

EVENT PLANNER PERCEPTIONS OF A COLLEGE FOOTBALL STADIUM AS AN
EVENT AND MEETING VENUE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SITE SELECTION
ATTRIBUTES

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Education

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Date: _____ Fall Semester 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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Venue: A Qualitative Study of Site Selection Attributes

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Maria and our two children, Lucas and Aliana. As a family we persevered through many difficult challenges over the course of a grueling five year process, which culminated in this dissertation. While my efforts were made in response to a personal decision to pursue a doctoral degree, the sacrifices they made were in support of my decision. This is an important distinction that deserves recognition and I am forever grateful for their willingness to leave our comfortable life behind on my behalf.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2009 I was presented the opportunity to pursue a doctoral degree and serve as a research assistant and instructor within the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. Prior to accepting these roles I understood the process would be demanding and time-consuming. A significant factor that helped convince me to take the plunge was the support network in place within the School of Recreation, Health, and Tourism. Reflecting on my experience I recognize this network of individuals was essential to my success and I would like to express my gratitude to each for their time and guidance.

Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. John Nauright (now on faculty at the University of Brighton) for helping to construct a research assistantship and instructor position, which ultimately provided necessary supplemental financial support throughout the PhD process. More importantly, I deeply value your mentorship and our collaborative research projects, which were instrumental in my early academic development. Thanks to Dr. David K. Wiggins, who stepped in to fulfill the role of dissertation chair upon John's departure. Your commitment to meaningful research is admired across research disciplines and I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to continue my development under your guidance. I would like to express sincere gratitude to Dr. Seungwon "Shawn" Lee for taking me under his wings midway through the doctoral process. Our past and current collaborative research projects not only helped shape the framework for this dissertation but also my identity as a researcher. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Christopher Atwater, who willfully fulfilled the final and perhaps most crucial position on my dissertation committee. Your comments regarding questions of methodology during the proposal defense and throughout the dissertation research itself were a positive influence that enhanced the quality of the study.

There are many other influential people outside the School of Recreation, Health, and Tourism that deserve recognition and I'll attempt to express adequate gratitude to each. Undoubtedly, some individuals will be left out and I apologize to each in advance for my unintentional oversight. To begin, I would like to say thanks to the dedicated library staff at George Mason University as well as the staff that form the larger Washington Research Library Consortium network. Their efforts in locating, acquiring, and circulating many books and articles on my behalf over the past five years is much appreciated. To Dr.

Earle Reybold, your passion for rigorous qualitative methodology has not only impacted the way I approach my own work but also how I engage the world around me. A special thanks to Dr. Matt Karush, who served on my initial dissertation committee and provided oversight of my secondary concentration work. To Dr. Michael Lariscy and Dr. Greg Wimer, I value your early influence in my development as an undergraduate student and professional. I also appreciate our enduring friendships, which have withstood the test of time and distance. I would like to acknowledge a number of close friends who likely suffered through a number of scholarly discussions they probably had no interest in, including Rwany Sibaja and family, Chris McCurry and family, David Harkness and family, and Leo Tonkin. Finally, I would like to express a sincere thanks to my immediate and extended family for their unconditional support and love which, along with gallons of coffee, provided the fuel to persevere until the end.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	American Broadcast Company
BCS	Bowl Championship Series
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CFA	College Football Association
CIC	Convention Industry Council
CMP	Certified Meeting Planner
FAM	Familiarization
FBS	Football Bowl Subdivision
FCS	Football Championship Subdivision
IAFC	International Association of Fairs and Expositions
IAEM	International Association for Exhibition Management
IFEA	International Festivals and Events Association
ISES	International Special Events Society
MLB	Major League Baseball
MPI	Meeting Professionals International
NASSM	North American Society for Sport Management
NBA	National Basketball Association
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NHL	National Hockey League
NFL	National Football League
ROI	Return on Investment
SMSA	Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles
USC	University of Southern California
WEC	World Education Conference

ABSTRACT

EVENT PLANNER PERCEPTIONS OF A COLLEGE FOOTBALL STADIUM AS AN EVENT AND MEETING VENUE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SITE SELECTION ATTRIBUTES

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George Mason University, 2014

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Sport organizations, including intercollegiate athletic departments, seek to capitalize on a variety of revenue streams to offset expenses and generate income. Sports facility lease agreements are one of many sources of revenue available to universities and their athletic programs. Supplemental income generated from hosting special events, such as social, celebratory and corporate events, can help mitigate rising program costs and reduce an athletic department's overall dependence on institution and government allocated funds. This qualitative case study explores the perceptions prospective event and meeting planners have of a National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I college football stadium. Findings provide athletic administrators insights on how these venues are perceived by prospective customers as potential event and meeting venues. The study should serve as a resource for the development or improvement of marketing,

operational, and infrastructural management strategies aimed at generating supplemental income through stadium lease agreements.

CHAPTER ONE

General Statement of the Problem

Intercollegiate athletic departments in the United States face a number of challenges in the new millennium. Among the most pressing issues for Division I level National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) programs is financial sustainability. According to a recent *National Collegiate Athletic Association Revenues and Expenses of Division I Intercollegiate Athletics Programs Report* all but twenty-three of the one hundred twenty-four Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level college athletic programs lose money and require subsidies to meet annual operating costs (Fulks, 2013). A major source of expenditures for FBS member universities and their athletic programs over the past twenty years has been significant investments in facility construction and renovation projects (Jozsa Jr., 2013). Citing figures provided by the watchdog group Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Yost (2010) suggests the pursuit of lavish athletic facilities, which is colloquially known as the “facility arms race”, continues to be a significant economic concern shared by all program stakeholders, including coaches, university presidents, endowment administrators, and the NCAA. To offset rising program costs and to maximize their return on investments (ROI) many college athletic departments seek to capitalize on each stadium related revenue stream, including facility lease agreements year round (Jozsa Jr., 2013; Yost, 2010). In general, outdoor sports

stadiums host a variety of special events year round (Ammon Jr., Southall, Nagel, 2010; Lee, Kim, & Parrish, 2012). However, few studies have investigated this phenomenon at the intercollegiate level. Specifically, there are few studies that investigate how these venues are perceived from the perspective of the individuals who plan or coordinate events. Prior to exploring how collegiate stadiums are perceived by prospective event and meeting customers a brief introduction to the evolution of intercollegiate athletics as a commercial enterprise and the economics of contemporary NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics is provided.

Evolution of Intercollegiate Athletics as a Commercial Enterprise

The commercialization of intercollegiate athletic programs in the United States has a long history that dates back to the second half of the 1800s. Organized intercollegiate sports began in earnest with an 1852 regatta between Harvard and Yale on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire and an 1859 “Massachusetts rules” baseball game between Amherst and Williams College. While it is tempting to conceive of the era of intercollegiate athletics prior to the turn of the twentieth century as amateur and non-commercial, Smith (1993) suggests that doing so would be anachronistic as these programs took on professional characteristics from the very beginning. He points out that the regatta in 1852 was in fact a commercial sports spectacle. The event was organized by regional railroad superintendent James Elkins, whose main objective was to increase ridership (Smith, 1993; Smith, 2011). “Both teams were given free transportation, along with lavish gifts and unlimited alcohol. The several thousand spectators who followed the teams...paid their own way” (Yost, 2010, p. 32). Pope (1995) supports Smith’s

assessment of the status of intercollegiate sport in the nineteenth century and adds that the ideological notion of amateurism was invented between 1870 and 1890 as a mechanism to justify collegiate sport amid growing concerns over professionalism.

Intercollegiate spectator sports such as rowing and baseball increased in popularity and attracted large crowds over the next several decades. However, it was football that permanently altered the sports culture on college campuses across the United States. Yale University's Walter Camp helped introduce several rule changes in the 1880s that ultimately transformed British rugby football into the American version of football. Specifically, the creation of a line of scrimmage and the concept of downs and distance to gain significantly differentiated the "new" football from the British code. Amid widespread public concern over the dangers of playing the game, gambling, and the exploitation of amateur athletes, representatives from influential colleges and universities met in New York City in 1906 and founded the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS). A few years later this working group changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The formation of NCAA subcommittees, including a rules committee, immediately resulted in additional amendments. Among the most significant changes was the adoption of the forward pass rule in 1906. The forward pass set apart the American football code from its rugby predecessor, helped to alleviate some of the violence associated with the sport and, perhaps more importantly with respect to commerce, satisfied spectators' preferences (Schmidt, 2007).

Beyond changes to the rules of play, Camp's rational emphasis on position specialization helped Yale's squad dominate football from 1885 to 1899, when it won forty-six straight games and outscored opponents 2,018 to 29 (Guttman, 2004). By the 1890s, a number of other colleges and universities began to place value on the sport as an educational component for students and as a vehicle to achieve institutional pride and notoriety (Smith, 1988). Also, college presidents and alumni associations understood sponsoring college sports teams potentially helped secure alumni favors and donations and increased enrollment (Smith, 2011; Yost, 2010). Clotfelter (2011) emphasizes that these motives ushered in an era of unprecedented financial investment in and support for intercollegiate athletics while expanding the purpose of educational institutions to include entertainment for the citizenry.

Spurred by the federal government's Morrill Act of 1862 and 1890, state universities took shape and grew large...they helped to democratize American higher education, adding service to the traditional aims of research and teaching. In their appeal to the broad citizenry, it seemed natural for them to fold in 'public entertainment' in the form of athletics... (Clotfelter, 2011, p. 46).

To be sure, widespread skepticism, discontent, and criticism of intercollegiate athletics persisted well into the twentieth century. The resistance was particularly strong in the South, where many of the region's institutions of higher education were religiously affiliated and shunned what they viewed as the barbaric and overly violent game of football. However, by the turn of the century there were clear signs that intercollegiate sport in general, and football in particular, was a popular diversion for students, alumni,

and the general public who otherwise had no connection to universities. Perhaps more importantly from an organizational standpoint, institutions were becoming more willing to make financial commitments on behalf of these constituents in order to further develop and gain control over the spectacle (Guttman, 2004; Smith, 1988; Smith, 2011).

One of the early sources for institutional investment that signified the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics was the procurement of professional football coaches. By the first decade of the 1900s many university presidents were willing to pay large sums of money to coaches and even grant them high ranking professor status. For example, in 1905 Harvard University president Charles William Eliot hired former baseball and football star William “Bill” Reid to lead the university football team in its pursuit to unseat rival Yale University as the northeastern perennial power. The twenty-six year old Reid was paid a salary of \$7,000, a sum that surpassed the salary of the highest paid professor at the university by 30%. Interestingly, this financial investment by Eliot on behalf of the university came just a decade after he himself denounced the very practice of intercollegiate athletics (Clotfelter, 2011). Over a decade earlier in 1892, University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper agreed to terms with former Yale All-American Amos Alonzo Stagg and granted him professor status as director of the department of physical culture. President Harper’s goal was to gain nationwide institutional prestige through intercollegiate sport. Stagg delivered, guiding the school to seven football conference championships during his tenure (Guttman, 2004).

While hiring professional coaches to lead college football programs certainly aided the development of the sport, this process, along with a range of other factors, also eventually eroded student governance over intercollegiate athletics. The days of students organizing their own competitions, selecting willing participants among the ranks of the student body, and devising competitive strategies among themselves gave way to coaches who recruited quality players from outside the university, organized the competition schedule, ‘managed’ player eligibility, implemented scientific and rigid training methods, scouted opponents, and interacted with institutional governing boards, the university president, faculty, and alumni among other tasks (Smith, 1994). Despite being ‘strange bedfellows’, universities gradually assumed responsibility for the operation of intercollegiate athletics and by 1920 the takeover was complete (Clotfelter, 2011).

The practice of hiring professional coaches was not the only evidence of the budding commercialization of intercollegiate athletics in the early 1900s. The construction of stadiums to accommodate the growing number of fans required significant capital investment. Early stadium funding was often financed through donors, gate receipts, public subsidies, and institutional investment. In 1903, Harvard completed construction of the first steel-reinforced concrete stadium in the United States. With a capacity of nearly 40,000 and at a cost of over \$300,000, the horseshoe shaped venue was financed through a combination of alumni donations and the sale of admission tickets (Jozsa Jr., 2013). In 1914, Yale University built the much larger Yale Bowl on land procured by Camp through his athletics ‘slush fund’. Though lacking the aesthetics of Harvard Stadium’s Greco-Roman style architecture, the Yale Bowl was comfortable,

practical, and with a seating capacity of 75,000 it could accommodate the university's students and all alumni (Watterson, 2000).

During the 1920s a boom in major stadium construction on college campuses not only signified the growing popularity of the sport among fans, but also the willingness of universities to invest in and capture the value of the product they were sponsoring. Some of the largest and most iconic venues were constructed during the decade, including Michigan Stadium and Ohio Stadium. Of the ten original members of the Big Ten conference, eight universities constructed new stadiums during the decade. These venues allowed the sponsoring institutions to generate and retain large sums of revenue through the sale of admission tickets. In an era before widespread media broadcasting, this revenue was one of the few sources of funding available to institutions and their athletic programs (Clotfelter, 2011).

The rapid development of intercollegiate athletics in the early twentieth century did face significant challenges on college campuses. In fact, the first organized initiative to collectively reform college sports gained momentum in the 1890s and resulted in the creation of the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives (ICFR) in 1895 (Gerdy, 2006; Smith, 2011). Many of the concerns shared by college faculty members and administrators were later outlined in the 1929 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report titled *American College Athletics*. According to the author of the report, Henry Pritchett, there was particular concern regarding the commercialization of college sports. Most of the one-thousand research participants on over one-hundred universities believed commercialized intercollegiate athletics directly

led to the exploitation of college athletes, created unwarranted external pressures on universities from influential alumni, threatened academic integrity, and compromised the core mission of universities (Clotfelter, 2011; Smith, 1988).

Despite these issues, intercollegiate athletics as a commercial enterprise continued to gain momentum throughout the twentieth century. The emergence of state universities across the South and nonmetropolitan Midwest resulted in additional football teams and many of these were successful in garnering widespread public appeal. As Clotfelter (2011) points out, the acute rise in popularity was in part due to professional sports teams' pursuit of urban markets in the northeast, hence there was little competition for football as an entertainment product in these regions. Another factor that contributed to the popularity of intercollegiate athletics in the South was Jim Crow segregation, which made it difficult for racially integrated professional sports teams and leagues to gain entertainment market share in the region.

During the 1920s and into the early 1950s, colleges capitalized on their commercialized entertainment product by charging fees to radio and television companies for the rights to broadcast games. This revenue coupled with gate receipts increased the capacity for schools to allocate more resources to finance their athletic programs (Josza Jr. 2013). In 1938 the University of Pennsylvania hosted the first televised college football game. Twelve years later the school sold the broadcast rights for its home games to the American Broadcast Company (ABC) for \$150,000. By 1950, a number of universities had negotiated broadcasting rights deals, including Michigan, Wisconsin, Tulane, University of Southern California (USC), and the University of California Los

Angeles (UCLA). As concern from other universities mounted over the impact of television on gate receipts, the NCAA was able to wrestle away control over the broadcast rights of televised football games from the schools in 1951. Bolstered by a Congressional mandate to oversee intercollegiate athletics in the wake of several college basketball gambling scandals, the NCAA began brokering lucrative contracts with networks for the right to televise games. This revenue was then distributed among its member institutions, with the bulk of the funds allocated to the schools that appeared on television. Of course, the NCAA itself retained a percentage to finance its own operations, which beginning in the mid 1950s included regulating athletic scholarships and eligibility among member institutions. From the perspective of Sack and Staurowsky (1998), the formal institutionalization and governance of athletic scholarships in 1956 transformed student-athletes into university employees. By the 1960s, the NCAA had emerged as the *de facto* national governing body for intercollegiate sports with a responsibility to govern both the commercial and academic facets of the enterprise (Lawrence, 1987).

In 1983, the dollar value of the NCAA's football television contract exceeded \$60 million, yet a number of schools from the major conferences had grown discontent with the restrictions placed on the number of games that could be aired on a weekly basis and the amount of allocated funds to their institutions. In the high profile *Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma v. National Collegiate Athletic Association* court case, the Supreme Court ruled that the NCAA's control of broadcast rights violated anti-trust legislation. This decision effectively ended the NCAA's control over the broadcast of

college football games prior to the 1984 season. Individual schools and conferences were now free to negotiate their own television deals. The College Football Association (CFA), which was instrumental in bringing forth the lawsuit, began brokering television contracts on behalf of the seven major conferences and a few independent schools. In the 1990s the University of Notre Dame and the Southeastern Conference (SEC) broke away from the CFA and signed their own contracts with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) respectively. Soon after these developments, the CFA, which originally formed in 1976 to represent the interests of the large football programs, dissolved. Today's television broadcast deals for major college football games are complex as conferences often have contracts with multiple networks. A few conferences, including the Big Ten and the SEC, have partnered with major television broadcasting companies to create their own television networks as a way to increase even more revenue for member institutions. Interestingly, the NCAA has never regulated regular season basketball games but the organization does generate substantial revenue from the sale of its post season NCAA championships in a variety of sports, including its basketball 'March Madness' tournament (Grant, Leadley, & Zygmunt, 2008).

This brief overview indicates organized intercollegiate athletics began in the mid nineteenth century and rapidly evolved into a lucrative commercial enterprise by the early twentieth century. The impetus for the commercialization of college sports was the pursuit of institutional prestige and a means to attain alumni favors and donations (Yost, 2010). The mass appeal of college sports (mainly football and basketball) created market

demand, which made it possible for some schools to generate substantial sums of revenue in support of athletic programs. The sale of admission tickets and alumni donations spurred stadium development after World War I. The advent of radio in the 1930s and 1940s and television in the 1950s offered a new medium by which schools could procure lucrative funds through the sale of broadcasting rights. A struggle over governance and control of increasing revenues among schools, conferences, and the NCAA characterized the second half of the twentieth century; yet, the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics persisted and expanded into the new millennium.

