over the next four months and by the end of October 1996, a little more than one year away from the Kohl's opening, the University had employed all four phases of their ticketing schema setting the stage for the final step in the process of seating the new facility.

Based on the pledge and ticket order forms which were received by the University at the end of October '96, UW officials established a rank order list for choosing seats in

all four of the phases discussed earlier. In the spring of '97, the athletic department constructed a document entitled "How to Select Your Kohl Center Seats and Parking." This informational brochure was mailed to every Badger supporter who signed up for season tickets and paid their required donation as appropriate. The following excerpts reflect the information contained in this particular document:

> An appointment time has been scheduled for you by the UW Athletic Department based on the priorities outlined in the Kohl Center Ticket Plan that was announced last year...On the day of your appointment bring your enclosed appointment card and parking permit to the UW Field House at your designated appointment time. If you cannot make your scheduled time, you may send someone in your place. If you would like the Athletic Ticket Office to select your seats and parking you must provide credit card information before your scheduled appointment...If you want to sit with others who have a different appointment time, all account holders must come at the latest of the group's scheduled appointment times...Please note that if you come at a later time than your originally scheduled appointment, you will have fewer seating options. Selection for men's basketball takes place from May 13-30; dates for women's basketball are June 10-14; and dates for hockey selection are to be determined.

These procedures clearly indicate the logistical challenges that come with having to accommodate priority seating in a 17,142-seat arena. It truly was a hands-on process for both the athletic department representatives as well as affected Badger supporters. And while it was evident that the process undertaken to seat the new Kohl Center was rigorous, it was not comprehensive. The UW Ticket Director pointed out, "...priority

seating was exclusive to each sport. It wasn't really a comprehensive annual fund...and football was not included in it in any way." But while football was not included, the Kohl Center plan certainly helped to lay the groundwork for the forthcoming priority seating/priority points plan that the athletic department was preparing to implement. The Kohl Center plan served as valuable insight to the athletic department and "softened" the various constituencies because as one board member of the UW Athletic Advisory Board remarked, "...we had a track record of priority seating that began with the Kohl Center...so it was not completely a new concept." It is from this frame of reference that a discussion begins regarding the development of the current comprehensive priority seating and priority points system now employed by the UW Athletic Department.

"Keeping Big Red in the Black"

Any dialogue on UW's current priority seating and priority points systems would be remiss without a discussion first of the Athletic Department's Five Year Strategic Financial Plan entitled "Keeping Big Red in the Black." This October 1999 document represents the collaborative work of athletic department administrators, staff members, and coaches. It was truly the seminal work for UW athletics, serving as the "road map" for departmental operations through 2005. This strategic document was ultimately presented to and approved by both the UW Athletic Board and the Chancellor of the University. The document's Executive Summary sets the background for this 46 page in-depth discussion on the current and future state of UW Athletics.

> In 1989 the University of Wisconsin Athletic Department was ending the decade with an operating deficit of $2.1 million, deferred facilities maintenance in excess of $3 million and a period of low attendance due to a string of losing seasons in

> its high profile sports. In response to these challenges, the athletic department initiated strategic decisions to diversify and expand revenues; invested in sports, salaries and facilities; hired new coaches who brought success to football and basketball; supported expanding opportunities for women; eliminated the deficit; and built the athletic reserve to $3.9 million…After a decade of successful growth, the department now faces a new set of financial challenges. The department lost $1.1 million in 1998-99 and budgets a loss of $600,000 in 1999-00. In addition, the department conservatively estimates the cost of inflation and anticipated capital infrastructure and maintenance needs will result in more than $36 million of additional expenditures over the next five years. In order for the department to overcome its financial challenges…significant measures will need to be taken; namely cost containment, revenue enhancement and facility improvement…The implementation of the actions outlined in this strategic financial plan will enable the department to maintain successful academic, athletic, and financial performance well into the 21st century without assistance from student fees or additional support from the state and/or university.

A key component of this plan was the identification of several departmental initiatives intended to guide the overall operation of the department. It was believed attainment of these objectives would translate into a high standard of success for athletics. The objectives below were articulated as a part of UW's Athletic Department Strategic Plan:

> Academic Excellence
>
> The athletic department strives to enable its student athletes to excel in the classroom and takes great pride that University of Wisconsin student athletes have

earned more Big Ten academic achievement awards than athletes at any other Big Ten institution during the past twelve years.

Competitive Success

Over the past six years UW has finished first or second in the overall Big Ten competitive standings and has consistently ranked as one of the Top 25 athletic programs in the country. In addition, Women's Sports Illustrated recently ranked the women's sports program 10th best in the country.

Financial Solvency

It is the department's objective to fund the athletic program entirely from revenues generated by the department. As of June 30, 1998, after seven consecutive years of annual surpluses, the department's reserve was $3.9 million.

Gender Equity and Diversity

The athletic program is committed to providing equal opportunities for male and female student athletes. As a result, the department has added three women's sports and implemented roster management initiatives to ensure its athletic participation more closely mirrors the male/female ratio of the University's student body.

Building Bridges to Campus

A new initiative implemented in 1998, the department is striving to implement programs, build alliances and improve communications between the campus community and the athletic department. The department's goal is to encourage its student athletes and employees to be more connected with the campus through participation in campus sponsored programs as well as athletic department sponsored programs for the campus community.

Great Place to Work

Making the department a great place to work for its 250 full time employees and hundreds of seasonal/part-time staff and student workers was added in 1998 as the final strategic initiative. The department has taken steps to accomplish this by improving communication within its staff, broadening involvement in decision-making, increasing opportunities for staff development and providing better recognition of outstanding achievement.

Ultimately a number of these initiatives are predicated on the ability of the athletic department to generate sufficient revenues to meet the challenges listed above. In this document, the athletic department concedes that to many outside the University it would appear that the athletic program is financially profitable and is generating more than enough revenue to excel well into the 21st century. Contributing to this perception was the fact that in previous years the department had routinely sold out Camp Randall Stadium, had won two Rose Bowls in the past five years, led the nation in men's hockey attendance, was a national leader in men's and women's basketball attendance, and had just completed one of its best years competitively in the history of the overall program. Yet the Athletic Director warned "...the academic, athletic and financial success that has been achieved over the past 10 years will quickly erode if the department is unable to successfully overcome its current financial challenges." The following is an assessment of the financial challenges that faced the UW athletic department.

> Since 1989, the department embarked upon an aggressive capital project plan...as a result of constructing these necessary facilities, the department's annual debt service is now $4.2 million, which is $3.5 million higher than the '95-'96 debt

> service. Additionally the department has identified the following four major capital projects that it plans to initiate over the next five years: Camp Randall Stadium (Estimated cost - $40 million); Natatorium (Estimated cost - $11.5 million); Track/Soccer Complex (Estimated cost - $5 million); Boathouse for Men's and Women's Crew (Estimated cost - $3 million)

Clearly the largest planned capital project plan was the Camp Randall Stadium undertaking. In an interview with a member of the UW Athletic Advisory Board, the following comments highlight the importance of this particular undertaking.

> There was this realization that if we were going to fix up our old stadium and if we were going to make it into something where access is not limited and where safety is a paramount concern…then we are going to need to do something big. Did we have to do it? No. We could have probably talked the state into paying for some improvements to the stadium; barebones improvements just to put some modern plumbing fixtures and stuff, but we decided that the fans deserved more than that. They expected more than that. They expected a stadium that was comfortable and accommodating to them, and on top of that, I think fans expected that we step up.

Another significant financial challenge was presented by UW's commitment to gender equity and its goal of providing equal opportunities for all male and female student athletes. "Keeping Big Red in the Black" identified the following reality:

> …The cumulative effect of adding three women's sports to meet Title IX requirements has increased the operating budget by approximately $3 million over

> the past five years and in 1999-2000, the cost of adding women's hockey will increase the operating budget by over $1 million.

The final significant financial challenge that was addressed dealt with the lack of significant annual contributions from donors.

> The athletic department is substantially behind its peers in generating revenue from its annual unrestricted fundraising program…currently generating about $1.5 million. This figure ranks last in the Big Ten and is over $8 million less per year than Penn State.

With the identification of these financial challenges facing the UW athletic department; the context surrounding the development of a priority seating program at UW begins to be framed.

Rationale for the Development of Priority Seating

Based on the documents reviewed and the interviews conducted with the study's participants, it was clear that the primary reason for establishing priority seating was to address the athletic department's need to generate additional revenues. In the five year strategic plan, "Keeping Big Red in the Black", the athletic department identified "a plan to increase its annual operating revenues from $39 million in 1999-00 to $51.4 million in 2004-005". They also "…expressed the desire to build the overall athletic department operating reserve from $3.9 million to over $10 million by June 2005". According to the Senior Associate Athletic Director, "…the economic reality of what we were trying to do here forced us into making some adjustments…we were building a long range outlook. A long range plan to keep us in the black."

