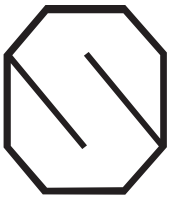

Field Approaches to Institutional Change: The Evolution of the National Collegiate Athletic Association 1906–1995

Marvin Washington

Abstract

This article uses qualitative and quantitative data to examine the institutional change of an interest association. Interest associations are unique institutions in that they may be more concerned with membership growth than with economic gain. However, these associations play a vital role in the social control and evolution of organizational fields. After a discussion of the theoretical literature on institutional change, I examine the change of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as it competed for dominance in the US collegiate athletic field with a contender institution, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. I hypothesize, and find support for the claim that to contend with the competing institution, the NCAA changed by changing its membership criteria. In the early period of the NCAA, it was a place for only high-status schools. After 1952, the NCAA attracted lower-status schools, which were previously not interested in joining the NCAA. This study advances institutional theory using qualitative and quantitative evidence to examine how a major interest association emerged and transformed itself in order to maintain control over field structuration.

Keywords: institutional theory, institutional change, organizational fields, institutional strategy

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There has been recognized value in examining powerful actors and their effects on field-level composition and related institutional processes (DiMaggio 1983; Campbell and Lindberg 1990; Ingram and Inman 1996; Haveman and Rao 1997). In spite of a growing interest in the institutional perspective, there are still gaps in our understanding of institutional processes (Scott 1995; Barley and Tolbert 1997). An often-neglected area of inquiry is the question of how institutions evolve: 'we need an enhanced understanding of both the heterogeneity in institutional environments and the processes that generate institutional change' (Powell 1991: 183).

Institutional change can come from changing analogies, private agreements and conventions (Leblebici et al. 1991), conflict or competing institutional logics (Zald and Denton 1963; Haveman and Rao 1997), changing or competing goals (Christensen and Molin 1995), co-optation of contending institutions (Selznick 1949), or disruptive events (Hoffman 1999). While there has been research that focuses on institutional change, there is room to explore this concept further. As noted in Scott's (1995: 146–147) concluding chapter:

Organization Studies
25(3): 393–414
ISSN 0170–8406

DOI: 10.1177/0170840604040042

'We need better information about the life course of institutions. Although we now have many studies of the emergence of institutions, we have far fewer of the processes by which they persist over time and still fewer of their dissolution. Moreover, virtually all of these studies deal with only one of these phases, either emergence or persistence or deterioration. We need longitudinal studies that capture the entire sequence of institution building, maintenance, and destruction. Such studies can be conducted at the societal level but are probably more manageable at the field level.'

One way to examine institutional evolution is to locate the institution in question inside of its wider environmental context, or its organizational field (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Leblebici et al. 1991; Scott 1995; Greenwood and Hinings 1996). DiMaggio, Powell, Scott, and colleagues have brought 'fields' to the forefront of institutional analysis, to direct attention to the structured social worlds that constrain and enable local action. An organizational field approach highlights the active nature of an organization's context and encourages study of the particular structures and relations and meaning systems to which an organization relates. 'By incorporating network, cultural, and historical elements, interorganizational fields provide a fruitful context for tracing and interpreting the nature and process of change in institutional practices' (Leblebici et al. 1991: 333). While much is known about how organizational fields influence organizational evolution, little is known about how institutions evolve and the strategic steps that institutions take to attend to changes in the institution's field (Lawrence 1999; DiMaggio 1991; Powell 1991).

This article examines the co-evolution of institutions and actors. I focus this discussion on one particular type of institution: associations. By using the term 'institution', I am highlighting the aspect of associations that deals with the 'shared rules and typifications that identify categories of social actors and their appropriate activities or relationships' (Barley and Tolbert 1997: 96). These types of associations are typically categorized as trade, identity, or interest-based associations (Aldrich and Staber 1988; Knoke 1986). Most research on associations has focused on trade associations (Aldrich and Staber 1988; Aldrich et al. 1990, 1994), state bar associations (Halliday et al. 1987, 1993), and trade unions (Staber 1985, 1989).

Recently, work in the new institutionalism tradition has examined professional and interest associations. Greenwood et al. (2002) provided an account of how one professional association (accountants) legitimated changes to its activities in the field of professional business services. Lounsbury (2002) used the founding patterns of finance associations to describe the changing institutional logic (from a regulatory logic to a market logic) of the field of finance.

My work contributes to this line of inquiry by examining interest associations. Interest associations are key actors in constructing the logics and meanings within a field (Galvin 2002; Scott et al. 2000; Washington et al. forthcoming). 'Interest associations compete over symbolic resources and legitimization (such as acceptance by field participants that are needed for membership or survival) more than material resources and therefore may compete differently for environmental resources than other organizations'

(Galvin 2002: 677–678). Galvin used the founding patterns of healthcare interest associations to examine the evolution of the US healthcare field.

Interest associations, as institutions, are unique in that they have different strategic processes than organizations. Lawrence describes institutional strategy as 'patterns of actions that are concerned with managing the institutional structure' (1999: 162). Lawrence suggests that there are two categories of institutional strategies: membership and standards of practice. These categories focus organizational scholars toward two questions: where can I go and what can I do? I extend his work on institutional strategy by examining the 'where can I go?' question. Analyzing membership (the 'where can I go?' question) is central to understanding institutions and organizational fields (Bourdieu 1993; Lawrence 1999). 'Although the concept of membership has not been prominent in the theoretical development of institutional theory, it is central to the general concepts of institutions and especially organizational fields' (Lawrence 1999: 168).