Despite the commercial potential and mass appeal of major FBS level college athletic programs, particularly for the revenue sports of football and basketball, most athletic departments as a whole are not financially sustainable and lose money on an annual basis (Brand, 2005; Clotfelter, 2011; Fulks, 2013; Grant, Leadley, & Zygmunt, 2008; Jozsa Jr., 2013; McClellan, King, & Rockey Jr., 2012; Yost, 2010). Nevertheless, as their predecessors did over one-hundred years ago, administrators of these institutions continue to allocate scarce institutional resources to intercollegiate athletic programs with hopes participation will garner notoriety and prestige, increase enrollment, and generate revenue. According to University of Michigan President Emeritus James Duderstadt (2003), the university's sports teams not only provide a sense of excitement and pride for the extended university community, but they also help create the larger community through the construction of emotional bonds. Although the operation of intercollegiate athletics presents many challenges, most presidents at major institutions understand that sports gain far more attention for the schools relative to other activities. Therefore,

presidents are willing to financially support intercollegiate athletics and tolerate the corrupt elements of the business as simply dismissing intercollegiate athletics outright comes with both institutional and personal consequences (Duderstadt, 2003).

While acknowledging that supporting intercollegiate athletics has its critics (Bok, 2003; French, 2004) and numerous controversies stemming from the commercialization of college athletics are important issues in need of reform (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Duderstadt, 2003; Gerdy, 2006; Lawrence, 1987; McCormick & McCormick, 2006; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Yost, 2010; Zimbalist, 2001), ethical and social issues outlined in the growing list of critical texts on intercollegiate sport are beyond the scope of this particular study. An assumption of this study is that college athletics are not going away anytime soon and their popularity makes them a viable source of commercial income. Therefore, it is important for institutions to continuously seek ways to convert potential revenue into tangible income in their quest to achieve self-sustaining athletic programs. Eloquently stated by economist Frank Jozsa Jr. (2013), “Because of tight budgets, scarce resources, and increasing academic costs, college and university officials must search for and discover nontraditional sources of revenue to finance, operate, and expand their athletic departments...” (p. 25). Also, according to O’Reilly’s (2013) application of portfolio theory to professional sport club management, the diversification of revenue channels not only provides new sources of income, but also reduces financial risk from an investment perspective. Before contemplating creative ways to generate revenue it is necessary to gain a holistic understanding of the business of operating ‘big-time’ college athletic programs. The following section provides an outline of the economics of NCAA

FBS level Division I intercollegiate sports programs, with particular attention given to the expenses and the various sources of revenue.

Economics of Contemporary Intercollegiate Athletics

Each intercollegiate athletic department has its own unique way of managing its fiscal operations. Because programs vary in size, purpose, and affiliation, expenditures and sources of revenue may differ drastically from one institution to another. The following subsections outline the primary expenditures and income for a typical NCAA FBS level Division I athletic department.

Operational expenses. In his State of the Association presidential address at the 2005 NCAA convention, former NCAA president Myles Brand voiced concern over a “spending spiral” trend among Division I athletic programs and the impact of this trend on the integrity and core mission of the university. He also reluctantly predicted athletic spending would continue to increase above unsustainable levels because of the pressure to attract the most talented athletes and coaches in order to generate wins and increase revenue and national prestige (Brand, 2005). The statistics provided by a recent *National Collegiate Athletic Association Revenues and Expenses of Division I Intercollegiate Athletics Programs Report* confirm his prediction as total expenditures for 2012 increased at a faster rate than revenues over the totals from the previous year by 10.8% for FBS level institutions. This figure drops slightly to 6.8% for Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) schools and 8.8% for Division I schools without football. Compared with overall institutional spending, intercollegiate athletics expenses on average outpaced those of the university by 4.4% for FBS schools, 3.0% for FCS schools, and 3.1% for

Division I schools without football. The top three expenditures for FBS level athletic programs are employee salaries and benefits, which typically account for 34% of the budget; grant-in-aid spending, which typically account for 15% of the budget; and facility related expenses, which account for 14% of the budget. The remaining program expenditures cover costs associated with team travel (7%), game operations (4%), guarantees (3%), equipment (3%), fundraising (3%), recruiting (2%), institutional support (2%), sport camps (1%), and membership dues (1%) among other costs (10%) (Fulks, 2013). These figures are useful to gain insight on the various types of intercollegiate athletic department expenditures. However, scholars have pointed out the actual total amount of expenditures by intercollegiate athletic departments among institutions is difficult to accurately measure given some of the costs of operating these programs, such as facility construction, renovation, and maintenance, are sometimes absorbed or financed through the institution's general fund (Clotfelter, 2013; Jozsa Jr., 2013). Also, support in the form of out-of-state tuition waivers granted to athletes is often underwritten by state governments, though not without controversy (Bluestein, Galloway, Malloy, 2013).

Sources of revenue. Similar to the variance in expenditures among institutions, sources of income may differ for several reasons, including whether a program is housed in a public or private institution, athletic department affiliation with respect to level of play and conference alignment, and the institution's overall philosophy on subsidizing the program through the use of institutional funds, such as student fees. Ticket sales typically account for the most generated revenue for FBS level NCAA Division I athletic

programs. In 2003, ticket sales at FBS level universities accounted for 27% of all department generated revenue (Grant, Leadley, Zygmunt, 2008). Nearly ten years later this figure has remained constant. According to the figures generated by Fulks (2013) on behalf of the NCAA ticket sales accounted for 27% of the revenue generated by FBS level institutions in 2012. Interestingly, cash contributions provided by alumni and “others” account for the second most percentage of generated revenue at 26%. The third largest source of income for FBS level athletic programs is ‘trickle down distribution’ revenue from the NCAA and conferences, which accounts for 22% of generated revenue. The remaining sources of generated revenue include the combined category of Royalties/Advertising/Sponsorships (9%), Broadcast rights (3%), and Concessions/Merchandise (3%). Finally, a significant and controversial source of income for intercollegiate programs not generated by the department is allocated revenue. As Fulks (2013) outlined in the NCAA report,

Allocated revenues are comprised of: student fees directly allocated to athletics; financial transfers directly from the general fund to athletics (i.e. direct institutional support); indirect institutional support, such as the payment of utilities, maintenance, support of salaries, etc. by the institution on behalf of athletics; and direct governmental support which is the receipt of funds from state and local governmental agencies that are designated for athletics (p. 9).

This allocated revenue accounts for up to 20% of FBS level intercollegiate athletic department budgets.

Purpose of the Study

With the economics of contemporary intercollegiate athletic programs outlined and separated into expenditures and revenues, it is important to point that out for the vast majority of NCAA Division I programs the former exceeds the latter, resulting in annual deficits. As previously stated, only twenty-three NCAA Division I athletic programs reported net revenues in 2012. Interestingly, each of the programs achieving a surplus belongs to the FBS level of competition. No FCS or Division I program without football reported a revenue surplus in 2012. Perhaps a more alarming statistic is FCS level institutions subsidized 71% of the total costs of their athletics programs while Division I programs without a football team subsidized 77% of their total athletic program costs. As previously noted, the extent to which FBS level institutions subsidize their athletic programs is approximately 20%. Considering the median total budget exceeds \$55 million for the typical FBS level program, \$13.5 million for FCS programs, and \$12.5 million for Division I programs without football, the value of subsidies allocated directly to athletic programs at Division I universities ranges from approximately \$9.5-\$11 million (Fulks, 2013).

A major source of expenditures for universities and their athletic programs over the past twenty years have been investments in stadium construction and renovations, otherwise known as the 'facility arms race' (Clotfelter, 2013; Jozsa Jr., 2013; McClellan, King, Rockey Jr., 2012; Yost, 2010). In an effort to offset rising program costs and to maximize their return on investment (ROI), college athletic departments are increasingly seeking to capitalize on each stadium related revenue stream, including facility lease

agreements year round (Josza Jr., 2013; Yost, 2010). In general, outdoor professional sports stadiums are being used as host sites for a variety of special events year round (Ammon Jr., Southall, Nagel, 2010; Calzada, 2013; Lee, Kim, & Parrish, 2012; Solomon, 2012). However, few empirical studies have focused on this phenomenon at the intercollegiate level.

It is unclear from the NCAA report data how much revenue is generated through stadium facility rentals. In fact, there is no line item designated for this type of revenue stream in the annual NCAA report on revenues and expenses. Likewise, textbooks dedicated to intercollegiate athletics management often overlook facility leases as a potential revenue source. For example, Grant, Leadley, and Zygmunt's (2008) text *The Economics of Intercollegiate Sports* provides lengthy discussions on ticket sales, appearance guarantees, donations, corporate sponsorships, and naming rights but does not mention facility lease agreements in their chapter on budgets. Of the cited references consulted thus far only McClellan, King, and Rockey Jr. (2012) explicitly mention the revenue potential of facility lease agreements. However, these authors limit their discussion to indoor venues such as basketball arenas as sites for concerts, trade shows, and high school graduations. This is not surprising as Lee et al. (2012) highlight in their marketing study of professional outdoor sports stadiums that indoor arenas are climate controlled and have amenities designed to accommodate a wide variety of events. In short, indoor arenas are utilized year round in an efficient manner. Nevertheless, accessible news media reports and a review of departmental websites verify intercollegiate athletic programs are also actively seeking to attract a variety of social,

celebratory, and corporate events to their outdoor stadiums (Baird, 2013; Kaszuba, 2013; Woodhouse, 2012).

Over the past several decades an abundance of research studies addressing the site selection decision making process of professional event and meeting planners has been undertaken. However, as the review of the literature in the next chapter indicates, there is a shortage of research addressing perceptions of site selection attributes of unique venues. Specifically, a lack of research exists pertaining to outdoor sports stadiums as potential unique events venues (Lee et al., 2012; Kim, Jeon, Lee, & Parrish, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how college football stadiums are perceived by prospective event and meeting customers.

Research Question

The overarching research question of this study is framed as follows: How do professional event and meeting planners perceive an outdoor college football stadium as a potential event venue? A qualitative study that explores the perception of the attributes of outdoor college stadiums will contribute to the literature on unique event venues. This study will also provide a baseline understanding that can serve as a reference for intercollegiate athletic programs interested in developing or enhancing this source of revenue.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations that need to be made explicit. Consistent with most qualitative research, findings of this study should not be taken as generalizable to a larger population. Due to the small number of participants in this study, findings should be

viewed as contextually specific and hence remain applicable only to the setting under study. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest findings may be transferable and applicable to similar settings, but it is up to the reader (not the researcher) to determine appropriateness. To assist readers with making decisions with transferability, this study provides a thick description of research participants and the stadium setting. Another limitation of this study is that the researcher gained access to participant perceptions at one specific moment in time. It is possible participants would have a different perspective if interviewed at an earlier or later date. Also, external factors not controllable by the researcher may have influenced the nature of responses. For example, personal time constraints or impending scheduled commitments may have played a role in participants providing incomplete responses to interview questions. Another limitation relates to the specific voices informing findings. This study only reflects the perceptions of the stadium of the eight event and meeting planners who agreed to participate in the study. It is possible additional insights may be gained from other potential participants meeting the criteria for inclusion in the study. Also, although participants varied with respect to employment experience and types of events planned, all eight event and meeting planners interviewed were female. Ideally, there would be some level of variance in gender to mitigate any form of gender bias. However, the researcher was not able to identify and recruit male participants. A final limitation is that participants in this study were asked to base their perceptions on one specific stadium setting. It is highly likely each would have different perceptions of another stadium, such as a major professional stadium located in an urban setting.

Overview of Chapters

The inclusive pages of this manuscript explore professional event and meeting planner perceptions of an outdoor college football stadium as a host venue. The chapters have been organized in the following manner:

Chapter one provided background information in regards to context relevant to the study. After a brief statement of the research problem, the evolution of college athletics as a commercial enterprise within higher education was discussed. The chapter then focused on the economics of contemporary intercollegiate athletic programs, with particular attention given to the various sources of revenue available to them as well as expenses associated with operating costs. The chapter concluded with a statement of purpose for the research, the major research question, and limitations of the study.

Chapter two provides general information on the events and meetings industry, including a clarification of key terms, industry valuation information, and points of emphasis for academic researchers. It also synthesizes the academic literature on site selection attributes from the perspective of event and meeting planners and provides a brief discussion of emerging research on unique event and meeting venues. This chapter also provides the reader with critical foundational elements of event and meeting site selection criteria, which guided the overall design of the study.

Chapter three describes the methodology used to analyze the research question. It also provides an overview of the researcher's philosophical orientation as well as details outlining specific techniques used for the selection of participants, interview protocol

development, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of strategies used to enhance trustworthiness of findings.

Chapter four provides a detailed description of the stadium setting under investigation and the participants in the study. It also presents the results of interview questions, a narrative that summarizes findings, and direct quotes from participant responses in support of the presentation of emergent themes.

Chapter five continues the discussion of the results presented in chapter four and makes connections back to the literature outlined in chapter two. It also contains practical implications of the research findings, researcher conclusions, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Events and Meetings Defined

Event and meeting management as an area of study is comparatively new and scholars have struggled to provide uniformity of key terms, concepts, and definitions (Berridge, 2007; Getz, 2008). In the early 1990s J.J. Goldblatt and Donald Getz provided two of the earliest scholarly attempts to define what an event is. At the time Goldblatt (1990) defined an event as simply a unique moment with ceremony and ritual that satisfies a particular need. Getz (1991) offered a definition from a customer perspective and framed an event to be a leisure, social, or cultural experience beyond everyday experience. Due to an expansion of interest and research across academic disciplines, a number of definitions emerged shortly thereafter and both Goldblatt and Getz have since refined their respective definitions. Rather than remaining concerned over the semantics of what constitutes an event, Goldblatt (2005) emphasized the managerial aspects of producing events that occur infrequently by using the term ‘event management’ as a reference to the overall event production. Getz (2005) expanded his concept of events to include both the provider and consumer perspective:

A special event is a one-time or infrequently occurring event outside normal programmes or activities of the sponsoring or organizing body. To the customer

or guest, a special event is an opportunity for leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience (p. 16).

While this updated definition is more comprehensive, it fails to incorporate elements of business or organizational events that lack a celebratory nature. With this in mind, Shone and Parry's (2004) attempt to expand the categories of events covered under the broad events and meetings industry umbrella is perhaps most convincing.

Special events are: That phenomenon arising from those non-routine occasions which have leisure, cultural, personal or organizational objectives set apart from the normal activity of daily life, whose purpose is to enlighten, celebrate, entertain or challenge the experience of a group of people (p. 3).

As Berridge (2007) notes, this definition is applicable to many different types of events as well as many different types of people involved in events.

Raj, Walters, and Rashid (2013) have provided a typology of events which includes sporting events, corporate events, musical events, cultural events, commercial/business events, political/government events, personal/private events, and religious events. Getz (2005) opted for a more concise typology of 'planned events' and these include cultural celebrations, political and state, arts and entertainment, business and trade, educational and scientific, sport competition, and private events. Finally, Shone and Parry's (2004) four prong categorization is equally broad in scope, yet even more concise. They suggest events fall into one of four types based on complexity and uncertainty: 1) Personal Events (e.g. weddings, anniversaries, birthdays); 2) Leisure Events (e.g. leisure, sport, recreation); 3) Cultural Events (e.g. ceremonial, heritage,

folklore, art, sacred); and 4) Organizational Events (e.g. commercial, political, charitable, sales). Rather than attempting to construct yet another working definition for the term “event” or debate the various existing definitions, this study recognizes events vary in purpose, size, and complexity and they can be categorized into a variety of typologies. With some clarity on what an “event” is and how events can be categorized, it is necessary to qualify the term “meeting”. Getz’s (2005) typology classifies meetings as a specific type of event within his business and trade construct. Meetings would fall under organizational events within Shone and Parry’s (2004) typology. Therefore, the terms ‘event’ and ‘meeting’ are often used interchangeably to refer to the events and meetings industry in general and sometimes in combination, as indicated by the formal Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Events (MICE) industry acronym reference.

Industry Valuation and Academic Research

The most recent figures provided by the United States Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) indicate the events and meetings industry will experience rapid growth by 2020. Further, the *2012 Economic Impact of Meetings to the US Economy* by the Convention Industry Council (CIC) and Price, Waterhouse, and Coopers estimated the events and meetings industry as a whole accounted for \$280 billion in direct spending in the United States. Specifically, the CIC indicated approximately 1.3 million corporate/business meetings, 274,000 conventions/conferences/congresses, 183,000 “other events” (including social events), 68,000 incentive meetings, and 11,000 trade shows are held each year in the United

States. In total, these events account for over \$43.5 billion in spending on facility rental and event services alone (Convention Industry Council, 2014).

Before 1990, few event management degree programs existed and the main source of knowledge transfer within the events and meetings industry came from the efforts of a number of professional organizations, such as the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFC), International Association for Exhibition Management (IAEM), International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA), Meeting Professionals International (MPI), and the International Special Events Society (ISES). Since the early 1990s, the literature for events and meetings management has exploded alongside a movement to establish academic programs worldwide (Getz, 2008). Not surprisingly, a number of academic journals as well as trade journals have been established to disseminate research findings and to develop critical lines of inquiry applicable to industry practice.

Historically, researchers investigating the events and meetings industry have focused on exploring the motivators and barriers to event and convention attendance (Fjelstul, Severt, & Breiter, 2009; Fjelstul, Severt, & Breiter, 2010; Foster & Robinson, 2010; Kruger & Saaymen, 2012; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Ramirez, Laing, & Mair, 2013; Rittichainuwat, Beck, & Lalopa, 2012; Severt, Fjelstul, & Breiter, 2007; Severt, Wang, Chen, & Breiter, 2007; Tanford, Montgomery, & Nelson, 2012), destination image (Baloglu & Love, 2001; Boo & Busser, 2006; Chacko & Fenich, 2000; Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Fenich, 2001; Kim, Yoon, & Kim, 2011; Lee & Back, 2008; Oppermann, 1996; Rompf, Breiter, & Severt, 2008; Wong, 2011), and impact analysis

(Carlsen, Robertson, & Ali-Knight, 2007; Dosh, 2012; Hanley, 2012; Kim, Park, & Lee, 2010; Koch, Breiter, Hara, & DiPietro, 2008; Mistillis & Dwyer, 1999; Wood, 2008).

