

# A Perception of Revenue-Generation Strategies in HBCU Athletic Departments

Kelly Elliott and Tyler A. Williams

This study focuses on the perception of revenue generation among Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) athletic departments. Specifically, the study aimed to investigate perceptions of revenue-generation strategies in NCAA Division II HBCU athletic departments. To gather this information, participants with experience working with HBCUs were interviewed to obtain a better understanding of the current landscape of revenue-generation strategies as well as challenges. Participants took part in semi-structured interviews. Results indicated there are opportunities for HBCU athletic departments to generate revenue, but staffing may pose a challenge. This study will help athletic administrators understand current revenue generation at HBCUs and offers possible strategies athletic administrators can use to increase revenue generation with an understanding of limited resources.

Keywords: HBCU, revenue, collegiate athletics, administration, fundraising

## Introduction

Recent data from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) between 2017 and 2019 underscores the prominence of Division II (DII) Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in leading football attendance numbers (NCAA, n.d.), with the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC) leading DII attendance during that period. Moreover, DII HBCU basketball success has translated into substantial economic impacts, as seen with the DII Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) conference generating \$43.7 million in economic activity for Charlotte in 2019, surpassing even the ACC Basketball Tournament by \$7.1 million (CIAA, 2019). However, despite

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Kelly Elliott, PhD, is an assistant professor of recreation and sport management in the Conway Medical Center College of Health and Human Performance at Coastal Carolina University. Her research interests focus on intercollegiate athletics specifically addressing organizational behavior, policy, and leadership. Email: [kelliott@coastal.edu](mailto:kelliott@coastal.edu)

Tyler A. Williams, MS, is a doctoral student in the Department of Kinesiology and Health with a concentration in sport administration at Georgia State University. Her research interests include small college athletics, HBCUs, sport communication, and women in sport. Email: [twilliams305@student.gsu.edu](mailto:twilliams305@student.gsu.edu)

these achievements, HBCU athletic departments rely on external funding as they struggle to generate sufficient revenue to cover expenses (Berkowitz, 2013; Zimbalist, 2023). According to Kim and colleagues (2019), DII schools struggle to generate significant funds. While previous research highlights gate receipts as a revenue driver (McEvoy et al., 2013), further exploration of tailored revenue-generation strategies for HBCUs is necessary. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore athletic administrator perceptions of revenue-generation strategies used by DII HBCUs and to assess strategies that may help HBCU athletic administrators working to increase revenue generation. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What revenue streams are HBCU athletic departments using to generate revenue?
2. What challenges may prevent HBCU athletic departments from generating additional revenue?
3. What innovative solutions may help HBCU athletic administrators find additional revenue streams?

## Review of Literature

Athletic revenue-generation strategies that are present across DII HBCUs include donations, fundraising, sponsorships, and partnerships. This section includes a review of literature related to these athletic revenue-generation strategies.

### Donations

Beaty and Ma (2023) suggested that HBCUs, which had experienced a decline in foundation giving and were previously overlooked, have seen a resurgence in donations, particularly from corporations and corporate foundations. This increase in philanthropic support is attributed to HBCUs' demonstrated return on investment in student advancement and advocacy from their Black employees. An example of this would be L. Gale Lemerand's \$1.4 million donation to Bethune-Cookman University's football program and the university community as a whole (Bethune Cookman University, 2024). The donor stated,

When there [are] problems in any organization, whether it's a college or whether it's a business organization, there's a lot of publicity about that. But there's very little publicity when things start to turn around through the hard work of the current executives of this and the management of this great university.

Additionally, Daughtrey and Stotlar (2000) found that successful athletic seasons can positively influence athletic donations. Although this may still be relevant, this was not the case for Bethune Cookman, which went 3-8 during the

2023 season, prior to receiving the donation the subsequent year. Stinson and Howard's (2010) research indicate that donors often start with transactional motivations, such as ticket benefits, before transitioning to more philanthropic giving. Stewart's (2012) study focusing on DII athletics suggests that championships can boost cash donations and donor numbers. This can be inferred with the \$1 million donation from Charles Barkley to Miles College in 2020 (Kim, 2020), one year after they won the SIAC football championship in 2019. However, Rowell's (2016) study challenges the notion that on-field success directly correlates with increased giving, particularly in DII programs, which shows a need for further investigation on the topic. This study aligns with Kim and colleagues' (2019) call for more investigation into philanthropy within DII institutions.