To examine institutional change from an organizational field perspective, this study draws upon both qualitative and quantitative data from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The NCAA has been used as an empirical site in previous organizational studies (Stern 1979, 1981; Baxter and Lambert 1990; Washington et al. forthcoming). Stern argued that the NCAA changed from a 'confederation with no power over college athletics into a dominant, largely independent control agent influencing the athletic programs of both member and non-member schools' (1979: 243).

The US collegiate and amateur athletic field represents a field where there are multiple interest associations competing for dominance. In this article, I track the evolution of the NCAA as a response to changes in the field as represented by the creation of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Following the suggestions and prescriptions of previous institutional and organizational field scholars from both the old and new institutional theory tradition, I examine this change by providing qualitative and quantitative data on the life course of the NCAA. I also theorize the evolution of the NCAA by examining the key struggles between the NCAA and the NAIA. I use the qualitative historical analysis to determine the temporal pattern of the NCAA's evolution — the qualitative analysis identifies the key conflicts that help in understanding how the NCAA evolved. I then use these time periods to predict empirically one aspect of how the NCAA evolved — through changing membership patterns.

I find that the NCAA changed in response to a contender institution (that is, the NAIA) and that the change in the NCAA is characterized by a change in the membership. Specifically, the NCAA changed its membership criteria in an effort to take members from the NAIA. To do this, the NCAA reached out to lower-status schools in an effort to expand its membership base to combat the institutional threat of the NAIA.

More generally, this article makes three theoretical contributions to the institutional theory literature. The first is that it makes serious claims to examine institutional strategies by examining how institutions change their membership in an effort to maintain dominance in an organizational field.

Second, this article combines both large-scale empirical analyses with historical descriptive analysis following calls made by organizational and institutional scholars that suggest that this is the best way to study institutional phenomena (Scott 1995; Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Schneiberg and Clemens forthcoming). Third, it extends the empirical and theoretical focus on associations by examining interest associations. These types of institutions play a critical role in organizational fields as they can provide the ideation and structuration processes needed for organizational field evolution (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 1995). This article responds to calls for more research on institutional transformation: 'An empirical focus on issues having to do with institutional transformation and status mobility is [a] potentially fruitful direction for institutional research that can expand understanding of organizations and their connections to broader societal processes' (Lounsbury 2002: 264).

Research Setting: The National Collegiate Athletic Association

The current purpose of the NCAA is to regulate collegiate athletics. 'It is a voluntary association of approximately 1200 institutions, organizations, and individuals devoted to the sound administration of intercollegiate athletics ... good conduct in intercollegiate athletics and serves as the colleges' national athletic accreditation agency' (www.ncaa.org). Other sports associations that are similar to the NCAA would be the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) for world football and the International Olympic Committee for the Olympics (Sugden and Tomlinson 1998). All three sports associations are similar in that they represent the interest of their members, sponsor competitions, sanction teams and athletics, and regulate the rules of competition.

What makes this an interesting case is that the NCAA was not the first, nor is it the only, intercollegiate athletic association. Organized leagues to regulate collegiate and amateur athletic play existed before the NCAA. These leagues were organized to govern specific sports (the Intercollegiate Football Association in 1898), entire sports programs (the Amateur Athletic Union or the Young Men's Christian Association), or collections of colleges (the Big Ten Conference in 1894) (Washington 1999). In addition, contrary to popular belief, the NCAA was not needed to transform collegiate athletics into the moneymaking enterprise it is today. Schools were making money on sports before the advent of the NCAA television contract of the 1950s. By the late 1800s, football was already a major event on college campuses. A Princeton versus Yale 1889 football game brought in US$25,000 in revenue (more than US$510,000 in 2002 dollars) and Harvard's football games against Yale and Pennsylvania in 1894 grossed more than US$42,000 (more than US$615,000 in 2002 dollars). Thus, if schools had the opportunity to join other organizations to structure their athletic programs and they could make money without belonging to the NCAA, how did the NCAA convince schools to join its association?

It is easy to view this project in purely financial terms. Other scholars have even suggested that the NCAA expanded its membership to control its financial revenue in a changing market for athletic competition (Fleischer et al. 1992). This view is incomplete on two points. First, building markets is not only an economic enterprise, but is also an institutional or political project (Fligstein 1996). Scholars also argue that all economic behavior is embedded in social action (Granovetter 1985; Dacin et al. 1999). Thus, while the NCAA may have been defending its interests in allowing lower-status schools to join, the institutional question is why did the NCAA do it that particular way and in that historical time period? The second reply to a resource argument is that an institution can change for both economic and institutional reasons. While early writings in institutional theory divided organizational fields into institutional and technical sectors, institutional scholars now have a harder time making a distinction between these two sectors (Scott 1995). As such, this article makes an attempt to address those scholars that claim that an institutional analysis is devoid of power, interests, or agency (DiMaggio 1988; Fligstein 1996; Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997).

This article charts the change of the NCAA as evidenced by its changing membership. Specifically, I argue that the NCAA itself has changed from its origins until the present day. This change is the result of field-level struggles with contending institutions. In order to 'win' in its struggles with other institutions, the NCAA changed its membership patterns to attract schools that were a part of the contending institutions. The next section offers a brief description of the NCAA. From this section, hypotheses are developed and tested to examine which types of schools are likely to have joined the NCAA during 1906–95.