Recently, a need to study advances in communication technology and the practical implications for the events and meetings industry has emerged. Researchers have addressed this need from a variety of analytical perspectives, including the use of social media and information technology as part of the meeting experience (Hvass & Munar, 2012; Kim, Jang, & Morrison, 2011; Lee, 2011), the adoption of communication applications across generational cohorts (Fenich, Scott-Halsell, & Hashimoto, 2011; Yank & Jolly, 2008), and virtual meetings (Casanova, Dae-Young, & Morrison, 2005; Pearlman & Gates, 2010). Another contemporary research topic within the events and meetings literature has been environmental sustainability. Scholars have found that event planners are willing to pay a higher fee to host their events at a sustainably certified venue and that attendees are willing to pay a higher fee to attend meetings at venues with staff trained in sustainable management practices (Sox, Benjamine, & Strick, 2013). Draper, Dawson, and Casey (2011) determined recycling programs, energy efficiency, and water conservation are deemed important sustainable practices at convention centers by meeting planners. However, Strick and Fenich (2013) noted the inconsistency of environmental standards criteria across venues and suggest planners must do their own research when it comes to selecting products and services based on 'ecolabels'. They also warn of 'greenwashing', which occurs when a venue promotes sustainable practices to deflect attention away from environmental abuses or unethical environmental activities. Finally, site selection research remains a critical line of inquiry for researchers as well as

host venue stakeholders and suppliers. This particular body of literature will likely continue to develop and evolve in the future given market demand for hosting events and meetings as well as the needs and desires of those planning and coordinating events are constantly changing.

Site Selection Literature

The focus of this study is on the perception of site attributes of a college football stadium, therefore, the literature related to site selection criteria is of paramount importance. A site, or a host facility, is often a key factor that influences the overall success of an event or meeting (Bowdin, McDonnell, Allen, & O’Toole, 2006). The literature on event and meeting site selection is well developed and provides valuable insight on the attributes, features, and services valued most by individuals with the capacity to make decisions on which facility to select as a site for an event. Berridge (2007) has also emphasized that these features and services are integral components of a facility’s overall ‘servicescape’ and individual experiences are “a product of the particular servicescape that revolves around the physical nature of the objects in reception and the service delivery itself” (p. 75). Understanding the reasons certain venues are selected to host events and meetings is a critical starting point for administrators of college football stadiums seeking to gain market share in this particular industry. This knowledge can help venue managers prioritize and customize facility features and services and how to best promote their site to event customers in order to attract events and meetings to their respective venue.

While the site selection literature is primarily concerned with traditional purpose built events venues (e.g. convention centers, exhibition halls, and hotels) and the desired attributes of these facilities may differ from an outdoor sports stadium, a review of key selection criteria for events and meetings will be useful. Elston and Draper (2012) point out that this knowledge can provide practical guidance to management personnel of event and meeting venues with respect to “the type of information meeting planners desire when making their site selection decision, which will help them make an informed decision when selecting a destination and facilities” (p. 205).

Oppermann (1996) conducted one of the earliest studies on site selection criteria for convention cities and found planners with previous experience with a destination city perceived that particular destination more positively than those without previous experience with the same destination. Also, conference planners rated meeting room facilities and hotel service quality as the most important site selection attributes alongside destination safety/security, hotel room availability, and destination image (cleanliness/attractiveness). Interestingly, nightlife, climate, and scenery/sightseeing opportunities were rated least important.

One of the most widely cited articles on site selection criteria is Crouch and Ritchie’s (1998) synthesis of convention site selection studies. This meta-analysis incorporated the findings of over sixty research studies and the authors categorized all attributes that influence destination site selection into eight constructs, including accessibility, local support, extra conference opportunities, accommodation facilities, meeting facilities, information, site environment, and other criteria. Given the breadth in

scope of this study, their findings cover a range of criteria beyond the physical venue itself. Of particular interest to this study is the authors' 'meeting facility' criteria item, which includes seven key venue specific attributes such as capacity, layout/floor plan, price, availability, ambience, service, and security. While Oppermann's (1996) study revealed a meeting facility was an important site selection construct, it did not seek to unpack the various attributes of meeting facilities in the manner of Crouch and Ritchie's (1998) study.

Chacko and Fenich (2000) explored the destination site selection attributes that influence a destination's overall image from the perspective of meeting planners as opposed to attendees. They found meeting planners valued quality of the destination over attributes such as price and hotel availability. Also, the study suggests the overall promotional appeal of the site significantly contributes toward the overall perceived destination attractiveness.

Comas & Moscardo (2005) undertook a qualitative study that aimed to explore the site selection decision-making process of association meeting planners and to determine which site attributes they deemed important and why. Using Crouch and Ritchie's (1998) review of the literature as a basis from which to draw questions and as a tool for comparative purposes they identified a number of additional constructs not previously mentioned in the literature (e.g. budget constraints, time constraints, staff workload). The researchers attributed these new findings to their qualitative methodology, which allowed them to gain access to emergent alternative perspectives provided by the in-depth information they received from participants. With respect to the

decision-making process, association planners revealed that committees within the association helped plan the conference and association members voted to select the destination through an internal bid presentation. This finding was consistent with an earlier interview study by Clark and McCleary (1995), which revealed that many people are often involved in association event site selection decisions. Interestingly, of the seven major conference destination considerations, the meeting venue was the most important, ahead of budget constraints, time constraints, promotion, access, staff workload, and technology. Venue size, location, accessibility, and flexibility were key attributes considered to be important when selecting an event venue, whereas size was qualified by a venue's ability to comfortably fit the number of delegates in attendance.

The smaller conferences required facilities that were large enough to be comfortable, but not too large that it looked ridiculous. The larger conferences required space for concurrent workshops, trade exhibitions, and seating space for the business sessions (Comas & Moscardo, 2005, p. 128).

Other key site selection attributes that emerged from this study include the presence of a quality accommodation venue near the meeting site, convenience of a turnkey meeting and accommodation venue, site technology, price, and destination hospitality.

DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf, and Godlewska (2008) sought to compare site selection criteria across different types of event and meeting planners, including exhibition and trade show planners, corporate meeting planners, and association convention planners. Their exploratory study asked participants to rate 13 site selection criteria items grounded in the literature in terms of their importance and found that differences exist across type

of planner with respect to which criteria items are deemed most important. Specifically, exhibition and trade show planners rated the availability of large exhibition space most important, corporate meeting planners rated overall value for the money highest, and association convention planners rated event support services as most important. Other criteria items consistently rated high among all three cohorts include overall cost and a site's reputation for hosting successful events in the past.

Rompf, Breiter, and Severt (2008) noted the vast literature base related to destination site selection attributes, but pointed out there had been no attempt to differentiate the importance of certain attributes based on event type. Therefore, their study sought to explore the similarities and differences in destination selection criteria as a function of six specific event type categories, including convention/conference, incentive meeting, sales meeting, exhibition, board meeting, and training meeting. The researchers also compared the results to previous studies on destination selection criteria. They found event planners "assign different levels of importance to destination selection criteria based on the type of event being planned" (p. 36). Specifically, they found the perceived value attribute was significant across all event types and it ranked highest by three (convention/conference, board meeting, training meeting) of the six event type categories. Event planners of incentive meetings rated first class hotels as the most important site selection attribute, exhibition space ranked highest for planners of exhibitions, and overall cost was the most important attribute for planners of sales meetings. In addition to the six specific event types, the researchers added a seventh "other" category to incorporate responses from planners of events that do not fit the

constructed event categories (e.g. festivals, celebration party, CEO forum, educational program). Interestingly, this category rated reputation for hosting events as the number one event site selection attribute. With respect to selection attributes across all event types, all but two of the thirteen selection attributes held a general-to-strong sense of importance with the exception of nightlife and exhibit space, which were not perceived to be important.

A similar study was conducted with Italian meeting planners. Del Chiappa (2013) studied the influence of site selection decisions by different types of meeting planners as well as the importance placed on twenty-two site selection criteria items across six different event types. He found that internal meeting organizers (those who operate within a company or association) are more likely to influence the site selection decision of congresses, conventions, and seminars than external meeting organizers (i.e. Destination Management Organizations). However, external meeting organizers have more influence over the site selection decision of incentive travel meetings than internal meeting organizers. Meeting planner participants also placed different levels of importance across the site selection criteria items based on the type of event they were planning. Specifically, six criteria items were found to be important regardless of event type. These include affordability, quality and efficiency of industry personnel, convention bureau assistance, physical and socio-cultural settings, safety and security, and local transportation costs and travel time. Also, destination accessibility was deemed the most important attribute for congresses, conventions, symposiums, seminars, and kick-off meetings. This attribute was less important for incentive travel meetings.

Draper, Dawson, and Casey (2011) explored environmental sustainability practices across meeting and convention facilities and assessed the importance of these practices on the event and meeting planner venue site selection process. They also sought to test for differences on level of importance across event planner type (association planners, corporate meeting planners, third party planners) and experience. Sustainability practices fell into three categories: 1) energy efficiency, 2) recycling, and 3) sustainable policies. Similar to the findings by Park and Boo (2000), recycling was the most important sustainable practice for meeting planners. With respect to differences in importance across meeting planner type, third party planners rated each item with a higher level of importance than corporate and association planners. Finally, experience (years as a professional) was not a predictor variable for importance of sustainable practices.

Recently, Elston and Draper (2012) provided an updated synthesis of event planner site selection criteria research. Their study revealed the vast majority of site selection research has occurred since the 2000s and the bulk of this work has been published in the *Journal of Convention and Event Tourism* or under its pre-2004 title of *Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management*. Sample sizes of the aggregate studies ranged from 10 to 2,906 and only one study restricted participation to individuals with a Certified Meeting Planner (CMP) designation. Of paramount importance is the researchers' synthesis of site selection attributes across the inclusive studies in the meta-analysis. Specifically, the attributes that appear most often as significant to meeting planners throughout the literature include quality, availability and size of meeting space,

the cost/affordability of hotel rooms, and food/beverage. The researchers note perceived value may fit into the cost/affordability construct, yet this particular wording of the attribute has only recently surfaced. They also suggest new site selection criteria, such as sustainable practices, have emerged recently and more empirical research should test this attribute. Interestingly, attributes such as technology and location were not consistently ranked as important across all studies. However, since the publication of this synthesis a number of studies on mobile media and information technology have demonstrated the importance of this attribute. Finally, a number of site selection criteria items were identified as “not very important” across the literature during site selection process, including casinos, nightlife, resort activities, museums, and other recreational amenities and activities. Most of these can be categorized as extracurricular entertainment. The researchers warn this finding is from the perspective of meeting planners and not attendees; hence entertainment may be a driver of conference/meeting attendance.

Unique Settings as Event and Meeting Venues

The site selection studies previously outlined are focused primarily on purposed built meeting and event venues, such as convention centers, hotels, and conference facilities. Empirical research that explores unique venues as sites for events and meetings are rare. Woo (2013) emphasizes unique spaces, such as a parking garage, can play host to a great event while providing a one-of-a-kind memorable experience for attendees. However, these types of unique or non-traditional facilities are not free of challenges and it may take an innovative and creative thinker to navigate the venue’s shortcomings. Nevertheless, event and meeting planners frequently seek unique, unusual, or non-

traditional venues to provide a memorable experience for their clients and attendees (Hassanien & Dale, 2011) and the literature on the use of unique venues is developing.

Phillips and Geddie (2005) point out that cruise ships have become a popular destination option for corporate meeting planners. Their study explored meeting planner interest in utilizing cruise ships. They found many of the major cruise lines provide the necessary services to support meetings and the price is consistent with traditional land-based sites, such as resort hotels. However, over 67% of the 236 respondents indicated they had no interest in hosting a meeting on a cruise ship in the future. Only 11% of respondents indicated either high interest or moderate interest in using a cruise ship in the future.

Fawzy (2008) explored the importance of site selection attributes for cruise ships in the context of corporate meetings. He tested ninety site selection criteria items across five categorical subsets: Human; Technical; Facilities/Service; Destination Image; and Finance/Value. All attributes within the human and technical categorical subsets were assessed to be very important by participants. For the human subset, criteria items included cooperative convention staff, service attitude, capacity of staff to troubleshoot unexpected problems, and staff enthusiasm/commitment. The technical subset criteria included air conditioning, lighting and soundproofing, design/layout, audio-visual equipment, and state-of-the art communication equipment. Other key attributes deemed highly important include the reputation of the cruise ship, safety/security, availability of evacuation information, and quality food and beverage. Finally, the availability of children's facilities was ranked the lowest criteria item in terms of importance.

Lau and Hui (2010) conducted a study on the attributes of venue selection for wedding events in Hong Kong. They compared the site selection decisions among those choosing a Chinese restaurant and a hotel ballroom as the event venue. The respondents who selected the Chinese restaurant as the host venue indicated the main attributes influencing their decision were price, ambience, and quality food.

Daniels, Lee, and Cohen (2012) explored the site selection attributes related to wedding reception venues among newlywed couples. Their findings reveal that key attributes leading to site selection decisions are communication, food and beverage, aesthetics, pricing, and access. Of particular interest were the attributes ascribed to the unique venues included in the study, including a historic building, country club, plantation site, garden setting, and museum. Results showed that site selection attributes changed in terms of importance across venue type. The most important site selection criteria by venue was rental cost for the historic building, food/beverage cost for the country club, equipment provisions for the garden site, availability of a changing room for the plantation site, and décor for the museum.

Outdoor Stadiums as Event and Meeting Venues

Whitfield (2009) outlined a rationale of why and how visitor/entertainment attraction sites in the United Kingdom have attempted to diversify their product to offer conference and event facilities. She notes conference and event organizers are increasingly choosing unique venues to make an impression on clients and attendees. In recognition of this trend, racecourses, theme parks, cruise ships, castles, and sports stadia now market their facilities to gain market share in the valuable events and meetings

industry. Her study probed the motivations of entertainment/visitor attractions to enter this competitive market and found a desire to generate revenue by utilizing unused space as the main factor. “In doing so, refurbishing furnishings and décor were the two most common refurbishment activities undertaken to create conference and event facilities” (Whitfield, 2009, p. 86) as this was likely the most cost effective way to offer adequate facilities to support events and meetings. Respondents indicated future plans to upgrade technology and renovate and expand existing structures to better meet the needs of clients.

Lee et al. (2012) noted a gap in the literature with respect to the use of professional outdoor stadiums as sites for social and corporate events within the events and meetings industry. They explored professional sports team websites in the United States and found major outdoor stadiums are equipped with the necessary features and services to host a variety of meetings and events. Kim, Jeon, Lee, and Parrish (2013) developed a conceptual model for the attractiveness of professional sports facilities as event venues in the United States. One of the key attributes identified in the model is a venue’s ability to satisfy the key site selection criteria prospective corporate and social event customers require. These include logistical infrastructure (e.g. podium, microphone, furniture, etc), quality food and beverage, cost, location, adequate parking, capacity and layout, audio/visual aids, and meeting and event services. Other attributes the authors suggest influence a sport venue’s attractiveness as a site for non-sporting events are sport team value, sport involvement of event attendees, and fit between type of event and sports team.

Although qualitatively different from traditional purpose built event and meeting venues (e.g. convention centers, hotels, and conference centers) sports stadiums are considered a type of public assembly venue with infrastructure to accommodate a variety of event and meeting functions (Fenich & Bordelon, 2008). However, few studies on the use of these facilities exist. Further, the researcher is unaware of any academic study that explores the use of intercollegiate football stadiums as sites for events and meetings.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore how a college football stadium is perceived as a potential host event venue by prospective event and meeting customers. Specifically, the overarching research question was framed as follows: How do professional event and meeting planners perceive an outdoor college football stadium as a potential event venue. A qualitative research design was used as this methodology is particularly useful in gaining access to participant perceptions (Patton, 2002). The study utilized both an etic and emic research approach. Etic and emic refer to two contrasting ways of approaching research and each has significant implications for the way findings are expressed. The emic approach looks at a phenomenon through the eyes of members of the particular culture or group being studied. Accounts, descriptions, and analysis are expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as appropriate by members of the culture. The etic approach uses structures of knowledge or some criteria developed outside the culture or group being studied as a framework (Willis, 2007). Lett (2005) suggests the terms emic and etic may be best conceptualized as adjectives that modify the noun 'knowledge'. "Etic constructs are expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories that are regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers" (Willis, 2007, p. 101). This study examined the

original initial perceptions of a stadium as an event venue from the perspective of participants as well as how participants perceived a pre-determined set of fifteen conceptual schemes related to site selection attributes grounded in the existing literature base. Therefore, findings of this qualitative study provide both emic and etic knowledge.

Schwandt (2007) emphasizes the qualitative case method is a preferred design choice when the researcher explores ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions, when the researcher lacks control over events being studied, when the phenomenon under investigation occurs in a naturalistic context, and when multiple data sources are desired. Similarly, Yin (2003) suggests a case study design should be considered when the researcher seeks to explore “how” or “why” questions, participant behavior cannot be manipulated, contextual conditions are relevant to the phenomenon under study, or the boundaries between the context and phenomenon are not clear. The research question of this study fits within these general research framework guidelines given it is a “how” question, the researcher lacks control over participants, and the stadium context is relevant to research findings. Therefore, the rationale for the use of case study research design is appropriate and justified.

Glesne (2011) points out the term case study has different meanings across disciplines hence it is important to further clarify the term.

In qualitative inquiry, case study research refers to the intensive study of a case, but what a “case” means can vary, from one person to a village or from an event to a set of procedures... The common denominator is that each... is a bounded integrated system. Defining something as “bounded” often remains ambiguous,

though, with the researcher deciding what will and will not be included within the boundaries (p. 22).

With this explanation in mind, a clarification of the boundaries of the study will help avoid confusion and specify the nature of the case. Baxter and Jack (2008) have noted this process is not as easy as it may seem given "...determining what the unit of analysis (case) is can be a challenge to both novice and seasoned researchers alike" (p. 545). After a rigorous reflective process, the researcher decided the boundary or unit of analysis of this case study is the perceptions of professional event and meeting planners with site selection authority. With the unit of analysis established, it is also necessary to determine what the case will not consider in order to avoid the pitfalls of undertaking a study too broad in scope. Various strategies exist to develop boundaries for a study to limit scope (Stake, 1995; Yin 2003). The binding strategies for this particular study included place (Creswell, 2003) and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994), whereby place was determined by selecting participants whose professional employment was based in a particular city region and context was provided by selecting a single stadium setting for participants to consider. Therefore, the depth and breadth of the study is limited to perceptions of professional event and meeting planners with site selection capacity (unit of analysis) bounded by their city region of employment (place) and in consideration of the same stadium context (context). It is important to note that the process of drawing boundaries not only limited the scope of study, but also helped to enhance the trustworthiness of findings by ensuring perceptions were based on the same setting, which allowed for analytical comparisons across participants.