Previous research has noted challenges with alumni giving (Gasman 2010; Stuart, 2017). Most research on HBCU student and alumni giving relies on qualitative interviews, with a few surveys that often have small samples. For instance, Cohen (2006) surveyed 1,000 alumni from four HBCUs, but the 12% response rate indicated low engagement and potential bias from responders who held their alma maters in high regard while expressing concerns about their institutions' finances. Hunter et al. (1999) and Drezner (2010) engaged in qualitative interviews with HBCU alumni and current students, respectively, to explore their donation behaviors and future intentions. Despite the limited number of interviews in both studies, they emphasize the significance of educating individuals about philanthropy as a key strategy for boosting alumni donations at HBCUs.

Moreover, private donor contributions and fundraising initiatives have played a pivotal role in bolstering HBCU athletic budgets (Carter, 2016). One potential avenue for success for HBCU athletic departments is active participation in social media campaigns such as "Giving Tuesdays." By actively engaging in Giving Tuesday campaign on social media as suggested by Kim and colleagues (2019), HBCU athletic departments can tap into the collective goodwill and generosity of individuals who value the unique contributions of HBCUs to the sports landscape. In 2023, schools like Claflin University, known for its high alumni giving percentage (Claflin University, 2023a), participated in the international social media campaign with the goal of raising \$50,000 or more in one day (Claflin University, 2023b). Such campaigns provide potential donors with real-time updates on fundraising progress toward the overarching goal, offering a beneficial approach for institutions with limited resources. Another potential avenue of success is the use of technology like apps, specifically for giving. Gasman (2021) highlighted a spare change technology app called I Heart My HBCU, a mobile app that allows people to donate their spare change to HBCUs, founded by Howard University alumnus Dominique King, who recently partnered with Xavier University of Louisiana. "Through the partnership with the I Heart My

HBCU app, Xavier students, alumni, and friends will be able to connect and raise funds to support scholarships, academic programs, campus enhancements, and the institution's endowment" (Gasman, 2021). With this in mind, the future success of HBCUs hinges on their ability to secure funding from alumni and involve them in philanthropy (Cohen, 2006).

## Sponsorships and Partnerships

HBCUs have a loyal and influential fanbase that drives positive word-of-mouth for sponsors through strong brand awareness, goodwill, and trust (Elliott et al., 2018). Early research indicates HBCU fans are psychologically involved with their teams (Armstrong, 2002) and attend games for entertainment (Armstrong, 2001). Corporate sponsorships and partnerships have become increasingly important for HBCUs (Cunningham et al., 2019). Examples of corporate sponsorships secured by HBCUs include SIAC's partnership with Cricket Wireless as the conference's first wireless partner (Batiste, 2022) and HBCUs' partnerships agreements with companies like Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour (Berman & Kim, 2018).

The National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) and the SIAC began a successful collaboration in 2019, demonstrating the potential for partnerships to secure financial support (NBPA, 2019a; 2019b). HBCUs have also leveraged media rights and broadcast deals to increase their revenue (Dixon & Pope, 2018). Examples of three successful HBCU partnerships with television are the recent partnership between the SIAC and ESPN, Aspire, and HBCU Go (Brooks, 2021; SIAC, 2017a, 2017b, 2024). The CIAA also has a history securing streaming partnerships most recently partnering with HBCU Go following their partnership with Blue Frame Technology (CIAA, 2018, 2023). Another noteworthy partnership secured by the CIAA is its deal with the City of Baltimore for its conference basketball tournament. According to the CIAA, Visit Baltimore and the Local Host Committee made a \$1.2 million donation to the CIAA general scholarship fund that supports the conference's 12 member institutions (CIAA, 2023).