Status Struggles and Periodization in the Field-Level Transformation of Collegiate Athletics: NCAA versus NAIA

Stern (1979, 1981) argues that there were two major periods of interest in the NCAA: before and after 1952, when the NCAA adopted the 'sanity codes' and created a college division. Many thought that the lack of rules governing the status of college athletes was insane. Thus, the NCAA developed the 'sanity codes' in an effort to determine the athletic eligibility requirements of both the individual (whether they were amateur athletes) and the university (whether they abided by all of the NCAA rules). However, from an institutional change perspective, the creation of a college division is a more important marker of the change of the NCAA. It was in 1952 that the NCAA had to contend with the increasing power of the NAIA and thus created different divisions to give other types of colleges, previously not wanted by the NCAA, a 'place to go' for athletic competition. This membership category creation, as will be described below, represents a change to the NCAA.

Early History of Collegiate Athletics

Although it may be taken for granted now, there was a period when people questioned if sports should be produced for spectators or if it should remain as a tool for physical exercise. The first promoters of organized sports had to overcome many obstacles to get the public to attend sporting contests (Leifer 1995). In the beginning of college athletics, there was debate over the relationship between sports and education. Although some colleges, such as the prestigious schools that were founded in the 1700s, had the necessary resources to exist, most colleges needed some activities to increase their visibility, financial gain and, hopefully, their prestige (Chu 1989). For these colleges, sports were the chosen activity.

History of Collegiate Athletics

The place of athletic competition on college campuses was up for debate as early as the 1780s. In 1787, Princeton students were not allowed to participate in athletics. These competitions were seen by the college administration as beneath the status of Princeton students. However, the students were looking for alternatives to the strict religious education that colleges were providing (Rudolph 1962). By the 1820s, the debate over the place of athletics on college campuses intensified. In 1826, Harvard imported from Europe gymnastic exercises, and soon outdoor gymnasiums were erected at Yale, Amherst, Williams, Brown, Bowdoin, and Dartmouth.

By the end of the 19th century, intercollegiate leagues existed in tennis, baseball, lacrosse, basketball, swimming, wrestling, and soccer ('soccer', or 'association football', will be used to distinguish football from 'American football') (Fleischer 1958; Stagg 1946). University officials recognized that the popularity gained by their colleges through involvement in athletics was helpful in increasing the visibility of the school. As noted education historian Frederick Rudolph claimed, 'once the sport had been accepted, the games had to be won' (1962: 381). To deal with this growing role of athletics in higher education, administrators and presidents formed committees to provide rules that would lead to a balance between sports and academic activities. Conferences such as the Big Ten (1895), Ivy League (1898), Big Eight (1908), and the Pacific Ten (1915) were founded to regulate athletic competition between their member schools.

Period One: Emergence and Dominance of the NCAA, 1906–52

The NCAA was founded in 1905 as a response to the increasing violence in college football (Falla 1981). The game of football represented the first truly intercollegiate athletic competition and was the first to rise to national prominence. Football received national attention when Harvard competed against Yale in 1875. In 1876, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia created the Intercollegiate Football Association to regulate the rules of play (Stagg 1946). However, these attempts were unsuccessful in minimizing the violence in collegiate football.

The conflict in football was between violence and scoring. The basic play in football was called a wedge, where the offense would place blockers in a V-formation and a ball carrier behind the V. The only way a defense could stop this play was to have players crash into the V, destroying the formation and allowing other players to tackle the ball carrier. Successful attempts to destroy the V led to many injuries; unsuccessful attempts led to touchdowns (and points) for the offense. Thus, rules that banned the V would lead to a reduction in scoring; rules that allowed the V would lead to injuries and deaths. In 1905, it was reported that 18 players died and 159 sustained serious injuries while playing football (Brubacher and Rudy 1968; Stagg 1946). The violence of college football had captured the attention of everyone, including the president of the USA. In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt, himself a former football player while a student at Harvard University, called a meeting with Yale, Harvard, and Princeton to discuss rules that the above schools could undertake that would curtail the violence in football (Smith 1988). In the midst of these meetings, Harold Moore of Union College died in a game against New York University and there were serious injuries to players in a game between Harvard and Columbia (Flath 1963). It was these injuries that led to a meeting between 62 colleges and universities to discuss brutality in football. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss three things: 'should football be abandoned, if not what reforms are necessary to eliminate its objectionable features, if so, what substitute would you suggest to take its place?' (*New York Times* 1905: 9). While some schools decided to abandon football or switch to the less dangerous rugby style of play, this meeting ultimately led to the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association which, in 1910, changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Stagg 1946).

From the formalization of football, the NCAA quickly developed rules for other sports. Rules were developed in sports from basketball and lacrosse to fencing (Stagg 1946). Founded in 1906 with only 38 member schools, by 1942 the NCAA had 314 schools that included 'nearly every college or university of importance in the country' (Stagg 1946: 81). The NCAA quickly became the dominant institution for collegiate and amateur athletics in the USA. 'It would be too sweeping to say the association [the NCAA] has dominated athletics in American Colleges, but it is entirely just to say that the changes that have taken place in college sports had their counterparts in the proceedings of the association' (Savage 1929: 29). In 1921, the first NCAA-sponsored championship game was organized as 62 colleges and universities met at the University of Chicago for the First Annual NCAA Track and Field Championships (Falla 1981). The 1920s was a period of football frenzy in the NCAA with the growth of post-season football bowl games and the building of large stadiums on college campuses: the University of Michigan built a stadium to hold in excess of 100,000 people and more than 85,000 people watched an Army versus Navy game. By 1940, NCAA-sponsored championship tournaments were organized in most NCAA-sponsored sports (Falla 1981).