The athletic department identified a number of revenue sources that would need to be "tapped" in order to achieve these lofty revenue projections. Revenue sources included ticket sales, conference (Big Ten) distributions, concessions and catering, concerts and events, post-season participation, suite rentals, corporate sponsors, parking, radio rights, investment income, state appropriation, licensing, game guarantees, merchandising, programs, and fund raising. The majority of revenues for UW are the result of ticket sales, yet the five-year strategic plan was only projecting a 10% growth in ticket sales over the next five years (2% annually). The Badger Fund Executive Director noted that, "...through the 90's we had incredible growth in our season tickets in all of our sports and we were really maxing out inventories from a ticket sales standpoint...we recognized this is a fixed revenue source." The UW Ticket Director added that:

> ...the emphasis behind the whole thing was the fact that our five year financial plan really threw out there that we needed to obviously get a certain amount of revenue. While the seating was sold out, we really were not doing much as far as annual giving...and that was really where the opportunity was.

The athletic department identified annual fund raising as an area that could be significantly increased. The Executive Director of the Badger Fund noted, "One way to increase revenue was through private gifts which to some degree are an unlimited revenue stream." In 1998-99, only 8% of UW's annual revenue was derived from fund raising, a figure substantially less than its fellow Big Ten institutions. The Assistant Director of the Badger Fund noted, "I think that looking at our peer institutions we saw where we were light years behind in annual fund raising and we just needed to step up our efforts in that area." The Senior Associate Athletic Director commented:

> We identified our current revenue sources and where we stood amongst our competition and the annual fund raising program at the University of Wisconsin was pretty much non-existant. We were doing a good job of raising money for buildings and for scholarships, but the annual fund raising program…we were not doing a very good job at all. The stars were aligned. The economics forced us to do something about improving our annual fund raising…

If generating additional revenues for UW athletics was the primary goal of implementing a priority seating program, than one of the department's secondary goals was the desire to create a comprehensive and consolidated annual fund to accommodate this program. The Assistant Director of the Badger Fund noted that:

> We had a football booster club that was raising money for football, basketball booster club that was raising money for basketball, hockey booster club that was raising money for hockey and those things were great; but we thought we could better utilize our synergies as a department to consolidate our fund raising and to better serve our donors and to better support our donors and to better utilize the resources we had available to us.

In my interview with the reporter from the Wisconsin State Journal, the following comment was made:

> …the major thing that they wanted to do was preferential seating. They had a preferential seating idea for hockey, for football, for basketball, for hockey and they wanted to come up with one that would incorporate people who donated money, and long-time season ticket holders from all of these sports into one pool, and to let these people have a point system and have an idea of recognizing who

> has been contributing and who has donated money, and who has really kind of singled themselves out as the preeminent donors and supporters of the program…they wanted to assemble these different groups of season ticket holders into one area and to get them into one group so that they may have a better handle on organizing their donations…

By virtue of having recently moved into the new Kohl Center, the Athletic Department was able to "impose" its preferential seating program on all basketball and ice hockey patrons. The same could not be said for the 1982 preferential seating plan for football. This program was extremely sporadic in terms of its application across the spectrum of football fans and according to the Senior Associate Athletic Director:

> …something like 20% of the football people that were supposedly required to make annual donations were not making annual donations. We had a situation where, like airline seating, I am sitting in one seat and I paid the price of the ticket and nothing else, and the person to my right paid the price of the ticket and a $150 annual donation and the person on my other side was paying a $500 annual donation…we just felt that was not a good system.

The Badger Fund Executive Director echoed this notion by relaying the sentiment of a number of donors when they learned that donations would now be required across the board:

> We had folks calling, saying "Truly it is about time. We have been giving for years…but it has been maddening sitting next to somebody knowing that we have been giving $500 a year and they have been giving nothing." It was not that these

folks were unhappy about the fact that we were implementing it for everyone, but rather that we had not done so previously.

A third significant reason for establishing a new comprehensive priority seating program was in response to the recent "on-field" success of Badger athletics, in particular football and men's basketball. The Executive Director of the Badger Fund noted that:

> ...we had the opportunity to participate in some very high demand events in the mid-to-late-90's...two Rose Bowl's and a Final Four. We did not have a well-thought out and well-communicated plan to handle requests for any of those things. We really learned from those experiences and recognized that we had room to improve the way we allocated tickets and parking (benefits).

Establishing the Badger Fund and in particular a priority points system provided the university with a systematic means of recognizing the "most-valued" donors and an objective process for allocating benefits. As the UW Ticket Director remarked,

> ...we could systematically recognize who donors were and at what level or value they were to the institution...as the ticket director that was critical to my job because I am distributing most of those benefits and I need to know who is who...the first year I was here, we went to the Rose Bowl and the Final Four and without a priority point plan in place...we did not know who our valued donors were and that was extremely difficult.

The Badger Fund

The UW Athletic Department concluded that in order to accomplish the goal of creating a comprehensive and consolidated preferential seating plan, they needed an organization, which they did not have, to administer such a program. There was a

realization that running such a program through the booster clubs was inefficient and unrealistic given the wide breadth and scope of a consolidated program. As was noted by the Assistant Director of the Badger Fund in regards to the football booster club:

> ...I think they realized they did not have the staff, the manpower, or the capacity to really administer 40,000 seats. They could handle it for the couple hundred members they had and as a way to encourage contributions for somebody that wanted new season tickets and that type of thing...but I think they realized to manage it for the 9,000 season ticket holders that were going to be affected, they were just not equipped to do that...

The athletic department published a brochure in the year 2000 entitled "Introduction to the Badger Fund." This full-color brochure was the formal announcement to its season ticket holders regarding its formation of the newly "coined" Badger Fund. This brochure informed patrons in the following manner:

> One of the key strategies of the "Keeping Big Red in the Black: A Five Year Strategic Financial Plan" was the development and implementation of a coordinated annual giving plan, utilizing the department's key capabilities of tickets, parking and special events. That is why the department has established the Badger Fund, a program for annual giving in support of Wisconsin athletics. The Badger Fund will consist of donations for preferential seating in football, men's basketball, women's, and men's hockey, as well as unrestricted gifts in support of UW Athletics. The Badger Fund will include a priority points system that incorporates years of season ticket purchase, donation history and other factors in establishing priority for selected department benefits, including but not

> limited to seating requests, individual game ticket purchase, away game ticket purchase, bowl tickets and more. Revenue generated by the Badger Fund will be used primarily to fund the department's scholarship and facility improvement costs, particularly the expense associated in upgrading Camp Randall Stadium.

The evolution and make-up of the Badger Fund, according to its current Executive Director, was:

> ...it came out of our development staff which was initially housed over at the UW Foundation...we really hammered out the details and logistics of pulling a comprehensive annual fund program together. Initially we were not working under the official name "Badger Fund", but that name was confirmed within our first year of existence, which was our planning year [2000].

In effect, the Badger Fund managed to accomplish two key objectives. One, it brought all preferential seating under one office of primary responsibility and two, it provided the mechanism to overhaul the old 1982 football preferential seating program. The Senior Associate Athletic Director summed up the Badger Fund this way:

> It really came from a program that was in place that was not working very well to kind of a self-analysis of where we had potential and what we needed to work on from a revenue standpoint. We identified that building the annual [Badger] fund was room for growth and that the best way to do that was to utilize tickets and parking.

Ultimately, the Badger Fund was the vehicle that would help carry UW's annual fund raising efforts to a new level.

BUILDING A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM

In order to develop a comprehensive priority seating program a number of steps were taken by the athletic department. First and foremost, the Senior Associate Athletic Director spearheaded this program. According to the Assistant Director of the Badger Fund, "The Senior Associate Athletic Director certainly led the cause." The Wisconsin State Journal reporter noted "The Senior Associate Athletic Director was the person whose initiative was largely behind the Badger Fund and preferential seating concepts...he was my person if I had questions..." The Senior Associate Athletic Director had this to say about the process of developing this program.

> We talked to our local research firm about gathering information. We all contacted various schools and gathered what other people were doing. It became quite clear that everybody does it differently...there is no one single "boilerplate." Each school has to handle their particular plan to their audience, their university community and the culture in which they exist. There is not a plan out there that we said, "this is it and this is what we are going to do." We did take the time to look at what other people were doing. They served as a basis for what type of plan we would build. We built this from scratch. We did not take somebody's program and modify it. We just began with a large working group and we began with the basics of a plan and we kept adding to it, modifying it, and putting it in from of people and said "what do you think?" We came back and made changes. That is how we built it. We met every Friday for a period of about 18 months...we incorporated some booster clubs, our development staff, our

> marketing staff, our sports information, administration…it was a wonderful process.

The UW Ticket Director had this to say about the process:

> …what we really wanted to do was model a new program and be comprehensive across all the sports...we did quite a bit of research, interviewing of development people and ticket people at various institutions, most of the Big Ten schools that had some sort of priority plan in place, a lot of the ACC and SEC schools…so we really had a comprehensive research project going…what we had found was that we were all raising money in kind of the same way…but it was not something where there was a uniform way of going about it. We really took kind of bits and pieces. We fit it to what we felt were our customer's needs or our donor's needs…and that was the way that we tied all of our sports and all of those benefits together under the Badger Fund, which used a priority points system that was comprehensive and allowed football buyers to have basketball priority and vice versa.