Gasman (2010) provided a general overview of funding sources for HBCUs and combined existing research across different funding levels, but did not specifically address DII HBCUs. Understanding DII HBCU athletic department revenue streams is crucial for ensuring financial sustainability and supporting student-athletes' success both academically and athletically.

## Methods

Qualitative methods were employed to investigate the current perspectives on the revenue generation. The participants selected for this study participated in semi-

structured interviews to address the study purpose. Semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity for the researcher to ask follow-up questions for important points made by the interviewee (Brinkmann, 2013).

## Participants

Participants included 10 athletic administrators recruited through purposeful criterion sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). Through purposive sampling, individuals were selected that had experience working at or with HBCUs. Individuals without prior working experience with or at HBCUs were deliberately excluded from the study. The identification of key athletic administrators took into account factors such as years of experience, expertise, and job responsibilities related to working at or with an HBCU. Following the recommendation of Hancock and Algozzine (2017), key individuals were chosen based on their knowledge and expertise, ensuring that they could provide crucial insights into the research questions. The selected sample size for this study was designed to encompass diverse groups associated with HBCU athletic departments while ensuring that data saturation was minimal. This approach allowed the researcher to concentrate extensively on each interviewee.

All participants in this study either worked at or had experience working with NCAA Division II HBCUs during the interview period. The researchers obtained phone numbers to reach out to potential participants through staff directory pages on college, NCAA, and conference office websites. Once phone numbers were obtained, the researchers reached out to participants asking if they would be willing to participate in approximately an hour-long semi-structured interview about their perceptions and experiences working at or with HBCUs. A total of 10 potential participants were contacted with information regarding the study. Table 1 provides a description of each participant.

## Data Analysis

To safeguard participant identity, pseudonyms were utilized (Taylor, 2016). Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, following a reconstruction transcription for clarity (Brinkmann, 2013). Prior to analysis, transcripts were shared with participants for accuracy and to build credibility (Taylor, 2016).

The researchers conducted a thematic analysis, coding and sub-coding data for common themes related to each research question. The analysis of data followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis framework. The final report included detailed descriptions of the phenomena described by participants to facilitate future comparisons (Shenton, 2003).

**Table 1. List of Participants**

Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Working Role
Eleanor	4+	Director
Francis	18+	Consultant
Penelope	20+	Consultant
Olivia	20+	Consultant
Theodore	4+	Director
Fitz	20+	Vice President
Finn	18+	Assistant Athletic Director
Lynn	20+	Director of Athletics
Josie	20+	Director of Athletics
Briel	20+	Associate Athletic Director/Senior Woman Administrator

## Findings

Research questions related to the general categories. categories of (a) revenue streams, (b) challenges, and (c) solutions to revenue generation for DII HBCUs. The following sections outline the overall findings related to each of these categories.

### Revenue Streams

Various revenue streams discussed by participants included ticket sales, sponsorships, advancement, student fees, paraphernalia, streaming, game guarantees, and digital assets,.

#### *Ticket sales*

All participants mentioned HBCUs rely heavily on ticket sales to generate income. However, it could be gathered from the interviews that the participants believed that most HBCUs are not doing everything they can to take full advantage from ticket sales. Theodore gave an example of the favor system that exists on HBCU campuses:

Because you did something for me back in the day, I am going to give you these ticket for free, and whatever that person did probably didn't equate to the number of tickets or the price on the ticket. Even if it is one ticket, that ticket could have a value of \$25 and that favor could have been a \$5 favor, you are not really getting that return.

The thought of HBCUs giving away tickets was mentioned in relation to the community as well. It was noted that schools will give tickets away to the community, compromising their potential to generate additional ticket sales.

