

A Case Study of Vanderbilt University's New Model of Intercollegiate Athletics  
Administration

Shoshanna Engel

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in the Department of Exercise and Sport Science (Sport Administration).

Chapel Hill  
2007

Approved by: Barbara Osborne, Esq.

Diane Groff, Ph.D.

Amy Herman, M.A.

## ABSTRACT

SHOSHANNA ENGEL: A Case Study of Vanderbilt University's New Model of  
Intercollegiate Athletics Administration  
(Under the direction of Barbara Osborne, J.D.)

The purpose of this research study was to analyze the Vanderbilt University athletics program to determine what motivated the 2003 structural shift, what differences exist between the old and new program structure, whether the changes have accomplished the goals set forth by Chancellor Gordon Gee, and how they have affected the athletics program. Interviews with members of the Vanderbilt University community revealed that Chancellor Gee sought integration of athletics into the university when he made changes in 2003, and that there are in fact structural differences in the current athletics program administration versus the previous and traditional athletics department. No quantitative measure exists to determine a causal relationship between the new structure and Vanderbilt's athletics performance, but subjects and data reveal that the changes have not been detrimental to the program. The biggest challenge, according to most subjects, is fighting negative perceptions of the revised structure.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Barbara Osborne for her encouragement to follow my interests and also her advice and guidance throughout the course of this study. Thank you, Diane Groff and Amy Herman, for serving on my committee and helping me to create and execute an enjoyable project. I am deeply grateful for the relationships I have developed with my classmates as we have navigated this experience together. I would like to thank Erin McArdle for her friendship, serving as a pair of eyes at Vanderbilt, and for her hospitality during my visit to Nashville. Lastly, I want to thank my friends and family for always supporting and encouraging me, no matter the endeavor.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of Purpose .....	3
Research Questions .....	4
Definition of Terms.....	4
Assumptions.....	4
Delimitations.....	5
Limitations .....	5
Significance of Study .....	6
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	6
Southeastern Conference, Vanderbilt University and Academic Reform .....	7
Vanderbilt Restructures Athletics .....	12
Response .....	16
III. METHODOLOGY .....	20
Data Collection .....	20
Subjects.....	20

Instrumentation .....	21
Procedures.....	21
IV. RESULTS .....	23
Motivation.....	24
Structural Differences .....	27
Integration.....	33
Athletics Record.....	35
V. DISCUSSION.....	40
Conclusions.....	40
Application.....	47
Recommendations for Further Research.....	48
REFERENCES.....	50

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Southeastern Conference Institutional Data.....	8
2. Vanderbilt University Win-Loss Records.....	37
3. Vanderbilt University Win-Loss Records Comparison .....	37
4. Vanderbilt University Student-Athlete Graduation Rates .....	38
5. Vanderbilt University Athletics Revenue and Expenses .....	44

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Vanderbilt Department of Athletics, July 2003 .....	31
2. Vanderbilt Student Athletics, August, 2006 .....	32

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Athletics participation and success have long contributed to American college and university culture. The relationship between athletics and the university has also bred controversy, eliciting discussion about safe and fair play, as well as academic integrity among student bodies and higher education as a whole. As a response, the National Collegiate Athletic Association formed in 1905 and has evolved throughout the last century as the predominant governing body for college sport. Yet, controversy remains. In 1929, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching sponsored a report on collegiate athletics, and, more recently, the Knight Commission issued several reports concerning the integrity of intercollegiate athletics and higher education.

Citing “disturbing patterns of abuse,” specifically “institutional indifference, presidential neglect, and the growing commercialization of sport combined with the urge to win at all costs,” the Knight Commission’s first report on college athletics, *Keeping Faith with the Student-Athlete*, suggested reforms in the way of presidential control, academic and financial integrity, and regular certification by the NCAA (1991, 4). Though many suggested reforms were adopted by the NCAA on the Division I level, including initial eligibility standards for prospective student-athletes, progress-toward-degree requirements, limits on the allowable numbers of grants-in-aid, and regular certification by the NCAA, the Knight Commission issued a follow-up report in 2001 calling for more action to inhibit what was

termed as “the erosion of traditional educational values in college sports” (Knight Foundation Fact Sheet, p.1).

In *A Call to Action* (2001), the Knight Commission lauded progress, but noted that reform was still necessary to ameliorate the declining state of college athletics. The Commission pointed to declining graduation rates and the ‘Arms Race,’ or the persistent increases in costs and revenues in college sports, as catalysts for universities and colleges to lose sight of their educational missions (Suggs, 2001). At this time, many collegiate athletics departments operated with virtual autonomy from their affiliated university or college, striving for financial independence while complying with NCAA regulations in addition to institutional policies.

As athletics departments moved further and further away from central institutional channels, criticism lamenting the state of college athletics became louder. Many pointed to the pervading commercialism, such as multi-million dollar television and apparel contracts, naming rights to capital projects, and the disparity between academic values for the whole and academic values with athletics interests in mind as the catalysts for the increasing chasm between a university and its athletics program (Hanford, 2003; Sack, 2001; Suggs, 2001). In addition to these problems, others examined the professionalization of college sports, from rising coaching salaries, specifically in revenue sports such as men’s basketball and football, to athletics departments practicing a business model of operation, where greater revenues lead to greater spending, with student-athlete welfare and the mission of the university hanging in the balance (Duderstadt, 2000). Growing attention to these problems in college athletics indicated that the problem was getting worse, not better.

In 2003, with hopes of curbing the isolation of the athletics program from the greater landscape of his institution, Chancellor Gordon Gee, of Vanderbilt University, cited the segregation of “intercollegiate athletics from the lifeblood of the university” as the wrong direction in which to move (Neel, 2004, p. 46). In a bold move, he set out to fully integrate Vanderbilt’s athletics program into the greater University’s infrastructure. The athletics director position was eliminated and specific functions of the athletics department, such as marketing and fundraising, were integrated into the university’s greater systems devoted to these tasks and operations. A longtime proponent of increasing academic integrity within athletics, Gee caused a media windfall, making this proclamation as the football season hit full stride and Vanderbilt prepared to host Auburn University in a Southeastern Conference match-up. The move garnered national media attention and illuminated, if not rekindled, a debate over the state of college athletics and the need to right the ship. Chancellor Gee’s approach drew both applause and criticism from contemporaries in higher education, athletics directors across the country, and the media. The decision begged the question of whether anything was truly changing or Chancellor Gee was creating a rhetoric of revolution to tackle the much talked about problems within intercollegiate athletics.

#### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to analyze the Vanderbilt University athletics program to determine what motivated the 2003 structural shift, what differences exist between the old and new program structure, whether the changes have accomplished the goals set forth by Chancellor Gordon Gee, and how they have affected the athletics program. This analysis will be done through an examination of previous discussion and study surrounding Vanderbilt University’s athletics program, the events leading up to Chancellor

Gee's 2003 decision to alter the university's approach to intercollegiate athletics, subsequent media coverage of the modifications, and consequent events, or a lack thereof, as evidence of change.

### Research Questions

1. What motivated Vanderbilt University to change the structure of their athletics program, and what goals did they seek to accomplish in doing so?
2. What differences exist between the new and previous structure of the Vanderbilt University athletics program?
3. Does the revised structure of the Vanderbilt University athletics program constitute integration of athletics into the greater University, as proposed by Chancellor Gordon Gee?
4. Are there differences in the athletics record of Vanderbilt's varsity athletics teams pre-2003 and post-2003? If so, are the changes related to the revised department structure?

### Definition of Terms

1. Athletics Record: the combination of a win/loss count and the graduation rates of student-athletes.
2. EADA Report: Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act reports completed by all institutions receiving federal funding.
3. National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): a voluntary organization that serves as the governing body for over 1250 institutions of higher education.
4. Southeastern Conference (SEC): a Division I-A athletics conference that includes 12 institutions in the southeastern part of the United States.
5. Student-athlete: a student whom participates in intercollegiate varsity sports.

### Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The information each institution submitted on the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) reports were accurate and true representation of what occurred at Vanderbilt University.
2. The information compiled from interviews and a site visit to Vanderbilt University is the most accurate information available.

#### Delimitations

This study is delimited to:

1. Vanderbilt University, a Division I-A institution, is the only institution and athletics program to be closely examined.
2. Interviews conducted with individuals associated with Vanderbilt University athletics at the time and since the 2003 decision to change the structure of the athletics program. These individuals include Chancellor Gordon Gee, Vice Chancellor David Williams II, Senior Woman Administrator Candice Storey, Football Coach Bobby Johnson, and Todd Turner, the former athletics director at Vanderbilt and current athletics director at the University of Washington.

#### Limitations

This study is limited to:

1. Vanderbilt University is a private institution, making it more difficult to obtain certain types of information, such as financial disclosures.
2. Information obtained and conclusions drawn from the interview process are based on subjective data and pertain only to the specific situation at Vanderbilt University.

3. Though information from this study may be useful to other NCAA Division I institutions, the circumstances and conditions surrounding both Vanderbilt University and the SEC may differ greatly from other institutions and athletics conferences.

#### Significance of the Study

This study will serve as a close examination of an alternative to the generally accepted athletics department model at the Division I level. While Vanderbilt University is a member of the Southeastern Conference (SEC), the athletics program operates without an athletics director, making it the only institution in the conference that does so. This deviation from the generally-accepted model of athletics department infrastructure represents an alternative model for Division I-A athletics. This study, done three years after the changes made national headlines, may help Vanderbilt University grade its progress, as well as provide other Division I-A institutions, specifically smaller private universities in large conferences, with an analysis of the feasibility of such a model.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Southeastern Conference, Vanderbilt University, and Academic Reform

The Southeastern Conference was founded in 1932 when 13 members of the Southern Conference left to form their own conference (About the SEC, 2006). Vanderbilt was a founding member of the conference. The SEC possesses a successful athletics record, with several teams each year winning national championships in a variety of sports. In revenue sports, the SEC has captured seven national basketball titles since 1936 and 15 consensus national football champions since 1950 (Official 2006 NCAA Football Record Book, 2006). This national prominence, in tandem with the SEC's membership in the Bowl Championship Series, solidifies the SEC's identity as a major Division I-A athletics conference.