While these two perspectives highlighted the process of examining other priority seating programs, the Assistant Director of the Badger Fund offered a different viewpoint:

> Because we had a program in place for football, we kind of utilized that as our basis. We did not start from scratch. We said, "We have a program that was not really completely enforced, so let's start enforcing that". That is more how we came at it.

A review of UW's current priority seating program indicates that in reality, the program is an amalgamation of the 1982 program, the Kohl Center ticket plan, and

research conducted by UW interests all wrapped into one plan. During my interviews and through the document retrieval process, I was able to distinguish two distinct lines of research conducted by UW regarding priority seating. The first was an examination of priority seating programs at other intercollegiate institutions and the second was research conducted on current season ticket holders.

Intercollegiate Institutional Research

According to the Senior Associate Athletic Director, a local research firm (Just the Facts, Inc.) was utilized to gather pertinent data from other "like" universities that already had some form of preferential or priority seating programs. Just the Facts, Inc. compiled information from several schools athletic departments that were deemed as having comparable football programs based on the parameters of size, scope, attendance, and ticket demand. The following schools were utilized as a part of this study: Arizona State University, University of Georgia, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, Ohio State University, Penn State University, Syracuse University, University of Tennessee, University of Texas-Austin, University of Nebraska, University of North Carolina, and Washington University. Data collection for this study consisted of both interviews and document analysis. Only six of the schools were actually interviewed and of these six a number of the responses to questions were coded as "no response." While the purpose of my study was not to critique this work, I will make the following critical assessment for the purpose of placing this research within its appropriate context for use as a "document" within this study. A thorough review of the documentation regarding this research did not indicate a level of rigor or methodological pragmatism typically found in qualitative research methods. Additionally, no attempts

were made to address concerns of and/or procedures for strengthening validity and/or reliability issues. The study has "informational utility"; however it should be "absorbed" within its proper context. The following bullet points summarize the main points from the aforementioned study:

- Priority seating programs that have worked successfully for one athletic department may not be appropriate or feasible for another school
- Schools tend to have two tiers of giving and support. The first tier encourages or rewards those fans that either contribute regularly or have been loyal to the program over the years; the second tier is targeted at those supporters who have a significantly greater capacity to provide large donations either to the university as a whole, or to the athletic department specifically
- The "sports market" and demographic/financial capacity of the school's supporting community should be a major consideration
- Understand your customer's perspective, commitment, and support capacity
- Research your athletic supporters to assess their feelings on proposed program
- Keep the program simple and easy to understand

In addition to these recommendations, the study compiled a comprehensive table that allowed UW administrators to cross-compare all 13 schools in four separate criteria. The first criteria addressed stadium-seating capacity at each venue. The second criteria presented the gamut of ticket prices ranging from individual game to season to special group rates. The third criteria identified the various levels of established giving at each University. And finally the fourth criteria identified amenities and special benefits that were afforded to various established giving levels as well as through priority seating

programs. While these benefits were listed, they did not track back to any particular giving level and as such there was no way to tell which benefits were associated with what dollar amounts.

Season Ticket Holder Research

One of the recommendations from the institutional research was to solicit feedback from season ticket holders and athletic donors to assess their perspective, commitment and support capacity. UW took this recommendation to heart and according to the Executive Director of the Badger Fund:

> We did work with our School of Business and their graduate students (The Sports Marketing Team from the AC Nielsen Center for Marketing Research) to select a population of our season ticket holders and donors; we were trying to get at their thinking as regards to all of our different ticket and parking priorities and what was of interest to them. We were trying to get a feel for how can we reward these folks for giving at these various levels.

According to documents prepared by the Sports Marketing Team, the objective of the focus group research was to talk with season ticket holders about the ticketing program for the 2000-2001 football season and understand their concerns about the program and proactively address those concerns through communication. The team held four focus groups over two days in November 1999, each one lasting approximately 90 minutes. The research team was comprised of two males and two females. Regarding the participants in these focus groups, there was a couple interesting notes. First, there was no mention made in any of the documentation, nor could any of this study's participants remember specifically, the number of participants in each of the four groups.

Anecdotally, the number that was thrown around reflected 10-15 people per group. The second interesting caveat was the fact that all participants from the focus group donated, at that time, less to the University than would be required in the new ticket plan. No explanation or rationale for this "segmented" sample was provided, however one of the recommendations made by the research team indicates that perhaps the selection of such a "narrow" sample reflected a limitation in their study. The research team acknowledged that additional "survey" research should be conducted that will involve a larger and more diverse sample of the UW sports consumer. According to the research team's report, there were two key themes that emerged from the focus group findings. One was the desire of donors to be viewed as "partners" with the Badger team and with the University and the second theme revolved around providing "clarity" in communications to season ticket holders.

The sentiment of participants in the focus group was that the idea of partnership is what has kept the fans loyal through the hard times and for this the athletic department should recognize them as much as possible. One participant summed this up by stating, "...that's why a lot of people kept their tickets through the severe Don Morton years; they felt that they were accumulating something...sort of a partnership." Supporters of the program want to be informed as another donor commented, "I think it should be spelled out and people should know exactly what the value is for the dollar they're putting down." Along these same lines, one donor remarked, "I don't trust this...I don't think you can just say that Wisconsin is $1.5 million without telling us where that $1.5 million is coming from [In reference to the annual fund raising total for UW athletics]." The research team recommended that the athletic department be very diligent in terms of

making sure its information is complete, accurate and has source data to back it up. The final comment under the partnership theme relates back to the 1982 preferential seating plan. The typical donor comment regarding this program was "What was the 1982 plan? I don't remember that." "So there's been a plan in place?" Many long-time season ticket holders were simply not aware that a plan existed previously because the department did not communicate this well enough to supporters. And because of this void, many season ticket holders did not realize that they had been treated preferentially for a number of years by virtue of not having to pay the annual donation. On the other side of this are the "newer" season ticket holders who had been paying these annual fees. The research team recommended the athletic department should concede that the 1982 plan was not enforced uniformly and that the current plan was aimed to rectify that inequity.

The second theme identified was "clarity" and perhaps is best summed up by the comment of one of the donors, "Just shoot it straight with the fans." The sentiment of the focus groups was that by providing clear, complete information about the new program, it would indicate a level of respect for ticket holders. Additionally, a detailed description of the priority seating plan and its associated benefits which came directly from the athletic department would help reduce the impact of "noise" (i.e. media reports, rumors, etc.) that could misconstrue the facts.

Overall, when looking at the results and recommendations made by both research groups to the UW athletic department, there was a close parallel between what was suggested and what was actually implemented. To the extent that these recommendations "drove the decisions" is unclear, however based on the data gathered through the interviews and document analysis, it appears as though the process to develop a program

was highly rigorous and involved a multitude of source data, of which this was just one. Ultimately, decisions were made through a collaborative process that utilized many sources of information. The Excecutive Director of the Badger Fund summed up this process best by saying:

> ...internally we definitely had the knowledge and feel for what direction we could and wanted to head in. Having said that, we absolutely solicited feedback and input from our donors and volunteers [research team], and to some degree, we tweaked things based on this feedback. One thing that we learned early on is that every suggestion or idea was made from a very personal perspective, which we didn't fault anyone for...patrons were making a suggestion because they were looking at how this was going to affect them. What we needed to do is take all that feedback in and say "how can we build a program that is going to meet our financial needs and goals, is one that we are going to be able to administer effectively, while also taking into account the feedback from patrons?" We knew we needed to develop a program that would mesh all those things. But much of the feedback was informal...we had a working group internally that kicked things around...it was not always scientific and definitely more qualitative than quantitative.

Loyalty Discount

In January 2000, the UW Athletic Advisory Board approved a plan that would bring preferential seating in football, men and women's basketball, and men's ice hockey under one program, the Badger Fund. While a preferential seating plan for basketball and ice hockey had already been implemented with the advent of the new Kohl Center, for the

football program this would be a complete overhaul of the 1982 preferential seating program. Unlike the previous program, this new football preferential seating plan was going to be enforced for all patrons and not just a select few. There was one stipulation to this, however, the Executive Director of the Badger Fund addressed as:

> ...one of the main things we kept hearing, in focus groups and one-on-one visits, was the loyalty factor. A lot of patrons shared that they had been with us when few were...and there was some truth to that. We knew we could not completely grandfather longtime season ticket holders because then we'd be back to square one. We needed to find a way to reach the point that every patron was contributing at some level. So we developed two different tiers for the longtime season ticket holder discounting their annual giving through a four-year period...but by 2005 everybody will be participating at the minimum preferred seating level.

In a brochure simply titled, "2001 Badger Fund", the following criteria were addressed regarding UW's plan to incorporate a football loyalty discount with the "roll-out" of its new preferential seating plan.

> Football Loyalty Discount:
>
> Season ticket holders with 25 or more years of continuous purchase are eligible for the following discount on their annual preferred seating contribution:
>
> 2001: 100% discount
> 2002: 75% discount
> 2003: 50% discount
> 2004: 25% discount
> 2005 and beyond: Full Contribution

Season ticket holders with years of continuous purchase between 10 and 24 years are eligible for the following discount on their annual preferred seating contribution:

2001: 60% discount
2002: 45% discount
2003: 30% discount
2004: 15% discount
2005 and beyond: Full Contribution

The reporter interviewed from the Madison State Journal made this comment regarding the football loyalty discount:

> That was huge…that was a signal that they had really thought this out and that the fan was really important in this and that they were not just a human checkbook that was going to give them money all of the time…everybody talks about loyalty and they have recognized that and a lot of people, especially the long time season ticket holder, appreciated that.