The Rise of a Contender Interest Association: The NAIA

Although the early period of the NCAA had a major emphasis on football, by the late 1930s basketball had begun to vie for attention in the NCAA. In 1937, a post-season collegiate basketball tournament began with the creation of the National Invitational Tournament (NIT) held at Madison Square Garden, the location of many famous boxing matches. The NCAA started its post-season basketball tournament in 1938. That same year, the NAIA started its interest association as a protest to the NCAA and NIT's post-season basketball tournaments. The smaller, less prestigious colleges, which were not given the opportunity to compete in these basketball tournaments, created this new association (Hoover 1958; Land 1977).

The NAIA was founded for two major purposes. First, there was dissatisfaction with the American Olympic Committee over how it selected its teams to compete in the Olympic basketball tournaments (Hoover 1958). Second, its members wanted to have a basketball tournament for teams that were excluded from the Amateur Athletics Union (AAU) or the NCAA's tournaments (Hoover 1958). During the late 1930s and the early 1940s, there were many teams with excellent records. Therefore, although there may have been 50 schools with near perfect records, the less prestigious schools never got picked to participate in the post-season basketball tournaments (Land 1977).

Three types of schools were instrumental in the early growth of the NAIA: Teachers' Colleges, Liberal Arts Schools, and Historically Black Colleges. Although Teachers' Colleges, or normal schools, have been around since the 1840s, they were lower status than other colleges and universities (Westmeyer 1985). The Liberal Arts Schools were the smaller colleges that were never picked to participate in the post-season tournaments (Hoover 1958), and the NAIA was the first institution to permit black student athletes to compete in its authorized events and the first institution to allow Historically Black Colleges to participate in its post-season tournaments (Hoover 1958). The NAIA was successful in its attempts to represent the less prestigious colleges. In 1951, the NAIA had one of its member schools, Indiana State, represent the USA in the Pan-American games. Having one of its member schools represent the USA in an international competition helped fuel the growth of the NAIA (Hoover 1958). With less than 100 members in 1942, the NAIA grew to 435 members in 1955, almost as large as the NCAA's membership of 439 schools. Figure 1 presents the membership growth patterns of the NCAA and the NAIA.

The success of the NAIA was attracting additional schools as well as media attention. As the NAIA grew in numbers, it also grew in status. In 1960, a NAIA 'all-star' team defeated Ohio State, the NCAA champion in a post-season basketball tournament. This gain in the status of the NAIA did not go unnoticed by the NCAA. The NCAA, 'feeling the crunch of expanded NAIA membership created a college division to force the issue of a choice for colleges participation' (Land 1977: 32).

Period Two: The Institutional Strategy of the NCAA, 1952 to the Present

In response to the frustration of the smaller colleges that led to the development of the NAIA, the NCAA organized a small college committee in 1937

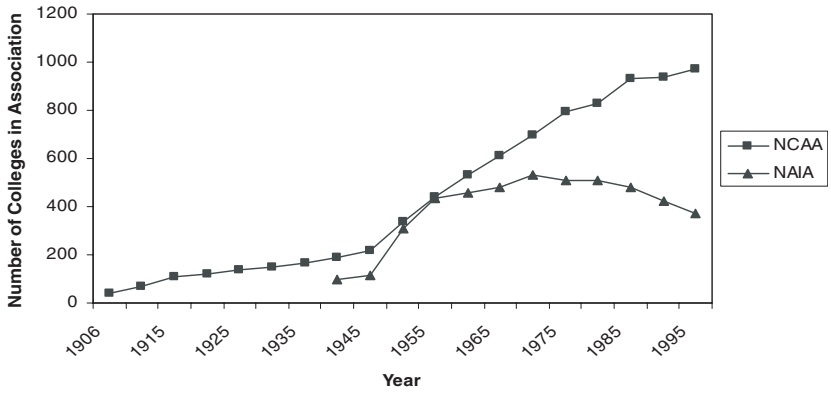

Figure 1.
Growth of the NCAA and NAIA, 1906–95

to think about expanding its membership with smaller colleges. The plans from the NCAA membership committee were finally instituted in 1952 when the NCAA developed a college division (Falla 1981).

In addition to creating a second division, the NCAA also created different membership categories. Under the names of allied or affiliated, the NCAA created this category as a way of increasing the membership of the NCAA without diluting power inside of the NCAA. Smaller colleges were given the opportunity to join the NCAA as an allied or affiliated member. This was a non-voting and non-post-season eligible membership. However, smaller colleges needed to obtain this membership designation, which was usually free, if they wanted to compete against any regular dues-paying NCAA member (Falla 1981; Stagg 1946). Thus, while the NCAA had 314 members by 1942, it had only 221 dues-paying members.

The evolution of the NCAA also created different places where colleges could go. First, the NCAA expanded its organization to include smaller schools. In 1957, the NCAA created a small college tournament. The creation of a tournament gave legitimacy to the smaller, less prestigious colleges that joined the NCAA. This tournament provided these colleges with an opportunity to compete against similar schools for a chance at a national championship. By the 1960s, the Historically Black Colleges were allowed to compete in NCAA-sponsored events and were given membership (Land 1977).