Additionally, SEC member institutions represent seven of the top 30 football stadiums with regard to seating capacity, with four of these institutions placing in the top 10 (Official 2006 NCAA Football Record Book, 2006). Large stadiums provide potential for large revenues on the institutional level, but the SEC also boasts considerable annual revenue distribution. From 1995 to 2003, the SEC's revenue distribution to its member institutions grew from \$45.3 million to \$101.9 million (About the SEC, 2006). Members not only reap financial rewards from SEC membership, but they also garner national media exposure as the conference holds contracts with ESPN, its affiliates, and CBS to televise football, men's and women's basketball, and additional women's sports throughout the academic year (About the SEC, 2006).

Though Vanderbilt was a founding member of the SEC, they do not possess an extremely large football stadium, have never won a national championship in football, and were often thought of as the underdog of the conference, with little chance to produce winning records or participate in bowl games (Griffin, 2003). Having not had a winning football season since 1982, Vanderbilt did not perform at the same level as many other SEC institutions. Football records were not the only things separating Vanderbilt from its SEC counterparts. Vanderbilt University is the only private institution in the conference, the undergraduate population is significantly smaller than other institutions, and the academic standards, or selectivity of the university, is much higher for admissions purposes than the rest of the conference members. Table 1 illustrates the differences between Vanderbilt and other SEC institutions.

Table 1

*Southeastern Conference Institutional Data*

---

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>2003-2004 Under-graduate Enrollment</u>	<u>2003-2004 Graduation Rates</u>	<u>% Admitted</u>
University of Alabama	Public	15,892	62%	85.9%
University of Arkansas	Public	13,083	48%	68%
Auburn University	Public	19,251	68%	72%
University of Florida	Public	33,982	77%	42.6%
University of Georgia	Public	25,415	71%	57.9%
University of Kentucky	Public	18,108	61%	77%
Louisiana State University	Public	26,156	56%	73%
University of Mississippi	Public	11,224	56%	67.3%

Mississippi State University	Public	12,839	57%	70%
University of South Carolina	Public	17,133	61%	63%
University of Tennessee	Public	19,224	59%	74%
<u>Vanderbilt University</u>	<u>Private</u>	<u>6,283</u>	<u>83%</u>	<u>33.7%</u>

*Note.* Data used in this table was obtained from the Common Data Sets/Facebooks for each institution, The Princeton Review data, as well as the NCAA graduation-rate data.

These differences illustrate that, though variations exist among all of the SEC institutions, Vanderbilt more greatly deviates from its conference counterparts in many ways. Representatives of Vanderbilt even noted that, “High standards of excellence have been set, and then either met or maintained, in most areas of the University’s life - except athletics ... there have been some examples of excellence in athletic competition, [but] Vanderbilt has not, for the most part, attained a reputation for excellence in any consistent way in its competitive athletic program” (Final Report, 1996, ¶ 9). As Vanderbilt’s academic programs rose to national prominence, their athletics ventures did not follow suit.

In 1996, Vanderbilt was thrust in the spotlight after a hometown men’s basketball prospect in Nashville, Ron Mercer, was denied admission to the university. Though Vanderbilt was on his short-list of colleges, the school deemed Mercer’s academic record insufficient, and the ordeal brought attention to the stringent academic standards the university employed. Mercer ended up attending another SEC institution, the University of Kentucky. It was also expected that a nearly \$4 million deficit would plague the Vanderbilt athletics department in the upcoming year. At approximately the same time, Chancellor Joe Wyatt created a Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics at Vanderbilt to examine several issues stemming from the relationship of athletics to the greater university. Many believed

that the expected deficit, coupled with the highly-publicized Mercer affair, served as an impetus for Chancellor Wyatt to form the Committee in order to tackle the issues of what role athletics should play on campus and what Vanderbilt was willing to commit to improving their athletics program (Blum, 1996).

The Committee looked primarily at seven issues, including the proper role of athletics at Vanderbilt, the implications of intercollegiate athletics on academic standing, the financial implications of intercollegiate athletics, the options available for Vanderbilt's intercollegiate sports programs, the impact of professional sports in Nashville, TN on Vanderbilt's athletics programs, and the potential impact on Vanderbilt's athletics programs with increased efforts to achieve gender equity (Final Report, 1996). In researching these problems and drawing conclusions specific to Vanderbilt, the Committee reinforced the belief that "intercollegiate athletics, at the Division I-A level, can and should be pursued with the same commitment to excellence as Vanderbilt has given to most of its other endeavors" (Final Report, 1996, ¶ 9). The Committee further declared that Vanderbilt "can engage in successful athletic competition without jeopardizing its principle mission" (Final Report, 1996, ¶ 10).

While investigating their own situation, the Committee visited and compared Vanderbilt to other Division I-A institutions with similar academic missions and philosophies around the country, such as Duke, Stanford, and Northwestern University. They also examined the possibility of seeking membership in an NCAA Division with a lower level of athletics competition, such as Division I-AA, Division II, and Division III. The Committee concluded that the only feasible alternative for Vanderbilt would be Division III, so they investigated institutions with similar profiles, such as Washington University, Emory University, New York University, and the University of Chicago. Through interviews and

associated research, the Committee found that athletics plays a major and pivotal role in total university life, enhances the image and reputation of the university, improves and cultivates alumni relationships, and is desired for a diverse student experience. At Vanderbilt, specifically, the Committee determined that a successful athletics program is important to university constituents, provides an opportunity for greater diversity within the student body, enhances the university's ability to raise funds, and could help cultivate improved relationships between Vanderbilt, the city of Nashville, and other regional constituencies (Final Report, 1996, ¶ 11).

In addition to determining that a successful athletics program could contribute to university life in a multitude of ways, the Committee determined that remaining a Division I-A institution in the Southeastern Conference was best for Vanderbilt University. They did cite advantages to moving to Division III, such as the absence of scholarships allowing for greater participation opportunities and lower overall financial costs, but ultimately concluded that transition costs, logistical concerns, and the potential loss of conference revenue and media coverage coupled with the potential for athletics success modeled by other highly regarded academic institutions, provided enough reason to remain Division I-A and commit institutional resources to improving the intercollegiate athletics program (Final Report, 1996, ¶ 14). Proclaiming that athletics was an important strategic function of Vanderbilt, the Committee's recommendations included maintaining institutional financial support, raising additional funds for athletics, clearly enumerating admissions policies, and utilizing institutional and conference resources in recruiting and game scheduling practices to become more competitive in all sports (Final Report, 1996, ¶ 17). The report served to publicize

Vanderbilt's renewed commitment to enhancing its athletics program without compromising its academic mission.

Chancellor Wyatt retired in 2000, opening the door for Gordon Gee to lead Vanderbilt into the Twenty-first Century. Having previously served as President of West Virginia University, the University of Colorado, The Ohio State University, and Brown University, Gee brought to Vanderbilt experience from a diverse group of institutions. He inherited a program of 14 varsity sports that had never been on NCAA probation, and the football graduation rate was 91% (Bechtel, 2003). These statistics put Vanderbilt in a unique position; the institution's impeccable record enabled administrators to play a strong role in academic reform within intercollegiate athletics. Todd Turner, the athletics director at Vanderbilt when Gee took office, was a national leader in academic reform at the Division I-A level. Turner served as chair of the NCAA's Working Group in Incentives and Disincentives, which is tied to academic performance, and was integral to reform efforts in this area as well as with initial and continuing eligibility standards (Todd Turner, 2006). Gee's experience at institutions with large athletics programs, such as Ohio State and the University of Colorado, and differing philosophies such as Brown University, a member of the non-scholarship-granting Ivy League, coupled with Turner's reform efforts, afforded the Vanderbilt administration with a broad knowledge base with which to approach the philosophy and operating systems of the athletics department. Clearly, these key actors were no strangers to reform.

#### Vanderbilt Restructures Athletics

An announcement made on Tuesday, September 9, 2003 marked a fork in the road to athletics salvation for Vanderbilt University. Looking behind him, Vanderbilt Chancellor

Gordon Gee saw a generally accepted, but “broken” system where athletics was isolated from virtually every facet of the university at large. Noting that “many athletic departments exist as separate, almost semi-autonomous fiefdoms within universities,” Gee resolved that the name on the front of a football jersey should represent more than a “franchise” for fans (Gee, 2003, ¶ 4). Looking ahead, he saw two options: The first was to maintain the status quo - continue competing at the highest level to recruit the best athletes, build the best facilities, and raise the most amount of money. The other, a seldom-explored option, so it seemed, was to declare war on the system and reign in college athletics to fall in line with the mission and goals of the greater university. Gee chose the latter path (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Days before welcoming the Auburn University football team, a Southeastern Conference rival, to Nashville, Gee announced that Vanderbilt University was to “replace our traditional athletic department with a new body that is more connected to the mission of the university and more accountable to the institution’s academic leadership” (Gee, 2003, ¶ 3). In doing so, he stated that there was no longer a need for an athletics director, and that Vanderbilt aimed to bring the student-athlete back into the fold of the university (Gee, 2003, ¶ 3). Gee’s announcement coincided with the release of *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values*, a scathing commentary on the perceived isolation of student-athletes, even at top universities (Bowen & Levin, 2003). Citing the issues brought to light in the book, Chancellor Gee explained the shift of Vanderbilt’s athletics program to the division of student life and university affairs as a means of “ensuring that every student, every athlete, is a part of a vibrant academic and social community” (Gee, 2003, ¶ 7). As part of his announcement, Gee also suggested university presidents commit themselves to the following reforms:

First, all students who participate in intercollegiate sports should be required to meet the requirements of a core curriculum. The “permanent jockocracy” has far too long made a mockery of academic standards when it comes to athletes. We need to end sham courses, manufactured majors, degree programs that would embarrass a mail-order diploma mill, and the relentless pressure on faculty members to ease student-athletes through their classes.