This decision was truly a trade-off between short-term revenue and long-term loyalty.

Priority Points System

In many ways, the priority points program is the backbone of the Badger Fund. As the UW Ticket Director noted, "…using a priority point system really allowed us to tie all of our sports and all of our benefits together under the Badger Fund…" A UW brochure entitled "Badger Fund: Guide to the Priority Point System," was mailed to all Badger season ticket holders in 2000. According to this document:

> The Badger Fund Priority Point System was established to provide a systematic, orderly and fair process to prioritize seating and parking requests from loyal University of Wisconsin-Madison fans wishing to attend athletic events. The following system, approved by the Athletic Board in February, was developed

with the input of a wide range of UW supporters, including ticket customers, athletic donors, booster club members, and alumni. Beginning with the 2001-2002 academic year, contributors to UW athletics will be ranked for the purpose of determining priority for that year's applicable benefits. You must be a donor to UW Athletics at a minimum level of $50 in the current year to receive Priority Points as outlined below. Additionally, priority points will be used in conjunction with annual giving levels to determine priority for the current year's available benefits.

Table 2: UW Priority Points Criteria

Factor	Points
Season Tickets – Consecutive Years of Purchase	10 pts. (Per year)
Badger Fund – Current Year Giving	10 pts. (Per $100)
Badger Fund – Consecutive Years of Giving	10 pts. (Per Year)
All other Giving to UW-Madison Athletics	10 pts. (Per $100)
Varsity Letterwinner at UW-Madison	100 pts. (One time)
Graduate of UW-Madison	50 pts. (One time)

According to the 2000 Badger Fund brochure, the priority point system would be used in two different ways: first, to decide who will receive ticket and parking benefits when available and second, to determine ticket and parking locations. All contributors, above the $50 donation level, would be ranked for the purpose of determining that year's benefits. The 2004 Badger Fund brochure identifies the following benefits:

- Opportunity to request football season and single-game tickets
- Opportunity to request football and men's basketball season parking
- Bowl Game ticket priority
- Big Ten men's basketball tournament ticket priority
- Varsity sports pass
- Opportunity to request men's basketball season tickets
- Opportunity to request NCAA men's basketball tournament tickets
- Men's basketball pre-game reception

- Football training camp outing
- Legends of Wisconsin golf classic

It is noted that the above benefits are listed hierarchically based on established annual giving levels. The further "down" the list one goes, the larger the required annual donation is to receive this benefit and thus the benefits become increasingly exclusive.

One observation to be made pertains to the stated purpose of the priority points system. The official Athletic Department statement regarding the Badger Fund Priority Point System was to "...provide a systematic, orderly and fair process to prioritize seating and parking requests from donors wishing to attend athletic events." The Senior Associate Athletic Director had this revealing comment to make regarding a priority point system:

> The point system is about money. It is about money because that is why we built the program...you cannot be embarrassed to say it is about money. You can impact your point totals most by giving money. There are other factors that we put in there...but it is ultimately put there to drive annual giving.

This "apparent" discrepancy between these comments and the department's stated purpose are not necessarily in conflict, but rather are a reflection of the mutual exchange theory discussed in this study's literature review. A further discussion of this is made in Chapter V of this study.

Key Groups and Constituencies

Once a decision had been made to develop and implement a comprehensive priority seating/priority points program, the UW athletic department next identified a number of key groups or constituencies that would be pivotal in terms of gaining their

support for the this new program. These key constituencies represent groups that were both internal and external relative to the UW-Madison university system.

In looking at those entities that were internal to the university system, there were three key groups identified during the interview process by several members. These three groups are the UW Foundation, the UW Athletic Advisory Board, and the head coaches of the major sports. The Senior Associate Athletic Director noted:

> A key player [for "buy-in"] was our UW Foundation that is the fund raising arm of the entire university. Technically, all of our fund raising and development activities are coordinated through the UW Foundation. We had to sit down with them and say in tickets and parking you really do not want any part of that and let us as an athletics department manage that and utilize those things to promote giving on an annual basis. Let us run the annual giving and you guys can continue to track the major development and major gifts.

The Executive Director of the Badger Fund remarked that within the university system:

> ...a very key group was the UW Athletic Board which is primarily made up of faculty and staff. They are a group that provides feedback and advice on policy-type decisions...this group would need to be a part of process as we really needed their buy-in to move forward...that was a group that we definitely needed to educate, cultivate and bring along.

One member of the UW Athletic Advisory Board commented on the group's initial reaction to the priority seating/priority points plan:

> ...I think that the board, after learning that other schools had already been doing this for some time and also after having come to grips with the financial picture

> for the university, especially the need to improve the stadiums, saw that priority seating was pretty much a necessity…I think the Board was generally accepting of the concept.

The third constituency that was identified was the coaches and as the Senior Associate Athletic Director remarked:

> We had to sit down with our coaches, particularly in the higher profile sports and explain to them what we were doing and why we were doing it and what we needed them to be saying. They were keys. We were able to talk about this being the financial future and if we were going to continue on the road to success that we had been driving on, we needed to do this stuff. They were not a hard sale at all.

One former head coach during the implementation process noted that:

> …time was spent with the administration to try and determine where the better seats were, which ones would be higher priced…we were not in the process entirely, but questions were asked and our opinions were solicited".

The key for this particular group was that they were on-board with the department's plan and spoke with one voice. It should also be noted that even though not identified specifically as an internal group, the UW Athletic Department also gained "buy-in" from the UW Chancellor because of the program's high profile.

There were four external constituencies that needed to be addressed regarding the new priority seating/priority points plan. These were the individual sport booster groups, the Alumni Association, UW Athletic Advisory Council, and Badger supporters. The Senior Associate Athletic Director had this to say about the University's booster groups:

> The most active and the most pertinent one in this discussion was the football booster group…there was this sense at the time that the big athletics department was trying to eliminate all of the booster clubs and come up with their own…bringing the booster clubs to the table and explaining to them that we are not trying to undercut their sport and this is all about money to athletics…we were going to say we want people to be able to give to athletics in general and that is we would encourage and promote because that is best for the future of the department; however, if you have a particular passion for a particular sport, we will allow you to do that as a part of the new annual fund contest that we are talking about.

The Executive Director of the Badger Fund recognized that the sport specific booster clubs would be one of the biggest challenges in terms of bringing on board with the new program:

> …they felt threatened and a little leery of change…I think we always came to the table throughout the process and shared information openly and honestly…we tried to be sensitive to the fact that some of these volunteers had vested interests. They considered themselves "major players" within the department and some were very involved with our ticket and parking priorities and how these were allocated. By making it a broader based program, it was going to change the dynamic. We recognized that and we tried to be sensitive to it always again keeping an eye on the end goal.

The second external constituency addressed was the UW Athletic Advisory Council which one participant compared to a "Board of Visitors" for an academic unit.

While not a group that required any type of formal approval, the Executive Director of the Badger Fund noted that:

> ...we have always taken things like this to this group to bounce ideas off of. I think because they're high level donors, we knew for the most part the group would support us, but we wanted them to kind of help carry the torch in the community.

A third external constituency that the UW administration worked to bring on board was the UW Alumni Association. This group was identified as critical since before a priority points system was implemented, this group, according to a Senior administrator, received tickets to any and all events regardless of whether or not they were contributing to the annual fund. The priority points system would do away with any preferential treatment for this particular group and as such was identified as a group requiring "special handling."

It was only after the UW athletic department had "addressed" the aforementioned constituencies that they turned their attention to addressing the fourth and largest external constituency; the thousands of Badger supporters who are season ticket holders and donors. From the UW Ticket Director's standpoint:

> ...the key group was our patrons...we really had to think about what their needs were and then sell it to them...we really had to educate them to the benefits and we are actually still doing that...it is an ongoing process...

The Badger Fund Executive Director echoed this sentiment noting that:

> ...it is a lot of hand holding. We are still a work in progress. Every time we do a special ticket allocation...there is still education. People want to understand why they got tickets and why they didn't...

Bringing this group along was clearly one of the largest and most coordinated efforts of the Badger staff.

SELLING UW'S "NEW" PRIORITY SEATING PROGRAM

Once UW had made the decision to build and implement a comprehensive annual fund that would incorporate priority seating and a priority points program, they were faced with the daunting task of educating and marketing the new programs to the general public. The following are a number of the strategies employed by the athletic department in an effort to "sell" the program.

Get Started Early

The Senior Associate Athletic Director had these remarks about the overall process:

> The first thing we did is that we said probably two years (maybe three) in advance that we are going to implement a new preferred seating program. We did not know what it was going to look like, so we said "probably it is coming and get ready because it is coming."