The NCAA's attack on the NAIA for institutional dominance was carried out through pressure on the NAIA and pressure on the colleges themselves. In 1952, the NCAA developed a television committee, through which it regulated television contracts for all its member colleges. In 1952, the amount that the NCAA received from allowing its games to be televised was US$700,000 a year; by 1973, that had increased to US$6.75 million a year (Fleischer et al. 1992). The Columbia Broadcasting Station (CBS) cancelled its NAIA television contract once it had obtained the rights to televise the NCAA's games (Hoover 1958).

The NCAA also argued against the NAIA's involvement in the Olympic selection process. In 1940, the NAIA received one of the four invitations to

participate in the Olympic basketball trials, with the NCAA, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the Amateur Athletics Union champions receiving one vote apiece. By 1960, this number decreased to one of the eight as the NCAA increased its number of invitations to three, two for the university division champions and one for the college division champion. Although an NAIA 'all-star' team won the 1968 Olympic basketball trials, the NAIA had lost its voice in Olympic basketball by 1973 (Land 1977). At this time, the Olympic basketball committee switched its invitation procedures from selecting whole teams to inviting individuals. While the NAIA was allowed to send eight players in 1973, none made the international tournament team.

Another attack on the NAIA was through the National Invitational Tournament. Prior to 1960, schools could choose which tournament they wanted to enter — the NCAA tournament or the NIT tournament. In 1960, the NCAA executive committee instructed its members that conferences with automatic bids to the NCAA tournament should compete only in that tournament and that all schools 'owed their first allegiance to the NCAA tournament' (Fleischer et al. 1992: 55). This had the effect of reducing the status of the NIT tournament, and allowed the NCAA tournament to garner all of the prestige and television revenue.

In 1973, the NCAA underwent a major restructuring as it changed from two divisions, university and college, into three divisions: Division I, II, and III. The creation of Divisions II and III were done at great expense to the NCAA. Division II and Division III have neither the media coverage nor television revenue of Division I and thus cannot attract the needed revenue. While, in 1999, the NCAA spent US$34 million on all of Division I Championships and only US$7.3 million on the Men's Division I Basketball post-season tournament, they gained in revenue US$45 million on all Division I Championships and more than US$25.8 million on basketball alone, not including television fees (www.ncaa.org). For all of Division II's post-season tournaments, the NCAA gained US$1.2 million in revenue on US$8.4 million in expenses; for Division III's tournaments, the NCAA garnered only US$1.1 million in revenue on more than US$10 million in expenses (www.ncaa.org).

The NCAA also forced colleges to choose which institution they would support. Prior to 1974, colleges that were members of the NCAA and NAIA could compete in either the NCAA or NAIA post-season tournaments (Land 1977). As early as 1955, the NCAA began scheduling its college division post-season events at the same time as the NAIA's post-season events (Hoover 1958). This decision hurt the NAIA, as the NAIA needed its best teams to compete in its tournaments in order to generate revenue. The NCAA received most of its revenue from the university division and did not view the college division as a money-generating organization (Falla 1981). In 1974, the NAIA, hoping to reduce the uncertainty in its post-season tournaments, required its members to declare at the beginning of the season if they were going to participate in the NCAA's or the NAIA's post-season tournaments. This rule change inspired many NAIA schools to leave the NAIA and join the NCAA. In 1973, the NAIA had its most members – 558. Between 1973 and 1996, the

NAIA lost 196 members — more than 30 percent. During this same period, the NCAA grew from 757 members to 996 members, an increase of 239 schools or more than 30 percent.

In summary, the change in the NCAA can be characterized as a set of competitive dynamics between contending institutions. The NCAA was originally founded to organize the athletic competition of elite, large colleges and universities. With the creation of the NAIA, the dominance of the NCAA was challenged. At first, the NAIA actually helped the NCAA by increasing the legitimacy of collegiate athletics; with the creation of the NAIA, there were two places to go. However, as the status of the NAIA increased, the NCAA began to view the NAIA as a threat. To combat the increasing status of the NAIA, the NCAA opened its membership to smaller, less prestigious schools and directly attacked the NAIA. Eventually, to keep the large, prestigious institutions from losing their power, the NCAA restructured from two to five divisions, with most of the original members staying in the most prestigious and financially rewarding Division I. To further examine the NCAA and the changes in its membership, the next section details the development and testing of hypotheses about when a particular type of college is most likely to join the NCAA.

Hypotheses

From the historical, qualitative data above, I have developed a set of hypotheses. The first set of hypotheses takes seriously Savage's claim that by 1942 the NCAA had as its members all of the prestigious schools. While there were no barriers to deny any school membership (other than Historically Black Colleges), once the prestigious colleges started joining, I argue that the smaller colleges viewed the NCAA as a place not to join. Haunschild and Miner (1997) found that firms were more likely to use the same investment banker if they were the same size and had similar levels of profitability. Haveman (1993) found that only large savings and loans were likely to imitate others in diversifying into new markets. In addition, smaller colleges were not playing the bigger colleges and thus might not have seen the benefit in joining the NCAA. The more prestigious colleges did see the benefit, as they wanted to keep pace with the prestigious colleges that had already joined. This leads to the first two hypotheses:

H1: In the first period, a focal high-status school is more likely to join the NCAA than a lower-status school.