Administrators interviewed indicated that of the fans that do buy season tickets, HBCUs are not giving them the appreciation for coming to the game or being a season ticket holder. It could be gathered from the interviews that perhaps HBCUs are not making their fans excited about buying season tickets. It can be inferred that a cause for this may be staffing challenges. The majority of participants noted that at HBCUs, an employee that serves as a coach or full-time administrator may also have the added responsibility of overseeing ticket sales. Participants also mentioned permanent seat licenses and reserved seats as a way to generate game-day revenue. However, when it came to ticket sales, the participants highlighted that all revenue from ticket sales seems to come from football, but it would be advantageous for HBCUs to start ticketing other sport programs. Briel outlined her experience ticketing non-revenue generating sports:

In the 2017–18 academic year, we moved to charging for softball and baseball. Now we moved into 2019 and are charging for volleyball and soccer. I think those are some ways we create that revenue stream we were missing. I don't think anyone complained over the last two years about having to pay for tickets.

The participants all mentioned game attendance was crucial, and they suggest HBCU athletic administrators work to increase attendance at athletic events.

It could be surmised from the discussion with participants that HBCUs have the opportunity to improve their creativity regarding building hype around games, leading to increased ticket sales. However, although it may be advantageous to improve the atmosphere, it is important to note the limited resources HBCUs have to hire additional gameday personnel. One of the suggestions made through the interviews was HBCUs should focus on more than just the matchup on the field.

### *Sponsorships*

Interviews with participants alluded to HBCUs using corporate partnerships and relationships with cities as a revenue stream, which includes participation in neutral site championships. However, despite the mention of sponsorships, the participants did not feel as if HBCUs were taking full advantage of the opportunities. Specifically, Olivia mentioned from her experience working the HBCU championships:

I think anytime you pull your resources as far as your impact on that city and you can articulate that as a group, you are going to get more from that city or that business. I think that from my perception, that is not something that those institutions (HBCUs) were used to.

The insight provided by this participant may be supported from previous endeavors of the SIAC as the conference created league-wide head-to-toe apparel

sponsorship with Nike (SIAC, 2017). Bundling sponsorship packages to include all institutions in a conference may be advantageous for the entire conference and the individual institutions that benefit.

The empirical material collected indicated that although there is revenue generation from sponsorships at HBCUs, athletic departments may not be fully maximizing their value in these partnerships. An example of this could be an HBCU securing a sponsorship deal with a local company for their athletic programs, but not actively leveraging this partnership for broader marketing exposure or additional financial benefits.

#### *Advancement*

It was noted by most participants that HBCU fans have great affinity and they continue to have that affinity moving forward after graduation. It was reported that their alumni have pride in their institution. However, issues such as donor fatigue, the lack of giving until the last minute, and not having a wealthy alumni base were noted as impacting revenue potential from fundraising on HBCU campuses. Fitz outlined how HBCUs could start to get more alumni involved, “Not everyone is capable of writing a \$10,000 check, but everybody is capable of giving \$50-\$100 for a ball game. So, we got to build a foundation that will support the sport programs.” This highlights that there is a lack of consistent support foundations for HBCUs.

#### *Student fees*

Participants noted they have noticed student fees and financial support from student services helping athletic departments. Francis suggested HBCUs can gain a better understanding of their institution’s potential to raise their budget using student fees.

#### *Paraphernalia*

The importance of paraphernalia was highlighted; however, it could be gathered through discussion that many HBCUs have not capitalized on selling the merchandise. Theodore noted his perception of the challenge, “they [HBCUs] do not create enough avenues for buying paraphernalia. One of the biggest issues if you want to buy HBCU gear, you have to go on the campus”. Another note from the interviews was the suggested lack of creativity of paraphernalia sold at HBCUs.

#### *Streaming*

Participants all mentioned the importance of creating visibility for athletic programs, especially back to the local community. When it comes to streaming for non-revenue generating sports, Fitz highlighted the importance of a team’s success when it comes to selling the initiative to both sponsors, networks, and the institution. From the discussion with participants, it seems as if revenue from streaming has improved over the years.



### *Game guarantees*

The participants discussed HBCU teams and their involvement in football classics. Specifically, Finn indicated, “in a lot of cases, universities give up a lot of control of their image and everything associated with the game that they are not maximizing the amount of money that they could. They are not getting all of the money they could”.

