

# Identifying Coach and Institutional Characteristics that facilitate the development of NCAA wheelchair basketball programs

**Emily Rutland**  
Yale University

## BACKGROUND

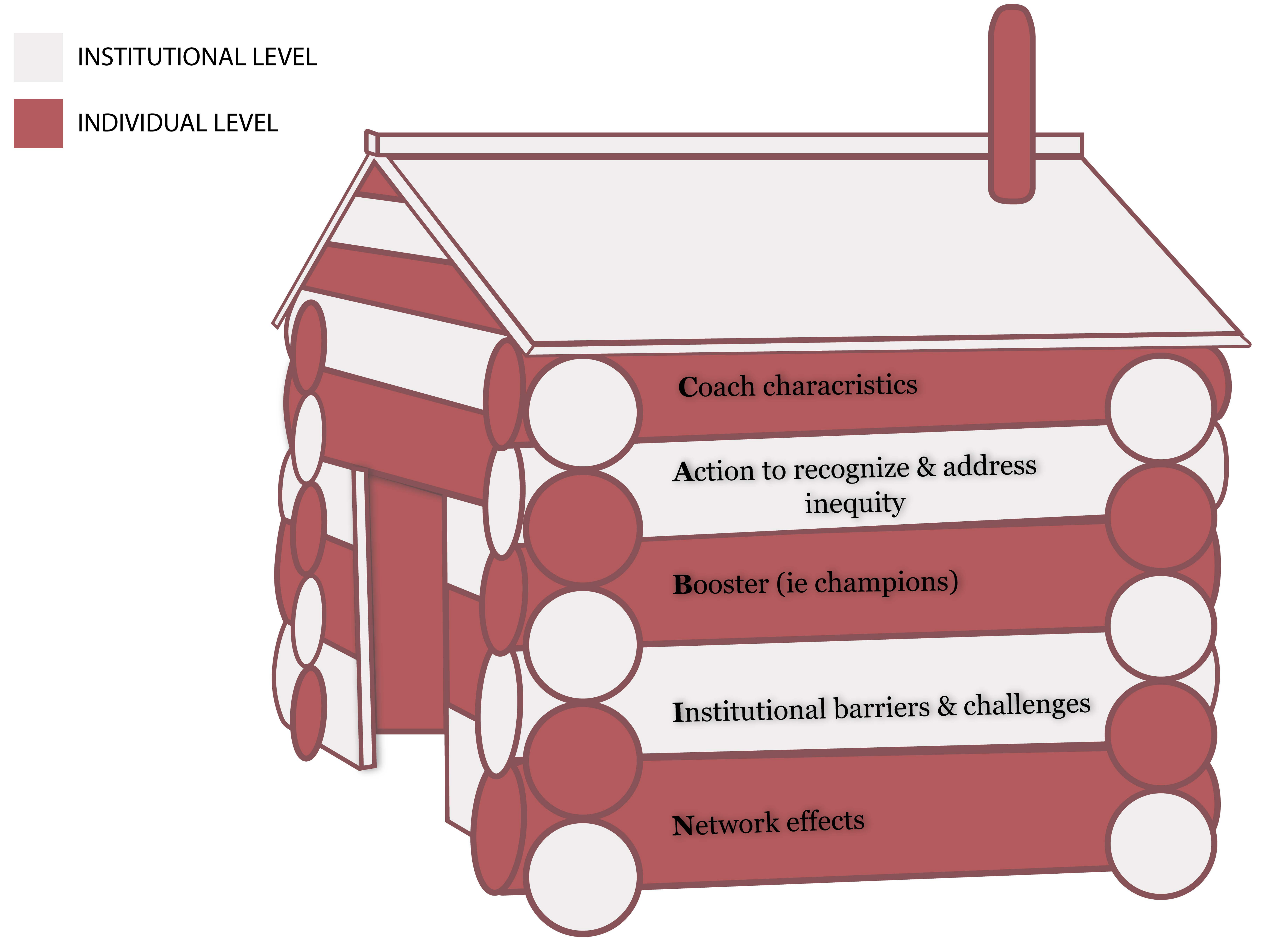
Despite national and institutional policies, American colleges do not currently provide student-athletes with disabilities equal access to sports opportunities. Disabled youth who wish to pursue their academic and athletic dreams in college thus have prohibitively limited options, even with popular American sports such as basketball.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics and factors that may facilitate the development and perpetuation of collegiate wheelchair basketball (WB) programs in the United States.

## RESULTS

Thematic data analysis uncovered five common themes important to the development and maintenance of these programs: a) coach characteristics, b) actions to recognize and address equity, c) boosters, d) institutional barriers, and e) network effects.



## CALL TO ACTION

While sport industry practitioners, specifically collegiate athletic and campus recreation leaders, should consider this study’s findings when developing WB programs, it is also important to acknowledge the steep power imbalances between player-facing employees at individual schools, who are invested in the success of the student-athletes but juggle demanding daily schedules (i.e., coaches, administrators), and national-level sports governing bodies (i.e., NCAA). Due to the enormous heterogeneity in the social and sports culture at American colleges, individual coaches and affiliate supporters of WB programs cannot—and should not be expected to—turn the tide on their own. Self-perpetuating disparities between non-disabled basketball and WB programs cannot be overcome from the bottom of the power structure. Self-identified champions for collegiate WB programs must courageously step forward from among the most powerful groups in American college sports. If leaders were to explicitly prioritize WB, offer persistent and tangible support to WB, including systems-level budgetary allocations, then year-over-year growth can be expected in American collegiate WB. The growth of college WB will diversify and expand the culture, climate, and participants in American basketball, which will allow American basketball (inclusively defined) to better reflect the diversity of America itself.