Glesne (2011) adds that case studies often employ in-depth examination of data accessed through multiple modes of collection and write-ups are often descriptive and holistic with the possibility of comparisons of more than one case leading to a search for patterns. Stake (1995, 2000, 2006) differentiates multiple types of case studies based on their broad purpose: intrinsic; instrumental; and collective. The intrinsic case study seeks a comprehensive understanding of a single case and is descriptive in nature. Findings remain applicable only in the context of the setting where the study occurred. Instrumental case studies seek to derive an understanding of something broader than the single case under study by providing insight into an issue, redrawing generalizations, or aid in theory development. Collective case studies, often known as multiple case studies, seek to compare multiple cases to explore similarities and differences.

The main impetus for this study is to understand the perception of a single outdoor college stadium as an event venue from the perspective of prospective event and meeting customers. Gaining access to in-depth qualitative data does not lend itself to broad generalizations of all college sports stadiums and comprehensive understandings from a single case remain applicable to the setting under investigation. However, Stake's (1995, 2000, 2006) characterization of the instrumental case study approach also fits the purpose of this research as the researcher is guided by an interest in the case as a means to understand a broader issue (e.g. stadiums as event venues). While "meaning resides in the context and it cannot be completely removed from it" (Willis, 2007, p. 222), thick description of the case setting and participants heightens the transferability of findings to

other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and aids in the understanding of the broader phenomenon.

Philosophical Orientation

Epistemological transparency is an important and informative part of the research process that should be made explicit to readers and when researchers communicate their epistemological awareness the process of self-reflection can aid researchers in selecting appropriate methods that support their knowledge building (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). Consistent with the case study approaches of Stake (1995) and Yin (2003), this research is based on the constructivist paradigm. Miller and Crabtree (1999) suggest constructivism “recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn’t reject outright some notion of objectivity” (p. 10). Constructivism assumes reality is socially constructed and one of the advantages of this paradigmatic lens is the collaboration between researcher and participant. This affords participants an opportunity to voice their own views of reality which ultimately enables the researcher to gain insights into participant perspectives within a given context. Whether or not this understanding may or may not be relevant in other contexts is not a major concern of constructivists. Rather, understandings are viewed as contextual or local knowledge where users of the knowledge decide what seems applicable or transferable to a new context (Willis, 2007).

Participant Selection

Random sampling is a strategy often used by quantitative researchers for selecting large numbers of research participants to achieve a statistically representative sample by

which generalizations for a given population can be drawn. As Glesne (2011) points out, “Qualitative researchers neither work (usually) with populations large enough to make random sampling meaningful, nor is their purpose that of producing generalizations” (p. 44). In qualitative research, participants tend to be selected purposefully based on some set of specific criteria. Patton (2002) discusses the strengths of purposeful sampling within the context of qualitative research.

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (p. 230-231).

Patton (2002) outlines sixteen variations of purposeful sampling strategies where the logic of each serves a particular purpose and emphasizes “The sampling strategy must be selected to fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints being faced” (p. 242). Maxwell (2005) suggests that using the term ‘sampling’ within the context of qualitative research is problematic “because it implies the purpose of ‘representing’ the population sampled” (p. 88). He gives preference to the terms purposeful selection (Light et al., 1990) and criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Regardless of the term used, the process is an acceptable means to select “those times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information that you need in order to answer your research questions” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88).

Stratified purposeful sampling is one variation of participant selection in qualitative research. This strategy seeks to capture variations among participants rather than maintaining a focus on a typical or homogenous sub-group of participants (Patton, 2002). Participant variation is based on some criteria deemed by the researcher to be relevant to the purpose of the study. Some examples of variation criteria include socioeconomic status, education level, level of employment, employment experience, or employment type. Maxwell (2002) addresses variation in selection through his four pronged goals for purposeful selection and emphasizes the importance of both “achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected...and systematically selecting individuals or settings that represent the most important possible variations on these dimensions” (pp. 89-90).

This study utilized a criteria-based stratified purposeful selection strategy. The selection criteria of the participants chosen for this study was based on the following: 1) The individual is a professional event and meeting planner and is solely or in part responsible for site selection decisions and 2) the participant resides or works in close proximity to the stadium setting under study. It is critical to the purpose of this study that participants fulfill these two criteria in order to provide rich and meaningful data. An assumption of this research is that event and meeting planners lacking site selection authority or those who do not routinely engage with the event site selection process would not be able to provide meaningful insights regarding the site selection criteria as it pertains to the use of a stadium as an event venue. Also, it was a preference of the researcher that participants possessed awareness or familiarity of the stadium setting

hence the second selection criteria item was established. Finally, to ensure the findings represent variation in the unit of analysis, the stratification of participants was based on years of employment experience and type of events and meetings planned.

Patton (2002) emphasizes “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry...the size of the sample depends on what you want to find out, why you want to find it out, how the findings will be used, and what resources (including time) you have for the study” (p. 244). The decision on the number of participants to include in the study was made largely on the basis of Patton’s latter point and a predetermined range of at least eight participants was established by the researcher in consultation with the dissertation committee. Ideally, the number of participants to include in a qualitative study should be made during the study itself and based on the concept of saturation (Creswell 2008), also known as redundancy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, time constraints associated with dissertation research did not permit the study to reach the point of saturation.

Data Collection

Glesne (2011) begins her discussion of research techniques by stating ‘data collection’ is a problematic term for qualitative research. Dicks, Mason, Coffey, and Atkinson (2005) suggested ‘data recording’ as a preferable alternative because data are not “inert materials lying around in the field, waiting for the researcher to come along and ‘collect’ them” (p. 115). In reality, neither term conveys the ways in which qualitative information is constructed by the researcher and participants. However, data collection is

the dominant term used within the research discipline and for lack of a better term it will be used throughout this study.

Data collection for this case study included two strategies commonly used in qualitative research: interviewing and document review. Document review was used primarily as a means to provide in-depth descriptions of participants and the stadium setting. Interviewing was the predominate method used to access participant perceptions as these are communicated through verbal communication and are not likely accessible through other sources. Patton (2002) states “We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...The fact is that we cannot observe everything...We have to ask people questions about those things” (p. 340-341). This study adhered to the interview guide approach. The guide lists the questions or issues to be explored to ensure the same lines of inquiry are addressed with each participant interviewed.

The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. Thus, the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

As suggested by Maxwell (2005), the interview guide was developed with an anticipation of how particular questions would actually work in practice and how people are likely to respond. Interview questions were pilot-tested to gain valuable feedback from “people as

much like your planned interviewees as possible, to determine if the questions work as intended and what revisions you may need to make” (p. 93). A former national association event and meeting planner was contacted over the phone and interviewed in person three weeks prior to the first participant interview. As a result of pilot testing the interview protocol, modification to the delivery of the venue quality question in the interview guide was made to enhance clarity as this the meaning of the term ‘quality’ was deemed ambiguous by the researcher. Prior to pilot testing questions and throughout the duration of the research, the policies and procedures established by the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) were followed.

This study utilized the interview guide approach for data collection as described by Patton (2002). This strategy has a number of advantages, including ensuring the best use of time for the interviewer and interviewee and establishing a more systematic and comprehensive interview process by limiting the issues to be explored. This approach also allowed for open conversation focused on the topic at hand to allow for participant perceptions to emerge as well as allowing for the emergence of other topics of importance not included on the interview guide itself. With respect to question sequencing, the order of questions asked to each respondent remained constant across the interviews with basic experiential and background questions preceding opinion and knowledge questions. Patton (2002) suggests that this is a good strategy as “Finding out from people what they know works best once some rapport and trust have been established in the interview” (p. 352-353). Creswell (2008) describes this particular

strategy in question sequencing as providing an “icebreaker...to relax the interviewees and motivate them to talk” (p. 233).

Of the seven interviews, four were conducted face to face and three were conducted over the telephone. One of the four face to face interviews included two participants while the other three were conducted one on one. Interviews completed over the telephone were at the insistence of the participant and were the result of participant time constraints. Face to face interviews have traditionally been the preferred mode of interviewing as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gain non-verbal cues, such as body language. However, empirical research on the effects of telephone interviews is emerging and scholars have questioned whether or not any resulting ‘data loss’ is actually detrimental to the study (Novick, 2008). Irvine, Drew, and Sainesbury (2013) analyzed and compared the interaction effects of semi-structured interviews conducted face to face and by telephone and determined rapport is more difficult to achieve with telephone interviews, interviewees seek clarification slightly more frequently during telephone interviews, vocalized acknowledgements from the interviewer occur less frequently during telephone interviews, interviewees check on the adequacy of their responses more frequently during phone interviews, and telephone interviews tend to be shorter and concise. Interestingly, the researchers suggest “...in this data set, the telephone mode did not appear to lead to increased difficulties in substantive understanding” (Irvine, Drew, & Sainesbury, 2013, p. 101). To mitigate difficulties in establishing rapport, the researcher contacted interviewees in advance of the actual interview to not only invite them to participate in the study and schedule the interview for a later date, but also to engage in

meaningful discussion to enhance rapport and trust (Amis, 2005). The researcher also made frequent acknowledgements of interviewee responses across all interviews. Specifically, frequent member checks were given by the researcher as a mode of acknowledgement and attentiveness as well as a means of ensuring clarity in understanding.

Patton (2002) states “The raw data of interviews are the actual quotations spoken by interviewees. Nothing can substitute for these data...recording the verbatim responses of people being interviewed is therefore essential” (p. 380). In this study, six of the seven interview exchanges were recorded using a digital recorder after gaining consent from participants. Transcription of each recording occurred on the same evening the interview took place with the exception of one interview, which was transcribed the following day. One telephone interview was not recorded due to the participant insisting on completing the interview during the initial introductory contact phase. Citing time limitations and scheduling conflicts, the participant unexpectedly made herself available at a time when the researcher was not anticipating conducting the interview and not in possession of the digital recorder. In this instance, detailed notes of responses, including direct quotes, were taken in lieu of the recording. Interview notes were transcribed and expanded upon immediately following the completion of the interview to ensure a thorough account of the exchange was recorded.

In order to provide a thick description of the college stadium setting selected for inclusion in the study, the researcher reviewed institutional documents and artifacts as well as audiovisual materials. Documents and other artifacts are a valuable source of

information in qualitative research and these come in many forms, including newspapers, meeting minutes, journals, letters, web site data, and e-mail comments (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2002). Documents and artifacts examined in this study include newspaper articles in the local press as well as relevant organizational documents and artifacts provided by the university (e.g. university fact book, diagram of the venue, floor plans, detailed infrastructural data, inventory of suite amenities, etc.). The use of audiovisual materials as a data source is becoming commonplace in qualitative research. These consist of images or sounds researchers collect to help them understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). Specifically, the website of the stadium setting under study was consulted to access data related to the facility's site attributes, including but not limited to specific features and services as well as key geographical information as it relates to the site attributes (e.g. accessibility, proximity to lodging and entertainment facilities). Finally, a site visit to observe the setting was arranged as another data collection technique. The information attained through the site visit enhanced the descriptive nature of the stadium setting under study and contributes towards enhancing the transferability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was developed to solicit responses from participants to answer the following overarching research question: How do professional event and meeting planners perceive an outdoor college football stadium as a potential event venue? The first part of the interview protocol included experiential and background questions framed to solicit information related to the length in years in which participants had been

involved with planning events as well as the frequency and types of events participants plan on an annual basis. These questions were designed to ensure variance in participant responses across different types of participants. Also, to build rapport, participants were asked to describe to the researcher in their own words how they would characterize their role as an event and meeting professional.

The second part of the interview protocol was designed to solicit information about the event and meeting venues participants typically use in the city region where the stadium is located, participant familiarity with the stadium setting itself, and participants' initial perception of the stadium as a potential event and meeting venue. Data related to initial perceptions of the stadium was included to understand participants' perspectives prior to them reflecting on and providing feedback about specific site selection attributes as they pertain to the venue. This open ended question was not grounded in or limited to the specific criteria outlined in the literature hence responses provide emergent data about prospective event and meeting planner customers' perceptions.

The third part of the interview protocol asked participants to describe the process they go through when selecting a host venue for their clients. This question was included to better understand the overall site selection process that event professionals undertake when deciding on a host venue.

The fourth and final part of the interview protocol was designed to afford participants the opportunity to provide their perception of fifteen specific site selection criteria attributes grounded in the events and meetings literature. Criteria items included: 1) cost, 2) technology, 3) venue capacity and layout flexibility, 4) food and beverage

service, 5) location and accessibility, 6) venue reputation, 7) venue quality, 8) safety and security, 9) promotional appeal and attractiveness, 10) ambiance, 11) availability, 12) support services, 13) environmental sustainability practices, 14) parking, and 15) venue uniqueness. These items were included due to their prevalence across the vast array of research studies in the events and meetings site selection literature.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) notes the challenge of qualitative analysis rests with making sense of massive amounts of data and the process essentially involves reducing the amount of information, identifying significant patterns or themes, and constructing a narrative framework to communicate what the data reveal. Maxwell (2005) states that one of the most common problems in qualitative studies is allowing transcripts to pile up. He advances this thought further by stating that the researcher should begin data analysis immediately after the first interview or observation and this process should continue as long as he or she is working on the research. Glesne (2011) agrees and advises that data analysis should be done simultaneously with data collection as this enables the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds.

Multiple analytical strategies throughout the duration of the study were used to make sense of the data. One such strategy included writing reflexive memos or notes based on the interview exchange, which Maxwell (2005) states both captures “your analytic thinking about your data and facilitates such thinking, stimulating analytic insights” (p. 96). Writing memos also helped with developing tentative ideas about relationships among data and challenged the researcher to constantly re-examine the

purpose of the research as well as the methods chosen. Corbin and Strauss (2008) highlight the conceptual and analytical nature of reflexive memos and remind qualitative researchers of the importance of denoting concepts and their relationships as this is an integral part of the overall process that transforms raw data into findings. In addition to reflexive ‘memoing’, content analysis of the interview data was used to develop a general understanding of the core meanings conveyed by the participants, which are sometimes referred to as patterns or themes. The strength in this technique is in the inductive nature of the process as findings emerge out of the data.

As Patton (2002) notes, content analysis “sometimes refers to searching text for recurring words or themes” (p. 453). Willis (2007) refers to this basic process as ‘eyeballing’ the data. With this in mind it is important to clarify deriving significant patterns or themes involves much more than scanning the data. Maxwell (2005) advises listening to interview recordings and reading the transcripts as a means to become familiar with your data, but analysis does not end with developing tentative ideas about what you initially see or hear.

One of the most common categorizing strategies in qualitative research is coding. The purpose of coding is to fracture the data into categories for comparative purposes. Maxwell (2005) highlights a distinction in categorizing analysis by describing three different types of categories: organizational; substantive; and theoretical. “Organizational categories function primarily as “bins” for sorting the data for further analysis” (p. 97). The ultimate goal, however, is to move beyond organizational categories toward substantive categories, which are primarily descriptive and developed

by separating text segments into open codes. “Theoretical categories, in contrast, place the coded data into a more general or abstract framework...and represent the researcher’s concepts (what are called etic categories), rather than participants’ own concepts” (Maxwell, 2005 pp. 97-98). This level of categorization is referred to as axial coding by grounded theorists using the constant comparative method of analysis. However, constant comparative method involves an additional confirmatory deductive step to affirm authenticity; content analysis ends with substantive or theoretical categories. In this study, once all data across the interviews were exhausted and theoretical categories were achieved by placing the coded data into an abstract framework the researcher searched for patterns or themes in the data to represent the core meanings found throughout the content analysis. These themes are presented in chapter four alongside excerpts from interview transcripts and discussed further in chapter five.

Trustworthiness

Stake (2006) emphasizes the importance of the researcher in incorporating strategies to address potential biases that could call into question the credibility of the study. One strategy is to make explicit the researcher’s background and any potential affiliations that could otherwise introduce researcher bias (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher is a former sports facility and event director at a National Collegiate Athletic Association Division II university and has interacted with a variety of event and meeting customers in the past. The nature of this professional experience relates specifically to the use of an indoor sports arena as an event venue and not an outdoor stadium. Also, the researcher has conducted one previous qualitative study as a co-investigator on a similar

topic. The major differences between this earlier study and the current inquiry is that the first focused on major outdoor professional sports stadiums with event and meeting planners being asked to provide their perception on the advantages and disadvantages of using these types of venues, and participant responses were based on a range of geographically dispersed venues. The current study solicited participant perceptions on a specific set of objective site selection criteria items grounded in the literature as they applied to one specific venue located in the participants' region of employment. As was discovered from the previous study as well as the current study, professional sports stadiums are qualitatively different from college stadiums and are perceived as such. Therefore, narrowing participant perceptions to one specific venue contributed towards consistency and stability and ultimately enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings (Krefting, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986). The researcher also engaged in constant reflexivity to examine how these past experiences may be influencing this particular study (Glesne, 2011, Schwandt, 2007). While these experiences likely helped to shape an understanding of the data, researcher engagement in a reflexive process is a useful strategy to ensure that the researcher is aware of his or her influence on the data and contributes towards enhancing trustworthiness of findings (Krefting, 1991).

Qualitative research is often judged differently depending on the audience (Patton, 2002). When describing the credibility and reliability of qualitative research, some scholars opt for the term trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glesne, 2011; Sandelowski, 1993). Patton (2002) uses both trustworthiness and authenticity when describing credibility in qualitative research. He emphasizes that any research strategy

needs credibility to be useful and researchers should adopt a stance of neutrality. “The neutral investigator enters the research arena with no ax to grind, no theory to prove, and no predetermined results to support” (p. 51). The credibility of a study is essentially the product of confidence in the truth and in the conclusions. Both Patton (2002) and Maxwell (2005) outline procedures to enhance trustworthiness, or validity, of findings. This research design utilized several of these procedures, including constant member checks with participants during the interview process, clarification of researcher bias, multiple modes of data collection, and design checks to reflect on how the design decisions may have impacted the study. Also, the researcher used a systematic criteria based stratified participant selection process that provided information rich respondents that differed in employment experience and event type to introduce both consistency and variation in the data. Specifically, participants were all professional event and meeting planners who reside or work in close proximity to the stadium setting of central importance to the study. However, participants also represented a range of planners based on event type and years of professional experience. Had this study involved primarily experienced corporate meeting planners the perspective of inexperienced social event planners would have been overlooked.