The majority of participants recognized the balance that needs to happen between having home games and participating in classics. One of the issues mentioned by participants was the fact that HBCUs are putting their student-athletes through tough games to earn a paycheck. Josie and Fitz both mentioned how administrators are sending football teams to get slaughtered against tough opponents just to earn a paycheck for the institution.

### *Digital assets*

The participants believed HBCUs need to do more to tap into digital assets. One area where HBCUs were reported as struggling was telling their story, and participants believed social media was a good place for that to occur. Penelope mentioned the importance of taking advantage of the free marketing that digital assets have to offer, “Use of social media helps because it is a free space and you can cast your net wider than going out and shaking hands in your community.” It could be gathered that HBCUs could do more with their social media platforms.

## **Challenges**

Challenges were another key area discussed by participants regarding revenue generation. Challenges discussed include history, alumni, administration, and tickets.

### *History*

Beginning with the history of HBCUs, most participants reported the balance between history and tradition as a roadblock preventing HBCUs from really taking full advantage of revenue opportunities available to them. Eleanor mentioned her experience with people questioning why HBCUs still exist and how society has put HBCUs in a bad light.

### *Alumni*

Theodore mentioned an interesting transition he noticed occurring on HBCU campuses that he believes impacts the institution’s relationship with alumni and alumni giving:

HBCUs were created out of the goodness of the heart of a struggling community whether it was a group of abolitionists or a group of freed slaves. So, that is important because these schools are so conditioned to do with less, we have always had to do with less. Now, we are in a time where the

first couple of generations that they educated, their kids are now here, and those kids have grown up as more. Their kids have grown up as the haves instead of the have nots. So, they are expecting more and HBCUs are having to learn to cater to privileged African American students.

It could be gathered that the lack of alumni giving stems from the experiences they had on campus. Throughout the interviews, it was mentioned that it is difficult to generate revenue when your institution is graduating people into careers that don't make a lot of money. However, even among the wealthy alumni, participants noted there is still a lack of giving. For example, Penelope mentioned Morehouse College graduating movie stars, but not seeing any major giving from those graduates. From Penelope's statements, there is a perception of alumni not giving back because HBCUs do not have a culture of giving and there is a mindset of "what have you done for me? I am not giving you anything back because you didn't do much for me."

#### *Administration*

It could be gathered through discussion with participants that there is a lot of turnover in HBCUs and the same administrators and staff cycle from institution to institution. The participants also mentioned how HBCU athletic administrators do not work well together to achieve common goals among institutions. Specifically, Oliva noted:

In general, they are competing outside the lines of competition just as much as they are competing inside the lines during competition. In my experience, administrators don't compete; they help each other out. They want to provide the best experience, and then once the ball goes up, the whistle is blown, the race is on, that is when you compete. But it feels like that is a little different at HBCUs.

The distrust amongst HBCU institutions was noted by participants as a challenge preventing collaborative revenue generation.

#### *Tickets*

The participants identified a challenge facing HBCUs to sell season ticket packages. All participants acknowledged that they spend a significant amount of time trying to pre-sell tickets as it helps them better gauge the revenue for the year and set their budget. According to Fitz, season tickets are valuable for the institution because, "It does not matter if I play four home games or five because I am selling the value of the opportunity to buy tickets, not how much it costs to go to one game." Additionally, all participants mentioned the importance of the gameday experience when selling season tickets. Participants mention that ticket sales are vital for HBCUs because they help to offset the cost of putting the games on and paying the officials.

## Solutions

Participants noted it is important for HBCU athletic administrators to understand their donors. All participants acknowledged the importance of knowing donors and working with institutional advancement.