H2: Liberal Arts, Historically Black and Teachers' Colleges are less likely to join the NCAA in the first period than other schools.

Following Stern (1979, 1981), I define the first period as between 1906 and 1952 and the second period as after 1952.

The last hypothesis takes seriously the NCAA's attempt to co-opt schools from the NAIA. Selznick argued that one way institutions change is through

the co-optation of contender institutions' members: 'Co-optation is the process of absorbing new elements into the ... organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence' (1949: 13). This also follows Lawrence's (1999) claim that the ability of an institution to change membership rules is related to the dominance of that institution in the field. From this, I argue that once the NCAA felt threatened by the NAIA (recall that the NAIA had nearly the same number of members as the NCAA by 1955 and was also starting to beat the NCAA champion in post-season basketball tournaments), the NCAA put in place incentives to attract the NAIA members. As the NAIA members differed from the NCAA's by including Historically Black Colleges, Liberal Arts Colleges, and Teachers' Colleges, it is these colleges that the NCAA would want to attract. This leads to the last hypothesis:

H3: Liberal Arts, Historically Black, and Teachers' Colleges are more likely to join the NCAA in the later period than other schools.

In summary, I argue that there were two periods in the evolution of the NCAA. The first period was the rise of the NCAA, as it became a powerful actor that regulated the athletic contests of prestigious, large universities. The second period was a period of competition between the NCAA and the NAIA that resulted in the NCAA changing its membership to include Historically Black, Liberal Arts, and Teachers' Colleges, and its division structure from one division to five. As such, this model of change is similar to the one suggested by Schneiberg and Clemens: 'this model of change predicts sequences in which successful institutionalization is followed by the emergence of new competitors or alternative models' (forthcoming: 36).

Data and Variables

The data set includes data on 549 colleges. This represents the population of schools founded prior to 1905. This data set does not include women-only schools, or colleges from Mexico, Puerto Rico, or Canada, as these schools were not allowed to join the NCAA until the early 1980s (Falla 1981). Specifically, there are 24,361 organization-years and 493 events. The dependent variable for this study is the date a school joined the NCAA as a regular member. The date the school joined the NCAA was obtained from the NCAA membership directories that are published yearly starting in 1906.

The first independent variable is *high-status school*. Time series measures of a school's status have been difficult to identify. Following the novel approaches to measuring status of Podolny (1993), who used tombstone placements as an indicator of status for investment banks, Rao (1994), who used winning reliability contests as an indicator of status in the automobile industry, and Benjamin and Podolny (1999), who used location as a measure of status in the wine industry, I developed my own measure of status for colleges and universities. Most indicators of the status of colleges and universities go back to the late 1960s (for example, *Peterson's Guides to Higher Education*). To develop a measure of status for schools, I used a

school's biographical entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in the years 1906, 1920, 1929, 1949, 1965, 1977, and 1990. Controlling for the age of the school (older schools are possibly more likely to 'do something' that would put them in the encyclopedia), I argue that schools that are in the encyclopedia would be higher status than schools that are not. Specifically, I created a dichotomous (1/0) measure with a school receiving a 1 if that school was listed in the encyclopedia for a given year. This measure relates to status in two ways. The first way is that it is an external measure: someone from outside the field of higher education is conferring status to organizations inside the field (Singh et al. 1991; Kraatz and Zajac 1996). The second way this relates to status is that there is variation in the measure. Not all schools are listed in the encyclopedia. Another improvement with this measure over Podolny's measure of tombstones is that this measure varies with time. By coding a college's status at seven points in time, I can test the effect of organizations when they are high status or low status, versus testing the effects of organizations that were high status at one point in time, but may not be high status at the time of joining the NCAA.

With respect to the other independent variables, I used numerous almanacs and college guides to code whether a college is a *Teachers' College*, *Historically Black College*, or *Liberal Arts College*. Note that these variables are not mutually exclusive. A school can be high status and Historically Black, Historically Black and Liberal Arts, or any other combination of the four hypothesized variables.

Five variables are used as control variables. Since the NCAA was founded as a place to regulate football rules and the NAIA was founded as a place for schools to play basketball, playing *basketball* and *football* prior to joining the NCAA are used as control variables. To determine the date the schools started playing football and basketball, I used many archive sources from the NCAA and the NAIA, including three external sources: *Ronald's Guide to Basketball*, *Ronald's Guide to Football*, and *Blue Book's Guide to College Athletics*. The school's *age* is coded to further strengthen the status variable.

Two measures are coded as size controls. These are used to control against the argument that larger schools are more likely to join the NCAA, as larger schools are more likely to have sports programs. I code a college's *enrollment* and its *endowment*, measured every five years. Other data on size or financial status of a school might be more preferable. However, given the size of the data set (549 colleges spanning 90 years), it was difficult to obtain complete financial information of all schools for any data other than enrollment and endowment. Table 1 provides the summary statistics and correlations for the variables used in the empirical models.