CHAPTER FOUR

Stadium Setting

During the design phase of the study the researcher deemed it important to specify one stadium setting for participants to consider. This design decision ensured participant perceptions were based on the same venue. The university football stadium selected for inclusion in this study is on the campus of an NCAA Bowl Championship Series (BCS) level institution located in a small city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The city is spread across approximately ten and a half square miles and features an estimated population of less than 50,000. The Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), which includes the city and four surrounding counties, is much larger and is estimated to be approximately 200,000 inhabitants. It is important to note approximately 20% of city inhabitants are classified as resident college students. Descriptions of climatic conditions provided by the city's official website indicate an annual mean temperature of fifty-seven degrees Fahrenheit, over forty-four inches of rainfall, and twenty-four inches of snowfall annually. Summers and winters are mild with seasonal highs averaging in the upper 80s and mid 40s respectively. With respect to educational and socio-economic descriptors, nearly eighty-seven percent of inhabitants over the age of twenty-five have attained at least a high school diploma, forty-eight percent of residents over the age of twenty-five have earned a college degree or higher, and the per

capita income and median household income of city residents is approximately \$26,000 and \$64,000 respectively. Economic statistics indicate nearly 5,000 businesses are based in the city and annual expenditures on accommodation and food services exceed \$303,000,000. Further, the top five leading employers by industry type include local and state government, health care, leisure and hospitality services, professional business services, and retail trade. Finally, the city region is home to thirty business associations, thirty six professional membership associations, one hundred six nonprofit civic organizations, and approximately twenty private companies employing at least two hundred and fifty people in the local area.

The stadium is owned and operated by a state supported institution founded in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The university has an enduring colonial legacy which is visible in the architecture of its buildings and is represented in various ways through official institutional symbols and logos. The university has been awarded many national academic awards and honors, including being ranked among the top five public universities in the United States by *U.S. News*. During the 2012-2013 academic year university enrollment exceeded 20,000 students, seventy percent of which were classified as undergraduate students. Among first-year students, over ninety percent ranked in the top ten percent of their high school classes. The institution's academic units feature nearly a dozen schools that offer a wide array of degree programs, including architecture, medicine, business, engineering, and law, among others. Annual in-state undergraduate tuition, fees, room and board, and expenses related to books and personal expenses ranges from \$24,000 to \$27,000 depending on degree program.

With respect to geographical orientation the university and the football stadium are located in the city center and are accessible by one major interstate and one major highway, which intersect near the campus. A number of commercial retail and leisure establishments are in close proximity to the campus, including a shopping mall, grocery stores, restaurants, coffee shops, theaters, and lodging. The football stadium is located in the southeast quadrant of campus and is surrounded by parking facilities on three sides and is accessible by multiple access roads, one of which directly connects to a major highway.

The university's athletic program sponsors over two dozen men's and women's intercollegiate sports and is a member of a major conference with an automatic berth in the football Bowl Championship Series. The football team draws the most spectators to campus on an annual basis and although the team has won multiple conference championships and several post-season bowl games, it has never won a national championship.

The football stadium was constructed in the 1930s with seating for over 20,000 spectators. A series of expansion and renovation projects have significantly increased this capacity and today the venue can accommodate well over 60,000 spectators. The stadium architectural style features a classic U-shaped concrete bowl with an upper deck. The north end of the stadium is open and features an oversized multi-million dollar state-of-the-art video board display. This end of the stadium is also enclosed by a turf berm that provides additional seating and standing room options and is bordered by a decorative paved plaza and campus access road. In addition to typical stadium features such as

dressing rooms, concession stands, and restrooms, the venue also has fifty-six private suites, which range from 550 to 750 square feet in size. Each suite can accommodate up to twenty guests and features a covered balcony equipped with overhead heat lamps and a flat screen television. The interior of each suite is equipped with a number of amenities including two refrigerators, an additional television monitor, a leather couch, two leather lounge chairs, four armchairs, a coffee table, a private restroom, individual climate controls, a telephone, a sink, buffet counter, cabinetry for storage, and waste receptacles. Forty-four of the fifty-six suites are located in the south end zone of the stadium while the other twelve are located toward the north end wings of the stadium.

In addition to the private suites, the fourth level of the venue provides a large press box on one side of the facility and a large exclusive private box on the other side. Both boxes extend the length of the field from twenty yard line to twenty yard line. The press box is designed to accommodate various press outlets that provide media coverage for football games at the venue as well as the coaching staffs for both the home and away teams. It features computer connections, private media and coaches booths, rest rooms, a large open working press area, and a reception and dining area enclosed by glass. The presidential suite is located on the fourth level on the east side of the stadium and provides over 350 additional balcony seats for select athletic department donors and university guests. A prominent feature of this suite is two lounge areas, each equipped with a permanent bar to support beverage service for guests. These lounge areas are situated inside an open floor plan suite that features approximately 7,000 square feet and

unobstructed views of the field and surrounding landscape. Additional amenities include flat screen television monitors, private restrooms, and logoed carpeting.

Additional interior spaces within the stadium include offices for various athletic department support services as well as at least one auxiliary departmental office associated with academic affairs, at least four open lobby areas, a hall of fame room, and two team dressing rooms. The office suites are divided by type of support and include the typical set up of reception desks, individual enclosed office spaces, small meeting rooms, restrooms, and break rooms. The hall of fame room features a large open floor plan enclosed by glass windows and doors. The space is segmented by floor type (carpet and laminate wood) into two distinct areas that serve different purposes. The carpeted area is the larger of the two spaces and is used year round in support of a variety of program functions and events, including stadium game day operations meetings for event staff. The smaller of the two areas supports social functions, such as cocktail receptions and alumni reunions, and includes a permanent bar and an adjacent catering kitchen. In combination, both spaces comprising the hall of fame room cover nearly 4,000 square feet. The interior corridors of the venue offer ample lobby space on each of the four levels. All interior lobbies feature carpeting, are climate controlled, and contain minimal infrastructural or decorative obstructions (e.g. furniture and plants) that would impede egress for guests. Team dressing rooms are located on the lower level of the stadium and were renovated within the past fifteen years. The home team dressing room is over 3,600 square feet and features carpeting with the team's logo woven into the fabric, mahogany wood lockers surrounding the perimeter of the space, a private dressing room for the

coaching staff, private restrooms and shower stalls, and strategic space for equipment and medical staff. The room is accessible from the interior corridor of the facility and large double doors lead directly onto the football field. The visitors' locker room is considerably smaller in size at 1750 square feet and does not provide the same level of quality infrastructure as the home team dressing room. It should be noted that both dressing rooms are used infrequently as the team's new indoor practice facility provides an on-site dressing room for players on non-game days throughout the year.

The playing surface is a natural grass turf field equipped with a state-of-the-art Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT) system, which monitors and controls the amount of available water and air flow below the surface. During the season necessary lines and logos are painted on the field. However, during the off-season the turf resembles a manicured green lawn. A brick and mortar wall surrounds the field and separates the playing surface from the bowl seating areas. Four light towers rise skyward above the upper deck of the stadium and provide high levels of illumination for activities on the field.

Finally, the stadium is flanked by paved surface parking on the east and west sides of the facility. The south end of the facility is considered the main entrance and is connected to a multilevel parking garage that accommodates approximately six hundred motor vehicles. Throughout the venue event attendees and guests have panoramic views of the surrounding landscape, which the local convention and visitor's bureau indicate are an important component of tourism in the region.

Participants

This study utilized a criteria-based stratified purposeful selection strategy. The selection criteria of the participants chosen for this study was based on the following: 1) The individual is a professional event or meeting planner and is solely or in part responsible for site selection decisions and 2) the participant resides or works in the same city region as the stadium setting under study. To ensure findings represent variation among event and meeting planners, participants were also carefully chosen based on years of employment experience and type of events planned. In addition to using abstract geographical identifiers, each participant was provided a pseudonym to provide an additional level of anonymity. All participants met the two criteria items for inclusion in the study. With respect to employment experience, participants in this study indicated professional event and meeting planning experience of less than one year, five years, seven years, fifteen years, twenty years, twenty-four years, and two participants indicated thirty years of experience. Collectively, participants represented a range of experiences with respect to types of events and meetings planned, including celebration events, private parties, weddings, formal galas, social events, awards banquets, fundraiser dinners, corporate meetings, small and large conferences, and government meetings.

“Sarah” is a self-employed independent planner involved with coordinating celebration events and private parties such as weddings, anniversary celebrations, birthday parties, office events, lunches, and holiday celebrations. She has been working in the industry for twenty years and plans approximately four events annually for small organizations and individual clients. Currently, Sarah also works part-time as an

administrative assistant during the week for a local educational institution. She indicated some familiarity with the stadium setting in this case study, but has had no experience with hosting one of her events there.

“Brittany” is an independent planner with twenty-four years of professional planning experience. Ten of these years were spent working for a local private estate. Fourteen years ago she decided to launch her own event and meeting planning business. Initially, Brittany’s business focused on corporate and business meetings, but economic conditions following September 11, 2001 forced her to focus on other types of events such as weddings, private parties, and non-profit fundraiser events. Her business plans approximately thirty-five events per year, employs two additional professional meeting planners, and periodically accommodates and supervises college interns.

“Sasha” is one of the professional event and meeting planners working for Brittany’s company. She began planning events less than one year ago. Although her experience is limited to wedding planning, at the time the research was conducted Sasha was planning a fundraiser golf tournament and gala party. Brittany and Sasha both indicated minimal familiarity with the stadium setting in this study. Specifically, Brittany has been to the venue in the past for a networking event. However, Sasha has never been inside the stadium.

“Valerie” has been planning large corporate meetings, sales seminars, incentive meetings, employee celebrations events, and conferences for fifteen years. For most of her career she indicated coordinating between fifteen and twenty events per year. However, in the past year she has reduced her workload to two large conferences

annually to accommodate her new familial responsibilities. Although she has planned weddings, fundraising events, and social events, she prefers to focus on corporate focused events. Valerie has been to the stadium setting in this study for sporting events. However, her familiarity is limited to her role as a spectator. She has been to the upper level private suites in the past, but is unaware of any meeting rooms in the facility.

“Megan” has been in the industry full-time for approximately thirty years. She owns and operates a full service event planning company that coordinates travel tours, government meetings and conferences, trade shows, weddings, and a variety of food themed events, such as lunches and corporate picnics. Megan’s business strategy does not emphasize social events due to the limited profits associated with them. However, she will plan them on a case by case basis if the financial incentive is assessed to be sufficient. She has attended several football games and a concert at the stadium; hence she has some familiarity with the venue.

“Ann” has been working in the events and meetings industry for approximately thirty years. Her emphasis and specialization is in the design or visual aspects of event planning. Ann normally works with weddings and high end social events. She is also involved with planning private parties and galas for large corporations. Ann indicated having minimal familiarity with the stadium, but has been to it one time for a concert.

“Cathy” has seven years of event planning experience. Before launching her own independent event and meeting planning business two years ago, she worked for two separate foundations coordinating fundraiser banquet dinners. In her current role Cathy primarily plans weddings and corporate banquets and social gatherings as a means to

raise funds for local non-profits organizations. The number of events Cathy, coordinates on an annual basis is approximately twenty. She has been to the stadium on several occasions for sporting events and concerts. Cathy was also aware the stadium had several indoor spaces for entertaining, including the smaller private suites and the larger presidential suite.

“Mandy” is an event and meeting planner working for one of the foundations at the university that owns and operates the stadium in this study. She has a total of five years of professional experience as an event planner with two different foundations at the university. Mandy plans approximately forty events per year on behalf of the foundation. The main types of events are donor recognition ceremonies, fundraiser dinners, social dinners, and banquets. Mandy is familiar with the stadium in this study, including the various indoor event spaces throughout the venue.

Findings

Event and meeting venues in the local market. Participants were asked to identify the event and meeting venues they typically consider when planning an event in the city region that was the focus of this study. The type of venue participants considered using varied depending on the type of event being planned. Specifically, participants identified three local conference hotels and three large private estates for corporate meetings or conferences. Two of the three conference hotels are part of a larger national chain of hotels recognized for having meeting rooms, banquet facilities, and in-house catering departments that accommodate large corporate events and conferences. Both of these venues are located within the city limits near the downtown area and each can

accommodate over 300 overnight guests. The third conference hotel and the stadium setting in this study are owned and operated by the same university and are located a few blocks from one another in the downtown area of the city. The university conference hotel accommodates fewer overnight guests than the chain conference hotels, but offers comparable event and meeting features and services. Compared to the two large conference hotels, the three private estates have limited lodging availability. However, each has comparable meeting rooms, banquet facilities, and onsite catering services. While all three estates are also known for hosting high end social events and weddings, they actively market themselves as preferable sites for corporate meetings and conferences. Unlike the conference hotels, the private estates are located outside the city limits and feature a spacious landscape in a rural setting. Two of the estates also feature vineyards and recreational opportunities, such as horseback riding and bike trails.

The venues participants identified as sites for social events, celebration events, and private parties include vineyards and cideries, historical buildings, theaters, country clubs, private estates, an indoor sports arena, and public picnic shelters. Specifically, participants associated the vineyards, cideries, historical buildings, country clubs, and private estates with high end social and celebration events, including weddings, galas, banquets, and fundraiser dinners. These venues are located outside the city limits and offer a combination of outdoor and indoor event spaces. The theaters, which normally feature plays and musical performances, were identified as unique social event spaces conveniently located downtown near shopping, restaurants, and lodging. Public picnic shelters are located throughout the city and were identified by one participant as an event

space for small private celebrations, such as birthday parties and office holiday parties. Finally, an indoor sports arena located on the same university campus as the stadium was identified by one participant as a site for donor recognition banquets.

Initial perception of the stadium as an event and meeting venue. Each participant was asked to reflect on her initial perception of the stadium as a potential site for events and meetings prior to evaluating it with respect to specific site selection criteria items identified in the literature. The question was open ended, therefore responses represent emergent data. A theme that emerged across the participants was the stadium could accommodate large outdoor events such as concerts, sporting events, corporate social outings, tradeshow, graduation ceremonies, and family/community events and festivals. For example, Sarah offered the following perspective, "...if your event is large enough and you need that space then I think it's a great location for one. When I think of (the stadium) I think of concerts or something you are going to have outside like a football game or a concert." Sasha, who has less than one year of experience in the events and meetings industry, stated "I mean I have seen where other stadiums will broadcast a game or something like that. Where everyone comes to the stadium to watch together...I have seen it more with professional teams...they do that at the (local theater). They do Oscar parties and things like that." Valerie, a corporate meeting planner, suggested the field would be an ideal site for large outdoor corporate focused events as well, "You could do umm, company, you know social outings basically. You could do sports and games on the field. You could project something on the jumbotrons. It would be a perfect location to do the university graduation." Two participants also suggested the smaller

spaces within the venue, including the private suites and presidential suite, could be utilized for smaller food themed events, such as brunches, lunches, dinners, and small private parties. For example, Cathy envisioned entertaining corporate executives or an individual for fundraising purposes by having them “in the suites with the stadium, you know overlooking the stadium and having a little dinner or luncheon, something along those lines.” Mandy offered a similar perspective but added the possibility of hosting smaller conferences within the venue as well. “I could see certain dinners happening...food types of events, you know brunches...uh conferencing I think we could probably use that for a central check in hub and use suites as breakout sessions for smaller conferences...”

Participants also perceived a variety of problems related to using the stadium as an event and meeting venue, including cost, a lack of adequate event space, restrictive policies, and scheduling issues related to athletic department utilization and climate. Megan, a veteran event and meeting planner with thirty years of experience, described the stadium spaces and infrastructure as “bare bones” and indicated it simply “...doesn’t have the facilities you really need...” for hosting meetings. She also perceived the nature of the policies outlining the terms of use of the venue to be too restrictive. “They don’t want you on the field...They don’t even like concerts being held there.” Brittany also communicated a concern about a lack of adequate indoor space, particularly in the event of inclement weather. “If I have 200 people that plan to be on the field for an event, where can they be accommodated if it’s going to rain? I don’t know of any large spaces. Not for 200 people, which is a standard size that wineries are accommodating.” Two

participants also voiced a concern over a perceived policy restriction that outside groups would be required to use the in-house catering department. They felt this particular food and beverage policy would not be a desirable option. Specifically, Cathy was concerned about the limited menu options.

...the problem with using a stadium like that is that, um, they are already contracted in with a certain caterer...So with that you are limited to what you can do...you have to order off their menu. You have to make selections, well, they maybe not what your wanting, depending on your guests and the uh, type of event that you're actually going to have, so it can be limiting.

Finally, three participants suggested the costs associated with utilizing the venue would be too high. When asked about her initial perception about using the stadium for celebratory events, Sarah indicated the location of the venue is great but "it all depends on the budget. Uh, I'm sure it isn't cheap to have it there." While Valerie perceived the use of the stadium for a meeting to be "astronomically expensive", Cathy offered a more detailed description related to costs associated with creating the appropriate event atmosphere.

...unless you have the budget to start putting up drapes, you know, and make it less of an arena...that's where your money starts to add up. Especially there you've gotta pay the venue space and then you have to, um, bring in your tables and your chairs and your linens, and your dishes, and your caterer and floral, you know everything...making it a quaint and nice event, it starts to add up.

Site selection process. The third part of the interview protocol asked participants to describe the process they go through when selecting a host venue for their clients. This question was included to better understand the overall site selection process that independent event professionals undertake when deciding on a host venue. Similar to the question related to participants' initial perception of the venue, the site selection question was open ended to allow responses to reveal emergent data. Themes that emerged across the eight participants suggests the site selection process is client driven and event and meeting planners consider a variety of key selection criteria items outlined in the literature, including client budget and venue costs, venue capacity and layout flexibility, venue aesthetics, origin and transportation needs of attendees, venue technology, attendee lodging options, venue physical infrastructure and services, venue location, venue reputation, and event date. Interestingly, only one participant specifically mentioned conducting a web search of venues and making site visits as part of the site selection process. Also only one participant suggested site selection depended on whether or not the event would be held indoors or outdoors. Finally, one participant mentioned engaging sales representatives by submitting a Request for Proposal (RFP) in order to solicit information from potential host venues.

Sarah's response to the open ended site selection process question indicates that after meeting with the client she conducts a web search of potential venues to gather key information and makes follow up site visits in order to make an informed evaluation that takes into consideration venue cost, capacity, layout flexibility, aesthetics, physical infrastructure, and catering.