Participants discussed solutions to increase donations from alumni. These included working with alumni affairs and creating campaigns for alumni giving. Specifically, the majority of participants believed HBCUs were not selling the importance of their historical programs. Participants reported they believed selling the story of HBCU athletic programs will help them get more dollars from alumni and sponsors. Lynn highlights her perception, “A lot of HBCUs just have to show the things we are doing in a positive manner because a lot of our stories just don’t really get out.” In addition to HBCUs selling their story, the participants noted HBCUs need to understand and build relationships. Specifically, Josie mentioned the importance of following up with alumni once a donation is made to show gratitude for the gift.

The majority of participants expressed their belief that HBCUs should not try and reinvent the wheel, but should instead reach out to peers and find out what strategies might have been successful for them. Penelope noted:

I think the most important thing is to never reinvent the wheel. Someone out there is already doing a good job raising money in a space similar to yours. Go meet that person. Call them on the phone. Most people are willing to share, fundraising is not a big secret, there is nothing out there that makes it a big secret, but it is trying to make the time to get better and being more intentional about fundraising.

Participants all acknowledged the importance of working with institutional advancement. Francis noted HBCU athletic administrators should:

Meet with all of the stakeholders on campus outside of athletics to get a feel for what is the temperature in regards to athletics raising funds. Are there areas where they are not comfortable with us? Do they not want us to sell raffle tickets, for example? Or, are there donors they do not want us to contact. Making sure I understand the pitfalls before I fall into one.

It was commonly suggested that fundraising should involve the entire administrative team and that the athletic director does not need to have all the answers to fundraising. Working with coaches was highlighted as helpful because coaches do have a good handle on what goes on locally because of their involvement with sport clubs. Participants mentioned that athletic administrators should go through some type of training to learn how to raise money.

Participants recommended athletic administrators work through a strategic plan to understand where their priorities are and to present all ideas and initiatives

in a business model. One of the assets mentioned throughout the interviews was the involvement of students on campus. From the discussion with participants, it could be surmised that many HBCUs are not effectively engaging their students or student-athletes to assist with revenue generation. Theodore provided an example to help HBCUs increase ticket sales:

Create a student organization whose job is to help build awareness around the games. Get you a group of students that have energy and passion for the school. Use them as your foot soldiers to talk with students. Students communicate with each other the best because they are students and they are each other's peers.

It is important to note that some schools may already have this presence on campus, while others may not. Beyond ticket sales, when it comes to revenue generation through fundraising and capital campaigns, participants believed HBCUs could benefit by telling the story of their student-athletes: what they are doing and why they are doing it. Allowing athletes to tell their own stories can help create authentic and engaging content and reduce the need for extensive marketing and communications teams while still promoting the school's brand. Lynn highlights her perception:

It really has to do with the level of reputation. How organizations see you functioning, how trustworthy you are, giving them something positive to put their name on. I think that is very important and a lot of HBCUs just have to show the things we are doing in a positive manner because a lot of our stories just don't really get out.

Additionally, from an alumni cultivation perspective, Francis noted the importance of cultivating the relationship with students before their graduation to continue to build the affinity they have for the institution. Alumni associations are part of the HBCU space. Table 2 provides an overview of the participant's discussion of HBCU Athletic Revenue Streams, Challenges, and Solutions.

**Table 2. Overview of HBCU Athletic Revenue Streams, Challenges, and Solutions**

Revenue Streams	Challenges	Solutions
Ticket Sales	History	Understand donors and alumni
Sponsorships	Alumni	Build connections
Advancement	Administration	Utilize resources (conference office, NCAA)
Student Fees	Tickets	Collaborate with institutional advancement
Paraphernalia		Utilize resources (athletic staff)
Streaming		Utilize strategic plan
Game guarantees		Tell the student-athlete story
Digital assets		

## Discussion

The study suggests a significant number of HBCUs are in need of more dedicated on-campus staff specifically focused on developing and nurturing relationships with alumni. While it may be best practice to hire more experienced staff, that might not be possible for HBCUs working with limited budgets. Therefore, based on the findings, it may be advantageous for HBCU athletic administrators to consider innovative partnerships and student collaboration.