The Badger Fund Executive Director reviewed the process in this manner:

> We created a handful of publications that detailed the changes and sent them to thousands of patrons...the first mass communication was really specific and covered the football preferred seating program. Six months later we did another publication that took to the next level and showed how preferred seating was a part of a comprehensive annual fund program with a priority point system and

> benefits. In between those two publications we had a newsletter that we used to make general announcements about the new annual fund program and which encouraged patrons to call us if they had questions. Then it got down to one-on-one conversations and visits. We also used our websites and did some radio and TV spots that ran during game broadcasts…for the most part the media coverage was as good as we could expect in this market here…there were a few columns, absolutely, that were critical. They [media] examined us pretty closely here, so we were not expecting them to write PR [public relations] pieces for us. We did our best to manage it and I think overall they tried to be objective.

The reporter from the Wisconsin State Journal shared these thoughts on the interaction between the media and UW:

> …once it became apparent to them that it was going to be illustrated to the public and it was going to be followed as a story, they cooperated and they definitely tried to provide as much input as they could to make sure that the message was not and did not go off on a tangent. I don't think it ever did…They did a lot of different things to try and educate people and I think it helped them in the long run having it explained in the morning newspaper when those occasions arose.

Interviews and document analysis revealed that the primary means of communicating with season ticket holders was through direct mail pieces. Secondary means included the use of the athletic department's website, booster club functions/luncheons, local media outlets, and as the UW Ticket Director identified, "…we took hundreds and hundreds of phone calls through the Badger Fund, through the ticket office, and through other parts of the athletic department…" Throughout the study, it became apparent that there was

several themes emerging that illuminated the key strategies employed by UW to "sway" public opinion in their favor.

Open and Honest Communications

First and foremost, the approach that was taken by the UW athletic department was to be open and honest about the program, why it was doing it, where the money was going, and how it was going to affect patrons. The Executive Director of the Badger Fund noted that, "...we always came to the table throughout the process and shared information openly and honestly...we tried to be just really forthcoming with information." Along this same line of thought, the UW Athletic Department was very diligent in terms of involving and educating its "own people" of the program so that it might deliver an accurate and consistent message to outsiders. The reporter from the Madison State Journal remarked:

> It was not a thing that there were people behind the scenes going "what is this all about"...they had done a lot of talking, they had done a lot of planning. They had stood in front of a grease board for hours on end going "what if we did this and what if we did that." What I felt was impressive was the fact that there are a lot of cracks that things can fall through and there are a lot of ways that things can get misinterpreted and presented and get twisted around a little bit...yet, I never got the sense that there were people who did not know what this was all about and had no clue why they were doing what they were doing. It was clear to me that there was a lot of good inner departmental education going on. The proper people were kept in the loop and proper people were well schooled in what the whole process was.

Logical and Forthright

A second strategy undertaken by UW was to take a "logical" approach to justifying the need to implement the new program. They clearly emphasized the financial landscape for UW athletics and the need to generate additional revenues. Additionally, they emphasized the need to have a fair, orderly, and systematic means of distributing tickets and benefits. As the UW Ticket Director noted:

> It was key that it (priority seating) came out with the five year strategic plan for the overall athletic department and included all of our finances and not just how much money we were going to raise off of donations. That helped considerably.

One member of the UW Athletic Advisory Board had these comments to make regarding the need to raise revenues for the department:

> There was initially the group of people who will always resist having to pay more for something. One of the points made to these folks was the safety issue of Camp Randall Stadium. We were able to say with a clear conscience that the stadium was old, that it was certainly unworkable in many significant respects it was unsafe and that it presented unfair and truly substantial hurdles to even marginally disabled people and so forth. So, the legitimacy of the cause for raising the money was there, and once people saw that, I think they became comfortable with it.

Another technique utilized by the athletic department was to stress the fundamental need to have a fair and orderly system to distribute its tickets and benefits to season ticket holders and donors. The Assistant Director of the Badger Fund noted:

> …we were just happy to have an objective standard that we could evaluate. When something like NCAA basketball tournament tickets come up and you get requests from all over the place, I think we were just thrilled to have a standard to fall back on and say this is our system for recognizing support and we are going to follow it as opposed to having to decide should I take care of "Joe" or "Rich." I think that made everybody happy…

The Badger Fund Executive Director also pointed out that:

> …we had just come off a period when we went to three Rose Bowls and a Final Four, and there were a lot of questions and concerns about who got tickets and why. With our new program there was a very clear system to help us with these kinds of high-demand events…we were very forthcoming with information so patrons knew why they didn't get something or why they did. Over time, we hope that by continually doing things "by the book," that our patrons will continue to develop trust in the program and us.

Another key technique that the athletic department employed to help sell the priority seating program was sort of a "keeping up with the Joneses" approach. In an interview with the UW Athletic Board representative it was revealed that:

> …when people learned that other Big Ten schools had been doing this for a long time that also placated a lot of people's concerns about this new program and I think it's almost ironic when you get down to zero-sum game mentality, some of these folks were almost to the point that they were dismayed that we had failed to get on the band wagon earlier…given that the rest of the Big Ten was doing them…I think that is what ultimately captured people. Once they learned more

> about it, they said, "Hey, why didn't we do this awhile back when Penn State did it."

This technique of trying to appeal the donor's "competitive nature" was also clearly evident in a number of the newspaper articles that were reviewed for this study as it was often the case that stories would refer to priority seating plans at other Big Ten Universities (i.e. Ohio State, Penn State, Minnesota, etc.), contributing to the notion that UW was lagging behind. This argument was also strengthened through the five-year strategic financial plan released by the university that identified UW as last in the Big Ten in terms of fund raising dollars.

Loyalty Discount

A third key strategy in implementing the priority seating plan was the inclusion of the football loyalty discount, which served to "soften" the impact of a plan that was going to require long-time season ticket holders, in many cases, to raise or begin to donate to athletics in order to maintain their current seats. The Senior Associate Athletic Director commented on the importance of the loyalty discount:

> It [loyalty discount] actually turned into a buzz word that really played well…we wanted our long-time season ticket holders sitting in those seats, not a lot of turnover and feeling good about they got something that the new guys that came in during the Rose Bowl years were not getting because they lived through the down years and they stuck with us…we did not hear nearly a ripple from out there in the community because they felt that they were being recognized for that loyalty…and going back to the research, we floated the concept to phase in a

> loyalty discount and it had a certain ring to it that people liked and we incorporated that and it worked wonders.

While the loyalty discount was a great strategy for the long term, it was also acknowledged by the Senior Associate Athletic Director that, "...in the short run we left a ton of money on the table." This leads to the next key strategy that was not to "gouge" the season ticket holders.

Conservative Approach

From the start, the UW athletic department was very cognizant of the market in which they operated. As the Badger Fund Executive Director pointed out, "We are not in Columbus, we are not in Detroit and we are just not in a major metropolitan area. The state is relatively conservative from a fiscal standpoint." The Senior Associate Athletic Director reiterated that, "...we always wanted to say we are not nearly as expensive or aggressive as others." A key decision made by the university that reinforces the notion that they did not want to "gouge" their supporters was the decision not to reseat its venues. As the UW Ticket Director noted:

> I was actually at the University of Virginia before I came here and we reseated our basketball arena every year. While it raised a tremendous amount of money, it was painful. It was painful for the athletic department; it was painful for our donors. That was tough, but we raised a tremendous amount of money doing that...we did not feel like reseating was really something that was necessary (at UW) based on our financial picture...we may have left money on the table but we also retained our buyers and it was a lot less painful.

The reporter from the Wisconsin State Journal also commented on this notion:

> ...one of the underlying things on this whole process, they have been proactive, but they have not been aggressive in trying to just turn this thing into a money maker. It is clear to me that they took the time to recognize that these people are customers and they want to have them as customers 10 years from now. That has been one of the more impressive, unwritten little recognized elements of this administration...I really think that people understand that they are not getting gouged. They have made an attempt to try and be cordial, fair and they have not done anything to an extreme.

Perhaps this strategy was most evident in the absence of any real upheaval by Badger supporters. According to one newspaper account, a sampling of season ticket holders revealed little outrage about the plan...the reaction of the fans seem to be rather subdued (Mulhern, 2000). One fan even remarked, "I think it's very fair...they have produced some good football teams. If you want to watch them, you've got to help pay."

It should be noted that there were in fact some negative criticisms made regarding the plan such as these comments made by one donor in the Madison Capital Times (Mulhern, 2000):

> It does bother me, not only for myself, but my father-in-law, who has had tickets for 30 years...for people like that who have really been through everything with Wisconsin athletics, any kind of fee is a disservice to the longevity of fans at UW

Another fan in the same article remarked:

> To be honest, I'm not really in favor of that much of a jump, especially since to me things have been mismanaged [in the athletic department] a little bit. It's a lot

> of money for us. I think we'll come up with it, but if it were any more, I think we'd think long and hard about it.

The Senior Associate Athletic Director categorized most calls over the 18 months prior to implementation of the program as being informational, opposed to callers being really upset or angry. The reporter from the Wisconsin State Journal had this comment to make regarding the "goodwill" that had been built up during the priority seating process:

> When they raised ticket prices and announced that the next budget would have a $5 increase for football tickets and that there would be another basketball increase and that there would be another hockey increase, I got no phone calls. I got no complaints. I got nothing. I did not get an email from anybody about this. I talked with a key administrator at UW who had received no complaints either.