Second, colleges should make a binding four-year commitment to students on athletic scholarships. One of the dirty secrets of intercollegiate athletics is that such scholarships are renewed year-to-year. A bad season? Injury? Poor relationship with a coach? Your scholarship can be yanked with very little notice. Rather than cynically offering the promise of academic enrichment, colleges should back up the promise so long as a student remains in good academic standing.

Third, the number of athletic scholarships a school can award should be tied to the graduation rates of its athletes in legitimate academic programs. If a school falls below a threshold graduation rate, it should be penalized by having to relinquish a certain number of scholarships for the next year’s entering class. A version of this proposal is part of a reform package now snaking its way through the NCAA.

Fourth, graduation rates should be tied to television and conference revenues. If money is the mother’s milk of college athletics, then access to it should be contingent on fulfilling the most basic mission of a university – educating students (Gee, 2003, ¶ 10).

Though these goals reach beyond the changes that Chancellor Gee made in September 2003, they are indicative of the direction of reform that the chancellor sought.

After eliminating his position, Gee offered former Vanderbilt Athletics Director Todd Turner a lower-paying and undefined position as assistant to the vice chancellor within the new, reorganized athletics program. Turner turned down the offer and left Vanderbilt University. In an email to athletics department staff, Turner voiced disagreement with Gee’s move, stating that though dedicated “to making positive changes in the culture of athletics at the Division I-A level, I do not feel the strategy [Mr. Gee] has chosen for Vanderbilt will produce the results many of us have worked so hard to achieve” (Suggs, 2003, ¶ 7). In the same email, Turner displayed confidence that Vanderbilt would continue its record of doing things the “right way,” but also cited the administrative isolation from peers he foresaw as a

challenge to “Vanderbilt’s credibility and effectiveness when it comes to leadership in Division I-A athletics” (2003, ¶ 7). Despite his commitment to academic reform in collegiate athletics, Turner was not convinced that Gee’s plan would solve any of the problems Division I-A institutions faced, nor would it help Vanderbilt attain greater athletics success while maintaining their academic reputation.

Gee was not the first to propose an alternative model for Division I-A athletics departments. Several years earlier, Timothy Davis, at that time an Associate Professor of Law at the Southern Methodist University School of Law, introduced a model for athletics departments that proposed a system of institutional governance over athletics that would operate in unison with national standards set forth by the NCAA (1995). He believed that intercollegiate athletics should be governed at the institutional level, and that without proper institutional oversight, “intercollegiate athletics threatens the moral and financial stability of colleges and universities” (Davis, 1995, p. 601). Davis indicated that viewing intercollegiate athletics as part of the university at large, rather than a somewhat autonomous entity within the university, had several implications, including the potential to subordinate athletics values to the educational values and foundations of a given university (1995). Many of the reforms Gee espoused echo these sentiments.

In summarizing his proposal, Davis said that his model “promotes the educational interest of the student-athletes by integrating intercollegiate athletics programs into the university community” (1995, p. 606). The model of institutional governance accounted for trustee and presidential responsibility, faculty oversight, student advisory participation, athletics department staff and coach responsibility, alumni participation, academic support, and admissions policies. Davis’s proposed model was very specific, creating committees

accounting for all of the aforementioned personnel, as well as explicitly outlining duties for each department and position within the athletics program. Though an exact replica of his model may be impossible at some institutions due to administrative structures, it does serve as an example of how reorganization may help tackle problems, such as academic progress and performance, which Davis highlighted as major ills of college sport. Recent reforms in intercollegiate athletics, such as the Academic Progress Rate and the Graduation Success Rate, have addressed many of Davis's concerns regarding external means of accountability concerning athletics departments, but his notion that reform efforts have failed to create fundamental change within intercollegiate athletics, whether due, as he believed, to the "absence of a unified and coherent reform initiative centered around academic values" (1995, p. 622), or not, persists in the discussion revolving around the current state of college athletics. Gee's announcement revisits the argument of whether internal changes, in addition to external reforms, are the answer.

#### Response

Gordon Gee's reorganization of the Vanderbilt athletics program triggered a media windfall. Immediate response amongst peers in higher education and sports writers around the country varied. Some applauded Gee's actions, while others displayed skeptical criticism toward the bold move. The move was not without detractors, either, as many administrators and writers around the nation mocked Gee's decision, questioned his rhetoric, and, given Vanderbilt's unique position, doubted its feasibility on the Division I-A level as a whole (Griffin, 2003; Hanley, 2003; Heath, 2003; Nelson, 2003; Sullivan, 2003).

In the immediate aftermath, several members of the SEC community expressed surprise at Vanderbilt's decision. Coach Mark Richt of Georgia said he was surprised, but

that “only time will tell if it’s a good thing or not” (Barnhart, 2003, ¶ 6). In a neutral reaction, the University of Florida athletics director Jeremy Foley commented that he would “take [Gee] at his word that this is the right thing for Vanderbilt” (Barnhart, 2003, ¶ 7). Commissioner Mike Slive of the SEC echoed the sentiments of Foley, noting that although the decision and results would be interesting, the move was specific to Vanderbilt and the actions of one institution did not constitute a widespread trend (Barnhart, 2003).

Several national and regional newspapers published editorials voicing support for Gee. *USA Today* called Gee’s move “refreshing” and applauded his courage to be the first to create changes of this kind, wishing him well on his “lonely quest” to change the culture of Division I-A intercollegiate athletics (Root for sports reforms, 2003, p. 11A). Furman Bisher, of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, highlighted the similarities of Gee’s new model with Knight Commission recommendations and lauded the optimism present in the public relations risk that was September 9, 2003 (2003, 2C). In one of the most supportive editorial commentaries, Carol Slezak of the *Chicago Sun-Times* recognized the symbolic value of Vanderbilt’s shift, but also challenged other universities to take notice and place the same emphasis on the student-athlete that Gee so desperately sought (2003).

Support came from other sources as well. On the radio program *Talk of the Nation*, Myles Brand, president of the NCAA, said that he agreed with Gee’s “goal of that mainstreaming integration” of the athletics program into the central channels of the university (Simon, 2003, ¶ 17). Brand pointed to a drift in Division I-A athletics from the collegiate model, where athletics serves as “part of a developmental educational opportunity” to the professional model, where athletes are paid to play a sport rather than obtain an education, as a major impetus for some of the indiscretions and harmful consequences

befalling college athletics (Simon, 2003, ¶ 17). Gordon Gee's decision to restructure his department seemed to be a response to this drift -- an attempt to emphasize institutional integration. Jason Holwerda, a varsity basketball player, emphasized the fluidity of relationships on campus when he said, "It's kind of an equal playing ground and everyone's involved" (Edwards, 2003, ¶ 7).

Though many around the country supported Gee, others expressed neutral skepticism or light praise veiled in defensive language. Debbie Yow, athletics director at the University of Maryland, said the effort was admirable, but that her university was "already fully integrated in every important role" (Heath, 2003, p. D1). The athletics directors at Northwestern and DePaul Universities also asserted that many institutions already operated with an integrated model (Hanley, 2003). A unifying theme in the neutral reactions to Gee's decision was fear that the move would be largely symbolic and lack the long-term revolution that Gee envisioned (Hanley, 2003; Heath, 2003; Nelson, 2003).

The sentiment of symbolic postulation was also echoed by cynics as they pondered the results of Vanderbilt's new athletics model. *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* agreed with Gee when he said that "If I tried this at Ohio State, I'd be pumping gas" (Gee's move, 2003, p. C1), and claimed that Gee espoused grandiose values, but that he did not actually affect much change within the athletics program at Vanderbilt. Tim Sullivan of *The San Diego Union-Tribune* called efforts to reform big-time college sports a "fool's errand," because the student-athlete is in practice an oxymoron (2003, p. D1). In a mocking tone, Tim Griffin of the *San Antonio Express-News* said that "It's too bad that along with his grand pronouncement to save athletics, Gee couldn't have waved his magic wand and somehow made the Commodores competitive in the Southeastern Conference" (2003, p. 8F). A

common theme in all of these criticisms was the loftiness of the task -- the seeming impossibility of one man to affect substantial change within Division I-A athletics.

Gordon Gee's move to reform athletics, at least at Vanderbilt University, was met with much peer reaction and media commentary. Immediate response was mixed, but opinion from all sides provided many questions that only time would answer. Did anything actually change at Vanderbilt? Has the athletics landscape of the university improved? Is Vanderbilt any more competitive within the SEC than they were prior to 2003? These questions, among others, remain subjective, but may be more easily answered once the attention died down and Vanderbilt settled into its new skin.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Data was collected for this study from archived records and interviews with individuals involved in Vanderbilt athletics. Archived records included EADA reports, media guides, and available budget reports. In addition to archived data, interviews served as the primary data source for this study.

Subjects

Three to five individuals involved in Vanderbilt's athletics program prior to, and in some cases, after the 2003 decision to restructure participated in this case study. The individuals chosen played key roles in the athletics department and, in some cases, the decision-making process at Vanderbilt. Each individual represented a different position and provided a first-hand account of prior circumstances, the event, and subsequent events. The following individuals served as subjects in this study:

1. Chancellor Gordon Gee: Chancellor of Vanderbilt University since 2000; previously president of West Virginia University, University of Colorado, The Ohio State University, and Brown University.
2. Vice Chancellor David Williams II: Vice Chancellor of the Division of Student Life and University Affairs.
3. Chancellor Emeritus Joe Wyatt: Former Chancellor of Vanderbilt University

4. Todd Turner: Former Vanderbilt University Athletics Director; currently Athletics Director at the University of Washington.
5. Bobby Johnson: Vanderbilt University football coach since 2002.