Well, first I would meet with the client to see what their needs are...I do research on the website for venues...You can get a listing of the venues that they have, see the dollar amounts and you can do your own research a little further by actually going to some of those sites...you can see the various rooms...you can see the seating capacity and what not...The location...I take that into consideration...how it looks, how clean it is...the flooring, is it carpeting or is it hardwood floors...are there any guidelines on catering and that sort of thing...I will go and take pictures, including the walls, the lighting, the electrical outlets and so forth. The number of washrooms and other accommodations like ramps and elevators.

Valerie also indicated the process of selecting an event site begins with understanding the wants and needs of the client. She provided a list of criteria items she considers during the selection process and suggested venue location was a critical item.

You know the first thing is just sitting down with the client and figuring out the who, what, and where. Umm, which really will narrow down the selection process...where they want to be mostly its geared towards where the majority of their attendees are going to be...Um, so once I have these questions answered then it's really going out and speaking with some national sales reps to choose some locations...I then put together a handy dandy little analysis for them (the client) to select from.

When asked specifically if any other items beyond venue location were important during the site selection process, Valerie stated “Ummm flexibility on space in case we grow or decrease our size and price.”

Ann, who has thirty years experience and normally plans high end social events, also indicated the site selection process she goes through begins with understanding the client and then considers several key venue criteria items, including aesthetics, size, and cost. “Uh, yeah well I ask them (the client) to try and establish their case level and aesthetics. I think that is key right there. The size of the event is also key...and also budget.” When asked to clarify aesthetics she emphasized the beauty of the setting and venue details as well as the presence of natural light and a view.

Perhaps the most detailed response on the site selection process was provided by Brittany, who has twenty-four years of experience planning weddings, private parties, and fundraiser galas and dinners. Specifically, she mentioned taking into consideration the time of year and day of the week for scheduling purposes. Brittany also considers the number of attendees and the vision of the client with respect to the event theme. Other criteria items that factor into the site selection process for her include client budget, attendee transportation needs, and venue restrictions and guidelines.

Cathy’s response to the open ended site selection process question also emphasized the role of the client in the process.

I, you know talk to the clients to find out what type of event they are having...well after having a conversation with them, figuring out what their needs are, what drives them, what’s important to them...you learn a lot just by listening

to them explain um, you know why they're contacting you, what their needs are, and what they need to have accomplished.”

Beyond understanding the wants and needs of the client, she also considers the time of year and climate, whether or not the event is to be indoors or outdoors, venue layout options, client budget, and venue infrastructure (e.g. number of restrooms, adequate kitchen). With respect to time of year and climate Cathy stressed the importance of having a rain plan at the venue if the event is to be held outdoors as well as the need for shade during hot weather.

Perception of key site selection criteria items at the stadium. Each participant was asked to reflect on fifteen key site selection criteria items grounded in the events and meetings literature. The criteria items in this study include overall cost, venue technology, venue layout and flexibility, food and beverage service, location and accessibility, venue reputation, venue quality, safety and security, attractiveness and promotional appeal, ambiance, availability, support services, environmental sustainability, parking, and venue uniqueness and attractiveness. It is important to point out that participants were asked to provide their perspective about each item as it pertained to the specific stadium setting under study as opposed to sports stadiums in general. This allowed for comparative analysis across participant responses that reveal the positioning of the stadium as a potential event and meeting venue from the perspective of potential buyers in the local market.

Cost of venue. Perspectives on the overall cost associated with using the stadium as a site for hosting events and meetings varied. Specifically, four participants perceived

using the venue to be too costly, three participants felt the price point would be on the same level as other event and meeting venues in the local market, and one participant perceived the costs associated with using the stadium as a site for events and meetings to be lower than other local venues. Sarah used the phrase “fairly expensive” when reflecting on the costs associated with the stadium. Her evaluation included costs associated with hiring support staff and liability insurance as well as setup and cleanup fees. Brittany and Sasha also felt that the stadium would be more expensive than other event and meeting venues in the area. However, as Sasha pointed out, the higher cost would not be too high for some clients.

I think it would be in the higher end of the budget but not out of the range of people so that it would be so exclusive...given that there are some exclusive wineries around here I think it would be on a similar level...I think it's on the higher end of the budget.

Cathy was one of three participants who perceived the overall cost of using the stadium to be comparable to other venues in the city region. She offered the following perspective. “I would say it's probably, you know on par. You know here venues go anywhere from thirty-five hundred dollars to thirty-five thousand dollars so...I think it would be affordable.” Although Ann had trouble assessing the cost of the venue because she “didn't think there is anything comparable to it”, her assumption was the venue would be “mid range.” Likewise, Valerie characterized her perception of the overall cost of the stadium as an event and meeting venue as “middle of the road.” She even offered

an estimated daily rate of \$10,000 for turnkey use of the field and a significantly smaller amount for the suite areas within the venue.

Mandy, who plans events for a foundation associated with the university that owns the stadium, was the lone participant that evaluated the overall cost of the venue to be comparably less than other event and meeting venues in the city region.

I know internally as uh, as a constituent of the university this is a much cheaper option...I don't think it would be uh, anything to compare to a vineyard, to compare to you know a place downtown...I think it would be under those places, certainly...As far as the event spaces down below (the stadium) I think...a site premium would be applied to that for outside business. I don't think that the price would be that much...an average vineyard around here is anywhere from twenty to thirty thousand...we'd definitely be on the low end of that.

Technology. With respect to perceptions of available technology at the stadium five participants perceived the venue to have adequate in-house equipment to support their events. While Sarah and Cathy assumed the venue would have a dedicated technical support department to coordinate technology needs, Brittany and Sasha were confident their technological needs would be met and both were excited about the range of possibilities the video board display would offer their clients. Mandy characterized the technology in the stadium to be a “basic setup”. Specifically, she stated the in-house technology could support smaller scale conferencing needs, including overhead projection, standard computer connections, and even special lighting. However, “...anything above that you'd have to contract out, um, bring in an outside company.”

Valerie, Megan, and Ann had a different perspective on available venue technology at the stadium. Valerie, who plans large scale conferences, thought the technology available would be "...geared for what the stadium is and that's football games" and she "would definitely have to bring someone in to handle the technology aspect of the event."

Though Megan had praise for the stadium public address system, her overall perception of the technology at the venue was not positive. "No, they don't have it. They are bare bones stuff." Likewise, Ann "suspected" the stadium would not have adequate technology to support her high end social events, which include private parties and galas as well as corporate focused entertaining events.

Layout and flexibility. Perceptions of venue layout and flexibility varied widely across participants due to the multiplicity of potential event sites within the venue. Six participants suggested the field space itself offered flexibility with respect to layout options for an outdoor event. However, each suggested tents would need to be part of the floor plan due to climatic conditions. While Sarah felt outdoor events could be moved indoors if forced to do so Cathy and Mandy cautioned about the layout flexibility of the indoor spaces and described the private indoor suites and the presidential suite as "limiting" and "restricting" respectively. The exception to this perspective on the indoor spaces was Mandy's familiarity with the football recruiting room on the first floor inside the venue.

...the recruiting room, they have plenty of options down there...there is a built in bar that is not moveable in one part of it but the other part there is a lounge area that can be moved, changed from a lounge to a conference style, to uh, boardroom

style, um, classroom setting, theater style, um it is very flexible on the amount of options that space has.

Megan was the lone participant that offered a negative perception on venue layout and flexibility. As she mentioned earlier in her interview, one of the key site selection criteria items for her is a venue's ability to accommodate fluctuations in the number of guests attending an event. She characterized the stadium's layout flexibility as "bare minimal" and emphasized it does not have options to respond to increases or decreases in event size. Finally, Valerie refrained from offering her perspective on venue layout and flexibility due to not being familiar with the venue. "Honestly I just don't know...for an indoor meeting I don't know what they have."

Food and beverage service. Perceptions on venue food and beverage service were consistently negative across participants. Six characterized the food and beverage service as either "limited", "not desirable", "mediocre", "not sufficient", or "restrictive". Cathy's response summed up the negative perceptions about the venue's catering service.

...it's kind of uh, cookie cutter, if you have to go with that, the run of the mill...you can't bring in the good caterers, which, uh, kind of makes it hard...it's nice to be able to bring in someone who can actually make, you know have a beautiful presentation of the food, and um, for the food to be really good...you're limited with the in-house, um catering that they have to offer.

Only one participant suggested the in-house food and beverage service would be sufficient and one participant refrained from offering a definitive and conclusive perception. Interestingly, the researcher did not ask for opinions on catering policy.

However, six participants included in their response an assumption that they would be required to utilize the in-house food and beverage supplier as a matter of policy. One participant assumed she would be able to select food and beverage service from a list of approved caterers in addition to the in-house caterer.

Location and accessibility. Perceptions of venue location and accessibility were positive across all eight participants. For example, Cathy stated the venue is “right there in the middle of everything...not far from downtown area, you know the heart of it all, so there’s major shopping that’s not far away, um, so there’s a lot around it, hotels, which are always important when you’re doing events.” Also, she and three other participants suggested having the major highways located near the venue was an asset.

...you know there are some larger roads that kind of can feed into you know, nearby um, (the stadium) is close enough to the interstate highway, um a larger by-pass and then you just do a little turn off, it’s pretty close.

While Brittany and Sasha agreed that venue location was great Sasha voiced a specific concern about the accessibility of the venue during certain times of the year. “And some of those roads are even closed during the summer. So if there are less students then there is construction going on.” Brittany also identified a potential drawback with the location of the venue on a university campus. Specifically, she was concerned that problems may arise if students’ attention were drawn to the event while it was happening. “Uh huh and the noise, that is something else you need to think about. So if um, the students saw a wedding going on I might be afraid of what could happen.” Valerie also raised one issue

in regards to venue location. However, her concern was more focused on the isolated nature of the city region in general than the stadium itself.

It depends on where guests are coming from. If everyone is local then I think it is a great location...If the majority of guests have to fly in from out of town as a whole I think the city in general is not a good location.

Reputation. Six of the eight professional event and meeting planners interviewed for this study stated that the stadium either did not have a positive reputation as an event and meeting venue or that it was lacking a reputation as an event and meeting venue. One of the two positive perceptions of venue reputation came from Mandy, who is affiliated with the university through her role as an event planner with a campus foundation. Specifically, Mandy felt the school's overall brand and the uniqueness of the stadium itself boosts the venue's image as a potential site for events and meetings, particularly for clients and guests with a connection to the university. "I think as a, as a venue it is, it is very unique...and I think that anyone with a university connection would *absolutely love* (original emphasis) to uh, you know have something here." Cathy based her positive perception of venue reputation on previous successful experiences with hosting events on the university campus in other venues. "I think they do uh, a great job, and uh they're very accommodating and very helpful so I wouldn't have a problem with that all."

Cathy's perspective was not shared among the other six participants. Sarah, Valerie, and Ann suggested that the stadium's reputation was limited to large outdoor events that require extensive seating arrangements, such as football games or concerts. While Megan's perception was that the stadium simply lacks a reputation as an event and

meeting venue, Brittany expressed a specific concern regarding the amount of “red tape” that would be involved in utilizing the facility. “I think my first impression is there would be a lot of red tape involved, just like it is with the chapel and anything that you do. Do I really want to go through all that red tape?” Sasha communicated a similar perspective with respect to logistical challenges stemming from utilization policies. “There would need to be permits for specific allotments of time as opposed to having the freedom to come in there all day and set up if you need to or stage if you need to, it would be difficult.”

Venue quality. Participant perceptions on the quality of the venue were positive with respect to the staff and the venue as a sports stadium. However, several participants suggested the stadium lacked quality when considering it as a site for events and meetings. For example, Megan suggested the staffing would be good. However, the venue lacks quality and needs “modernization” to support events and meetings. Ann offered a similar perspective with respect to the types of high end social events she plans. “Uh, well, um I mean for a stadium I assume it’s gotta be pretty good but...I’m just not seeing the venue for a high end social event...” Mandy also stated the venue needed modernizing but the quality of the staff would provide a pleasant event experience.

...as far as a state of the art venue it is not, um, but the quality staff that work here, facilities crew, catering staff, you know the event professionals that you would work with are top notch. I think they would make your experience um, very pleasant...it’s not state of the art, you know a brand new facility but it’s still structurally and aesthetically, it’s pleasing enough to make any event special.

Safety and security. All eight participants perceived the safety and security at the stadium setting to be either very good or at a high level. However, Brittany did express some uncertainty about alcohol management for special events at the stadium. “Yeah it would and the thing that they are going to have to get most used to is the bar situation, like for a wedding. It’s going to be a whole different ball game so to speak.”

Uniqueness and promotional appeal. Likewise, all eight participants perceived the stadium to be a unique venue with promotional appeal that clients and guests would be excited about experiencing. Interestingly, the emergent nature of the qualitative data revealed several reasons for this perception from the perspective of the event and meeting planners who participated in this study. For example, Sarah stated guests would be excited about being at the stadium rather than “being cooped in the standard ballroom or a vineyard.” Valerie suggested that most event guests enjoy experiencing venues in ways that deviate from their specific purpose. “I think you know anytime you get a chance to go into a venue that is used for a particular purpose and you get to experience it in a different way then it’s an interesting opportunity for most people.” Megan, Ann, Cathy, and Mandy each communicated they perceived the promotional appeal and attractiveness of the venue to be linked with the identity and brand of the football team itself. Specifically, they felt alumni of the university and fans of the university’s athletic teams would be very interested in attending events at the stadium. Brittany, Cathy, and Mandy also pointed out the exclusive nature of the venue and attending an event at the stadium would be a unique or rare opportunity that would appeal to attendees. For example, Mandy stated “I think it would be cool, um, given the um, exclusivity of the space. I

mean I think a lot of folks would say, oh I have to, you know, it's a rare opportunity that I can be getting into these doors, so I think that's appealing."

Ambience. The perception of the stadium's ambience across the event and meeting planners in this study varied. Specifically, Sarah, Megan, and Ann each perceived the stadium's ambience negatively. While Megan characterized ambience as "non-existent" for events and meetings, both Sarah and Ann stated it would take additional work to "dress-up" the venue to create the appropriate atmosphere.

The participants who stated the ambience was good provided interesting perspectives as to why they perceived the ambience in a positive way. For example, Cathy was optimistic about the idea of incorporating the balcony spaces on the upper level of the stadium as they provide an unobstructed view of the field below for certain types of events.

I would say, hmm, I would say it would be nice depending on which space that you're using and what you're trying to accomplish...you've got the background of the football stadium looking out, you know you can open up the doors and go out on the uh, covered patio, or area to sit and kind of take it in I think it, uh, would be a nice background.

Mandy highlighted the colonial architectural details of the stadium in her response. She emphasized the stadium's ambience was consistent with the university's historical identity and this was an asset for the venue, "...here it sort of falls directly in line of what you would see when you walk out onto the lawn...you're in 1700s colonial times...I think that alone provides a really great ambience."

Availability. With respect to participant perceptions of the stadium's availability for events and meetings, five participants suggested the venue would be difficult to book in the fall during football season. However, they felt there would be opportunities in the spring and summer months to book the venue. For example, Valerie stated "I would think it would be readily available as long as it's not September, October, or November." Similarly, Sarah mentioned she felt availability was good "as long as it's not within the football season." She also added that with the addition of the football team's new indoor practice facility, "the stadium may actually be more available than it used to be." Mandy offered the following perspective:

I think that you know as I mentioned, football season would probably be offline, as are a lot of other facilities, you know grounds are impacted by football season...I think the football season would be off um spring I think there could be some windows of opportunity there...then summer...I think we'd have more opportunity in the summer and spring, uh than anything.

Megan and Ann provided responses that differed from most participants as both assumed the venue was too exclusive to schedule and groups not affiliated with the university would not be permitted access to stadium spaces regardless of the time of year. Brittany offered an interesting perspective, which shifted the blame for the difficulty in booking the venue to an external entity. Although she thought the venue would be vacant and available with the exception of football season, she stated that scheduling the venue would be problematic, not because of utilization by the football team, but rather the

athletic conference's release date of the football schedule did not leave enough lead time for planners to consider the venue as a host site for events.

I mean they (clients) are going to want it in the fall and they can't get it until the football schedule comes out and the (conference) holds everybody hostage until February so you won't get fall dates...The (conference) holds you hostage. It holds the entire industry hostage and the whole town hostage until February for the fall season the same year so you can't book anything in the fall. So that's going to be one of your biggest downfalls.

Support services. Seven of the eight participants in this study perceived adequate support service would be provided for events and meetings held at the stadium. In her response, Sarah identified the support staff she perceived would be on hand to assist with the execution of the event.

I say you would have the police department for staffing, you have their ushers who are there checking on who is suppose to be there...there is staffing that you can use for catering, umm, there is staffing for setup, staffing for cleanup, you have staffing for any A/V setup too.

Megan also highlighted some of the support services that would be available; particularly security and use of the stadium public address system. While Cathy based her positive perception of available support services on previous experiences with using other venues at the university in the past, Mandy, who is employed at the university, referred to her insider's knowledge to provide an informed perspective that suggested planners would have access to adequate security, catering, greeters, facility operations staff, and

audio/visual support. Valerie also indicated adequate support services would be provided at the venue, but qualified her response by stating staff would need to be trained on how to support various types of events differently.

“I think it would have to take a lot of training and a lot of knowledge for support to understand how to support differently for a meeting as opposed to a social event... someone who is picking up trash in the stadium is not going to pick up every little thing during a game... someone who is going to come in and refresh a meeting room during a break they need to do it then, they need to do it efficiently, they need to do it quietly, and the need to do it well. So there would need to be some training on the venue’s part to train staff how to support different venues.

Ann, who has thirty years of experience and plans high end social events and corporate entertaining events, was the lone participant that voiced a concern regarding support staff. Specifically, she stated a need to bring in outside vendors for food and beverage service, greeters, security, and housekeeping support.

Environmental sustainability. In addition to soliciting perceptions of the environmentally sustainable efforts at the stadium, each participant was asked if environmentally sustainable practices were an important site selection criteria item for them personally. Interestingly six of the eight event and meeting planners interviewed in this study indicated environmental sustainability was not an important criteria item they take into account when selecting a host venue for their events. Brittany mentioned that clients occasionally communicate a need to incorporate environmental sustainability into the planning for an event but in general “it’s not a huge thing.” Valerie provided a similar

response. “Umm, it’s not that important, no. I would say it’s pretty far down on my list. You know most places recycle and what not so it’s not really a decision maker.” While Ann acknowledged the emphasis placed on environmental sustainability in the events and meetings industry, she felt it simply was not a feasible goal. “Yeah, I mean people, there’s a buzz word sustainability, that people enjoy to throw out but I’m not sure when push comes to shove that they’re really ready to support that on a large scale event.” Mandy mentioned from a personal perspective that she was concerned about the impact of events and meetings on the environment. However, it does not have much of an influence when she chooses a host venue.