### Student Collaboration

HBCUs might find it advantageous to collaborate with student groups on campus, such as Royal Courts or Student Government Associations. For example, student groups may provide guidance for athletic department staff as it relates to designing and selling paraphernalia or running social media platforms for the athletic department. Athletic administrators could create programs that include student groups getting funds for their organizations in exchange for their work.

Athletic administrators could also provide students internships or work with professors to incorporate experiential-based learning components in current classes. These opportunities could include areas related to development. For example, business or sport management courses could include a component related to hosting an annual athletics event aimed at engaging donors and alumni to foster ongoing support. Students in these classes could receive credit for the experiential learning opportunity under guidance of both the athletic department staff and their professor.

## Innovative Partnerships

One noteworthy conclusion from the findings presented is it appears that HBCUs may grapple with the tension between offering free tickets to community members to maintain connections and the need to generate revenue through ticket sales. Administrators must navigate this delicate balance, considering the financial implications of their decisions while also prioritizing community engagement. Including professional trainings on community relations from institutional advancement outside of athletics, or by working with peers at other HBCU institutions, may help administrators faced with this dilemma.

Additionally, athletic administrators may benefit from trainings related to new apps that may help attract and maintain donors. As Gasman (2021) noted, the spare change technology app called I Heart My HBCU could be beneficial for HBCUs. Having administrators trained on the app may lead to better utilization of the app as it relates to revenue generation.

HBCUs could also consider trainings from professional organizations. In recent years, the SIAC partnered with Nike to establish Sideline Stores through BSN (SIAC, 2018). This collaborative effort involves conference member institutions working with BSN to create an online platform dedicated to selling gameday gear. Hosting training sessions with Nike and BSN could help athletic administrators on campus get the most out of the partnership as they create merchandise and promotional campaigns for their sideline store.

In the realm of social media, athletic departments leverage these platforms as a cost-free avenue to promote sports programs, engaging fans, alumni, and sponsors. Social media's role as a revenue-boosting platform is evident, particularly through sponsorships, facilitating ongoing fan engagement beyond single games (O'Hallarn, Morehead, & Pribesh, 2017). Athletic departments are now establishing dedicated social media teams comprising full-time employees, student workers, and even volunteers to narrate their team's story. Considering former student-athletes for these roles is advantageous due to their intimate understanding of the university's brand and ability to communicate experiences. While HBCU athletic departments lead in social media engagement among small colleges, the emphasis on social media within the department might require further evaluation. Smaller institutions, like HBCUs, may face challenges capitalizing on social media-promoted ticket sales, as research suggests a lack of clear correlation between social media metrics and attendance or ticket revenue during financial challenges (Popp, McEvoy, & Watanabe, 2017).

One potential avenue for success for HBCU athletic departments is active participation in social media campaigns such as Giving Tuesdays. By actively engaging in Giving Tuesday campaigns, HBCU athletic departments can tap into the collective goodwill and generosity of individuals who value the unique

contributions of HBCUs to the sports landscape. In 2023, Claffin University, recognized for its high alumni giving rate (Claffin University, 2023a), joined an international social media campaign aiming to raise \$50,000 in a single day (Claffin University, 2023b). These campaigns offer real-time fundraising updates, making them a valuable strategy for institutions with limited resources.

## Implications and Future Research

One implication of this study notable to both academicians and practitioners is the lack of a clear understanding of the connection between attendance and revenue generation at HBCUs. According to the results of this study, athletic administrators report that HBCU are struggling with ticket revenue; however, HBCUs continue to have high attendance during athletic contests. This discrepancy can disadvantage HBCU athletic administrators that project more revenue based on fan attendance numbers at HBCU athletic contests.

This study focuses on senior administrators' perspectives on revenue generation; however, it may also be important to explore the perspectives of other participants to include fans, alumni, students, and other on-campus administrators regarding their expectations and priorities related to HBCU athletics.

Analyzing the effectiveness of marketing and branding strategies in translating high attendance into revenue is crucial. Future research could help better understand the story that HBCUs have to sell to corporate sponsors and alumni.

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