#### Instrumentation

Interviews served as the primary method of data collection for this study. Questions for each subject were prepared in advance and administered during in-person and/or telephone interviews. A set number of uniform questions were posed to each subject, in addition to questions specific to their role in the Vanderbilt University athletics program. The questions and interview technique were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill prior to the interviews.

#### Procedures

Each individual was contacted to obtain consent and to schedule an approximately one hour interview. Interviews were conducted either on a site visit to Vanderbilt University or via telephone on the pre-arranged date. Each interview was taped via a digital recording device and then transcribed for accuracy and efficiency. Copies of the transcripts were provided to subjects upon request. Transcripts were then reviewed and analyzed for relevant data pertaining to the research questions.

EADA reports from three years prior and three years subsequent to the changes at Vanderbilt taking place were compared to determine if any differences exist. The comparison was used to identify if the source of funding for athletics spending changed, and in turn if available funding changed, as was proposed by Chancellor Gee. Budget records from the same six-year span were requested for a similar comparison. Special attention was to be given to the marketing and academic services expenditures, because those divisions

were specifically mentioned as departments that would greatly benefit from integration into and access to the budgets of the University's marketing and academic services branches. Media guides from several sports, including football and men's and women's basketball, along with graduation rates obtained from the NCAA were used to identify win/loss records and graduation rates for teams at Vanderbilt. This data was used to analyze whether the organizational shift in athletics at Vanderbilt affected the athletics records of teams at Vanderbilt.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was to analyze the Vanderbilt University athletics program to determine what motivated the 2003 structural shift, what differences exist between the old and new program structure, whether the changes have accomplished the goals set forth by Chancellor Gordon Gee, and how they have affected the athletics program. The primary data for this study was collected through a series of interviews with individuals involved, both at the time of and since, the 2003 structural shift. Six primary subjects were identified for this study, and three additional subjects were identified during and subsequent to a site visit to Vanderbilt University for data collection. The primary subjects included Chancellor Gordon Gee, Vice Chancellor David Williams, II, Chancellor Emeritus Joe Wyatt, Former Vanderbilt Athletics Director Todd Turner, Vanderbilt Football Coach Bobby Johnson, and Vanderbilt Director of Compliance/Senior Woman Administrator Candice Story. Of the original six primary subjects, only three were interviewed. Chancellor Emeritus Joe Wyatt could not be reached for participation. His office at Vanderbilt was contacted via telephone, but Chancellor Wyatt was away from the university. He was contacted three times via email and no response was received. After reviewing the consent form and sample questions, Bobby Johnson declined to participate in the study. After initially agreeing to participate, Todd Turner was contacted for consent and participation in this study, but he failed to respond to several follow-up attempts to solicit his involvement. He was contacted via telephone on three occasions and via email on five occasions. The

three additional subjects interviewed included Vanderbilt Baseball Coach Tim Corbin, National Commodore Club Associate Director Cal Cook, and former Vanderbilt Faculty Senate Chair Ginny Shepherd. Coach Corbin was identified and contacted to provide an Olympic sports coach perspective. Cal Cook was encountered on campus during the site visit to Vanderbilt University and offered to participate in the study. His participation provided information from the fundraising perspective within Vanderbilt Athletics. Ginny Shepherd was identified as a member on the faculty committee for athletics at Vanderbilt and provided a faculty perspective.

Access to athletics-related budgets at Vanderbilt University was denied by university administration. Financial records and area-specific budgets, for marketing and academic services, for example, were requested from Vice Chancellor David Williams during his interview. He was approached because of his supervisory role in Vanderbilt athletics. Secondary data was collected from EADA reports, websites, and media guides. The available data was used to analyze whether any financial and/or athletics record differences exist between the old and new athletics program structure. All of the data is thematically categorized as it applies to the research questions.

#### Motivation

Each subject was asked what they understood as the motivation for, or goals that drove, the structural shift in Vanderbilt's athletics program. Chancellor Gordon Gee reported that in making changes to the Vanderbilt program he sought to prove that an institution could compete in what he called "the most powerful athletic conference in the country, the SEC," succeed in that conference, and convert the popular notion of college athletics into what he termed "true intercollegiate athletics," where student-athletes have the opportunity to succeed

(interview, January 25, 2007). Gee also noted that intercollegiate athletics is at a crossroads, and that universities must decide whether athletics are to operate in concert with, and as an active function of the university, or whether they will continue to be isolated, separated, segregated, and operate with “no functional reality akin to what the university is about” (interview, January 25, 2007). He stated that Vanderbilt is “one university; we’re not an amalgamation of colleges, programs, and departments tied by heating plants. We’re one university and we have to value, develop, operate, and culturally develop ourselves as one institution. That includes all of our intercollegiate activities, whether it be sports, band, orchestra, or chemistry” (interview, January 25, 2007). Acknowledging the general tension that exists in the relationship between athletics and a university and his dislike for the direction he thought that relationship was headed in at Vanderbilt with regard to his value system and the university’s needs, he said several factors and the “long-range view” of success precipitated his decision to make structural changes to the Vanderbilt athletics program (interview, January 25, 2007).

Vice Chancellor David Williams stated that one motive for the structural shift was the quest for Division I competition with Division III integration. In striving for this goal, he explained, Chancellor Gee sought to provide better service for all parties involved in athletics, including administration, coaches, student-athletes, and the general student body. Williams cited the desire to eliminate duplicate services, such as student life functions, marketing, and fundraising, as one motivation to revise the structure of athletics administration, and in turn also reduce expenses. He also noted the desire to eradicate the separation of student-athletes from the general student body with regard to housing and dining (D. Williams, interview, January 26, 2007). Cal Cook, Associate Director of the

National Commodore Club (NCC), Vanderbilt's athletics fundraising organization, also noted the reduction of duplication and the opportunity to merge resources within several athletics and university offices as goals of Gee's decision to restructure the athletics program (interview, January 25, 2007). Director of Compliance and Senior Woman Administrator, Candice Story, said she understood the idea behind the changes was to make "a public statement that for far too long athletics has been isolated from the university...and by moving athletics under the auspices of a main university arm, that you would be integrating it into the main, the core of the institution" (interview, January 26, 2007). She explained that ultimately the idea was to provide more opportunities for Vanderbilt student-athletes to become involved in campus life while also providing a "big-picture" campus perspective for coaches and staff, rather than the day-to-day focus previously in place (C. Storey, interview, January 26, 2007).

Baseball coach Tim Corbin reported that he understood the impetus of the changes to be the need to bring departments together to create a unified segment rather than an athletics program that operates as a "satellite" program outside of the university (interview, January 25, 2007). He stated that he thought "it was just to integrate the athletics department more into the crux of what the university system is all about and not let it [athletics] run on this wild hair and move on its own" (T. Corbin, interview, January 25, 2007). Coach Corbin also acknowledged that he understood the rationale behind the structural changes because of the "big money" and separatism that currently exists in college athletics (interview, January 25, 2007). Finally, faculty member Ginny Shepherd said she believed the main goal of the restructuring of athletics was to better integrate athletics into campus life. An example of

this, she said, was making changes so that the governance of athletics falls into line with the governance of the university (G. Shepherd, interview, February 12, 2007).

### Structural Differences

Each subject was asked what structural changes have taken place in the Vanderbilt athletics administration and program. Chancellor Gee stated that the position of athletics director was eliminated, as was the athletics department. He explained that the duties previously carried out by the athletics director and through the departmental structure of athletics migrated toward a new management structure, including four directors of sport operations and a vice chancellor carrying direct responsibility for day-to-day management. This structure, he said, was similar to what exists in other programs at the senior levels of the institution. Gee appointed Vice Chancellor for University Affairs, David Williams II, to oversee athletics. Deeming the athletics director position irrelevant, Gee said that with the new structure, much administrative cost was reduced and the majority of that money was used to support student-athletes and coaches rather than the “vast administrative structure” that previously existed (interview, January 25, 2007). An example of this, he said, was the sports media program. Rather than operate a satellite program, the director of sports media reports to Mike Schoenfeld, Vice Chancellor of Public Affairs for the entire university. According to Gee, this allows sports media to utilize the entire apparatus of the university’s media program to enhance resources and output for athletics needs (interview, January 25, 2007).

David Williams explained that when the restructuring of athletics occurred in 2003, he was also overseeing the revitalization of the Division of Student Life at Vanderbilt University, in addition to serving as University Secretary and General Counsel. Williams

said that previously, the athletics director reported to him, not the Chancellor, and that functionally, his new role was most akin to that of a traditional athletics director. He noted that athletics took on a closer relationship to student life because he was overseeing both programs, but that athletics never operated within the student life program. Williams said he devotes roughly one-third of his time to athletics, and, citing the need for day-to-day oversight, he said that four director of sport operations positions were created. Each director is assigned one major sport, two to three Olympic sports, and one additional administrative responsibility, such as car dealer liaison, training table, and strength & conditioning. The directors report directly to Vice Chancellor Williams, whereas all other support services report to Williams and another arm of the university. Williams cited athletics marketing's reporting line to the public relations office, the National Commodore Club's relationship with the university development office, the athletics compliance office's line to the university compliance office, and the academic support service's responsibility to the provost's office as examples of this (interview, January 26, 2007).

Candice Storey became Director of Compliance after the restructuring, and was previously an academic counselor for athletics. During her time as an academic counselor, her office was not in the McGugin Center, which houses academic services for athletics; rather, she operated out of the Sarratt Student Center and reported to the provost's office. Though she was the first to report external to athletics, she clarified that a few months prior to the 2003 restructuring, the entire academic support staff for athletics began to report to the provost's office. She said this may have been a precursor to the full restructuring of Vanderbilt's athletics program. Once she assumed compliance duties, Storey said that she had and continues to have a dual reporting line to Vice Chancellor Williams and the

university compliance office (interview, January 26, 2007). Cal Cook also spoke about dual reporting lines and the elimination of duplicate services. The NCC, for example, previously reported directly to former athletics director Todd Turner, but, after the changes, began to report to the Development and Alumni Relations (DAR) office. Cook explained that with the new structure, resources were merged and duplication was eliminated, thus allowing for greater productivity (interview, January 25, 2007).