Method

Longitudinal analyses are used to test empirically the hypotheses about institutional change. The dependent variable is the rate of schools joining the NCAA. The model tests the pattern of joining the NCAA as a function of

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Factors Predicting a School's Likelihood of Joining the NCAA

Variable		SUM / Mean	Correlations							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	High-status School	164								
2	Teachers' College	84	−0.16							
3	Liberal Arts College	182	0.07	−0.24						
4	Historically Black College	34	−0.03	−0.02	−0.02					
5	Log of (enrollment +1)	4.12 (mean)	0.25	−0.35	0.20	−0.08				
6	Log of (endowment +1)	10.79 (mean)	0.16	−0.35	0.27	−0.06	0.51			
7	Participate in basketball	301	0.11	−0.12	0.11	−0.18	0.22	0.17		
8	Participate in football	382	0.15	−0.16	0.12	−0.10	0.22	0.25	0.34	
9	School age	66 (mean)	0.12	−0.12	0.18	−0.08	0.45	0.40	0.11	0.12

Note: all correlations above .05 or below −.05 significant at $p < .05$

college-specific variables. The rate is modeled using an exponential model with period specific effects in TDA (Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995) software. This has become one of the dominant models for examining institutional change as it allows for 'period effects' change in the base rate of organizations' processes and 'interaction effects' or changes in the effects of lower-level factors resulting from new institutional arrangements (Schneiberg and Clemens 2001).

Schools enter the data set in 1905 — one year before the founding of the NCAA. Schools drop out of the data set when they become a 'dues paying' member of the NCAA. The model tests the pattern of NCAA membership as a function of collegiate-level and field-level variables. The rate is modeled using a piecewise constant exponential model in TDA (Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995) software. Formally, the model has the following form:

$$r_{jk}(t) = exp\ \{a_l^{(jk)}\, A^{(jk)}\, a_l^{(jk)}\}$$

where *jk* represents a state transition, or in this case, a transition from not participating in a sport to participating; *l* represents the time periods; and $A^{(jk)}$ represents the covariates, with $a_l^{(jk)}$ being the coefficients associated with those covariates in the *l* time period. Estimating the covariates for different time periods represents an improvement over including interaction terms (a particular covariate interacted with time) in that interactions with time lead to heavily biased estimation results (Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995).

Results

Table 2 lists the results of the event history models for hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Model 1 presents the results of a two-period model on the impact of a school joining the NCAA. This model represents an improvement over a one-period model ($\chi^2 = 74.9$ with two degrees of freedom, $p < .001$). This suggests that splitting the data into two time periods (pre- and post-1952) does describe the pattern of adoptions. Model 2 presents the results of the control variables. Here, as one would expect, enrollment, endowment, play basketball, and play

Table 2. Event History Analysis of Factors Predicting a School's Likelihood of Joining the NCAA

Variable		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
1	Period one (1906–52)	−4.14***	−6.59***	−6.51***	−6.43***	−6.37***
		(0.06)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.23)
2	High-status school			0.41***		0.37***
				(0.12)		(0.13)
3	Teachers' College				0.02	0.02
					(0.25)	(0.25)
4	Liberal Arts College				−0.60***	−0.56***
					(0.14)	(0.14)
5	Historically Black College				−0.16	−0.19
					(0.33)	(0.33)
6	Log (enrollment +1)		0.26***	0.24***	0.24***	0.23***
			(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
7	Log (endowment/1000 +1)		0.0541**	0.0474*	0.07***	0.06***
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
8	Play basketball		0.85***	0.84***	0.86***	0.85***
			(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
9	Play football		0.60**	0.57***	0.60***	0.57***
			(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
10	Age of school		0.004*	0.003	0.004**	0.004*
			(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
11	Period two (1953–95)	−3.30***	−5.47***	−5.49***	−5.92***	−5.94***
		(0.07)	(0.22)	(0.63)	(0.64)	(0.64)
12	High-status school			0.32		0.31
				(0.20)		(0.20)
13	Teachers' College				0.86***	0.89***
					(0.21)	(0.21)
14	Liberal Arts College				0.95***	0.92***
					(0.18)	(0.18)
15	Historically Black College				0.91***	0.89***
					(0.26)	(0.26)
16	Log (enrollment +1)		0.28***	0.28***	0.27***	0.26***
			(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)
17	Log (endowment/1000 +1)		−0.0585***	−0.0559**	−0.0302	−0.0260
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	0.03
18	Play basketball		0.29*	0.28	0.35*	0.35*
			(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
19	Play football		0.39*	0.40*	0.39*	0.40*
			(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
20	Age of school		0.002	0.002	0.001	0.001
			(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
	log likelihood	−2415.81	−2378.35	−2176.86	−2151.85	−2146.50
	log likelihood of base model	−2378.35	−2183.57	−2183.57	−2183.57	−2183.57
	χ^2	74.9***	389.6***	13.4***	63.4***	74.1***
	Degrees of freedom	2	10	2	6	8

Note: 24361 organization years, 493 events Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ Hypothesized variables one-tailed; control variables two-tailed

football are all significant with age of school being significant only in the first period. Model 3 represents the results of the first hypothesis. Recall that hypothesis 1 suggested that high-status schools would be more likely to join the NCAA in period one. Hypothesis 1 is supported, as a *high-status school* is *positive and significant in period one*, but not *significant* in period two.

Model 4 represents the results of hypotheses 2 and 3. Recall that hypothesis 2 argued that Liberal Arts Colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Teachers'

Colleges would be less likely to join the NCAA in period one. Hypothesis 3, however, argued that Liberal Arts Colleges, Historically Black Colleges, and Teachers' Colleges would be more likely to join the NCAA in period two. There is marginal support for hypothesis 2 in that *Liberal Arts Colleges* are *negative and significant*, but *Historically Black Colleges* and *Teachers' Colleges* are *not significant*. However, there is overwhelming support for hypothesis 3. *Teachers' Colleges*, *Liberal Arts Colleges*, and *Historically Black Colleges* are all *positive and significant*.