Although not an intended outcome, UW's effort to facilitate open and honest communications with its donors during the implementation of priority seating actually paid big dividends at a later date when they looked to raise ticket prices.

SYNOPSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section synthesizes the key findings above as they relate to this study's fundamental research questions. The following is a synopsis of these findings.

Why was a priority seating program established at the University of Wisconsin-Madison?

There were three primary reasons for developing the current priority seating program at UW. First, and above all else, this program was developed to generate additional revenue for the athletic department through annual giving. At the time, UW was ranked last in the Big Ten Conference in terms of revenues generated through annual fund raising. Secondly, because UW had experienced significant growth in the 90's in

terms of season ticket sales and was to the near point of "maxing" out this revenue stream, the opportunity to include football into a priority seating schema was viewed as a huge untapped resource with potential to generate significant funds. Finally, in the 90's UW had the opportunity to participate in a number of high-profile sporting events (i.e. Rose Bowl appearances, men's basketball Final Four) and the athletic department did not have a systematic, objective process for allocating tickets (i.e. benefits) to its supporters. As a matter of necessity, the priority points program was developed to provide an objective, fair manner in which to distribute benefits to donors.

What factors played a role in the development and implementation of the program?

There were many factors that contributed to the way UW looked at, developed, and ultimately implemented the existing program. One key factor was the fact that the football program had an old (1982) preferential seating program in place that quite frankly did not work well. This program was poorly run, unevenly administered, and created inequities amongst the thousands of season ticket holders. Administered by the football booster group since its inception, this program was in dire need of an "overhaul" and a comprehensive priority seating program administered by the athletic department was just the answer. The need to become more efficient, broad-based, and synergistic, was a driving force behind building a comprehensive, all-inclusive priority seating schema. It was also the catalyst for the eventual development of the Badger Fund program office as the oversight mechanism for all priority seating and priority points programs at UW. Another major factor was the fact that UW is a public institution in the state of Wisconsin and therefore was subject to "much" scrutiny about the priority seating program from a number of oversight entities; particularly, the UW Athletic Board, UW

Foundation, and the UW Chancellor. Receiving "buy-in" from these groups was critical for the athletic department to press forward with its implementation of this program. Upon approval from these internal constituencies, UW also had a number of external groups that it needed to be sensitive to and work towards educating and gaining "buy-in". These groups included the UW Alumni Association, individual sport booster groups (particularly football's Mendota Gridiron Club), and most importantly the thousands of UW athletic supporters (season ticket holders).

How were the key factors in the priority seating and priority points system determined?

Above all else, the UW athletic department spent a great deal of time (roughly 18 months) to develop the factors that would make-up its priority seating/points program. Ultimately, the factors that were eventually settled upon were a direct reflection of the athletic department goals as laid out in the five-year financial plan "Keeping Big Red in the Black." Three distinct approaches were taken by administration to assist in program development. First, a consulting firm was utilized to research "other" priority seating programs across Division I athletics. While it was discovered that there is truly no one "boilerplate" for priority seating, the research did provide a wealth of information as to specific approaches taken by individual schools that would be utilized later. A second research approach was led by a team from UW's School of Business. Utilizing focus groups, this research set out to gain direct feedback from current UW athletic donors regarding their thoughts and feelings about a new priority seating plan. The third approach involved the development a diverse, multi-disciplined working group to assimilate the data collected and to develop the program, as it's currently known. This

group incorporated a wide array of interests: UW booster club members, marketing, development, sports information, and a host of senior administrators.

Why were priority points criteria weighted against one another as they were?

Simply put, the criterion that was ultimately decided upon was a direct reflection of the objectives as set forth by the athletic department. The number one objective for the athletic department was to generate additional revenues. The number one criterion, in terms of increasing total points, was to give more money. Next to revenue generation, the athletic department wanted to reward fan longevity and loyalty to the program and therefore provided criteria, albeit not as heavily weighted, for things like consecutive years as a season ticket holder and consecutive years giving. Inclusion of UW alumni and letter winners was somewhat of afterthought and included primarily to "appease" the UW alumni association. As such, the points associated with these criteria were insignificant relative to the number of points that could be earned through other means. One priority points criteria that was notably absent in the UW program was a provision for employees of the University; particularly since one of the stated goals of the athletic department was to "build a bridge" and improve communications and relationships between athletics and the campus community. While it may appear that the inclusion of this criterion would serve as the proverbial "olive branch," it was explained by one athletic department official that such criterion would be considered a "special perk or benefit" that could not be afforded to State employees.

What was the overall strategy involved with "marketing" the new program to donors?

A clear strength of this entire process was the manner in which UW "sold" this new program to the public. UW began its informational campaign to the public nearly

two years before formally implementing the program, proving to be an astute decision. This allowed the department to "refine" the program several times based on feedback it was receiving in addition to allowing ample time for UW supporters to "travel" the donor continuum that is discussed further in Chapter V. The "sales" approach taken by the athletic department was open and honest, relied on logical and factually based arguments, and also tried to foster a sense of partnership, particularly in its attempt to build a common enemy by comparing what UW was doing to the "rest of the Big Ten." Another key strategy employed was the branding of a loyalty discount for long-time supporters. This tactic proved invaluable in terms of quelling the negative backlash from a group of supporters who were arguably the "most" potentially harmed by the new program. Finally, the athletic department was adamant about posturing itself as fiscally conservative in terms of its approach to giving. A common theme throughout the campaign was to highlight UW's program relative to "other" big schools that were charging much more. There is no single measure more telling about the success of UW's strategy to sell its program than the overwhelming acceptance by its supporters.

THE PROGRAM TODAY

Nearly three years after its inception there can be little doubt that the Badger Fund and priority seating have been a phenomenal success at UW. The numbers alone do not lie. First and foremost, there was not a "mass exodus" of season ticket holders after the implementation of this program. The Senior Associate Athletic Director remarked, "...very few people walked away. We had 97-98 percent renewals." According to the UW Division of Intercollegiate Athletics "2002-2003 Annual Report," the 2002 annual giving to UW athletics had risen to $7.7 million. This figure was $2.5 million greater

than donation levels prior to the implementation of this program and more than double the annual giving to UW athletics prior to the opening of the Kohl Center. The second, and more telling number was the number of overall donors to UW athletics. The 2002-2003 Annual Report identified the number of donors to UW athletics in 2002 at 14,160. This number is up from 8,999 donors in 2000, the same year priority seating was implemented. In the three years prior to 2000, the number of donors to UW remained relatively stagnant.

Finally, there were a couple noteworthy comments made in hindsight regarding the priority seating program. The Senior Associate Athletic Director, when asked if he regretted anything or would have done something differently, had this to say:

> I wish we had done it earlier, because it's proving to be a very good program...I think it worked very well and I am very proud of the people who stepped up. I like the results so much that I would not change a thing. This is exactly where we wanted to end up. There is not one thing that stands out that says I wish we had done it differently. Based on where we are now, I would do it exactly the same way.

Perhaps the reporter from the Madison State Journal best sums up the entire process. When asked if he felt that UW had made any mistakes in the process, he responded by saying:

> From a reporter, it is going to sound silly but I think they could have asked for more money. People would have done it and I know that the levels of donations and how much you have to donate to sit in a certain level...all of those things were very well thought out. Not a purely cold-hearted bottom line thing.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an old adage that says "when life gives you lemons; make lemonade." In 1982 the University of Wisconsin implemented a "lemon" of a preferred seating program that was done so with little insight, little conviction, and no sense of how this program fit into the overall fund raising schema. The erratic nature in which this program was administered and allowed to muddle through over time, in and of itself warrants this criticism. To the defense of the current administration, the inefficiencies of the 1982 program were ultimately acknowledged, addressed and certainly not repeated. The "millennium" version of a priority seating and a priority points program at the University of Wisconsin would have to be deemed an unequivocal success by nearly any objective standard. The program has met and in most cases exceeded all of the goals that it initially set out to achieve. It has raised additional revenues through annual giving, nearly doubled the number of donors to athletics, built a systematic and orderly means by which to distribute various benefits to its season ticket holders, and accomplished these things without "alienating" its core fan base. The following discussion is a synopsis of this study's major findings and their implications to the field of sport management and administration. Additionally, suggestions have been made regarding future research on this topic.

SYNOPSIS OF MAJOR FINDINGS

There were two fundamental propositions that guided the search for relevant evidence as a part of this study. The first proposition stated that the lack of any substantive research on the topic of priority seating led me to question what underlying principles govern the development and implementation of said programs. The second key proposition guiding this study was the thought that priority seating, while traditionally thought of as a fund raising tactic, may in fact be more suitably categorized as a pseudo sponsorship-like arrangement whereby each party is governed not by traditional fund raising edicts but rather by a more market-like exchange where both parties are mutually satisfied. The following underlying themes and principles that were uncovered during the course of this study serve as the basis to address the study's initial two propositions.