From a coach's perspective, Tim Corbin described a close relationship with both Vice Chancellor Williams and his assigned director of sports operations. For example, he said that he would approach his sports operations director, not Williams, about ordering more clay for his baseball infield, but that he would involve Williams in a discussion about "bigger" issues such as stadium renovations taking place within other SEC programs and hosting tournaments (T. Corbin, interview, 2007).

Athletics flow charts from July 2003 and August 2006 display the structure of Vanderbilt's athletics program before and after Gee announced changes in 2003. Prior to the restructuring, Todd Turner oversaw the entire athletics department. Six associate and assistant athletics directors presiding over Olympic sports, communications, compliance, business affairs, operations and major gifts, along with the executive director of the NCC, reported directly to Todd Turner. It was noted that Todd Turner reported to the Vice Chancellor of Student Life and University Affairs, who at the time was David Williams. The Assistant Athletics Director for Major Gifts reported to the Associate Vice Chancellor for University Development. The Associate Athletics Director for Business Affairs reported to the Chief Financial Officer and Vice Chancellor for Administration and oversaw marketing, facilities, and tickets in addition to business affairs. The Associate Athletics Director for

Operations oversaw football, men's basketball, and baseball in addition to equipment, video services, dining services, strength & conditioning, and sports medicine. It was also noted that the Assistant Athletics Director for Compliance served as the athletics department liaison to university admissions while also overseeing academic support for athletics, but the Assistant Provost/Director of Academics for Athletics that was noted as reporting to the Vice Chancellor for Student Life and University Affairs does not appear on the flow chart.

The 2006 organizational structure of athletics shows David Williams overseeing the entire program, which is divided up into four major components. The Directors of Sport Operations (DOSO) each oversee a major sport, including football, men's basketball, women's basketball, and baseball, as well as oversee an administrative area, such as medical services/equipment, the car dealer program, the Hendrix Room/dining services, and strength & conditioning. The DOSO responsible for men's basketball is also listed as an assistant vice chancellor. Support Services encompasses business operations, life skills, and facilities/game events. Each of these areas also reports to the associate vice chancellor that oversees budget and business operations for the entire university. The Director of Academic Support has dual reporting lines to David Williams and the provost's office, and the Director of Compliance reports to Williams and the university's compliance office. External Communications includes communications, tickets, development, and marketing. The Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor for Development oversee athletics development and tickets, while the Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs oversees marketing and communications/sports information. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate these structures.

Figure 1. Vanderbilt Department of Athletics, July, 2003.

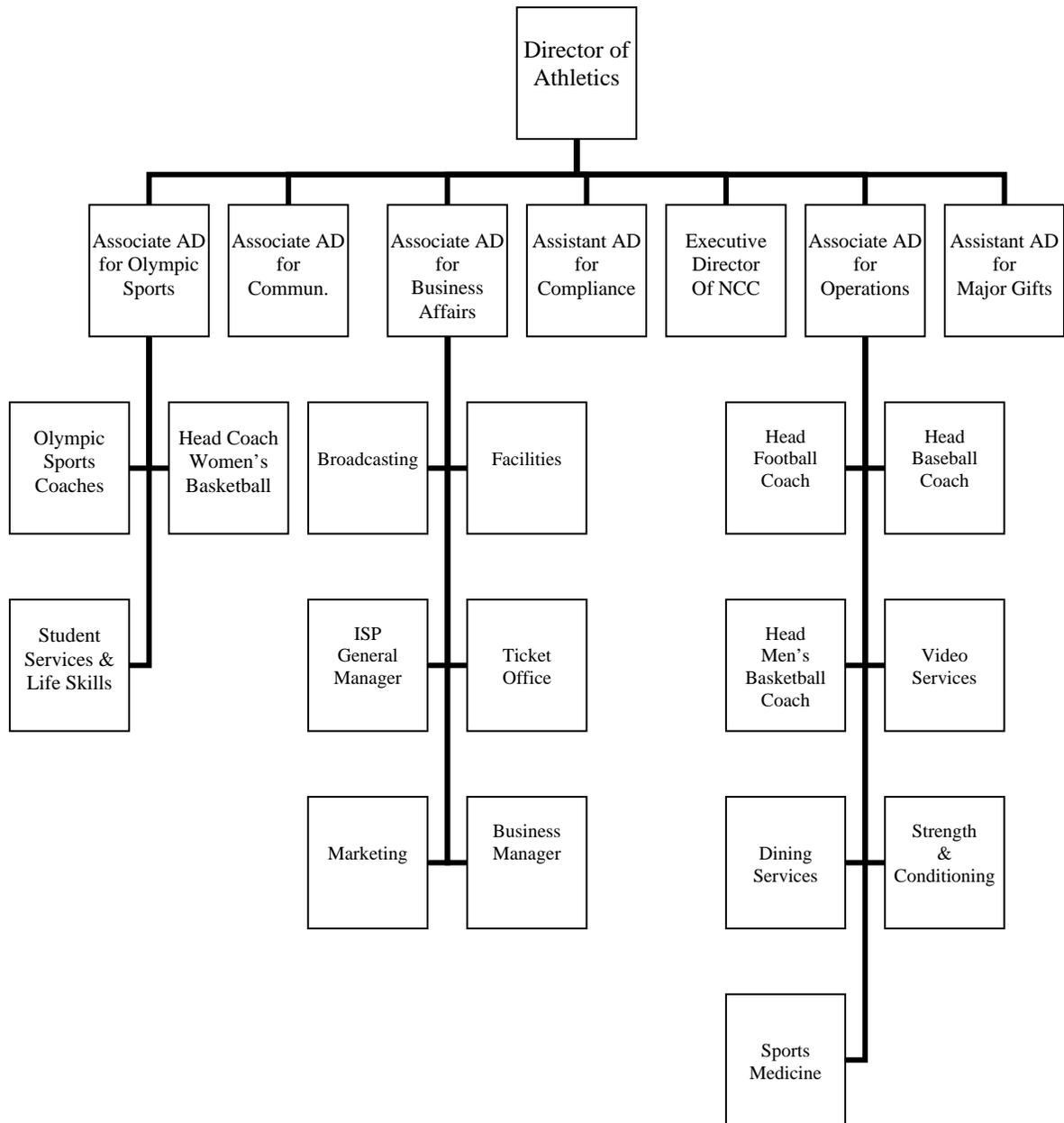
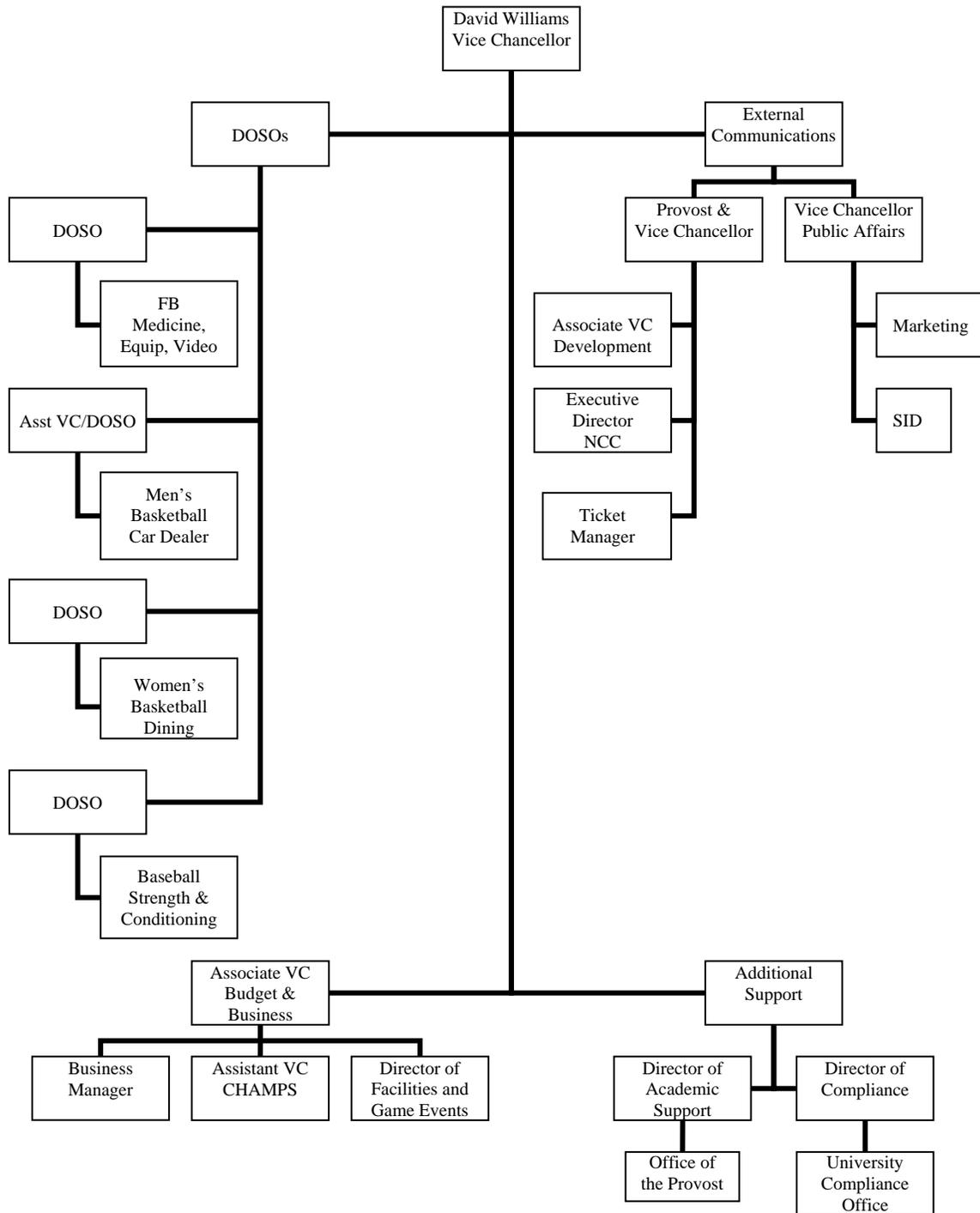


Figure 2. Vanderbilt Student Athletics, August, 2006.