Model 5 presents the results of all the hypotheses together. Here, the results are unchanged as a *high-status school* is *positive and significant* in period one, but *not significant* in period two. *Liberal Arts Colleges* are *negative and significant* in period one and *positive and significant* in period two. *Teachers' Colleges* and *Historically Black Colleges* are *not significant* in period one, but they are *positive and significant* in period two.

Discussion

How did the NCAA change? Previous work by Stern (1979, 1981) argued that there were two periods in the history of the NCAA. I also provided empirical, quantitative evidence that supports that the membership pattern of the NCAA in the first period was different from that in the second period. The first period was characterized by high-status schools joining an institution to coordinate schedules and develop rules of play. The creation of a small college division ushered in the second period in the history of the NCAA.

The creation of a small college division, a small college tournament, and different membership categories allowed the NCAA to accept Liberal Arts Colleges, Teachers' Colleges, and Historically Black Colleges, which were all more likely to join the NCAA in the second period than in the first. It is interesting that, with the possible exception of the Historically Black Colleges, there were never any sanctions prohibiting Liberal Arts and Teachers' Colleges from joining the NCAA. The cost of joining was never an issue. Joining the NCAA cost schools less than US$40 as late as 1939, and schools could obtain joint memberships (Stagg 1946). The cost of joining the NAIA was US$50 in 1952 (Hoover 1958). In 1991, the dues for joining the NCAA were still between US$900 and US$1800 depending upon the type of membership. On the other hand, while there might have been financial benefits in joining the NCAA (it is NCAA schools that participate in the post-season football and basketball games), these benefits are only for the biggest schools (Division I teams) and are restricted to less than 20 percent of those schools.

Conclusion

This study represents one way to describe organizational field-level structuration processes: follow the conflict. In this case, the conflict occurs at the association level — the NCAA versus the NAIA. However, organizational

field conflict could also come from conflicting institutional logics, competing high-status practices, dueling niches, or from social movement pressures. Future research could continue examining organizational fields as locations of conflict in order to understand how fields evolve.

The advantage of taking an organizational field perspective is that it provides insights into the key time periods of the field. Instead of splitting a field into time periods based upon convenience, or at the midpoint of the observation period, an organizational fields approach provides a theoretical rationale for splitting the observation period into different time periods: key periods represent important moments in conflict creation or resolution processes in the field.

If an institution is a set of rules that identify actors and appropriate activities (Barley and Tolbert 1997), then one could argue that key changes to the institution would be marked by key changes to the types of actors that are present. An advantage of examining an institution this way is that membership changes are often easily identified. Thus, membership changes, while not the catalyst for the institutional change, are often good markers of the change; when the membership has changed, then the institution must have changed. As such, this is similar to other research that has used staffing as a marker of change (Edelman 1997; Lounsbury 2001). Also, one could use other markers of institutional change, such as changing vision statements, the changing demographics of the top management team, or even changing headquarter location.

To ground this story of institutional change, I examined the National Collegiate Athletic Association. However, the mechanisms identified in this study (organizational status and institutional competition) are not limited to interest associations. One could argue that all types of voluntary associations, or trade associations, are subject to the conflicting pressures of growth. Future research could improve our understanding of how organizational status and institutional competition affect institutions.

This project extends previous institutional change projects that have argued that institutions change through analogy (Leblebici et al. 1991) or through the selection and retention of organizations (Haveman and Rao 1997). What separates this project from Haveman and Rao's (1997) work is that the 'losing' institution does not die. Although the NAIA is not as big as it was in the 1950s, it still exists. Future research could extend the concept of institutional competition by following the life course of the winning institution and the losing institution. This project also focuses attention on the authorization of actors as an institutional process. Following Barley and Tolbert (1997), this project charts a change in an institution by examining the processes by which new actors become authorized and legitimate.

This project answers many calls for research on institutional change. It combines qualitative historical analysis with empirical quantitative analysis to describe institutional change. As such, this project follows other calls and attempts to combine the 'old institutionalism' with the 'new institutionalism' (Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997; Kraatz and Zajac 1996; Lawrence 1999). Drawing from the old institutionalism, I examine

how an association rises to power through struggles with a contender association. Drawing from the new institutionalism, I then relate this struggle to organizational practices by testing how this struggle impacted the organizational adoption practice of joining the NCAA, and I located this struggle in its wider organizational field. Future research could build on this effort to combine both institutionalisms and loosen the 'iron cage' of the new institutional theory's current focus on isomorphism, legitimacy, and early versus late adoption, and instead examine the institutional processes of power, stability, and change.

Note

I thank Kimberly Boal, Finn Borum, Tina Dacin, Tiffany Galvin, Matt Kraatz, Rodney Lacey, Michael Lounsbury, Huggy Rao, Roy Suddaby, Marc Ventresca, and Edward Zajac for comments and conversations that improved this article. I thank David Wilson and the two reviewers at *Organization Studies* for their feedback and suggestions. I also thank the Dispute Resolution and Research Center at Northwestern University and the Management Department at the University of Iowa for generous support of this project. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1999 Academy of Management Conference, University of Iowa, and the Institutions Conflict and Change 1999 workshop at Northwestern University.

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