...it’s not something that I would say would make or break my decision to have an event at a certain venue...I think sometimes you’re event purpose can sort of, not necessarily trump being friendly to the environment, and that sounds awful but you know it’s not one hundred percent your main concern at that point I would say.

Sarah, who plans celebratory events for small organizations and individuals, and Cathy, who plans weddings as well as banquets and fundraiser galas, both mentioned basic environmental sustainability practices were important when selecting a venue. However, within their responses, both planners qualified their position by stating that the emphasis on environmental sustainability would either depend on the client or the type of event being planned. Specifically, Sarah mentioned that if environmental sustainability is important to the client, then she would likely emphasize this as part of the planning process in general. Cathy stated, “...for certain events definitely so. It’s something that I

try to be aware of but um, it's sometimes a little more difficult when you're working with other vendors and other people.

With respect to environmental sustainability practices at the stadium in this study, all but one participant perceived basic programs, such as recycling, were being implemented and would be available to support their needs. However, advanced programs such as solar panels and grey water systems used to conserve energy and water were probably not in place. Sasha offered the following perspective. "I think they could accommodate basic things like recycling. Providing bins for glass and plastic recyclables but you know going any farther than that I'm not sure they are equipped beyond that." Cathy was the lone participant whose response was different from this perspective as she refrained from offering her perception about environmental sustainability practices at the stadium due to a lack of knowledge. "I really couldn't tell you...at other venues in town, yes, they're very aware of that and try very hard to do that. I don't know about (the stadium)."

Parking. Parking was perceived to be adequate by six of the eight participants. However, Sarah and Cathy qualified their positive perceptions about parking at the venue. Specifically, Sarah voiced a concern about the additional cost of including parking and parking attendants in the overall budget.

I know for some events you have to purchase parking separately. If you are hosting an event there I'm sure it's going to be a package deal where everything is included but it depends on the type of event you are hosting...they would have to

have staffing out there directing you to where you need to go, so that's another issue you have to take into consideration is staffing for parking.

Cathy pointed out the potential negative impact other events and activities on a university campus would have on the availability of parking for special events at the stadium. "I think there is adequate parking there but it also depends a lot on what's going on at the university umm, but for the most part there should be plenty of parking." Valerie and Megan, both of whom focus their planning efforts on corporate meetings and conferences, were the two participants who had negative perceptions about parking availability. Specifically, they perceived the availability of parking to be "problematic" and "limited" respectively.

Uniqueness. All eight participants felt the stadium was a unique venue that could provide a memorable one of kind experience for clients and attendees. When participants were asked to elaborate on their perceptions, Sarah stated she felt the stadium was different and "it's not the norm plus it would be an original atmosphere that you could create in the stadium...you could have something in the evening, with the lights...There are large screens, audio/visual that you could project, that system would be really great." Cathy emphasized the exclusivity of the space as to why she felt the venue would be a unique and memorable experience for attendees.

There's only one large stadium like that...it definitely provides a one of a kind, and you're not just freely in and out of that space, I mean they keep it locked down, so it's not like you can wander in whenever you would want to...it provides a unique opportunity, you know the first time to go umm, go into the

presidential suite, it'd be a unique experience...or if you were able to have something out on the field, and walk the field I think that would provide a unique experience.

Brittany, Sasha, and Valerie all stated they felt the venue could provide a memorable experience simply because it's "different." Valerie also added the experience would be enhanced for attendees "if they could get a tour of the locker-room or some in and out of the stadium that most of the populace doesn't get to see."

Two participants tempered the positive nature of their responses by stating the experience would be most appreciated by people with some level of identification or connection with the university and that the venue would not have the same effect on individuals with no affiliation. For example, Ann stated the stadium is a unique venue that could provide a memorable experience "if you have a real love for the football team...Someone who has attended the university, or somebody with a love for the university, maybe their kids have gone to the school...I can see it could be fun for a real sports family." Mandy shared a similar perspective and felt upgrades to the in-house audio-visual infrastructure and support services in general would need to be made to make the venue more appealing to clients lacking some affiliation or preference for the university. Finally, Megan suggested that although the venue was unique and could provide a memorable experience for the right client, the planning process would be "a pain in the neck...it would be more trouble than it's worth."

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Implications of Findings

Scholars, particularly historians, have argued that the framing of intercollegiate athletics as an amateur enterprise has been constructed around self serving recollections of the past and in reality intercollegiate athletic programs have been commercial entities since the middle of the nineteenth century (Davies, 2012; Pope, 1995; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Smith, 1993; Smith, 2011; Sperber, 2000). Today, intercollegiate athletic programs and the universities that sponsor them employ an even wider variety of commercial strategies in an effort to offset operational expenditures in pursuit of financial sustainability while simultaneously seeking to capitalize on intangible and tangible by-products of sponsoring competitive sports teams. Like their predecessors, twenty-first century university administrators choose to invest scarce resources in support of ‘big-time’ intercollegiate athletics to achieve notoriety and prestige, financial gifts and favors from alumni, increases in enrollment, and a sense of community (Duderstadt, 2003; Smith, 2011; Yost, 2010). Despite the criticism of intercollegiate athletics (Byers, 1997; Flowers, 2009; Nixon II, 2014; Wertheimer, 2008; Zimbalist, 2001), stakeholders view the commercialization of college sports as vital and believe any restrictions placed on the pursuit of revenue would likely result in the cancellation of most programs (Harrison,

2004). Therefore, it is safe to assume programs are not likely to curtail commercialization strategies in the face of aggressive intercollegiate athletic reform efforts.

Stakeholders of intercollegiate athletics view the commercialization of college sports as vital and believe any restrictions placed on the pursuit of revenue would likely result in the cancellation of most programs (Harrison, 2004). However, despite a commitment to and the implementation of a variety of commercialization strategies and receiving millions of dollars in subsidies, the overwhelming majority of intercollegiate athletic programs accrue annual debts (Brand, 2005; Clotfelter, 2011; Fulks, 2013; Grant, Leadley, & Zygmunt, 2008; Jozsa Jr., 2013; McClellan, King, Rockey Jr., 2012; Yost, 2010). Currently, the main sources of revenue NCAA Division I athletic programs capitalize on include ticket sales, cash contributions by alumni and “others”, funds distributed by the NCAA, royalties, advertising, sponsorships, broadcast rights, concessions, merchandise sales, and allocated revenue (Fulks, 2013; Grant, Leadley, & Zygmunt, 2008). The two main expenditures for a typical Division I athletic department include employee salaries and benefits and grant-in-aid spending (Fulks, 2013; Grant, Leadley, & Zygmunt, 2008). Another significant expenditure for universities and their athletic programs over the past twenty years has been major investments in stadium construction and renovations. This era of capital investment in physical infrastructure improvements has become colloquially known as the ‘facility arms race’ and scholars and administrators have expressed concern over its impact on college athletics (Brand, 2005; Jozsa Jr., 2013; Yost, 2010).

In an effort to offset rising program costs and to maximize their return on investment (ROI) in athletic facilities college athletic departments are increasingly seeking to capitalize on each stadium related revenue stream. This includes leasing out sports facilities, including outdoor stadiums, for a variety of special events year round. It is unclear how much revenue is generated through stadium facility rentals as this data is difficult to access and is likely kept confidential. In fact, there is no line item designated for this type of revenue stream in the annual NCAA report on revenues and expenses (Fulks, 2013). Likewise, textbooks dedicated to intercollegiate athletics management often overlook facility leases as a potential revenue source. Although the literature on the use of professional outdoor stadiums as unique event and meeting venues is developing (Lee, et al., 2012; Lee et al., in press; Kim et al., 2013; Parrish, Lee, & Kim, 2014) the researcher is not aware of any studies focusing on this phenomenon at the intercollegiate level.

This study explored how professional event and meeting planners perceive a college football stadium as potential host sites for their events. A qualitative research design was chosen to gain in depth insights from this influential group of stakeholders. Each of the eight participants selected for inclusion in this study met specific criteria established in advance by the researcher. This was deemed critical to the purpose of the study as it permitted access to rich and meaningful data. Also, it is important to emphasize that the decision to focus participant perceptions on a specific stadium not only provided a boundary for the study, but also enhanced the credibility of findings by

ensuring data were based on the same setting. This allowed for analytical comparisons across participants.

Therefore, each participant in this study can be categorized as a third-party event and meeting planner who routinely make decisions about which sites to use as a host venue in the particular city region under study. Collectively, their professional experience ranged from less than one year to thirty years and included knowledge of planning a wide variety of event types, such as celebratory and social events as well as corporate meetings and conferences. Professional planners employed by one of the many event and meeting venues in the area were not considered for inclusion in this study as the site for the events they plan is pre-determined, hence they do not engage with the site selection process on a regular basis. Though participants in this study possessed varying degrees of familiarity with the venue, each communicated at least a basic awareness of the stadium setting.

The participants based their perceptions on a football stadium located on the campus of an NCAA Football Bowl Series (FBS) level university in a small city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The university itself is large, with an enrollment that slightly exceeds 20,000 students. It has an enduring colonial legacy exemplified through its architecture and branding efforts and is perceived as providing a high quality education. It is consistently ranked among the top ten public universities by *U.S. News* and *Kiplinger* and is recognized nationally as having high academic standards at affordable in-state tuition rates. Although the university's athletic program has won several national championships in multiple non-revenue sports, the football team has not won a national championship and is not considered to be a high profile program.

The city population where the stadium is located is less than 50,000 inhabitants. The Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) of the city region is approximately 200,000 inhabitants. In general, the socio-economic statistics indicate residents are well educated with an above average level of household income. The demographic profile of the city indicates forty-seven percent of city residents fall between 20 and 39 years of age. This suggests a high concentration of young residents. Although branding and reputations vary across universities in the United States, many share similarities with respect to geographical orientation and culture. Specifically, the term ‘college town’ is often used to describe small regional cities with major state universities. This particular city embodies the imagery and culture associated with a ‘college town’ and was recently ranked a ‘Top 20’ college town by the American Institute for Economic Research (Stone, 2013).

With respect to the events and meetings industry, the stadium is ideally located in the city center and is accessible by several major roadways and is surrounded by ample parking. There are numerous commercial and leisure establishments within walking distance from the venue, including a shopping mall, grocery stores, restaurants, coffee shops, theaters, and lodging. Stadium administrators should view the stadium’s orientation positively since central location and accessibility are two factors professional event and meeting planners look for when selecting a venue (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Daniels, Lee, & Cohen, 2012; Del Chiappa, 2013; Elston & Draper, 2012).

The stadium architecture is a concrete U-shaped bowl with an upper deck level and accommodates nearly 65,000 spectators. In addition to the outdoor field area, which

participants in this study indicated could provide a unique setting for a variety of outdoor events, the venue includes numerous indoor spaces that are equipped to support a variety of events and meetings. Specifically, the stadium has fifty-six private suites with amenities and services that could allow them to function as small meeting and seminar rooms, breakout rooms for smaller conferences, or as an intimate celebratory or food themed event space for up to twenty people. Additionally, the stadium features a presidential suite that provides approximately 7,000 square feet and features an open floor plan concept that includes two lounge areas equipped with a permanent bar for beverage service. All fifty-six private suites and the presidential suite offer unobstructed panoramic views of the manicured field below as well as the picturesque surrounding landscape and skyline. Additional potential event and meeting spaces within the venue include climate controlled and carpeted lobby areas on each of the stadium's four floors, an upscale dressing room that features logoed carpeting and an open floor plan concept, and a versatile 4,000 square foot hall of fame room equipped with a full service kitchen. It is important to emphasize that the venue has an exclusive service contract with a nationally recognized food and beverage service provider with the capacity and experience to support a wide variety of special events. Turnkey meeting services, such as an onsite food and beverage service and catering kitchen, is an important criteria item within the site selection literature (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Elston & Draper, 2012), therefore having these available is a major asset that enhances the venue's ability to attract and support events and meetings.

Competitors in the local market. Participants communicated they often considered several event and meeting venues in the local market and the decision to choose one particular venue over another is usually determined by the type of event being planned. For example, participants named specific venues as sites for social events and different venues for meetings or conferences. Specifically, local event and meeting planners consider private estates and wineries located in the countryside for social and celebratory events. Also, they primarily consider two large conference hotels and one university hotel located near the city's downtown area as well as the private estates outside the city for conferences and meeting space. A practical implication of these findings is administrators at the stadium now have a profile of the primary competitors in the local market by event type. This can help determine pricing strategies for the different event spaces within the venue.

Another finding is that professional event and meeting planners do not currently consider the stadium as a host site for their events. This is not surprising given venue administration is not actively soliciting this type of business. An implication of this finding is when stadium administrators begin to pursue market share within the local events and meetings industry they should first strive to create a basic awareness among prospective customers and then focus on marketing efforts to establish positioning and differentiation alongside the vineyards, private estates, and conference hotels participants cited in this study.

Perception of the stadium. A theme that emerged from participants' initial perception of the stadium as an event and meeting venue is that it is conceptualized as a

site for large outdoor events, including concerts, festivals, graduation ceremonies, viewing parties, sporting events, corporate social outings and tradeshow. Only two participants, both of whom indicated a high level of familiarity with the venue, communicated the possibility of successfully utilizing the interior spaces of the stadium for events and meetings. Specifically, they suggested the stadium could accommodate a variety of food themed events, such as brunches, lunches, dinners, banquets, and private parties, as well as conferencing in their initial perception of the venue. These findings indicate the venue is not currently perceived as a suitable site for smaller social events and business meetings among the majority of participants in this study. Specifically, six of the eight participants considered the possibility of planning events on the field in isolation of the other many possible event spaces available throughout the venue. It is highly likely that the two participants that did conceptualize utilizing the interior spaces did so due to their knowledge of these spaces.

The implications of this finding for stadium administrators is that the venue is not currently positioned well in the minds of prospective clients lacking in depth knowledge of the interior parts of the stadium with respect to the types of events and meetings it can accommodate. As outlined earlier in the chapter and elaborated on in chapter three, there are ample event and meeting spaces throughout the venue as well as key features and services that are considered important criteria items in the site selection process, such as catering (Daniels, Lee, & Cohen, 2012; Elston & Draper, 2012; Fawzy, 2008) and technology (Comas & Moscardo, 2005). Having these key items mean the venue could support a much broader array of event types than most participants initially perceived.

Specifically, the hall of fame room and presidential suite could accommodate events up to 150 and 200 people respectively. Also the private suites, lobby areas and corridors, and home team dressing room could be presented to planners as additional unique indoor event spaces that could be used as either the main assembly point for smaller events or as supplemental spaces in support of larger events based in the hall of fame room or presidential suite. Stadium administrators should consider strategies to educate local event and meeting planners about the possibility of utilizing these inconspicuous interior spaces within the stadium for events and meetings. This can be achieved through direct marketing efforts as well as coordinating personalized local FAM (familiarization) tours (Barnhill, 2011) or an industry specific ‘open house’ event. Direct marketing efforts and site tours offer stadium administrators a valuable opportunity to use visualization strategies that showcase the versatility of the various spaces located throughout the stadium while also emphasizing the variety of events these spaces can accommodate.

Process of selecting a host venue. Another theme that emerged from this study is the site selection process for independent event and meeting planners is client driven and involves an evaluation of venue features and services deemed important by the planner. Although all participants in this study indicated they have the capacity to make site selection decisions on behalf of their clients, none did so without first gaining an in depth understanding of the client’s needs, objectives, and vision for the event. This process shares similarities to the findings presented by Comas & Moscardo (2005), who indicated association planners’ site selection involves formal feedback from association members and input from committees formed to organize conferences. Though the clients of the

third-party planners in this study may not necessarily ‘vote’ on the site they do wield influence.

Once planners and the client developed a mutual understanding of the variables guiding the vision of the event, planners typically make informed suggestions or recommendations to the client as to which local site would best accommodate the event based on specific venue criteria. Specifically, common criteria participants cited as important in this particular study include budget and venue cost, venue capacity and layout flexibility, venue aesthetics, transportation needs of guests, venue technology, lodging options, venue physical infrastructure and services, venue location, and venue reputation. Surprisingly, web searches of venues, site visits of venues, and request for proposal (RFP) inquiries were not common elements of the site selection process for the participants in this study.

An implication of these findings for stadium administrators is that marketing and advertising efforts must consider and target the potential end users in addition to event and meeting planners as the end user has a voice in the site selection process. One way to achieve this objective is to include key stakeholders of local corporations and organizations in the marketing mix. For example, local business owners should be exposed to the idea of hosting company holiday parties and employee recognition ceremonies at the venue. Board members of local foundations and non-profit organizations should be delivered marketing materials that advertise the stadium as an ideal venue that could accommodate fundraiser events such as banquet dinners and silent auctions. The target marketing possibilities are numerous. However, what needs to be

made explicit based on the emergent data from this study is that stadium administrators should extend their marketing efforts beyond communicating with event and meeting planners and include strategies to identify and engage the local event and meeting planner clientele. Also, since not every event is planned by a professional event and meeting planner, the extension of marketing communications to the broader public could be designed to engage individuals and civic organizations who may be organizing events on their own and without planning services of professional planners, such as church groups and small companies who rely on volunteers or employees respectively to coordinate events.

Another implication of these findings relates to the emergent criteria items event and meeting planners in this study identified as part of their site selection evaluation process. Specifically, the site selection criteria items consistently cited across the eight participants include capacity and layout flexibility of the venue, site location, venue cost, and quality food and beverage service. Stadium administrators should incorporate ways to emphasize each of these criteria items within their marketing mix and branding strategies as each of these are considered very important items influencing decisions to select purpose built venues (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Del Chiappa, 2013; Elston & Draper, 2012) and unique event venues (Daniels, Lee, & Cohen, 2012; Fawzy, 2008). This will make the information planners in the local market consider most important explicit and readily accessible.

Finally, although web searches and the use of an RFP was only mentioned by one participant in this study, a well designed website and an online RFP form are critical tools

host sites use to communicate with prospective event and meeting planners. Using interactive elements of communication technology, such as an electronic RFP, provide advantages over manual systems, including efficient use of information, reducing human error, operational consistency, improved data security, increase market reach, ability to update information quickly, and reduce marketing expenses (Goldblatt, 2011). Therefore, stadium administrators are encouraged to develop an interactive web-based platform designed to target and communicate relevant information to event and meeting planners and their clientele.