Chancellor Gee reported that his role in athletics after the changes remained very similar to the time prior to the restructuring. Though he said his role is comparable and he

and Williams remain in close contact about athletics, he said that since 2003 he is much more comfortable with the athletics administration because “it’s not a convince-them situation; rather, it’s what we are going to do now, and people are on board.” Overall, Gee stated that his role in athletics has not changed and that he remains “very happily engaged” in the athletics program at Vanderbilt (interview, January 25, 2007).

Ginny Shepherd reported that because there is no daily faculty involvement in athletics administration, she was not aware what exact structural changes had taken place at Vanderbilt. She postulated that perhaps there is more faculty oversight with regard to athletics, but there is not a significant increase in the faculty’s involvement with athletics matters (G. Shepherd, interview, February 12, 2007).

#### Integration

When asked about a definition of integration, Chancellor Gee said that he was “right in the middle of that movie” (interview, January 25, 2007). He characterized integration as an absence of barriers created by athletics to academic success and campus involvement. He said that athletics should provide no more barriers than any other time-consuming activity, but campus involvement is “based upon choice” rather than proximity (G. Gee, interview, January 25, 2007). Gee noted student-athletes participating in fraternities and sororities, studying abroad, and living with non-athletes as examples of integration. For example, Gee recalled a recent encounter with a female student-athlete in a campus dining hall; she introduced the friends that accompanied her to the chancellor and not one of them was a student-athlete. Gee said, “Now that’s integration” (interview, January 25, 2007). Though he acknowledged there was never athletics-only housing at Vanderbilt, Gee believed that student-athletes often chose to live with each other. He noted a culture of separation prior to

the structural changes that, in his opinion, has significantly changed in the three years since he made changes to Vanderbilt's athletics program. Gee stated that ultimately he wanted to reach full integration of athletics within five years of the structural changes (interview, January 25, 2007).

David Williams spoke about integration in terms of reducing duplication in services and the elimination of the notion that student-athletes engage in certain activities separate from the general student body. These were the same activities Gee mentioned. Williams noted that the dining facility, the Hendrix Room, housed within the McGugin Center, an athletic facility, only serves dinner and is open to the entire student body at designated times. The idea of serving dinner only, Williams explained, was that student-athletes dine just as other students do, but there is a facility that is convenient and open later than other dining halls to accommodate practice schedules and sports medicine treatments. Williams also cited team activities as ways to combat isolation of student-athletes from mainstream campus. For example, he told the story of one of Vanderbilt's teams participating in freshmen move-in day on campus. After explaining to the coaching staff that the administration was seeking a broader experience for student-athletes on campus, the men's basketball coaching staff decided to participate as well, and were seen alongside their team in the fall helping matriculating students move into the dorms. Williams noted that this was an example of athletics being integrated into Vanderbilt's campus; there are no barriers to campus life for individual student-athletes, and entire teams and coaching staffs were also finding ways to participate in university life (interview, January 26, 2007).

Coach Corbin articulated that he feels as though he is much more integrated into the Vanderbilt University system than his coaching peers at other institutions. Particularly, he

said, he liked “being part of a university where I can speak. I like being part of a university where I’m thought of more as a faculty member than just a guy with a whistle around his neck and the spelling COACH on the back of his shirt” (T. Corbin, interview, January 25, 2007). Corbin explained that he has accompanied Chancellor Gee on several trips as an ambassador for athletics and the university, and that during his first year, prior to the changes in athletics, he was never invited to make such trips. In this way, he explained, he felt as though his position as a “university citizen” was very integrated into the university community, rather than just a position in athletics apart from the university mission (T. Corbin, interview, January 25, 2007).

Candice Storey spoke about her experiences as a student-athlete at Vanderbilt and as a member of the athletics staff. She said that during her time as a student-athlete, she felt as though her peers were involved in campus life, whether it was as members of fraternities and sororities, on the honor council, or as representatives in student government. But, she did note that as a student-athlete, she was not aware of the relationship between the athletics department and the greater university. Speaking now as an athletics staff member, she explained that the staff has more of a big picture perspective on the place of athletics in the university, because of the change in structure, that did not previously exist. The focus broadened from day-to-day happenings to developing and strengthening the relationship between athletics and the university (C. Storey, interview, January 26, 2007).

#### Athletics Record

For the purpose of this study, athletics record is defined as a combination of win/loss records and graduation rates. Win/loss records were obtained from media guides and graduation rate data was obtained from NCAA-reported data. Also included in this measure

was Vanderbilt's finish in the National Association of Collegiate Director's of Athletics (NACDA) Director's Cup, which recognizes institutions that maintain success in a broad-based athletics program. The Director's Cup compares institutions nationally across Division I. Scoring is determined by an institution's highest finish, or final ranking, in ten men's sports and ten women's sports. For example, in a sport that fields a 64-team national championship tournament, participating teams earn points based on their final placement in that tournament. Each institution scores points for its ten highest performing men's and women's sports, respectively.

Of Vanderbilt's six teams in which a win/loss record is quantifiable, five showed an improved winning percentage in the three years since the restructuring versus the three years prior to the changes. Women's basketball is the only team to show a decrease in win percentage, dropping 1.1%, from 73.5% to 72.4%. In the other three revenue sports, football showed a 5.9% increase, men's basketball showed a 16.3% increase, and baseball showed a 17% increase in win percentage. Women's lacrosse won 1.1% more of their games after the structural changes took place, and women's soccer showed an 8.1% increase in wins. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate these differences.

Table 2

*Vanderbilt University Win-Loss Records*

Team	'00-'01	'01-'02	'02-'03	'03-'04	'04-'05	'05-'06
Baseball	24-31	24-27	27-28	45-19	34-21	38-27
Men's Basketball	15-15	17-15	11-18	23-10	22-13	18-13
Women's Basketball	24-10	29-7	22-10	26-8	24-8	21-11
Football	3-8	2-9	2-10	2-10	2-9	5-6
Women's Lacrosse	5-11	10-6	7-8	12-6	6-9	6-10
Women's Soccer	12-9	7-10	5-9-2	8-7-3	7-7-5	16-3-3

Table 3

*Vanderbilt University Win-Loss Records Comparison*

Team	Winning Percentage		
	'00-'03	'03-'06	Percent Change
Baseball	46.6	63.6	18.0
Men's Basketball	47.3	63.6	16.3
Women's Basketball	73.5	72.4	-1.1
Football	20.6	26.5	5.9
Women's Lacrosse	47.9	49.0	1.1
Women's Soccer	44.4	52.5	8.1

Director’s Cup standings showed Vanderbilt’s average position at 67.3 between the 2000-2001 and 2002-2003 academic year, with the best ranking of 54th during 2002-2003, the year immediately preceding the changes. Between 2003-2004 and 2005-2006, Vanderbilt’s average ranking was 54.3, with a best ranking of 28th in 2003-2004, the year immediately following Gee’s athletics program restructuring (NACDA).

Graduation rates were used as part of the measure indicating athletics record. Federal graduation rate data was available for the selected academic years and Graduation Success Rate (GRS) data was available for 2005 and 2006. Table 2 indicates the graduation rates for Vanderbilt student-athletes and Division I student-athletes as a whole for the selected years.

Table 4

*Vanderbilt University Student-Athlete Graduation Rates*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Vanderbilt Graduation Rate</u>	<u>Vanderbilt Graduation Success Rate</u>	<u>Division I Graduation Rate</u>	<u>Division I Graduation Success Rate</u>
2001	74%		58%	
2002	88%		60%	
2003	75%		62%	
2004	75%		62%	
2005	73%	92.58%	62%	76%
2006	80%	93.08%	62%	77%

*Note.* The NCAA began tabulating the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in 2005 to account for students omitted by the federal graduation rate calculation, including incoming transfers and students that left the institution prior to graduation that would have been academically

eligible to compete had they remained. All graduation rate and GSR data was obtained from the NCAA.

The average graduation rate for Vanderbilt student-athletes for 2001-2003 was 79% compared to 60% across Division I. Vanderbilt's average was 76% between 2004 and 2006, compared to 62% across Division I for the same time period. This shows a 3% decrease in Vanderbilt's student-athlete graduation rates during the three years after the restructuring as compared to the three years prior. Though Vanderbilt's rates dropped, they remained higher than the average at the Division I level. The NCAA developed and implemented the GSR to account for students omitted by the federal calculation, and Vanderbilt reported close to a 93% GSR in 2005 and 2006, as compared to 76% and 77% across Division I for those same years. GSR rates are not calculated prior to 2005.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

In the fall of 2003, Gordon Gee set out to change the athletics landscape at Vanderbilt University. In doing so, he changed the structure of the athletics program by eliminating and creating positions and redirecting reporting lines and resources. A trip to campus and interviews with those involved, past and present, with Vanderbilt athletics, revealed a program committed to competing at the highest level, but seeking to do so differently than in its own past, and certainly in a manner that deviates from the conference and national standard. Initially, these changes ignited a media firestorm, but three years later few of the media's predictions of athletics ruin have come to fruition. Rather, the Vanderbilt athletics program continued to compete, and in many cases improve, at the Division I level while navigating its transformed identity.