Characteristics of a Successful Priority Seating Program

A number of key strategies were employed during the development and implementation of UW's program that ultimately contributed to its success. The first strategy employed was the use of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. Although UW did not explicitly follow a SWOT analysis, much of what they did informally constituted the same "thought processes" involved with such a technique. They were able to identify a number of strengths such as an extremely loyal and raucous fan base, new facilities, long-standing traditions, and winning programs. The weaknesses identified included the lack of a coordinated, comprehensive priority seating plan and the absence of an organization capable of administering such a program. The opportunities presented to UW included recent Rose Bowl and Final Four

appearances where tickets were at a premium; a large "untapped" resource in terms of season ticket holders who were not donors; and capital improvement projects that provided a certain degree of legitimacy to their cause. Finally, the potential threat of a mass exodus of season ticket holders with the advent of priority seating was not very probable given UW athletics is the only real game in town. The introspective and external examination conducted by UW served as the compass for decision-making about all nearly all facets of the priority seating program. A SWOT analysis provides the necessary framework by which a school can make decisions about how to build a program, what to include in the program, when to deploy it, and how to sell it.

A second key strategy utilized by UW and one that is highly recommended for any program considering the implementation of priority seating is to initiate the process well in advance of the actual implementation. UW began going public with the idea of implementing priority seating two years before the actual implementation of the program. There are a number of good reasons for starting early; it allows sufficient time to collect and analyze information, solicit feedback, and make changes to reflect the desires and concerns of a host of interested constituencies. Perhaps one of the best reasons to start early is for the purpose of allowing donor's to run the gamut of what I refer to as the "Donor Stages."

It was evident during data collection that donors all came from different perspectives that were often based on their financial means and prior status as either donors or non-donors. Despite these different perspectives, a large majority of the donors appeared to "travel" through different stages of emotions originating with the initial announcement of the program all the way through its ultimate implementation.

Coinciding with the formal (or informal) announcement of priority seating, the typical donor reaction was initially one of anger. This anger usually transitioned soon thereafter to an inquisitive mode whereby the donors wanted to understand the justification or rationale for this program. The third stage was also in the inquisitive mode; however, the donors at this stage wanted answers about how this program was going to affect them personally. The fourth and final stage was the donor's ultimate acceptance or rejection of the program. Understanding these donor stages may be useful when rolling out a new priority seating program for several reasons. First, the sooner the program is announced the quicker the donors will begin to experience the stages of the donor continuum such that by the time the actual program is implemented, they have hopefully transitioned to the acceptance stage. Once in the acceptance stage, it is more likely that fans will participate in the program versus choosing not to renew their season tickets and make the required donation. If the program is initiated while donors are still in the anger phase, there is a greater likelihood that donors could let their emotions prevail and choose to dissociate themselves from the program. One caveat of note is that a school whose demand for season tickets is far greater than the available supply may not necessarily conform to this precept because it is "trumped" by the laws of supply and demand.

A key element of starting this process early is that as donors move through the stages, they will undoubtedly be providing feedback (often in the form of criticism) about the program. This information is extremely useful to athletic administrators charged with developing the program. This feedback can be used to "tweak" the program to where it becomes more "palatable" to donors as well as provide administrators with "vectors" regarding its public relations strategies for selling the program to the masses. Donor's

who are more accepting of the program are donors who are more likely to participate in the program.

A third key strategy in selling this program was the effort to facilitate a partnership with donors and create sort of an "us versus them" type of mentality. For example, UW did a great job of stressing what other "Big Ten" schools were doing in terms of both annual fundraising and with their respective priority seating programs. By identifying a "common enemy," UW was able to align itself with donors in a cooperative and not adversarial manner. A number of donors had commented that they felt "better" about giving knowing that the money was going towards building better UW teams that would be better equipped to compete against other Big Ten schools. They were also placated when educated about why donations made more sense for UW than simply raising ticket prices. One hundred percent of all donations made to UW go to support UW athletics; conversely, due to revenue sharing agreements with other Big Ten schools, a subsequent raise in ticket prices results in additional monies for the "enemy" and thus are not as desirable.

Priority Seating as a Market Penetration Strategy

While ultimately the goal of any priority seating program is to generate additional revenue for a sport property, a fundamental aspect of priority seating is its ability to "indoctrinate" a large group of patrons that were previously "non-donors" and convert them into donors. The priority seating program at UW did just that as it effectively doubled the number of annual donors involved in the program. The ability of priority seating to attract new donors closely mirrors the concept of market penetration. Essentially, market penetration involves increasing the number of participants to one's

established programs, either through the pursuit of new markets and existing products or through attempts to increase the consumption of existing consumers (Brooks, 1990). In the case of UW, they were able to build a comprehensive annual giving program and then systematically incorporate thousands of additional individuals to its "donor pool" through the use of this singular program (product).

This market penetration strategy also brings into question whether or not tactics might be employed to "expand" the priority points system to "new" markets. Within the context of this topic, "new" markets may constitute "single game" purchasers that attend athletic contests but do not (or cannot) purchase season tickets. Traditionally, priority points systems only reward season ticket holders and "ignore" arguably a large constituency of non-season ticket holders. Utilizing Eilefson's (1977) notion (discussed in the review of literature) that the market (potential donors) is a segmented group, athletic administrators should develop a differentiated product line or program that appeals to a diverse population. This group represents a significant untapped resource.

"Ride the Escalator"

While many of these "new" donors are giving at the absolute minimum established levels, they are nonetheless still giving. By virtue of attracting this large core of donors at the "grass roots" level, an opportunity has been afforded to the athletic department. Utilizing Greenfield's (1991) giving pyramid, athletic department's may now employ strategies over time to transition some donors from the annual giving program to the "major giving" or "estate and planned" giving programs. The premise of Mullin's (1985) "Attendance/Participation Frequency Escalator," is it's easier and cheaper for a sport entity to get existing consumers (donors) to buy (give) more than it is

for that same entity to attract new consumers (donors) appears to share an underlying theme with Greenfield's giving pyramid. Strategies must be employed to not only spur along giving within established levels but also between levels. As the Senior Athletic Director remarked:

> What is occurring now is we have people that never gave a gift to UW Athletics before and all of a sudden are donors to UW Athletics…once we can get people to start thinking about donating to athletics, the big multimillion donors start here. They start at $50, $250, and $1,000 and then you move them up the escalator.

Principle of Scarcity

Through the data collection phase of this study, a very interesting phenomenon began to emerge through the multitude of data. The hierarchical nature of a priority points system coupled with the associated benefits that the University has to offer essentially creates an opportunity cost for donors who are not high enough in the rankings to exercise their option to receive such benefits. An astute observation about priority points systems was made during my interview with the reporter from the Madison State Journal:

> What I think is really effective is that I think the people now look at this as an investment. It almost discourages the talk of "well they better win for me or I am going to be leaving next year." You have already invested all of this money to get to this point on the priority seating list and if you stop and back off, somebody is going to pass you. I think it almost encourages people to deal with it and ride out the tough times…this is a long-term investment.

This view refutes Kelly's (1991) position that it is ill advised to tie donations to priority seating because it becomes too intrinsically linked to winning and losing. The reality of priority seating and in particular, priority points, is that this program may actually serve as a "watershed" for teams through down-cycles and/or losing seasons. The rationale underlying this particular phenomenon is rooted in Cialdini's (2001) principle of scarcity.

The principle of scarcity is based upon the notion that opportunities seem more valuable to us when they are less available. The threat of potential loss plays a powerful role in human decision making (Testy & Kahnman, 1981; De Drew & McCaskey, 1997). An interesting feature of this principle is the fact that most people are actually "more" motivated by the thought of losing something than they are by the thought of gaining something of equal value (Cialdini, 2001). It is because of Cialdini's principle of scarcity that the astute athletic administrator may utilize priority points systems and their associated "potential" benefits as an extremely powerful tool in driving donations. Donors subjected to a priority points schema that distributes limited benefits based on one's ranking are likely to adhere with the following line of thinking as forwarded by Cialdini (2001):

> ...the principle of scarcity has notable power in directing human action...it trades on our weakness that says we know things that are difficult to get are typically better than those that are easy to get (Lynne, 1989)...as opportunities become less available, we lose the freedoms we already have. This desire to preserve our established prerogatives is the centerpiece of psychological reactance theory. According to the theory, whenever free choice is limited or threatened, the need to retain our freedom makes us want them (as well as the goods and services

> associated with them) significantly more than before. Therefore, when increasing scarcity—or anything else—interferes with our prior access to some item, we will react against the interference by wanting and trying to possess the item more than we did before. (p. 208-209)

Under a priority points system, the only way to "avoid" being in this situation where consumers risk forfeiting the ability to "exercise" an option on certain exclusive benefits such as football bowl game tickets, final four tickets, and special invitations to exclusive events, is to increase their standing within the priority points ranking. And the single most effective way to raise one's standing is to give more money to the University. Cialdini (2001) also notes that people are most attracted to scarce resources when they compete with others for them. As such, athletic administrators would be well advised to emphasize to donors their "standing" relative to others as frequently as possible to attempt to foster this competition amongst donors. This competition is the backbone of a typical priority points system and will make people do things they otherwise may not as evidenced by this story from the Madison State Journal reporter:

> ...last year the men's basketball team was in the NCAA Regional in Minneapolis and people were calling the Badger Fund and saying, "If I give you $10,000 right now, could you move me up on the list so I can get tickets?" You cannot do it that way. Although I would love to see what their answer would be if somebody said "I have a million dollars."