Perception of key site selection criteria. Participants were asked to evaluate the stadium as a potential host site for events and meetings in consideration of fifteen key site selection attributes grounded in the literature. Perceptions of the overall cost of using the venue, available technology, layout flexibility, venue quality, and ambience varied widely across participants. However, there was consistency in perceptions across the remaining criteria items. Specifically, participants perceived food and beverage service at the stadium and reputation as an event and meeting venue negatively. Perceptions of venue location and accessibility, safety and security, promotional appeal and attractiveness, availability, support services, environmental sustainability, parking, and uniqueness were consistently positive across the eight participants.

One implication of these findings is stadium administrators should address the perceived operational shortcomings and construct marketing and promotional efforts to mitigate the negative perceptions of the venue as cited by the participants in this study. Specifically, the food and beverage service provider, which stands to benefit financially

from any increase in the number of events held at the venue, should be viewed as a partner in future endeavors to attract business to the stadium. It should be noted that the food and beverage service provider that is contracted at the stadium in this study provides service for a variety of events at many large event and meeting facilities across the country, including conference hotels and convention centers. The provider also operates over one hundred event and meeting facilities and employs over 200,000 event and meeting professionals, including planners and support staff. Therefore, this particular food and beverage provider has the resources and industry expertise required to meet the needs and expectations of event and meeting planners. Since participants consistently felt the menu and quality of food were not desirable or limited and this is one of the most important criteria items factoring into the site selection process (Del Chiappa, 2013; Elston & Draper, 2012; Fawzy, 2008), stadium administrators should consider consulting and strategizing with the in-house catering company at the corporate level about ways to enhance the quality and selection of menu items. Also, it is also worth noting that none of the participants in this study had planned or coordinated an event at the stadium and only one participant had experience coordinating an event at a sports stadium in the past. Therefore, participants may have based their evaluations of food and beverage service at the stadium on previous personal experiences at sporting events and were not fully aware that the in-house caterer has the capacity to provide menu options beyond the typical ballpark fare (hotdogs, pretzels, etc.). Therefore, efforts to enhance the quality and variety of menu options in isolation of promoting these improvements would likely not alter planner perceptions. Stadium administrators should incorporate ways to showcase

their menu options available on non-game days to mitigate negative food and beverage perceptions resulting from lack of knowledge. One simple strategy would be to host an exclusive annual or bi-annual tasting event for event and meeting planners to provide these influential decision makers an opportunity to experience the various menu items first hand.

Although the stadium had a positive reputation as a sports facility and concert venue it was not perceived as a reputable event and meeting venue. To state the obvious, this was due to the venue not having a history of actively soliciting business from local event and meeting planners. As venue reputation has been found to be an important site selection criteria item in multiple studies (DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf, & Godlewska, 2008, Fawzy, 2008; Rompf, Breiter, & Severt, 2008), stadium administrators should seek traditional and creative ways to publicize the occasions when the stadium hosts events outside of sports and concerts to construct a reputation as an event and meeting venue. For example, one subtle strategy would be to coordinate the production of professional wedding announcements in local wedding magazines and newspapers for couples planning their ceremony at the stadium. Another strategy would be to coordinate press releases on behalf of nonprofit organizations that use the stadium and desire publicity. These activities are mutually beneficial as the end users would receive a service and the stadium's reputation as a versatile event venue would be enhanced by ensuring individuals outside of those in attendance are aware of the occasion.

The participants in this study had positive perceptions regarding eight of the fifteen site selection criteria items. Specifically, the event and meeting planners in this

study indicated the downtown venue location and accessibility was advantageous, safety and security on the university campus in general and at the stadium in particular is excellent, the venue would be appealing to guests hence it is likely events at the venue would be well attended, and the venue would be readily available outside of football season. Also, most participants stated adequate support services were perceived to be in place and there is ample on-site parking available.

Two criteria items perceived positively by event and meeting planners in need of elaboration include environmental sustainability and uniqueness. Surprisingly, all eight participants in this study stated that venue environmental sustainability efforts are not a deciding factor in the site selection process. Although they assumed basic environmental practices, such as recycling, were being implemented at the stadium this was not typically an area of concern for clients. This finding contradicts a quantitative study conducted by Draper, Dawson, and Casey (2011) as they indicated this particular site selection criteria item was rated highest in importance for third party event and meeting planners in comparison to association and corporate planners. A possible explanation of this contradiction may be contextual in nature and point to differing local attitudes towards sustainability. However, Elston and Draper (2012) point out more research on the influence of venue environmental sustainability practices on the site selection process is needed. Therefore, stadium administrators should use the findings of this particular study with caution. With respect to uniqueness, participants unanimously agreed the venue was unique and it would provide a memorable experience for clients and attendees, particularly those with some connection or identification with the university or the

football team. As event and meeting planners are increasingly seeking unique host venues, including entertainment sites such as race tracks and sports stadiums (Whitfield, 2009), stadium administrators at the university should emphasize this intangible feature in branding efforts, such as position statements and promotional slogans. Many professional stadiums with market share in the events and meetings industry use this strategy to highlight venue uniqueness. For example, to attract corporate and social events, Yankee Stadium claims to offer clients a “one-of-a-kind experience” while the special events department of the Washington Redskins frames FedEx Field as a venue that provides event and meeting guests with “the most memorable experience ever.” Finally, the participants in this study suggested the unique experience would be enhanced by incorporating access to exclusive behind the scenes spaces not typically accessible to the public. The qualitative study by Lee et al. (in press) also found that planners perceive these types of unique features and services at professional stadiums positively and the authors suggest incorporating the use of stadium video display boards, stadium tours, and player and mascot appearances into the event experience to satisfy clients and differentiate the stadium from traditional event and meeting venues. Therefore, stadium administrators should consider offering stadium tours that include access to the team’s dressing room, an opportunity to walk onto the field in the same manner players do on game day, mascot and former player appearances, and a visit to the private suites and press box to allow attendees to experience a rare perspective they would not have had otherwise.

Although event and meeting planner perceptions varied with respect to cost, technology, venue layout and flexibility, and venue quality, it is possible to derive useful perspectives from research findings to guide practice. For example, while participants did not consistently rate the stadium highly with respect to quality, they did indicate staffing at the venue was high quality. Stadium administrators should capitalize on this asset by emphasizing the professionalism of support staff, particularly with association planners, as this has been rated the most important site selection criteria item by this type of planner (DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf & Godlewska, 2008). Also, venue technology was assessed to be basic but adequate by five participants while three indicated they would need to bring in an external vendor to provide technology expertise. Conceptually, this barrier should be relatively easy to mitigate by simply providing a list of local vendors specializing in event technology support service to prospective clients in the event the in-house systems are deemed insufficient. Finally, the variance in perceptions on cost and venue layout and flexibility is believed to be largely based on participants' insufficient knowledge of the stadium and the price structure of spaces in sports stadiums in general. This is consistent with the study of professional stadiums by Lee, Parrish, and Kim (in press) and the authors suggest making a detailed cost structure of the various spaces throughout the venue explicit as this is not only a critical factor influencing the selection of host venues (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Daniels, Lee, & Cohen, 2012; Rompf, Breiter, & Severt, 2008) but it has also been rated the number one site selection criteria item for corporate planners (DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf, & Godlewska, (2008). Also, it is suggested stadium administrators provide visual floor plan

schematics in both hard copy and web-based promotional materials to allow planners to visualize or conceptually map the various floor plan options for the specific event they are planning.

Concluding Remarks

In consideration of the findings from this study, knowledge of the site selection literature, and industry experience, the researcher believes once the negative perception of reputation as an event venue is mitigated the stadium is well positioned to gain market share in the local events and meetings industry. Specifically, the outdoor field space is a unique site that would attract wedding clients; particularly those with some connection to the university (e.g. alumni) desiring a memorable wedding experience. The presidential suite is a unique site with panoramic views that could support a variety of upscale socials and corporate functions, such as networking cocktail receptions, wedding receptions, fundraiser galas, product launches, sales seminars, and employee recognition/awards banquets. The home team dressing room would provide a unique yet appropriate atmosphere for corporate team building exercises and, with direct access to the outdoor playing surface from the dressing room, the field itself could be incorporated into the logistical plan for team building activities. The possibilities for the hall of fame room on the first level of the venue are restricted only by its capacity of 200 people. This particular site within the venue provides ample assembly space that could be set up in theater, conference, classroom, and banquet style floor plans. Further, it includes an adjacent social area with kitchen for food and beverage service, which could be provided by the contracted onsite caterer. When considering the various spaces in support of each

other the venue could accommodate small conferences. For example, the interior first floor lobby is centrally located and provides ample space that could serve as the check-in hub, the hall of fame room would be ideal for opening and keynote sessions, the hall of fame's social area would be ideal for coffee breaks and cocktail receptions, the private suites are ideal for breakout sessions, and with picturesque panoramic views and upscale décor the presidential suite would be an excellent location for a closing banquet. All of the above hypothetical event scenarios could be enhanced by adding tailored messages for attendees on the state-of-the-art video board display, mascot and guest appearances by iconic figures in the athletic department's history (e.g. famous coach, a former player that advanced into the professional ranks, etc.), and stadium tours to provide guests with a one-of-a-kind behind the scenes perspective of exclusive venue spaces that are normally off limits to the public.

Stadium administrators should consider partnering with local convention hotels and conference centers, particularly the nearby university owned conference hotel. They should also engage the many on-campus organizations, associations, and foundations with respect to hosting the various meetings each organizes on a recurring basis. On the occasion prospective planners deem the stadium insufficient for their needs and they elect to utilize the typical sites for their events and meetings, the stadium could serve as an alternative supplemental venue for offsite functions. This practice is occurring in professional venues elsewhere. For example, the 2012 Meeting Planners International (MPI) World Education Conference (WEC) used Busch Stadium, home of the St. Louis Cardinals, as a supplemental reception site in 2012. Also, the North American Society for

Sport Management's (NASSM) annual conference incorporated the use of Heinz Field, home of the Pittsburgh Steelers, as a banquet venue in 2014. However, administrators are not encouraged to settle on developing a reputation for being a supplemental offsite venue. The findings from this study suggest the stadium possesses many of the required site selection features and services planners deem important when selecting a primary host venue and the participants interviewed indicated positive perceptions about most of these items. Although participants also communicated deficiencies, the researcher believes many of these negative perceptions were likely due to lack of knowledge.

Suggestions for future research

In consideration of findings from this study the following suggestions for future research are recommended:

The first recommendation is to broaden qualitative insights into perceptions of college football stadiums as event and meeting venues by 'replicating' the methodology used in this study at both similar and dissimilar settings. This would provide a more holistic account of the general phenomenon as researchers could compare findings to reveal any potential differences in perceptions at rural and urban settings, at large, mid-size, and small universities, at stadiums hosting popular championship teams and those where teams are not a focal point of the local community and so forth. Researchers could also use data as the basis for the generation of local theories. Additional 'replication' of methods could be employed to explore baseball stadiums, tennis stadiums, golf courses, indoor arenas, racetracks, and other sport specific facilities.

Another recommendation is to develop a quantitative instrument or adapt the instrument used by Fawzy (2008) to evaluate which site criteria items are most important to prospective event and meeting planners nationwide with respect to stadiums as event venues. This would reveal which items stadium administrators should focus on when constructing new or renovating existing stadium infrastructure. Conceptually, providing and tailoring the site selection items deemed most important by planners would increase the likelihood prospective clients would choose a stadium as an event venue.

Phillips and Geddie (2005) explored planner intent to use a cruise ship as a host site for meetings. It is also of great interest to the researcher to explore future intent to use outdoor college football stadiums as event and meeting venues. A quantitative instrument should be developed, or adapted from previous studies, to test future intent among professional event and meeting planners. This approach lends itself to the introduction of moderating variables influencing site selection at stadiums, including event planner type, geography (urban or rural), planner experience, planners' sport involvement and so forth. Theoretical constructs, such as consumer choice theory (e.g. utility, hedonism) could also be introduced into the model to test and perhaps advance the application of existing theory within the site selection literature.

Up until this point, research suggestions have assumed a lack of planner experience with the use of stadiums as event venues. As the use of stadiums becomes more common, studies should be designed to explore past experiences of planners and attendees with respect to overall satisfaction. This would reveal the specific areas

stadiums should consider improving in order to attract new and retain existing event and meeting customers.

Two planners in this study indicated they perceived the stadium's attractiveness would hinge on how well the team was doing at the time the site selection decision was made. The degree to which team success influences desirability of using a particular sports venue is an interesting area of study for researchers to investigate in the future.

Finally, the concept of topophilia may also be a factor influencing the attractiveness of stadiums as event and meeting venues for some clients and planners. Researchers should seek ways to operationalize this particular affective human emotion, which Tuan (1974) believes enhances the meaning of public spaces. Once the concept is operationalized and validated researchers should test its influence on the attractiveness of sports facilities as event and meeting venues. Though sport geographer John Bale (1994) did not empirically test topophilia he, as well as sociologist Richard Giuliannati (1999), have suggested stadiums are topophilic places with embedded meanings for those who experience them. Specifically, they suggest an intense psychosocial relationship exists between stadiums and people and it is this relationship, along with an appreciation for history and nostalgia, which explains the affective appeal sports venues (old or new) have for people around the world. Anecdotally, professional stadiums with high topophilic value include: Fenway Park in Boston, Massachusetts; Wrigley Field in Chicago, Illinois; and Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin among others. College stadiums that may also possess this affective quality for potential event and meeting clients and attendees

include: Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Notre Dame Stadium in South Bend, Indiana; and Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

APPENDIX A

Phone solicitation script for prospective participants:

Good afternoon I am trying to reach (Participant Name)_____. Is he/she available?

Hi and good morning/afternoon. My name is Charles Parrish. I am a PhD student at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA and I am conducting a research study on the perceptions event customers have of the University of Argile's football stadium (Alumni Stadium) as a potential site for social and corporate events. I understand you have experience in planning events and will likely have valuable insights on the topic. I would like to respectfully ask if you would be willing to agree to a brief interview at a later date and time of your convenience. The interview will consist of approximately 15 brief questions about your role in planning events in the Argile area as well as your perception of the stadium as a potential site for hosting events.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you again soon.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to understand prospective special event customer perceptions of Alumni Stadium as an event venue. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of open-ended interview questions at a time of mutual convenience. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further understanding of the site selection attributes of Alumni Stadium as an event venue.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Your name will not appear alongside any collected data and a pseudonym will be used in place of your name in any written reports. Only the researcher will know your identity. This interview will be recorded for transcription purposes only. You may choose not to have any part of or the entire interview recorded. Only the researcher will have access to the recorded data. All recorded data will be erased following the completion of transcription of the interview.

_____ I agree to audio taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio taping.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Charles Parrish (PhD candidate) and Dr. David K. Wiggins (Professor) at George Mason University. Charles may be reached at 504-999-0000 or cparrish@masonlive.gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. Dr. Wiggins may be reached at 777-999-2222 or dwiggin1@gmu.edu. You

may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

Name

Date of Signature

APPENDIX C

Semi-structured Interview Guide Prospective event customers' perceptions of Alumni Stadium as an event venue

A) Participant Background Information

QA1: How long have you worked as an event professional?

Probe: How many events would you say you have coordinated or helped coordinate in the past?

If not an event professional then;

QA1: Please describe your full time employment?

Probe: How many events would you say you have coordinated or helped coordinate in the past? (non event professionals skip to *QA3*)

QA2: Please describe your role as an event planner. What exactly do you do?

Possible Probe: Do you work as part of a larger event planning company/team or are you an independent planner?

Possible Probe: Please describe the event planning company/team that you work with.

QA3: What are some of the types of events you have planned/coordinated in the past?

Possible Probe: Which types of events do you typically plan or coordinate?

QA4: When planning a function, what are some of the venues in the Argyle area you would consider using?

Possible Probe: Why these particular venues?

QA5: How many times have you visited UA's Alumni Stadium? For what purpose and when?

QA6: Based on your knowledge of Alumni Stadium, what is your perception of it as a potential event venue?

Possible Probe: Would this venue better serve certain types of events? Why?

Possible Probe: Would this venue better serve certain types of clients? Why?

B) Site selection process

QBI: Please take me through the process that you normally engage in when making a decision on a venue for an event.

Possible Probe: Are there other people involved in making the final site decision? (such as co-workers or clients)

Possible Probe: Would you characterize your site selection authority as compiling a short list of venues for a committee/group to choose from or do you have the capacity to make the site selection on your own?

QB2: What are the most important criteria (features and services) you look for in a host venue?

Possible Probe: Why these particular items?

C) Perception of site/venue criteria (constructs drawn from the literature)

QC1: What is your perception of the overall costs associated with using Alumni Stadium?

Possible Probe: How does this compare with other event venues in the area?

Possible Probe: What is your perception of the overall value of the stadium as an event venue?

QC2: What is your perception of the technology available in Alumni Stadium?

QC3: What do you think about the capacity/size of event space(s)?

Probe: What do you think about the layout/flexibility of the venue?

QC4: What is your perception of the food/beverage service available at Alumni Stadium?

QC5: What do you think about the location and accessibility of Alumni Stadium for events?

QC6: Do you perceive Alumni Stadium as having a favorable or unfavorable reputation as a site for hosting events?

Probe: Why?

QC7: With respect to the quality of the venue, how does Alumni Stadium compare to the other venues in the area?

QC8: What is your perception of the safety and security of Alumni Stadium?

Possible Probe: Why?

QC9: What is your perception of the promotional appeal/attractiveness of Alumni Stadium with respect to clients and event attendees?

Probe: Do you think clients or guests would be more or less excited about having an event at the venue? Why?

QC10: From your perspective, does Alumni Stadium have a favorable or unfavorable ambience?

Probe: Why?

QC11: If you were considering using Alumni Stadium as an event venue would you perceive venue availability to be problematic or advantageous?

QC12: What is your perception of the event support services available at Alumni Stadium?

QC13: Are environmental sustainability practices important for you when selecting an event site?

Probe: If so, which ones?

Probe: What is your perception of environmental sustainability practices at Alumni Stadium?

QC14: Do you consider parking at Alumni Stadium to be an asset or would it be problematic?

Probe: Why?

QC15: Do you perceive Alumni Stadium as a unique venue that could provide a one-of-a-kind experience for clients/attendees?

Probe: Why/Why not?

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