#### Conclusions

When asked what they understood was the motivation for the structural changes made to the Vanderbilt athletics program, each subject reported something similar. Integration was repeatedly used to describe what subjects believed was the driving force behind Chancellor Gordon Gee's 2003 announcement. The integration of administrative duties into the university's infrastructure to decrease the duplication of processes, the integration of athletics leadership into university leadership, and removing any barriers preventing the opportunity for student-athletes' to engage in all aspects of campus life were listed as perceived goals of the changes. These reported motivations and goals matched closely with what Gee claimed

drove him when he, in his own words, “blew the damn thing up and said we’re gonna start over with this new model” (interview, January 25, 2007). Though each subject played a different role in the Vanderbilt athletics program, the message they conveyed was consistent: athletics would no longer exist as its own entity, as the goal was to bring it into the fold of the university as a whole.

Gee claimed that he consulted no one and acted unilaterally because the “forces of tradition” and the power of donors would have been against him (interview, January 25, 2007). He said that after mulling it over for twenty years, the situation at Vanderbilt made it possible for him to attempt to align an athletics program with his value system for the entire university. He famously says that if he tried this at Ohio State he would “be pumping gas” (G. Gee, interview, January 25, 2007). Though he acknowledges that the timing for this kind of decision is never ideal, Gee explained that Vanderbilt athletics was never broken, rather, the situation was ripe for the university and the athletics program to come together to improve (interview, January 25, 2007). As Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, Vanderbilt’s selectivity and graduation rate performance were already above average for both the SEC and nationally. Vanderbilt was not itself in an academic crisis; instead, the program there provided Gee with a platform to enact a new model that incorporated his values and the direction in which he thought intercollegiate athletics ought to move in.

Despite acting without consultation, Gee clearly conveyed what drove him to make the seemingly radical changes to the Vanderbilt athletics program in 2003, because all subjects spoke about the same ideas and goals. So, although the intentions of the changes were evident, it was unclear what effects they would actually have on the structure and operations of what was formerly the Vanderbilt University Department of Athletics. Every

subject mentioned fighting perceptions created by the media as one of the biggest and most pressing challenges following Gee's announcement. Though they knew there was no longer an athletics director, it was not immediately clear what else was going to change. As the media firestorm died down, Vanderbilt athletics continued to operate at the Division I level, but the program was certainly different.

Overall, David Williams serves as somewhat of a de facto athletics director, because he oversees athletics and attends SEC and NCAA meetings. However, because he only spends roughly one-third of his time dealing with athletics matters, the management team at Vanderbilt differs greatly from a typical athletics department that has a full-time athletics director. As flow charts and the subjects of this study conveyed, the absence of an athletics director was not the only change that took place. The new structure divided responsibilities once held by the athletics director and senior staff among four directors of sport operations (DOSOs). These DOSOs serve as liaisons between coaches and university leadership, and seemingly assist in the daily operations of their assigned sports, while also providing a pipeline to David Williams. This provides coaches with greater access to Vanderbilt's central administration, helping them to be citizens of the university (T. Corbin, interview, January 25, 2007) as opposed to athletics-only personnel.

The dual reporting lines that now exist for several other parts of the athletics program, including academic services and compliance, provide greater university oversight for athletics. Though many of these relationships were not clearly delineated on the 2003 flow chart, dual reporting lines did exist for Vanderbilt athletics prior to 2003. However, areas such as marketing, communications, and development were completely internal to athletics before Gee restructured. By weaving these athletics functions into the university's

mechanisms, not only is greater external oversight achieved, but university offices are able to provide athletics with greater potential resources, both in finances and manpower, that were previously unavailable. A consequence of this approach was a more streamlined program. David Williams explained that once these relationships were created with university offices, athletics was able to eliminate extra expenses. For example, Williams noted that since the changes were made, when personnel have left athletics, they are not necessarily replaced, because the new infrastructure allows for greater access to university resources, thus saving athletics time and money. Williams carefully pointed out that this situation was not one in which personnel was let go; rather, when they have left to pursue other endeavors, their responsibilities may have been dispersed among other staff instead of bringing additional employees on board (interview, January 26, 2007).

The new relationships and reporting lines clearly show structural changes, but the effects of those changes are not necessarily evident. Many subjects spoke about the elimination of duplication and access to university resources as intended consequences of Gee's 2003 decision. New reporting lines and a streamlined system confirms that this has occurred, but the financial consequences remain unknown.

Revenue and expense data taken from EADA records does not indicate a clear financial pattern. According to this data seen in Table 5, during 2003-2004, the year that Gee made changes, Vanderbilt's revenue decreased, but spending rose. The following year showed a nearly \$10.5 million decrease in revenue, but also a slight decrease in spending. Of the years analyzed, 2004-2005 represented the lowest revenue, but the second highest year in spending. Data also revealed that for 2005-2006, revenues and expenses were equal and at a high for the six-year period, which could indicate that university resources are indeed being

put into athletics. The increased spending may also mean that the university is committed to athletics and not abandoning the program, as was the perception when the changes occurred. Though no pattern can be established, the recent rise and balance in revenue and spending demonstrates the commitment of resources and the ability to properly allocate resources available to athletics.

Table 5

*Vanderbilt University Athletics Revenues and Expenses*

---

Year	Total Revenue (\$)	Total Expenses (\$)	Profit (\$)
2000-2001	34,418,592	17,977,533	16,441,419
2001-2002	38,898,249	32,095,308	6,802,941
2002-2003	35,987,448	29,817,371	6,170,077
2003-2004	33,754,007	33,093,276	660,731
2004-2005	23,351,537	30,941,071	-7,589,534
2005-2006	40,373,883	40,373,883	0

Access to budget records was denied, and though EADA reports contain information about revenue and expenses, they do not specifically address areas such as marketing and communications, which were both mentioned as areas that would directly benefit from the revised structure. Though these areas clearly have access to university leadership in public relations, it is impossible to know if they have greater access to funds without examining how their budget is allocated and the processes that they must follow when requesting additional resources. Approximately one-third of the budget comes from SEC conference revenue distribution, actual revenue, and institutional subsidies, respectively (D. Williams,

interview, January 26, 2007), so without knowing how and where funds are distributed, it is difficult to gauge whether institutional support has increased. Again, EADA data provides revenue and expense figures, but these figures are not broken down or itemized to indicate revenue sources.

Because Gee illustrated integration as a fluid and evolving concept, there is no way to exactly measure Vanderbilt's level of integration. However, the measures that are available point to the fact that the athletics program is moving in the direction that Gee sought. Campus visibility and student body ownership of athletics appear to be healthy, as evidenced by participation in activities like campus move-in and a plaque outside the women's basketball locker room that was dedicated by the student body. Currently, five student-athletes sit on the undergraduate honor council, as compared to zero at the time of the changes (Weir, 2007, C3). Gee stated that he set a five-year goal for full integration (interview, January 25, 2007), so the issue should be revisited at the end of that clock to determine whether he believes the program meets his goals and standards for integration.

No drastic differences exist in the athletics records for Vanderbilt teams prior to and since the 2003 revisions made to the athletics program. Women's basketball won a slightly lower percentage of their games, but advanced to NCAA Sweet Sixteen during the two years following the changes, compared with an Elite Eight appearance and a second round exit the two years prior to the changes. Otherwise, all other teams with quantifiable records showed improved winning percentages, proving to critics that a Division I institution operating without an athletics director would not simply fall apart and become uncompetitive. NACDA Director's Cup standings also displayed that a program minus a traditional department structure could be competitive under broad-based standards. Vanderbilt's 28<sup>th</sup>

place finish the year that the changes were made offered evidence that the new system may be effective.

No quantifiable measure exists to assess whether the changes in athletics record are directly related to the restructuring of the Vanderbilt athletics program. A cause and effect relationship cannot be established, but the changes have certainly not doomed the program or created an intramural program, as many in the media forecasted. Those immediate concerns, as well as fears about the effects of the change on recruiting, seem to have subsided, and Vanderbilt remains at least as competitive as they were, both in the SEC and nationally.

Again, Table 2 demonstrates that Vanderbilt's graduation rates were well above the Division I average. Though the average for the three years following the shift was slightly lower (3%) than the three years prior, the advent of the GSR indicates that the numbers may have been a bit deceiving. The new calculation accounts for incoming transfers and student-athletes that would have been eligible had they remained at the institution. Once the GSR was adopted by the NCAA, Vanderbilt's rates rose, indicating that most student-athletes completed their degrees. Because the GSR was not calculated prior to 2005, there is no way to know if Vanderbilt has shown improvement, but again, Vanderbilt's student-athletes performed well-above the average at peer Division I institutions. Also, graduation rates are calculated six years after a cohort enrolls. Therefore, graduation rates and GSR for cohorts entering Vanderbilt University after the 2003 changes will not be available until 2010. At that point, comparisons may indicate the differences, if any, between student-athletes that enrolled while a traditional athletics department existed and those that enrolled once the new structure was in place. According to David Williams, prior to the changes, student-athletes had access to two full-time and one part-time academic counselor. Since the changes, they

have access to eight full-time academic support personnel (D. Williams, interview, January 26, 2007). This would indicate that greater resources are being committed to academic services, and therefore graduations rates should not decrease.

### Application

Just as with any case study, the circumstances surrounding Vanderbilt's athletics program are unique to Vanderbilt University. However, Gordon Gee has shown that the restructured commitment of time, personnel, and resources under his new model for athletics administration can be effective, or at the least sufficient, at the Division I level. As Gee himself stated, Vanderbilt's established presence as an academically competitive university and its potential to compete within the SEC (interview, January 25, 2007) provided an appropriate backdrop for his well-publicized changes.