Understanding the scarcity principle and the way in which people typically respond to said principle is a powerful tool for those Athletic Administrators who are implementing or administering a priority points system. It is a principle that has

tremendous potential to drive additional giving when the University has benefits to offer its donors that are "limited" in number.

Priority Seating and the Market Exchange Theory

The Senior Associate Athletic Director at UW recognized priority seating in this manner:

> It is a sponsorship. It started out pretty much people were saying I am going to give because I have to...but as the people learned about the point system and the value of having more points than fewer points, we see now more and more people who are giving well beyond what they are required to give for their seating location

As people continue to give more and accumulate more points, they continue to demand more in return. In the case of UW, they have had huge successes with its football and men's basketball programs over the last decade and in return have had "opportunities" to provide benefits (tickets) to several high profile events for its donors. Because these events are often highly exclusive, such as the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, only a select number of high-level donors are being afforded access to these benefits, leaving the vast majority of the donors out of the mix. It is critical that athletic administrators provide a "diversified" benefits program (Eilefson, 1977) across the spectrum so that the entire range of donors is being catered to. Failure to do so will violate the principle that exchange transactions are reciprocal and if this reciprocity is not observed, such transactions will tend to eventually discontinue (Zafirovski, 2003). While it may be easy enough to come up with benefits packages for the low-end donors, the real challenge for

athletics administration is to come up with "meaningful" benefits when the high-profile events are not there because a team is not winning.

The objectives of this study, as set forth in Chapter I, have been satisfied. UW's development and implementation of a priority seating program provided a wealth of information regarding the underlying themes, principles, and practices associated with such a program. But there is also great potential for future research to be conducted in this area to further clarify, confirm, or even disconfirm the results forwarded here.

FUTURE RESEARCH

One recommendation for future research regarding this topic is to conduct additional case studies on other priority seating/priority points programs. The purpose for conducting multiple case studies would be to further corroborate or refute the findings from this study. The use of multiple case studies would also help to increase the generalizability or transferability of these results. Further studies in this area may want to consider a mixed methods approach, utilizing qualitative case study methods as was done here; but also including quantitative survey research as well. Quantitative survey research would be highly useful in gathering information about donor perceptions regarding priority seating/priority points systems. The information from this statistically generalizable sample would be highly useful in shedding light on the aforementioned concept of the "donor continuum." Additionally, because the UW process had occurred prior to the conduct of this study, I had to rely on information gathered through interviews and document analysis. Future studies should consider schools that are in the process of implementing priority seating so that the researcher may be afforded the

opportunity to observe the process as it evolves, thus contributing another source of evidence (observational data).

A second possible area for research involves the finding regarding the principle of scarcity. The contention of this finding was that priority seating and in particular a priority points system can serve as a "watershed" for annual giving during times when teams are not "successful" on the field. The basic premise is that people will not want to give up their "place in line" in terms of priority because they might miss out on a potential opportunity for future benefits. As such, they maintain their annual donations in the "lean" years simply to hold their spot in the priority ranking. Because UW has not gone through a "down period," in terms of winning and losing, since the inception of its priority seating system, there is no empirical data to corroborate this premise.

I would recommend a longitudinal study be conducted on multiple schools that have priority points programs in place. The purpose of the longitudinal study would be to account for periods of winning and losing such that an assessment may be made over time as to how annual giving correlates with the won-loss record of a school's premiere athletic programs. Also, by conducting a longitudinal study, a researcher would be able to assess the "elasticity" of the scarcity principle relative to the market-exchange theory. The thought process here is that over time the "imbalance" created in the mutual exchange of benefits will be so great that the scarcity principle will become ineffective because the desired "future" benefit that sustains the scarcity principle has been devalued to the point where it no longer holds the same power. Where that point exists is a question for future research. Also, in this same vein, is the concept of consumer loyalty and just how that concept may, or may not, sustain donors through "down" periods.

OVERTIME

As this study comes to a close, I cannot help but think back to that glorious fall day nearly 10 months ago when I watched a "sea of red" implode upon Camp Randall Stadium. The pageantry and the fervor of Wisconsin football are surpassed only by its reputation. The memories created on game day Saturdays are indelibly etched into the hearts and minds of thousands and thousands of loyal Badger supporters. But as I learned through the course of this study; creating, nurturing, and sustaining these memorable events come with a heavy price…a price that must be borne by someone. That someone is the University of Wisconsin Athletic Department.

At the outset of this study, the practice of priority seating and priority points systems seemed fairly innocuous and inconsequential in the grand scheme of things. My post-hoc assessment provides a very different viewpoint from this previous belief. In fact these concepts have become inextricably linked to the phenomenon that occurs "on the fields of friendly strife" season after season. No, you will not hear "how many priority points do you have" bandied about the Kollege Klub after a Badger victory; nor will chants of "Ohio State Sucks" be replaced by cries from the masses of "down with priority seating." Young college co-eds will not swap out their Bucky Badger tattoos for priority seating body art. No, priority seating will never be a very "sexy" topic for Badger fans; it will however be a topic of grave importance to those in athletic administration charged with its oversight. The future financial health and well-being of athletics at the University of Wisconsin will be predicated upon a number of factors, some more important than others. Like the great tradition of Badger athletics, priority seating and its associated points system has the potential to be a foundational pillar for revenue

generation for many years to come. Like the grand columns supporting the aged Camp Randall Stadium, priority seating is quickly becoming a vital support structure for Wisconsin athletics.

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Appendix A

Priority Points Criteria

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Baylor	X	X						X	X
Iowa State	X	X		X					
Kansas St.	X	X		X					
Colorado	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
UMASS	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Clemson	X	X	X						
Minnesota	X			X					
Oregon St.	X	X	X	X					
Wyoming	X								
Texas Tech	X								
Northwestern	X	X		X	X				
Washington	X	X		X					
Youngstown St.	X								
Boise St.	X								
Nebraska	X	X							
Ole Miss	X	X							
Air Force	X		X						
Duke	X								
James Madison	X	X	X	X					X
Portland St.	X	X		X	X				X
Oklahoma	X	X							X
Maine	X							X	
Indiana	X	X	X	X		X			X
Washington St.	X	X	X		X		X	X	
Tennessee	X	X							
Memphis	X	X		X					
Hawaii	X	X		X					
Gonzaga	X	X							
Texas	X	X				X	X		
Kansas	X	X							
LSU	X	X	X	X					
Missouri	X	X		X					
	Criteria:								
	A =	Current Giving to Athletics							
	B =	Cumulative Giving to Athletics							
	C =	Consecutive Years of Giving to Athletics							
	D =	Consecutive Years as a Season Ticket Holder							
	E =	Varsity Letter Winner							
	F =	University Graduate							
	G =	University Employee							
	H =	Restricted versus Unrestricted Gift							
	I =	Other							

Appendix B

Research / Interview Questions

1. Why was a priority seating program established at the University of Wisconsin-Madison?
    a. What factors (internal and external) contributed to the decision to implement/ upgrade priority seating?
    b. Why did UW feel that the "window of opportunity" to implement a new program was right?
2. What internal and external factors played a role in the development and implementation of the program?
    a. How did UW research the issue of priority seating programs?
    b. Who were the key players involved in developing the program and why were they chosen?
    c. Who were the key players/groups which were identified as "critical" in terms of requiring approval for a new program?
    d. What strategies were employed to develop a consensus for the program among the various groups/interests?
3. How were the key factors (criteria) in the priority points system determined?
    a. What was the basis for the priority points criteria utilized by UW?
4. Why were the priority points criteria weighted (i.e. relative importance) against one another as they were?
    a. How did UW reconcile the use of "accumulating" versus "non-accumulating" points?
5. What was the overall strategy involved with "marketing" the new program to current athletic donors?
    a. How did UW educate its donors on the new program?
    b. How did UW incorporate its donors in the process, if at all?
    c. How did UW approach the notion of "grandfathering" current season ticket holders?
    d. What plan did UW have to deal with any losses incurred from season ticket holders who opted out because of the new program?

Appendix C

Validity & Reliability

The following lists the various techniques and tactics that were used to increase the validity and reliability of this study. Per Yin (2003), I also identified the appropriate phase of the study in which these techniques were employed.

Construct Validity:

1. Data Collection phase
    a. Use of multiple sources of evidence (Triangulation)
    b. Establish a chain of evidence
2. Composition phase
    a. Use of key informants to review draft case study report
    b. Peer review

Internal Validity:

1. Data Analysis phase
    a. Pattern-matching
    b. Triangulation of data
    c. Peer examination
    d. Address rival explanations
2. Composition phase
    a. Clarification of researcher's bias

External Validity:

1. Research Design
    a.
2. Composition
    a. Rich, thick description
    b. Typicality or modal category

Reliability

1. Design Phase
    a. Case Study Protocol
2. Data Analysis and Composition Phases
    a. Case Study Database