In what most subjects characterized as the most arduous challenge to overcome with respect to the new structure, the media created misperceptions, and in turn a general misunderstanding, of what Vanderbilt athletics was and how it was to operate following Gee's historic decision. Many, including other university presidents and athletics administrators, did not fully grasp what changes actually took place and the effects of those changes on the athletics program and the university. This study illuminated the structural changes and also served to dispel the idea that Vanderbilt is not willing to commit the necessary resources to be competitive at the highest collegiate level. Though other models, such as Timothy Davis (1995) administrative and committee approach to collegiate athletics, exist, Gee's changes represent the first time that a major university has made changes on this grand of a scale. For other university officials, this should signal that change and deviation from the standard, such as eliminating the athletics director position, does not necessary

signal athletics failure. Though financial records would aid in analyzing the practicability of this model at specific institutions, Vanderbilt's ability to overcome the stigma of change and their success since 2003 indicate that it may be a viable option for institutions in the future.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Faculty member Ginny Shepherd said that she believes a Division I athletics program needs an athletics director and that eventually, when Chancellor Gee's reign at Vanderbilt ends, the school will return to the traditional athletics department model (interview, February 12, 2007). Though she acknowledges that nothing terrible has happened at Vanderbilt, she questions whether this is a viable model and notes that replication would be difficult because Vanderbilt is unique in that they are a small athletics program and a strong athletics tradition has never existed at the institution (G. Shepherd, interview, February 12, 2007). These sentiments prompt the need for a longitudinal study of the Vanderbilt athletics program. Until Gee is no longer at the helm of Vanderbilt, Shepherd's predictions remain just that, predictions.

Close examination of other Division I programs may indicate whether the Vanderbilt model is being utilized elsewhere. Gee said that many institutions have contacted him about his ideas and how they work in theory and in practice (interview, January 25, 2007), so a comprehensive look at Division I athletics leadership may shed some light on how much institutional oversight exists at other institutions. For example, questions may be posed, such as how many athletics directors participate in university leadership? To whom does the athletics director report? This broad view of Division I could help to show whether Vanderbilt is still standing alone, or whether other universities are aligning athletics with the mission of the university.

Three years removed from his headline-grabbing announcement, Gordon Gee and the Vanderbilt athletics program is still making the news. This study only examines the program through the 2005-2006 academic year, but during the spring of 2007, the media again focused on Gee's changes and Vanderbilt student-athletes. At one point, seven Vanderbilt teams were simultaneously ranked in the top 25 nationally and Gee's changes were again front and center. Noting the ranked teams and the fact that both graduation rates and student-athletes grade-point-averages have risen, Tom Weir (2007, C3) painted a picture of student-athletes that were not only winning games against big opponents, but were doing so while performing academically and involving themselves in campus life. Instead of becoming "perpetual doormats," (Weir, 2007, C3) as was predicted, Vanderbilt's teams have emerged this year as venerable foes in many marquis sports. Only time will tell, but as David Williams aptly stated, "...it's the best we've ever had at Vanderbilt, athletically. I can't say that the reorganization did it, but it certainly didn't hurt" (Weir, 2007, C3). Perhaps success can be measured by the changing perceptions of Vanderbilt's critics.

## REFERENCES

- About the SEC. Retrieved September 1, 2006 from  
[http://www.secsports.com/index.php?s=&change\\_well\\_id=9993](http://www.secsports.com/index.php?s=&change_well_id=9993)
- Auburn University 2003-2004 Common Data Set. Retrieved September 21, 2006 from  
Auburn University website: <http://oira.auburn.edu/cds/2003/sectionb.aspx>
- Bechtel, M. (2003, September 22). The Vanderbilt experiment. *Sports Illustrated*, 17.
- Bisher, F. (2003, September 13). Vanderbilt chancellor takes step for reform. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2C.
- Blum, D.E. (1996, April 26). Vanderbilt U. tries to reconcile academics and athletics. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Bowen, W.G. & Levin, S.A. (2003). *Reclaiming the game: College sports and educational values*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Davis, T. (1995). A model of institutional governance for intercollegiate athletics. *Wisconsin Law Review*, 599-645.
- Duderstadt, J.J. (2000). *Intercollegiate Athletics and the American University: A University President's Perspective*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Edwards, B. (Anchor). (2003). Vanderbilt University deciding to abolish its athletic department. On Morning Edition. National Public Radio.
- Fact Sheet. (n.d.). John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Obtained October, 2005.
- Final Report of the Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics. (1996). Vanderbilt University.
- Fitzgerald, T. (2003, September 18). Vandy shouldn't be declaring war. *The San Francisco Chronicle*, C2.
- Gee, G. (2003, September 21). My plan to put the college back in college sports. *The Washington Post*, B2.
- Gee's move not signal of change. (2003, September 18). *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, C1.
- Griffin, T. (2003, September 13). Vanderbilt leader is in the clouds. *San Antonio Express News*, 8F.
- Hanford, G.H. (2003, May 30) We should speak the 'awful truth' about college sports...*The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved September 2, 2007, from  
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v49/i38/38b01001.htm>

- Hanley, B. (2003, September 11). No ripple effect expected from Vandy restructuring. *Chicago Sun-Times*, 124.
- Heath, T. (2003, September 10). Vanderbilt eliminates athletic department; teams continue; goal is to mainstream athletes with rest of student body. *The Washington Post*, D1.
- Keeping faith with the student-athlete: a new model for intercollegiate athletics. (1991, March). John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Obtained October, 2005.
- Louisiana State University 2003-2004 Common Data Set. Retrieved September 21, 2006 from Louisiana State University website:  
<http://www.bgtplan.lsu.edu/cds/2003/enrollpersis.htm>
- Mississippi State University Common Data Set: 2003-2004. Retrieved September 13, 2006 from Mississippi State University website:  
[http://www.msstate.edu/dept/oir/cds\\_2003\\_04\\_final.pdf](http://www.msstate.edu/dept/oir/cds_2003_04_final.pdf)
- NACDA. (n.d.). U.S. Sports Academy Director's Cup Previous Scoring. Retrieved March 5, 2007 from <http://nacda.cstv.com/directorscup/nacda-directorscup-previous-scoring.html>
- NCAA. (n.d.). Federal Graduation-Rates Report Archive. Retrieved February 23, 2007 from <http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal/>
- Neel, R. (2004). Autumn surprise. *Vandy Alumni Magazine*, p. 44-55.
- Nelson, K. (2003, September 13). Is it “Gee Wiz” or “Gee Whiz” for Vanderbilt? *St.Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2.
- Official 2006 NCAA Divisions I-A and I-AA Football Records Book. (2006). National Collegiate Athletic Association. United States.
- Rankings & Lists. (n.d.). The Princeton Review. Retrieved March 9, 2007 from <http://www.princetonreview.com/college/research/profiles/>
- Root for sports reforms. (2003, September 12). *USA Today*, 11A.
- Sack, A.L. (2001, January 26). Big-time athletics vs. academic values: it's a rout. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved September 4, 2006, from <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v47/i20/20b00701.htm>
- Simon, S. (Anchor). (2003). Myles Brand discusses how to emphasize academics for student-athletes. On Talk of the Nation. National Public radio.

- Slezak, C. (2003, September 16). A comeback at Vandy: the student-athlete. *Chicago Sun-Times*, 119.
- Suggs, W. (2001, July 6). College presidents urged to take control of college sports. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved September 1, 2006, from <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v47/i43/43a03501.htm>
- Suggs, W. (2003, October 17). A course correction for Vanderbilt Sports. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved September 1, 2006, from <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v50/i08/08a04301.htm>
- Sullivan, T. (2003, September 20). Move toward athletic reform long overdue. *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, D1.
- Turner, T. (2006). Player Bio on University of Washington Athletic Webpage. Retrieved September 26, 2006 from [http://gohuskies.cstv.com/genrel/turner\\_todd00.html](http://gohuskies.cstv.com/genrel/turner_todd00.html)
- University of Alabama Factbook. Retrieved September 13, 2006 from University of Alabama website: <http://bama.ua.edu/~oir/factbook/2003-2004/2003p004.pdf>
- University of Arkansas 2003-2004 Common Data Set. Retrieved September 21, 2006 from University of Arkansas website: <http://www.uark.edu/admin/uadata/pdfreports/cds0304.pdf#pagemode=bookmarks>
- University of Florida, 2003-2004 Common Data Sheet. Retrieved September 13, 2006 from University of Florida website: <http://www.ir.ufl.edu/data/cds2003-04.pdf>
- University of Georgia 2003-2004 Common Data Set. Retrieved September 13, 2006 from University of Georgia website: <http://www.uga.edu/irp/cds/ugacds03.pdf#search=%222003%2004%20common%20data%20set%22>
- University of Kentucky Institutional Research, Planning & Effectiveness, Common Data Set: 2003-2004. Retrieved September 13, 2006 from University of Kentucky Website: <http://www.uky.edu/OPIE/CDS0304/Enroll0304.shtml>
- University of Mississippi Common Data Set 2003-2004. Retrieved September 13, 2006 from University of Mississippi website: [http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/university\\_planning/cds/cds2003um.pdf#search=%22003-2004%20undergraduate%20enrollment%22](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/university_planning/cds/cds2003um.pdf#search=%22003-2004%20undergraduate%20enrollment%22)
- University of Tennessee Common Data Set: 2003-2004. Retrieved September 21, 2006 from University of Tennessee website: <http://oira.tennessee.edu/cds/cds03.pdf>

US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (2007). Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act Data, 2001-2005 [Data file]. Available from Office of Postsecondary Education website, <http://ope.ed.gov/athletics>

Vanderbilt University Common Data Set: 2003-2004. Retrieved September 13, 2006 from Vanderbilt University website: [http://virg.vanderbilt.edu/virg/data2/doc/cds\\_200304.xls#'CDS-B'!A1](http://virg.vanderbilt.edu/virg/data2/doc/cds_200304.xls#'CDS-B'!A1)

Vanderbilt University. (2003). Department of Athletics. Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University.

Vanderbilt University. (2006). Student Athletics Organizational Overview. Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University.

Weir, T. (2007, March 8). Scores up on, off court after Vanderbilt reforms. *USA Today*, C3.